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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### SPECTACULAR SHAKESPEARE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CINEMA: MERGE OF CULTURES

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#### Abstract

In the entire gamut of publication and performance history, William Shakespeare is one of the most popular names and most of his plays have been acted and reacted, adapted and published in various forms. In many countries, to be particular, in India, perhaps due to the colonial heritage, Shakespeare has never ceased to fascinate – both in the pre- and post-independence era. Indian cinema has seen many versions of his plays in popular cinema. Amongst all the performances of Shakespeare's plays, Vishal Bharadwaj movie Omkara (2006) may be considered as one of the best ever Indianized performances of his play Othello. This study is an attempt to critically study the recreation of Othello in the Indian setting in the light of the original play. It is aimed at capturing the universality in the works of Shakespeare to establish the acceptability of his creations in each age, the significance of his citation, and the purchase of his status in various cultural niches and registers. In the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in Indian films, the Bard is not only absorbed into the cultural fabric of India but still maintains a catalyzing presence in post-colonial India.

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#### Introduction:-

In the history of publication and public performance of Western literature in India, William Shakespeare remains the most celebrated author till date. In India, his plays are not only studied and included in the curriculum at different levels but also performed at theaters and movies, either in the original form or adapted versions. Amongst all the performances of Shakespeare's plays, the recent Vishal Bharadwaj movie Omkara may be considered as one of the best ever Indianized performances of his play Othello. This study is an attempt to critically study the recreation of Othello in the Indian setting in the light of the original play. It is aimed at capturing the universality in the works of Shakespeare to establish the acceptability of his creations in each age, the significance of his citation, and the purchase of his status in various cultural niches and registers. In the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays in Indian films, the Bard is not only absorbed into the cultural fabric of India but still maintains a catalyzing presence in post-colonial India.

Over the course of the 1990s, Shakespeare films enjoyed an unprecedented resurgence. Movies such as Baz Luhrmann's William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet (1996), Kenneth Branagh's Hamlet (1997) and Michael Hoffman's A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999) stretched the bounds of Shakespearean cinematic representation, providing structures that revived the Bard for modern consumption. More recently, this re-imaging process has been carried further with Julie Taymor's Titus (2000) and Michael Almereyda's Hamlet (2000), but with a unique shade of the preoccupied late twentieth-century mindset: with vivid creation of an anxious mind in a dystopia - an

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imaginary society in which social or technological trends have culminated in a greatly diminished quality of life or degradation of values. Yet, beyond all consideration, it is still an amazement how Shakespeare continues to charm both the theatre goers and the weavers of dreams – both on stage and in the celluloid screen. This study attempts a comparison of the respective structures and characters of the original play by Shakespeare and its self-proclaimed Bollywood cinematic version- Omkara and tries to demonstrate their shared perspectives – each complementing the other for a fuller experience of Shakespeare. It is a look at the performance of Shakespeare in India, a surprisingly neglected area of critical attention so far, particularly in view of the fact that Shakespeare was introduced to India via the stage as early as 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Shakespeare In India**

In 1775 and 1776, Shakespeare had first touched Indian shores as an entertainer for English traders at the earliest modern theatres in the East in Calcutta and Bombay. From then on, Shakespearean plays had sailed out with the merchant traders and had become embroiled in the spice and textile trade of India. Once the Indians were introduced to English performative arts, Shakespearean plays saw an eager crowd of Indian playgoers. With time, we come face-to-face with a popular Shakespeare on stage and in films – translated and transformed – enriched with the ingredients from the cultural life of the milieu it was performed in. These adaptations of Shakespearean plays display differing levels of localizations in specific periods of English history, to a retelling with the excision, and adaptation of characters, scenes and subplots, along with the interpolation of songs and dances. Indian theatre and filmmakers always found Shakespeare a rich mine to exploit. Soon, in the hands of the Indian writers, theatre and movie makers deviated from the canonical model of Shakespeare, which was inculcated in the classroom. The result was “a product of an indigenous practice of creativity, in which translation, adaptation, and recreation of existing texts were all legitimate activity, and points toward another level of cross-cultural assimilation of Shakespeare.” (Trivedi, 2005. p. 29-30) Often Indian films adapted from Shakespearean plays ( a very popular film being Angoor [Grapes], 1981, by far the most successful screen version of The Comedy of Errors) not only popularized and commercialized his plays but also insinuated it into the psyche of the Indian audience without even knowing that it is Shakespeare.

Of course, it is a truth that cannot be denied that the early European theatres in India were set up with motives beyond the purely recreational; their purposes reveal a promotional and propagandist function. It was a time of consolidation of the empire and aggressive propagation of English studies. In 1844, Lord Hardinge, the Governor-General passed the resolution:

“assuring preference in selection for public office to Indians who had distinguished themselves in European literature.” (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz, 1996)

The study of Shakespeare was an imperial imposition. But, the performance was not. The fact that Shakespeare still amazes the Indian theatre/filmmaker is reason enough to believe the proposition that Shakespeare’s plays uphold some universals which apply across all cultures: more than two hundred years of interaction between India and Shakespeare is proof enough that this is a relationship that thrived deeply embedded in the contradictions of colonialism, of simultaneous submission and resistance. It is, after all in India, that we have the longest and the most widespread interaction with Shakespeare, outside of Europe.

One of the major reasons for Shakespearean plays being the favourite choice is the power of his narration: his characters are so real and human that they can be made relevant to any time and era. One such Shakespearean play, which is the favourite choice of most filmmakers, is Othello, closely followed by Macbeth, and has an appeal that cuts across cultures. This Shakespearean tragedy has seen innumerable stage adaptations. The young Malayalam director Jayaraj adapted the main theme of this Shakespeare drama against the backdrop of Theyyam, the powerfully visual performing art form of north Malabar. Released in 1998 Kaliyattam, is today regarded as the benchmark of movie adaptations from the Bard.

### **Shakespeare in Indian films**

The assimilation of Shakespeare into the mass media of the cinema started in the 1930s. The development of the film industry in Mumbai, the then Bombay, earlier the home of the Parsi theatre, had resulted in a direct transfer of not just men and money, but also of stories and texts from the theatre to the cinema. Most of these endeavours do not assume a prior knowledge of the original plays, and Shakespeare is present in them not as a cultural icon but as a resource to be exploited for characters and situations, often without acknowledgement. Perhaps, the fact that

majority of the Indian films based on Shakespearean plays are ‘cinematic offshoots’ rather than ‘complete and straightforward versions of Shakespearean plays’ is one major reason why the Shakespearean film still remains a virtually unknown entity. (1) The few who belong to the latter category have not been correctly identified. “This neglect is surprising since these films are rather unique works insofar as they attempt, not always successfully, a purely commercial appropriation of Shakespeare’s plays in the tradition of the popular, mainstream Bombay cinema.”(Verma, 2005. p. 240)

In some of the best examples of indigenization, what is achieved is a fusion, not just of forms, but also the philosophic perspective, resulting in a deeper intercultural rapprochement with Shakespeare’s text and recovering aspects of it submerged under the effect of various obvious reasons. Dennis Bartholomeusz’s essay “Shakespeare Imagines the Orient: The Orient Imagines Shakespeare” examines Shakespeare’s responses to the orient in general and India in particular and some recent productions from India, China, and Japan, and argues that just as Shakespeare’s imaginative encounter with the Orient enriched and extended his vision of life, his plays have enriched the cultures of the Orient. Further, he concludes that “the stages of the Orient have enriched his plays in performance; they have suffered a sea- change into something rich and strange.” (Bartholomeusz, 1994. p. 203,204)

Thus, we have the fusion of Shakespeare and the Oriental and concepts of hybridity – as an empowering condition, transculturation, indigenization, and relocation, passed through the filter of the ‘ideological sieves’ of the east. In sum, we have a transfigured version of Shakespeare: the critical approaches of these critics have allowed the Orient space enough to create the “other” Shakespeare. (Lomba, 1998).

As early as 1848, in a preproduction notice of the staging of Othello, the Bengal Harkaru of 1 August expressed ‘interest’ at the novelty of approach that “Young Bengal... famous for his devotion to Shakespeare in the school and the closet ...is endearing to embody the glorious creations of that mighty intellect.” It was apprehensive about whether anyone will be “able to play the moor without paint...possesses enough physical energy to carry him through the most arduous character.” The novelty in the approach of the Vishal Bharadwaj’s Omkara is one such suggestive reading of Othello. This ‘other’ Othello that Bharadwaj creates is a Moor without his paint. What we see is a conscious universalization and Indianization of Shakespeare’s play such that it assimilates into the social and cultural fabric of India and attempts at one of the most creative outcomes of the encounter between Shakespeare and India. What we see is the assertion of a playful freedom and postcolonial confidence to cut, critique, and rewrite the text of Shakespeare in contemporary terms.

Omkara declares its lineage at the very beginning, and the comparison with Shakespeare's Othello sets the tone of the film. And yet from the first shot, what strikes us is the brilliant re-imagining: even though the structure is religiously taken from Shakespeare’s Othello, it cannot be denied that the defining feature of the film is not its plot - but the characters and the overall mood. He succeeds in bringing to life Shakespeare in rustic India.

Omkara is a wonderful example of how the entire plot of Othello can be transformed and adapted to appeal to the twenty-first century Indian mindset, in gritty and realistic atmosphere that an Indian can relate to, soiled with heartland grime and delivered in a dialogue that is raw, yet poetic, abusive yet literate, mundane yet metaphoric. Like the other films based on Shakespeare's plays, this play can also be best considered in terms of its vision - that is, the imaginary world it creates, and the way of seeing it that it offers the viewer rather than the degree of its faithfulness to a Shakespearian original. However, Shakespearian films often arise from the director's desire to do justice to what are perceived as the original's salient qualities - attempting to encompass each 'necessary question of the play' (to borrow Hamlet's term.) To an extent, the history of Shakespearian film-making is one of variations on this theme: shifting attitudes to the Shakespearian source material, varied objectives, and changing techniques. Shakespeare and his staging whether be it on the Indian stage or in the silver screen is now no longer as it was in 1822 Kolkata, when they were merely canonical stagings – as a means to show how the natives could enunciate and enact the bard. A vast distance has been traversed from those days of mimicry to a postcolonial, postmodern freedom to innovate and take liberties with the text and its traditions of staging.

## **Othello and Omkara**

### **A. The Shakespearean Original**

Shakespeare’s Othello is a Moor who has just eloped with the fair Desdemona when the play opens and leaves Venice to command the Venetian armies in Cyprus, accompanied by his new wife and lieutenant Cassio. The treacherous ancient, Iago, a position below lieutenant plants Desdemona's handkerchief on Cassio, and manages to

convince Othello that his wife has been unfaithful with the lieutenant. Othello kills Desdemona out of jealousy, before Iago's wife eventually reveals that Desdemona's affair was but an invention of Iago's. Iago immediately kills his wife also, and Othello commits suicide in grief. On the superficial level, Othello seems to be obviously a play about sexual jealousy - the "bloody passion" that undermines the hero and turns him into a murderer. But on a deeper level, the play explores important concerns arising from but not restricted to the central phenomenon of jealousy. Shakespeare shows how a deeply malicious man (Iago) can exploit the gap between intuitive belief and knowledge based on empirical evidence in order to subvert a husband's faith in his wife. Iago activates in Othello the "green-eyed monster" of jealousy and we see the fall of a noble Moor from greatness: the entire and unforeseen change from the fondest love and most unbounded confidence to the tortures of jealousy and the madness of hatred. "The nature of the Moor is noble, confiding, tender, and generous; but his blood is of the most inflammable kind; and being once roused by a sense of his wrongs, he is stopped by no considerations of remorse or pity till he has given a loose to all the dictates of his rage and his despair." (Hazlitt, 1817) Shakespeare, in this character, puts into motion the various impulses that agitate this our mortal being and it is in this that he has shown the mastery of his genius and of his power over the human heart.

### **B. Omkara: The Hindi Cinematic Adaptation**

In Bharadwaj's film, Ajay Devgan plays Omkara also called Omi (Othello), who is the head of a gang of outlaws and calls himself a 'half-caste' as he is born of the union of his high caste Brahmin father with a low caste maid. The narrative focuses on Omi (Duke), one of the most feared and respected men as he runs an upper-caste youth force controlled by a shrewd politician Bhaisaab played by Naseeruddin Shah - the perfect anchor required for the indigenization of the Elizabethan tragedy. The scene of the cinematic action is the rugged plains of UP, in the midst of lawlessness. The movie is set against the political conflict around gangland of Uttar Pradesh and the plot revolves around peer jealousy and suspected marital infidelity. The infectious, diabolical, Dionysian and yet extremely credible chameleon-like and physically tough character of Iago is played by Saif Ali Khan by the name of Ishwar 'Langa' Tyagi Lal while Cassio is played by Viveik Oberoi as Kesu Firangi. Langda's pride is insulted when Omi appoints Kesu and not Langda as the Bahubali (chief lieutenant). Raging with envy, he hatches a plan to misleadingly implicate Omi's mind against his innocent lover, the eloquent homely beauty- Dolly (Kareena Kapoor) who had defied her father and her community, to marry Omkara. Dolly is the perfect balance between innocence and sensuality.

Considered one of the finest of tragedies of Shakespeare, Othello is a story of love turned bad by unfounded jealousy. Shakespeare had used techniques as juxtapositioning of one scene against the other, verse against prose, contrasts between relationships, characterisation, the language and the imagery to give the final effect of Othello. In the cinematic version, Omkara, makes use of the light and sound effect to recreate the magic of Shakespeare on celluloid. The audience is given an absolute visual treat with the desert-sand-looking-colour of the entire film. The character of Langda is shot with green-tinted light and the fact that Omi plays the black Moor, he is always with a black shawl around him. The landscape used unfurls slowly in wide expanses and its movements and shadows bring to life the high Shakespearean drama. Music is the soul of most Indian movies and the folksy tunes enhance and never for once interrupt the taut narrative.

Like in all other language, Shakespeare, through cinema, has been spectacularized. Lehmann and Starks (2002) in their introduction to "Are We in Love with Shakespeare?" rightly ponders over the status of Shakespeare as a performance phenomenon and probes the extent of his authority in post modernity.

### **Omkara - The Shades of The Original and Shades Apart**

In a review of Lehmann and Lisa S. Starks, eds. *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema.*, Scott G. Reed of the University of Georgia comments:

"From the theoretical advances of Barthes, Foucault, and the poststructuralist school to the ongoing debate over "true" authorship, even Shakespeare himself has not been immune to the slings and arrows of postmodern circumstance."

Indeed so, Shakespeare's plays in film adaptation places the text into conversation with not only the visual medium of film, but also with other "authorial" voices that come complementary and often competitive- that of the director, actor, and screenwriter. Added to it all is the infusion of variety of local and hybrid styles by the instinctive Indian performer. The resultant postcolonial confidence in the staging of Bharadwaj's Omkara becomes apparent in the

obvious shifting of the locale to that of rural Indian terrain complete with a typical twenty-first concern for ascendancy in the political sphere. Day-to-day regular knick knacks like cell phones, motorbikes and a guitar: the Indian director in Omkara, uses it all – down to the use of MMS cell phones to handle corrupt political rivals. But, though cast as a commercial entertainer, the movie defies all set rules of a commercial cinema and is a serious film, about real people and real emotions.

In Omkara, the bard is transferred to the heartland of India in a flourish of gritty, heavy, and crude UP dialect laced with down-to-earth expletives. But its realism and uncontrived sense of below the belt humour is an unexplored terrain in Hindi cinema. But, Omkara manages to display the deft nuances while sticking extremely close to the source material with little or no wavering in the script of the original. In one moment of intense jealousy and suspicion, Othello asks of Iago:

OTHELLO. Was not that Cassio parted from my wife?

IAGO. Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it,

That he would steal away so guilty-like,

Seeing you coming. (III.iii.36- 39)

Again, after she elopes, Desdemona's father warns Othello-

BARANTIO. "Look to her, Moor, if thou has eyes to see:

She has deceived her father, and may thee." (I,iii, 286-7)

We have a literal translation of these words. Any reader of the original text easily realizes that the transformations in Omkara from Othello are only superficial: the Duke is replaced by a corrupt politician who unabashedly orders trains to turn back. In the movie, the handkerchief is replaced by an ancestral waistband (cummerbund).

The plot of Omkara leads us out of the world of Othello's exotic exploits into a typically anarchic wilderness in interior India where laws are made to be broken. Into this, a tender love story creeps in. Unlike the original, where Othello and Desdemona are already announced to be married, in Omkara, Dolly is not married to Omi and she elopes with him on her wedding day. The entire metamorphosis of Omi takes place in the period between the elopement to the wedding: the space in between is time enough for Langda to instill doubts in the mind of Omkara about his wife's fidelity and for him to kill her on her wedding bed. We come face-face with someone who loves and hates in equal measures. The fact that Omi, loved only once and loved an unflinching beauty, who is better born in comparison to his half caste status must have combined with his indomitable ego that threatened to be crushed. The resultant was the fatal end of innocence.

The comparisons between Othello and Omkara become are easy to draw. Langda oozes evil in his speech. But, keeping in mind the Indian audience, the character of Omi is made a bit more rational than Shakespeare did: he does not believe Langda too easily, confronts him on the innocence of Dolly and asks for evidence before he actually commits the murder. With Omi less trusting, Langda is also made wlier.

As was mentioned earlier, the role of the actors, the dress designer, the scriptwriter, the cinematographer – everyone's contribution to the film finally affects the result. The portrayal of Kesu as a confused amateur in politics highlights the portrayal of Langda. He sports a mean look and pours invectives at will: he comes across as a better leader when compared to Keshu, thus softening our stance towards him. We tend to partially empathise with Langda. His handicap and lack of recognition despite many years of loyalty also serve in undermining his negative profile. Unlike Shakespeare's Iago, he is also not a professional schemer as there is a strong element of luck in all his moves. He uses all the luck and oppurtunites that come his way - whether it pertains to Billo's (Bianca's or Cassio's girlfriend's) entry at the end, his conversation with Kesu on his mobile or spotting Kesu's bike when he and Omkara return early from an election campaign. He does not emerge as totally black.

One of the major shifts in the plot of Omkara was the detailed marriage proceedings. The film is shot in India and marriage is a grand affair complete with many rituals: in India, marriage is a hinge on which the life of an Indian girl turns. This is utilised to the fullest – complete with old ladies of the house singing the marriage songs. We have a lavish display of the Haldi ceremony (in which the bride and the groom are smeared and washed with a paste of haldi or turmeric). During the ceremony, the typically Indian belief on omens and superstitions is brought to play in

the scheme of things, during the ceremony. An eagle is shown to fly overhead distracting Dolly's attention and finally dropping a dead snake into the bowl that had the turmeric paste. We see a dramatic splash of the paste on to the countenance of the heroine leaving her terrorized about the possible outcome of a marriage with a person whom she had embraced for love but who had of late turned violent and suspicious. It omen functions as a foreboding of the fatal end of the heroine. In fact, Indu does chide him on his ugliness and his beautiful wife:

“Jaise Kaale Lote Mein Doodh” (Like milk in a black jar) but these are not explored further and so his insecurities do not come to the surface.

Langda's desire for revenge and Machiavellian mechanizations lead to the mass destruction of lives at the end of the play. While in the Shakespearean play one of the insecurities in the character of Iago is that of a possible adultery committed by his wife, Emilia, with Othello, in the 2006 movie, this factor is overlooked. There is a single line accusation directed at Indu in the last scene when Langda faces accusations from Omi and Indu. However, he does not refer to Omi as the accomplice in adultery. Thus, in the Indianized version of Othello, the accusation is merely in a vain attempt at saving his skin and to prove his innocence. But, ironically, he is killed at the end by his own wife- in opposition to the original, where Iago kills his wife.

This is a diversion from the Shakespearean original. Unlike other tragedies of Shakespeare, where the villain is killed at the end to lead to a restoration of order, in the 2006 Indianized version, we see Iago killed by his wife in fits of fury and shock at the evil nature of her husband, whom she had referred to as *mera khargosh* (my bunny rabbit) in one moment of love. What we see satisfies our sense of social justice and restoration of order – the Elizabethan tragedy finds the perfect Indian setting: a faithful and unsuspecting wife confronted with a reality that she cannot digest kills her husband to avenge all his wrongs and restores order.

It is worth noting that the final scene also appeals to the Indian audience as it visualizes an idea that they are familiar with: Indian mythology is replete with examples of women who takes on herself the duty of restoration of peace and order, after the sinner has sinned to his fullest. It has religious connotations and the movie pictures even the screen presence of Indu as a goddess in anger – hair left untended, eyes as coals of blazing fire. She takes upon herself the duty of revenge and restoration of order. This is something very familiar to the Indian audience- the picture of goddess Durga, the incarnation of Shakti, or Power when she kills the demon, Mahishasura. This demon was almost invincible because of a boon granted by Lord Shiva (the Destroyer in the Hindu Holy Trinity of Creator-Preserver-Destroyer) whereby no male could defeat him. On parallel lines, Indu was able to slay the demon, thus ending his reign of terror. This elevation to someone in a higher order (or might be as someone possessed by the spirit) is for one brief moment and then she is to back to her normalcy: she weeps and cries as a widow near the dead Mahihasur.

Relationships are handled more subtly in *Omkara*. We have racial overtones in Emilia's references to Othello. She even calls him a “Blacker Devil.” But in *Omkara*, they share a brother-sister relationship. Typical Indian beliefs like swearing on a loved one's head gives the Indian Othello a distinctly Indian flavour. Besides, unlike Iago's not-too-happy married life, Indu and Langda share a ‘supposedly’ happy relationship.

These slight changes in the plot of *Omkara*, makes it a far more convincing and real-to- life cinematic experience. In the original, one fact is surprising: though Emilia and Desdemona are such close friends, they never mention the ‘handkerchief’ in their conversation. In the filmed version in a scene –*Omkara* tries to talk about it and in another scene where Indu and Dolly are about to talk about the wrist belt but ‘Langda’ manages to distract them. This seems more plausible.

James Christopher in his review of *Omkara*, September 6, 2006, in *The Times* said, “I've never seen the play so perfectly tuned to a time (the present), or a place (Uttar Pradesh).” The production is not in awe of Shakespeare. Rather we can use the words Panja (2005) for another much celebrated play of Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

In “its transparent need of not making a statement for or against Shakespeare, it was an example of second generation postcoloniality.” (p.33)

Thus, what we have in *Omkara* is a near-original Shakespeare with tweaks in the plot that makes the story the Indian director's imaginative response to Othello. Shakespeare's Othello is universal because it deals with ordinary

human emotions: jealousy, anger, love, envy. His story can be adapted across any language, country or culture because Shakespeare entertains and bares us to human feelings and frailty, introducing us to the dark side of man hidden under layers of emotions. The backdrop is redundant. In the words of Vishal Bharadwaj, the filmmaker, “Othello is a universal tale, dealing with the basic human traits of revenge and jealousy and I thought it would translate well into a film.”

### **Cross Cultural Transfer**

Though it cannot be denied that Shakespeare in performance in India is often indianized and the knowledge of the original text is not really necessary in order to receive the text, in translation, in performance and in filming, the literary text makes a cross border communication possible. In the words of Poonam Trivedi (2005):

“If translation, then, has a cross-cultural transfer is an extension of the boundaries of the text, interpretation is an expansion and interpenetration of it meaning and performance, a crossover embodiment into the material plane. A dramatic text as culturally encrypted as Shakespeare is not inert; it is continually reforming itself and its contextual world, crossing borders, absorbing and subverting, being assimilated and critiqued.” (p. 28)

Shakespeare introduced western culture to the Indians in India. While translators were eager to Indianize Shakespeare as well as preserve his foreignness, their attempts resulted in enriched and hybrid forms of drama and also inspired reform movements of the nineteenth century. It resulted in a cultural translation not only of the text but also of the western cultural concepts and values. Harish Trivedi, in his essay, “Colonizing Love” speaks of how the Indian concept of love which is indirect and passive, has been (post) colonized by the opposing western concept of love which is impetuous and physical. The popular and more hybrid genre of the cinema celebrate passionate and physical love and there are instance of these in the erotic scenes between Omi and Dolly and Langda and Indu. But here too, there is a distancing as regards kissing – marking it as something that is transgressive and foreign: what we have is a resistant but increasing acceptance of the Western norms of romantic love.

### **Working of Universals In Othello and Omkara**

Shakespeare’s Othello has universal elements that make it transcend over time and age and across all cultures – that is why it is adaptable to all forms of expression. Speaking about good literature we can put in the words of Kiparsky:

“[Literature] is universal. Eagleton’s (1983) statement that literature itself is a ‘recent historical invention’ is false...In the sense in which I have been using the term and in which I believe it should be the subject matter of poetic semiotic enquiry, literature is neither recent nor a historical invention. In fact no human community lacks a literature.”

Universals in literature points to all that is common in all literary works, properties which are common to all or most works of a given type, which appear across all literary traditions, properties which are a part of the repertoire of techniques available in all or most literary traditions. The universal in literature is highly significant for our understanding of the human mind and human society.

Most myths used in literature of different languages share properties in common. Speaking of the Hindu mythological character Sita, the chaste wife of Lord Rama in the grand epic of India, The Ramayana and draw parallels between her and Shakespeare’s Desdemona. The Ramayana belongs to a class of literature known in Sanskrit as *kavya* (poetry), though in the West it is considered to belong to the category of literature familiar to readers of Homer, namely the epic. It deals with mythological themes and has been transmuted into symbols and metaphors. As the story runs, Sita, the very paragon of virtue untainted, had to undergo a public test: she had to give the *agnipariksha* – whereby she had to emerge from the flames of the fire unscathed: this would be the touchstone of her unimpeachable moral character. Eventually, she is made the queen again, but still continues to be disrespected and finally submits herself to the bosom of the earth. Desdemona also has to undergo a trial for all her innocent, unflinching love for the Moor, Othello. Constantly under the scanning, unreasonably jealous eyes of her husband- she too has to undergo her symbolic baptism by fire: after a life of physical violence and mental turmoil, she is killed - smothered by a pillow in a bed covered in her wedding sheets. Symbolically, she is suffocated beneath the demands put on her fidelity. Women, across all cultures and all ages has subject to patriarchal men who make demands on them to prove their fidelity on the pressures of the society that they reside in: Sita had to prove her sanctity on the stray remarks by a washer man and Desdemona on Iago’s. Another stream of criticism, almost continuing to this day, chooses the comparative method, measuring Shakespeare with the yardstick of classical Indian literature.

Menon (1938) elucidates similarities of structure between Shakespeare and the Sanskrit classics which accounts for the initial appeal to Indians through the pleasure of recognition.

Another universal that Hogan (1996) posits before us is on the topic, a striking feature of this genre, cross culturally, is “the link posited between tragic events and fate, understood merely in the sense of some larger determining force, beyond anything in the control of those engaged directly and immediately in the events portrayed in the work.” (p.175)

In Othello, too this universal strongly works- Desdemona greets her husband and, without guilt, introduces Cassio’s name into their conversation. Here, fate plays a major role in this tragedy; not even Iago wholly arranged this swift, coincidental confrontation of Othello, Desdemona, and Cassio, and certainly the pathos of Desdemona’s position here is largely due to no other factor than fate. Desdemona could not purposely have chosen a worse time to mention Cassio’s name to her husband. In addition, she innocently refers to Cassio as a “suitor.” All these coincidences will fester later in Othello’s subconscious as Iago continues to fire the Moor’s jealousy.

Othello also employs another noteworthy literary universal- the use of metaphor. As Desdemona leaves, Othello chides himself for being irritated by his wife. Lovingly he sighs,

OTHELLO. “Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, Chaos is come again” (90–92).

There is an element of prophecy here not only in Desdemona’s and Othello’s farewells to one another, but also in their lines and in the remainder of the Moor’s first speech after Desdemona leaves. In a metaphorical sense, perdition will soon catch Othello’s soul, and chaos will soon replace order in his life.

It is the presence of these universals that make Othello loved, read, remade and re-imaged across all ages and cultures.

### **Conclusion:-**

Thus, the hybrid media called the film explores the encounters between two different cultures over different points of time. Omkara emerges as the Indian reincarnation of Shakespeare’s Othello– jumps out of his literary antecedents along with his accomplices, does (in the words of an anonymous reviewer of the movie) ‘a dance of crime-driven dynamics on the nozzle of their country-made guns.’ What a perceptive moviegoer realizes is something that can be put in the words of Poonam Trivedi (2006), as the recreation “serve both to dislocate and reinscribe the protean quality of Shakespeare.” (p. 35) This love for Shakespeare can be seen as a contrast to our celebration of the termination of the unwanted British rule in India: in the case of Shakespeare we publicly avow our fervent allegiance to him celebrating the continuance of his empire. This love – hate relationship can be explained thus:

“The British empire in India crumbled down, because it had only annexed our territory, but failed to annex our love... Shakespeare, on the other hand, approached us genially with a regal abundance of gifts and expected nothing from us except that we should accept them from him for our use and enjoyment...”

Attempts at re-imaging Shakespeare can give another perspective of looking at a text that was written hundreds of years back and for a different cultural milieu altogether. Popular and scholarly interest in Shakespeare and Shakespearean appropriation is continuing to develop new methods for seeing and performing the text in fresh ways.

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