

From *Hamlet* to *Haider*: Transcultural Shakespeare and Ethics of Authority

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Abstract

Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of *Hamlet* as *Haider*, the final film of his Shakespearean trilogy involving *Maqbool* (*Macbeth*) and *Omkara* (*Othello*), offers a gripping portrayal of the manifold crises experienced by people in the conflict-ridden valley of Kashmir, a flashpoint in India-Pakistan relations since the Partition, in the wake of insurgency, counterinsurgency operations by the Indian army and consequent collapse of normalcy from the early 1990s. Reconfiguring Hamlet's "To be or not to be" as the anguished voice of an entire ethnic population in struggle for survival, who ask 'Hum hain ke hum nahin?' (Do we exist or not?), Haider, as the Kashmiri avatar of Hamlet, re-weaves Shakespearean questions about ethics and authority onto Kashmir's ongoing history of violence, loss and agony, as personal trauma merges with the collective horror of an entire community where the Shakespearean expression of the rotten state is no longer metaphoric and the entire valley, manned by numerous soldiers, indeed becomes a haunting prison of untold torture. Rather than being only portrayed as a victim of chronic melancholy or a young man in the throes of an unresolved oedipal complex, Haider emerges as a rebellious protagonist whose personal quest for justice also entails a powerful critique of the Indian nation state and its repressive apparatuses. Focusing principally on Haider's reconfiguration of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech, the paper would seek to trace Hamlet's evolution as a radical antagonist to the state as a crucial component of that transcultural adaptation which *Haider* as a film attempts.

Keywords: adaptation, nation, trauma, ethics, authority.