

## Stuart Hallian Study of Shakespeare: A Resurgence of *Hamlet* through *Haider*

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### Abstract

*This work aims to investigate the rebuilding of the Shakespearean play Hamlet in an Indian movie Haider and the similarities and differences between both of the works. It further explores the audience's reception of the movie and the meanings that every diverse group drives differently according to their culture and context, geographies, and mindsets. It explains the reestablishing of Shakespearean works in the Indian context and the highlighting of local issues. The paper in the light of Stuart Hall's reception theory manifests the idea of the director Bhrdawaj who decodes the text of Hamlet according to his intelligence and then he encodes some meanings by recreating Hamlet into an adaptation. The Indian cinematic representation of Haider is then further decoded by various groups of audience rendering to their varied receptions. Most of the characters and their sensations in the Haider are similar to that of Hamlet's but their portrayal can be seen differently in this adaptation. Some characters are missing like Horatio, some are given clear voices who are previously ambiguous in the play, as Gertrude in the form of Ghazala, and a few are differently created to look realistic in the modern world such as Roohdaar who acts like Hamlet's ghost but is not the ghost, he is instead a prisoner and revolutionary who performs the similar role of conveying the message of vengeance as the Shakespearean ghost does. This research is also concerned about the last message given in the movie which is opposite of Hamlet's text, and through which the producer has tried to change the notion of revenge.*

**Keywords:** Coding, Decoding, Cinematic Adaptation, Shakespeare, Reception

### Introduction

This paper aims to investigate the rebuilding of the Shakespearean play Hamlet in an Indian movie Haider with a different cultural context. With the help of Stuart Hall's Reception theory, this paper is to explore the meanings, perceived by different social groups and their stance on the movie. Further, it will explain the similarities and variations of Haider with the original literary text Hamlet. The paper will elaborate that Haider is not exactly the apt description of Hamlet besides having similar characters, their actions, and traits, and storyline. The reception of meanings is different in Indian culture. The contemporary world is not like that of Shakespearean time. So the meaning and themes cannot be fully retained in the modern adaptation of Hamlet. Through Haider, Hamlet is given life again in Indian cinema where his acts are more justified. And Hamlet's mother Gertrude, in the voice of Haider's mother Ghazala is vindicated.

Moreover, the limited fictional conflict of a royal family in Denmark has been converted into a larger, realistic, and global issue of Kashmir. And the problems of families of disappeared persons have been pronounced in Haider via different cultural representation techniques used by the producer Vishal Bhardwaj.

These two texts will be analyzed through Stuart Hall's reception theory which is an offshoot of reader-response criticism. Reader-response criticism is a school of literary theory that focuses on the reader or audience and their experience of a literary work, in contrast to other schools and theories that primarily focus on the author or the content and form of the work. Stanley Fish attempts to situate the reading process in a broader, institutional context. He believes that "(Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities (1980) Relatively Similar is Reception theory, developed by Stuart Hall asserts that Texts in the media are encoded and decoded. The producer embeds

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messages and ideals in their media, which the viewer decodes. Different audience members, on the other hand, can decode the media in different ways, and probably not in the way the producer intended. In his 1996 essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', Hall argued that cultural identity is not only a matter of 'being' but of 'becoming', 'belonging as much to the future as it does to the past'. (Cultural Identity and Diaspora, 1996). Identities, according to Hall, are constantly changing and transcending time and space. The practical manifestation of this idea can be seen in the form of cinematic adaptation Haider (2014), of William Shakespeare's Hamlet.

Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet, and actor who lived in the seventeenth century. He is widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's greatest dramatist. He is known as the "Bard of Avon" and England's national poet.

He gave realistic themes and relationship sensations in his plays. His works have been translated into various languages throughout the world. And still, after 450 hundred years of his time, his plays are being adapted into movies with very little, required contextual changes. Many Indian movies are directly or indirectly indebted to Shakespeare, as said by Peer Nassir-U-Deen. Namrata Joshi says "Shakespeare's plays with their dramatic strength and superb portrayal of the universal truths of human nature, have always lent themselves well to the adaptation to different times and places". (Mohsin, Syed Wahaj and TaskeenShaista. "Cinematizing Shakespeare: A Study of Shakespearean Presence in Indian Cinema". An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities. Vol 2, Issue X (2015): 308-315. Print.). Since a minor deviation can lead to a massive theatrical blunder, the indigenized version of Shakespeare's drama in the form of movie adaptations necessitates thoughtful visualizations and artistic sensibility. However, Indian filmmakers add Indian visual complexities to European drama to make it more appealing to Indian audiences. At this stage, Indian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays are in anxious need of discussion.

The Indian screen adaptations of Shakespeare's works not only imitate him, but also alter and, in some cases, explain his characters and works in light of contemporary events. Goliyonki Rasleela Ram-Leela (2013), based on Romeo and Juliet; Vishal Bhardwaj's Hamlet trilogy Maqbool (2003), Omkara (2006), and Haider (2014), based on Hamlet, depict the bard only but the directors of these movies have reinvented Shakespeare in an Indian version. The theme of vengeance and deception runs through Shakespeare's longest play Hamlet the Prince of Denmark. Prince Hamlet is beseeched by the ghost of his father; late king Hamlet to avenge his murder from Claudius. Who is Hamlets' uncle and later becomes a step farther, probably the killer of the old king? The tragedy ends with bloodshed and deaths.

All prominent characters including Hamlet, his mother Gertrude, Uncle Claudius, lover Ophelia, Laertes, and many others die in the persuasion of revenge. Indian cinema has taken great advantage of the bard's craft. Hamlet's Indian version Haider also represents a similar story of a Kashmiri protagonist named Haider (performed by Shahid Kapoor), who is summoned by Roohdaar (his father's friend) that his father wants revenge from Haider's uncle Khurum who has seduced his mother and betrayed the father. Haider is confused about

Stuart Hallian study of Shakespeare: A Resurgence of Hamlet through Haider.....Zafar, Batool and Sajid

Whether his disappeared father is dead or alive? And if Roohdaar is right or his uncle Khurum's story is to believe? The film isn't set in Denmark but in controversial Kashmir During the conflict in the mid-1990s. Dr. Hilaal Meer operates a revolutionary leader who is suffering from severe illness. The next day the Doctor's house is invaded by the Indian Army, and he is accused of providing shelter to a terrorist group.

The Military burns his home with the revolutionary leader, and He was taken into a detention center named Mama2. His wife Ghazala is left without a clue of her husband's deportee and is now a half widow. Their son Haider Meer dreadfully arrives knowing his father's missing and later finds that his mother is remarkably happy at his uncle Khurram's house unconcerned about his father. He then leaves for his friend's studio and tries to trace his father. He eventually sees how the thought of freedom offends the administration. The malicious greed of the police and military are ruining life in Kashmir. Haider finds Roohdaar, The symbolic soul mate of his father. Who brings the news of his Hillal's death, whose last wish was to avenge Khurram Meer's deception in plotting his murder, for his nefarious interest in Ghazala and Politics. Haider becomes broken, knowing his mother's involvement in his father's exile and eventual death and her affair with Khurram. He gets traumatized and seeks

revenge for his father. Haider's lover, Arshia (the Indian version of Ophelia) tries to reconcile him and to control his anguish.

Arshia is the daughter of an evil-minded police officer Pervez who is the partner in crime with Khurram for Hilaal's death. Haider grows more insane when Khurram and Ghazala get married. He instantly tries to pursue vengeance, but it was stopped by Pervez, and he tries to kill Haider. Haider escapes by killing policemen and decides to cross the border in search of freedom. He calls his mother Ghazala before leaving, and he feels distressed and couldn't speak a word, yet Ghazala asks him to meet her once. Ghazala reveals that she never hated his father, but she was tired of the busy routines and uncaring nature of her husband. Haider questions her illegitimate concerns towards Khurram and warns her that she has to be widowed again because he will kill Khurram. Ghazala points Haider's gun towards her and asks him to end her agony. He unintentionally kills Pervez, who attempts to shoot Haider. Haider escapes, and Arshie, after losing her father, becomes cynical and commits suicide.

Haider reaches the graveyard where his father is buried and finds aged revolutionaries who strangely dig their graves. The next day he finds that Arshie is dead. As he tries to reach her corpse, Liaqat, Arshies' brother attacks him. Haider kills him accidentally. Later, Khurram arrives with a battalion and demands that Haider hand over his arms. Ghazala tries to persuade Haider to put an end to the vengeance, but he refuses. Ghazala blasts herself with a grenade, provided by Roohdaar. Haider becomes deserted, witnessing his mother's death. He then sees Khurram who is half burnt, his legs got cut, and Haider is about to take his father's revenge. But then seeing all the bloodshed, Haider recalls her mother's last words 'Revenge just begets Revenge'. So he disdains the notion of revenge. Khurram, who is full of guilt, begs for retribution for betraying Hilaal and deceiving Ghazala. Although the movie ends with massacre and violence unlike Shakespearean Hamlet, Bhardwaj's Haider does not take revenge. He leaves his bruised uncle to die on his own with a note, learned from his mother Ghazala that "revenge only begets revenge". The producer deliberately gives this message because this narrative is needed and appropriate in the occupied Kashmiri context. And people have derived various meanings from the movie all of which can be regarded as equally appropriate in Hall's perspectives.

**Research Questions:**

1. What are the similarities and variations between the literary text Hamlet and its cinematic adaptation Haider?
2. How Stuart Hall's Reception theory does help to analyze the manifold decoded meanings of *Hamlet* and *Haider*?
3. What role does the cultural context perform in perceiving the meaning of Hamlet's Indian cinematic adaptation Hider?

**Research Objectives:**

1. To accentuate the similarities and variations between literary text Hamlet and its cinematic adaptation Haider
2. To investigate How Stuart Hall's Reception theory functions in analyzing the manifold decoded meanings of *Hamlet* and *Haider*
3. To examine the role that the cultural context plays in perceiving the meaning of Hamlet's Indian cinematic adaptation *Hider*.
4. To highlight how *Haider* is tailored in a way that has globalized *Hamlet* and presented a modern, political issue to change the audience's narrative.

**Research Framework and Methodological Approach:**

This study is non-empirical and qualitative; the researcher intends to analyze the media text Haider and the literary text Hamlet using a deductive method and textual analysis. For this purpose, data will be collected from both primary and secondary sources. Websites with reputable documents, scientific posts, interviews, scholarly journals, and videos in question using the keywords "adaptation", "media text", "representation", "cultural context", "Indian cinema", and "Shakespeare" are consulted for conduct the research.

Reception theory is a variation of reader-response theory that emphasizes the reception or perception of each reader in deriving meaning from a text. Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist, is one of the most prominent advocates of reception theory, which he first proposed in his essay 'Encoding and Decoding in the (Television Discourse, 1973). He refers to the encoding/decoding model

communication as a form of communication. Is it a form of textual analysis that focuses on the Scope of "negotiation" and "opposition" by the audience?

This means that the audience does not necessarily embrace a "text"—be it a novel, movie, or other artistic work—but that the reader/viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on her or his cultural context and life experiences. In other words, the sense of a text is formed by the relationship between the text and the reader, not by the text itself. When a group of readers have a common cultural context and view the text in similar ways, they have a basic understanding of the meaning of the text. The less in common a reader's heritage is with the artist, the less likely he or she is to know the artist's intended meaning, and it follows that if two readers have radically different cultural and personal backgrounds, the artist's intended meaning will be lost, their interpretations of a text may differ greatly. Umberto Eco coined the word 'aberrant decoding' which means the reader's understanding varies from what the artist intends. Similar is the case with Shakespearean Hamlet. He might intend entertainment and political dilemma of his times through this play but the Indian Director Bhardwaj has decoded his work differently while making Haider. Furthermore, the encoded meaning of Bhardwaj in Haider is further decoded by the different groups of audience according to their perceptions.

#### **Data Analysis & Discussion:**

There are some obvious similarities between Shakespeare's play Hamlet and Vishal Bhardwaj's movie Haider. Haider's character is a replication of Hamlet, her mother Ghazala of Gertrude, Doctor Meer is late king Hamlet, Khurram is Claudius, Arshie is Ophelia, Pervaiz is Polonius, Liaqat is Laertes, and most beautifully fabricated the character of Roohdaar (that means soul) is a representation of the Shakespearean Ghost of Hamlet's father. The characters are not similar in names but also share common traits and characteristics with the textual characters of Hamlet. Haider is portrayed as a literary-minded young man. He is later traumatized by the death of his father and the engrossment of her mother in his murder and her ongoing relationship with Haider's uncle Khurram. His soliloquies, his doubtful insanity that has wisdom, love for the mother, and his pursuit of revenge, all hint towards the rebirth of the fictional prince of Denmark in Kashmir, because in this context something is rotten in Kashmir not in Denmark. Haider's soliloquies are as refined as Hamlet's. Some of them are the Hindi translations of Hamlet's dialogues and some are newly created, giving the vision of Haider's mental state and his inner character's insight.

Haider re-enacts Hamlet's famous soliloquy "to be or not to be, that is the question" from Hamlet, in "hum rhynyahumni? Bas yahiswaal ha" He like Hamlet kisses her mother and says

Stuart Hallian study of Shakespeare: A Resurgence of Hamlet through Haider.....Zafar, Batool and Sajid

'I cannot share you with your husbands'. This reminds me of the Oedipus complex of Hamlet that is recreated in Haider. As the director, Vishal Bhardwaj remarked in one of his interviews I chose Hamlet because it had a thread of sexual tension running through it, which was also present in the other two films. 'Hamlet is drawn towards his mother because of the Oedipus complex, which can be viewed on both a physical and psychological level. We kept the reference subtle since Haider was catering to a primarily Indian audience. This is only one facet of the mother-son relationship', Says Shahid Kapoor, the performer of Haider's role in the movie.

Haider's inadvertently murdering of Pervaiz, Liaqat and the policemen is akin to the actions of Hamlet. Khurum's vicious and manipulative acts are parallel to those of Claudius. And the prayer scene has been taken as it is in Hamlet. Roohdar's character is created for Hamlet's ghost. Some commonalities like Roohdar's white dress, the action of taking Hamlet into another direction which is a graveyard, and most significantly, evoking Haider to avenge the murderer of his father, Khuram, and to leave the mother on God's justification, is a true representation of that Ghost. The audiences are as doubtful of the credibility of Roohdar as of the Ghost. Haider's monologue that shows his agony, pain, and the troublesome of his life is comparable to Hamlet's soliloquy "to be, or not to be, that is the question, Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer" (HamletAct3, Scene1)

"Shaq pehaiyaqeen to, yaqeenpehai Shaq mujhe.

Kiska jhootjhoothai, Kiskesach main sachnahi. Haikihainahi, bas yahieksawaalhai.

Aursawaalkajawaabbhisawaalhai.

Dilki gar sunu to hai, dimaagki to hainahi.

Jaan loon kijaandoon, Main rahoongi main Nahi

(Rana. Seema "Hamlet's "To be or not to be" and Haider's "Main rahoongi main Nahi" An Analysis)  
(I have doubts in faith, and I have faith in doubts)

Who's a lie is a fib, and who's the truth is a lie

Is it so or it is not, that is the question,

Stuart Hallian study of Shakespeare: A Resurgence of Hamlet through Haider.....Zafar, Batool and Sajid

And the answer to this question is a question too,

It's there if I listen to my heart.

It isn't, though, if I listen to my conscience.

Should I take a life or give one up, should I live or die?"

(Haider. directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. India, 2 October 2014)

The mainstream storyline of the movie also meets the requirement of the original text. But Besides multiple similarities, there are Indigenization and cinematic changes in Hamlet's adopted version of Haider because it is produced in a different culture, diverse geographical context, and varied timeframe. Some of Hamlet's soliloquies were translated into Hindi, with some prominent lines omitted and others inserted because music and visuals replace a lot of words in cinema. Adaptation, according to Julie Sanders, is a "...transpositional practice, casting a particular genre into another generic mood, an act of re-vision in and of itself" (Sanders, Julie. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge Publication, 2006. Print.). In her book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon discusses the adaptation process (2006). Adaptation, she claims, can be examined from "three distinct yet interrelated perspectives" (Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge Publication, 2006. Print) she points out that adaptation can be difficult at first. By the reception theory's "negotiated" scope the reader can grab a balanced meaning from the original text. As producer Bhardwaj has grasped and given his self-created meaning to the character of Gertrude. He took this character from a marginalized position and gives her a major role in the form of Ghazala in Haider. He gives a voice to the voiceless Gertrude. He does not stay there only but also takes help from Hall's "opposition" idea which says that a reader can decode an opposite meaning of what the producer encodes because the audience of a text can have different culture and context so they can frame their relative meaning from a particular text. Bhardwaj has reconstructed Hamlet in modern-day India to highlight the urgency and conflict of Kashmir. He does not portray a prince's story who seeks vengeance for his father's murder. Instead, he puts Kashmir in Haider's heart.

In Hall's idea of "negotiation", the audience can further decode Haider as a symbol of Kashmir. Who is damaged, manipulated, tortured, and traumatized? The beauty of his mind which only used to write poetry is assaulted and converted into a hub of violence murder planning. Gertrude, about whom the readers are not sure of her being guilty in the text, in the movie Ghazala's character is a bit clearer. The sexual conflict Bhardwaj depicts in Haider is not completely indebted to Hamlet. Ghazala's betrayal of her husband is a bit justified. Her husband's exhausting routine, unconcerned behavior towards his young wife leaves her sexually deprived and fuel to the fire is Khuram's seduction that leads her to the destruction she causes to herself and the family.

When Haider questions her she says 'your father used to remain busy in his medicines and patients and you were away and I kept on waiting for you'. Ghazala is a portrayal of an Indian woman whose husband fails to give her marital pleasure, so she tries to attain her happiness in extramarital affairs for which she is never been forgiven by society, family, and especially the progenies. But similar to Gertrude she is a center of attraction for her son. A widowed and a bride at the same time as she admits on Khuram's bed that "ma AdhibewahunaurAdhiDulhan (I am a half widow and half bride)".

(Haider. directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. India, 2 October 2014)

As reception theory celebrates various meanings of different groups of the same text, Haider has become a controversy. The film is not a work of art but a portrayal of reality also. It hits a very sensitive issue of Kashmir where Indian armed forces are involved. The movie has divided people into various groups as an audience. One who sees it as a conspiracy against the Indian army and a symbol of unpatriotic behavior of Indian moviemakers? The other group supports this adaptation thinking that it is a sign of liberal India, where every kind of issue can be highlighted through art, and there is full liberty given to the media. The feminist group may admire this for Gertrude's character

justification through Ghazala. According to a First Post report, "portraying the painful political truth of Kashmir" is a difficult task.

Great challenge, "Particularly when the problem is at the heart of the conflict between Kashmiris and Indians." ". (Pandey, Vikas. "Haider: *Why is 'Indian Hamlet' controversial?*" BBC, 7 October 2014)

Kashmir remains one of the most divisive political issues in modern India, evoking intense feelings. Bhardwaj has also come under fire for what many see as his "unfair" depiction of the military." ". (Pandey, Vikas. "Haider: *Why is 'Indian Hamlet' controversial?*" BBC, 7 October 2014)

Film star Tabu, who has performed the role of Gertrude aka Ghazala in Haider, reestablishes the position of Gertrude by saying in an interview;

"Ghazala is torn between her idealistic husband, opportunistic brother-in-law, and her loving and innocent son. She believes she is responsible for maintaining order, but she is unable to do so. Her devotion to her child is irrational. She is always attempting to save him from being deceived and manipulated." (TheIndianExpress).

Haider, unlike Hamlet, does not murder his uncle to avenge his father's death. Unlike Gertrude, Ghazala does not die by chance; she chooses to die after discovering the truth. Her decision to commit suicide elevates her to the film's most courageous character, putting a strain on Haider's hold on the spotlight. Ghazala, who is ironically a woman, tends to be at the heart of the film in several ways. Ghazala appears to be at the core of the film in a variety of ways, ironically as a scapegoat rather than an actor with specific agencies. However, how she is positioned in the middle is less obvious. ("Why Haider should have been titled Ghazala". The Galaxy, October 10, 2014). Haider's context has been interpreted differently by Pakistani audiences. They see Haider as a present-day adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet as well as a realistic portrayal of the Kashmir conflict. They believe that this adaptation's layer is humanist. "The humanist narrative eventually transforms into a mouthpiece for the Indian government, urging militants to lay down their arms and join the 'democratic' process, opting for nonviolence, as Haider's grandfather and mother often remind him, 'revenge begets revenge.' " (Hashmi, Duriya." Haider's chutzpah." Dawn News, November 7, 2014).

On the other hand, several Indian audiences thought the movie is controversial and anti-Indian. The Newyork Times on Oct. 27, 2014, reported about an Indian social media

The campaign, " "Any movie that sympathizes with terrorists glorifies them; insults the Indian Army and defends ethnic cleansing, goes to the bin," one Twitter user said. #BoycottHaider." A picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a conservative whose election this year has emboldened Indians who support a muscular, unapologetic nationalism, can be found on the campaign's Facebook page. (The Newyork Times on Oct. 27, 2014)

The Kashmiri audience might decode a completely variant meaning, of their own choice from this Shakespeare's Indianized version. Their meaning seems the opposite of Hindu Indians. They feel Haider as a mouthpiece of their troubles and lifelong miseries. A Kashmiri gives his review on this movie as;" As I left the theatre after seeing Haider, I was relieved to have seen a film that defied expectations. I was relieved that the censors were allowing audiences to decide what was wrong and what was right and that there were no bans, stay-orders, or any of the other nonsense that had previously stifled India's free expression of ideas, a fact that was doubly shocking considering that our wise leaders had previously stifled it. ("Few Thoughts on Haider" The Greatbong Blog & Podcast, October 12, 2014).

Haider's plot outline is similar to that of Hamlet but it is not the same. The significant change is the ending of the movie, where Haider does not seek vengeance from his uncle and his mother's conscious suicide happens. This incident changes the whole narrative. Haider leaves his buried uncle to die on his own, to advocate the narrative that "revenge begets revenge only" that his mother and grandfather repeatedly saying. This abduction of revenge is nowhere similar to the hamlet which was at most a tragedy of revenge. The director decodes Shakespeare's play and establishes it into his age and context where violence and revenge are needed to be stopped and not to provoked through media. And the already decoded adaptation which further encodes many other messages; is again decoded by its different group of audience according to their background knowledge, mindset, shared emotions, geographical areas, and cultural factors involved.

### Conclusion

This paper has observed the similarities and variations between Hamlet and its Indian adopted version Haider, directed by Vishal Bhardwaj. It also probes into the various receptions of meanings by the different audiences of the same text Haider. It attempts to explore the idea of Indian director Bhardwaj, who has decoded Shakespeare's Hamlet in a modern-day context. It also sheds the light on audiences' decoding and reception of meaning from media text, according to their background knowledge and context in the light of Stuart Hall's theory of Reception. It has been observed that the mainstream storyline of Haider is quite similar to that of Hamlet, The Prince of Denmark. Haider's mental state, wise madness, his soliloquies, love for mother, thirst for revenge, and lost father, recreate Hamlet in India, but still, the movie is not altogether the same as that of the original text. The adaptation has contextualized the work of Shakespeare. It has taken the work to another level by highlighting a very sensitive and humanistic issue of Kashmir through the Shakespearean canon, without being biased. Although Haider has earned a sense of controversy in the local audience it is also praised as a piece of art. Its humanitarian narrative, the strong portrayal of women, and the non-violent message "revenge beget revenge only" is different from Shakespearean Hamlet but it is convincing and appreciated in the modern world.

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