Article

Srijani Dutta

Violence, Masculinity, Madness: Reading the Representation of the Theatre of Cruelty in *Maqbool* and *Haider*

Abstract:
This essay demonstrates the politics of representation of masculinity and how it gets reshaped and redefined by the state-sponsored violence and individual ambition in Haider and Maqbool respectively. Both of the films adapt the temperament of Artaud's theatre of cruelty as both films intentionally create the spectacle of cruelty and madness followed by the germination of the mental illness or psychosis. The masculine bodies of Haider and Maqbool are the sites of conflict, trauma and aggression that become the metonym of the nation, state and surroundings. Irrfan khan and Sahid Kapoor's method acting especially experimentation with body and facial expression shock the audience. Both of the films theatrically and metaphorically represent the traits of masculinity such as agitation, ego, cruel gestures in order to comment on the changing dynamics between individuals and society. This paper attempts to examine the interrelationship among masculinity, violence and madness.
Keywords: Theatre of cruelty, violence, masculinity, madness, abjection, film

Introduction:

Film is assumed as a mode of entertainment which reaches people in a vast scale. It is an art form that can change the perspective of the audience. Film tries to depict the society and its various kinds of problems, sufferings, conflicts in an aesthetic way. The film directors intentionally or unintentionally choose a subject that is somehow associated with life and existence. Vishal Bharadwaj is one of the critically acclaimed film directors in India for his use of music, sound and art of storytelling. In these films, he attempted to contextualize Shakespeare in the present day scenario of Kashmir and Bombay. Maqbool shows the corruption of the legal system, mafia world and its relation with gangster world and Bollywood. Haider tells the story of politically turbulent Kashmir, the involvement of youth/ students in Kashmir's politics, insurgency movement and how the social happenings can break the personal dynamics. Both films center on the same issue and that is power, violence and abjection. The films Haider and Maqbool, through their method of storytelling, evokes out the instances of the Theater of Cruelty, whose name symbolizes the meanings, metaphors, and psychology of the performance. The audience/reader may feel sensory experiences, as the performance displays a vast range of destruction, subtle voices, shock, apathy, violence, and

cruelty onto the body and mind of the characters, In the Theater of Cruelty, the characters reveal their sufferings, intentions, and trauma through gestures. While doing so, they unearth what lies within their mind, and reveal violent voices. This paper explores the themes of critically acclaimed French dramatist, actor, writer, and poet of the Surrealist Movement, Antonin Artaud's experimental Theater of Cruelty, and also reads the interrelationship among Artaud's cruelty, violence and Kristeva's abjection.

Body of Discussion:

In this paper, I have attempted to read the voices of the films, Haider and Maqbool, by focusing on the depiction and representation of violence, abjection, death, and darkness. Vishal Bharadwaj, the director, has used the trope of murder in order to show the politics of violence and its connection with patriarchy and masculinity.

Haider adapted from Shakespeare's Hamlet is set in politically turbulent Kashmir. The main theme is revenge, greed for power following the brutal murders and death of the characters. The entire atmosphere of the film is gruesome and dark. Shahid Kapoor plays the part of Haider whereas Tabu plays the role of Gertrude, Haider's mother. Gertrude remarries his husband's brother and this enkindles the motif and intention of revenge in Haider's mind. On the wedding day, he narrates the entire story of conspiracy of his uncle through symbols and the performance of "Bismil" song. Shahid Kapoor's method acting, aggressive gestures, expressions, masks- all create another identity of Haider. The 'self' of Haider loses the identity to become someone else. The binary between subject and object, self and other gets diluted creating the sensation of different voices and the trope of theatre of cruelty.

He wears the head mask of the eagle that signifies bad things or death. The picture gives a jolt to the eyes due to the violent gesture.

Vishal Bhardwaj has created the voice of violence and theatre of cruelty through the metaphor/image of grave/corpses. Due to the mental disease (PTSD) Haider asks the

fundamental existential questions. Haider utters some voices, gibberish sound and the movie ends with Khurram's voice/cry- these "voices" also do the storytelling of theatre of cruelty.

On the other hand, the storytelling of voice, violence and theatre of cruelty represented in Maqbool is done through the visual language of sound, gestures, hallucination and repetitive usage of bloodshed etc. Haider's violence is physical whereas Maqbool's violence is psychological. Maqbool has been adapted from Macbeth written by Shakespeare. The setting of underworld, violent act of murder of Abbaji, fear of Maqbool- all make the entire ambience violent and theatrical epitomizing the cruelty of Artaud's violence.

In the movie, Maqbool is the culprit. His performance creates the sense of destruction and cruelty in the reader's mind. He realises that she (Nimmi) is also hallucinating blood like him. In some scenes, Maqbool's gestures, behaviours, her facial expression tell the story of the film minutely. Thus, the murderous gestures of the characters reveal their psychology, their mind full of disgust and instincts. In this way, these films position themselves as the examples of Artaud's theatre of cruelty. In this film, we find the voices of Lady Macbeth played by Tabu

who implants the seed of murderous instinct in Maqbool's mind. Her voice is rebellious and full of dishonesty and malice.

Abjection and films:

Abjection is a feeling caused by death, blood, wastages, dirt, food (sometimes), grotesque figures. It is a sensation that is associated with fear, trauma and terror. It happens when the self fails to adjust with the other. It is the lack of proper meaning and law. It can be considered an apocalyptic condition fuelled by dystopia. When the division between subject and object gets blurred, abjection happens. Julia Kristeva has theorized the concept of abjection in order to depict the monstrous women and other objects and their association with uncanny. In the two films, the art of cinematography along with violent gestures, colour, sound narrates the theme of abjection. Some scenes of these films produce fear in the mind of the audience. As Haider is a story of revenge, the dramatic plot construction intensified by music justifies itself to be a saga of masculinity and mental illness. Haider was so full of revenge that he lost his 'normalcy' and became maniac. He suffered from PTSD. He is a conflicted soul whose consciousness is divided into two poles of extremities. A sense of oedipus complex is located in his character while on the other hand, he hates his mother for re-marrying his uncle. The conflict between love and hatred makes him suffer from dilemma without serving any resolution to it. Haider shows his masculinity through his violent dance performance at wedding day which proves to be a climax of the entire plot. The scenes of the graveyard, portrayal of the bones arouse the sensation of abjection. At the end of the movie, Haider dies leaving the story open-ended. The entire tone of the movie is bleak and nauseating as the gestures, dialogues invite cruelty onto the mind and body of the characters.

Theatre of cruelty and films:

According to Antonin Artaud, theatre of cruelty is a certain kind of theatre that incorporates the idea of violence, dystopia and death. It is an avant-garde concept which intends to shock the audience with light, sound, music, gestures in order to encounter the human primal instincts and intense emotions. In Haider, we, the audience can see the intense, maniac behaviour of the character Haider who has succumbed to psychosis and paranoia. He performs a mad dance; utters sound; he screams and uses symbolic props like clothes. The primary aim is to subvert the rational structure of thought, logic and language and make the audience see the raw world. Theatre of cruelty is highly influenced by surrealism. In this kind of theatre, the actors do the method acting while focusing on emotional memory and distortion of body. This movie follows the patterns, unique storytelling method to unearth to revenge, ego, madness, fragmented mind of the main protagonist, Haider. The grave-digging scene of this movie nearly haunts and shocks the audience. The famous word of this movie "Chutzpah" creates terror in the mind of the audience. Therefore, this movie intertwines itself with the theme and technicalities of theatre of cruelty. Haider is a theatrical movie that omits the binary between cinema and theatre. Bharadwaj willingly uses the political turmoil of kashmir as the

setting/ backdrop of the plot in order to show how political scenario can affect the private and personal lives of the characters. Along with the physical violence abjection, the audience also witness the emotional, psychological violence of the story. Therefore, the themes of violence, abjection, cruelty- all get mingled with each other to paint the grand spectacle of existence followed by death. In this regard, colours acts as the side characters. Similarly, Maqbool depicts how greed invites mental illness due to its excessive presence. Maqbool was hungry for power while Nimmi enkindled the false hope of power in his mind. Her presence was nothing but a catalyst. Nimmi played by Tabu justifies the character of Lady Macbeth. She trespasses the conventional feminine qualities and becomes a male hero besides being an ill companion to a male figure, Maqbool. Bharadwaj has transformed the kingdom of Denmark into a gangster world that is impregnated with corruption and malice. The murder of Abbaji played by Pankaj Kapur turns out to be the climax of the story. This story examines how ambition desired negatively can be the reason behind a person's tragic fall or death. Maqbool and Nimmi both hallucinate blood as they are the most fallen characters. This movie studies the psychological growth of these characters from the beginning to the end. The episodes of hallucination, murder of Abbaji create abjection due to the portrayal of blood, destruction and monstrosity. They are no less than monsters. Hallucination is a mental disease that is a symptom of psychosis. Maqbool along with Nimmi have lost their senses due to intense greed and corruption. It shows that they are on the verge of destruction and death. A sense of apocalypse rules over the entire movie. Irrfan khan has done a method acting which proves to be suitable for the example of theatre of cruelty. While hallucinating blood and Abbaji, Maqbool fails to draw a line between reality and false belief. It also shows his inability to make a difference between subject and object resulting in the arousal of abjection. This entire cinema is a performance of some corrupted, fallen characters whose silent scream shocks the audience. Nimmi is a monstrous women who invites violence after violence. The usage of guns as the props enkindles abjection and horror. There is no use of bright light in the movie often inviting an environment of dystopia and it foregrounds murder. While Haider emphasises on sound and music, Maqbool focuses on lighting to promote the concerns of the society and the individual.

Taking all the points under consideration, it can be argued that these two films follow the pattern and trajectory of Antonin's theatre of cruelty and Kristeva's abjection. These films basically show the conflict and struggle of the individual and how they become misfit to the surroundings and eventually become the scapegoats to their own actions. These films are melodramatic often showing the dramatic gestures of these characters who apply cruelty and violence onto the bodies of other characters. These two movies by Vishal Bharadwaj increase the level of excitement and adrenaline by displaying acute violence and abjection. The settings of the movies give them a contemporary tone. Ultimately, these movies talk about the political, social scenario of the contemporary India through the metaphor of Bombay and Kashmir. Shakespeare has written these two plays many years ago but they cross the boundary of time and space and become the universal stories. Though these movies are highly commercial, they

remain true to the aesthetic value of the parallel cinema. For this reason, these movies must be re-read time and again from different angles.

Reading abjection and theatre of cruelty in other two Bollywood films:

In my essay, I have attempted to read the works of other directors to read the connection among violence, abjection, and gestures and how these ingredients make the films as the examples of theatre of cruelty.

Tumbbad: The story of Tumbadd centres on the myth of Hindu God and wealth and how greed causes death. The cruelty is depicted through sound, ghastly gestures, and appearances of the ghost, music, shrilling voices and mental illness of the characters. In this particular film, we cannot 'hear' the voice of the ghosts but the sheer presence transforms the movie into a piece of theatre of cruelty.

Raman Raghav 2.0: Some voices create violence and cruelty. Vicky Kaushal, played the part of the police officer wears his uniform and he maintains his personality. But at the most of the times, he becomes the alter ego of the serial killer, played by Nawazuddin Siddiqui. Siddiqui's loud laughter, smirks, voices make this movie hypnotic. Aggressive gestures of the characters, usage of props like gun, depiction of blood- all deal with the theme of sadism and make this piece as an example of theatre of cruelty.

Shakespeare's Macbeth tells the story of the rise, valour and fall of Macbeth. It is a story of rivalry, greed and corruption among the princes and kings. In this film, the director has made Macbeth a charming gangster who wants to be the 'boss.' This film solely focuses on the psychology of Maqbool, Abbaji, Nimmi and others. Shakespeare's Hamlet tells the story of oedipus complex, greed for power and also mental illness. In the film, the focus is on the politics of human relationships and how violence creates anarchy and abjection. Music creates the temperament of cruelty in the film.

Conclusion:

With the advent of the ring wing politics, Bollywood has tried to navigate its journey with utmost caution and sincerity. Cinema and politics are inseparable. Cinema's duty is to reflect the socio- cultural scenario of the contemporary society which is dominated by different ideologies. The ring-wing political party or the BJP government has come to power with thousands of promises for a better society which in reality gets deteriorated haplessly. The right- wing political party has caused chaos and somehow lost faith from the mind of the audiences for associating itself with ethnic cleansing, communal riots, religious bigotry, jealousy for other ideologies, unemployment problem, rapid growth of suicides, students' deaths, rape and violence. Haider is a political film that has received a fair amount of criticism and threats and faced the cruelty of banned cultures at some points of India for

misrepresenting the history and the past political incidents. It is claimed that this film depicts the Indian army/ police in a negative way that hurts the sentiments of the Hindu nationalists and patriots. It has also been claimed that this film misrepresented Kashmiri Hindus and Muslims. This essay is not going to vent out a critical review or criticism of any movement of right wing or left wing political parties. Instead, this essay tries to raise some questions and answers some questions related to how a movie can be an alternative counter narrative of showcasing the reality by exposing the hollowness and cruelty imposed by ring wing political parties.

The primary intention to choose these two films is to read the psychology of the protagonists and how the other characters encourage them to do evil. What is the definition of evil? What is the definition of violence and cruelty? To depict the abstract concept, is a big thing and Bharadwaj has succeeded beautifully. It makes him an auteur. I like reading and watching psychological dramas. I also like reading Shakespeare. Therefore, I indulge myself into these psychological murder story, tragic- melodramatic tales of Shakespeare to know why we need to study Shakespeare even in the 21st century. Many articles, essays have been written on lady Macbeth's character, Bharadwaj's fascination with mafia world, Haider's character but locating the trends of theatre of cruelty in films has not been examined. My essay will add a new lens in this domain of film studies specifically the critical analysis of Vishal Bharadwaj's Shakespearean movies and the relationship between theatre of cruelty and cinema.

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Srijani Dutta is a writer, independent researcher and a guest lecturer of The Sanskrit College and University of West Bengal.