

# Decolonising Shakespeare in the Age of Social Media

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**Abstract**—In this chapter, the different writings of Shakespeare have, in the recent years, been decolonised concerning social media. We would discuss the change that digitalisation has brought to the present meaning of the cultural setup. In this you will know about the common themes about trust, identity, and betrayal between present times and Shakespearean plays. It goes a step further to look into innovative digital productions in challenging Eurocentric interpretations that open up the works of Shakespeare to varied audiences. The themes tapped into in this chapter include race, identity, and power relations.

This chapter shall also explore the possibility of social media as a transformative tool in the decolonisation of writings about Shakespeare through this chapter. Thus, it is bound to assist readers engage in certain versions of interpretation contributing toward the changing context of culture around his works. Finally, in this chapter, we will talk about the relevance of Shakespearean plays to a multiculturalist world by endorsing diversity and a better understanding of his heritage and persona in line with contemporary identities and experiences.

**Index Terms**—Decolonisation, Shakespeare, Social Media, Adaptation, Identity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The works of William Shakespeare are considered to be classics, but colonial overtones sully their historical importance, and non-Western views frequently are relegated to the outer periphery. Thanks to social media over the past decade, Shakespeare's works may be approached from an even more broad perspective owing to the countless newer avenues for interpretation and discussion opened up by them.

This chapter talks about how digital culture decolonises Shakespearean literature by bringing voices from all walks of life together to speak to the great issues of race, identity, and power.

Decolonisation in this sense means both the elimination of colonial influences and the reworking of cultural narratives to accommodate a variety of perspectives. Thus, here we are going to study different ways in which social media can be a transformational tool for interacting with Shakespeare's works. And we will also talk about a number of adaptations and critical reactions that speak to current social concerns.

Therefore, with works like *Othello*, *The Tempest*, and *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare's writing reflects and validates many of the complex power relations of his time. Over the centuries, these works came to form the basis of the Western canon and were disseminated throughout the world, often in the context of a coloniser's rule, as superior rule.

In this sense, Shakespeare's works represent some kind of

epitome of Eurocentrism, and in most cases, they have portrayed a worldview that supports the white race as superior, full of culture, and with strict social stratifications.

For instance, in *The Tempest*, where Caliban is subjugated and even denatured, the text has been interpreted many times as a metaphor for the entire phenomenon of colonialism itself (Loomba, 2002).

## What is Decolonisation?

Before knowing anything else one should know what decolonisation means, if one really wants to understand this chapter. Decolonisation in simple words is a process of challenging and breaking the colonial ideologies, narratives and thought structures in the literary texts and the rules of the old society.

Thus, decolonisation also covers a broad spectrum of the cultural, social, and political ideologies in the society which have been reclaimed and have changed. It also talks about the histories that were somewhere suppressed and changed by some or the other colonial powers.

Thus, here we will talk about how Shakespearean plays that were written decades ago are still being decolonised by the readers in terms of its meaning and interpretation. In this these plays will be reinterpreted as per how people understand it today and how they speak up about them on different social media platforms where they have freedom to speak what they understand or interpret.

## Impact of Social Media on the Cultural Interpretation of Various Texts

With time the usage of social media has increased which has eventually given them a platform to interpret older texts like that of William Shakespeare. Social media has impacted the overall thought process of people around the world and has opened up new doors for people to interact with each other and a platform for discussions across borders.

This helps everyone to understand what one makes out of historical texts and helps them to think more creatively about certain works. This has opened up new possibilities for the readers to interact and interpret literature.

While the digital age transforms access to literary works and makes it possible for different interpretations, these social networking sites of Twitter, TikTok, and YouTube have become essential spaces for asking questions and challenging such colonial narratives.

Using the decolonisation movement as the medium, younger generations use Shakespeare to critique and reshape perceptions of identity, race, and power. Digital platforms provide the platform for non-Europeans to enter into discussions that are inclusive of those non-European perspectives and thus effectively decolonising Shakespeare for a new audience.

Social media has become an ideal decentralised and highly

interactive space in which users can freely express their thoughts on cultural and literary matters free from the shackles that would be placed upon them in academia or even within the traditional confines of theatre. Thus, by using social media applications like TikTok and Twitter, people around the globe create and participate in reinterpretations of Shakespeare as ways of being inclusive and equitable.

For instance, a recent #ShakespeareSoWhite trend on Twitter brought attention to the casting of mostly white actors into Shakespearean roles and provoked debate over the question of whether Shakespeare is ever really "universal" when performed in a racially homogeneous framework.

TikTok appears to be a special space where different understandings of Shakespeare thrive. Short videos by creators using humour and cultural references when coming up with the version of reimagining characters, be it Othello or Juliet, create a blend of critique and performance that resonates well with contemporary audiences.

The creators develop these scenes within known settings that are common like corporate settings or high schools, bringing dimensions to the considerations of race, power, and identity that Shakespeare was aiming at such a long time ago. This format makes Shakespeare accessible and engaging for people who are typically engaged with his work, challenging them to critique those works within their own cultural contexts.

#### **Common Themes in Shakespearean Plays**

Shakespearean plays are long known for its themes like trust, identity, and betrayal which are quite relatable in these modern times with social media at hand. People these days face the same problems in their real life and that is why they can connect in a better way with these old writings.

Trust and betrayal are central themes in his plays are now viewed through different dimensions in social media, it increase dialogue in an instant manner, but polarise issues, especially those pertaining to loyalty, truth, and deception, so well set by the information and misinformation multiplied in bits of data travelling very quickly. The lens that this particular reimagination provides enables audiences to connect the themes in plays like Julius Caesar to their own experiences with "cancel culture" and public betrayal.

On Instagram, influencers and activists also create posts that draw parallels between Shakespearean characters and current complex social identities. For instance, "The Merchant of Venice" is seen in relation to religious and cultural identity and, thus, the use of the character Shylock is used to reinterpret speaking about modern issues concerning marginalisation and rhetoric of prejudice through redressing most significant concerns with relevance or lack of it in Shakespeare's exploration of identity in the context of a society characterised as multifaceted and in a state of constant change.

Some of the common themes seen in his plays which are common till now are:

- **Trust Issues**

In Othello, misplaced trust leads to tragedy as Othello believes Iago's manipulations over his wife Desdemona's fidelity. Contemporary issues of trust as they relate to digital interactions especially in social media concerning misinformation also almost set out to mirror this particular aspect of the narrative.

People these days often find themselves questioning whom to trust online; just as Othello is tricked by Iago's façade, people today are tasked with navigating an environment characterised by curated personas that may not represent reality.

- **Identity Crisis**

The Merchant of Venice includes such characters as Portia, which defies the concept of gender and identity. Portia disguises herself in order to disguise a lawyer and save Antonio; it raises questions about the traditional roles and expectations of gender. And actually, in the real discourse concerning the issues with lack of proper gender representation in literature over time, Shakespearean characters come alive and serve as tools for the profound probing into complex identities beyond traditional notions of binaries.

- **Betrayal**

As in Julius Caesar, the betrayal depicted reflects what happens in modern times, at least in the political arena. In this play, Shakespeare evokes the play of loyalty vs. ambition for the kind of political landscapes that emerge. Indeed, nowadays, betrayal often spawns grave consequences. On seeing politicians betray their constituencies or allies for mere personal benefits, the audience feels the timelessness of this theme in Shakespearean plays.

#### **Challenging Eurocentrism Using Digital Productions**

One of the strongest weapons of social media is in supporting decolonisation that is diverse casting in Shakespearean productions. Recent digital adaptations into film have rethought Shakespeare's works through culturally diverse sensibilities. This is not to offend the traditional Eurocentric reading of this work but to open the subject up to different voices.

Traditionally, the performances consisted solely of white actors, understanding his characters from a Eurocentric sense of perspective. However, social media platforms have been cultivating and advertising works that consist of a diverse ethnic and racial makeup. It provides a place where challenging the concept of "default whiteness" becomes easy which is seen within Shakespearean writings.

Such reimagining is representing not just the diversity of colour, but on a much deeper level, they criticise directly how Eurocentric interpretations have historically 'wiped clean' other identities out of the performances of Shakespeare.

For example, an online production by the Globe Theatre has casted a Black actor for the lead role in this play of Othello. Indeed, the racial prejudice and isolation were powerful through the very striking realism brought to the character by the actor. This casting choice reframes the story in contemporary racial relations, but social media responses often carry personal reflections from Black audiences who hold strong emotional connections to the themes of the character.

With this adaptation, Othello does not only remain a monolithic figure but a multidimensional character, whereas his worth and identity are deemed from the very fact that he is a victim or a villain based solely on his race. This compels the audiences to shift their own perceptions based on this historical representation.

Similarly, casting iconic roles with diverse actors points toward the role of representation in the theatre while

deprivations of traditional white men's roles bring an end to old stories and open up new windows for interpretations.

Reimagining Shakespeare's works with variety in casting allows social media to make productions engage with some of the freshest themes related to race and inclusion that were less visible beforehand.

#### **The Future of Shakespeare in Decolonised, Digital Age**

Digital spaces, from being deserted places of mere performance, also become sites of pedagogy and thus bring teachers and students within the reach of the decolonised interpretation of Shakespeare.

Lectures and discussions on YouTube web pages criticise Eurocentric representations of Shakespeare, necessitating eclectic syllabi with voices ranging from the past to the present. Where possibly many students from different places are echoing about race, power, and identity perspective, and teachers can introduce them to interpretations of different literary texts.

This is also an age of perpetual change in social media, so one can potentially have a constant process for reshaping the canon. It is through this multi-vocal, multi temporal praxis that platforms like Twitter and Instagram have begun to wear away the walls conventionally concealing study of Shakespeare to unfurl the cultural material for reinterpretation in interest of a new public. Thus, the digital swing will tell how Shakespeare's heritage-now once static, confined as a pillar of "high culture"-has come alive and globally relevant dialogue formed by an increasingly diverse audience.

#### **Adaptations of Shakespearean Plays in Bollywood**

Bollywood has a history of adapting Shakespearean plays, many of which reinterpret the original narrative in order to translate it to Indian sensibilities. Here is an investigation of notable Bollywood adaptations of Shakespeare's plays, noting in what ways each film resembles the original text and what unique interpretations they convey.

##### **• Maqbool a 2003 Movie is based on Macbeth**

Elements of ambition, murder, and guilt are what make the film Maqbool similar to the plot Macbeth. Maqbool played by Irrfan Khan is the protagonist, a loyal henchman in Mumbai's underworld who is influenced by his lover Nimmi (Tabu) much the same as Lady Macbeth influences Macbeth.

The critical characters such as Jahangir Khan-Duncan, Langda Tyagi-Iago remain intact to near similarity as done with their Shakespearean counterparts and these elements of betrayal and moral decay follow the essence of what is delineated in Macbeth. The plot explores how ambition is a corrupting influence in the characters, just as in the original play.

Set against the backdrop of organised crime in Mumbai, Maqbool contextualises the themes of ambition and power within this realm, which are capable of leading toward moral degradation. This adaptation also places much emphasis on gender dynamics; Nimmi's character comes across as the epitome of traditional femininity but could also be seen as a manipulative force.

She is a far more complex character than Lady Macbeth, whose complete character remains that of a villain. Now, the film is placed in a contemporary Indian context, offering a response to the issues in society regarding power and ambition but keeps at its tragic core the substance of

Shakespeare's work.

##### **• Haider a 2014 Movie that is based on Hamlet**

Haider has kept in all the themes like revenge and madness and the family's betrayal. Haider (Shahid Kapoor) aims to avenge his father's killing by his uncle, which is almost a similar case as that of Hamlet with Claudius.

The characteristics for Gertrude and Ophelia are retained by Tabu for Ghazala and Shraddha Kapoor for Arshia, respectively, but they fit well into the Kashmiri background. The existential angst of Hamlet can be easily witnessed through an individual vendetta like that taken up by Haider against political corruption.

Set against the political turmoil of Kashmir, the film takes Haider's quest for revenge as a way to address some broader societal concerns like conflict and identity crisis. And yet, not only is the movie convincing in its portrayal and psychology but, at the same time, the way Haider lost his wits was rather like Hamlet's struggles but this time from the perspective of Kashmir's socio-political scenario, thus watering the emotional depth in the story. It brings about a certain measure of justice to Shakespeare's original themes but very much comes alive as a telling commentary on contemporary issues that face Kashmir today.

##### **Ishaqzaade a 2012 movie is based on Romeo and Juliet**

In Uttar Pradesh, Ishaqzaade centres two lovers from political families in a rivalry that represents the core topic of familial conflicts that runs throughout Romeo and Juliet. They pursue a passionate romance that breaks down under social pressure and ultimately ends in death as a result of ingrained family rivalry.

It is set against the backdrop of contemporary India while retaining some of the salient elements of Shakespeare's original work. Despite addressing today's most urgent issues—caste discrimination and honour killings, which are prevalent in India—this movie keeps the melodrama of misplaced love at its core.

In contrast to earlier adaptations, which commonly focus on romance alone, Ishaqzaade delves into some deeper societal issues that today's youngsters face, particularly the issue of outside factors influencing personal decisions. As these are presently imbibed in the fabric of this adaptation, it resonates well with the people who are familiar with the Shakespearean tragedy and with growing social realities of today.

These adaptations tell us that the filmmakers have retold Shakespearean stories without being too ostentatious in using the same cultural framework of India. Maintaining fundamental questions such as love, betrayal, ambition, and revenge, the movie critiques today's social issue and thus makes it relevant for contemporary audiences. Each of them has a unique interpretation that stays true to the local context and this legacy created by Shakespeare in terms of storytelling.

## **II. CHALLENGES OF DECOLONISATION**

Despite all the growing interest pertaining towards the efforts made to decolonise literature curricula, however, the resistance continues to be prevalent among educational institutions themselves! Many traditionalists resist changing established canons because of concerns about the intensive academic rigor or preservation of literary heritage (Loomba).

All such resistances defeat the very attempts toward inclusiveness because they perpetuate the Eurocentric narratives at the expense of diverse voices being heard!

Yet another challenge finds its nesting within the myths regarding what "decolonisation" actually refers to. One could see it as merely diversifying authors instead of critically engaging the existing body of literature in a new framework, and thus it could only serve to water down the serious discussions of power dynamics as it does not sufficiently address the entrenchment of systemic inequality embedded throughout these literary traditions.

### III. CONCLUSION

As we enter an increasingly more intertwined world in which we live today it is essential to reconsider many of the heritages left behind for our consideration by none other than the likes of William Shakespeare himself through a view designed to consider only decolonisation.

Social media with Shakespearean texts permit opportunities for deeper engagement with the themes the works hold relevant today. Promoting inclusiveness with the encouragement of varied interpretation generates an added understanding not just as to works of Shakespeare but also in cultural contexts that begin to come together.

It is by focusing on this multiplicity of voices that coexist in readings with Shakespeare. That continued explorations of plays through modern frameworks pave a way towards a more appreciative reflection about the world, where every voice can bear potential contributions toward the on-going narration concerning one's history of the greatest playwrights.

This transformative power of social media has enabled the marginalised voices and Eurocentric interpretations, themes of race, identity, and power to battle for the page. It promotes a multiplicity of opinion in decontextualising Shakespeare's work toward modern, multicultural experiences. These reinterpretations of his works continue to evolve toward inclusivity while further advancing the interpretation of his plays in ways resonating with a globalised digital audience.

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