

**SHAKESPEARE ON INDIAN FLOORBOARDS AND HINDI CINEMA:  
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**Abstract:**

In an inter-disciplinary age to study and write down about a subject that sprawls over several decades and fields is a challenging task. One needs to put forward an argument that is relevant to readers who otherwise may be unaware or indifferent to it. Shakespeare is a subject which has been extensively revisited by artists, critics and scholars around the world. Reshaping of Shakespeare's work from time to time across different disciplines has reshaped our understanding of it repeatedly. Artists borrowed essence of Shakespeare's kaleidoscopic work and redesigned it into resonant patterns, thus leaving behind myriad manifestations to select from. Collaboration ranges from adaptation to appropriation in varying degrees at times difficult to categorize. Along with adaptation into wholly verbal medium (e.g., translations) the practice of indigenization through performing arts has played a great role in amplifying the reach of plays. The theatre and cinema are two medium which has extensively contributed in this cross-cultural exchange over the ages. Indian cinema in its initial years recorded the plays staged by Parsi theatre companies. Theatre being a spectacle has always tempted filmmakers and drew them closer. The researcher in this paper has attempted to delve deeper into the relationship between Shakespeare, Indian theatre and Hindi Cinema.

**Key Words:** Evolution, Hindi Cinema, Indian Floorboards, Relation & Shakespeare

**1. Introduction:**

The word Shakespeare refers to the renowned actor, dramatist and the poet William Shakespeare. In the present paper the term also stands for the work done by the man himself that resulted into his distinctive identity in the world history of literature and entertainment. His presence on Indian stage and Hindi Cinema has gone through many transformations in the past several decades. The Hindi Cinema also popularly known as Bollywood has borrowed a lot from Parsi Theatre and Bard's plays with respect to plot, structure, theme, storyline etc. Indian landscape has continuously witnessed the growth and progression of Shakespeare's horizon in these two arenas. The relationship between Shakespeare's plays and Hindi Cinema is based on some commonality factors that bind the two keeping them intact.

**2. Objectives:**

- ✓ The researcher studies how the theatrical and cinematic reworking of Shakespearean oeuvre evolved through times in India.
- ✓ The researcher has attempted to examine the connecting links between Hindi cinema, Shakespeare, Parsi Theatre and Bharata's Natyashastra and figure out how they collectively shaped the structure of Hindi films.

**3. Research Methodology:**

The related literature and films were studied to fulfil the objectives of the study. The structure of Shakespeare's plays and films was analyzed to illustrate connection between the two.

**4. Rendezvous: India and Shakespeare**

India and Shakespeare's relationship when delved deeper brings out many revelations about their introduction to each other. Shakespeare's plays have references to India when it was ruled by Mughals. Poonam Trivedi in her essay 'Shakespeare in India: Introduction' mentions that Shakespeare was introduced as an entertainer in India. His plays were first performed in English language for the amusement of European traders reaching Bombay and Calcutta around 1775. By 1850s began the performance in various Indian languages. Shakespeare as a colonial baggage got incorporated in the syllabus. Lord Hardinge, the Governor General, in 1844 passed a resolution which assured that first choice in government jobs will be given to those familiar with English literature.<sup>1</sup> The earliest performances of Shakespeare by Indians were enactment of scenes in schools and colleges. From 1940s to 1980s, 'Shakespeareana', a travelling repertory of Geoffrey and Laura Kendal toured India with a purpose to revive Shakespeare, a colonial legacy, in the post-colonial era. They staged plays of the Bard and other British playwrights. The movie 'Shakespeare-Wallah' (James Ivory, 1965) starring Shashi Kapoor was based on this group only.

**5. Redressing Shakespeare on Indian Floorboards:**

The adaptations in cinema are guided by time, culture, situations, circumstances and the six arts. It is director's choice whether to adapt faithfully or extract the essence of the text and build it up in a new setting. Linda Hutcheon considers adaptation as an acknowledged transposition of other work, a creative appropriation and an intertextual engagement<sup>2</sup>. Gianneti classifies adaptations based on the degree of fidelity into (a) the *loose* (b) the *faithful* and (c) the *literal*. The one that borrows an idea, a character, or a situation from the original and then develops independently is a *loose* adaptation. The *faithful* adaptation is the one that remains true to the tone and spirit of the literary source by recreating it in filmic terms. The third category i.e. *literal* adaptations are mostly confined to plays. In such adaptations dialogue and action of the play are transferred to the screen<sup>3</sup>. The initial performances based on translation of the plays with an intention to gratify the middle class were done by Parsi Theatre Companies (1874-1949). These were free adaptations which changed names and locale, interpolated characters, action and added songs and dance. In Mehdi Hassan Ahsan's opinion Shakespeare's and Indian's way of thinking did not match and thus alteration was a compulsion. The critic also finds this extrapolation as a bold step, an act of cultural confrontation and a way to 'upstage' the British officers<sup>4</sup>. It has been suggested that structure of Hindi films evolved from the dramatic structure of the Parsi plays, which were in turn, modelled on Sanskrit plays. Flamboyant acting, rhetoric speeches, exotic curtains and sceneries in the backdrop and mesmerizing music marked their productions. This pattern was followed by Hindi cinema with rhetoric dialogues and shoots on

exotic locations. Parsi drama was actually in a way Indian drama and its dramatic text scripting was widely spread in the whole nation. It included drama of various languages. Thus, the term Parsi Theatre comprises of Parsi-Hindi, Parsi-Gujrati, Parsi-Urdu, Parsi-Marathi and Parsi-Bangla Theatre. Agha Hashar Kashmiri, known as "Shakespeare of Urdu" wrote plays titled 'Safed Khoon', 'Saeed-Havas' and 'Shaheed-e-Naaz' which were Hindustani adaptations of 'King Lear', 'Richard Three' and 'Measure For Measure'. The prayer-drama-prayer convention of Sanskrit drama was slightly modified to peace (song)-conflict (drama)-peace (song) format in Parsi theatre and other travelling theatre companies' productions. This format originated in western theatre companies staging Shakespearean and Jacobean plays for Elizabethan audience. The number of songs and dance incorporated to provide entertainment varied according to the length of the play. The reason was to stretch average theatrical experience to around 3-4 hours. This later on became a convention for writing film scripts. As far as the modern Indian stage is concerned the audience is more familiar to indigenized Shakespeare. Atul Kumar, Mumbai stage director, states that in India around 80 percent of productions related to Shakespeare are experimental works with a fresh take<sup>5</sup>. In 2006 staging in Indian languages and in Sinhalese of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' was done by Tim Supple drawing on performance forms like Lathakali and Mallakhamb. London's Globe Theatre invited Indian directors Sunil Shanbag ('Maro Piyo Gayo Rangoon' based on 'All's Well That Ends Well') and Atul Kumar ('Baranvi Raat' based on 'Twelfth Night') in 2012 for staging Indian adaptations. Rajat Kapoor's play 'Hamlet-The Clown' has won several awards. Habib Tanvir's 'Kamdev ka Apna Basant Ritu ka Sapna', based on 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is also an impressive localized adaptation. The above listed playwrights are only few of the many contemporary stage directors who have switched to local interpretation of the Bard. In 2015 artistes of the ICK (International Centre of Kathakali) performed Othello in the Bharat Rang Mahotsav dressed in Kathakali costumes. Stage reverberated with drumbeats accompanied by a song that comprised of Malayalam translation of the lines<sup>6</sup>. Kattimani, an actor-director conducted a workshop to transform prisoners of Mysore jail. The jail inmates performed a Kannada adaptation of the play 'Macbeth' titled 'Maranayaka Drishtanta', directed by H.S.S. Prakash. With more than 240 years old relationship that Shakespeare and India shares, the playwright today holds a number of multilingual translations and recreations of his oeuvre. The timeless human appeal of his works makes him man of not one age, but of all ages. The freshness in new interpretations has also contributed in keeping his stories alive.

#### **6. Cinematizing Shakespeare:**

Arundhati Roy in the novel 'The God of Small Things' writes "The great stories are the ones you have heard and want to hear again"<sup>7</sup>. This quote has a special meaning when we discuss repeated retelling of Shakespeare on screen. Till date countless movies have sourced from his plays with many resulting into remarkable cinematic spectacles. Shakespeare was introduced to Hindi cinema by Parsi theatre. Silent film 'Dil Farosh' (1927) was based on Parsi theatre's adaptation of the play 'The Merchant of Venice'. 'Khooon-e-Nahak' (1928), 'Hathili Dulhan' (1932), 'Khooon Ka Khooon' (1935), 'Kafir-e-Ishq' (1936), 'Pak Daman' (1940) were few of the early free adaptations (location and time unspecified) of Shakespeare's plays. Rajiva Verma states that the plays produced by Parsi Theatre and the films based on them were hybrid in nature. It was often observed that the characters were Muslims, speaking Urdu, but songs were in Hindi with frequent reference to Hindi myths<sup>8</sup>. Kishore Sahu's 'Hamlet' (1954) although termed 'free adaptation' in the film's credit roll was a shot-by-shot copy of 'Hamlet' (1948) by Laurence Olivier. These films popularized Shakespeare and embedded him in the consciousness of the masses without their knowledge. Shakespeare's influence on Hindi cinema resonates either in theme, story, characters or dialogue such as 'Romeo and Juliet' in 'Bobby' (1973), 'Ek Duje Ke Liye' (1981), 'Love Story' (1981), 'Qayamat se Qayamat Tak' (1988), 'Saudagar' (1991) and the list goes on. Poonam Trivedi in the paper 'Filmi Shakespeare' quotes an example of a scene from the movie titled 'Agneepath'. Amitabh Bachhan essaying the role of a mafia don arrives home and washes hands before the meal. His mother quips, 'the whole water of Bombay will not cleanse his hands'. It is a line borrowed from the Macbeth's sleep-walking scene. The critic writes that this unexceptional expression of the taint of immoral could have been expressed in numerous ways. Still the dialogue writer chooses Shakespeare, a canonical figure<sup>9</sup>. Such kind of unacknowledged and unnoticed presence of Shakespeare in Indian cinema marks the fusion of Shakespeare and Indian Film. Renowned actor Naseeruddin Shah once stated in an interview that although in Hindi film industry the roots may appear to be missing but every big story is from Shakespeare<sup>10</sup>. Keeping in view the intercultural engagement with Shakespeare the only way to be faithful to him was to relocate him completely. One of the most successful initiatives in this regard has been Gulzar's 'Angoor' (1982) adaptation of 'The Comedy of Errors'. The film marked new beginning in Indian Cinema. Cinematic representations of plays such as 'Maqbool', 'Haider' and 'Omkaara' are also an attempt to re-envision literary heritage in formal and completely localized manner along with retaining the global appeal.

#### **7. Bharata, Shakespeare & Parsi Theatre: Shaping Hindi Cinema**

Bharata & Shakespeare are the two master dramatists who defined fundamental elements of the dramatic art. Bard adhered to the Aristotelian schemata with slight modification. Shakespeare's plays had a beginning, middle and end with one event linked to another. Scholars have explained the Bard's plot construction as:

- ✓ Exposition (Beginning/Exposition, Act I)
- ✓ Rising Action (Middle/ Development, Act II)
- ✓ Climax (Middle/Development, Act III)
- ✓ Falling Action (Middle/Development, Act IV)
- ✓ Denouement (End, Act V)

The terms used to denote the same in Hindi drama are

- ✓ Paristhiti (situation)
- ✓ Uljhaav (complication)
- ✓ Nishpati (resolution)

If Shakespearean plots are analysed it is observed that they may or may not comprise of cause and effect relationship. For example the sub plot of Jessica and Lorenzo in "The Merchant of Venice" runs parallel to the main plot involving Antonio and Sherlock and both are not interrelated at all. On the other hand, in the same play, the sub plot of Bassanio and Portia too runs

parallel to the main plot and has a cause and effect relationship. The two also join at the end. In Hindi Cinema too the sub plot may or may not contribute to the main plot. For example in the film "Aligarh" the main plot of Prof. Srinivasan and sub plot involving journalist Sebastian run simultaneously. They also join each other but there is no causation and it is a casual relationship. The purpose was to draw similarities and differences between the lives of the two.

While giving the account of Shakespeare's involvement in the development of English drama T. Singh writes that he addressed entire human life and left no human experience or sensibility untouched. He was far superior to his contemporaries and had a deep insight into human behavior which remains the same in all times and<sup>11</sup>. Shakespeare's plays filled with elements of jealousy, aggression, ambition, revenge, struggle, greed, animal instinct, infidelity, intrigue, love, humour, war, conflict, ego, insecurity, betrayal, loss and tragedy present human emotions that relate to people in every age. Similarly Indian films comprise of themes of repentance, fidelity, friendship, duty and love for the motherland. The Natyashastra mentions nine sentiments or rasa (love, laughter, grief, anger, enthusiasm, fear, disgust, astonishment, or renunciation). The films too comprise of these sentiments and at the end of the film one chief sentiment is evoked which leads to rasa or evocation of parmananda i.e., aesthetic delight in the audiences.

Bharata designed drama according to Brahma, the Hindu God. Sanskrit dramas, stories of Gods and demons were rife with moral instructions and exhortative speeches which resulted into darshanik viewing<sup>12</sup>. Similarly the dialogues of Hindi films have also been rhetoric in nature. The darshanik or holy gaze of Hindus guided the strategies of Indian adapters so as to make the audience task simpler and attain an aesthetic delight. Majority of the Hindi films have happy ending with few incorporating the Shakespearean tragedy too.

The Indian cinema uses the term 'Samvad' to denote dialogue writing in the films. In the language of Indian cinema, a samvad happens when something is communicated. It can be a monologue, a conversation between two or more characters, or a mumble- they are all understood as examples of samvad. Samvad or dialogue has its origin in the Sanskrit poetics. In ancient times drama and poetry were synonymous. Poetry existed as an integral part of drama. In Sanskrit, Greek and early English drama, it is found that poetry was the medium of narration and dialogues.

A climax in a plot is reached just 15 – 20 minutes before the close of the play. For example, in "Othello", climax scene comes when Othello resolves to murder Desdemona in Act III Scene III. If we compare the timing of the climax scene in Indian films it also comes 10-15 minutes before the close of the film<sup>13</sup>. The average length of the Hindi film used to be three hours. The length of the Shakespearean plays and Parsi plays was also the same.

Further, many of Shakespeare's plays are not pure tragedy or comedy. For example, Othello is a romantic tragedy. Even Hindi films generally don't stick to one genre strictly and thus are popularly known as 'masala' films.

#### **8. Conclusion:**

The theatrical and cinematic reworking of Shakespearean oeuvre evolved starting from free adaptations moving on to appropriation and finally crafting a glocalised representation of the Bard. Parsi playwrights modelled their text on the dramatic structure given in natyashastra and took Urdu zabaan for writing the script. The darshanik gaze of audiences observed in Parsi theatre was utilized in the films too via characters so as to evoke the same among the audiences. Shakespeare's presence on floorboards of Parsi theatre has been instrumental in giving definite structural pattern to the spectacles in Hindi cinema. Retelling Shakespeare in a localized manner brings him nearer, making him very own heritage, and thus leading to an improved understanding of the Bard.

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