



## A Cultural Materialist Analysis of Film Maqbool in the Play of William Shakespeare's Macbeth

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### ABSTRACT

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The paper attempts a cultural materialist reading of Maqbool to bring out such hidden aspects of the movie. There are certain hidden structures in the movie which remain unearthed when watched without critical eyes. This article aims at analysing the movie, Maqbool from the perspective of cultural materialism where it tries to bring out that how the movie interrelates with the contemporary social and political situations of the time which it depicts. Shakespeare's plays have become available in the cinematic adaptations in various languages across the globe. The present research focuses on Bollywood movie Maqbool (2004), the Hindi language movie adaptation of Shakespeare's famous play Macbeth (1606). Maqbool is such a movie adaptation in Hindi, directed by Indian film-director, Vishal Bhardwaj. All these focus on various aspects of the original texts, and come up with some entirely new movies which at times have the Shakespearean elements in them. The film relates to the incidents and events from Shakespeare's play Macbeth, though it has new flavors' of its own as a typical Bollywood movie. Like Shakespeare's plays, these movies also have something to offer to the critics.

## INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's popularity in the present times has been seen in the movie adaptations of most of his plays. There is hardly language and country with a film industry which have not adapted the famous plays of the playwright on the popular screen. "Since the very earliest years in the development of the motion picture film-makers have found the plays of William Shakespeare to be continually tempting as subject matter for films" (1). "Technical and artistic developments of the twentieth century, the motion picture camera, with its capabilities for sound and color, was equally unavoidable was the filming of the plays of Shakespeare. The film of Shakespeare was as natural and ordained a combination as bread and butter" (2).

Shakespeare's plays have already been adapted into various languages of the world. They appear in a new light with various regional variations. It is clear that "when a film emerges from a play, a new text is created from the old text, and we are sensitive to how interconnected the two are" (Burnett). As a result of recent cinematic developments, film adaptations have opened up new frontiers to a wide range of audiences from different cultures and following different traditions.

Since most adaptations of plays include some regional elements in addition to Shakespeare's characteristics for specific audiences, audiences find them attractive, as it becomes quite an engaging experience for most of them to see Shakespeare's works with local people. The characters are based on the original characters, and the film's plot closely follows the play's plot, although in a different context. Apart from similar elements, the film also retains its originality in its depiction of cultural diversities and creation of contemporary context based on available models. As a film "Maqbool has a lot to offer those who are interested in transcultured Shakespeare" (3).

### Research Methodology

Here discuss the broader implications of the analysis for understanding Shakespearean adaptations in global contexts and the relevance of Cultural Materialism in film studies. Summarize key findings from the analysis, highlighting how cultural materialist perspectives enhance our understanding of the adaptation process. Compare specific scenes, motifs, and themes between "Macbeth" and "Maqbool." Analyze how the material conditions depicted in "Maqbool" influence the narrative and character development. Research the director's background, previous works, and interviews to understand their approach to adapting "Macbeth" in an Indian context. Review critical reviews, audience reactions, and

box office performance to gauge how the adaptation was received in different cultural contexts. Investigate how cultural norms, traditions, and values are portrayed and interpreted differently in the film compared to Shakespeare's original play.

## Discussion

The present article attempts a cultural materialist analysis of *Maqbool* to bring out some elements of social significance. The film has deep layers of social and political turmoil involving politics and crime. A cultural materialist analysis of the film will help in understanding the conditions that led to a particular type of depiction of certain events and incidents. It will also try to highlight the ongoing power struggle within the film's story. The term cultural materialism comes from the writings of the famous Marxist critic Raymond Williams. In his opinion, it is "a theory of the specificities of material cultural and literary production within historical materialism" (4).

"It affirms the materiality and structure of cultural practice, including 'literature', against literary 'tradition', but devalues (denies) economic determination in general" (5). During the 1980s, cultural materialism emerged as a tool for the study of Shakespeare's plays. With the publication in 1985 of Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield's influential book, *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*, its relevance became more known than before. It analyzes the existence of dominant, residual and emergent elements in a culture. Dominant ideologies represent the most powerful elements in a culture. Residual elements represent a power that is past, but its shadow is still present somewhere in the culture. Emerging elements are always in search of power and try to raise their voice. Thus, they are newly emerging elements of a culture.

According to Raymond Williams, culture is not a static phenomenon; rather it is always growing and developing. In this process of emergence and development of culture, there is always a kind of power struggle found between different social groups of different sections of a particular culture. This ongoing struggle is for power and importance within the culture. Every group in a culture tries to be dominant. Similarly, the present dominant group tries to maintain its gained power, and takes certain measures for doing that. Thus, the struggle for absolute power continues and the existing power structure in the culture keeps changing from time to time. Cultural materialism studies this struggle for power in relation to the historical and political events related to a particular text. This reading of literary texts, especially Shakespeare's plays, is, in many ways, similar to American neohistoricism. According to some critics, cultural materialism is often described as a political form of historiography.

A text is always closely linked to its context, and close cultural materialist analysis of any text can be helpful in obtaining detailed contextual – cultural, historical and political – information about that particular text. Thus, a cultural materialist reading of a literary text focuses mostly on the cultural practices and other social elements in that particular text, and studies them in relation to the political situation and historical events of the time in which the action takes place.

It tries to explore how a society works with its various social and cultural groups in a political and historical context. The purpose of such analysis of texts is to find out the dominant, residual and emerging elements and political situation in the society at a particular time described in those particular texts. It also considers those dissident or rebellious voices, which are not always strong, but emerge from time to time from the oppressed, ruled or marginalized sections of the social structure. So, in a way, cultural materialist reading is the study of a text, or a text in its adaptation to actual political and historical contexts. In this type of reading, a particular text, or adaptation, allows the text to be studied and analyzed based on the time and cultural background when it was produced. Similarly, analysis of the text can reveal more about the historical and political events of the time.

The only difference is that, while the original Shakespeare plays will tell more about the contemporary politics and Elizabethan society of the time, the recent film adaptations will give some more important information about the timeline and different social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, when analyzed critically from the perspective of cultural materialism, Vishal Bhardwaj's attempt to adapt Shakespeare's Macbeth into the film Maqbool equally says something about the various social and political phenomena prevalent during that time. . Has the ability to do. Until now, it was mostly hidden from the consciousness of the general audience. As a film, Maqbool has various hidden layers of meanings that are closely linked to the various social and political structures prevalent during contemporary times, or rather the time period around which the film is made. A cultural materialist analysis of the film would go a long way in uncovering these hidden layers of meanings and bringing out some untold truths about the society and culture depicted.

Jahangir Khan symbolizes the dominant ideology in Bhardwaj's film Maqbool. When the film begins he is in complete dominance with his powerful criminal and political networks. At this point he is like King Duncan in Shakespeare's Macbeth. Miyan Maqbool can initially be placed in the category of emerging element. He is the person most likely to become the leader of the gang after Jahangir Khan, thus, serving as the Macbeth of Shakespeare's original play. His ambition is more encouraged by the prophecy of

Pandit, who is the direct translation of Shakespeare's Witches. Nimmi's words added more coal to the fire of Maqbool's ambitious imagination. (5) More emerging elements can be discovered among Maqbool's companions. Everyone is trying to defeat the other. Devsare embodies the residual element of the past and acts as the voice of the disaffected in the present in the film. He is an honest police officer who represents survivors like Commissioner Deshpande, who had earlier seized Jahangir Khan's house at the time of his marriage. He symbolizes the orderly and maintained law and order in the past and also represents the voice of dissent in this fallen society. His character is completely opposite to that of a Pandit and a priest. The maintenance of law and order by Devsare at the end of the film can be linked to Malcolm's coronation and the victory of law and order over evil criminals and corruption in the contemporary context.

Guddu and Sameera are portrayed as disunited elements. They break the normal rules of love and marriage. Despite the fact that they are from different religions, and the dominance of Sameera's father Jahangir Khan in the culture, they are in love. Nimmi also has an important dissident voice in the film. Although she is Jahangir Khan's lover, and has to do as per his wishes, she always realizes that she is being exploited. She knows and regrets that a man of her father's age is physically abusing her. She is aware of her bad luck, but also has the courage to love secretly. And to get that love back she has her own plans which she imposes on her lover Maqbool. She is well aware of the fact that Guddu and Sameera are in love, and that Guddu may replace Jahangir Khan in the future, so she informs Maqbool of the situation, and gradually convinces him of her success and his love and affection. Also makes plans to achieve. Thus, he is a dissident voice in the film that becomes successful with the help and support of the emerging voice seen in the character of Mian Maqbool.

Maqbool also secretly loves his boss's mistress, though that love is mutual and reciprocated, which acts as a dissonant element here. He is depicted as a rising dissenting voice, which becomes Chief in the future as a result of his actions and plans to depose the Chief. The priest and priestess, who are portrayed as substitutes for the three witches, act more actively in the film than the witches in Shakespeare's play. They set the plot for upcoming events. They encourage Maqbool by announcing the upcoming future, while also in a way warning him against Kake's son. Furthermore, the priest insists that the Pandit's predictions are always correct, and in the same manner, the Pandit surprisingly, though comically, tells Kaka how he survived to the time when his son is alive. At the same time, he also implicates to Maqbool that for him the danger lies in Kaka and his son. Purohit declares that Kaka's son may be an answer to

Maqbool. This, in a way, also warns Maqbool about his own safety, and subsequently paves way for the upcoming violence and bloodshed.

As the events of the film reveal, it seems that a hierarchy exists to remove the gang as supreme leader by betraying others. As the Pandit's comments show, Jahangir Khan had earlier done to his supreme commander Lalji Bhai by dethroning him and snatching away his position, just as Mian Maqbool had done to Jahangir. These types of criminal practices appear to be common in the field of crime. Everyone wants their own benefit. In the past, Jahangir Khan was a rising element in the criminal culture, dethroning Lalji Bhai, the leading voice of his time, and becoming a leader himself. This cyclical process is seen again when Mian Maqbool, the rising voice of Jahangir's time, is deposed and he takes over in his place. The same thing is repeated again when Guddu and Riyaz Boti are presented as the emerging voices of dissent against Maqbool. At the end of the film, Boti is shown shooting Mian Maqbool which reveals that he replaces Maqbool's main voice with the help of Guddu and moreover, ironically, it is the same Guddu who was earlier appointed to kill Boti and who knows what will happen if the story progresses further. As an emerging dissenting voice, Guddu could replace Chief Riyaz Boti. So, it is clear, as Raymond Williams has very accurately said that this process of conflict between different powerful elements in a culture is always going on. It is an endless struggle that knows no limits. Once there is a winner, there is someone else.

Although Jahangir Khan is a criminal, he trusts his people, or at least shows that he trusts them. When Riyaz Boti comes under his protection, Maqbool warns Jahangir Khan against him, but he shows trust in Boti and allows him to work for the gang. Nimmi has an illicit or illegitimate relationship with Jahangir Khan. Although she is just his girlfriend and nothing else, he always respects her in public and talks to her politely.

He approves of his daughter Sameera's marriage with Kaka's son, Guddu, to make his daughter happy, ignoring their secret love affair and different religious backgrounds. These are some positive qualities, but the overall truth is that he is a criminal-leader, and when someone is no longer important and beneficial to him, he turns to him. As it is seen in the movie, he kills his own brother-in-law. Even Lalji Bhai, his boss was perhaps also killed by him, as Pandit implicates. When he is satisfied with Nimmi, he sends for another mistress. Many other such cruel instances are there in the movie. Here, Bhardwaj's movie, Maqbool, stands visibly apart from William Shakespeare's Macbeth, as what the movie depicts in these incidents are not at all the parts of the original play. (6) As the adapted portrayal of king

Duncan, Jahangir Khan seems to be more negative in the movie. There is nothing like what Shakespeare put into the character of King Duncan. According to Shakespeare's play, Duncan was a just king, while Jahangir Khan is a criminal-leader, a kind of don of a corrupt criminal gang, who has both power and support from politics. It is ironic, and in some ways even unrealistic, when things are compared to contemporary politics, that Jahangir Khan also helps people in politics. As Pandit and Purohit told DCP Devsare, Jahangir Khan plays an important role in political elections. He is also a symbolic leader of his community, and hence his people support the candidates he supports. By engaging in a cultural materialist analysis of the film, this phenomenon of cultural representation can be better understood in relation to the role of caste, community, religion and power in contemporary Indian politics.

Miyan Maqbool, as the adaptation of the character of Macbeth, is depicted in a new light in the movie. Unlike Macbeth, who does not have any personal cause to kill King Duncan, Maqbool has sufficient reasons to kill Jahangir Khan. He loves Jahangir's mistress, Nimmi, and here is a personal cause involved. By killing him, he acquires both love and power. Moreover, Jahangir Khan's negative character and criminal background also contributes in the murder. His murder cannot be said as tragic as that of King Duncan. Basically, in the movie everything is depicted in a different social and cultural setting, so it tries to capture its own relevant areas for discussion. The story is romanticized in the contemporary corrupt social and cultural milieu. Maqbool signifies the emergent element in a culture which subverts the present dominant ideology and replaces it. By dethroning Jahangir Khan and becoming dominant himself, Maqbool proves it.(7)

In conclusion, it can be noted that "Maqbool's story is linked to the popular film genre of the twenty-first century as it presents the contemporary world of ambition and power games." in the domain of Mumbai underworld".(8) As the film shows, there is a deep connection between politics and the underworld. In many cases, they depend on each other for mutual benefit. This may be related to some extent to the role of people with criminal backgrounds in contemporary politics, as well as the political events of the time when the film was made. Law and order has completely collapsed. As shown in the film, the society is full of corruption and crime. It is difficult for the police to arrest or punish these politically supported criminals and maintain law and order in the society. People like police, pundits and priests are also involved in corruption. Honest officers face difficulty and have to work under immense political pressure. With some fictional accounts, this film presents the dark side of power politics in a culture in a very vivid manner.



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