

GENDER AND POWER IN SHAKESPEARE’S ADAPTATION IN INDIAN FILMS: WITH REFERENCE TO MAQBOOL AND OMKARA

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Article Received: 05/07/2026
Article Accepted:07/08/2026
Published Online:08/08/2026
DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2026.8.08.189

Abstract:

Shakespeare's tragedies, through the universal and deeply human issues they present, such as the intoxicating effect of power, ambition leading to downfall, jealousy destroying peace, the struggle against authority, as well as the essence of human relationships, have been able to inspire arts and cultures throughout the globe. With Indian cinema, these concepts of power, desire, jealousy etc. have been given much different perspectives and implications as they have been filtered through the Indian socio-cultural contexts. This paper is focussed on how gender and power dynamics are depicted in Vishal Bhardwaj's films Maqbool (2003) and Omkara (2006) that are respectively Shakespeare's Macbeth and Othello based adaptations. Taking the notion of dialogism and cultural negotiation as a point of departure, the article will explore what these two films do to Shakespeare's plays when they exhibit these plays at Indian socio-political contexts characterized by patriarchy, caste system, honour culture and political violence. It will be shown that in both movies, it is the masculine that enact and hold power and that it is largely through avenues/ routes of exclusion, control and violence that they are able to maintain it. Outset, are assigned the roles of being subordinate to main male heroes and are excluded from legitimate positions of power. Both through the drive of self-ambition as well as through simple submission, women's fate is to be subjugated by patriarchal systems that dictate not only their agency but also their sexuality. By juxtaposing these two films, the paper shows that Indian Shakespearean adaptations are more than mere reinterpretations of Shakespeare's tragedies but operate as powerful critiques of social inequalities that still persist in India today. By anchoring Shakespeare's ideas in very familiar Indian contexts, Maqbool and Omkara bring to light really in postcolonial India, gender is a very important dimension in the way power and authority are exercised.

Keywords: Adaptation, Gender, Indian Cinema, Patriarchy, Power, Shakespeare

I. Introduction

It is widely recognized that Shakespeare's dramatic works have kept their relevance over the ages not just due to the merit of their inclusion in the canon of Western literature but also because of their great ability to different cultural, historical, and ideological settings. The histrionical philosophical dilemmas dramatized in his tragedies include, inter alia ambition authority, jealousy, betrayal violence, and moral responsibility (Loomba 45). At the same time, the plays vividly display the very unstable and hardly imperceptible bases on which power is erected. Adapting Shakespeare's dramas to Indian films, though it involves their radical changes dramatically influenced by postcolonial issues at a macro level, power-struggles within the indigenous community at the micro level, and at the same time, within the culture-specific codes of gender caste honour, and authority. Shakespearean adaptations in India act as a lucrative ground for discovery of the mode of transformation of the global literary works under the influence of the local socio-cultural patterns.

In this article, the issue of gender and power is interrogated in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Maqbool* (2003) and *Omkara* (2006), which are respectively based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Othello* (Bakhtin 281). Using a detailed comparative analysis of the text and cinematography, the paper investigates the ways in which the structures of predatory patriarchal power as well as the caste hierarchy, the culture of honor, and gendered violence impact upon the characters' lives and characterize their experiences. The author defends the view that the two featured films illustrate the uneven power relations entrenched in Indian society and, through them, point to the very apparatuses that tool patriarchal systems to keep going female subjugation. Dialogism, a principle first articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin, acts as a promising theoretical model to describe this occurrence. Bakhtin's dialogism fundamentally holds that the meaning of a word, phrase, or text is not complete or ready for use in some context. Rather, meaning is achievement of an ongoing, open-ended interaction between different voices, contexts, and ideological positions.

Using theatrical works of Shakespeare as examples of dialogism in Indian films show the use of these films not as derivative writings but as changing points of cultural interactions where Shakespeare's narratives are in a dialogue with the Indian socio-political issues. Indian adaptations of Shakespearean plays in cinema reflect the influence of the original text, the film industry standards, local cultural rituals, and the current social environment, This way making the text polyphonic rather than monologic. So Shakespeare's position of power or fame is challenged which gives Indian cinema the freedom to present his plays to reflect local experiences and ideologies. In *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth's desire for power unsettles the conventional female role, even though paradoxically it is the cause of her mental collapse. *Othello* narrates the story of Desdemona, whose naivety is juxtaposed with the destructive forces of male jealousy and honour. Indian derivatives of these plays aggravate the gendered aspects by placing them in a milieu where patriarchy not only sets

the tone but also gets the strongest backing from caste systems, honour codes, and social monitoring.

Omkara unfolds a different yet in the same way repressive arrangement of power. Authority here is based on a caste system, political supremacy, and a masculine code of honour. Being a lower-caste leader in a dominant political structure, Omkara's power is always unstable, which leads to his increased desire for control. In Omkara manliness is a show, a display of force, being physically dominant and claiming women as one's property. Dolly, the character of Desdemona in the story, is completely outside of this power structure. She is limited to being faithful, obedient, and emotionally present which is in line with the traditional feminine roles in Indian culture. Yet, even though she is naive and docile, Dolly can still be the target of mistrust and violence because in patriarchal honor systems female sexuality is a metaphor for male reputation. The great tragedy in Omkara is that Dolly's obedient behavior does not shield her from harm in any way. She is not at all equipped with the social power or legal authority to stand up for herself when the question of her loyalty arises. No matter how innocent she is, her self-control which in the culture is identified with purity ultimately turns out to be the very reason for her destruction. The killing of Dolly by Omkara is considered an honour killing as he believes that his manhood has been challenged. This remaking of Shakespeare's Othello as a story about honour-based violence uncovers the gendered oppression that is so deeply rooted in Indian society that women get punished not for what they do but for their role as the symbol of male honor.

A careful analysis of *Maqbool* and *Omkara* exposes a deeply ingrained pattern in Indian Shakespearean adaptations: women are not only barred from legitimate access to power but are also punished irrespective of their choices. In a way, Nimmi's desire for power and Dolly's submission are two diametrically opposite forms of female conduct under the male-dominated society, but both are doomed to failure. That means, the patriarchal norms appear to be so rigid in their denial of female empowerment that even when women obtain power, it is the masculine one that is celebrated and violently enforced. Setting Shakespeare's tragic heroes in the Indian milieu, these movies unveil the gendered violence that Shakespeare's plays do hint at but do not sufficiently contextualize. As a result, Indian Shakespearean adaptations turn Shakespeare's questioning of power into to be exact cultural critiques of patriarchy, caste, and honour. Through dialogism and cultural negotiation, films like *Maqbool* and *Omkara* recuperate Shakespeare as a living and changing source rather than a fixed colonial legacy.

II. Literature review

Turning to the critical debates around adaptation theory, these form a key lens through which to interpret issues of gender and power in Indian Shakespearean cinema. Linda Hutcheon's statement that adaptation is a kind of "repetition without replication" points to adaptations being influenced by new cultural, political, and ideological milieus (Hutcheon 7). Because of this, for Indian filmmakers, Shakespeare's works are not unalterable templates

but rather malleable narratives that can highlight the problems of the society at that time, for example, gender inequality and the imbalance of power. Robert Stam's criticism of fidelity-centered methods offers additional backing for such interpretation. According to Stam, adaptations ought to be analyzed as dialogic texts which not only refer back to the original text but also reflect the socio-historical contexts of their making (Stam 62). This dialogic stance is of great significance Mainly for Indian cinema where Shakespeare's works are used as a means to explore issues like caste politics, masculinity, and male dominance. Shakespeare's feminist interpreters have also draw attention to the female characters who often appear to be operating within the confines of a dominant power structure and use indirect methods to achieve agency. These characters in Indian adaptations become more explicitly the victims of marginalization due to the prevalence of gender stereotypes and honesty-based morality. Experts in Indian cinema and gender studies have consistently highlighted that the control of female sexuality and chastity is the chief means by which power is preserved in Indian society (Karanth 57). Honour killing, domestic surveillance and violence against women are not illegal acts; they are the use of force as a means to control (Bablu 17-18). Though, Maqbool and Omkara present these situations, among others, as Shakespearean tragedies turned into social commentaries. That means, theory of adaptation in combination with feminist criticism and cultural studies helps a comprehensive understanding of gender and power in Indian Shakespearean adaptations.

III. Masculine power structures in Maqbool

Power in Maqbool is represented in the form of a strictly male criminal chain of command, characterized by violence loyalty, surveillance and fear. Men have exclusive control over authority, and the capability to overpower, punish, and dispose of competitors is the only way that one gains standing, not by good leadership or official recognition (Bhardwaj, Maqbool. This power arrangement is a reflection of male-dominated social systems in which control and force are the main aspects of male gender, whereas female gender is linked to need and relateness. The dark world represented in Maqbool is not only a criminal territory but also a symbolic reference to the larger social system where power is exchanged via informal ties and personal commitments rather than through the opening or the democratic institutions. Abbaji, the character in the movie who matches King Duncan of Shakespeare's Macbeth, is a model of such a disgraced male influence. Abbaji's leadership is portrayed as heavily dictatorial and unethical, whereas Duncan's role as a king is shown to be fair and kind-hearted. Besides the drug trade, his power even extends to the government agencies since he has a very close relationship with corrupt police and other officials.

This mixing up of burglary, ruling, and male domination is an illustration of truth is in Maqbool the masculine power is being preserved through deep-rooted corrupt practices and not through moral rectitude. His reign over men is one of an absolute nature. He commands loyalty, not negotiates it, and any form of the dissent is met with an immediate harsh punishment. That's why, fear becomes the major method through which order is sustained. This masculine authority infiltrates the personal and domestic realms as well,

which is a way of upholding patriarchy as a pervasive system. To demonstrate the point, Abbaji's interaction with Nimmi shows how women get integrated into power structures only as properties and not as active participants. Being a mistress places Nimmi in a socially unclear position she is near power but is kept in the dark when it comes to being acknowledged, respected, or secured. Her sexual availability to Abbaji acts as a status symbol of his superiority, This way setting up the notion that women represent male authorities rather than being independent subjects. Such a scene resonates with the fundamentally patriarchal Indian mentality in which women's identities are largely dependent on their interactions with men.

As a result, women in *Maqbool* are effectively denied access to positions of authority and influence. They are placed at the fringes of the story, their presence being limited to home settings and emotional tasks, whereas men dominate the spheres of public life, politics, and violence. The closeness to power that Nimmi has does not give her any form of control; on the contrary, it makes her even more defenseless. Her reliance on male characters brings out the patriarchal belief that power is a male attribute and that women are able to obtain it only through indirect ways, such as manipulation or influence, but not through legitimate authority (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.7.25–28). The story portrays this indirect relationship with power in a negative way, which further marginalizes the idea of female ambition. The criminal hierarchy portrayed in *Maqbool* is an accurate representation of the general social and political structure of India, where informal channels of power such as criminal networks, patronage politics, and corrupt bureaucracies might exert a stronger influence than the official institutions. By placing Shakespeare's tragedy in this milieu, the movie reveals the deep-rooted patriarchal system that is based on exclusion, domination, and silence. Men do not only possess power, but it is also their capacity to exercise control over other people, In particular women, that defines them as powerful, and silence of any dissent is a necessary condition for their dominance. In fact, violence not only acts as the means but also the very signifier of power, So making masculinity synonymous with the use of force.

Besides that, *Maqbool* also, in a very subtle manner, points out the unstableness of such power structures. Though Abbaji's power appears to be without limit, it is so largely because of the fear instilled in people rather than through a consensus, This way making it unstable by its very nature. His being betrayed and killed is a clear indication of how the coercive nature of male dominance leads to its own downfall. Yet, the film, on one hand, shows the demise of the patriarchal power morally, Then again, changes nothing in its gender-based logic. The removal of Abbaji does not lead to female empowerment; rather, the power changes hands from one man to another. The system remains the same, and women continue to be sidelined. By placing *Macbeth* in an Indian socio-cultural context, *Maqbool* not only continues, but deepens Shakespeare's challenge to the concept of power by associating it with familiar patriarchal and corrupt structures The movie unfolds the ways in which masculine authority gets normalized by violence and women have no voice in systems

that associate power mainly with men. By showing a criminal network sidelining women and giving men a dominant position as a fact, Maqbool can be interpreted as a strong discourse on the gendered basis of power in today's Indian society. Instead of depicting power as a neutral force, the film reveals it to be a deeply gendered concept that keeps inequality and violence going.

IV. Gendered access to power and its consequences in Maqbool

In Maqbool, the obtaining of power by the means of treachery reveals not only the changing ethical side of the authority but also the restrictive gender-patterned philosophy through which responsibility, guilt, and punishment are handed out. Even though Maqbool's rise to power is presented as a tragic outcome of his ambition, fate, and the corrupt system, the story mainly blames Nimmi for it. This unfair distribution of blame shows how patriarchal power structures let off men while leading to the condemnation of women, Mainly those who, like Nimmi, try to get a share in the male-dominated spheres of authority(Bhardwaj, Maqbool). only as plot ending elements but also as tools through which the film maintains the patriarchal order. After Maqbool kills Abbaji and takes over the underworld, the film switches to portraying the internal violence of guilt and paranoia from external violence of power struggles. But, this psychological weight falls on the characters in different ways.

Although Maqbool directly commits murder, he still publicly is a legitimate authority figure, still capable of winning loyalty and maintaining control. Even though his moral worry is there, it still does not pose an immediate threat to his position. However, Nimmi gets the guilt to a greater depth and in a more visible way. Her depiction as a person who overreacts, loses her mind, and destroys herself fortifies the image of women as being emotionally unstable. This difference mirrors the cultural general inclination to perceive male violence as a political or strategic act while female participation in power is seen as a moral and psychological deviance. Nimmi's marginal social position acts as a catalyst to worsen the effects of her interaction with power. Versus Lady Macbeth, who has the advantage of a socially legitiminable role as a noblewoman and a queen, Nimmi is Abbaji's mistress, a situation that makes her a socially unworthy person, lacking respect, shielding, and recognition. Her illegitimacy means that even after Maqbool's ascent, she cannot publicly assume responsibility or authority. Rather, she is stuck in the private domain, away from the public display of power. The whole idea of her being pushed away in space symbolizes how authority is divided by gender in Maqbool: the exercise of power is done in public, male domains, whereas women are put in the private space where their role is not only hidden from sight but also doubted.

In fact, Maqbool simultaneously criticizes the male domination system that is portrayed as a scene of a bloody tragedy. The authority that is gained through betrayal can cause insecurity and violence, destroying trust and solidarity. The chief of Maqbool is constantly afraid and degenerates morally, which is an indication of Truth is patriarchal

authority maintained by force is a kind of power that is bound to destroy itself eventually. Even so, such a criticism does not go so far as to advocate dismantling gender hierarchy. The movie portrays masculine authority as a thoroughgoing source of male dominance and aggression, but it still does not show situations where women are also having power. On the contrary, the film refashions the patriarchal order by getting rid of the woman who breaks the rules. The death of Nimmi is a clear demonstration of the punishment inflicted on a woman who makes an effort to gain power in a system that has no place left for her. She is punished so harshly that not only is she removed from the movie, but she is also wiped out from the whole social order. This ending is Really a very clear affirmation of the idea that any woman who tries to get some kind of authority or control over men whether the woman does it in a very open or in a very secret way upsets the patriarchal equilibrium and so the must be annihilated.

Nimmi's trajectory highlights how patriarchal systems continue to suppress women by restricting them from having a stable and regular access to power, and by blaming women morally when power gets disturbed. Women are given the chance to be close to power, but are still deprived of their legitimacy, and if they try to come closer, they get punished. Such a relationship shows that power is gendered - men not only have authority but power is also defined in a way to exclude women. Maqbool, in this way, transforms Shakespeare's tragedy into a culturally relevant study of patriarchy which survives through restriction of female agency and is in turn supported by male privilege. Because of this, the imminent fallout of different environment for men and women getting into power through Maqbool highlights how patriarchal systems cannot accommodate women's desire for power. In reality women may never reach a position of power when the system in question is one in which men not only retain authority but also use violence to secure it. On one side, the film shows the degeneration of male power whilst However, it also shows its sturdiness, with the help of which patriarchy manages to live on and adapt even when one ruler falls. Maqbool, through such a not entirely one-sided depiction, a) The film mostly illustrates this point about the journey of gender, power, and punishment in Indian society. b) offers a forceful and, at the same time, quite disturbing critique of gender, power, and punishment in Indian society.

V. Power, caste and masculinity in Omkara

In Omkara, authority is manifested through the interwoven mechanisms of caste hierarchy, political power, and aggressive masculinity, resulting in a social system that is both openly visible and forcibly maintained. Contrary to Maqbool, where the power is exercised secretly through the crime circles, Omkara depicts the power in the visible structures of rural and semi-urban Indian politics, where the supremacy is shown, disputed and approved in the public places. The leadership of Omkara is not only the basis of his dominion over the land and the people but also his capability of presenting the culturally accepted forms of masculinity, strength, control of one's emotions, and the ability to inspire fear as well as loyalty. So, his power is closely linked with his gender identity, This way supporting the notion that power in this situation is characteristically masculine. Caste is a

determinant factor in the constitution of both Omkara's masculinity and insecurity. Being from a mixed caste background, Omkara is in a paradoxical position in the social hierarchy (Loomba 53). On one side, he has great political and military power, Then again, he is still troubled by the stigma of caste inferiority.

Omkara's political power is out in the open and a performance Yet Dolly's life is restricted to the private realm where her worth is determined by her obedience and chastity. The division further strengthens the male-dominated splitting of public power and private femininity, thereby keeping women politically powerless. Since Dolly has no institutional and social backing, she is even more exposed and unprotected. While men can resort to their caste alliances; get backings from politics; or at least use force, Dolly has no ways to defend herself from the accusation. From Omkara's growing mistrust - which stems from the crafty insinuations of Langda Tyagi - Dolly is silenced most of the time in the story. Her muteness Though must not be equated with the lack of her resistance or strength; it exemplifies the systemic predicament of women in the patriarchal society, where the testimonies of women are the least trusted and the voices of women are hardly heard. Here, silence is a reflection of deep-rooted power inequalities of the system and is not a personal shortcoming. In the play Omkara, the public display of power further serves to normalize the use of gender-based violence as a tool for re-establishing male dominance (Bhardwaj, Omkara). The film presents Omkara's killing of Dolly as a statement of honour, a treatment encouraged by the cultural codes of the situation. Several changes in this sequence make it a turning point in the story. Not only is the message about victim type shifted, but the setting is changed, allowing the director to create a more relaxed atmosphere due to which the audience sympathizes with Iago's point of view.

The production is smooth and precise, and the screenwriter's literary skills are well displayed in the dialogue and stage directions. Relying heavily on infinities of the form to include the aspect of time and physical aspect and symbolic aspect, the cultural text movie Omkara and the original play Othello reflect the contrasting conventions of from to, and in the usage of, the major elements in both works. When one examines the society depicted in the movie it becomes apparent that the issue of caste really helps in dynamics and changes in the story (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 52). You may want to know that the director has changed the setting of the play and the story structure Omkara's conversation with Dolly is first and foremost a verbal duel, a conflict carried out in words even while the bond of love between the two keeps on growing. The difference between comrades who fight side by side and lovers who share a passionate relationship is echoed in the language move-by-move, role-by-role. Language and cultural symbols are used to sustain and justify these gendered practices of power. The incorporation of local dialects, musical traditions, and culture-bound visual features help the film relate to a specific population, link Shakespeare's topics to social issues on the ground.

Dolly's death can be seen as a double-edged sword. First, it reestablishes Omkara's authority as the dominant male. Second, it points out the cruelty of a social system that considers women as the bearers of male honour. Characters such as Omkara, while exposing conditions of patriarchal violence, paradoxically also display the vulnerabilities involved in exerting male control. Omkara's command seemed initially unquestionable but it gets shattered soon when suspicion and strategizing come in. Awarding more importance to honour and external control than to internal trust makes him an easy target for deception, this is one of the ways in which hyper-masculinity can be self-destructive. Yet, as in *Maqbool*, this aspect remains only as a critique without leading to a total breakdown of the gender hierarchy. Instead of questioning the very system that gave rise to the violence, the story solves the dilemma by executing the woman. Delivering it in the way that power is exercised with the interplay of caste and that manhood is a violent act in a performance, Omkara gives a reinterpretation of *Othello* (Shakespeare, *Othello* 3.3.165–170) which is, culturally grounded and reveals the gendered basis of authority in Indian society. Dolly's lack of participation in power and her dying point illustrate how patriarchal systems function through the denial of women's voices, identities, and creation of their vulnerabilities.

VI. Gendered violence as an assertion of power in Omkara

The culmination of Omkara vividly exposes that patriarchal power, in the final analysis, gets established through gender violence, the female body being the main target on which masculine power is displayed and reasserted. The killing of Dolly cannot be just seen as a sad outcome of individual jealousy; rather, it is rooted deeply in the culture as an act of honour killing and is, in fact, justified by Omkara's conviction that his masculine power and social standing have been permanently undermined. This crime, while being in fact a musical parallel to that of Desdemona in Shakespeare's *Othello*, gains greater importance in India where honor killings to suppress women are a reality not only depicted in the literature, but also continuing as a societal problem. So, the film indirectly makes Shakespeare's private family troubles a symbol of the widespread man-dominated society and the acceptance of using violence as the method of perpetuating men's rule (Bhardwaj, Omkara).

In the movie, not only is control of one's environment, physical power, social alliances important facets of constructing a man's image, but possession also of female sexual entity largely. When Dolly is found to be unfaithful, the decision that has been made to interpret her act is not that of a simple failure of morality, but a public disgrace that completely erodes Omkara's masculinity. In patriarchal systems based on honour, a woman's body is the symbol of male reputation and if her sexual purity is questioned, it is the same as challenging male authority (Loomba 53). Violence is of Omkara then is his mode of re-establishing himself; rather than seeing it as a punishment given to his wife, he views it as a rewriting of the threat to his masculinity. It is this reasoning that shows how patriarchal power makes men accountable for cases of violence. The way the film depicts Dolly's silence that accompanies the final showdown only makes it more apparent that the issue of gender violence is structurally grounded. The character of Dolly is not only silenced physically but

is also verbally denied as she is not even given the chance to talk, to justify herself or even to defend herself, which is like perpetuating the notion that in patriarchal systems, the voices of women do not carry any weight. Rather than interpreting her silence as a sign of submission, it is more logical to view it as an effect of being metaphorically and systematically shut out of the discussion.

In contrast, to Nimmi in *Maqbool* who aims at power through men and at getting over male authority, Dolly strives for neither of these. Her submission to her husband through love, loyalty, and readiness to serve at the emotional level makes her the recipient of the idealized womanhood attributes that patriarchy, male domination, and male control seek to uphold. Yet Truth is she is killed signals the downfall of everything even this catering to the patriarchal male desire for ideal womanhood is founded upon a contradiction and That's why unfolds through a series of steps that lead to the final downfall and destruction of the victim. *Omkara* brings to light the terrible and sad contrast that in the patriarchy: women are first asked to be meek and pure but the, in fact, these very qualities lead to them being vulnerable to violence and, in the end, not really protected (Bhardwaj, *Omkara*). Dolly's horrible going to the fate that she is subjected to in the situation patriarchy can be thought to be the idea that the protection that women may, at best, have in the patriarchy is conditional and so very much dependent on the way the man perceives the situation totally disregarding truth and justice. Changing Shakespeare's handkerchief into the *kamarbandh* (waist ornament) sharpen the metaphor of violence from a gender perspective.

In Indian culture, the *kamarbandh* signifies a woman's sexuality, her honour and the legitimacy of marriage. So, the loss or misplacement of the *kamarbandh* is symbolically understood as the woman's fall from virtue. By turning Shakespeare's icon into a local one, the film essentially endorses the cultural norm that connects woman's sexuality to man's honour and, as a result, Dolly's killing, for the story's morality, is considered a logical reaction to a shameful act. Masculinity as a public and performative act in *Omkara* matters a lot in justifying violence as an instrument of power (Trivedi and Bartholomeusz 52). The film depicts *Omkara*'s power not as a private matter but as a public performance, This way suggesting that any attack on his masculinity would have to be met not only decisively but also so that everyone will see. *Omkara*'s killing of Dolly only brings back his feeling of dominance by a short window, whereas it changes the entire situation of his life and leaves him deprived of moral sense and devastated. The killing of Dolly is a metaphorical commentary on how women are punished not for the actual crimes they have committed but rather for the mere indication that they might disrupt male authority. Because of this, no matter if a woman is a rebellious one or a docile one, she will always be at the disadvantage of the male-dominated and legitimized-power control kinds of structures. Being an Indian version of *Othello*, *Omkara* changes the Shakespearean tragic play into a strong indictment of patriarchy, which through violence, silence and the restriction of female sexuality, manages to sustain itself.

VII. Comparative reading: gendered power across the two films

Comparing *Maqbool* and *Omkara* side by side, one finds a very similar trend in Indian Shakespearean adaptations, In particular on the portrayal of gender-based power. The two movies take place in different socio-political contexts the urban criminal environment in *Maqbool* versus the rural caste politics in *Omkara*. Though, the plots of both films depict the male gender as the sole holder of power, which is supported through violence, dominance, and the control of women's bodies and voices. The different endings of Nimmi and Dolly are not two different moral options but point to the structural inability of women to be empowered in patriarchal societies. A woman who tries to wield power indirectly or who fully obeys patriarchal standards will eventually be erased and punished. In *Maqbool*, Nimmi's strategy of indirectly attaining power by persuading and emotionally influencing others leads to her being marked as a disrupter within the male criminal world. The patriarchal notion is reinforced that women who desire power are dangerous and upset the social order. On the contrary, in *Omkara*, Dolly is portrayed as the perfect image of womanhood faithful obedient emotionally attached, and quietly political. Though, her act of giving in does not shield her from harm. respect and submission do not guard her from suspicion and violence; instead, they make her vulnerable to male power. Taken together, these two plots reveal a sad paradox: women who are found fault both when they go against the patriarchal norms and when they support them(Stam 62).

Indian cinematic interpretations intensify the Shakespearean argument against dominative structures of power by locating violent acts against women within familiar socio-cultural contexts. Shakespeare's works insinuate that the domineering masculinity is prone to internal disruptions and that females are helpless, but *Maqbool* and *Omkara* uncover these power relations and place them in the Indian context of honor culture, caste distinction, and informal power networks(Bakhtin 281). Unlike that of the Shakespearean characters, the power in these movies is not something that is isolated and hypostatized. It is social, it is physical, and it appears as itself through everyday practices of control. In *Maqbool*, power changes hands through the criminal business and institutional corruption, but in *Omkara*, it is the caste pride and political authority that give the power an aura of legitimacy. Though, at one level, both systems depend on women being kept out and men being allowed to be violent as a norm. In *Omkara*, Dolly's character is metaphorically sacrificed for a supposed fault which she didn't commit, whereas the male players who actively mislead and sow suspicion only experience their repercussions later or indirectly. The last-mentioned inversion is just an instance from a big pattern of blaming women for men's moral downfall and at the same time giving them more freedom without their men's presence. This is the way through which patriarchal authority is preserved, even when men fail. When Shakespearean tragedy in India gets into a social milieu leading to free reign to re-interpret/assessment of the literary work, it is for sure used as a means of cultural commentary through the spectacle of cinema. *Maqbool* and *Omkara* reveal that, on one side,

patriarchy is maintained by the domination of women, and on the other side, by very deeply-rooted ideas about gender, honour and authority.

In both movies, females are the metaphorical places where masculine power is manifested and reiterated. Nimmi's body is the site of a drama involving her aspirations, her guilt, and her conscience, while Dolly's body carries the conflict between what is honourable and what is shameful. In both instances, women's subjectivity takes the back seat to male power. Besides being mere vehicle characters, the female protagonists in both stories also symbolise the deep-seated psychological and emotional impact of the dominant patriarchal systems. Their deaths after all, are not simple misfortunes, but metaphorical gestures that mark the return of the patriarchal order after it had been threatened. In this way, violence against women becomes a kind of punishment that strengthens the gender hierarchy and restores the supremacy of males (Loomba 53). Also, these reinterpretations make clear how patriarchal power uses women as scapegoats for moral blame. Nimmi's guilt torments her mentally quite a bit more than it does Maqbool, even though he is the one who physically commits the violent act.

VIII. Conclusion

Indian Shakespeare adaptations interpret Shakespeare's power-related themes to criticize patriarchy from an indigenous perspective, showing the use of power as a mechanism for shaping, sustaining and legitimizing authority in particular social contexts. In Maqbool and Omkara, ' power is still predominantly male; it is exercised through the mechanisms of exclusion, mistrust and violence all of which prevent women from gaining credible recognition as authorities. Power in these two films is represented as male dominating, controlled by men in an unchallenged way and carried out by the use of coercion over both public and private spheres. Besides shifting Shakespeare's tragedies into Indian socio-cultural realities, these adaptations portray patriarchy not only as some theoretical notion but also as a system that governs people's daily lives and leads to the suffering of women(Bakhtin 281).

Patriarchal systems illustrate through the journeys of Nimmi and Dolly how women are given power at arm's length but are denied legitimacy and protection. Nimmi is, in a sense, indirectly trying to assert her power in Maqbool, which leads to her being identified as an existential threat to male supremacy which results in her being psychologically tortured and finally eliminated. Dolly, in Omkara, is so compliant with the patriarchal system that it restores her faith in her own character but it is this very submission that betrays her showing how female chastity is very vulnerable and highly contingent on patriarchal honour codes. The two stories jointly convey that women are penalized for whatever they do: a woman who is assertive is labeled as the devil, whereas a woman who is obedient is silenced and annihilated(Loomba 53). Such depictions imply that it is not very likely for a woman to be empowered in a social structure where the exercise of power is clearly gender-based and strictly controlled.

Making these dynamics clear, Indian Shakespearean adaptations not only broaden and deepen the power critique dimension of Shakespeare. While Shakespeare's dramas reveal the fragility and corruptness of male power, *Maqbool* and *Omkara* use such social settings as caste discrimination, honour culture, political corruption, and violence against women for rooting the problem (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*). Character of power in both movies is not symbolic or metaphysical but deeply social, acting with control over space, language, and bodies. Female characters turning out as the places where masculine authority is first imposed, then questioned and finally reaffirmed, that is how violence against women is shown to be a method of social control of patriarchal systems. Besides, they depict in reality patriarchy is so persistent that it even survives through moments of critique of it. Nimmi and Dolly's murder that will bring the narratives to a close reinstates the order of the patriarchy rather than erasing it, and that is a symptom of how gender norms are still so tightly held in cultural stories. This makes the nature of adaptation as a form of culture so troublesome because it is simultaneously able to make a critical commentary on the dominant power structures while still being very much conditioned by them.

In fact, Indian Shakespearean adaptations like *Maqbool* and *Omkara* go beyond just the retelling of Shakespeare's plots; they effectively communicate the issues of gender, power, and violence in present-day India. Engaging in a dialogic manner with Shakespeare's tragedies, these films point to a fact that patriarchy is sustained not only through acts of violent domination but also through the controlling of women's agency, sexuality, and voice. By highlighting the gendered politics of power, *Maqbool* and *Omkara* not only pay homage to the timelessness of Shakespeare but also show that adaptation is a process of cultural negotiation in which gender remains central to the struggle for authority and meaning (Hutcheon 7).

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SP Publications

International Journal Of English and Studies (IJOES)
An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal; **Impact Factor:8.337(SJIF)**
ISSN: 2581-8333|Volume 8, Issue-8(August);2026

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