

Shakespeare And Pakistani Contemporary Problems: A Critique On The Winter's Tale And Fasana-E-Ajaib

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Abstract

It has become a trend worldwide to appropriate and adapt the plays of Shakespeare. This trend allows the adapters to modernise and/or localise the plays and achieve their respective objectives. This study probes into the adaptation of The Winter's Tale into Pakistani Fasana-e-Ajaib (1990) by Gregory Thompson. This study draws parallels between the two and further highlights the potential of Fasana-e-Ajaib to address Pakistani contemporary real-life problems, such as honour/target killings and political affiliations. In order to do so, while using the parameters of Catherine Belsey's Textual Analysis, Linda Hutcheon's Theory of Adaptation is used as a lens to achieve the set objectives. It is pertinent to mention that interviews with Gregory Thompson are also part of the analysis. The researchers conducted these interviews for this as well as another similar project.

Key words: Pakistani Society, Appropriation, Adaptation and Honour/Target Killings

Introduction

The plays of Shakespeare have a universal appeal, and they attract readers, audiences, scholars, critics, and researchers alike. The plays are universal and global due to the variety of themes. However, most importantly, it is the dramaturgical construction of the plays that allows the creation of an empathetic connection between the play in question and the reader/scholar of any given country/region/culture. This empathetic connection allows the reader to relate to and interpret the play in his/her own way (from their own cultural perspective). This interpretation may not necessarily be an exact reflection of the play as deemed by Shakespeare or old-school criticism of Shakespeare. Rather, it instills a new spirit in the play in question, as well as maintains the essence.

Shakespeare in the Bush (1998) by Laura Bohannon is an article about Shakespeare and how he is understood in the tribes of Africa. Keeping with the tribal traditions of storytelling, Bohannon was asked to tell a story in English. She chose Hamlet. The tribesmen, after hearing the story, questioned the very interpretation of it and, for instance, considered the appearance of the ghost in Hamlet as an omen with a valid meaning. They gave a new interpretation to the play by taking into consideration their own socio-cultural beliefs. They heard and understood the play from their own perspectives. The chief of the tribe opines:

Sometime ... you must tell us some more stories of your country. We, who are elders, will instruct you in their true meaning, so that when you return to your own land your elders will see that you have not been sitting in the bush, but among those who know things and who have taught you wisdom (Laura Bohannon, 1998).

Thus, it is evident that one reads and understands Shakespeare as per his or her own socio-cultural beliefs. Subsequently, Shakespeare ceases to be English, and, as a result, his plays become part of the new given context. Shakespeare ceases to be English once he crosses geographical and linguistic boundaries. Dennis Kennedy makes the point that "he [Shakespeare] regularly crosses national and linguistic boundaries with apparent ease" (Dennis Kennedy, 1993).

The scope of the subject at hand is not limited to mere Shakespeare's crossing of geographical and linguistic boundaries. But it serves a far more important task. While appropriating and adapting the plays of Shakespeare, parallels are drawn between the play in question and the relevant socio-cultural beliefs and traditions of a given country. Similarities and differences are drawn. But once this connection is established, the adaptive version of the play is used to highlight the problems of the given country/society. The best example of this (in the context of subcontinent Shakespeare) is the trilogy of the adaptations of the three most famous tragedies of Shakespeare. Hamlet becomes Haider, Macbeth becomes Maqbool, and Othello becomes Omkara. To take the example of Haider, its setting changes from Denmark to Kashmir and, as a result, it represents the problems related to Kashmir, such as the issues of missing people, target killings, and water wars between India and Pakistan (to name a few).

In a similar line of argument, Shakespeare is widely present and read in Pakistan. He is sometimes studied in the same old school fashion; however, with the increased number of adaptations of his plays, the trend of teaching and understanding him has changed over time i.e. increase in the number of Pakistani adaptations of Shakespearean plays has been observed. The following are a few examples of such adaptations: Taming of the Shrew as Ilaaj-i- Zid Dastyaab Hay and Macbeth as Raees, Measure for Measure as Raham. Ilaaj-i-Zid Dastyaaab hay is an adaptation that reveals and addresses the issues related to the patriarchal setup in Pakistan. It deals with how daughters are married according to their birth order and how they, generally speaking, do not have a say in their own marriage, that is, to accept or reject a proposal. The focus here is not on the Ilaaj-i- Zid but on the fact that how the adaptation has the potential to address the Pakistani contemporary real-life problem. A problem that is still prevalent and present in Pakistan. Similarly, the related problem attached to this is honour and honour killing. Honour-based killing is a nuisance that is present in Pakistan. Although various bodies are fighting this menace on various fronts, limited or no significant research has been

carried out on it from the perspective of *The Winter's Tale* and its subsequent adaptation, *Fasana-e- Ajaib*.

Research has been carried out on some aspects of the mentioned adaptations and the subsequent problems they highlight. However, limited or no significant research has been conducted on Gregory Thompson's *Fasana-i-Ajaib*, a Pakistani adaptation of *The Winter's Tale*. Therefore, this study takes into consideration *The Winter's Tale*'s Pakistani adaptation, *Fasana-e-Ajaib*, as a case study to address the subject at hand. With the support of the National Academy of Performing Arts in Karachi, British director Gregory Thompson directed *Fasana-e-Ajaib* in the summer of 2016.

This paper draws parallels between the *Fasana-e-Ajaib* and *The Winter's Tale* and, as a result, probes into the potential of the later to address contemporary problems in Pakistan, especially honour killing, target killing, and political associations/slogans. This paper specifically probes into research questions: Why do adapters appropriate and adapt Shakespeare's plays, in this case, *The Winter's Tale*? What are the various parallels between *The Winter's Tale* and *Fasana-e-Ajaib*? And how far is *Fasana-e-Ajaib* – a Pakistani adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* – successful in depicting the real-life contemporary problems of Pakistan, such as honour-based killings? In addition, how does *Fasana-e-Ajaib* help in addressing the subject at hand?

Honour and honour-based killings are both subjects of the play and a cry for help in Pakistani society. The reason for choosing honour and honour-based killing as a theme is that it is currently prevalent in the country, which needs to be addressed and challenged academically. This paper establishes and demonstrates the potential of the play to raise awareness of and address the issue at hand, as well as suggest possible yet plausible reforms to curb honour-based violence and killing. Thus, it establishes the significance of the paper. This paper also adds to the existing body of criticism of Shakespeare and how he is a global writer. It demonstrates how Shakespeare can potentially be reread and retold (in this case, *The Winter's Tale* and *Fasana-e-Ajaib*) to highlight, address, and raise voice against honour and honour-based violence, and, as a result, pose possible reforms to the relevant Pakistani bodies/authorities.

This paper is essentially qualitative, descriptive, and analytical in nature. It makes use of the parameters set by Catherine Belsey (2013) for textual analysis. Textual analysis is carried out to probe into the content, the construction of language and the embedded messages within the text. Random text passages have been selected to shed light on the subject at hand. Closed as well as intensive reading techniques have been used to do the same. Various data bases have been accessed for relevant data on research papers, articles, news and other resources. The script of the adapted play *Fasana-e-Ajaib* is the text for this paper. Essentially qualitative in nature, evidence-based subject opinions and views have been given importance and logically presented. Linda Hutcheon's *Theory of Adaptation* (2006 and 2012) is carefully used as a lens to address the subject at hand. The said theoretical perspective is used to look at how well *The Winter's Tale* was adapted and used in *Fasana-e-Ajaib*.

It is pertinent to mention here that original interviews were conducted by the researchers with the director of this adaptation, Gregory Thompson. The people who did the research for this

paper own the rights to the transcriptions of the interviews, which can only be used for this and other related projects.

Literature Review

Dennis Kennedy argues that 'he [Shakespeare] regularly crosses national and linguistic boundaries with apparent ease'; (Kennedy, 1993). However, he questions his own argument by posing a question: "Does he cross into Poland or China as the same dramatist who is played in Stratford?" Kennedy (1993) further argues by replying to his question that when Shakespeare does cross into China or Poland, all his settings for the plays and characters transform into the respective countries. Similarly, the researchers argue and demonstrate the potential of the plays of Shakespeare, in this case, *The Winter's Tale* as *Fasana-e-Ajaaib*. The understanding and interpretation of the play, *The Winter's Tale*, is not Western anymore; however, keeping the spirit of the play intact, *Fasana-e-Ajaaib* starts to represent Pakistan and Pakistani culture. The problems and issues in *The Winter's Tale* become Pakistani nuisances and it begins to speak of the relative Pakistani contemporary problems. Furthermore, these problems and their related consequences are looked into and understood from a Pakistani perspective. The perspective changes, but the spirit of the play continues to amuse, inspire, and affect the readers and audience alike.

The dramatic structure of Shakespeare's plays, as well as the familiar real-life content in subsequent adaptations, present a familiar yet striking image to the audience. The audience and provides the right platform to address the issue at hand and reach a wider range of audiences. Therefore, through the medium of film and adaptations, various respective problems and issues are highlighted and addressed, which otherwise are either unsafe or controversial. Thus, these adaptations provide a safe way to criticise as well as reach a wider audience. By taking the example of the play *Hamlet*, Jon Kott argues that 'many generations have seen their own reflection in this [*Hamlet*] play.' This is true for the other plays by Shakespeare too. As a result, we see a significant increase in the adaptations of the plays of Shakespeare. Having said that, many critics may disagree on the authenticity of the spirit of the translated and adapted works of the play. However, according to Kott, "What matters is that through Shakespeare's text we ought to get at our modern experience, anxiety, and sensibility." By doing so, the plays—through their language and dramaturgical construction—allow the readers, adapters, and researchers to reread and retell the stories of Shakespeare through their modern relative experience; thus, they voice their own respective modern world's anxieties and sensibilities. Muazzam Sharif (2017) demonstrates the potential of *Hamlet* to fight *badal/vengeance* in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan; thus determining the play as an educational tool for social reformation. He highlights the use of drama for the purposes of education and social reformation.

Gregory Thompson, in collaboration with the National Academy of Performing Arts (NAPA) Pakistan, adapted *The Winter's Tale* as *Fasana-e-Ajaaib*. Translated into and performed in Urdu, *Fasana-e-Ajaaib* is set in the Moghul era of 1624. Similar to the time-space-shift from Sicily to Bohemia of 16 years in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* Act 3, in *Fasana-e-Ajaaib* the time-space shifts from the Moghul era of 1624 to modern-day Pakistan of 2014 (Thompson, 2021). This adaptation addresses the deep-rooted and grave issue of

honour killing in Pakistan. In addition, it also supports and promotes the practise of performing arts and theatre in the country and further plays a pivotal role in diminishing the taboos attached to them.

Referring to the change in the government, the armed guards and guns on the street, and the lack of availability of power supply and street lights, Gregory Thompson drew parallels between the Elizabethan Age and times and the modern-day Pakistan of 2014. It is this comparison and the familiar content that attracts the reader, audience, and researchers alike to the serious nuisance of honour killing. In *The Winter's Tale*, on mere suspicion of a love affair between his wife and friend Polixenes, Leontes orders Camillo to kill the latter and put the former into prison, which ultimately leads to her death. This false accusation of adultery and infidelity, and the resulting punishments of death or harm, is nothing new to a Pakistani reader or audience. Pakistani society has numerous honour killing incidents. To consider an example, in the year 2000 alone, 'nearly 1000 women were killed in Pakistan [mostly in Sindh and Punjab] out of a total world figure of 5000 honour killings' (Rabia Ali, 2001).

In an interview, Gregory Thompson expressed that the honour killing case of Farzana Parveen in May 2014 moved and triggered him to launch a project to address the issue through film media. Farzana Parveen, aged 30, was beaten to death outside Lahore High Court by her family members and relatives for the very reason that she chose to marry a man of her own choice. She was murdered in the name of honor (Gregory Thompson, 2020).

Discussion and Analysis

The Winter's Tale and *Fasana-e-Ajaib* have a lot to offer the Pakistani audience. A Pakistani audience can easily refer to and learn from the play and its adaptations. Pakistani socio-cultural background, the play and its adaptation are easily understandable and relatable. It does not require rocket science for the Pakistani audience to infer from the texts and relate. It is mainly because the parallels are remarkable and the references made are familiar. Parallels between the *Winter's Tale* and *Fasana-e-Ajaib* are numerous. Even in allegorical references, there are parallels. Before getting into the details of the analysis, an example is given to show how the argument is made.

When Cleomenes expresses his thoughts over the grief of Leontes, he sighs!

“Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd
A saint-like sorrow: no fault could you make
Which you have not redeem'd; indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass: at the last,
Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil;
With them forgive yourself” (Act V, scene 1).

The counter part of it is that ‘Sir Buhut hogaya. Aap ne malika ke yaad main Hazrat Yaqoob (peace be upon him) ke tarah aanso bahai hain’, which literally translates into: Enough is enough! You have shed tears like the Prophet Hazrat Yaqoob (peace be upon him) in the grief and memory of the queen. Reference is made to the Prophet's grief for son, Prophet Hazrat Yousaf (peace be upon him).

Fasana-e-Ajaib and the 21 Century Pakistan

There was this possibility to come to Pakistan and to do a Shakespeare show; and so I came over to Karachi and met the actors at NAPA. And obviously, people wanted a Shakespeare comedy. That was the request from the National Academy of Performing Arts. It should be a Shakespeare comedy ... I can't remember the exact dates, but ... Farzana Praveen was murdered (Gregory Thompson, 2020).

There are various obvious choices about the selection of the play; however, *The Winter's Tale* was selected. The very reason for the selection of this play was that it has close resemblance with the Pakistani society –even the problems, especially of honour-based killings, are in common.

Fasana-e-Ajaib and Pakistani Contemporary Problems

Honour Killing

Honour and revenge are interchangeable in Pakistan, because honour (disgrace to honour) calls for revenge. It is considered obligatory to exact revenge on the offender or so-called offender. In the year 2000, "nearly 1,000 women were killed in Pakistan [mostly in Sindh and Punjab] out of a total world figure of 5000 honour killings." The Interior Ministry disclosed in the National Assembly [of Pakistan] on Thursday that during the last three years of the Musharraf regime, over 4,000 women were murdered all over Pakistan, including 1,019 in the name of honour [...] The Interior Ministry also confirmed that 1,000 women were killed in the name of honour during 2005-07, which gives an insight into the alarming rise in the trend of killing women in that archaic tradition (Violence is Not Our Culture, 2016). Apart from other reasons, it is mainly carried out to earn back the honour and avoid social shame. Physical relations outside marriage, particularly for women, are deemed as dishonour for the family and call for revenge/honour killing. For the family, it wrongly becomes the 'self-authorized justification to kill her' (Sujay Patel & Amin Muhamamd Gadit, 2008).

As discussed earlier, in his closing remarks of the London screening of *Fasana-e-Ajaib*, Gregory Thompson explicitly mentions that the honour killing of Farzana Parveen in 2014 triggered this project of the appropriation and adaptation of *The Winter's Tale* into *Fasana-e-Ajaib*. It is obvious from the remark and from the adaptation that it deals with the issue of honour killing. In the play, the jealous King Leontes wrongly accuses his wife Hermione of adultery and infidelity with his best friend. The subsequent imprisonment and humiliation led to her death. Her daughter with Leontes is banished and exiled. This storyline in itself is self-sufficient to draw the attention of the Pakistani audience, readers and researchers alike. The number of honour killings that take place in Pakistan is significant, and *Fasana-e-Ajaib* exactly relates to the real life issue in Pakistan.

Victims of honour killing suffer the same fate as Hermione. And those who have survived also live a miserable life, just like the life of the first sixteen years of banishment of Perdita (Hermione's daughter). Honour, shame, and societal pressure prevent the victims from speaking up, let alone knocking at the door of the courts. In terms of honour killing, Pakistani law is fundamentally flawed. It might well be another topic for research to probe into the exact law pertaining to the subject at hand. However, what is pertinent is that the law is faulty, as

evident from the following event. Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, an advocate for the victim, has written about it. Chinoy represented the entire case and depicted the lack of law in the said matter through an Oscar-winning documentary/short film on Saba Qaiser, an honour killing case survivor. The film was screened in the house of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif. Following the viewing of the film, the prime minister directed the formation of a committee to investigate the matter and amend the law in order to provide justice. Chinoy described this in her speech at the Oscars and claimed that this "is the power of film" (Oscar Awards 2016). In a similar line of argument, this is the power of Fasana-e-Ajaib.

Target Killing

In a similar line of argument, target killing in Pakistan, especially in Karachi, is another pressing issue that Fasana-e-Ajaib addresses. One such instance from the adaptation is a task given to Camillo, that is, to kill Polixenes. In one of the scenes, Camillo reveals this plan of killing Leontes and informs him that *muje aap ke qatal per mamor kia gia hay*, which literally translates into 'I have been given/assigned the task to kill you'. The use of the word *mamor* (literally meaning assigned to) explicitly suggests the meaning of target killing. The issue of target killing in Pakistan, especially in Karachi, is so common that the English phrase "target killing" is used in the Urdu language for it too. These target killings are both political and non-political. Even religious factions and individual citizens are not safe from it. As per the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in the year 2014, a total of 568 politically affiliated target killings took place. In addition to this, 107 non-political target killings took place in the city of Karachi alone. However, this figure fell by more than half in 2015, but target killing continued. As per the report, in May 2015, 45 members of the Ismaili community were targeted and killed.

Considering these recent real-life target killings, Fasana-e-Ajaib and others are effective mediums for addressing the issue at hand. Apart from the other relevant bodies, this medium becomes a strong channel to raise awareness among the crowds/audience and voice the otherwise unvoiced. *Muje aap ke qatal pa mamor kia gay hay*, maybe a one-liner, but it is so pregnant with actual meaning. Fasana-e-Ajaib presents numerous such instances throughout.

In similar line of argument, *Aap ne ek badshah ko zeher dene ka kam aik sharif un nafs insaan le supard ker ke os ke ezat ko bhe daghdar kia* (You have tainted Camillio's honour by asking him to poison the king) and *main un ke ezat koi ilzaam nahe dounga* (I will not taint/pollute his reputation) are just two examples of target killing and political and character assassination.

Political Associations/Slogans

As demonstrated in the previous paragraph, one-liners in Fasana-e-Ajaib play a remarkable role and draw the attention of the Pakistani audience because they are loaded with hidden yet obvious ideas. The parallels may not be explicit, but they are obvious. The trickster in Fasana-e-Ajaib, for instance, uses two words while he is showing his skills on the stage. First he uses the word "tsunami" and, second, "tabdeeli agai hay." He uses the word "tsunami" when he sees the crowd of people who have gathered for a political procession. A Pakistani citizen watching, hearing or seeing them would immediately recall and associate them with the Pakistani prime

minister and chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf party, Imran Khan. This word is used by him, for him, and against him. He uses the word in a sense of sweeping the corruption out of the system. Also, it is used against him by his rival counterparts, suggesting that his policies and long marches have swept away the democratic rights of all. Similarly, the second phrase, Tabdeeli agai hay (Change has come/Change has occurred) is used against him too, in a similar fashion as the previous word. It is made synonymous with the meaning of change for the better and change for the worse, respectively. This catch phrase is very popular in Pakistan and in Pakistani communities outside Pakistan.

Similarly, references are made to the character Autoclycus, especially in Act 4, Scene 3 of the play. Autoclycus reflects upon his own self-praising that he has earned by tricking and cheating simple people. My father named me Autolycus, who being, as I am, littered under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up of unconsidered trifles. With die and drab, I purchased this caparison, and my revenue is the "silly cheat". Although the focus of this study is not on the political interpretation of the text in question, every now and then remarks are made to statements passed by Pakistani politicians against each other for political gains or benefits. The focus here is on the fact that the play and various characters and scenes reflect upon the local society and how they address certain issues pertaining to Pakistani society.

Conclusion

A Theatre brings revolution, to put it into the words of the Director, Gregory Thompson. It is the play adaptation and appropriation of plays like *The Winter's Tale* into *Fasana-e-Ajaib* that certainly helps the cause. This study positively asserts that theatre, in this case, the adaptation of *The Winter's Tale*, certainly helps in addressing the contemporary real-life problems of Pakistani society, whether it is honour killing or target killing, and/or problems related to political associations. Thus, it is concluded that there are parallels between *The Winter's Tale* and *Fasana-e-Ajaib* and that the latter has the potential to address contemporary Pakistani problems. For these various reasons, the play *The Winter's Tale* and its subsequent adaptation may be used as an educational tool to combat the subject at hand.

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