

Mouse Trap Scene In Hamlet And Bismil In Haider: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

Haider is an Indian adaptation of Hamlet where Denmark becomes Kashmir and Hamlet becomes Haider. It retells the story of young Kashmiri whose sufferings are similar in to Hamlet; however, the nature and dimension of them are completely different. Where the adaptation focuses on the issues like revenge, forced disappearances, missing people and mental health in Kashmir, the Bollywood song Bismil sheds further light on water wars between Pakistan and India. Bismil resonates and relates to the Mouse Trap scene in Hamlet. Therefore this paper focuses on the comparison of the Mouse Trap scene and Bismil. Research has been carried out on Haider and the problems that it addresses; however, limited or no significant research has been conducted on the comparison of the two and the subsequent problems that it addresses. Essentially qualitative in nature, this paper uses the parameters of Textual Analysis set by Catherine Belsey (2013) and further uses the lens of Linda Hutcheon (2012) for the critical analysis.

Keywords: Bismil, Contemporary Problems, Water Wars, Mouse Trap Scene.

Introduction

Shakespeare's plays have been appropriated and adapted worldwide so much so that they have become a powerful medium to address the problems of any given country/region. Haider -an Indian adaption- is one such example of the appropriation and adaption of Hamlet. Haider is directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and it is part of his Shakespearean tragedies trilogy. In this Trilogy, Bhwardwaj has adapted three plays of

Shakespeare: Macbeth as Maqbool (2003), Othello as Omkara (2006) and Hamlet as Haider (2014).

According to TazehKand (2013) Hamlet has been adapted in thirty different countries, where each adaptation has focused on different aspects of the play and has given a new dimension to its meaning and understanding. Haider is no exception. It has given a new meaning to Hamlet, where Hamlet is no more the prince of Denmark but a young educated Kashmiri who has lost his

father and has become a victim of the region's political unrest. Through Haider, Bhardwaj highlights the problems of common Kashmiri people who are torn between the conflict of Pakistan and India over the region. Haider address issues like missing people, forced disappearances, Indian military cruelties, water wars and mental health. Research has been carried out on the comparison of Hamlet and Haider and the subsequent related issues; however, limited or no significant research has been conducted on the most important element of the play -Mouse Trap scene and the counterpart Bismil song- that has a life of its own. The Mouse Trap scene from Hamlet is replaced with a Bollywood number Bismil. Thus, it is referred to as The Mouse Trap Song Bismil in this paper.

Essentially qualitative in nature, this paper uses Catherine Belsey's parameters of Textual Analysis ((2013)) and applies Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation (2012) to present a critique on the argument at hand. The present paper compares and contrasts The Mouse Trap scene and Bismil song in order to shed light on the nature as well as the significance and importance of the adaptive Bismil. How is it similar as well as different from The Mouse Trap scene, what purpose does it serve in Haider, and for why is it important to have of the adaptive Bismil are the questions that this paper focuses on and probes into. This paper also determines the use of Bismil as the revival of centuries old tradition of Bhand Phather which is very much historically relevant to as well as important for the Kashmir region.

According to Bhawani (2009),

Bhand Phather is the oldest and richest art form of our folk theatre, which has preserved our theatre art form in all its manifestations. It has survived in all times only for its popular idiom, versatile metaphor and unique style in content, presentation and performance. These folk and wandering performances are

spread all-over Kashmir and have peculiar dress, improvising wit and humour in their acting, dancing and music. (para 5)

Bhand Phather, according to Sheikh (2014), a distinct Kashmiri performing art combining mimicry, buffoonery, music and dance, which emerged some 2000 years ago and reached its culmination in the tenth century. (p.78)

Thus, Bhand Phather is a centuries old Kashmiri open theatre performing art that included themes/sub genres like farce, comedy, drama, folk story and so on. Mainly it includes dance and performance combined with the touch of satire and/or irony in its themes. The motive/ purpose behind Bhand Phather is mostly social reformation. The Bhand usually includes a story which has a moral and/or it has motives behind the story telling. Generally the motive is to bring out the evil of the society and present it to the audience in a an exaggerated manner. Bismil is a classic example of Bhand Phather which has the elements of embedded story/message, satire and ironical at the same time. Bhand means folk actor and Phather means dramatic performance to unveil the evil of the society; the evil may be a person or an ideology, and/or a socio-cultural issue.

In the case of Bismil, it certainly is played well to suit the occasion where Haider tries to bring out the evil of his uncle -Khurram. Haider's father Meer is a doctor and he treats his patients equally regardless of which side they are on. Earlier in the film, Meer treats Kashmiri freedom fighters and upon this he is arrested by the Indian forces. Later Meer is listed as a missing person whereas in actual he is killed in the Indian Army camp by due to heavy tortures. His body is thrown into the Jhelum River. His arrest was due to the information provided to Indian forces by his brother Khurram, who is in turn was informed by

Ghazla -Meer's wife. Khurram is in love with Ghazla and marries her too. Bismil song occurs during their wedding events. therefore, it is an apt time for Haider not only to catch the guilty conscience of his uncle but to unveil the evil by exposing him. it is pertinent to mention here that the role of ghost is replace with an actual person but who is as mysterious as the ghost himself. His name is Roohdar. He is declared as a Pakistani agent by the Indian forces but he claims himself to be the representative of Kashmir itself and of the freedom fighters who are fighting for the right of self determination. The character of Roohdar so mysterious as the ghost in itself that it requires a separate study, which this paper recommends. However, the focus here is on the comparison of the Mouse Trap scene and Bismil which serves the purpose for Hamlet and Haider respectively.

For Murder, though have no Tongue, will Speak
(Act 2 Scene 2 Line 589)

There is a play tonight before the King
One scene of it comes near the
circumstance

Which I have told thee [Horatio] of my
father's death (Act 3 Scene 2 Line 75-77)

Hamlet arranges a play within a play to catch the guilty conscience of his uncle whom he believes to have killed his father. He stages the play in front of his mother and Uncle Claudius to determine and make certain what the ghost of his father has told him about the murder. Hamlet is perplexed by the untimely and unnatural death of his father. He is equally confused and angry about the hasty marriage of his mother with Claudius. In order to find the truth and be certain about what the ghost have told him, Hamlet uses and adapts the play of The Murder of Gonzago. He adds a few line to the already existing text of the play and asks the performers to not only add these lines but to perform them too in front of his uncle. 'You could for a need study a speech of some

dozen or sixteen lines, which | I would set down and insert in't (Act 2 Scene 2 Line 535). The Murder of Gonzago revolves around similar incident that has happened to his father and with the addition of these extra lines make it more appropriate to the situation.

Hamlet believes that doing so will allow him to observe the reaction of his Uncle and the mother, which will in turn ascertain his guilt. 'I'll have these players | Play something like the murder of my father | I will observe his [Claudius]' looks' (Act 2 Scene 2 Line 590-593). He even sets the course of action for the performers and ask one of them to 'Suit the action to the word | the word to action (Act 3 Scene 3 Line 17-18) so much so as 'twere the mirror up to nature'. (Act 3, Scene 2 Line 23).

Although Hamlet (Shakespeare) as many other options, like The Spanish Tragedy and The Tragedye of Solyman and Perseda by Thomas Kyd, in front of him to stage in front of his uncle for the reason to find the guilt of the later, he chooses The Murder of Gonzago. The reason behind choosing this play is that it is suitable as well as flexible like Hamlet, and has room for appropriation and adaptation because of the dramaturgical construct of the two.

Taking its cue from the Mouse Trap scene, Bhardwaj in Haider inculcates the same scene but with a twist and newer dimension. Similar to the use of stage players/performers in Hamlet, Hamlet makes use of The Murder of Gonzago, Haider uses the centuries old tradition of Bhand Phathar. The only difference is that Haider gets involved in it himself and performs in the act - Bismil.

Literally meaning wounded or sacrificed lover, Bismil is the revival and old fairy tale that resonates with story and affair between Ghazala and Meer, and is written by Sampooran Singh

Kalra. Karla is very famous and popular, he is mostly known by his pen/screen name Gulzar. The song got so much fame and popularity that it won the 2015 best singer and song director in National Film Awards in India. The unique thing about the music of this song is that it is both the amalgamation of Kashmiri as well as Pukhto music (that is particular to North-West Pakistan). The Pukhto music touch is given to the song with the use of the musical instrument Rabab.

With all the colourful costumes and huge puppets, masks and caps, red colour dominates the Bismil song where the huge puppet, representing Khurram and devil, is red in colour. Even Ghazal is wearing red colour. . Even the song has the word red (Laal) used in it repetitively. Symbols like these 'have the virtue of being unshakably traditional and almost universal in impact, like red for danger.' (Styan, 1983, p.3). The red colour also plays an important role in the religious rituals, for instance, driving out witches and evil (Turner, 1975). Certainly the presence of red colour refers to the danger and violence in the film, and shows the evil nature of Khurram.

In addition to the use of Bismil as a mouse trap scene, it further refers to other things in the film which resonates to real life problem in Kashmir. For instance, the word Jhelum is repeated several times in the song. Jhelum is the name of the river that originates from Verinag Spring in Kashmir and flows through Pakistan and India. Joined by other rivers on its way it ultimately falls into the mighty River Indus. Pakistan and India has several wars between them and Kashmir has been the key element in it; mainly because of the strategic location of the land as well as having the headwaters of almost all rivers.

According to Alam (2002), 'source of Indo-Pakistan tensions was the Indus waters dispute.' (p. 342). Pakistan as well as India are dependent

on these waters for agriculture and dams (power stations for electricity). According to Dixit (2003), Pakistan's 'agriculture and food security depended on some durable agreement with India ensuring uninterrupted flow of waters through the river basins of Jhelum, Ravi, Chenab and Sutlej.' (p.125).

This conflict got worsen with the passage so much so that both the countries had to sign a treaty for survival and equal distribution of water. The treaty was called Indus Water Treaty and it was signed in 1960. Pakistan was given control over the three western rivers including Jhelum whereas India was given control over the three eastern rivers. One of the largest earth filled dam is built on the river Jhelum which feeds electricity to a large part of Pakistan. In short controlling Kashmir would mean controlling all the waters; therefore, both the countries have been at loggerheads with each other over Kashmir.

Despite the treaty of Indus, Pakistan and India are involved in water wars in the present times too. The present government of Narendra Modi is putting pressure on Pakistan by blocking the flow of water to Pakistan. According to SingKhadka (2016), 'experts say Delhi is using the water issue to put pressure on Pakistan in the dispute over Kashmir' (para 3) because Modi mentions that 'blood and water cannot flow at the same time.' (Rowlatt, 2016, para 2). India claims that they have been forced to take these steps because of Pakistan's use of power at the Line of Control (LoC) at Kashmir.

Having said this, the use of the colour red and Jhelum in Bismil has far more serious importance and significance. The red refers to the blood that flows through the river suggesting the loss of lives in the wars between Pakistan and India, especially over Kashmir issue and the waters. However, Bhardwaj makes use of the same song to put forward the message of peace and stability in the region, especially in the last stanza of the

song. Zinda hay wo zinda hoga I Mujrim bhi sharminda hoga (He (it) is alive, he (it) will be alive again I And the culprit will be punished) is the message he wants to get across through the song as well as through the entire film.

Having said this, the researchers argue that Bismil has much more to offer than mere entertainment. The song sets the stall similar to that of the mouse trap scene in Hamlet and adds new dimension by addressing modern-day problems of the conflict between Pakistan and India. According to Bhardwaj (2014), 'it [Bismil] is not about the dance, it is about his fight.' It is argued that Bismil is about the fight of Haider, Kashmir, Pakistan and India. It is even about the fight of Dr. Meer and Roohdar and the freedom fighters -above all it is about the fight of Kashmir for Kashmir. In addition, the song and the entire film provides a safe platform to touch upon and criticize the sensitive issue of Kashmir and subsequent equally sensitive country matters of Pakistan and India.

In an interview with Viji Alles, the lead role Shahid Kapoor replies 'it's a fictional film' when asked about the sensitivity of the issue of Kashmir and the subsequent conflict between Pakistan and India over it. It is argued that it is a fictional film based on Hamlet; however, the problems highlighted are real and the issues raised are genuine. Through Haider, Bhardwaj has highlighted the real problems of Kashmir and Kashmiri people. Therefore, Haider in general and Bismil in particular play a significant role in addressing the issues of Kashmir which are long forgotten and suppressed by the controlled-media.

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