

A Critique On The Presence Of Shakespeare In Pakistan

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Abstract

Shakespearean appropriations and adaptations dominate the present day and age. These adaptations give a new meaning to the plays of Shakespeare and create a new dimension in which they are read, translated, and performed as well as understood. Doing so allows the adapters to draw parallels between the plays and modern-day age, in this case modern-day Pakistan. Research has been carried out on few of the adaptations of Shakespeare in Pakistan; however, limited or no significant research has been carried out on the reasons and purposes behind all these adaptations. Therefore, this paper focuses on the presence of Shakespeare in Pakistan and establishes the significance of his plays and the subsequent adaptations in the country. Essentially qualitative in nature, and by using Hutcheon Theory of Adaptation, this paper probes into the purpose behind as well as the necessity of the appropriation and adaptation of Shakespeare's plays.

Keywords: Appropriation, Adaptation, Contemporary Problems, Forced-Arranged Marriages, Honour Killings, Media Reports

Introduction

Therefore, essentially qualitative in nature, this paper traces the presence of Shakespeare in Pakistan. By doing so, this paper probes into research questions like: How Shakespeare is read and understood in Pakistani context? How and why Shakespeare is appropriated and adapted in Pakistan? What purpose do the plays and their subsequent adaptations serve in Pakistan? The

Theory of Adaptation of Hutcheon (2012) is used as a lens to probe into the research questions set for this paper.

English is effectively the official language of Pakistan in the face of the fact that Urdu has been stated as the national language of Pakistan. In the

constitution 1973 of Pakistan, Urdu is declared as the official language but on paper only -in practice it is still English. Having English mostly as the medium of instruction in schools and colleges throughout Pakistan, it is also taught as a subject and language in almost all the schools across the country. In the public sector universities across Pakistan, English is the medium of instruction throughout and it is made obligatory by the Higher Education Commission in Pakistan (Khan, 2013). The Ministry of Education has announced that education throughout must be in English and that science and mathematics subjects must be taught in English too. (Coleman, 2010). Except Urdu and Islamic Studies, all other subjects are taught in English language.

Considering few examples, Medicine, and/or Engineering are courses are taught in English. Material and resources available are in English. In short, from primary to bachelors level of education, English is taught as a compulsory subject and various modules like language learning, essay writing, poetry, drama prose and novel are taught at the later level. In addition, at the university and the respective affiliated colleges English Literature is part of the curriculum and covers works from the 14th to 21st Century. It roughly covers the works from Chaucer to George Bernard Shaw; followed by 21st century Pakistani Literature in English. It is pertinent to mention here that Shakespeare and his plays as well as sonnets dominates the English literature course in Pakistan. Along with his sonnets, his tragedies as well as comedies are part of the curriculum. Shakespeare is almost synonymous with English literature in Pakistan.

According to Viswanathan (1990), 'English Literature made its appearance in India, albeit indirectly, with a crucial act in [British] Indian Educational history: the passing of the Charter Act in 1823.' (p.23) In addition to a long list of

English works taught at the government schools in British India, Shakespeare's plays such as Hamlet Othello and Macbeth are predominantly present in the syllabi. on the contrary, Trivedi in her book *India's Shakespeare: Translation, Interpretation and Performance* (2005) claims that Shakespeare was present in British India as early as 1775. According to Mukherjee (1980)

When the English came to Calcutta they brought with them the plays of Shakespeare. Early in the nineteenth century Shakespeare was a subject of study in the Hindu College. Much before that Shakespeare's plays had begun to be staged in the theatres that the local Englishmen had setup in the city for their entertainment and relaxation. The names of David Garrick, the great eighteenth-century Shakespearean actor, and Garrick Drury Lane Theatre ... were familiar in Calcutta among the readers of Shakespeare and the lovers of theatre. (p.1)

In the past decades, Shakespeare in Pakistan has been taught in the old colonial fashion where his plays have fixed meaning as in the English context. According to Makhdom and Awan (2014),

It is a matter of observation that the curriculum for teaching English Literature in Pakistani universities since independence has long been traditionally associating itself with a strong syllabus devoted to Eurocentric content

However, with the advent and use of the adaptation of Shakespearean plays, there is break from this old school criticism of Shakespeare and his plays are retold and reinvented with new fervour and zeal; but most importantly, with a new meaning. The new meaning is local to the

respective region in which his plays are appropriated and adapted. Bohannon's 'Shakespeare in the Bush' (1998) sheds light on the argument at hand:

Sometime ... you must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom. (p. 35)

The approaches to teaching, understanding and interpreting Shakespearean plays have changed. This change is mainly because of the involvement of domestic cultural values and local literature. For this very reason, this paper bases its argument on Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation (2012) where she describes adaptation as: an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation and an extended inter-textual engagement with the adapted work. (2010).

Therefore, essentially qualitative in nature, this paper traces the presence of Shakespeare in Pakistan. By doing so, this paper probes into research questions like: How Shakespeare is read and understood in Pakistani context? How and why Shakespeare is appropriated and adapted in Pakistan? What purpose do the plays and their subsequent adaptations serve in Pakistan? The Theory of Adaptation of Hutcheon (2012) is used as a lens to probe into the research questions set for this paper.

Kennedy (1993) argues that 'he [Shakespeare] regularly crosses national and linguistic boundaries with apparent ease' (p.2), but at the same time, he raises the following important

question about how Shakespeare travels: 'does he cross into Poland or China as the same dramatist who is played in Stratford?' (p.2) Similar to the crossing of geographical boundaries of the English language, Shakespeare also crosses linguistic as well as cultural boundaries. When they do, the plays of Shakespeare are no more limited to western understudying or interpretations. Their understanding and meaning change. It may be argued that, while doing so, the originality of the plays may be lost; however, the new meaning and understanding create a newer dimension to the plays and compensate for the language (English) lost. In addition, the local language has its own richness that is added to the beauty of the newer dimension of the plays. For instance, when Hamlet is performed in Krakow, Hamlet seems to be of Denmark, and becomes Polish, and Poland becomes the prison.

According to Kott (1974), 'what matters is that through Shakespeare's text we ought to get at our modern experience, anxiety and sensibility.' (p.48) Therefore Shakespeare is translated and adapted across the boundaries with a newer dimension, meaning, and understanding. Now the writer may have one thing in mind while writing but once it reaches the audiences, the implicit or explicit message or idea may change as per the understanding of the audience. The interpretation may change and so does its meaning. Therefore Shakespeare in Pakistan gets an overhaul and creates a new dimension of understanding the plays. The plays become Pakistani in the context and relate to issues and nuisances that are Pakistani in nature.

With the recent advent of adaptations of Shakespeare's plays worldwide, Pakistan has its own understanding of Shakespeare's plays. Several plays of Shakespeare are appropriated and adapted in Pakistan that give voice to contemporary Pakistani problems. For instance,

Rahm (2016) is the Pakistani adaptation of Measure for Measure. Reham highlights the political corruption of Pakistani society and challenges that ways in which the suffering class is exploited by the politician for their own gains, benefits, and pleasure. To elaborate on the argument at hand, Taming of the Shrew as Ilaaj-i-Zid Dastyaab Hay and Winter's Tale and Fasana-e-Ajaib are the two examples, amongst many, to show the presence, importance and value of Shakespeare in Pakistan.

During the London Olympics 2012, all the plays of Shakespeare were performed by the participating countries. Pakistan chose Taming of the Shrew and performed it in Urdu. The title was translated as Ilaaj-i-Zid Dastyaab Hay (2012). The play is set within Pakistani context to address the issues related to patriarchy, where the parents decide the marriage of their daughters, mostly without the consent of the later. The daughters and/or sisters are married in their order of birth. Permission of the parents is must in the subjects like marriage.

The play focuses on how the patriarchy and male dominance affect the lives of the characters; especially lives of the daughters who have to be married in the order of their birth. Parents permission is a must. (Qureshi, 2012) The director, Haissam Hussain, explained in the interview after the performance that 'Taming of the Shrew goes with our culture and it has all the elements that are in our society'. (Qureshi, 2012)

By adapting this play, Hussain thought to 'raise awareness about the role of educated and strong women in a patriarchal society [...] to use the opportunity to address stereotypical views of Pakistan (as dysfunctional and consisting mainly of terrorist and other extremists)'. (Schafer 2013, p.257 Taming of the Shrew was used as a medium to highlight and address Pakistani contemporary

problems in a lighter way. For instance, the issue of forced- arranged marriages and forced marriages are highlighted in the play. It is pertinent to mention here that the forced or forced arranged marriage should not be confused with arranged marriages, where there is a say or consent of the girls are taken into consideration. In the west all arranged marriages are confused with forced marriages. In addition, the issues related to arranged marriages is a separate topic for research which this paper recommends. .

Having said that, forced arranged marriages is a nuisance in Pakistan. According to Schafer (2013)

In some way Theatre Wallay's appearance at the Globe seemed very timely, as one of the main news stories in the British press at the time was feeding the worst British stereotypes about Pakistani culture: the trial of the parents of Shafiea Ahmad (1986-2003), accused of murdering their daughter because she refused an arranged marriage, can read as a brutal taming narrative. (p.258)

In Pakistan such cases like Shafiea are common. Those girls who refused to marry according to wishes of their parents often suffer the consequences that may lead to death and/or murder even.

Ilaaj-i-Zid Dastyaab Hay offers much more in a lighter tone to Pakistani audience. In addition to the problems related to forced-arranged marriages, it addresses the issues of class difference and/or the conflict between the upper and upper middle classes, esp in the matters of marriages. Belonging to different classes, Meer (Tranio) and Ghazi (Gremio) fight for the hand of Bana (Bianca) in marriage. Both fight and brag about their wealth to win the hand of Bina in marriage.

Being British passport holder, Meer even uses it as show of wealth and status in order to win the argument. His British passport outbids Ghazi's temporary visit visa.

in addition we see a frequent switch over from English to Urdu and vice versa throughout the play. it is mostly for the reason to enable the English speakers to follow and understand the play. However, there is another reason for it to, that is, the status consciousness and show of class. Speaking English in Pakistan is a status symbol. Meer or Ghazi with a better English pronunciation try to impress Bina and her parents. According to Rahman (2002) 'English is the key to power and employment in the state and private sectors' and is 'associated with upper and upper middle classes.' (p.4556)

Similarly, other social, cultural and linguistic issues are highlighted in the Pakistani Shrew. Issues related to homosexuality in Pakistan are also addressed through the Pakistani Shrew. Bina is shown as a powerful character who defies the preset rules of patriarchy. Through her, patriarchy is challenged and so are the various taboos related to forced-arranged marriages. In a nutshell, Taming of the Shrew becomes a powerful tool address contemporary Pakistani problems. Doing so, established the strong presence of Shakespeare in Pakistan.

Where Ilaaj-i-Zid Dastyaab Hay address the issues in a lighter way, Fasana-e-Ajaib (2014) addresses similar Pakistani issues in a much serious and grave way. One of the far more serious issue that it deals with and addresses is honour killing in Pakistan. It is pertinent to mention here that Fasana-e-Ajaib is based and triggered by the 2014 case of Farzana Parveen who was brutally murdered by her family members for marrying a man of her choice. Honour killing is a very pressing issue in

Pakistan. In the year 2015, 1005 cases of honour killing were reported. These cases involved 82 underage girls too.

In collaboration with the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA), the British Director, Gregory Thompson adapted *The Winter's Tale*. it is titled as *Fasana-e-Ajaib* in Urdu.

The story dates back to 1614 when Moghuls were the rulers of the subcontinent and roughly matches the time when Shakespeare wrote it. Similar to 16 years time shift in the Act 3 of the play, that is, from Sicily to Bohemia, *Fasana-e-Ajaib* also shifts from the times of the Moghul's to Modern day Pakistan. (Thompson 2014).

The play screened in London in May 2016. While discussing the play, (Thompson (2014) drew parallels between the play and modern day Pakistan. he further drew parallels between the modern day Pakistan and the Elizabethan age by referring to the change in government, military rules, security guards in front of the buildings, guns on the street and power outages etc. There are numerous parallels between the play and modern day Pakistan. Referring to the Leontes suspicion of his wife and her supposed-relationship with his childhood friend Polixenes, and the former's subsequent order to kill his wife for adultery, Thompson (2014) compares it with the case of Farzana Parveen and similar girls who are killed by their family members in the name of honour. Thus this parallel shed light on the serious issue of honour killing in Pakistan. According to Patel and Gadit (2008), honour killing in Pakistan is 'self-authorized justification to kill her' (p. 684). In the report of Ali (2001) 'nearly 1000 women were killed in Pakistan [mostly in Sindh and Punjab] out of a total of world figure of 5000 honour killings.'

In addition to honour killing, *Fasana-e-Ajaib*, address the issue of target killing in Pakistan. Leontes assigned a task of killing Polixenes to Camillo. Camillo mentions this to Polixenes by saying that *mujey aap ke qatal per mamor kia gia hay* meaning 'I have been assigned the task to kill you'. Target killing is a pressing issue in Pakistan especially in Pakistan. 568 non political and 107 political murders/target killings took place in Karachi alone in the year 2014.

Having said that, *Fasana-e-Ajaib* has a strong message to communicate to the Pakistani as well as international audience. The Pakistani audience do not have to draw explicit parallels but mere fictional resemblance can trigger the senses of relating. Thus by considering mere these two examples, we see the presence as well as the significance of Shakespeare in Pakistan and role he plays in the academia and in public (though news). For the later, we see a marked rise in the use of quotes to and from Shakespeare in the media reports of Pakistan. A cursory look at few of the titles of articles that appeared in the recent newspapers are: *The Shakespeare wali* (2016); *Shakespeare creates a parallel universe* (2015), and *Bard-ji on the beach: Post-colonial artists write back to Shakespeare* (2016). Similarly there are plenty of examples in the media reports of Pakistan that marks the presence of Shakespeare in media reports of Pakistan. For instance, Peter (2003) call Musharaff as Hamlet in Khaki because of his hesitant and indecisive mind about fight against the war on terror. Furthermore, Ali (2014) also notes:

just as Hamlet had to put aside everything else in his life in order to deal with Claudius, our government too must prioritize to make terrorism its main challenge to be tackled (para 3)

above are few of the examples, the news media is full of such examples. Shakespeare's quotes (from his plays) are used in the media reports to highlight a particular issues. All this suggests that there are load of parallels between the plays of Shakespeare and Pakistan.

This paper successfully establish the fact that Shakespeare is predominantly present in Pakistan and that his plays have loads of parallels with/in modern-day Pakistan. It is the presence of these parallels that allow adapters and reporters to use Shakespeare and address relevant contemporary Pakistani problems. These problems vary in nature and include, but not limited to, socio-cultural issues, and political and linguistic issues. Through the medium of Shakespeare and his plays, these problems are highlighted, addressed as well as challenged because they provide a safe of criticism and reach maximum number of audience though the medium of drama and news. A rise in more complex adaptation are now in practice in Pakistani drama. One such example is the current drama *Sang-e-Mah* (2022), starring the famous Pakistani singer Atif Aslam. The play has its root implanted in Hamlet's story. A comparative study of the two is what required further probe; which, as a result, is the recommendation of this paper. In a nutshell, Shakespeare is largely present in Pakistan, and his plays subsequently has the potential to address contemporary Pakistani problems through the drama of medium and news.

Furthermore, having established that Shakespeare is largely present in Pakistan both in academia and public sphere; there is strong need for revisiting and retelling of Shakespearean plays in the academia. This paper suggests/recommends as well as argues at the same time to teach Shakespearean plays in the academia with these newer dimensions and new interpretations so as to enable students to raise

voice and address relevant Pakistani contemporary problems.

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