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Cinematic Adaptation and Political Reimagination in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014): A Critical Comparative Study with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

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ABSTRACT

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014), the third installment of his Shakespeare trilogy, stands as a powerful reworking of *Hamlet*, embedded within the socio-political turmoil of 1990s Kashmir. Unlike mere reproductions, *Haider* demonstrates remarkable directorial autonomy and artistic innovation, interweaving themes of revenge, identity, trauma, and political violence. This paper will critically examine the contemporaneity and the originality of the film *Haider* as a story adapted to explore the tension and complexity of the state of political tension that has been persistent in Indian administered Kashmir and the controversial role of the Indian army in tackling the political doldrums there. This paper will further explore the making and the storyline of the film *Haider* based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the context of militancy and a brutal Indian counterinsurgency in Kashmir. It is not simply an adaptation but also a challengingly creative and contemporary story, the concept of which goes beyond adapting the Shakespearean tragic story of revenge. Despite its genuine shortcomings, the Indian adaptation of *Haider* by Bhardwaj's does conceptualize and contextualize a gripping contemporary tale that can be safely called Bhardwaj's magnum opus in its own right on the juridico-political crisis pervading the India-Pakistan borders over Kashmir.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing a research paper on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a challengingly harrowing task due to the fact that the play has forced and titillated millions of scholars to produce a constellation of interpretations which have added further to the complexity and obscurity of the play particularly its most enigmatic tragic hero Hamlet. In this paper however, critical light will be thrown upon the 2014 Indian adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Bhardwaj, an acclaimed film maker of Bollywood. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is complex and a great work of art like the enigma of the Monalisa in that it explores the complex psychological workings of the

human mind and Shakespeare's desperate plunge into the subconscious and subterranean regions of Hamlet's heart, his heart of darkness and that of a hypersensitive modern individual who has to take up arms against the sea of troubles' make the play an ongoing contemporary study. The hauntingly bitter cold in the Elisnore castle with a dead silence all around and the utter nervousness in Fransisco's terrified face mark the broken political state of Denmark. The Act 1 Scene 1 sets the horrifying and dramatic tone and mood of the play. The shadowy appearance of the ghost provokes thoughts both moral and political creating mystery and suspense. The dead silence and the inky blackness of the night, reinforced by the slow calculated sounds of the sentries' boots reaffirm the confused alarm and watchfulness at the very outset of the play serving an appropriate expository. This part of the play is both dramatically and theatrically significant for what is to happen next. Jeanette Winterson in introduction to one of her anthologies observes that the human mind is most open to the idea of ghosts and supernatural manifestations when it is in a state of cold or chilling damp from without and anxiety emanating from within [28].

But of course, the question in Hamlet concerns itself with the query: why has the ghost come back from the ashes of the dead? Is this the troubled spirit of the old King? Is it a demon? It puzzles the imagination severely when Horatio says, 'A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye.' (Shakespeare 1.1.112). This expository part of Hamlet essentially interprets the political and military situation and the impending disaster that looms large in the troubled minds of the guards on the ramparts of the gun-platform of the Elsinore castle. In *Haider*, the Indian adaptation of *Hamlet* the film maker has a different concept very relevant and relating to the military counterinsurgency unit in the volatile political state of Kashmir. This is how Bhardwaz creates the expository part of his storyline setting the tension in the war-torn, conflict-ridden, upsetting landscape of snow-covered Kashmir, a disputed zone in the northern most geographical region of India. Just as Horatio's expository remarks suggest the military threats that begets retribution and honour themes, central to Hamlet, so is the dead silence over the military surveillance of the gunned soldiers surrounding the school building and Hilal Meer's lodge in Kashmir for interrogation. The state of King Claudius and Polonius is projected as the counter-insurgency and government-run, counter-insurgent militias in Haider and thematically dominates the action. Vishal Bhardwaz commenting on the setting of his film says in an interview with The Indian Express that,

> It was the political turmoil and the 25 years of tragedy of Kashmir that compelled me. Our way of looking at Kashmir has either been cosmetic – only for shooting songs – or rhetoric, where we show a man in a phiran, holding a Kalashnikov. Haider is the first film where we see Kashmir from the inside. I don't think we have made a mainstream film about the issue [22].

1.1 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following key research questions:

i. How does Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* adapt the characters and structure of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to reflect the historical and political realities of 1990s Kashmir?

ii. To what extent does *Haider* maintain fidelity to *Hamlet*, and where does it diverge to assert its own cultural and political identity?

1.2 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

i. To examine how *Haider* reinterprets the narrative, characters, and moral dilemmas of *Hamlet* within the specific socio-political context of Kashmir.

ii. To analyze the use of cinematic elements—such as visual imagery, music, setting, and performance—in constructing a politically charged adaptation.

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2. Literature Review

The adaptation of Western canonical texts into postcolonial contexts has long intrigued scholars across disciplines, particularly in literature, film studies, and cultural theory. Adaptation, as it has been proved many times, has taken the shape of a distinct field of study in literature [26]. The genre is getting more and more popular each day throughout the world. The Arab Shakespeare Trilogy, for example, is a collection of three adaptations of Shakespearean plays, including versions of *Hamlet*, *Richard III* and *Twelfth Night*, performed around the world, which have won many awards and met with widespread acclaim [1]. This study situates Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* within the broader discourse on adaptation theory, Shakespearean reinterpretation, and postcolonial cinema. The literature reviewed below provides a theoretical and critical foundation for understanding *Haider* both as a text in conversation with *Hamlet* and as a film rooted in the politics of Kashmir.

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) offers one of the most influential frameworks for understanding adaptation as both an act of reinterpretation and cultural negotiation. She argues that adaptations are not mere copies but "repetitions without replication" that gain new meaning in new contexts. This view allows for a nuanced reading of *Haider* not as a derivative of *Hamlet*, but as a text that reframes Shakespeare's tragedy to reflect local political realities.

The global afterlife of Shakespeare has been critically examined in works like *Postcolonial Appropriations of Shakespeare* [16] and *Shakespeare, the Movie: Popularizing the Plays on Film, TV, and Video* [10]. These texts highlight how Shakespeare is often appropriated by former colonies to assert cultural identity or critique imperial legacies.

Bhaskar et al. pointed out that Indian cinema has a fairly long history of adapting Shakespeare plays, including *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*, to Indian characters and settings [19]. Many researchers have discussed the relationship between adaptation, ethics, and value in the context of Shakespearean adaptation in Bollywood and Hindi cinema [15]. The postmillennial period of Bollywood cinema greets William Shakespeare, "welcoming him as the man of the 'millennium,' resulting in a growth of Shakespeare's authority in India [11]. Within this tradition, *Haider* stands out for its political ambition. Scholars like [27] have noted that Indian Shakespeare adaptations often navigate between fidelity to the source and demands of local sociopolitical relevance. *Haider* exemplifies this through its setting in insurgency-torn Kashmir, replacing the Danish court's internal decay with state surveillance, disappearances, and military occupation. On the note of fidelity, it has been found that numerous authors and directors have taken certain liberties to contextualize Shakespeare in relevant day and age. One prime example of this is the famous British film director Laurence Olivier. Olivier's film version of Hamlet begins with a line Shakespeare never wrote: "This is the tragedy of a man who could not make up his mind" [25]. The sentence was added by the director (and principal actor) Olivier himself and represents a long-standing British theatrical tradition of supplementing Shakespeare's language with words deemed necessary to clarify the original plot. A similar stance is also taken by Vishal to contextualize the Kashmir conflict in India.

The Kashmir conflict has remained largely underrepresented or sanitized in mainstream Indian cinema. Basharat Peer's memoir *Curfewed Night* (2008), co-writer of *Haider*, serves as both a source text and a critical lens through which the film's narrative realism is constructed. Scholars such as [29] argue that Kashmir's political identity has been suppressed by dominant nationalist narratives, making *Haider* a rare cinematic intervention. Critical reviews and academic responses to *Haider* have largely acknowledged its boldness in depicting the cost of conflict. The film's visual and narrative design foregrounds absence, loss, and trauma—particularly through the motifs of disappearance and madness. The Oedipal tension between Haider and his mother also aligns with *Hamlet*, but is reinterpreted in light of militarized patriarchy and fractured familial loyalties.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study draws on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that includes adaptation theory and film theory, enabling a layered analysis of *Haider* as both a literary reinterpretation and a politically engaged cinematic text. Central to this study is Linda Hutcheon's (2006) concept of adaptation as "repetition without replication," which understands adaptations not as derivative texts but as creative reinterpretations that engage with new audiences, contexts, and meanings. *Haider* is thus approached as an adaptive dialogue with *Hamlet*, where narrative and thematic elements are retained but transformed to reflect the socio-political reality of Kashmir in the 1990s. This is supported by [12] notion of transtextuality, particularly hypertextuality, where the new text (*Haider*) rewrites and repositions the source text (*Hamlet*), often with ideological and cultural motivations. To analyze how *Haider* employs visual storytelling to politicize *Hamlet*, the study incorporates elements of mise-en-scène, cinematography, and sound design from film theory. These formal techniques are not merely aesthetic choices but are instrumental in reconfiguring Shakespeare's themes—such as madness, justice, and revenge—within the visual and emotional language of contemporary Kashmir.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Contextualizing the Kashmir Conflict

The film is a contemporary modern adaptation of Shakespeare's *Tragedy of the Prince of Denmark, Hamlet* and also an adaptation of Basharat Peer's memoir titled *Curfewed Night*. Kashmir, often described as "Heaven on Earth," has since 1947 been a geopolitical flashpoint between India and Pakistan. Its complex ethno-religious composition and ambiguous political status post-Partition have led to widespread insurgency, military occupation, and civilian suffering [9]. In *Haider*, this contested history forms the backdrop. Bhardwaj blends the personal with the political by situating Dr. Hilal Meer's disappearance—a central event mirroring King Hamlet's murder—as a consequence of medical aid offered to a separatist militant. This creative choice echoes [18] memoir *Curfewed Night*, which inspired the screenplay. Peer recalls, "Ikhwan... tortured and killed like modern-day Mongols," capturing the fear that pervades the civilian experience [18].

4.1.1 Historical Background

Kashmir is an ethnically heterogeneous state in the Himalayan region which is very popular due to its spectacular lakes and natural beauty famous as the heaven on earth. According to the Indian Independence Act of 1947, Kashmir was given the option to choose accession to either India or Pakistan. Local ruler Maharaja Hari Singh, despite the region's Muslim culture and heritage, claimed to go on the side of India in return for its assistance against an invasion from Pakistan. In spite of UN intervention into the political conflict raised by India and Pakistan relating to Kashmir, the issue could not be settled and the two countries failed to comply with an agreement to demilitarize the region. The United Nations proposed a plebiscite to settle the matter but to no avail. Two armed wars followed –one in 1949 and the second in 1999 and both India and Pakistan declared themselves to be nuclear powers. Thousands of lives have been claimed so far due to armed conflicts and the issue over Kashmir has only worsened further to the detriment of the locals fighting for independence still now. Kashmir always makes news headlines over issues such as military intervention in common Kashmiri lives, persistent surveillance, forced disappearances and extra judicial killing. Curfew or strikes are quite an everyday issue.

The late 1980s and early 1990s, the period in which *Haider* is set, marked a significant shift in the conflict's intensity. Disillusionment with Indian electoral practices and rising political suppression gave way to a full-scale armed insurgency, supported in part by cross-border elements. In response, the Indian government

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implemented a counter-insurgency strategy that included the deployment of hundreds of thousands of troops and the enforcement of laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA). This period witnessed widespread human rights abuses, including enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and the displacement of the Kashmiri Pandit community.

The issue further escalated in 2019 when the Indian government abrogated Article 370 of the Indian Constitution which allowed the state a certain amount of autonomy - its own constitution, a separate flag and freedom to make laws. All this meant that Article 370 had granted the region special status, and its revocation in August 2019 deepened the crisis in an already volatile area.

The BBC reported the news on 6 August 2019 this way,

> In the first few days of August, there were signs of something afoot in Kashmir. Tens of thousands of additional Indian troops were deployed, a major Hindu pilgrimage was cancelled, schools and colleges were shut, tourists were ordered to leave, telephone and internet services were suspended and regional political leaders were placed under house arrest. (BBC 2019)

Former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti had condemned India's decision to curb the state's autonomy. Ms Mufti said the decision betrayed Kashmir's decision to align with India in 1947,

> Today marks the darkest day in Indian democracy. Decision of J&K leadership to reject 2 nation theory in 1947 & align with India has backfired. Unilateral decision of GOI to scrap Article 370 is illegal & unconstitutional which will make India an occupational force in J&K. [24].

4.1.2. Militarization, Disappearance and Narrative Suppression

In *Haider*, the scenes of betrayal, oppressions, injustice, revenge as well as the dark and dismal brooding atmosphere of the play is quite finely adapted to Kashmir which bring us back to Shakespeare's immortal line 'Something is rotten in the state of Denmark', (Shakespeare 1.4.90) but here it applies explicitly and extensively to Kashmir. And regarding the state of political and military affairs, remarked one reviewer of Mid-day Newspaper, "While Vishal Bharadwaj brings alive the ecstasy, pain and passion of Hamlet on screen, he also reminds us of the harsh truth in our own backyard, the man-made mayhem in the God-made jannat that is Kashmir." [21]. He further adds, In *Haider*, Mr Bhardwaj "holds the mirror so uncomfortably close to the issue that intimate details of the suffering and the evident hopelessness of your own countrymen sits as a burden on your conscience." [21]. All of these aspects point towards the fact that the central theme in *Haider*—and in Kashmir's lived experience—is that of disappearance. Tens of thousands of people were reported missing, allegedly detained or killed in custody by Indian security forces. The film captures this traumatic motif through the character of Hilaal Meer (Haider's father), a doctor who vanishes after secretly operating on a wounded militant. His absence becomes the catalyst for Haider's psychological and moral unraveling.

Militarization of public and private spaces is another recurring reality. In *Haider*, homes, hospitals, and universities are all surveilled or occupied, reflecting how the conflict permeates every aspect of civilian life. The presence of the army is not merely visual or logistical—it is ideological, representing state power and its capacity to manipulate truth, law, and justice.

In *Hamlet* the suspense is accentuated through the play opening on a midnight scene- the platform of the ramparts of the Elsinore castle. It is bitter cold, dead silence and anxiety ridden atmosphere. The shadowy appearance of the apparition increases tension and horror about the state of Denmark and Horatio remarks, 'This bodes some strange eruption to our state (1.1.69)

An outbreak of violence is approaching. Marcellus is troubled about the hectic preparation for war going on in the country. In *Haider* the opening scene is equally troubled with violence in Kashmir where the counter insurgency groups are around the borders to guard Kashmir from militant insurgency. The atmosphere visualizes the calamitous political state of Kashmir associated with military violence escalating every moment. What troubles the mind and the sight in Hamlet is the appearance of the ghost whereas the

apparition in Haider is the dead silence associated with fencing of the borders of Kashmir amidst a perpetual silence in curfew and the military gun points aimed at Haider everywhere he goes. Just as Hamlet encounters a crisis of his identity having entered the palace, so has Haider encountered the military intervention and strange interrogation. His doctor father was arrested on charge of giving medical assistance to a militant at his house and has since been ostracized. So unlike Hamlet who finds himself as an outsider emotionally and spiritually in the palace overtaken by Claudius preparing for his marriage with Gertrude, Haider is already maligned and stigmatized by the label of a criminal that his father had to bear for his obligation as a doctor. Vishal gives Haider a stigmatized and suspicious entry making his task even more challenging. He was sent back to Aligarh and his education is progressive enough to raise a strong and valid voice of protest in his own way in the process of his search for his father who was arrested in harness and disappeared. When Iqhlak Mir, a leader of a militant group for independence of Kashmir, was brought to Dr. Hilal Mir's house for an emergency surgery, his wife asked him with a look of anxiety and fear –

> Ghazala: "Which side are you?"
> Dr. Hilal: 'Zindegi' (Life). [7]

There is a depth of an ocean in this suggestive one-word answer and we know, as a doctor his primary obligation is to save the life of a human being no matter his friend or a foe. Yet he got arrested from a mass assembly quite comparable to the ruthless identification of the Jews in the Second World War and the subsequent brutalizing in the concentration camp. The military brutality is strongly evident in Kashmir's politically volatile atmosphere which Vishal accentuated very strongly with all visual suggestive images such as the chilling cold winter, the foggy and blurred roads, the shrunken leaves of the trees, barbed wire fences zoomed-in recoiling the borders, and the dead silence.

4.2 Adaptation Theory and Cinematic Autonomy

Almost anything and everything is adapted nowadays for alternative entertainment and commercial success. But the story of *Haider* far outweighs the common assumptions and considerations.

> The genius of this film is how its director Vishal Bharadwaj has managed to adapt Hamlet to a whole new setting, and yet as an audience one wonders if they are watching an entirely new story. Bharadwaj has deftly used the show-but-don't-tell technique to give us a veiled peek at the lives of ordinary Kashmiris who have borne the brunt of the Indo-Pakistan border conflict. This is the great triumph of the film [2].

What makes *Haider* such a special film is that, unlike other works that have dealt with the Kashmir Conflict, it does not pretend that history does not exist. The Director's social and moral responsibility in exposing the ills as shown in the torture cells called MAMA II where the detainees are inhumanly manhandled and persecuted are sincerely drawn in the film and he faithfully claims, "I'm also an Indian, I'm also a patriot, I also love my nation. So I won't do anything which is antinational," Mr Bhardwaj told the Times of India newspaper on Tuesday. "But what is anti-human, I will definitely comment on it." [23]

Adaptation theorists such as Hutcheon (2006) argue that adaptations are both derivative and autonomous: "an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary". Bhardwaj's *Haider* exemplifies this balance. The film retains key motifs of *Hamlet*—revenge, madness, mother-son tension, moral decay—while dramatically altering characters, events, and setting.

[12] calls this transformation "transtextuality," where adaptations speak to their source texts but generate new meanings. For instance, the ghost in *Hamlet* becomes Roohdar in *Haider*, a spectral figure who symbolizes both the memory of Dr. Hilal and the voice of Kashmir's political unconscious.

Moreover, the musical "play-within-a-play" scene in *Hamlet* is reimagined as a Kashmiri folk performance exposing Khurram's guilt. Songs like "Bismil" serve as both catharsis and political critique—Bhardwaj using music in lieu of Shakespearean soliloquy to reveal psychological depths. Vishal's adaptation is many dimensional and it is no typical adaptation of identical events rather it is a very creative manipulation of the

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motive, suspense, spirit and tension against the background of Kashmir which very well relate to those of Hamlet in many ways. Hutcheson reflects, "Adaptations are not simply derivative or secondary works, but rather creative and autonomous works in their own right, which both repeat and transform the source" (Hutcheson 2006). Maybe precisely because of that she concludes, "Adaptation has its own aura (Hutcheson 2006), apart from which *Haider,* as a unique and successful adaptation, can also be declared as a creation that has its own "presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" [6].

Vishal's visual autonomous expression creating meaning out of the political labyrinth of Kashmir against its thematic parallel of Denmark is aesthetically and realistically poised without an iota of doubt. An adaptation treated as an adaptation and not as a "work" but "a text", a plural "stereophony of echoes, citations, and references" [3].

Vishal delineates beautifully the exquisite natural surroundings and spectacular tourist locations in Kashmir in the movie apart from shooting those ugly brutal military camps of torture. This contrast is very significant in understanding the interest in Kashmir which is known as the 'Heaven-on-earth' by the tourists. The song 'Jhelum Jhelum' brilliantly connects the theme of eco-fascism and the geo-political contention over this beautiful and bountiful land of colour and splendor. It further accentuates the tension and anxiety over the disappearance of Haider's father Dr. Hilaal Meer. What George Bluestone points out about the success of an adaptation goes strongly with *Haider*, "When a film becomes a financial or critical success, the question of its faithfulness is given hardly any thought." [8]

Nonetheless it has to be said that Vishal remains quite faithful to the original story and has not taken any undue directorial advantage in the name of technical or creative autonomy though he does that quite extensively in some areas which adds a new meaning to the authenticity of the subject as well as verisimilitude to the whole work of Haider as an adaptation. He used the source as raw material and reinterpreted the core narrative structure versus a literal translation. So what Vishal sought to explore in Haider is not quite ambiguous within the ambit of his creative imagination, something that has been discussed by the theorists in the past, "Adaptation is repetition but not a replication. And there are manifestly many different kinds of intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume or erase the memory of an adapted text or to call it into question." (Hutchinson 2006)

In making the movie the film maker has displayed his mixed intent in the adaptation of Haider what can be called "contested homage" [13] in which he reproduces and repeats artfully but reinterprets the plot or storyline of his text in keeping with an appropriate local context allowing it to breathe freely in an independent space with a strong political and human statement.

4.3 Thematic Convergences and Divergences

Both Hamlet and Haider feel trapped—Hamlet in a morally diseased court, Haider in a militarized homeland. While Hamlet says, "Denmark's a prison" (2.2.243), Haider faces literal checkpoints, interrogations, and surveillance. The psychological imprisonment becomes geographic.

Among the characters, Bhardwaj's Ghazala is more morally ambiguous than Gertrude. She oscillates between loyalty to her son and romantic involvement with Khurram. Her climactic self-destruction in a suicide bombing deviates sharply from Gertrude's accidental death, signifying agency and guilt in a way Shakespeare's queen never achieves. We come to know that Khurram cherished a secret desire for Ghazala whose destiny is hanging over the fact that she is a half-widow or half-wife to Hilal Meer. It is because of this incestuous passion he decided to hand his brother over to the military forces and maintained falsehood with Ghazala who took it for truth. We can also notice that she told Haider that "Your father only cared for his own and not for his family" [7] which Haider refuted by defending his father's virtues of generosity and love. Vishal presented the character of Ghazala a bit differently in the beginning and in the middle and we felt suspicious about her sense of loyalty to her husband. Haider finds her mother in the arms of his uncle in intimate moments which infuriated him terribly. He revolted against her mother in every possible method

either with the scathing lashes of words or by dirty black humour. His oedipal complex finds violent expression when he encounters his uncle and treats him as his arch rival, never allowing him the space of his beloved father. Haider bitingly satirizes Khurram Meer on many occasions but handles him diplomatically.

Arshia, the counterpart to Ophelia, displays more autonomy. As a journalist and lover, she actively participates in the narrative until her tragic suicide. Unlike Ophelia, Arshia's death is tied directly to the pressures of political loyalty and betrayal, not simply heartbreak or madness. Much of the greatness of Vishal's artistic and directorial skills finds eloquence in the portrait of Arshia who is playing the parallel role of Ophelia in Hamlet. But there is a gulf of difference between Ophelia, the utterly submissive and dominated lady and the active, independent, spirited and assertive Arshia. Vishal extensively transformed Arshia in the context and she is a newly conceptualized heroine from the very beginning though her ending does not quite artistically comply with her role throughout the movie.

Vishal presented two childhood friends of Haider and they are way too much different from Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Both of them are bent on mimicking popular Bollywood hero Salman Khan and one reason behind such portrayal is artistic, comical and commercial. There is an obvious financial need for adaptation as well (Hutcheon 2006). They highly romanticize Salman Khan who remains the Bollywood blockbuster and hugely popular since the early 90s and these two young men with their mimicry as well as their strange physical appearance add to the element of comedy to the otherwise tragic action of the film. They are used as informers or pawns by Khurram Meer to keep an eye on Haider and later kill him but things happen the other way round. Unlike Hamlet where they are used mostly by Claudius, in Haider they are set against Haider by Iqbal who resembles Polonius. Their presence and performance are very well adapted in the context. Their video rental business is quite suggestive of the Indian film industry and its popularity across the world. These two peculiar characters are a comic relief to the audience too. The movie retains a cultural familiarity and authenticity in the director's sense of cinematography and this fact adds to the contemporaneity of the art of adaptation. Linda Hutcheon calls this commercial aspect 'Tried' and 'Trusted' and this reference to commercial success of film adaptation is apt, "A best-selling book may reach a million reader; a successful Broadway play will be seen by 1 to 8 million people; but a movie or television adaptation will find an audience of many million more" (Hutcheon 2006).

4.4 Directorial Vision and Visual Metaphors

Bhardwaj's camera captures the aesthetic duality of Kashmir—the picturesque Dal Lake against the horror of MAMA-2 torture cells. This visual interplay underscores what [29] calls "eco-fascism": the exploitation of scenic beauty to mask systemic oppression.

As [8] notes, "the film must communicate through visual and kinetic terms what the novel does through words". *Haier'*s success lies in its ability to visualize emotional trauma without depending heavily on Shakespeare's language.

One of the most distinctive aspects of Bhardwaj's direction is his treatment of the Kashmiri landscape, not merely as a backdrop but as a politically charged metaphor. Snow-covered valleys, shuttered homes, and bullet-riddled walls represent a beautiful land under siege. The contrast between the natural beauty of the region and the brutality of military occupation serves as a visual irony, reinforcing the central tension between surface appearance and hidden violence—a theme also present in *Hamlet*.

Haider's dilapidated and decimated ancestral home and the recurrent visual memories create a strong psychological response in the viewer's mind. Haider having entered the city to head towards his ancestral home ruminates upon the memories of his own lost childhood. So, Haider's imagination is broken into pieces that wove the organic pictures of his family and the place where he grew up in his childhood. We constantly see that the director zooming into the emptiness of his mind full of childhood nostalgia wider and wider. This is how Haider's memories of the past strongly impress upon his present and he searches for his father figure who was to him an image of refuge just as the old Hamlet was like a *Hyperion to a Satyr* to

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Hamlet. Unlike Hamlet who revisits his memories with his father and gets lost in his lonely meditation and depression, Haider visits his ancestral home that is a ramshackle and dilapidated house only lying with its ruins and he reinvents his childhood memories with the house by desperately looking for articles used by his father, touching on the broken remains of the furniture and so on and so forth. This poignant emotional landscape associated with Haider's memories of his past and his sense of location finds brilliant expression in the visual flashback technique in the movie which in all the movie productions of Hamlet is absent since Hamlet's nostalgia finds little space compared to the grave mental and spiritual crisis that he is to be so engrossed in.

Like Hamlet, Haider finds Kashmir a prison house for himself. One contrast between the two states of prison is that for Hamlet, Denmark is both politically and morally a place that stifles his freedom. In case of Haider he is presented more with the horrifying booths and military check posts keeping a constant eye on him in the more literal sense of the term, a fact that characterizes Kashmir's political crisis 24 hours a day. He feels suffocated because of the surveillance as a brutal force that creates a crisis in Kashmir making it a flash point of violence. Vishal shoots such curfews stifling the life of the Kashmiris extensively contrasting the sensuous and captivating beauty of Kashmir and how anxiety, fear and military tortures in the camps resound with unbearable screams and pains. Vishal's powerful zooming of shots of Haider who walks like an outsider through the foggy lonely roads in his own native place and how he is rescued from the security checks and interrogation by his journalist fiancé must not be missed. During the day the whole Kashmir is enshrouded in thick mist and fog and things are hardly visible the image of which creates the uncertainty and suspense that underlie the invisible violence in Kashmir underground. So, Kashmir is a prison not because it stifles Haider with the fear of a foreign invasion but because it is a place surrounded by political borders that infuse horror and fear of the Military intervention on Haider's freedom of movement and expression.

5. Conclusion

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* is an exemplary case of transposition—what adaptation theorists call a reimagination rather than replication. While drawing from the tragic structure of *Hamlet*, Bhardwaj weaves a deeply political, contemporary story that reflects the lived experiences of Kashmiris. The film succeeds not merely because of its fidelity to Shakespeare, but because of its refusal to treat adaptation as mimicry.

In contextualizing *Hamlet* within the burning political theatre of Kashmir, *Haider* stands as a cinematic and ethical triumph—an avant-garde retelling that challenges state narratives, aesthetic conventions, and the presumed apoliticism of classical literature. Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* stands as a landmark in Indian cinema, not merely as an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* but as a courageous and contemporary narrative deeply rooted in the ongoing Kashmir conflict. Through its innovative blend of theatrical homage and cinematic originality, *Haider* transcends traditional adaptation by engaging directly with the socio-political realities of militarization, forced disappearances, and human suffering in Kashmir. The film's thematic convergence with *Hamlet*—exploring revenge, betrayal, and moral ambiguity—is recontextualized within a volatile landscape marked by political unrest and historical trauma, offering a potent commentary on justice and identity..

Ultimately, *Haider* exemplifies how adaptations can function as autonomous works of art that dialogue with their sources while addressing urgent contemporary issues. By situating Shakespeare's universal themes within the specific political context of Kashmir, Bhardwaj not only revitalizes a classic text but also foregrounds the lived realities of a region often marginalized in mainstream discourse. This study reveals that *Haider*'s success lies in its capacity to merge artistic expression with ethical engagement, inviting viewers to confront the complexities of conflict and memory through the powerful medium of cinema.

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