

Othello to Omkara: Caste, Social and Political Hierarchy in Vishal Bhardwaj's Adaptation of Shakespeare

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Abstract: Shakespeare's *Othello* has inspired numerous adaptations across films, television, and theatre in various languages. This paper focuses on Vishal Bhardwaj's cinematic adaptation, *Omkara* (2006), which transposes the narrative from sixteenth-century Venice to contemporary rural Uttar Pradesh, India. Bhardwaj localizes the story through the use of the Khari Boli dialect, rustic landscapes, and culturally specific political and social structures, effectively replacing the racial dynamics of the original play with caste hierarchies and regional power politics. The film explores the interplay of caste, gender, and political influence, highlighting the social and political hierarchies that shape the characters' actions and fates. This study examines how Bhardwaj reinterprets Shakespeare's characters, motifs, and conflicts to reflect the Indian socio-political context while retaining the tragic essence of the original play.

Keywords: Othello, Omkara, Shakespeare, Bhardwaj, Caste, Adaptation

Adaptation involves reimagining and reshaping a source text within a new context or medium, whereas transformation implies a more profound change, often producing a work that can stand almost independently of its source (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 5). When novels are adapted for the screen, filmmakers must translate descriptive prose, internal monologues, and narrative exposition into visual storytelling. Scenes are condensed, inner thoughts rendered through dialogue, and narrative description conveyed through cinematic techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, editing, and camera movement. This distinction underscores why adaptation theory differentiates between "adaptation" and "transformation."

In contrast, plays—particularly those of Shakespeare—are written for performance. Their scripts are crafted for actors to bring to life through spoken word and action, making it tempting to

assume that adapting a play to film is more straightforward than adapting a novel. However, as Anderegg observes, simply transposing a play's dialogue into a cinematic medium does not constitute a true adaptation (30). Film privileges visual and sensory experience—what Aristotle calls “opsis”—over language, whereas theatre relies primarily on the spoken word. Consequently, adapting a play for film requires reimagining how the story is communicated visually, not just verbally.

This distinction helps explain why Shakespeare's works occupy a unique position in adaptation studies. His plays are highly versatile and have been reinterpreted in diverse forms and settings. Some filmmakers, aiming to avoid overly literal fidelity, obscure their Shakespearean sources entirely. A prominent example is Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), a celebrated adaptation of *Macbeth* that employs Japanese Noh theatre conventions and samurai imagery, yet retains the play's tragic essence. As Hutcheon argues, adaptation is an intertextual act: the new work is enriched by the original while simultaneously asserting its own creative identity (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 22).

Vishal Bhardwaj, influenced by Kurosawa, views Shakespeare's plays as deeply human and universal, allowing them to be transposed into any cultural or temporal context. In his adaptation of *Othello*, titled *Omkaara* (2006), Bhardwaj preserves the story's core while embedding it in contemporary rural Uttar Pradesh. He modernizes communication through devices such as mobile phones and television, exemplified in the scene where Omkara eavesdrops on Kesu and Dolly's conversation. The film also incorporates regional idioms and the Khari Boli dialect, anchoring the narrative in its local milieu. Bhardwaj emphasizes that this linguistic specificity lends the dialogue authenticity and “earthiness,” making words as potent as physical action or weaponry (Bhardwaj, Interview).

A striking example of cultural adaptation in Bhardwaj's *Omkaara* is his decision to replace Othello's handkerchief with a cummerbund, which Omkara gives to Dolly. In a scene rich with foreshadowing, Omkara places the cummerbund around Dolly's neck and instructs her to keep it safe, signaling its later significance as a symbol of betrayal and doom. This substitution demonstrates how

adaptation can transform symbols and motifs, imbuing them with culturally specific meanings that resonate within the Indian context. The cummerbund, an item familiar in North Indian attire, carries connotations of honor, status, and personal trust, which align with the film's exploration of social and political hierarchies.

Examining this example alongside adaptation theory clarifies the distinction between transferring a novel and adapting a play. Adapting a novel typically requires condensing extensive narrative and conveying internal states visually, while Shakespeare's plays, already designed for performance, invite reinterpretation through visual spectacle, dialogue, and embodied acting. Filmmakers such as Kurosawa and Bhardwaj do not simply translate the original text; they create new works that engage in a dynamic conversation with their sources, combining intertextual references with local invention. In *Omkara*, Bhardwaj subverts conventional Bollywood tropes, such as celebratory wedding sequences, replacing them with ominous signs and a sombre atmosphere that foreshadow the tragic trajectory of the characters. Through such choices, adaptation becomes a creative negotiation between fidelity and cultural resonance, where the narrative is reshaped to reflect contemporary social realities while retaining the core emotional and thematic stakes of the original work.

Understanding the adaptation further requires mapping Shakespeare's characters onto their Indian counterparts in *Omkara*. Set in the politically charged landscape of Uttar Pradesh, Bhardwaj's characters are meticulously reimaged to reflect regional dynamics and social structures. Omkara Shukla, also called Omi Bhaiya, embodies Othello as a half-caste political enforcer, or 'Bahubali,' whose strength and authority are both respected and feared. Dolly Mishra parallels Desdemona, as the privileged daughter of a prominent lawyer, whose innocence and loyalty are tested by the machinations surrounding her. Langda Tyagi, marked by a distinctive limp, mirrors Iago, serving as Omkara's trusted yet envious lieutenant whose manipulations drive the plot. Indu Tyagi, Omkara's sister, functions as Emilia, acting as both confidante to Dolly and witness to Langda's schemes. Kesu Firangi, the educated and charismatic newcomer whom Omkara favors, represents Cassio, while

Rajan Tiwari, a politically ambitious fixer and Langda's pawn, corresponds to Roderigo. Billo Chamanbahar, a bar singer and Kesu's romantic interest, aligns with Bianca, and Raghunath Mishra, Dolly's father and a respected legal figure, assumes the role of Brabantio, disapproving of Dolly's unconventional relationship with Omkara. By carefully mapping these characters, Bhardwaj preserves the narrative structure of *Othello* while embedding it in a culturally and politically specific setting, highlighting the ways adaptation can negotiate between textual fidelity and local resonance.

Language and Setting: Localizing the Narrative

Omkara unfolds in the heart of rural Uttar Pradesh, with its characters speaking in Khari Boli, a regional Hindi dialect. This linguistic choice not only anchors the film in its specific locale but also enhances the authenticity of its depiction of small-town power dynamics. The use of local dialects allows characters to convey social hierarchy, intimacy, and tension in ways that standard Hindi could not capture, making language itself a marker of identity and authority. Bhardwaj further embeds cultural specificity through the inclusion of regional terms and rituals that carry political and social significance. For instance, the term *Bahubali* refers to a powerful local figure, often associated with muscle, influence, and occasionally criminality; Omkara's rise to this status marks a key shift in political alliances. Similarly, being chosen as a candidate for the *Vidhan Sabha*, the legislative assembly of an Indian state, signals political legitimacy and public recognition. Rituals such as the *Tilak* ceremony, where a vermilion mark is applied to the forehead, formalize Omkara's new position and symbolize honor, blessing, and political succession, while the *Rudrabhishek*, a Hindu ritual worshipping Lord Shiva, underscores the religio-cultural backdrop against which power and authority are negotiated. Bhardwaj's attention to visual storytelling complements these linguistic and ritual markers: Dolly's evolution from structured, constrained silhouettes to more flowing and vulnerable attire mirrors her journey from protected privilege to exposed victimhood, highlighting how setting, language, and costume collectively reinforce the narrative's social and political hierarchies.

Social Themes: Caste, Gender, and Marginalization

Omkaara retains and transforms the core concerns of Shakespeare's *Othello*, replacing race with caste as the central locus of prejudice. Omkara Shukla, the titular 'half-caste' enforcer, is constantly reminded of his mixed heritage, and his insecurities are deftly exploited by Langda Tyagi, echoing Iago's manipulations in the original play. Just as Othello's status as an outsider shapes his fate, Omkara's half-caste background engenders suspicion and self-doubt that make him vulnerable to manipulation. Dolly, an upper-caste Brahmin and daughter of the influential lawyer Raghunath Mishra, initially enjoys societal privilege and protection. However, her decision to elope with Omkara strips her of these safeguards, exposing her to patriarchal authority and caste-based marginalization. The patriarchal context is further underscored by her father's warning, in which he likens her to a *tariya charitra*—a woman of dual nature—fueling Omkara's suspicions and foreshadowing her tragic fate. Dolly's complete trust in Omkara and his associates, shaped by her sheltered upbringing, ultimately renders her vulnerable to jealousy and betrayal, mirroring Desdemona's fate in the original play. Her transformation from cherished daughter to a doubly marginalized woman—both as the partner of a 'half-caste' man and as an outcast from her own caste—illuminates the intersectional forces at work in Bhardwaj's adaptation.

The film also invests its supporting characters with cultural and narrative depth. Langda Tyagi's physical disability, mocked by Rajju, symbolizes both his resentment and his marginal status within the local power structure. Indu, like Emilia in *Othello*, steals Dolly's *kamarband*, reinforcing themes of betrayal from within a trusted circle. These nuanced details illustrate how Bhardwaj reinterprets Shakespeare's characters and motivations within the specific social milieu of Uttar Pradesh. Omkara's narrative arc closely follows the tragic trajectory of *Othello*, yet the adaptation is enriched by the integration of local ritual, politics, and social commentary. A pivotal moment occurs when Omkara appoints Kesu as the new *Bahubali* instead of Langda Tyagi, triggering jealousy, intrigue, and ultimately violence. By situating these universal themes in a culturally specific context, Bhardwaj transforms Shakespeare's story into one that resonates deeply with contemporary Indian audiences.

The film is firmly anchored in Uttar Pradesh, where regional dialects and the pervasive climate of corrupt local politics shape every facet of the characters' lives. Omkara serves as an enforcer for a local politician known as Bhaisaab, participating in a ruthless campaign for a parliamentary seat that often involves eliminating rivals. Much of the narrative unfolds in Omkara's native village, where he brings his fiancée, Dolly, as they await an auspicious wedding date. The seeds of jealousy are sown early, paralleling Shakespeare's *Othello*: Dolly's father warns Omkara of women's supposed duplicity, saying, "Strongman, may you never forget the two-faced monster a woman can be!" (0:20:41). Throughout the film, Dolly maintains an aura of innocence and purity, while Langda, Omkara's long-time friend and brother-in-law—mirroring Iago—initiates the betrayals that drive the plot toward its tragic conclusion. By embedding caste, gender, and power struggles within the fabric of the story, Bhardwaj's adaptation demonstrates how Shakespeare's timeless themes can be revitalized and rendered relevant to a contemporary Indian context.

Kesu, another central character, becomes his own adversary, as his susceptibility to temptation and personal weaknesses play directly into Langda's schemes. This internal conflict not only propels the narrative but also mirrors the tragic self-sabotage at the heart of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Bhardwaj integrates modern technology seamlessly into the film's narrative, further updating the story for a contemporary audience. For instance, Omkara eavesdrops on a conversation between Kesu and Dolly using a mobile phone, while political events, such as Bhaisaab's election party, are broadcast on television. These elements ground the story in present-day India while echoing the inventive strategies employed in other modern Shakespeare adaptations. Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), for example, uses a news anchorwoman as the chorus, and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet – The Denmark Corporation* (2000) reframes Hamlet's soliloquies for a world dominated by media. Unlike these stylized or meta-commentary-driven adaptations, *Omkara* situates its narrative firmly within local political realities, using regional language, social customs, and contemporary weapons—guns replacing swords—to create a uniquely Indian interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

As the plot unfolds, Langda's treachery intensifies, betraying both familial and professional loyalty, which heightens the sense of impending tragedy. Omkara is portrayed as a sombre, brooding protagonist, a criminal enforcer unhesitant in his use of violence. This depiction allows Bhardwaj to reimagine the persistent political turbulence of modern Uttar Pradesh as a constant threat, effectively replacing the transient danger posed by the Turks in Cyprus in the original play (Rosenthal 188). The adaptation also cleverly integrates Bollywood conventions while localizing Shakespearean motifs. The symbolic handkerchief, for instance, becomes a cummerbund that Omkara presents to Dolly, draping it around her neck with an ominous warning to keep it safe. This seemingly mundane act foreshadows its later significance as a symbol of betrayal and doom.

Bhardwaj subverts typical Bollywood wedding tropes to underscore the story's tragic trajectory. While Hindi cinema often portrays nuptials as vibrant, communal celebrations, *Omkara* presents two failed marriages. By the time the primary wedding occurs, Omkara and Dolly's relationship is already poisoned by mistrust. The ceremony itself is suffused with ominous signs: a falcon drops a snake onto the *haldi*, and Omkara departs after the *tilak*, both considered inauspicious. Dolly's henna-stained fingerprints on her new home's door evoke blood, symbolically foreshadowing her death. The subdued soundtrack and muted visuals heighten the sombre atmosphere, marking a stark departure from the exuberance typically associated with Bollywood weddings.

Omkara's jealousy, stoked by Langda's manipulations and reinforced by the so-called "ocular proof," culminates in tragedy. In a devastating scene, Omkara smothers Dolly with a pillow, denying her any chance of defense. Only after Indu confesses to taking the cummerbund is the truth revealed, but by then, it is too late to prevent catastrophe. Indu, paralleling Emilia in *Othello*, emerges as a pivotal figure whose agency is central to the film's conclusion. As Omkara's sister, she transcends traditional female roles in Bollywood, embodying themes of resistance and justice. Upon discovering her husband's betrayal, she exacts vengeance by killing him with a single blow from a machete. This act critiques both patriarchal norms in Shakespeare's text and misogynistic traditions in Indian society, positioning Indu as a figure reminiscent of the avenging goddess Maa Kali.

Bhardwaj's commitment to realism extends to the film's bar scenes, which eschew the typical anti-realism of Bollywood set-pieces. These sequences are muted in color, somberly lit, and integrated into the narrative's political and emotional stakes. In one scene, Langda orchestrates Kesu's drunken downfall; in another, Billo distracts a political rival, foreshadowing further violence. Through this careful weaving of regional authenticity, contemporary technology, and richly layered character motivations, *Omkara* delivers a distinctively Indian interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy. The film simultaneously pays homage to global adaptations while asserting its own voice, transforming universal themes of jealousy, betrayal, and the consequences of power into a story that is vividly grounded in the social, political, and cultural realities of Uttar Pradesh.

Racial and Caste Identity

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the protagonist is defined as an outsider: Othello is a Moor whose valor and military accomplishments cannot shield him from the racial prejudice of Venetian society. When Brabantio accuses Othello of using witchcraft to win Desdemona's love, it reveals the deep-seated suspicion and racial bias toward Othello's otherness. Brabantio warns Othello:

Look at her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:

She has deceived her father, and may thee (Shakespeare 1.3.293–294).

This line not only expresses Brabantio's distrust of Desdemona but also exposes the societal view of Othello as a perpetual outsider, vulnerable to suspicion and slander. Similarly, in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara*, identity and otherness are reimagined through the lens of caste. Omkara Shukla is depicted as a "half-caste" within his community, a status that fuels his insecurities and shapes how others perceive him. In one pivotal moment, Dolly attempts to reassure him, saying:

Chaand jab aadha ho jawe na, tab bhi chaand hi kahlawe hai bas" ("Even when the moon is half, it is still called the moon) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:35:21).

This metaphor directly addresses Omkara's anxieties about his social standing, suggesting that his worth is not diminished by his caste. The parallel between Othello's racial otherness and Omkara's

caste status demonstrates how societal prejudice can be effectively translated into a culturally specific adaptation (Sharda 603).

Familial Conflict and Loyalty

Another central theme is the tension between familial duty and personal loyalty. In *Othello*, Desdemona must navigate the conflict between obedience to her father, Brabantio, and devotion to her husband, Othello. Though she acknowledges her father's influence, she asserts her independence by choosing Othello, thereby inviting familial conflict and societal scrutiny (Shakespeare 1.3.182–188). Bhardwaj mirrors this dynamic in *Omkara* through the relationship between Dolly and her father, Raghunath Mishra. Like Brabantio, Raghunath cannot accept his daughter's choice of partner, warning Omkara:

Bahubaali, aurat ka tariya charitra bhulna mat. Jo apne baap ko thag sakti hai, wo kisi aur ki saagi kya hogi” (“Strongman, don't ever forget the dual nature of a woman. She who can deceive her father can never truly belong to anyone else) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:20:41).

Langda Tyagi, Omkara's confidant, seizes on these words, manipulating Omkara's vulnerability in the same way Iago exploits Othello's trust (Sharda 610). Raghunath's warning not only questions Dolly's loyalty but also triggers Omkara's growing suspicion, propelling the narrative toward its tragic conclusion.

Thematic Continuity and Character Responses

Both Desdemona and Dolly are shaped by protective, privileged upbringings. Desdemona's defiance exposes her to new dangers, while Dolly's sheltered life leaves her tragically unprepared for the consequences of her choices. Dolly's transition from structured, boxed silhouettes to more flowing, vulnerable attire symbolizes her journey into victimhood within a patriarchal world (Gruss 227). Bhardwaj's adaptation localizes Shakespeare's themes while intensifying their relevance for contemporary Indian audiences, using the interplay of caste, gender, and social hierarchy to amplify the narrative impact.

Omkara's social critique extends beyond the central couple. Raghunath's repeated insults toward Omkara's mother—denied even the dignity of a name—underscore caste-based exclusion. Omkara is consistently devalued for “carrying the blood of a lower-caste woman” (Sharda 612). Such commentary situates personal grievances within broader societal prejudice, showing how caste informs perception and self-worth. These attitudes are reinforced through vivid metaphors and imagery. Indu, Omkara's sister, comments on the couple's disparity:

Kya jodi hai...bilkul jaise koile ke lote mein dudh” (“What a match made in heaven, like milk in a pot of coal”) and “Kauwe ke chauch mein barfi...jaise amavas ke goud me chandrama” (“A candy in a crow's mouth...like a moon in the lap of the darkest night) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:42:18; 0:42:35).

These metaphors visualize the perceived incompatibility between Omkara and Dolly, emphasizing the deep-rooted biases that shape their relationship. Dolly, described as “as fair as the moon,” is positioned above Omkara in both complexion and caste. Omkara, likened to a crow, is depicted as overreaching by “snatching” Dolly, suggesting that acquisition alone does not confer legitimacy (Sharda 615).

Through these metaphors and dialogue, *Omkara* foregrounds the effects of caste and colorism on identity formation and social inclusion. Bhardwaj's adaptation demonstrates that Shakespeare's themes of otherness, prejudice, and marginalization are not only translatable across cultures but can be deepened through culturally specific storytelling. By situating these dynamics in Uttar Pradesh, Bhardwaj illustrates how caste functions as both a personal and societal constraint, shaping interactions, power relations, and tragic outcomes (Trivedi 150).

Language, Caste, and Social Marginalization in *Omkara*

In *Omkara*, the lexeme *kajri* functions as a pejorative marker, laden with both literal and figurative significance. Etymologically, *kajri* denotes “darkness” or “blackness,” and within Bhardwaj's adaptation, it becomes a synecdoche for lower-caste status and social abjection. Raghunath Mishra's utterance—

Par galti to meri hai... bhul gya ki tu brahmin to hain par aadha... adha khun to tere badan mein us kajri ka bhi hai” (“Actually, it is my fault... I had forgotten that you are half-caste after all. Your blood is that of a kajri) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:12:34)—

operates as a speech act that simultaneously dehumanizes and otherizes Omkara, framing his maternal lineage as a site of ontological contamination. The absence of a proper name for Omkara’s mother in the film serves as a metonym for the erasure of subaltern subjectivity. This nominal omission is not simply a narrative device; it functions as an ideological gesture that reinforces the invisibility of marginalized bodies within dominant social discourse (Sharda 613). Bhardwaj’s deployment of such language exemplifies a Foucauldian interplay of power and knowledge, wherein casteist and colorist terminology perpetuates systemic structures of domination (Foucault 27).

The association of dark skin with lower-caste identity is further reinforced through both visual and verbal iconography. *Kajri* operates as a chromatic and social signifier, invoking the constructed binaries of purity and pollution underpinning caste hierarchies. The posthumous denigration of Omkara’s mother illustrates what Spivak terms “epistemic violence,” highlighting the persistent stigmatization of subaltern figures (Spivak 271). In this way, language itself functions as a mechanism of oppression, reinforcing caste distinctions and perpetuating cycles of exclusion and social marginalization.

Bhardwaj’s adaptation is intertextually rich, drawing on Shakespearean tragedy while localizing its concerns through Indian caste dynamics. The film’s diegesis, punctuated by moments of implied interiority, explores how language mediates identity and agency. The recurrent use of casteist slurs both characterizes social hierarchies and critiques them, illuminating the psychological consequences of verbal marginalization. Combined with strategic use of Khari Boli dialect and regionally specific mise-en-scène, these elements authenticate the socio-political landscape of Uttar Pradesh and situate Omkara’s personal struggle within a broader matrix of systemic oppression (Gruss 230).

This approach finds theoretical resonance in B. R. Ambedkar's seminal essay *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916), which rejected the notion that caste originated from racial distinctions. Ambedkar argued that the Brahmin class's self-imposed isolation, maintained through strict endogamy and rituals such as child marriage and sati, was imitated by other groups, transforming social classes into rigid castes through "imitation and excommunication." As Ambedkar asserts, "Some closed the door: Others found it closed against them" (Ambedkar 14). This framework illuminates the mechanisms through which caste boundaries are policed in both Shakespeare's *Othello* and Bhardwaj's *Omkaara*. In each text, social hierarchies are reinforced not merely by lineage or skin color but by the structured enforcement of group identity and exclusion (Béteille 62).

In *Othello*, the tension between group identity and personal merit is dramatized through the character of Othello, the Moor of Venice, whose military accomplishments cannot fully shield him from racial prejudice. Iago exploits these vulnerabilities, warning Brabantio:

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tugging your white ewe" (Shakespeare I.i.88–89). This vivid imagery casts Othello's marriage to Desdemona as a violation of social and racial boundaries, seeking to preserve endogamy and the perceived purity of Venetian society (Anderegg 35).

Similarly, *Omkaara* translates these dynamics into caste terms. The film opens with Omkara instructing Tyagi to disrupt Rajju's wedding procession, a ritual symbolizing the continuity of caste. Resistance to this procession signals opposition to social hierarchy, yet Tyagi allows Rajju to escape—a narrative echo of Iago's "motiveless malignity" (Coleridge 112). The union between Dolly and Rajju, designed to preserve upper-caste endogamy, is disrupted by Omkara, who abducts Dolly, radically altering the social order. Authority figures, represented by the Duke in Venice or by regional political leaders in Uttar Pradesh, wield power to enforce or overlook these boundaries. In *Omkaara*, the Duke's pragmatic corruption and reliance on Omkara mirror the Venetian Duke's prioritization

of state security over social propriety, demonstrating how political expediency often overrides entrenched social hierarchies (Rothwell 201).

Individual actors, however, resist such disruption. Tyagi, whose surname marks him as belonging to the highest Brahmin sub-caste in North India, functions as both enforcer and gatekeeper of caste privilege, directly challenging Omkara's authority. This dynamic illustrates Ambedkar's insight that endogamy and exclusion are actively maintained by dominant groups who "close the doors" to outsiders (Ambedkar 15). Bhardwaj's adaptation, therefore, reframes the racial anxieties of Shakespeare's *Venice* into caste-inflected struggles over identity, status, and power, demonstrating how literary adaptation can serve as both narrative and social critique.

To illustrate the persistence of caste boundaries, *Omkara* visually emphasizes Tyagi's resentment and Omkara's outsider status in scenes where Tyagi undermines Omkara's authority, not merely out of personal animosity but as an assertion of social hierarchy (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:45:12). Similarly, in *Othello*, Othello reflects on the precariousness of his social position, stating, "For she had eyes and chose me" (Shakespeare III.iii.192), highlighting his struggle for acceptance in a society that defines itself through exclusion. By drawing these parallels, both texts interrogate the mechanisms through which racial and caste boundaries are maintained and challenged, showing how authority figures, social rituals, and collective expectations shape individual identity. Through this lens, *Othello* and *Omkara* demonstrate that the enforcement of social hierarchies is not merely abstract but intimately enacted in the lived experiences of their protagonists (Ambedkar 14; Sharda 613).

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