

“For Murder, though have no Tongue, will Speak”, *Hamlet* Speaks for the Contemporary Problems around the Word

Muhammad Muazzam Sharif* Zubair Shafiq† Umtul Ayesha‡



Abstract

People from different countries reshape and revise Hamlet to suit their situations and alter their personalities accordingly. Hamlet highlights issues in political, moral, social and cultural spheres of a country. Shakespeare’s Hamlet attracts the minds of readers to the extent that they establish a link with their unconscious minds; thus resulting in an empathetic connection between readers, characters and the adapters. This paper offers an analysis of the different adaptations of Shakespeare’s Hamlet in some countries. It delineates the link between Hamlet and its adaptations, particularly Haider –an Indian adaptation. This paper compares Hamlet and Haider and draws parallels between the two in order to highlight and address contemporary problems especially that of conflict between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. This paper talks about Haider that successfully created the desired impact which should be the purpose of an adapted play. Essentially qualitative in nature, this paper uses the lens of Linda Hutcheon –Theory of Adaptation- to conduct textual analysis.

Key Words:

Hamlet,
adaptations,
appropriations,
Revenge
Issues,
Globalization,
Universal
Uniformity and
Contemporary
Problems.

Introduction

The Mouse Trap is one of the most determining parts of the play and a scene being recurrently discussed (Almeryda, 2005). Hamlet plans this *Play within the Play* to be certain of his father’s murder and the subsequent revenge that the ghost demands from him. He is utterly perplexed by the appearance of the ghost, the remarriage of his mother and the impudence of Claudius before the play (*The Murder of Gonzago*) is staged. “I’ll have the players | Play something like the murder of my father [. . .] I will observe his looks” (2.2.590-592). Despite the perilous ambience, Hamlet is still betwixt and between while Claudius feels the threat and decides to kill Hamlet.

* Lecturer, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Mardan, KP, Pakistan.
Email: sharifmuazzam@gmail.com

† Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Lecturer, City District Government Degree College for Women, Peshawar, KP, Pakistan.

The reason for why Claudius is overwhelmingly horrified is the reason why Hamlet chose the particular play *The Murder of Gonzago* to stage before him. Similarly, the reason for why Shakespeare chose *The Murder of Gonzago* to suit the situation of Hamlet is the reason why people around the world shape up and modify *Hamlet* to put up with their situations, particularly in cases of revenge practices. As Gordon McMullan's words justify it better that "Shakespeare, was first and foremost an adapter" (Gompertz, 2016), which suggests that people use *Hamlet* to assist their purposes and appease their tremor regarding the issue of revenge, which is a common practice in tribal setups.

Revenge is not the only concern of *Hamlet* as a play, but many other leading-edge matters are addressed by it as in the context of socio-political issues. However, the intention and design are different behind every adaptation of the play depending the culture, country and the social norms of the adapters. This is called "heterocosm" by Linda Hutcheon in her *Theory of Adaptations*. *Hamlet*, according to her, when adapted, does not lose the originality but becomes more familiar to people and their nature. Similarly, Margaret Atwood's *Gertrude Talks Back* and Mahmud Adwan's *Hamlet Wakes up Late* are the other examples of how the play is read, demonstrated and re-displayed with new different dimensions. These different portrayals do not batter *Hamlet*'s originality in them but add to the virtuosity of the subject matter and the play.

Hamlet is the most filmed play of Shakespeare, that is, it has been filmed 259 times, while over 72 productions have been presented through film only since 2000 (BUFVC, 2016), and over 30 countries have adapted it to address the problems with different facets and dimensions (Tazeh Kand, 2013). The adequacy and accord of *Hamlet* with a common man's life are such that it is filmed in languages other than English too, for instance, *Khoon Ka Khoon* in Hindi, translated as *Blood for Blood* in English, and *Hamlet narrates Hamlet* in Farsi written by Mahmud Sabahi.

The purpose of this paper is not to illustrate how many times the play *Hamlet* has been adapted and appropriated, but to demonstrate that how these different adaptations have put on a great impact on the lives of people involved in filming, staging, seeing and reading them as spectators and readers. The actors who acted in them especially the inmates, involved in the *Hamlet Behind Bars*, among them could totally relate to it and identify themselves with the characters they were playing (*Hamlet behind Bars in Rezina*, 2016). Thus, *Hamlet* acts as a therapeutic device for them and gives them a liability to reassess and see their crimes in a new light. This makes it evident that *Hamlet* has a pact with almost every contemporary problem, be it social or political; thus has the potential to reform. .

This paper probes into the fact that how and why *Hamlet* is adapted all across the world and in what ways does it serve the purpose of familiarizing it with other cultures, countries and languages. *Haider*, by Bhardwaj Film Productions, is one of the examples of the Indian adaptations. The film is produced from the

perspective of revenge along with the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan.

The tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has been the topic of many works, poems, dramas and film but rarely has it been discussed from the perspective of Shakespearean drama, that is, *Hamlet*. The previous works have either been classified biased or as the works of fantasy while dealing with the subject at hand. How far has it (the adaption of *Hamlet*) been successful to portray the real life contemporary problem is what this paper probes.

The main objective of this research paper is to explore reasons for which the adapters across the world appropriate and adapt *Hamlet*. Furthermore, it also explores the potential of *Hamlet* to allow its adaptations, such as *Haider*; consequently empowering them to depict the real life contemporary problems (in this case Kashmir). As a result, it further helps in determining the role of drama/film, in this case *Hamlet* and its adaptation, and subsequent influence on the readers/audience.

This research paper focuses on the following research questions: Why do adapters appropriate and adapt *Hamlet*? And how far is *Haider* –an Indian adaptation of *Hamlet*- successful in depicting the real-life contemporary problems of Kashmir?

This study revisits *Hamlet* and defines new approaches to study, read and most importantly use the play as a medium to voice contemporary problems and as an educational tool to instruct the people about the former. Thus, it highlights the social use of drama, which is the basic purpose for which it is written. Furthermore, Kashmir being a serious and sensitive topic, which requires immediate and equally serious attention from both Pakistan and India, this study attempts to reach the wider audience, like *Hamlet* and *Haider*, but through different medium, that is, academia. This study also adds and opens new vistas to the existing Shakespearean criticism.

Storyline of *Haider*

Haider, the protagonist of the play, is in the same situation as Hamlet. Roohdar as the Ghost, Ghazala as Gertrude, Arshia as Ophelia, Pervaiz as Polonius and Khurram as Claudius are presented. It is seen that *Haider* is sent to Aligarh to study while his father Dr. Meer is arrested for protecting and giving aid to the freedom fighters of the country in his house. Ghazala informs Khurram about her husband while Khurram, who works as a spy for the Indian Army and is against freedom fighters, gets Dr. Meer arrested by the Army and is later on, shot to death by them. *Haider* comes back, searches for his father and suspects his mother and uncle Khurram guilty, particularly when they are seen together soon afterwards.

Research Methodology

The current study is essentially qualitative in nature, which for the most part is based on the parameters of Textual Analysis. The researchers have made use of various databases like British Universities Film and Video Council and have accessed relevant research, articles, news and other resources. Copyrighted DVD with original English subtitles is used. Being a qualitative study, the researchers have given importance to evidence based subjective views and opinions.

In order to achieve the desired objectives and systematically probe into the set research questions, the theoretical perspective of Linda Hutcheon is followed as prescribed in her work the *Theory of Adaptation*. This perspective explores the successful appropriation and adaptation of *Hamlet* into *Haider*.

Literature Review

Aaron Hestlehurst reports in a BBC documentary *Living Shakespeare*: “they [Shakespeare’s plays] are there in Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Hindi; but the impact of Shakespeare’s works around the world can be proven in more than a thousand translations” (Hestlehurst, 2016). Shakespeare’s plays sermonize the modern day issues to the depths that the term “adaptations” has become closely associated with Shakespearean criticism; thus giving the plays a new perspective every time they are approached (Rich, 1972). Margaret Atwood in her short story *Gertrude Talks Back*, which is a monologue, opens the *Hamlet*’s closet’s scene to view from the perspective of Gertrude: “oh! You think what? Claudius murdered your Dad? It wasn’t Claudius darling. It was me!” (Desmet and Sawyer, 1999).

Another noticeable example of the argument is the feminine perspective of *Hamlet* by Kalki Koechlin, who relates and compares Ophelia with an Indian woman Jyoti Singh. Singh was raped by 12 men in a bus and is a tragic example of other women in India who are/were disgraced and oppressed too (*BBC News*, 2016). She sees Indian women just like Ophelia, and wants them not to end up like her. Hence, every adaptive version of *Hamlet* is far different from another which has the power to address the contemporary problems with a comfort and dexterity. Jan Kott argues that “Hamlet is like a sponge. Unless produce in a stylized or antiquarian fashion, it immediately absorbs all the problems of our time” (Kott, p. 49).

Analysis and Discussion

Bismil and Water Wars

Haider presents a similar *Play within the play* by the name of *Bismil*. *Bismil* is a song embellished with Pukhto music and the Pukhtun traditional instrument

Rabab. It is, in reality, a revival of the hundred years old art folk theatre of Kashmir (Kumari, 2014). The tradition is called “Bhand Pather”. The two words mean “a folk actor” and “performance”, respectively. It used to be a lively satirical show/performance which would highlight the social and moral evils and issues before the audience (Ahmad Sheikh, 2014). The tradition is revived and used in the most appropriate and best manner to replace *The Mouse Trap* with *Bismil*. Haider presents this song on the occasion of his mother Ghazala’s and uncle Khurram’s marriage. The renowned song writer –Gulzar– also won an award for writing the song in The National Film Award in 2015. *Bismil* is a rare kind of song which does not exhibit any kind of dance but a conflict and a fight. *Bismil* insinuates other important symbols too. For instance, the word *Jhelum* is used in recurrence. It is a river that originates from Kashmir and flows through Pakistan and India. The mentioning of this river in the song is symbolic in a way that Pakistan and India have a long history of an issue over the waters. Thus, through this song, Bhardwaj presents the conflict of Pakistan and India over waters in a symbolic way.

Treatment of Revenge in *Hamlet* and *Haider*

Haider, however, is in the state of despair after this act along with the great turbulence and turmoil in his mind about whether to take revenge or not. His mother Ghazala, however, withholds him to take revenge, and states:

“Guns only know how to take revenge”

“Unless we set free from our revenge/vengeance, we cannot attain”

“True freedom”

“Remember, revenge begets revenge.”

This is the remarkable trait of *Hamlet* and accordingly of *Haider*, that how it addresses the issue, works for the reformation of certain norms and diversification of the stereotypical mindset in terms of revenge and other social and moral issues.

Ghazala tries to bring around in Haider’s mind not to take revenge, but when she apprehends the situation that Haider would leave and join the freedom fighters, she commits a suicide attack in which Khurram is badly wounded and Haider is injured too. Haider wants to kill Khurram at that time but he refrains from doing so. This happens because of his decision of listening to his mother and to overcome his feeling of revenge. It gives a new look to *Hamlet*’s tragic end. Thus, Bhardwaj successfully conveys the message about the worth of not taking revenge, which is a real life problem of the young Kashmiris. The deep and consequential words of Ghazala “Revenge begets revenge” surmount in the mind of Haider, hence resulting in purging the matter. Therefore, the words of Ghazala is the message that Bhardwaj tries to give to the victims of Kashmir.

The Character of Roohdar and the Conflict of Kashmir

Roohdar on the other hand also provides a fundamental credence to the ideology of freedom of Kashmir, (and metaphorically of mind).

Dr. Meer: *Roohdar, it seems we will be killed together as well*

Roohdar: *You can die doctor, but I won't*

Dr. Meer: *And how is that?*

Roohdar: *Because you are the body and I am the soul. You are mortal, I am immoral.*

Dr. Meer: *Roohdar, are you Shia or Sunni?*

Roohdar: *I am the river and the tree, I am Jhelum, I am Chinnar, I am both a temple and a mosque, Shia and Sunni, I am a pundit, I always was, I am and I will always be.*

Kashmir is a territory which saw independence for only two months (August-September 1947) (Schofield, 2000). After the partition of India and Pakistan, the Prince of Kashmir, Hari Singh was hesitating in whether to join India or Pakistan. He wrote to the governor-general of India, Mountbatten to help him with the Pukhtoon tribal aggression and belligerence towards them (Bose, 2009). The Indian general agreed on the condition that Kashmir would sign its accession to India. The commitment was legalized in the span of two days and Indian troops were sent to Kashmir for help. This, later on, turned out to be the most unfavorable decision for Kashmir. However, Kashmiris are forced to take sides and staying neutral is reckoned to be a crime to be punished. This has resulted in an adverse and a detrimental impact on the minds of Kashmiris, hence giving them a mental stroke. For instance, in *Haider*, when a child, who is standing outside his house door, is unable to comprehend the sight and is in the state of limbo when his mother calls him inside. Also, Arshia asks him to go, but he is still, until Roohdar comes and tells him to get inside. It shows the deathly still minds of Kashmiris and the silently agitated situation of Kashmir (Duschinski, 2009).

The notion of taking sides is also shown in *Haider*. One of the two brothers, Dr. Meer is considerate towards the freedom fighters and provides them with the aid and protection. His words are the true representation of the concept of taking sides in Kashmir when his wife, Ghazala asks him about on which side he is on. He answers the question with the stately expression that he would be on the side of life. Another example of this is when Dr. Meer is arrested along with Roohdar by the Indian army. They are tortured to death and are forced to say "Jay Hind", which means long live India, which they refuse to say. It also shows the badly afflicted minds and mental health of Kashmiris. This is shown through the mind of Haider too. However, in certain places in the film, Haider has noticeable signs of intensive sanity. For instance, when he tells Arshia that he has been given a gun by Roohdar, Arshia immediately informs her father Pervaiz and Pervaiz tells

Khurram about the gun. And, when Khurram asks him about the gun, Haider turns back and looks at Arshia in complete distrust and animosity.

Although in other places, Haider shows the signs of post-traumatic stress. While in Kashmir, the same mental illness has increased day by day (Margoob & Ahmad, p. 19). Also, the rise in the number of patients who frequently visit psychiatrists for mental health issues is seen (Hassan & Shafi, 2013). A report by a health department in 2009 reveals the facts that the rate of increasing issues of depression has raised up to 55% in Kashmir valley so far (Amin and Khan, p. 218). It shows great instability and fluctuation (between sanity and insanity) of the minds of the people. The same fluctuation is seen in Haider’s personality too from the above-mentioned examples of his reactions towards Arshia and his backlash in killing Pervaiz. The wind of this fluctuation comes from Hamlet when he kills Polonius in Frenzy. Thus, *Haider* associates a powerful link to *Hamlet* and presents the tragedy from a different angle without ravaging the originality and individuality of the play *Hamlet* and its characters.

The excessive use of guns in *Haider* also speaks for the physical and mental exertion of gun use in Kashmir. A recent report (2016) shows that over 35 people were killed in a conflict and 1,500 were badly injured by the Indian Army. The guns are used both by the freedom fighters and the Indian Army but the latter uses them against the former while the former use them in self-defense. Especially, the use of pellet guns by the Army is the choke hold for the Kashmiris. These guns cause large and deep injuries, particularly, the eye injury. The expense of these casualties was so much that India had to send an eye specialists’ team to Kashmir (Iqbal, 2016). In *Haider*, Roohdar wears black glasses, which shows the same grounds for him to be victimized by the Army. This makes his character a symbolic and a powerful representative of the play.

The Enforced Disappearance

The disappearance of Dr Meer brings into light another pressing issue of disappearance of innocent civilians in Kashmir. The people of Kashmir live in a great fear and extremely vulnerable situation. This is called “enforced disappearance”, according to United International Convention for the protection of all Persons, 2006 survey (Human Rights Reports, 2016). Thousands of people have disappeared in the past 30 years. A movement later turned into an organization was made for the parents of such people. The Association of Parents of Disappeared People (APDP) in Kashmir helps people to find their missing children, spouses and siblings. Unfortunately, no decline has been seen in the increasing ratio of the missing people. The wives of such disappeared people, as well as Ghazala in the film call themselves as “half-widows”. Most of these women, unlike Ghazala, spend a life in total despair, anguish and uncertainty about their husbands’ life or death. Many become patients with severe mental

illness too. Such disappeared people are searched in the nameless graves. Muhammad Atta, a former, was forced to be a gravedigger in Kashmir in 2003, due to a big toll of anonymous dead bodies coming every day victimized by the police and Indian Army (Chaudhury, p. 10). According to Atta, it made him vomit when he buried the unrecognizable bodies, and the mutilated dead bodies would haunt him at night. Yet, he had to bury around 235 dead bodies. Since, they were mutilated; Atta Muhammad would keep the belongings of the dead bodies for the families to recognize their relatives. In *Haider* too, an old age man provides Dr. Meer's belongings to Haider when he is missing, which brings it into similarity with *Hamlet*.

Such grave issues are addressed by *Haider* in a way that marks it an exquisite film and distinctively *Hamlet* as the most indicative and commendable a play of Shakespeare. This is the reason that the plays of Shakespeare have been adapted and staged for almost 400 years by different playwrights in different eras (Fischlin and Fortier 2000). Also, a new field has emerged as the Shakespearean Cultural Studies as an amalgamation of Shakespeare Studies and Cultural Studies (Lanier, 2006). Dennis Kennedy refers to Shakespeare's plays to be regularly crossing the national and linguistics boundaries (Kennedy, 1993), and it can be accurately said that Shakespeare emanates from the era and literature of every language and culture.

Conclusion

The significance of this paper is the character of Hamlet in itself and in its tendency to bring into discourse the issues that call out to be resolved. The character of Hamlet cracks open the entanglements and perplexities of mind. It investigates the problems like social and domestic violence, female oppression, cultural bounds for women, revenge followed by revenge, the silent prologues of overpowered tongues and minds and the plague of the socially constructed appalling norms. The significance of this paper is also the powerful adaptations that are equally influential as *Hamlet* and feature the same issues in different and exceptional ways. *Haider*, *Khoon ka Khoon*, *Gertrude Talks Back*, and *Hamlet Narrates Hamlet* are few of the adaptations that have strengthened the universality and dynamism of *Hamlet* even more. Furthermore, the significance of this paper is the eminence and nobility of Shakespeare that sparks out his plays among his contemporaries and familiarizes him even today with the psyche of every individual who reads him and identifies himself with the cosmic characters of Shakespeare.

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“For Murder, though have no Tongue, will Speak”, *Hamlet Speaks for the Contemporary Problems around the Word*

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