

V . K Prakash's Karmayogi as an Adaptation of Hamlet

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Abstract

V. K Prakash emerged as one of the significant directors of the Malayalam film industry. His film Karmayogi is an adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet . His love for theatre and his School of Drama background were the reasons why V K P decided to adapt Hamlet. Karmayogi tells the story of Rudran Gurukkal the lone male descendant of Chathothu family. Rudran is haunted by strange kind of destiny. The present research analyses the film Karmayogi with respect to the play Hamlet in cultural , thematic and story aspects.

Introduction

Karmayogi is an enchanting adaptation of Shakespeare's radical revenge tragedy Hamlet which is set in the feudal times. This Malayalam adaptation interweaves the culture and ritual of our ancient land and its narration glorifies traditions and rituals of medieval Kerala. Creative Land Pictures has collaborated with V.K Prakash to throw open doors of Kerala culture to the engulfing universe of Shakespeare's imagination.

V. K Prakash is an Indian director who has worked on films, music, videos and commercials. He has worked on Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi films. He studied in the school of drama , before commencing his career in the film industry. V.K Prakash's first film "Punaradhivasam" received the National Film Award for best feature film in Malayalam, Kerala State Film Award for Best Debut Director and Kerala State Film Award for Best Story.(Hooli)

Director has done justice to one of the most prominent works of Shakespeare by creating a detailed adaptation in harmony with creative liberty. One striking feature of the movie is "Kelipatram" which plays a crucial role in the plot of Karmayogi . Kelipatram is ritual based on an epic of Lord Shiva, where a man discards all comforts of life and visits houses to beg for a living . Only a person with passion and dedication can perform this ritual. Karmayogi incorporates this passion to follow one's tradition into narrative.

The film has all important characters and situations of Shakespeare's play though narrated in the backdrop of life and cultural setting of the Malabar region known for its centuries old martial art tradition Kalaripayattu hero worship and folk lore. Karmayogi has a huge star cast comprising Bollywood actress Padmini Kolhapuri, Nithya Menon, Saiju Kurup, Thalaivasal Vijay and Ashokandepicizing local versions of the original Shakespearean characters like Queen Gertrude, Claudius, Ophelia, Polonius and Horatio. While Belram Mattanoor penned the script the noted South Indian cinematographer R D Rajashekar has wielded the camera. Karmayogi explores the story through "Yogi Community" a section known for their martial art talents in North Kerala. In the film Rudran's father has become a Kelipatra and after his murder Rudran decides to follow in his father's footsteps as a Yogi. But he has to face many

hurdles on his path before fulfilling his goal of becoming a Kelipatra. Actor Indrajith plays the role of Rudran the embodiment of Prince Hamlet. The characters of both son and father RudranGurukkal are played by Indrajith. As the King Hamlet in Shakespeare's play, RudranValiagurukkal appears only in very few scenes in the Film especially in the dreams of Rudran the son.

Another prominent element of the movie is "Kalaripayattu" also known as Kalari, the well known martial art form practised extensively in Kerala, which contains 18 tricks of combat. This also is an integral part of Hamlet similar to Hamlet's raging clashes, Karmayogi has arresting fight sequences based on the knowledge of 'Yogisamudayam' the only clan of people, who mastered the 19th trick in Kalaripayatu. The scientific fact to the 19th trick is that of speed which causes on illusion of a change in form.

Poorakkali, another traditional dance ritual of Kerala, performed by the troop of young men plays a crucial role in the film parallel to the play "The Murder of Gonzago" in Hamlet . Performed during the nine day Pooram festival in Baghavathi temples across Northern Kerala, Poorakkali is meant to entertain as well as to spread knowledge decked in lion costumes the men dance around a huge multi tiered lamp also known as 'Nilavilakku' .The dance involves masculine movements, acrobat and martial art steps. The dancers keep rhythm by singing, clapping and synchronised foot thumping movements.

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In Karmayogi the cultural context Hamlet is recast into the life and ways of Kerala's Yogi community. Karmayogi set against the backdrop of Kelipatram a traditional art form popular among the Yogi clan of North Kerala. The film Karmayogi opens with a narration which explains the ritual art Kelipatra a symbolic form of begging to evoke the myth of Lord Shiva . When Rudran becomes a Kelipatra , he faces many hurdles on his path before fulfilling the goal of becoming a perfect Kelipatra. Rudran , following the elder members of his community decides to redeem their tradition , leaving behind wealth and the material possessions. (Shyamala)

Rudran begs at every doorsteps in Ekarajyam in the traditional costume of Kelipatra dressed in red, the whole body smeared with ashes and a bell in hand to inform the arrival of Kelipatra his journey begins . Kelipatras are not supposed to speak and their arrival is announced by the sound of the bell. Early morning he reaches the temple and takes bath in the river nearby wearing a turban, carrying a bowl and a stick in one hand and a bell on the other, Rudran reaches Kidathan's house, where he is mocked and ridiculed. Unmindful , Rudran continues to beg . Monnumani offers some rice to Kelipatra , who after facing four directions , makes three sounds and continues his journey to the next home . Kidathan , while complaining about Rudran's decision in becoming a Kelipatra , derives secret pleasure at Mankamma's discomfort though Mankamma asks Kidathan to send Monnumani to change Rudran's attitude he remains resolute . Only a person with passion and dedication can complete the ritual, Rudran's confused state of mind expresses doubts about the Ghost, nature and intention , claiming these reasons for inaction.

In Karmayogi there are certain events which are similar both in Hamlet and the film. Fortinbras attack of Denmark and Sahyan's unexpected attack are the most remarkable events. Though Fortinbras makes only two brief appearances in the latter half of the play, he is referred to throughout. Fortinbras has a serious case of father's

issues. His father Old Fortinbras former king of Norway made a bet with Old Hamlet and wound up losing his life and some important Norwegian territory in the process. Young Fortinbras naturally have to reclaim the land his father lost. But while Hamlet sets around contemplating life and death, Fortinbras take immediate action by raising an army to reclaim Norway's territories. And at the end, the royal court of Denmark has been copied out and then Prince Fortinbras claims the throne restoring order and continuity to the court. Similarly in the case of Sahyan in Karmayogi (Sreejith Ravi), who has a serious case of his father who had been killed by Rudran's father Valiya Rudran Gurukkal. Sahyan attacked Rudran with some fighting men. At the end of the film, Sahyan makes his second appearance, by that time Rudran decided to follow his father's path and becomes Kelipathram and hands over the land to Sahyan. In the play Hamlet's father's ghost appears to Hamlet, in the film Rudran's father appears to Rudran in his dreams. Hamlet's father's ghost appears to Hamlet telling the prince that he was murdered. Moreover he reveals that his own brother, Claudius was the murderer. The ghost demands vengeance, telling Hamlet not to plot against his mother whom he describes as merely weak and lustful, but to focus the whole of his revenge on Claudius. In Karmayogi Rudran Gurukkal appears to Rudran in his dreams and reveals that Bhairavan murdered him, Rudran wishes to have strong proof before revenge and thus he arranges Poorakkali by enacting the death of Rudran Gurukkal to catch the conscience of Bhairavan.. He seeks the help of Shankunni (Ashokan) to whom he has revealed about the appearance of Rudran Gurukkal in his dream to watch Bhairavan's feeling while Poorakkali is performed. Rudran invited Bhairavan and Mankkamma to see the performance to watch Bhairavan's face. When the murder was performed Bhairavan appears to be frightened and he orders to stop the Poorakkali before it end thus Bhairavan's guilt is revealed and the genuinity of the dream is confirmed in the film. In the play Prince Hamlet pretends to be insane or mad in order to thwart and baffle those who prevent him in his quest for revenge. Hamlet poses a viable threat to Claudius throne whether sane or insane and Hamlet's supposed inanity provides justification for determined action. But in the film, after the death of Valiya Rudran Gurukkal, Rudran wears black dress and after that when he appears to him in his dreams and reveals that he was murdered by Bhairavan, Rudran starts Kelipatra and wears red dress, who would beg aims without uttering a word. By following the path of his father he plans to take revenge on his father's death by killing his uncle. Similar to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in Hamlet Marmani acts according to Bhairavan's orders in Karmayogi. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are close friends of Hamlet they end up being traitors who agree to take Hamlet to his death. They do whatever Claudius asks them to do. In Karmayogi Marmani acts according to Bhairavan He serves as a messenger of Bhairavan. But later on his attitude towards Rudran changes and stands on his side. Killing of Ophelia's father is remarkable event in Hamlet. In the play Hamlet kills Ophelia's father Polonius. It was an accident a case of mistaken identity. In Gertrude's chamber, the Queen and Polonius wait for Hamlet's arrival and he hides in the room. Hamlet does not know who is behind the arras; he doesn't know he is killing Polonius. Polonius is Kidathan in Karmayogi and as the chief councilor of Bhairavan. In the film Kidathan falls to Bhairavan. But Bhairavan tells everyone that Rudran kills Kidathan.

At the end of the play Hamlet accepts Laertes's challenge to a duel. Hamlet is pricked with Laertes sword, which is laced with poison. They take a break and King urges Hamlet off as to why she died, he also lets Hamlet know he is dead man because of

the poisoned sword. Hamlet forces the king to drink from the poisoned cup so that he dies too. Then as Hamlet dies he forgives Laertes, all are poisoned in the climatic showdown, Mankamma (PadminiKolhapure) Bhairavan had killed her husband and she drinks the poisoned drink , Rudran escapes unscathed to wreak vengeance on Bhairavan and he kills Bhairavan on Rudrabhumi .Unlike in Hamlet, in KarmayogiRudran does not die .At last Rudran turns to be Kelipathram who would beg alms without uttering a word . Probably Rudran dies a symbolic death. Even though the culture varies, language varies; the basic structure is the same.

Conclusion

Hamlet is the most often produced play in the western literary canon and a fertile global source for film adaptation. Karmayogi is an adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet , with a storyline capable of seemingly endless retelling and the adaptation by others . The locale of Karmayogi is set in the feudal era , and is shot amidst the picturesque landscape of Kerala. The story revolves around tradition , relationships , wealth and combat . Unlike the original Hamlet , the play portrays the loss and turmoil in a man's life depicting heart wrenching emotions like jealousy ,suspicion, betrayal, hatred, vengeance and greed .

V. K Prakash has created Karmayogi as a revenge tale worthy of action movie label including a title which translates to The Sacrificer or The One Who Does Selfless Action. In this rousing Malayalam language adaptation of Hamlet , a Shakespearean homage at twist something is rotten in feudal South Indian state of Kerala. The royals are members of martial Yogi clan and masters of Kalaripayattu , the ancient martial art form reaptured for ancestor of Karate. Hamlet and King Hamlet here Rudran and RudranValiyaGurukkal (both played by Indrajith) are trained warrior rulers who , when realm is in danger also morph into avatars of their namesake avenging God . The parallel between hero and divine warrior is established at the outset , with the Opening credit set to a hymn in praise of Lord Shiva , the Hindu God of Destruction (also known as Rudran) literally !The Roarer, the traditional performance of the opening prayer here does double duty and homage which overtly sets up the film's theme of divine might and ritual sacrifice . This Shiva motif is foregrounded throughout Prakash's adaptation, Rudran is not only the God's name but also belongs to his bloodline . This explicit paralleling of hero and divine destroyer not only works to build viewer's expectations to an inevitably explosive conclusion, but also heightens the cultural translation of Hamlet as litrical super human.

The director and the Scenarist Balram Mattannor has mainly replanted the tragedy from Denmark, where it originally happened to a small area in northern Kerala, keeping the basic premise intact. Karmayogi simply isn't sure as to what it wants to turn out into ; simple decipherable adaptation of Hamlet or a multilayered period piece that conceals depths of meaning in it . That it becomes neither is its tragedy.

It starts of with Rudran realizing that his father has died and that his uncle Bhairavan is the assain. His mother Mankamma marries her husband's murderer in haste , and Rudran waits and waits to avenge his father's death. The Prince of Denmark in Shakespeare's play is the son of a local Chieftain in film ; Rudran is thus the son of Valiya Rudran Gurukkal of the Chathothu ancestral house , who used to be Kelipathram . Symbolizing Lord Shiva's tryst with silence and the penance , the Kelipathram would beg alms without uttering a word.

Claudius finds flesh and blood again in Bhairavan and springs to life yet again , and without doubt is one of the few characters who hasn't been lost in adaptation . The vileness is all in tact , and so is the shrewdness. Mankamma is more of a pale adaptation of Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark , the Freud's Oedipal suggestions would certainly not hold ground when it comes to Rudran and Mankamma . Here, she appears more of a passive woman . who even seems to share her son's bewilderment at times .

Moonnumani does show symptoms of having lost it as does Ophelia, and we aren't really sure as to how she meets her end . In the film , we watch her corpse being carried away and can only wonder if she had indeed climbed a willow tree and had fallen to her death. Polonius is Kidathan in Karmayogi and as the chief councilor of Bhairavan . he is as conning as ever. Laertes, his son has been transformed to Kanthan, though his fate in the film would be distinctly different from that of his adversary . Horatio becomes Shankunni , the man from nowhere , whose roots and origin we would never know.

Karmayogi would perhaps be pleased at vindicating Hamlet for the final deed that he is bound to commit and hence makes Kidathan fall prey to Bhairavan , instead of the Prince himself . And while Kanthan is indeed poisoned in the climatic showdown , Rudran escapes unscathed to wreak vengeance on Claudius.

The costumes in Karmayogi seem deliberately designed in stark contrast to the cultural references . This could be seen as an endeavour to set up a cross cultural bridge while adapting a foreign play that is decidedly eastern.

There are several striking features in the film which explores the Kerala tradition and culture like Kalaripayattu, Poorakkali, Kelipathram etc. Kalaripayattu is an integral part of the movie because it is similar to the Hamlet's raging clashes . Poorakkali the traditional dance ritual of Kerala ,performed by a troop of young men ,plays a crucial role in the film . Parallel to the play The Murder of Gonzago in Hamlet. The Kelipathra a crucial role in the plot of film, it is a ritual based on an epic of Lord Shiva where a man discards all comforts of life and visits houses to beg for a living Karmayogi incorporates that passion to follow one's tradition into narrative. The huge star cast of the movie is remarkable.

Indrajith in the title role does a decent job of playing the youngster constantly at the loss to come to decision . But Karmayogi is a film that has allowed the limelight to fall on Bhairavan more than Rudran himself , and Thalavasal Vijay's performance no doubt has considerably added to this impact. PadminiKolhapure and Nithya Menon come up with impressive feats as well.

Perhaps what makes Karmayogi half as effective as it should have been is the dreadfully slow pace at which events evolve . For the play that is celebrated for its critical junctures, this adaptation falls incredibly short of building on its timeless appeal. Even though the culture varies, language varies the basic theme and structure of the film is same as that of the play Hamlet.

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