



VIDHYAYANA

ISSN 2454-8596

www.vidhyayanaejournal.org

An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SHAKESPEAR'S *OTHELLO* AND YAGNIK'S *USMAN*

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ABSTRACT

Othello is marked to be a typical Shakespearean tragedy, with the focus on the tragic hero *Othello*, arousing the emotions of pity and fear. Though the main source for *Grahan* is Shakespeare's *Othello*, but the method of giving treatment has changed. *Othello* on one hand is a true Elizabethan tragic hero, follows all the rules and terms whereas *Usman* has some contrasts. *Othello* has been shown married to *Desdemona* in the very opening of the play, and *Usman* is yet to marry *Mona* in *Grahan*. *Othello* is a valiant and brave General of the Venetian fleet and *Usman* is the political leader of youth. Both the protagonists are facing racial issues, caste conflicts and also considerable age gap from their ladylove. *Grahan* in this sense becomes a very apt adaptation of *Othello*. The character of *Motabhai* has also been glorified and is given a higher stature. The fact cannot be denied that though both works share similarities as well as contrasts, also stand for their individuality. None of the either work becomes a shadow of another.



KEYWORDS: Treatment, Individuality, Adaptation, Similarities, Contrasts

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SHAKESPEAR'S *OTHELLO* AND YAGNIK'S *USMAN*

Introduction:

Shakespeare's "*Othello*" is one of the four popular tragedies performed and screened across the boundaries of world. As quoted by Dr. Avadhesh Kumar Singh, *he is beyond desh (geography), kaal (time), and kul (class)*. Just like many of his plays being adapted, translated, experimented, explored and exploited the maximum, one such successful gujarati adaptation is *Grahan*, penned by Bharat Yagnik.

Grahan is an influenced work of Shakespeare but though it retains its individuality and personal style. The protagonist/hero of Shakespeare is a perfect example of blending of love and jealousy, and Yagnik's hero, *Usman* also makes himself an instrument to artificially induced jealousy, which leads to the ultimate doom of tragic end.

The Comparative Analysis:

Othello in one sense of the world, by far is the most romantic figure among Shakespeare's heroes, and he is so partly from the strange life of war and adventure which he has lived from childhood. In appearance, in behaviour and in almost all human attributes, he stands far apart from the rest of the world around him. *Othello* is introduced as the



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General of the Venetian forces and Shakespeare does not enlighten us as to when and how he came to be appointed as the general. However, we learn of his background from his own mouth:

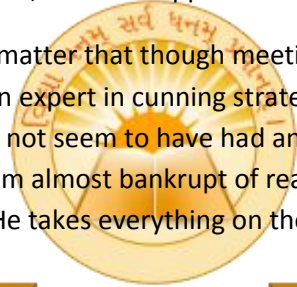
"I fetch my life and being from men of royal siege"

Yagnik has portrayed Usman in the same colour of Othello, but with difference in shades. The hero of Graham is not an army general, nor does hail from war background. He does not belong to a royal lineage but is shown as an aspiring politician. Usman, a *Siddi Goma* (African origin) is appointed as the head of their political party by his godfather Motabhai (duke). Though he does not share any blood relation with Motabhai but he is the dearest to him.

The one peculiarity to be noted here is that in Graham character of Motabhai has been glorified, adding to the circumstances under which reversal of fate takes place. In former, character of Duke is hardly found in one scene, which makes his scope limited. But here, due to the experimentation done by Yagnik, it could be felt that apart from Usman, Motabhai also plays an equivalent role of importance.

The manner in which he passes on comment, the dialogues uttered by him and the part played by him in Usman's and Mona's life gives an indication that sometimes he is of equal stature to Usman. But as his role is made scene and time bound, the feeling gets suppressed later on, and he reappears only at the end of the play.

The paradox with Othello however lies in the matter that though meeting with all adventures, with strange people and narrow escapes, should have made him an expert in cunning strategies, and as we see him holding highest position in the army, his past experience does not seem to have had any effect on his mind, in fact his struggle for survival against all odds in life has rendered him almost bankrupt of reason and common sense. He cannot distinguish between appearance and reality. He takes everything on the face value, which becomes the cause of his tragedy.



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Usman on the other hand also has the similar traits. Though his being a politician, and upon that Ibrahim (Iago) being his brother and one who has stayed with him right from childhood, then too Usman fails to understand his intrigue play. It can be called a failure on his part, as a politician, a social person like him is very much expected to be having knowledge about the human psychology and underneath happenings of human mind. On the contrary, he is made a tool for revenge by Ibrahim for his self-satisfaction. Both Othello and Usman have never learnt to probe into human motives or to seek for inner truth.

Othello is a moor and is believed to be barbaric in his manners, though he is not. He is double the age of Desdemona. Due to these things, Brabantio denies upon accepting Desdemona's marriage and Othello as his lawful son-in-law. He somewhere suspects that there is still Moorish savage and passion burning inside Othello, under the cold Christian blood which can anytime blast like lava of emotions.

Usman too shares considerable age gap from Mona, and he also faces racial issues. In the very beginning of the act, Motabhai indirectly makes the point clear that the insect of suspicion had carved Usman from his inner soul. But one interesting cultural change brought upon at this juncture of time by Yagnik is that, he tries to establish a connection between human psychology and nature. Babubhai (Brabantio), along with many other reasons for Mona not to marry Usman, gives one more reason that he cannot marry her as cosmic influences of moon were averse on his life. Shakespeare also suggested this matter in *Othello* when he who after smothering the soul of his joy blames the moon



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for his human madness:

"It is the very error of the moon,

She comes more nearer earth than she was wont

And makes men mad."

This also gives a nomenclatural establishment with the very title itself that is Grahan which mean eclipse. The Grahan here only affects the life of Usman and Mona, and shatters their world into pieces. The eclipse is of suspicion in the hero's mind sown by the villain. Along with his suspicious nature, it is also the supernatural element of eclipse that causes the tragedy.

The most evident reversal turn into both Othello's and Usman's order of fate lies in the fact that the former was married to Desdemona, whereas the latter was yet to marry Mona, respectively. Yagnik tries to make 21st century *Othello* digestible, but a question always arises in the minds of reader, if a girl who loves a boy can really stay at his house even before marriage? The answer to this question may vary in accordance with personal thinking, but there are other instances too where Usman is shown of modern generation. With the ample use/misuse of technology, the web of misunderstanding is created between Mona and Usman.

Othello kills Desdemona because of his abstract sense of righteousness, purity and loyalty is outraged. This is not to say that Othello doesn't feel some natural jealousy of a husband of a guilty wife. The remarks of Dr Brandes on this point are illuminating. He says-

'This is not a representation of spontaneous but artificially induced jealousy, in other words, of credulity poisoned by malignity.'

Hence, the readers get the message that the credulous fools are caught, and many worthy and chaste dames, even all guiltless, meet approach. Indeed, Othello loved Desdemona too well. His love for her was warm and sincere. We see that Othello is perfectly right in affirming in his self-analysis that he, loved not wisely, but too well". Because, in the first place his lack of wisdom lay in his choice of a wife. Being a foreign adventurer and a moor, and a man of idle age, he should not have chosen of a Venetian Magnifico. A critic commented on this match, "We see before us a perfect womanhood in the most graceful shape, and perfect manhood in a form most repulsive, and it is as if day and night came together, the two cannot unite."

Usman also somewhere lacks in his decision making, and it is seen in the play when he choses to elope with Mona, and makes her stay with him at his house, which shows he is yet immature. Othello is not immature, but on contrary very much responsible. As the chief army general of the fleet, he commands great respect and admiration. The fact that he immediately agrees to lead the Venetian fleet against the Turks within hours of his marriage shows that he is more loyal to his employers and finds more delight in battle than the emotional urge to satisfy his physical appetite. Without a moment's hesitation and with no sense of regret to leave his newly married wife, he rushes to his charge.

Yet another feature which goes parallel in both is their nature of one piece. The trust, where they trust is absolute. Hesitation is almost impossible to both. In case of Othello, he is extremely self-reliant and decides and acts instantaneously. He puts his entire confidence in the honesty of Iago who has not only been his companion in arms,



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but, as he believes, has just proved his faithfulness in the matter of marriage. But unfortunately, the confidence is misplaced. Usman too trusts Ibrahim, and considering him as his brother and well-wisher, one who had always stayed by his side in all ups and downs of life, he believed on the story roasted by him. But there was a scope for him to double check his trustability as he somewhere knew that intellectually he was far sounder than Ibrahim. The obvious reasons can be that on one side Iago was educated, but Ibrahim was uneducated, upon which Usman could have twice thought upon.

Conclusion:

Thus, Othello makes on us the impression that he is a great man with a noble soul, thrust by fate into the clutches of a devil and succumbing to his machinations because of the his noble virtues. Iago works successfully on Othello not because he was a credulous fool, or a person over-jealous by temperament, but because he was an idealist, great and noble in his mind and spirit, but a misfit in the world of a scheming villainy.

Usman also marks a trace of individuality, though he is an version of Othello. Due to the changes in the social, cultural and situational contextual references of his character, he blossoms upon the plant that is sown by Yagnik. Usman is shown to be under the ecliptic shadow of nature, which imparts a new reason and shape to his tragic ending, which differs from that of Othello. But the fact cannot be denied that towards the end, both die out of guilt and the self-realization of the error that they have committed by smothering their faithful beloved's respectively. Usman thus doesn't become a mere caricature of Othello, but has his individual existence.



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