

## **Haider in Hamletian Cloak: Shakespeare Walking Through the Bazaar of Wounds**

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### ABSTRACT:

*Shakespeare has been ceaselessly alluring film-makers with his diversified plots brimming with characters having myriad faces. Shakespeare's adaptations on celluloid have not only liberated the literary classics from the confinement of a strictly compartmentalized academic space but also have successfully made Shakespeare global. Bollywood was never idle in exploiting essence of Shakespeare(s) as inter-textual echoes and there were even direct text-to-film adaptations in the cinematic panorama of 1970s-80s. However, with Vishal Bharadwaj the Indian industry has touched the pinnacle. Maqbool (adaptation of Macbeth) and Omkara (adaptation of Othello) created instant history the moment they hit the floor. Bharadwaj's creative endeavours recast Shakespeare amidst Indianized settings so fluidly that the films often have outgrown the frame provided by the hypo-text.*

*Haider*, is the final film in the proposed Shakespeare trilogy of Bharadwaj, for the purpose of which the filmmaker brings Shakespeare in insurgency-hit Kashmir of 1995 when civilian disappearances were hushed up under the rule of AFSPA. Kashmir's unshaken voice of truth scathingly ruptures the narrative of utopia created by the mainstream films with colourful sceneries and counters the discourse of bravery and heroism manifested in the patriotic films which actually succeeded in lulling us to slumber. Haider's Kashmir represents the images under the negative, where the darkness comes to the fore and the brightness recedes to the fading background. The prevailing dystopia, an exploration of which is also found in Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*, makes us glimpse another version of the dismal Denmark of Shakespeare. Haider, the Hamletian protagonist, robes himself in the mould of his alter-ego to articulate what is unvoiced, to reveal what is hidden.

Though Hamlet remains one of the most adapted texts all over the world, Bharadwaj's epoch-making version carves a universally acclaimed niche, in spite of being a mere shadow of the hypo-text. This paper proposes to talk about the multifarious issues from setting, including characters to the analysis of scenes, all spaces where Shakespeare is reprocessed in the making of Haider.

**Keywords:** Hamlet, Kashmir, Adaptation, Transculturation, AFSPA

*The Shakespearean understanding of life ...  
is neither eastern nor western — just new in-  
sights into the individual predicament.*

— (Mulyil, 1964, 7.)

Stage-to-film adaptations, no matter how successful the film may turn out to be, always involve the risk of being snubbed as inferior. However, if not from time immemorial, since the advent of motion pictures, adaptations are everywhere, not only in the obvious representation of novelistic stories but also in liberating plays from the confines of the proscenium arch and (re)-visioning them in filmic versions where images precede and often supersede words of mouth. There exist diverse opinions among critics centring on the debate, whether to consider adaptations as “minor”, “subsidiary”, “derivative”, “secondary” to the adapted texts or as products of artistic excellence (Hutcheon XII-XIII). In the words of the adapter-novelist John North in Louis Begley’s novel *Shipwreck* (2003), “[T]hrough images film conveys a vast amount of information that words can only attempt to approximate...but approximation is precious in itself, because it bears the author’s stamp” (Hutcheon 2). Though cinematic adaptation is an offshoot of popular culture that celebrates mosaic multiplicity, merging hierarchies and blending genres, questions of fidelity pervade the unconscious of the motion picture of a trans-genre adapted text, confirming Tagore’s thoughts “[C]inema is still playing second fiddle to literature” (qtd. in Hutch-

eon 1). The viewers of an adapted movie watch the film looking for the essential spirit of the original text and they are disappointed if thwarted from the comfortable position of foreknowledge by a jerk experienced through shuffling, reshaping and re-visioning of plot elements. So, it is the expectation of pleasure, aroused from the advantageous standpoint as readers of an established classic, possessing authority of the awareness of the primary text, which induces them to look for the cinematic transformations. Adaptation announces a celebratory self-proclaimed inferiority tied up in an obligatory relationship to the hypo-text preoccupying the dominant throne of classic superiority and the challenge lies in its emerging as a Sisyphus figure predestined to carry the burden of past as long as it lives, and yet becoming the indomitable outgrowing shadow of the source text. The filmmaker takes the task of reinterpreting, already knowing that his vision in attempting to decode and encode a classic will always be seen as a re-vision, a palimpsestic creation. The moralistic discourse of infidelity is now shifted towards inter-textuality and the filmmakers of adaptations are seen as readers with individualized reading abilities. It releases literature from the stifling confines of being unidirectional and broadens the arena for appreciation of adaptations (Hutcheon 1-22).

The journey of Shakespeare's plays from text to screen, via theatre, has been rough yet fascinating. Shakespeare was born in an age when global-

ization started by connecting continents through world trade and he had the dynamic potentiality to incorporate constant changes into his work not only to respond to erstwhile socio-political-cultural scenarios but also to embed seeds of universalism within them. If globalization is thought to be the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole, Shakespeare and the multiple adaptations of his plays in different mediums across culture proclaim the celebration of that: “The Shakespeare we confront today has been globalized beyond the confines of any single language or territory” (Bosman 286). Shakespeare has come down from the throne of Englishness and acquired disguises of various colours disseminated beyond the overarching grand-narrative of production confined only to English production houses like the Royal Shakespeare Company. Akira Kurosawa’s *Throne of Blood* (1957) and *Ran* (1985) are Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and *King Lear* adapted as film versions encoded in core Japanese feel and flavour. Kurosawa re-contextualizes *Macbeth* in the feudal era of Japan, utilizes Noh performance, expands characterization and lets the blood of original dialogues induce life force to the flesh of the action film. *Ran*, again, is set in the feudal world of samurai, with some similarities and divergences with *King Lear*. In the *Bad Sleep Well* (1960), Kurosawa innovatively retells the story of Hamlet, against the backdrop of the post-Second World War period of crisis. Grigori Kozintsev’s *Korol Lir* (*King Lear*) deserves to be mentioned here along the same line.

The 1971 Russian adaptation of Shakespeare is a worldly acclaimed masterpiece reflecting the intensity of burning human emotions and passions of the tragedy of King Lear successfully on the visual medium. In the wake of “medialization and globalization” innumerable cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare have flooded the global market in the late twentieth and early twenty first century (Burnett 7).

Almost every filmmaker of Shakespeare’s plays faces the challenge of recreating something in a completely different medium for which the stage is the universally revered abode. There can be two forms of Shakespearean adaptations identified by Charles Marowitz in his *Recycling Shakespeare* (1991) – the “Fundamentalist Approach” where the director invests his creative energy in finding out unexplored nuances of meanings from the existing words on page and the “Reform Approach” where the audience is caught in enthralling awe in the view of the director’s incorporated originality into the existing text (Marowitz 8). However, it is Shakespeare and his flamboyant worlds that play the catalyst and prompt ingenious reformulations in various styles.

When the whole world is brimming with the glow of reinventing Shakespeare on the screen space, Bollywood, India’s film hub, has also contributed to the process with its uniquely customized Shakespeares. Interestingly the Bard has been the inspiring presence behind many plots and subplots of

Hindi films and there are acknowledged adaptations as well, *Do Dooni Char* (1968, Gulzar re-adapting from Bengali film *Bhrantibilas* which is an adaptation of *Comedy of Errors*), *Angoor* (1972, Gulzar's adaptation of *Comedy of Errors*), *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak* (1988, Mansoor Khan adapting *Romeo and Juliet*), *10ml Love* (2010, Sharat Katariya adapting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*), *Ram Leela: Goliyon Ki Rasleela* (2013, Sanjay Leela Bhansali adapting *Romeo and Juliet*), to name only a few. The theatricality embedded in the intrigued and twisted plots, complex and layered characterisation, reiterative motifs and metaphors of Shakespearean plays have made them the irresistibly potent source of imitation for the hyperbolically dramatic Bollywood. However, it is Vishal Bhardwaj, who stands apart distinctively as a maestro in Shakespearean adaptation with his crowning trilogy of *Maqbool* (adaptation of *Macbeth* in the Mafia-based underworld released in 2003), *Omkara* (adaptation of *Othello* released in 2006) and the last but not the least *Haider* (re-contextualizing *Hamlet* amidst Kashmir Insurgency, released in 2014). Highly influenced by Kurosawa's adaptation of *Macbeth* in *The Throne of Blood* (acknowledged by Bhardwaj and stated in the blog-post of *Mail Online India*), the Bollywood director made up his mind to encode Shakespeare in Indian ethos to reach out the masses: "My [Bhardwaj's] films are inspired by Shakespeare's works but are not meant for Shakespearean scholars. I try to identify with the spirit and essence of the play by giving it a

twirl that appeals the Indian audience” (qtd. in Srivastava, n.p.). He intermingles core Shakespearean elements with typical Bollywood masalas to cook a fusion cuisine, for Bhardwaj believes the success of a film lies in its appeal to the mass and Haider turns out to be his “first golden goose”, being declared as “the fifth highest-rated crime drama of all time” (*NDTV Movies*). There have been debates and critical opinions of both shades concerning the aptness of the translocation of Shakespearean classics and Bhardwaj’s rather bold attempts to debunk the Shakespearean myths, making a topsy-turvy of themes and contexts. However, Tatlow’s remarks on the transculturation of Shakespeare are instructive in this context. He states:

Every engagement with a Shakespearean text ... is necessarily intercultural. The past is really another culture, its remoteness disguised by language that can occasionally appear as familiar as we seem to ourselves, whom we understand so imperfectly (Tatlow 5).

Adaptations across the frontiers of diverse cultures have always involved translocation of themes and characters deeply rooted in the conventional ethos of the culture of their genesis. Culture operates like language, providing a structure for every individualized expression. Relocating Shakespeare in the background of an Indianized setting essentially raises the concern about instability resulting out of the mishandling of the knitted plot design. Never-

theless, Bharadwaj, in his adaptations, re-visualises Shakespeare in a neatly woven milieu soaked in Indian rationale. His Shakespeares are transcultural appropriations converging and merging paradigms of classics and at the same time re-confirming Jonathan Bate's analytical comments on appropriation: "Shakespeare' is not a man who lived from 1564 to 1616 but a body of work that is refashioned by each subsequent age in the image of itself" (qtd. in Cartelli 2).

This paper focuses on analysing *Haider*, as a trans-cultural Shakespearean adaptation, re-contextualized in the illusory Elysium of Kashmir. Indian cinema has been highly instrumental in sketching the grand narrative of nationalism around Kashmir for decades. The stereotypical representation has either shown the valley as a hub of terrorism positing the deadly terrorists against a passionately patriotic army thriving hard to restore balance to the 'heaven on earth' (as in films like *Border*, *Mission Kashmir*, *LOC Kargil*, *Lakshya*, *Fanaa* et al) or cast as a place of natural beauty and bounty with floating shikaras, snow-capped mountains and flower-laden slopes (as in *Mission Kashmir*, *Fitoor*, *Kashmir ki Kali*, *3 Idiots*, *Noorie* et al). Vishal Bharadwaj along with the Kashmiri journalist Basharat Peer (author of *Curfewed Night: A Frontline Memoir of Life, Love and War in Kashmir*, a personal account of Insurgency hit Kashmir in the 1990s) have moved beyond the familiar discourse of Kashmir's charm and charisma to lay

bare the repressed mini narratives of the Kashmiris as well as of Kashmir. The intrigued plot of Shakespearean *Hamlet* is moulded and revised to shape the unsung history of the bereaved people, to echo the subdued cries of the ripped apart soul of the land of Kashmir.

*Haider* begins in a strained ambience when a doctor agrees to perform an appendicitis operation on the leader of a separatist group. The doctor, Hilaal Meer (played by Narendra Jha), arranges everything for the success of the operation to save the life of the ailing leader and even takes the risk of carrying the patient secretly in his ambulance, tactfully handling the enquiry of the Indian Army on the check post. He brings the sufferer into his own house caring less for his own endangered life and reputation and manages to relieve him from his pains, much to the indignation of his wife, Ghazala (played by Tabu), who is anxious and nervous at keeping a militant in the house. The next morning they wake up with a call from the local masjid delivering the message of a military raid. While going out to respond to the announcement, agitated Ghazala expresses her worry for their only son Haider. The apprehension of unease and disquiet is injected in the very beginning, in parallel with the introductory exchange of dialogues between Bernardo, Marcellus and Horatio who give us the assumption of the political turmoil of Denmark in the hypo-text. Here, in Kashmir, the residents live their lives on their nerves, torn apart between the

military and the militants. In the film, the doctor is accused of sheltering terrorists in his house and is taken away for questioning while their house is bombed to dust in a devastating encounter. Haider (played by Shahid Kapoor) returns from Aligarh, where he studies British Revolutionary Poets, after the news of his father's "disappearance" reaches him. Repositioning *Hamlet* amidst the Insurgency-stricken wounded Valley is indeed an audacious and intuitive attempt on the part of Vishal Bhardwaj.

Kashmir insurgency is the conflict between the separatists and jingoists (demanding either Kashmir's cessation from India and accession to Pakistan or complete independence of Kashmir) and the Government of India. From the inception of Kashmir as a border-state of India edging Pakistan it has remained the cynosure of the nation's security politics. The geographically unsettled location (causing territorial dispute) and the rise of religious fanaticism (the state has a majority of Islamist population) among the residents have made the access of democracy limited in the region of Kashmir, promoting rise of local political leaders often supporting the causes of the militants and being instrumental in provoking the residents against the Government policies. A disputed election in 1987 fanned the fire of insurgency in the valley when some of the members of the legislative assembly supported armed groups against the Indian government ("Insurgency in Jammu and

Kashmir”) and the President’s rule was sought after for almost a decade. Incidentally, the elections in Kashmir has never been a peaceful democratic process: “The history of elections held in Jammu & Kashmir right from October 1951 to 1999 is full of recorded evidence that points out large scale state supported rigging, coercion and out-right brutality in the early years and use of gun point to drag the helpless Kashmiris out of their homes to cast vote, in the later years” (“Kashmir: Nuclear Flashpoint”). Amidst the commotion of a state election the ultimate sufferers are the local residents whose destinies are tossed between the oppression of the militants and ineptitude of a government, as is clear in the words Prem Nath Bazaz, a Kashmiri journalist and activist, summarized in 1978: “After independence, rulers of J & K State were not the freely chosen representatives of the people as they should have been but were the nominees and the protégés of the Central Congress Government... their source of power was New Delhi... not even once the elections were fair and free and a candidate holding independent views had slim chance to be elected” (“Kashmir : Nuclear Flashpoint”).

Bhardwaj has aptly painted the dismal political scenario and the malfunction it causes in the social and personal lives of the Kashmiris in the canvas of Haider. In Bhardwaj’s narrative, the political turbulence and the hapless plight of the Kashmiris play the trope intensifying Haider’s bereavement of losing his father. Kashmir has been conferred

the rule of AFSPA following the insurgency of the 1990s. Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts (AFSPA) granting Indian Army with special powers in disturbed areas has undergone scathing criticism in the hands of Bhardwaj. He makes a parody of the unruly massacre and oppression the so called protectors of the rules are involved in. Some of the special powers under the act include, arresting suspected persons without warrant, firing upon or using forceful means against a person acting against law (even if it causes death), to search any premise and take suspected persons in custody for indefinite period and most importantly legal immunity of the army officers for their actions as their actions are always thought to be justified and rightful (“Armed Forces Act”). Bhardwaj has raised a voice of protest in minutely portraying the reign of terror in the lives of the Kashmiris under the power of Indian army. The scene where a local resident hesitates to enter his own house unless and until his identity card is checked by someone is cursory but pertinent glimpse of the traumatic psychological scar left on the inhabitants of the land. After the implementation of AFSPA it became mandatory, for everyone entering and leaving the land, to stand in a queue for body-search and every native resident has to follow this strict identity-check method such a numberless times that it becomes an inarguable episode of his/her existence. Haider is rescued twice (once by Arshia, his childhood companion and the second time by Salman-Salman, his young-age friends-turned-spies) from the unnecessarily unavoidable compli-

cations of questioning and searching of the officers of the Indian Army. Bhardwaj's portraiture never dithers in divulging the narratives of an afflicted state. The Kashmir scenario registered in "'Hum-sheera', 'Humsaya': Sisters, Neighbours: Women's Testimonies from Kashmir", an article written by Ritu Dewan recording the evidential statements of the local habitants (published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in October 1994) seems to tell the tale of Haider's *mise-en-scène*:

Violence has completely destroyed the day-to-day life of the Kashmiri people. Fear of the security forces seems to be overriding as it is they who target the ordinary people. Bunkers proliferate in every area. Guns protrude from the windows, pointing directly at the street and passers-by, always ready to fire. The BSF, brought in ostensibly to ensure the security of the populace, actually generates a terrible, constant insecurity... Farewell greetings have changed from 'Khuda Hafis' (God be with you) to 'Sahi Salaamat Laut Ana' (come back safe). (Dewan 2654, emphasis mine)

Dewan's article was an outcome of her visit to the Valley during 1994, as a member of the social services organization Women's Initiative and her accounts coming out of interviews of the Kashmiris stands a testimony to the verisimilitude of Bhardwaj's screenplay. The filmmaker vows to bring forth the histories of the terror-stricken Kashmiris who have lived the lives amidst the roar of violence.

Following the rule of AFSPA during the Kashmir conflict of 1990s, disappearances of the civilians were common and kept as a hushed up issue which nobody dared to discuss in the fear of the military forces. Remarkably, Dewan's article written with an aim to publicize voices of the ordinary people, hidden behind the clamoured media coverage of law and order issues of the Valley, reports an incident of which Bhardwaj's story is unmistakably chained:

In Bandipora town, tehsil and district Baramulla, we visited, among many others, the family of Aiyaz Ahmed Mir Shahri, killed in custody on November 8, 1991. He was severely tortured, as was evident in the photographs of his body – wounds, cuts, holes, electric shocks on his eyes, head, throat, tongue, chest, arms, abdomen, private parts, legs. His body was thrown into a ditch from where it was picked up by the villagers. (Dewan 2654)

Scenes from *Haider* showing the torments of the captives in military camps, the abuses and injustices inflicted on them faithfully reflects countless such narratives of 'disappeared' Kashmiris.

The chronicles of bravery and martyrdom of the Indian soldiers, fighting the insurgents and Pakistani soldiers, reaching us from different media, are not rare. Bollywood has given us many films praising our soldiers' valour in defying severe climactic conditions and sacrificing their lives in guarding the Line of Control from terrorists. Bhardwaj's is

a completely different attempt in presenting the story of Kashmir inside out. Bhardwaj illuminates on setting *Haider* in Kashmir (in an interview with *The Indian Express*):

It was the political turmoil and the 25 years of tragedy of Kashmir that compelled me. Our way of looking at Kashmir has either been cosmic—only for shooting songs—or rhetoric, where we show a man in a phiran, holding a Kalashnikov. *Haider* is the first film where we see *Kashmir from the inside*. I don't think we have made a mainstream film about the issue. (qtd. by Singh in “Kashmir is the Hamlet of my Film’ says Bhardwaj”, emphasis mine)

Kashmir with its ulcerated serenity comes alive on the screen and seems to speak of its silenced pain in shrieking. The land has always remained appealing to us for its offer of heavenly glimpses, its awe-inspiring beauty of nature's bounty. Bhardwaj probes into the layered veneer of the soothing beauty and with *Haider*, the viewers, roam into the darker alleys, penetrate into the shadowy truth lurking behind the unperturbed tranquillity. *Haider's* Kashmir does not offer solace to a ripped soul, rather its own soul is torn apart. The valley of Jhelum has become a Golgotha for its own residents. People disappear and never return compelling their families for never-ending waits. Initially, Bhardwaj had prepared a synopsis of an espionage thriller for *Haider* and on showing it to Gulzar, he complained its lacking of the tragedy of Hamlet. It is then Bha-

radwaj was initiated to a realistic account of Kashmir's pity through Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night*. As the director acknowledges, "If Basharat was not a part of the film, *Haider* wouldn't be made or it wouldn't be made this way" ("Haider"). *Curfewed Night*, a heart-wrenching autobiographical record of Kashmir's tormented soul, remains the genesis of *Haider* providing the irresistible urge to reveal blasphemous truths.

The representation of the dance of autocracy (in the name of democracy) unleashed by the armed forces on the valley of Kashmir is discomforting yet unequivocally veracious. The diseased anatomy of the land reeks out odours of suppression and persecution turning the valley into a penitentiary where the inhabitants are trapped within the claustrophobic panoptic of the AFSPA-ed officers. Haider's tormenting portrayals in the scenes showing never-ending fruitless wait of the families for their 'disappeared' members, armed officers thoughtlessly shooting and killing the captives, truck full of corpses, the plagued plight of the half-widows contribute to weave the dismal milieu. Reworking Hamlet's statements about his rotten state and damaged world, Bhardwaj makes Haider aphoristically aver: "*Pura Kashmir kayedkhana hain mere dost*" ("The entire Kashmir is a prison, my friend").

Haider returns home only to find his childhood memories turned into ashes and his mother in an unusually close relationship with his uncle Khur-

ram (played by Kay Kay Menon). Desperate to find his ‘disappeared’ father Haider begins his search alone. It is perhaps for the first time in his life, Haider has felt the cleft from his mother. The relationship between Gertrude and Hamlet has multiple shades with some obvious Oedipal undertones subtly squeezed in by Shakespeare and it is never a conventional mother-son relationship. Bharadwaj skilfully includes episodes suggesting the not-so-normal affinity of Haider and Ghazala, clearly assumable even by a non-Shakespearean reader. Haider is shown excessively and a bit abnormally dependent on and close to his mother, in the scenes where an adolescent Haider puts perfume on his mother’s neck and kisses her, or in the earnest conversation between Ghazala in bridal dress and Haider in the disguised madness before her ceremony of marriage to Khurram. Ghazala reminisces how little Haider used to say “*Jab main bada ho jaunga, main Mouji se shaadi karunga*” (“When I will grow up, I will marry my mother”), how he used to feel angry even at his father touching his mother. Haider, by the time knowing about the conspiracy behind his father’s death, replies in a tone of contempt “*Par ab to unke bhai apko chhute hain, ab main kya karun?*” (“But now his brother touches you, what can I do now?”). The incestuous avidity is subtly dispersed here through the brilliant acting and dialogues, keeping in mind the prejudices of the Indian audience. Ghazala, on the other hand, manifests superfluity of emotions and concerns for her son. She caresses him affectionately, cannot sleep in

the night tormented by the thoughts of Haider's possible peril, leaves food when he does not turn up for few days – acts more like a beloved than a mother. However, Bhardwaj's *coup-de-maitre* lies in releasing her from a marginalised, passive role predestined by the source text as well as by the confines of a Muslim household and making Ghazala a more humane character than Shakespeare's Gertrude has been. His endeavour has seen a success in the unparalleled performance of Tabu. Ghazala emerges to be a character of flesh and blood with her humanly passionate desires and faults. Actress Tabu who plays the character "Ghazala", explained:

Ghazala is torn between her idealistic husband, opportunistic brother-in-law and her innocent and passionate son. Somewhere she feels she has the responsibility to keep everything in control but obviously she can't. Her love for her son is crazy. She is always trying to protect him from being misled and misguided....Haider's predicament is that he doesn't know what to do with his mother—whether to love her, hate her, believe her or kill her. (qtd. by Singh in "Tabu : My Role in Haider is to die for")

Bhardwaj liberates Ghazala from the guilt of being a conspirator in murdering her own husband with which Shakespeare's Gertrude is burdened. Ghazala emerges to be less intriguing than her Shakespearean counterpart. In the Haider-Ghazala scene amidst the debris of their bombed house (which is a restructured replication of the closet

scene in *Hamlet*), Ghazala confesses that she in a state of panic revealed the secret of the militants being hidden in their house to Khurram and proves her innocence in not knowing Khurram's motive of using the secret for his double-purpose objective, winning a position of power at the cost of his brother's life and making a path for legitimizing his love for *bhabijaan* (sister-in-law). For a moment it strikes the audience whether Ghazala is again manipulating his son by playing innocent as she is shown to do often to make Haider obey her wishes. It is towards the end in the graveyard, that Ghazala ultimately supersedes the intertextual echo by sacrificing her own life for her son and emerges as a "true '*mujahid*', a fighter for justice" (Dewan 2657, emphasis mine). She frees herself from the constraints of passionate desires leaving for Haider the ultimate message "*Intekaam se sirf intekaam hi aata hai*" ("Revenge only results in revenge") — a message that is not far from Shakespeare's Hamlet which itself serves as an interrogation of both revenge and revenge tragedies. Bhardwaj's Gertrude is saturated in the colours of the bereaved Kashmir where women are compelled to linger infinitely for their disappeared husbands whose whereabouts remain forever unknown. Souidiya Qutab's article "Women Victims of Armed Conflict: Half-widows in Jammu and Kashmir" based on a conducted survey (2010) of extensive interviews of half-widows of different villages of the region of Kashmir lays bare the "kahanis" of multifarious (social, economical, legal, psychological and familial) hassles faced

by the women whose husbands 'disappeared' and the whereabouts of whom never could be found:

Besides the uncertainty about the existence of their loved one, they do not get official recognition of their status, as there is no proof of the husband's death... These women, therefore, cannot reconcile with their loss, and their grief becomes prolonged. (Qutab 258-259)

Their existence becomes ostracized, traumatized and stigmatized and they even struggle to eke out a living. Though Ghazala is never shown struggling for life in a state of acute poverty, her oscillating predicament, as a half-widow, vouchsafes the micro narratives of all Kashmiri women. More than sketching her as a diplomatic mind, Bhardwaj concentrates on drawing commiseration of the audience. Her follies of ignorant trust, melodramatic manipulations and indulgence in sexual cravings that are instrumental in the death of her husband and the tragic dilemma of her son recede in the shadowy background and the compassionate tale of a woman neglected by her husband, betrayed by her lover, excessively affectionate to her son on whom she puts her life, surfaces up. In Ghazala's speech Bhardwaj squeezes in the plight of the half-widows of Kashmir. The quandary of the mass of the native women whose husbands has been taken into custody as potential suspects of acts of terrorism reconfigures the 'histoire' laying bare the mishandling of the special powers the armed forces in-

deluge in. Their husbands never return, no trials are held, no FIR is taken, the fine line between the victim and the innocent is never drawn and even the simplest news of where the captives are imprisoned never reach the awaiting relatives. Ghazala in Bhardwaj's hand becomes the representative of all those Kashmiri women who are pathetically torn between an envisioned widowhood-in-future and a tormenting present. The character of Gertrude thus acquires a very different identity in Bhardwaj's hand and contributes to the multidimensional exploration of the crisis in Kashmir.

Bhardwaj even takes the liberty of omitting one of the most important characters, of Horatio's, bestowing on Arshia (Ophelia in *Hamlet*) the plot-function of playing the role of Haider's sole confidant as well as his female companion. Arshia does not remain unassertive and shadowy under the larger-than-life image of the titular protagonist. Unlike Hamlet's Ophelia, she emerges to be a woman of independence and her character compensates for a lack of Horatio in Haider. Anjan Dutta, a noted Bengali filmmaker, in a review of Haider, published in *The Telegraph* on 15th October, 2014, accused Bhardwaj of robbing Haider of the "main pillar of construction called Horatio":

Why does Vishal do away with the main pillar of construction called Horatio in *Hamlet*? Here is where the whole film finally cheats us, the discerning as well as those unaware of the text.

William knew what he was doing. By robbing the primal, most important confidant called Horatio, Haider ends up having no worldview. (Datta)

Nevertheless, Arshia, having conferred with multiple roles, frees the plot of Haider from the necessity of Horatio. She escorts Haider when he returns from Aligarh, feels and shares his unexpressed pain of a shattered memory and always remains a shoulder for Haider to peacefully lean on. If a Horatio were there, it would have made the plot unnecessarily lengthy and tedious. Arshia (played by Shradda Kapoor), again, becomes the instrument connecting Haider and Roohdar (the character replicating Ghost of Old Hamlet). However, like her inter-textual parallel, Arshia, caught in the web of a tormenting psychological dilemma, unable to comprehend the ways of the world where a father betrays her daughter's trust and a frenzied lover murders his beloved's father, sacrifices her own life releasing herself from the burden of a self-built guilt. Bhardwaj takes liberty with the characterization along with moulding the scenes to suit the re-visioned backdrop he has provided to the narrative of Hamlet. Arshia's character acts as an exemplary one revealing the troubled situation faced by the women of Kashmir. Caught in the web of violence Arshia realizes her plight as a ploy in the game of politics, manoeuvred by her own father and police officer Parvez Lone along with Haider's uncle and local political leader Khurram, rather

late. Bhardwaj through the character highlights the power-play prevalent in the valley between the armed and the unarmed where the innocents and the ignorant are victimized. His creative endeavour releases the adaptation from being a slavish imitation, making it a process of reinterpretation and recreation. The viewers experience the palimpsestic echo through the memory of the source text which resonates in repetitions with variance.

The same pattern reappears in relation to the ghost of Hamlet's father who becomes in Haider a separatist leader named Roohdar. In the words of Anjan Dutta, "By making the Ghost an extremist, Vishal makes the huge blunder of robbing Hamlet's revenge of its complexity" (Datta). In Shakespeare, it is the Ghost of Old Hamlet who fanned the flicker of revenge in Hamlet and there have been plenty of debates regarding the ethical identity of the ghost. Haider's Roohdar (literally 'rooh' means soul/ spirit; played by Irfan Khan) narrates a story to Haider, the story that he claims to have the advantage of knowing from spending tortured nights and days in the dungeon-darkness of the jail where he was kept with Hilal Meer (Haider's father), a story of the days they spent together as 'rooh' and 'sharir' (soul and body), 'daria' and 'pani' (river and water), inseparable in anguish until the latter's death by gunshot. Like the ghost in Hamlet, it is Roohdar who plants the seeds of revenge in Haider's mind voicing-over his father's last wish in taking '*intekaam*' (revenge) on his uncle for lending

hand to such a heinous conspiracy. However, the hypotextual enigma re-echoes here in the disparity between Roohdar's version of portraying Hilaal as a tormented figure seeking revenge of his prescribed destiny and Hilaal's portraiture in the initial scenes of being an excessively concerned doctor for whom saving a patient's life matters more than his own. Can a person, who even in the moment of crisis, remembers to instruct medicinal doses to a militant-patient think of revenging his own brother by making his son shoot at his eyes? Haider, not having any other choice, had to put his faith in Roohdar's version of the story as do the audience but the rupture is suggestive. The implied issue of Haider getting trapped and manipulated by the opponent separatist group in dismantling Khurram from his position of power and thereby moving one step closer to the tower of power in Kashmir echoes and re-echoes even after the film ends, just as the ghost of Hamlet announces his resonance throughout Haider and the shadows of preceding revenge tragedies never leave Shakespeare. Moreover, it is the persona of Roohdar, that becomes a tool for Bhardwaj to trace the sub-current of the terrorized reign spread in the valley.

The moments in which Haider touches the height of the marvellous are the scenes of the rambling monologue and the wonderstruck enactment of the play within a play. Haider, like the Prince of Denmark, disguises his motives of revenge in an adopted cloak of madness and for Bhardwaj the

madness of the Bard becomes the trope to present the maddening plight of the people in Kashmir. Interestingly enough, the scene of the monologue is shot using graver shades, mostly greyish. The initial line given to Haider is a reworking of Shakespeare's "To be or not to be: that is the question" in Act III, Scene I – "*Hum hain ke hum nahin/ Hum hain to kahan hai/ Aur gaye to kahan gaye*" (Do we exist or do we not? If we do, then where? If not then where have we gone?) It requires the talent of a master-mind to imagine the Hamletian dilemma in the lives of the Kashmiris. The quintessential Shakespearean question turns out to be the hushed up howls of the Kashmiris whose right to self-determination, at odds with the hegemonic intent of the state, produces a cauldron of violence and nihilism that matches the anguished utterances of the Shakespearean tragic hero.



Figure 1: "Hum Hain Ke Hum Nahin" ("To be or not to be") scene from *Haider*

Haider, representative of the powerless ordinary men of the Valley, speaking from a raised platform

in front of countless heads, reveals strikingly sacrilegious truths questioning the disappearances and mass slaughter of the mass in the name of protecting a country from terrorist attack. It is here, Haider's story becomes the life-haunting narratives of thousands of Kashmiris and Bhardwaj attains the height of universality the Bard possesses. Haider's voice becomes the call of conscience which has remained buried deep within the practised complacency of a terror-stricken marginalised existence. Through the matrix of Shakespeare and the apparent mumbling of raving Haider, Bhardwaj exposes the bleeding wounds of a postcolonial nation state.

Such remarkable episodes highlight how Bhardwaj uses Shakespeare's own concerns about state and authority in Hamlet to a telling effect in his portrayal of Kashmir which acts as the lifeline of the adaptation. This is again evident from the simulation of the 'play within a play' episode from Shakespeare, where the representation soaked in the flavours of Kashmir is a manifestation of the traditional folk dance Dumhal, performed in the valley by Wattal tribes. Bhardwaj successfully employs the folk structure to provide Haider the occasion of enacting a living replica of the disappearance-murder-incest riddle right in the celebratory function of his mother's re-marriage.

The scene remains a rich tapestry, with the feast of colours amidst the bleak snow-covered stony background, the throbbing of multiple instruments

producing a harmonious symphony out of a mind in discord, Shahid's brilliant dance performance and Gulzar's shivering lyrics of Bismil—"Mat mil, mat mil,/ Gul se mat mil/ Aye bul-bul-e bismil" ("O Nightingale of the hurt one/ Don't meet the flower") – all contribute to build the thrilling momentum. The theatricality of the climax leaves the audience in mesmerizing magical spin confirming the triumph of the director in giving the relish of a real Shakespeare. Interestingly, the slice of Kashmir, presented in imitation, completes the process of familiarization compelling the viewers to willingly suspend their disbelief in reimagining the crisis of the valley.



Figure : 2. "Bismil" song sequence from Haider (replicating Play-within-a-play in Hamlet)

Bhardwaj's genius lies in tuning every single Shakespearean chord to sing the soulful rendition of Kashmir. The world of Haider entangled in the orb of Kashmir scrupulously exhibits the visible darkness where friendship and betrayal, love and revenge, unrest and calmness coalesce. The role of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two royal spies in

the disguise of Hamlet's friend, appointed by Polonius to keep an eye on the Prince of Denmark, is replaced by Salman and Salman in Haider. They serve the purpose of comic relief in their visibly freakish imitation of Salman Khan (a leading Bollywood Actor with huge fan following) in talking, acting and dressing -- in every possible way. Despite the comic mimicry, the audience is constantly kept in anxious end, even in the funny moments, by repetitively reminding of the real identities of Salman and Salman set in a mission of espionage by Arshia's father, Pervez Lone. The uncanny similarity, of both the Salmans, resembles the inseparableness of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and they meet the same fate of being brutally murdered by the protagonist. Yet, like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, they too act as governmental spies and practice deceit and violence against Haider to ensure rather tenuous prospects of material gains. In the process, the creation and existence of Salman and Salman operates as a mechanism blackening the portrayal of Kashmir where even the most meagre material gains are enough to induce ethical violations of one degree or another.

The one character that embodies best this pervasiveness of ethical violations where mere survival is most precarious is perhaps the character of Khurram, Haider's paternal uncle, who along with police officer Pervez Lone, in the role of Polonius, plays a key role in unravelling the world of violence, betrayal and greed that dominates everyday

life in Kashmir. Their fraudulent conspiracy discloses how the surreptitious power-plays involving the men of influence contribute to (dis)colouring the lives of thousands of Kashmiris. Khurram, an advocate by profession, is shown in scenes from Haider, disguising his real motive of attaining rule over Kashmir under the garb of helping out defenceless families of 'disappeared' people. A person, who himself, uses underhand means to 'disappear' his own brother, contriving a joint plot with the police officer is really a sham, yet the fidelity with the actuality of Kashmir is unnerving. However, Bhardwaj also humanises the character of Khurram. Towards the end of the film, his serpentine Claudius-like mask falls off, in the sight of Ghazala's impending death worn in a girdle round her body. In a freeze-frame shot, there is no revengefulness in the villain's eyes, there is no fear of death, his sole concern lies in saving his beloved. This is the mark of originality that Bhardwaj imparts Khurram with. He is given a genuine passionate emotion of love which contradicts his connivances in a way that Shakespeare's Claudius lacks.

This complexity proves to be an integral feature of Bhardwaj's film and become manifest in the conclusion as well. While the ending with its bloodshed and littered dead bodies obviously recalls the conclusion to Hamlet, there is no vision of providential benevolence with flights of angels. Yet just as the Shakespearean prince had acquired the wisdom of "Readiness is all", Haider too find release

from the logic of revenge and spares Khurram, even as he lies writhing in pain, having lost both legs after Ghazala sets off the explosives in her suicide-bomber's vest. The culminating metamorphosis is impregnated with a possibility of a new dawn, a sunrise for Kashmir, free from *intekaam* (revenge) — a truth that Hamlet himself realises much too late.

Contextually repositioning Shakespeare into the valley of Kashmir, Bhardwaj thus interlaces Shakespearean tragedy with the political cataclysm of the crucified state. Kashmir emerges as a character in *Haider*, blatantly voicing the unvoiced, untamed and fearless like a rustic child who speaks truth and nothing but the truth. Haider's agonized frustration in search of his disappeared father, his helpless trauma after knowing the truth of ruthless autocracy practised under the garb of democratic shelter of protection, his lunatic frenzies desperate to find a remedy from the inescapable power game — all divulge long-buried harsh realities of thousands of Kashmiri's lives. Kashmir, is truly, the Hamlet in *Haider*, impregnated with the existential crisis, where the ghastly image of hell lurks behind the facade of heaven. The tormented history of Kashmir blends with the political turbulence of *Hamlet's* Denmark and Shakespeare's England in the canvas of *Haider*: prophetically mirroring the crisis of states, astutely interrogating the ethics of authority and persistently exploring the labyrinths within individual psyches, Shakespeare lives with renewed metamorphoses of his texts.

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