Article

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Adaptation, Appropriation, and Intertextuality in *Kaliyattam*

Abstract: Variant modes of Indian creative and cultural expressions attempt many adaptations of William Shakespeare's plays. *Othello* of 1603 A.D and its 1997's Malayalam film *Kaliyattam* by Jayaraj is considered one of the paradigm kinds in this. As Vishal Bhardwaj set Shakespeare's plays into Indian ethos in narrative and aesthetics, Jayaraj also reformulated it according to Kerala's cultural topography. This essay tries to discuss a page-to-screen adaptation model and the meaning the foundational tale brings with it. Jayaraj's *Kaliyattam* is an inter-semiotic translation. Handling the time span between the 16th to 20th century A.D. plus metamorphosing its content into Kerala's cultural topography is also very important. The essay also tests the politics behind intertextuality. It also attempts to explain the complexities that the " Theyyam " art form brings with it.

Key Words: Translation, Inter-semiotic, Adaptation, Intertextuality, Keraḷa, Othelo, Kaliyattam.

Any literary work and its film adaptation have their characteristics, even though both have a similar storyline. A Literary work reveals the story in the narrative form, while a movie *relives* it through audio and visual means. As of today, countless literary works have been adapted into films with resounding success. This essay aims to find the differences and similarities between both versions of aliterary work and its film and to identify the process of adaptation of a literary work into an adapted work or a motion picture. Literature reflects human life, it's said, and films breathe life into literature, which is also implicit.

When discussing literature and films, intertextuality also merits an examination. Intertextuality signifies the relationship between a literary work and other texts or the structures of the medium itself. It has deep roots in the literary scene. It is the shaping of a text's meaning by other texts. It can refer to an author's borrowing and transforming of a prior text or to a reader's referencing of one text in reading another. The term 'Intertextuality' has been borrowed, changed, altered, distorted, substituted and

modified many times since it was coined by poststructuralist Julia Kristeva in 1966. (Kristeva, 14) These several notions of intertextuality replace the notion of inter-*subjectivity* when we realise that meaning is not transferred directly from the writer to the reader but is mediated through or filtered by a verity of codes to both the writer and the reader by other texts. When William Irwin had opined, that intertextuality has come to have almost as many meanings as users, from those faithful to Kristeva's original vision to those who simply use it, he was questioning the same as a stylish way of talking about allusion and influence. Correspondingly, Julie Sanders also explained adaptation and intertextuality as a "certain process that involves a transition or transformation from one genre to another, such as the changes of novels into the film; drama into musical; dramatisation of prose narratives into prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making a play into prose narrative". (Sanders, 32) Sanders' deliberate admiration of the flexibility of variation and revision can be understood here, how any art can acclimate itself to its current era and form. Yet, it wasn't until Linda Hutcheon instructed the cinematic researcher that the *scrupulous significance* of "adaptation" is to "adjust, to alter, to make suitable", did theorists realise the value of adaptation as a process and a product, "a formal entity or product, the process of creation, the process of reception". (Hutcheon, 41)

It is a truth universally acknowledged that from the earliest days of cinema, adaptation has been nearly as common as the development of original screenplays. Adaptation is possibly seen as interpretation, involving at least one person's reading of a text, choices about what elements to transfer and decisions about how to actives these elements in the medium of images and sound. (Hawkens, 23) When situated in India, the administration becomes even more elaborate, as India has had a history of song and dance performance and literature in various languages. Combined with the cinematic medium of storytelling and modification, this caucus of assorted indulgences becomes a wholesome treat.

History of Shakespearean Adaptations in India

William Shakespeare's texts enormously influenced Indian filmmakers and theatre practitioners, largely because of India's colonial legacy, which installed the Bard at the pinnacle of literary endeavour as not only education but also the vivacity of life itself. One of the offshoots of cinema is the recognition of adaptation (in India) as a traditional performance, such as Yakshagana and Kathakali, which otherwise dramatise stories from our epics, often the impressive *Mahabharata*. (Gupta, 21) This becomes a reliable kind of experimentation since both the text adapted and the form into which it is adapted have

immense respectability in the eyes of the cultural establishment. It is relatively easy to get national acceptance. (Jayaraj's *Kaliyattam* does not adapt Shakespeare's *Othello as* Theyyam performance but sets the story among Theyyam performers, more about that later).

"Consider now, if they asked us, will you give up your Indian empire or your Shakespeare you English…

Should not we be forced to answer: Indian or no Indian empire, we can't do without Shakespeare!' (Carlyle, 148)

The saga of adaptations of Shakespeare into a film in India stretches from the very beginning of cinema itself in the silent era till date. The 1950s, though, were dominated by adaptations in the Parsi theatre mode, with the 1930s being the most critical decade. Parsi theatre refers to professional theatrical companies that flourished around 1850–1940. Early Indian films, including silent versions of *Hamlet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, were probably shot from staged performances of Parsi theatre adaptations of the plays. For instance, Sohrab Modi's film *Hamlet* (1935) was based on his most popular Urdu plays in the Parsi theatre *Khoon-e-Nahak.* Modi's *Said-e-Havas* (1907) was turned into a film later under the same title in 1936. Cinematic versions of Shakespearean plays made during the 1930s were produced during the great intensification of the national movement for freedom from British colonial rule. Nevertheless, it has been established that by and large, cinema failed to address the issue of nationhood. (Verma, 2005:272-4)

According to Kenneth Rothwell, films based on Shakespeare's plays can be divided into two broad categories as "adaptation" and "derivative". Adaptations rely heavily on Shakespeare's actual words, and derivatives abandon his language altogether." Major Shakespearean Parsi theatre films may be seen as derivatives of the fifth or "parasitical" type, "which exploits Shakespeare for embellishment or graft brief visual or verbal quotations on to another wise unrelated scenario," provided the "brief visual or verbal quotations" are understood as extendable to an entire scene or even several locations. (Rothwell, 219) In Shakespearean films of the 1930s and 40s, the protagonists were Muslims; on the other hand, several Parsi theatre plays, including many written by Agha Hashr Kashmiri, were based on episodes from the Sanskrit epics, and both kinds of films and plays were equally popular.

Some of the essential adaptations of that time were Sohrab Modi's *Hamlet* (1935), whose full title was *Hamlet* (aka.) *Khoon ka Khoon*, Akhtar Hussain's *Romeo and Juliet* (1947; with Nargis and Sapru as actors, and Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet* (1954). There was also an earlier silent movie on *Hamlet* titled *Khoon-e-Nahak* (Unjust assassination) *or Hamlet* (1928) by Raja Athavale, as well as a

silent movie directed by M. Udvadia, using *The Merchant of Venice* under the title of *Dil Farosh* (1927). These films are little known, except that both were derived from Parsi theatre adaptations of the two plays. Sohrab Modi's *Hamlet* was one of the earliest talkies based on a Shakespeare play made anywhere in the world. This had originated from Modi's adaptation of the play for his brother Rustam Modi's theatre company Arya Sobodh Natya Mandali, titled *Khoon ka Khoon* (blood for blood). *Khoon ka Khoon* had Indian names for the characters.

The film was not merely based on a Parsi theatre play: it highlighted this connection through its title and assumed the audience's familiarity with it. Nevertheless, unlike the play, the film gave the characters Shakespearean names, though there is no absolute certainty. The film looked back to the Shakespearean original as well as its Indian adaptation and addressed the elite as well as the masses. As brought out by the costume, sets and gestures, the film also evinces familiarity with the Western performance tradition of *Hamlet*, and there is a witty allusion and tribute to its author in the play-within-the-play scene, where Shakespeare's portrait adorns the arch in front of the inner stage where that scene is enacted. The double title of the film also points to an interesting intercultural and inter-textual phenomenon: one component, "hamlet", is designed to attract the educated English-knowing elite and to dignify a popular art form. The other, "khoon ka khoon", seeks to draw the crowds by offering them the chance to experience once again the thrill and pleasure of sitting through a performance, in a different mode, of a familiar and popular play. In other words, it seeks to exploit both the cultural capital of the canonical text written in the language of the colonial rulers and the commercial possibilities of the popular Parsi theatre play. Presumably, the silent *Khoon-e-Nahakor Hamlet* also had this double appeal. In each of these two instances, we have not a text, a subtext, or a text in the foreground and a network of analogues and allusions in the background, but two texts equally foregrounded and on the surface. This was not the case with the majority of Parsi theatre plays using plots or scenes from Shakespeare, for in them, the "source" text is quite overwhelmed by an aggressive and supremely confident act of appropriation.

Unlike Modi's *Hamlet*, the the1947 Urdu film *Romeo and Juliet*, produced by the film star Nargis's own company and with her and Sapru in the lead roles, was not derived from any specific Parsi theatre play, and there was no attempt to Indianize the action. Nevertheless, there is little doubt that it retained the style and idiom of the Parsi theatre, with songs and dances and Urdu rhetoric. At least one of the songs was written by Faiz Ahmad Faiz, one of the leading Urdu poets of India and later of Pakistan. It is also probable that, through the very choice of a play like *Romeo and Juliet* as its base, the

films ought to address the burning issue of the bloody partition of the country obliquely. That event was so fraught with emotion and accompanied by such extreme and unprecedented violence that any direct allusion to it in the film, whose making coincided almost precisely with the event, could have been risky. Both the print and the film script seem to have been lost. Still, there is the tantalising possibility that, unlike all previous Shakespeare translations and adaptations, this film boldly addressed an urgent topical issue through a straightforward, "literal" presentation that did not attempt to localise the action in an Indian setting. With Kishore Sahu's *Hamlet (*1954), the Parsi theatre tradition of Shakespearean adaptation ends. By this time, an audience of young cinemagoers had emerged that had never seen a Parsi theatre play, at least not since attaining adulthood. The film does not attempt to Indianize the action. Not only do the actors retain their Shakespearean names, but there is also an attempt at authentic costume, setting, and locale. Several contemporary reviewers noted the influence of Olivier's Hamlet. There were, however, many significant departures from that film (and Shakespeare's play), especially in the plot.

Moreover, the language of Sahu's film preserved the Parsi theatre heritage while setting up the kind of complex web of intertextuality among various works and literary traditions referred to earlier: the Shakespearean text, Olivier's film, the Parsi theatre adaptations (especially *Khoon-e- Nahak*), and the Urdu literary tradition in general. But by this time, with the decline of Parsi theatre, the number of viewers who could summon their memories of the Parsi theatre adaptation while watching his movie and thus see it merely as a filmed version of an Urdu play had also declined. Like Modi's film, Sahu's *Hamlet* eschewed the kind of extremely free and gross appropriation of the Shakespearean text marking the typical Parsi theatre play, attempting instead a faithful and authentic depiction of the action of *Hamlet.* At the same time, both films used the characteristic language and rhetoric, songs, and dances of the Parsi theatre tradition. But Sahu's film no longer had the kind of double appeal, to the elite as well as the masses, that Modi's film enjoyed, and the rhetoric of the dialogue (some of it taken verbatim from *Khoon-e-Nahak*) must have sounded rather quaint to the younger members of the audience.

The Comedy of Errors dominates the next assimilative phase of Shakespearean adaptations, producing at least three films based on the play. The first of these, *Bhrantibilas* (1963), a Bengali film featuring the superstar Uttam Kumar, was based on Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's nineteenth-century prose narrative with the same title. The other two movies (both in Hindi), Debu Sen's *Do Dooni Chaar* (1968; closely based on *Bhrantibilas*) and Gulzar's *Angoor* (1981), also have contemporary settings. However, none of these films creates any creative tension between the contemporary Indian vehicle and

the Shakespearean tenor. Though modern, the setting is unlocalised and un-historicized in all three films. The only detail from the original play that none of them has been able to accommodate is the Ephesian law against the Syracusans. (Verma, 2012:89)

Economy and Adaptation of the 1990s Cinema

The Shakespeare film renaissance of the 1990s in Hollywood and England ushered in the third phase of Shakespearean films in India, in which there is an active, conscious, and sustained engagement with the original text and its context and a constant back-and-forth movement between the two texts. So far, there have been three important direct adaptations, besides a couple of films that could be placed in Rothwell's category of "mirror" movies. These films include Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003), a Hindi adaptation of *Macbeth* set in the underworld of Mumbai, and Rituparno Ghosh's English film *The Last Lear (*2007), which, with some stretching, can be seen as a mirror film, since it deals with the making of a film for which a famous old, retired stage actor is persuaded to play the main role. Steeped in Shakespearean verse, the actor is deeply regretful that he never got to play King Lear, the one role he had aspired for all his life. In the relation between the old stage actor and the young, ambitious auteur-filmmaker, there is some reflection of the generational conflict of the Shakespearean original. But the period has been dominated by *Othello*, which has now caught up with *Hamlet* with three screen versions in less than ten years: Jayaraj's *Kaliyattam* (1997), a Malayalam adaptation in a village setting where the low-caste hero or protagonist is a *Theyyam* artist who dances as a god or goddess in this ritual and folk art form of Kerala; Royston Abel's *In Othello* (2003), a mirror film in English about a theatre group in Delhi; and Vishal Bhardwaj's Hindi film *Omkara* (2006), set in a violent world of crime and politics in western Uttar Pradesh.

Othello and Omkara

It has been remarked that *Othello* is Shakespeare's most famous tragedy in India, where it is regarded as a "tragedy of caste". While this statement may broadly be true with respect to translations, adaptations and performances of the play, the film adaptations call for a more nuanced generalisation. Given the above, the popularity of *Othello* would be surprising, but for the fact that the caste fact as such is underplayed in the films. It is most manifest in *Kaliyattam*, whose hero would now be called a Dalit, but class seems an equally important factor in the tragedy since the Desdemona figure is the village

head's daughter. In *Othello*, style and region, rather than caste, are crucial factors. In a theatre group engaged in an English production of *Othello*, the Assamese actor selected to play the hero is perceived as an outsider because of his regional accent and weak command over English grammar and diction, reflecting his class status. In *Omkara*, though the half-caste status of Omi, the hero, is mentioned, not much is made of it: the father of Dolly (Desdemona) objects to the match, not because Omi is only half a Brahmin. However, that is something to abuse him with because he is a gangster. The idea of the witches, and though they provide "comic relief", such episodes, as in a Shakespearean tragedy, are integral to the film's thematic concerns and, to some extent, to its plot. The equations are worked out not only at the level of plot and character but also, quite minutely, at the imagistic level. In *Maqbool*, for example, the cops, who combine the role of the witches with that of the porter, rework, while urinating, the porter's "streamy" Freudian association of wine, fire, water and urine into their philosophy of the equilibrium of power, in which water balances fire just as one gang balances another. On the other hand, the naked newborn babe acquires a literal instead of a merely metaphorical existence at the end of the play, though transformed into a neatly swaddled infant held in the protective arms of Guddu.

The two films' scripts show familiarity with the plays' minutest details and current critical approaches and interpretations. For example, *Omkara* hints at sexual insecurity as one of the motivating forces behind Langda Tyagi's (Iago's) actions in a little scene where Indu (Emilia) shows him dolly's (Desdemona's) stolen girdle, after which they make love. Later, while lying in bed, Indu says he has a ravenous beast inside him. What beast, he asks, obviously pleased: a cheetah? A wolf? A snake? A chameleon? You are my little rabbit, she replies, and a cloud passes over his face. She then gets up and asks what he would like to eat: upon which he says, the joviality gone, that he would like to drink some blood. (Verma, 2002:7)

When Omkara asks what he should do if the negotiation fails, Bhai Ji tells him, in English, that he can then "go ahead." The negotiations have not quite ended when Kaptan makes an insulting remark about Omkara's affair with Dolly (Desdemona), to the effect that he has bet a hundred rupees that Omkara, being a sensible chap, will enjoy Dolly and then discard her. Though Keshu and Langda try to restrain him, Omkara pushes them aside and strolls, with measured steps, to a hand pump where an old lady has just filled a pitcher to carry home. Omkara lifts the pitcher, puts it on her head, and says: "Mother, go and tell the village people that Kaptan has lost his bet." He then walks back slowly towards Kaptan: as he does so, a song begins to be heard in the background. It is the title song of the film, celebrating in the manner of a folk song (with verbal and musical allusion to the

heroic songs of Aalhaand Udal the martial prowess of Omkara, building him up as a great warrior of myth and legend, the greatest of fighters, on whose brow, when he frowns, three furrows appear in the shape of the god Shiva's trident. When he gets near enough to Kaptan, Omkara suddenly whips out a dagger and stabs him savagely. His team joins in, and everyone in Kaptan's team is killed, to the background accompaniment of the martial song about Omkara. Only one member of Kaptan's team is spared. Omkara tells him to tell his people that bets are placed on horses, not lions.

Kaliyattam and Bending *Othello*

Kaliyattam is the direct rendition and adaptation of Shakespeare's Othello. Director Jayaraj makes an explicit claim of it at the beginning itself.

Figure 01: Opening title card shows that Kaliyattam is adapted from Shakespeare

The Story of *Kaliyattam* revolves around Kannan Perumalayam (Suresh Gopi), a Theyyam artist and Thamara (Manju Warrier), the beautiful daughter of the village head. While Unni Thampuran hates Kannan because he had a crash on Thamara, and Panniyan (Lal), who plays a Koomali (Joker character in Theyyam), is jealous because he has the coveted role of Theechamundi which is held by Perumalayan. Paniyan plants the seeds of doubt on Thamara's fidelity in Kannan's mind making him suspect that Thamara and his assistant Kanthan (Biju Menon) are having an affair. Kanthan spots a silkrobe, which he had presented toThamara, in Kanthan'shands. Kannan, out of the grief and anger of Thamara, kills her by suffocating them with a pillow. On the same night, Paniyan plans to get Kanthan killed by Unni Thampuran, but the plan goes haywire, and Thamburan gets killed. Between all these, Kannan overpowers Paniyan, crushes his legs with a big stone, and lets him live the rest of his life as a live meat. Kannan Peumalayam gives the Theechamundi title to Kanthan and embraces the ritual fire to Theyyam to death.

Kaliyattam retells the play *Othello*. *Kaliyattam* is set in an early 20th-century village in North Malabar. The tragic hero, Kannan Perumalayan, played by Suresh Gopi, is the chieftain entitled by the ruler to play the Theechamundi in the realistic art form of North Kerala, the Theyyam.

Figure 02: Perumalayan as a Traditional Theyyam artist

The war between Venice and Cyprus in Shakespeare's play has been substituted by Theyyam, a complicated ritual dance religiously conducted for the kingdom's prosperity. The ruler and the village look upon Perumalayan as their God and hero, just like Venetians treat Othello. Balram Muttanor's script has faithfully followed the play sequences of events. Through the film, the director shows that this film is about how ritual and tradition can shape and often destroy people's lives. In this context, the notions of intertextuality are used here to understand the varying texts of Othello, as in Shakespeare's play and *Kaliyattam,* as in Jayaraj's film. If Othello is a Moor, Perumalayan is untouchable, his face disfigured by smallpox scars. Here the director has used the caste concerns of Indian society and the associated prejudices to develop the suspicious nature of the protagonists. It is characterisations that make the movie distinct and different. The first appearance of Perumalayan is remarkable in that he is shown playing the Goddess in Theyyam costume. The angry father of Thamara is seen addressing his daughter's abductor as–Devi and laments that his daughter has been enticed and abducted. Perumalayan is God when he performs, and this ennobles the character.

Theyyam is a form of ritual performance generally performed by castes such as Thiyya, Vaniya, Maniyani, Kammalar, and Malayan and the people belonging to these castes, being placed lower, were not allowed to enter temples. Hence, they created their shrines and coves and started their forms of rituals, which then later got assimilated into the Brahmanical system, very much the way Bharatanatyam, which was once the domain of the Devadasis was incorporated into Brahmin culture. Othello is set in a milieu where the protagonist is a Moor among white Italians and eventually suffers on account of marrying a white woman from a noble family. Here Perumalayan (Suresh Gopi), a Theyyam performer, falls in love with the headman's daughter and marries her against her father's wishes. In Shakespeare's play Othello, a general in the Venetian army has stature despite his black skin; in Jayaraj's film, Perumalayan has stature as a Theyyam performer, giving him sanctity. This elevation in status within this Theyyam space is to such an extent that when Thamara's father, Thampuran, is informed about his daughter's elopement and confronts Perumalayan, he does not let his men even touch him because Perumalayan is in his attire at that moment, just about to perform. Instead of confronting him for the impropriety he has dared to commit, Thampuran bows down in front of Perumalayan and asks for the blessings of the goddess he is representing. The key point in the film is the distinction between the divinity of the role and the weakness of the man playing it.

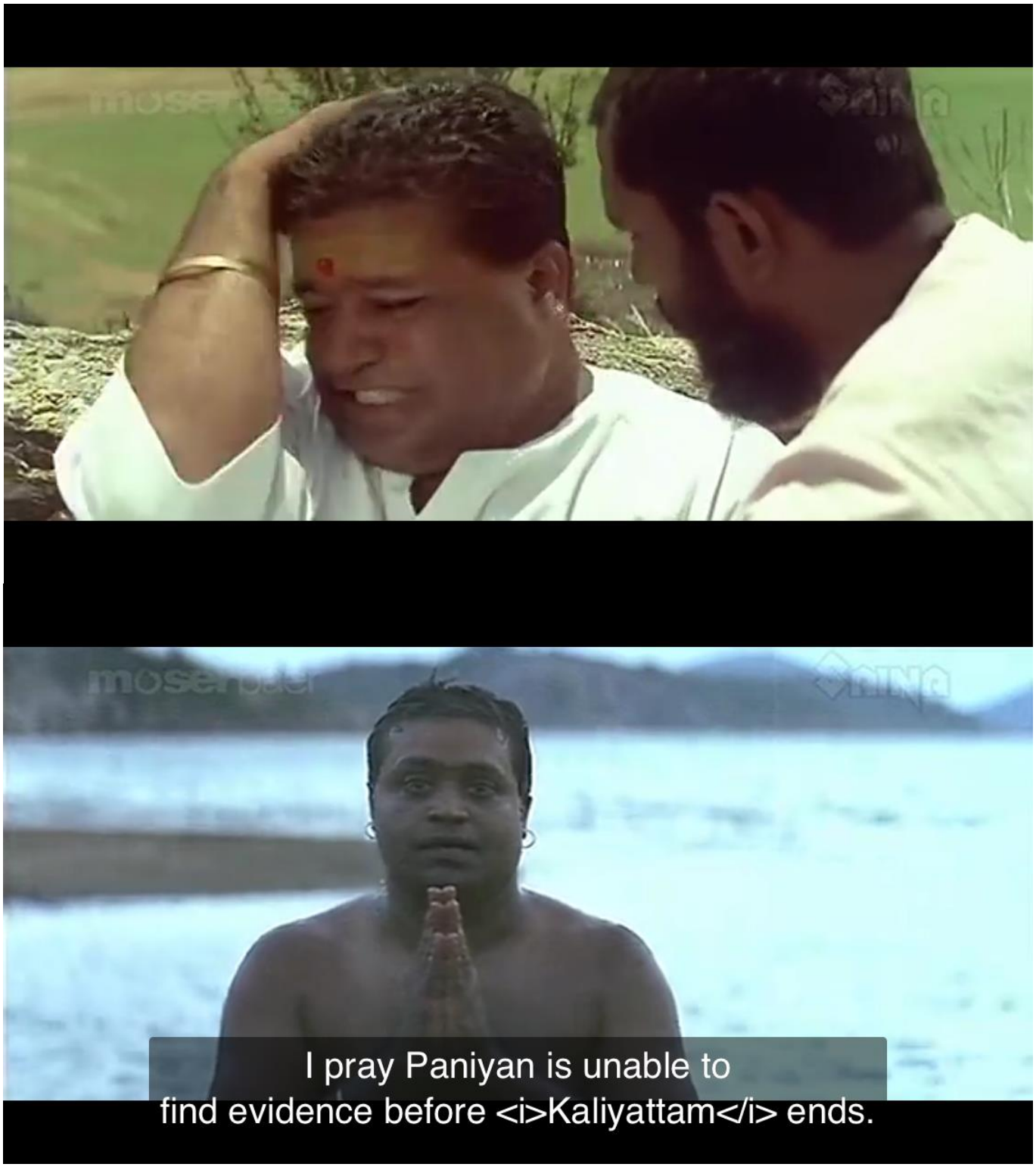
Shakespeare's play originated in a specific cultural system: 16th-century English theatre. In performing a play, either Shakespeare or other, the slanting point for the theatre director and the filmmaker is the original written text. Shakespeare wrote *Othello* to be staged. He wrote the play according to the stage setting. While Jayaraj made it a film, he made more changes. Every performance, theatre director and filmmaker is the original written text. One turns it into a stage performance, theatrical or other into a film. Every performance, theatrical or cinematic, implies an interpretation of the play. The very fact that living actors read the dialogue, using intonation and body language, involves interpretation of theirs or the director's-even if the script used is very close to the original play.

Figure 03&04: Paniyan, as the incarnation of Iago, evilises the plots

Iago is the most sophisticated and complex of Shakespeare's villains. He is jealousy personified, and his malignancy is not without the movie. He is jealous of Cassio, of the marital bliss of Othello, and he even suspects of an illicit affair between his wife, Emilia, and Othello. The adaptation of this character in the films does not seem as effective and convincing as the original. This is because of the relative limitations of film in contrast to drama.

The most notable spectacle in *Kaliyattam* is the Theyyam. Since it is both a ritual as well as an art form, it has divine implications. Othello's aside from his inner conflict is presented in *Kaliyattam* as Perumalayan demanding the Gods to answer the doubts in his mind regarding his wife.

Figure 05&06: Perumlayan turns into a psychological metamorphoses after Paniyan's slander



At his powerful call, we see the gods in Theyyam attire coming before him. They retreat without a word, and this seems to suggest that it is not God's will that caused the fall of the mighty artiste but

his tragic flaw. The end is astoundingly moving when we see the dejected Perumalayan, in Theechamundi's attire, running into the fire after declaring Kanthan his successor. The character's strength and willingness to accept punishment for his sin are seen when we see his silhouette bravely enduring the frames. He does not fall or run out but continues to dance in the fire.

While dealing with Shakespeare's plays, it should be considered that they were originally intended for Elizabethan theatre. This means that the theatrical models used were very different from contemporary ones. The play *Othello* is divided into five acts but in the film, there are no divisions, and the film makes it a two-hour entertainment. The use of settings and decorations was minimal. The spoken words are supposed to activate the imagination of the audience. All performances by young took place during the day, and if the enacted events were set at night or in a dark place, the darkness has to be imagined. Women were not allowed to act on stage, and their roles were performed by young boys whose voices hadn't changed yet; from the point of view of modern speculation, this theatre and contemporary performance try to stimulate the lack of realism.

Jayaraj has only taken the storyline from *Othello* for his film *Kaliyattam* and the entire culture and situations made according to Kerala culture, especially of the North Malabar culture, i.e., Jayaraj made a film in the background of Theyyam. Kerala people consider Theyyam as an idol, and every year, Theyyam festivals take place in North Kerala. Nature has gifted Kerala with many unique features both geographically and in its culture. Jayaraj made the film according to Kerala culture for their understanding. One possible way to approach this question is to view the film in light of the elements central to a Shakespearean tragedy: the magnitude of the heroes, their suffering and the catharsis experienced by the spectators. Their presence in the film depends on interpretation and emotional response to it.

Jayaraj crafted the film *Kaliyattam* with different situations, costumes, and backgrounds from the source text. While analysing the film and play, one sees that the film's central theme is the same as the play's. The costume and makeup, too, have an essential role in the film. In *Kaliyattam*, the director uses apt costumes and makeup that indicate Kerala culture. The manipulation of lighting is essential to an image's impact. It helps to create a particular atmosphere and shapes and highlights objects by creating highlights and shadows.

The music is subservient to mood and tone in much of the film. Without detracting from realism, it underscores how oral Indian cinematic traditions are and how much they borrow from local folk theatre and dance. Music also strongly affects the viewer's emotional response to the film. In

Kaliyattam, Jayaraj uses four songs. In this film, the narration happens from the director's point of view. Adaptation suggests moving an entity to a new environment and altering its structure or function to make it fit. When reading the play *Othello* and comparing it with the film version, one notices many differences between the source and target texts. There are so many differences between the film and the drama. Filmmakers must choose what to include and exclude from the literary source material and what to highlight or downplay. Emotional involvement is more important in the film than in literature. *Kaliyattam* is an interesting film—it declares its lineage at the very beginning, and the comparison with Shakespeare's *Othello* sets the tone of the film. While defining feature of the film is not its plot—but the characters and the overall mood.

Suresh Gopi's Perumalayan (the chief of the tribe of Malayans) is an overweight artiste (true enough to be accurate) who is, however, regarded highly for his Theyyam skills, and famed for his expertise in *Kaliyattam*, the ancestor of Kathakali', Kerala's premier dance form. Gopi's character has none of the sexual appeal of *Othello* (the stuff of much racist stereotyping). It is a rather ugly-looking man, remarkable for his artistic virtuosity and little else. It is, therefore, almost incredible why Thamara (Desdemona, played with a quiet strength of conviction by the underrated Manju Warrier) should fall in love with him, defy her community, and marry him for the sake of illogical love. The movie's realism underscores this, and a distraught Perumalayan's inner complexes stem as much from his wife's unparalleled beauty and high status (strange casting because Warrier is no Helen of Troy but shines forth as a rather homely though eloquent beauty) as from his poor looks and lack of self-worth.

Figure 07: Perumalayan hints that Thamara's eloquent beauty is the metaphor for the future crisis.

Cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's plays have been an essential part of the history of cinema from its earliest days and have attracted researchers from various disciplines. This paper has approached the subject from a translation study perceptive. Through the adaptation, we found that the film differs from drama or theatre. These two distinct media use different semiotic languages and rely on different genres and how they handle the span of time between the 16th century and the present. Thus, the filmmaker makes the distance between the past and the present appeal small and increases the film's appeal to a contemporary audience. Therefore, this paper aims to offer a framework for dealing with cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare's play as an inter-semiotic translation rather than to provide an exhaustive history of Shakespeare on screen.

Jayaraj's adaptation works very well as far as *Othello* is concerned, but, as with Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara* (2006), it is Iago that presents difficulties. While Thampuran hates Perumalayan because he also loves Thamara, Paniyan (Lal), who plays a Koomali (comic character in Theyyam), is envious because he has the coveted role of Theechamundi which is held by Perumalayan.

Figure 08: Paniyan's desire to play Theechamaumdi, the lead role

Paniyan plants the seeds of doubt on Thamara's fidelity in Kannan's mind making him suspect that Thamara and his assistant Kanthan (Biju Menon) are having an affair. This leads Perumalayan to take

the blameless Thamara's life by smothering her. The issue is that Shakespeare's Iago does not simply act out of envy. Iago's acts are so excessive as to have puzzled generations of critics, but that mystery is not preserved.

If one looks at the adaptations of Shakespeare's tragedies by Vishal Bhardwaj – notably *Maqbool* (2003) and *Haider* (2014) – one departure is striking, the elimination of the 'occult' element, which owes, primarily to Indian cinema's distance from mimesis, which is best understood as 'realism' in which imitation of the world is paramount. Since the world is ultimately not 'knowable', mimesis includes that same mystery in the form of 'ambiguity' with the 'occult' featuring even when the supernatural element is absent, as in *Othello*.

Cinema, because it is an extension of photography, has promoted mimesis. Still, photographs had a different significance in India, and instead of being imprints of reality, early portraiture tried to make traces of the person endure by straying from 'realism'. Photographs were used to retain the likeness but were then painted over to turn each sitter into an archetype – like 'matriarch', 'landowner', etc. (Pinney, 149). As if corresponding to this, Western students of Indian poetics have expressed puzzlement that while literature is not intended to be mimetic, neither does it offer a theory of art being for art's sake. Both litterateurs and literary theorists acknowledge that classical literature is not indifferent to the intellectual demands of society or to society itself but is a fully exploited expression whose principle is not subordinate to an external standard (as mimesis would be) but is more remarkable in some sense. Art and literature pursue something more durable than the immediate reality perceptible to the senses, a transcendental meaning. Students of the *rasa* theory have also noted that the theory does not deny that art is mimesis but only adds that it is an imitation of a special kind, that *rasa* does not imitate things and actions in their particularity but rather in their universality and potentiality – which makes the imitation 'truer than the real thing'. (Elliot, 217)

Given these aspects of Indian aesthetics/poetics/dramaturgy, the transformation of the individual to type in early photographs perhaps corresponds to actual things elevated to a 'truer' level, which is 'eternal'. This sense of the truth of art being at a higher plane than empirical reality has an important consequence: the world is not inscrutable as realism/mimesis might insist but has a transcendental meaning accessible to art. The scrutability of the spatiotemporal world constructed by most Indian films hence disallows ambiguities. This, consequently, prevents it from being interpreted the way Shakespeare's plays have been or, to phrase it differently, emerges as already interpreted because its meaning is entirely visible on the surface. This is true of *Kaliyattam* as well, although hardly of *Othello*.

Far too much has been written about Iago's excessive conduct in *Othello,* but what is pertinent from my viewpoint is that Iago's seemingly unmotivated acts take on 'occult' significance (as 'evil' rather than emotional 'envy') because the spatiotemporal world of the play specifies 'order' as a defining characteristic. (Raatzsch, 12-21) The play is set in Venice, and the strict rule of the law there gives new significance to Iago. It has been widely noted that the play has a sense of stable hierarchy, and each person's fate is determined by it. The army is one place where merit is recognised, and that is where Othello rises. There is an implication in the play (though Iago) that socio-political order cannot stifle the waywardness of the human soul, which will find its outlets, and usually do evil. If this is allowed, the question which comes to us is whether the 'evil' of Iago can have any significance in the milieu of *Kaliyattam's* kind and whether it will not fall into the mechanistic 'revenge' or 'envy' category as Langda Tyagi (in *Omkara*) or Panniyan does, where that strict sense of a rigidly maintained social order is absent.

Once Iago's unmotivated acts are replaced by simple envy, the film loses its ability to create wonder, and regardless of its ambitions, *Kaliyattam* is not *Othello*.

Figure 09: Red Silk Robe as a substitute for the Desdimona's Kerchief

Othello is a canonical text from a certain milieu in which literature and art must necessarily respect the world's mystery through mimesis, but that is not true of India. As already suggested, there are strict purposes that they are required to fulfil, and the notion of *rasa* is primarily intended to define the permitted emotions. In making a film based on a Shakespearean tragedy in India, the original text is not simply transposed into an Indian milieu with some appropriate changes. Still, a wholly different philosophical outlook on the meaning of the world is imposed upon it.

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Filmography

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