

**Indian Hamlet in Action: V. K. Prakash's *Karmayogi* and Vishal Bharadwaj's *Haider***

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**Abstract**

This paper points out the adaptation process of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to the Indian context. It tries to cite how V.K. Prakash's *Karmayogi* and Vishal Bharadwaj's *Haider* become the eastern trans-creation of the Bard's text. Both *Karmayogi* and *Haider* became an Indian Hamlet in the hands of the filmmakers. This article aims to study the steps taken by the bardolators - V.K. Prakash and Vishal Bharadwaj in order to create native codes and trans-create the bard's codes in their adapted movie and how they incorporate the politics, culture, tradition, norms, beliefs, customs, rituals to the adapted text's inner core or essence. It also examines the significance of these two adaptations- *Karmayogi* and *Haider* as distinct from other Shakespearean adaptations. The article tries to delineate the creativity of the film makers to make an entirely different target text (inspire of following the core idea), out of a canonical text. These two re-interpretations of *Hamlet* are conspicuous with their eastern elements.

**Key Words:** Adaptation, Appropriation, Re-interpretation, Culture, trans-creation

Andrew Malraux has written, "Behind each artist stands the cathedral, the library and the museum. Behind each form is a conquest-a taking over, an incorporation, a further development- of another previously existing form, whose traces it bears"(Garga 155). Shakespeare is being considered by both ancient and modern artisans as a quarry of literary schemes. Shakespeare's plays are intermittently adapted and appropriated by the masterminds creatively since the Elizabethan era. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, one among his longest plays, is treated as capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others" (Thompson and Taylor 74). As Das says, "among all the plays of Shakespeare, *Hamlet* appears to

be the most popular in India" (52) The play *Hamlet* is trans-created in most media such as Film, *Kathakali*, *Jatra*, *Kabuki* etc. Film makers such as Laurence Olivier (1948), Kurosawa (1960), Grigori Kozintsev (1964), Tony Richardson(1969), Franco Zeffirelli (1990), Kenneth Branagh (1996) etc. has tried out re-reading of the text *Hamlet* on the filmic medium. Indian artists, especially film makers too approach Shakespeare in order to get meaningful themes.

In *Domesticating Shakespeare- A Study of Indian Shakespeare in Popular Culture*, Dr. Mukesh Yadhav pore over the indigenization process of Indian translations of the Bard's text. According to him, "these films achieved great success

in India and have domesticated Shakespeare like never before” (49). The Indian filmmakers V.K. Prakash and Vishal Bharadwaj re-interpret *Hamlet* in the background of differing culture, milieu, tradition and language. V.K. Prakash adapts *Hamlet* as *Karmayogi* while Vishal Bharadwaj generates the Bollywood version of the same as *Haider*. V.K. Prakash transplants the play into the Yogi community’s culture of Northern Malabar. Vishal Bharadwaj uproots the text to the inconsistencies prevailed in Kashmir of the nineties. Both the cineastes-V.K. Prakash and Vishal Bharadwaj attempt to trans-create the essence of the Bard’s text as per their own perspectives. V.K. Prakash sets his film in the feudal era and Vishal Bharadwaj tries to imbibe the controversial environment of Kashmir and the sufferings and miseries of the Kashmiris. *Karmayogi* and *Haider* are the two eastern re-readings of *Hamlet* that vary tremendously. King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, and Horatio are the major characters of the play. While adapting, the Shakespearean characters, themes, dialogues, structure, scenes --all undergo the process of addition and omission in order to gel with the target environment and culture. Instances of such adaptations are present in both *Karmayogi* and *Haider*.

V.K. Prakash incorporates eastern cultural agents such as *kalaripayattu*, *kazchapayattu*, *kelipathra*, *poorakkali*, *Theyyam* (*Bhairavan Theyyam*), *panan* etc in the course of unveiling the story in the oriental context. His debut attempt with Shakespearean adaptation - *Karmayogi*-is packed with the play’s re-readings. The film sets in *Ekarajyam* during the time of feudalism at its peak in Northern Malabar.

V.K. Prakash presents Hamlet as Rudran Valiyagurukkal of Chathothu family, who performs the ritual *Kelipathra*. Chathothu family is depicted as famed for their excellence in *kalaripyattu*. The title *Karmayogi* is a significant one in the trans-creation process as it accentuates the term *karma*. Like Buddhists, the elite people of *Ekarajyam* firmly believe in the philosophy of *karma* ie, by validating the *karma* of life, one becomes a *yogi* (monk).The *Kelipatra* are believed to be avatars of Lord Siva, who once was cursed by Lord Vishnu for slicing the fifth head of Lord Brahma. Thus Lord Siva became a man in Varanasi and indulged in begging for twelve years in order to be liberated from the curse. The chief of the *Yogi* community, the follower of Lord Siva, performs the ritual by renouncing his luxurious and comfortable life.

Rudran Valiyagurukkal’s wife Mankamma, always conscious about her physical good looks, does not accept her husband’s *kelipatra* role. The beginning of the film informs the spectator about the mysterious death of Rudran Valiyagurukkal and the sudden marriage of Bhairavan and Mankamma. Bhairavan, the brother of Valiyagurukkal, is the counterpart of the diabolic character Claudius. Rudran, son of Valiyagurukkal and Mankamma who is away from his native land pursuing excellence in martial arts, reaches *Ekarajyam*. Like Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* he too is cloaked in black, which has high visual impact as it ignites the sense of mourning. He seems to be totally shattered due to his father’s unexpected farewell and mother’s hasty wedding. V.K. Prakash pursues Shakespeare’s narrative tools such as dreams and ghost figure in order to reveal the mystery behind his father’s death.

Rudran and his friend Shankunni (Horatio) see a dream in which Valiyagurukkal's ghost speaks about the truth regarding his death. The dream expounds his uncle's hand in his father's murder.

Frustrated and traumatized, Rudran decides to follow his father's path as *kelipathra*. His love Moonumani (Ophelia), the daughter of Kidathan (Polonius) and Shankunni are the constant companions of Rudran. Kidathan doesn't approve the relation of Moonumani and Rudran and he mocks him viciously when Rudran approaches him for alms as *kelipathra*. Meanwhile Rudran is haunted by his father's ghost and the thoughts of his uncle's guilt. He happens to meet a *Poorakkali* exponent, Koma Panicker, and he shares his confused thoughts with him. They determine to do a *poorakkali* performance in the Chathothu mana, which is apparently the replica of Valiyagurukkal's death. V.K. Prakash poignantly uses *poorakkali* instead of *The Murder of Gonzago*, the 'play within a play' by Shakespeare. Koma Panicker and Rudran foresee that if his uncle is guilty, he will show clear signs of it. Koma Panicker's crew performs *Panchali Sutrangam*. The characters-Hari and Haran present the story of a murder-by the rhythmic verses and the appearance of the murdered man after death. They enact that plot of a person pouring poison to another's ears-- the scene shocks Bhairavan and he escapes from the place with Mankamma.

Rudran decides to avenge his father's death. But because of procrastination, he fails to utilise his opportunities properly. In a state of frenzy, Bhairavan murders Kidathan and accuses Rudran of the murder. This leads to Moonumani's madness and then death. Bhairavan

hatches schemes to destroy Rudran with the help of Kanthan, brother of Moonumani (Laertes), who is in an urge to take revenge on him for his father's and sister's death. Bhairavan arranges a *kazchapayattu* between Rudran and Kanthan-- both *kalaripayattu* experts. Bhairavan and Kanthan decide to betray Rudran with a poisoned sword. But their ploy meet utter failure and Kanthan and Bhairavan are killed by Rudran. Mankamma commits suicide because of her guilty consciousness. Rudran hands over Chathothu family's properties to Sahyan of Chirikandothu family (Fortinbras, Prince of Norway), who retains constant enmity with the former. Rudran becomes a *yogi* for the rest of his life by leaving his royal attire and life. V.K. Prakash trans-creates the heart of the play to the history, tradition and milieu of Northern Malabar.

Vishal Bharadwaj instills contemporary Kashmiri cultural flavour to *Hamlet* in *Haider*. Before *Haider* too, Vishal Bharadwaj has utilised Shakespeare for good material in screen play. His earlier Shakespearean cinematic translations are *Maqbool* and *Omkaara*, adaptations of the play *Macbeth* and *Othello*. He transplants *Macbeth* to the Mumbai underworld and *Othello* to the criminal world. Vishal Bharadwaj selects a restive background to transplant the plot of *Hamlet* and thereby the target text get contemporary significance. "What makes *Haider* such a special movie is that, unlike other works that have dealt with the Kashmir conflict, it does not pretend that history does not exist." (Ashok 2014). *Haider's* screen play revolves around the narrative of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Basharat Peer's memoir *Curfewed Night*. Vishal Bharadwaj tries to unveil the torments and

afflictions of the people of Kashmir. He merges the Bard's text, film and the violent history of Kashmir. He uses Oedipal Complex, betrayal, jealousy etc. from *Hamlet* with the issues of patriotism, jingoism and the national conflicts of Kashmir in his film. He beats the earlier Shakespearean adaptations by choosing the milieu- Kashmir for the trans-creation process.

The counterparts of King Hamlet, Prince Hamlet, Gertrude, Ophelia, Claudius, Polonius, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and Fortinbras are Dr. Hilal Meer, Haider Meer, Ghazala Meer, Arshia Lone, Khurram Meer, Pervez Lone, Liyaqat Lone, Courtiers and Zahoor Hussain respectively. The King Hamlet is presented as a renowned doctor, Dr. Hilal Meer in Srinagar and his son Haider is a poet who pursues his studies in Aligarh Muslim University. From the beginning itself, film narrative tries to focus on the shattered dreams and lives of Kashmiris. He portrays the internal struggle during the time of Kashmir Intifada/insurgency. The chief of a pro-separatist militant group, Ikhlauque approaches Dr. Hilal to do an operation of appendectomy on him and he agrees to do so. He does the surgery at his house for avoiding unnecessary problems and his wife Ghazala accosts him with the question of his terrorist allegiance. But the very next day, the military group blames Hilal for protecting the terrorists and Ikhlauque is murdered in the following attack. Hilal is taken with them for questioning and after that Hilal is literally missing from the place.

Hilal's son Haider arrives in order to enquire about his father's disappearance. But he falls into a well of distress by seeing the love making scene of his mother and his uncle Khurram. Overwhelmed, he

runs to police stations and detention camps to find out his father. His childhood friend and now lover, Arshia Lone who is a journalist, joins him in his journey. He loses hope in the influx of the boiling issues later on. Meanwhile Arshia Lone happens to meet Roodhar who claims to be the messenger of Hilal. He meets Haider and informs him that his uncle Khurram is the master brain behind Hilal's tragedy. He adds that he approaches Haider just to exchange his father's last message to him - - to avenge his uncle for his death. He narrates the atrocities experienced by his father during his last minutes. Overthrown by grief and revenge, he becomes a shattered man. He begins to show the signs of post-traumatic stress disorder like Hamlet. Khurram arranges the meeting between Haider and Roodhar, and he informs Haider that Roodhar is the murderer of his father. Haider is craving for the real truth behind his father's murder. He shares his plight to Arshia and adds that Roodhar has given a gun to kill Khurram.

Pervez, Arshia's father comes to know about the gun and informs of it to Khurram. And he hastily arranges the marriage between him and Ghazala and orders his men to admit him in the asylum. Haider gets an opportunity to kill his uncle, but he cannot do it because Khurram is in prayer. Shackled by moral thoughts and procrastination -the tragic flaw of Hamlet-he hesitates to commit the action while Khurram is offering his prayers. Then Ghazala confesses to him that she informed Khurram about the terrorists in the house and now Haider is able to imagine the actions which lead to Hilal's tragedy. Pervez, the right hand of Khurram encounters Haider, but he shot to death and Haider escapes. Her father's

death by Haider, persuades Arshia to commit suicide. Roodhar advises Haider to attend a special military training in Pakistan. Ghazala contacts Roodhar and talks to Haider. He reaches the graveyard where his father's grave lies and he sees Liyaqat, Arshia's brother, with Arshia's corpse.

The encounter between Liyaqat and Haider results in latter's death. Khurram rushes towards the graveyard with full force and they attack Haider. The terrific fight scene gives the scene high visual impact. Roodhan brings Ghazala there and he reminds her son that revenge results only in revenge. But Haider pursues his revenge. Ghazala tells good bye to her son and moves forward with the suicide vest. Both Khurram and Haider try to prevent her but she switch on the hand grenade and the following explosion results in her death and Khurram is fatally injured but Haider manages to escape. Khurram pleads with him to take his life, but he leaves him to live. The film narrates the tragic plight of Kashmiris through the lens of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Vishal Bharadwaj inventively trans-creates the unexpendable scenes and dialogues to visualize the dilemma faced by the natives of Kashmir. "Hamlet's most famous line "To be or not to be" with its implied singular agent is translated into a slogan chanted by the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons- *hum hain ki hum nahin* (Shall we be or not be?). (Mookherjee 8). Vishal Bharadwaj delineates Haider's speech at Lal Chowk is an outstanding addition. The political leaders of Kashmir usually deliver their speech there. It is typical of "Bharadwaj's audacity in portraying

painful realities about the behaviour of Jammu and Kashmir police and the army" (Ramnath 2014). Bharadwaj points out a very significant issue in his 2014 film: the disappearance of people. Nowadays it is a common issue as males, females and children keep disappearing in Kashmir. The issue is noted by the celebrated Malayalam novelist M. Mukundan in his epic novel *Delhi Gadhakal*, where he speaks about the successive 'missing' of people in Delhi. Vishal Bharadwaj's *Haider* is obviously a critique on the history of Kashmir.

Both V.K. Prakash and Vishal Bharadwaj create two different Hamlets in Action-Karmayogi and Haider. Their attempts in translating *Hamlet* in their own perspectives are enthralling. The gravedigger scene and the ghost figure is tellingly reproduced in these films. Vishal Bharadwaj presents Roodhar as a ghost figure and Hilal with the tinges of supernaturalism. The Mousetrap play/play within the play of *Hamlet* is depicted in the movie *Haider* in a song 'Bismil' for cornering Khurram. During its picturisation, the images of the falcon and the nightingale are used by Vishal Bharadwaj. Unique adaptations and appropriations are born out of proper addition and omission of the target text. While transplanting the play to the regions of Northern Malabar and Kashmir, the directors V.K. Prakash and Vishal Bharadwaj take a pregnant journey to the cultural world of their target work. *Karmayogi* and *Haider* can be cited as an evidence for Linda Hutcheon's words: "Adaptation is repetition without replication"(173).

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