

Primitive Certainty and Tragic Action: Post-Jungian Mechanisms in *Omkaara*

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Abstract:

This paper examines *Omkaara* (2006), Vishal Bhardwaj's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, through a post-Jungian archetypal framework. It focuses on how certainty, not mere jealousy, drives the film's tragic violence. Drawing on Matthew M. Fike's analysis of primitive mentality in *Othello*, the study argues that *Omkaara* presents a "fetishistic displacement" in which uncertainty in a relationship is transferred onto a material object, the heirloom kamarbandh, which functions as unquestionable proof of Dolly's betrayal. As projection and fetishism increase, communication, ritual, and symbolic mediation collapse, making murder a psychological necessity. Through cinematic elements such as objects, disruption of marital rituals, and spatial motifs, Bhardwaj adapts archaic psychic mechanisms into visual form. The paper concludes that *Omkaara* visualizes Shakespearean tragedy by presenting violence as the exhaustion of meaning caused by certainty itself.

Keywords: *Othello*, *Omkaara*, Fetishism, Certainty, Psychoanalysis, Violence.

Introduction

Vishal Bhardwaj's films *Maqbool* (2003), *Omkaara* (2006), and *Haider* (2014) are among the most appreciated Shakespearean adaptations in Indian cinema. These movies are adaptations of *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, respectively. Most readings of *Omkaara* address jealousy, caste politics, or questions of adaptation fidelity. Such approaches, however, do not directly address how certainty, understood as the elimination of doubt, is obsessively pursued and when achieved, it leads to violence. The reasons behind tragedy are not limited to jealousy and impulsiveness; psychological factors also play a role. Tragedy stems from a "fetishistic displacement" in which uncertainty (doubt) in a relationship is transferred onto a material object (the heirloom). Such displacement leads the hero to reach a type of certainty that renders communication useless and tainted with accusation. As a result of such prolonged tension, when circumstances eliminate doubt, in other words, when certainty replaces uncertainty, action, especially violent action, becomes a necessity.

This paper uses a post-Jungian archetypal framework, based on Matthew M. Fike's reading of *Othello* in his book *A Jungian Study of Shakespeare: The Visionary Mode*. As Fike observes, "Othello's hamartia (error, mistake) is seen less as jealousy than as his inability to confront and overcome his own archaic psychological states, of which jealousy is one symptom" (109). Rather than replicating Fike's argument, this study highlights how the same psychological mechanism can be traced in the film using cinematic elements. In other words, this paper examines fetishistic displacement as a cinematic mechanism or technique that externalizes internal conflicts through image, sound, and object. Thus, this paper analyses *Omkaara* to show psychological operations, not sociological evidence or political allegory.

In Adaptation theory, cinematic adaptations are appreciated for their interpretive value rather than assessed through strict fidelity (Hutcheon, Sanders). Hutcheon defines adaptations as fresh iterations of the original works. As a result, rather than replicating the original works,

these adaptations produce new meanings. Therefore, this study analyzes *Omkaara* not as a faithful reproduction of *Othello* but as a creative interpretation that restructures Shakespearean tragedy into a new symbolic and cinematic context. Rather than evaluating this film by its fidelity to the original, this approach offers a fresh perspective on how a psychological process depicted in Shakespeare's *Othello* is reimagined within a new cinematic framework.

Synopsis of *Omkaara*

Omkaara is a 2006 Indian Hindi-language film directed by Vishal Bhardwaj and adapted from William Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*. The story in the film moves from Venice and Cyprus to the rural and semi-lawless political landscape of Uttar Pradesh, India.

The story follows Omkaara "Omi" Shukla, a powerful leader and political strongman who serves Tiwari Bhaisaab, a local politician. Omi's closest lieutenants are "Langda" and "Kesu". Langda is a limping strategist who is also married to Omi's sister, Indu. Kesu is Dolly's college friend, a younger, educated member of the gang.

Omkaara's love interest is a girl named Dolly. She is a young college graduate who comes from a high-profile family. Omkaara disrupts her marriage, winning her love despite political and social pressure, as well as her father's initial disapproval. As the group gets involved in local politics and election campaigns, Omi chooses Kesu over Langda for a leadership role. This decision awakens intense resentment and jealousy in Langda.

Taking advantage of Omi's insecurity, Langda plans situations that allow Omkaara to experience *certainty as self-evident*. He takes advantage of Omkaara's increasing reliance on material evidence rather than trust in his friend Kesu and fiancée Dolly. Omi begins to suspect Dolly's fidelity, especially as signs of alleged impropriety are planned and staged, and he gradually interprets ambiguity as proof of betrayal.

On the night of Omi and Dolly's wedding, the story's tension reaches its peak. Tormented by his own conclusions and convinced of his wife's unfaithfulness, Omi strangles Dolly to death. When Indu, Omi's sister, discovers the heirloom and claims she stole it earlier, she reveals the truth. Dolly was innocent; the suspicions stemmed from Langda's conspiracy. The tragedy worsens when Omi kills himself after Indu kills Langda in retaliation.

Section I: Conceptual Framework

This section introduces the conceptual framework used in the following analysis and explains the psychological condition that prepares the ground for tragedy. While this analysis draws primarily on Jung through Matthew M. Fike's synthesis, selected definitions of projection and archetypal structure are cited directly from Jung, where consulted. Drawing on Matthew M. Fike's post-Jungian reading of "The Primitive in *Othello: A Post-Jungian Reading*", the primitive is understood not as a racial or cultural category, but as a psychologically archaic and less differentiated mode of functioning. As Fike emphasizes, this condition describes areas of the psyche that are less conscious and therefore more susceptible to projection and subject-object confusion (Fike 89). Under such conditions, psychic contents are not recognized as internal states but are experienced as properties of external objects and events.

Starting with projection, Jung describes it as "one of the commonest psychic phenomena. It is the same as participation mystique" (qtd. in Fike 97), a state in which "the world is a more or less fluid phenomenon within the stream of [the subject's] own fantasy, where subject and object are undifferentiated and in a state of mutual interpenetration" (*Archetypes and Collective Unconscious* 101). Projection thus produces what Jung calls an "unconscious identity" between psyche and object, whereby unconscious contents are transferred outward and "become accessible to consciousness as qualities apparently belonging to the object" (qtd. in Fike 99). In this case, meaning is no longer mediated through

interpretation. Psychic contents are projected onto the object, which is experienced as a fixed point of reference, despite this fixity being psychically rather than objectively grounded.

As Fike clarifies in his synthesis of Jung's writings, the primitive does not recognize projection as such and therefore fails to distinguish between psychic contents and external objects (Fike 97). Here, Fike links this undifferentiation to the next symptom of the primitive psyche: fetishism, where the primitive believes that the perceived object has power and significance. This significance emerges as a psychic product of projected meaning and power. As a result, when psychic meaning is projected onto an object, that object seems to gain a compulsive authority over the individual's interpretation and judgment.

On this basis, fetishism functions not as a symbolic excess but as a psychic shortcut that resolves uncertainty by shifting meaning from communication in a relationship or a friendship to be placed entirely on the absence or the presence of a material object or proof. In such cases, an individual's psychic energy becomes fixated on objects instead of being directed toward dialogue, conversation, or genuine understanding. As Jung repeatedly emphasizes, the fetishistic effect "is obviously not inherent in the object, but is a psychic product" (qtd. in Fike 97), arising from projection and libidinal investment. Under conditions of participation mystique, the object becomes a site of "dynamic identification," experienced as causally effective and capable of exerting a form of "magical compulsion" over belief and action (qtd. in Fike 97). A related symptom is superstition, in which meaning is further displaced onto supra-personal forces; a later section of the analysis discusses this aspect.

In this sense, *certainty* here does not refer to mutual trust in relationships and friendships, nor to rational knowledge in the common sense. In this particular and psychological context, it refers to the closure produced by fetishistic fixation, whereby projected psychic contents are considered as self-evident truth. When meaning has been fixed to the object, ambiguity collapses. This certainty means there is no room for more than one

reading or meaning of the situation. Therefore, interpretation is already eliminated unless it reinforces the already established and sought-after conclusion. When a character reaches such a conclusion, action follows not from deliberation but from psychic necessity. It is this mechanism—rather than jealousy as an emotion—that structures the tragic trajectory examined in *Omkara*. The conceptual framework outlined here thus describes a general psychic process that displaces ambiguity, fixes meaning to external objects, and produces certainty as an experience; the following sections examine how the film cinematically stages this process.

Section II: Object Translation in *Omkara*

In *Othello*, one of the dramatic moments in the tragedy is when Othello gifts the handkerchief to Desdemona:

That handkerchief
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
 She was a charmer, and could almost read
 The thoughts of people.
 She dying, gave it me; and bid me, when
 My fate would have me wive,
 To give it her. (3.3.55-61)

In *the movie*, the kamarbandh Omi gives to Dolly is a generations-old heirloom that holds great sentimental value. When Omkara tells Dolly the story of the heirloom and how his parents' love marriage challenged caste politics, the gift takes on greater weight. The act of gifting the kamarbandh immediately coincides with heightened intimacy, signalling the object's early integration into the relational bond.

Before Dolly loses the heirloom, the relationship between Dolly and Omkara is mediated through care, intimacy, and mutual recognition. The dynamics in the relationship

shift immediately after Omkara sees Billo wearing the kamarbandh. Once he returns home and meets Dolly, his response is immediate and violent. He aggressively wakes Dolly, forces her to search for the ornament, hits her, and accuses her. These actions show that he treats the object's absence as more consequential than her testimony or affect.

From this point onward, the relationship is no longer grounded in dialogue or mutual recognition. This whole relationship now centers around the presence or absence of the fetishized object (the heirloom). Omkara's fixation on the proof culminates in two incidents. First, he demands that Langda provide evidence before the marriage. Second, when presented with evidence, he bases his conclusion on overhearing Kesu's phone conversation instead of confronting him directly. Seeing the heirloom thrown by Kesu's girlfriend serves as sufficient confirmation, providing *certainty* that replaces any attempts at communication and forecloses interpretation. The object thus assumes interpretive authority, replacing relational mediation with material proof — a clear instance of fetishistic fixation, in which projected psychic meaning is condensed into the object and experienced as incontrovertible truth.

Section III: Collapse Of Mediation

As the wedding day gets closer, Omkara's earlier promise to Dolly to forgive Kesu increases the tension between the couple. His need for proof of his wife's betrayal becomes more urgent. Such pressure makes him intolerant of uncertainty. At this point, he is way past considering any explanation or reconciliation.

The more tense he gets, the more distant he grows from both Kesu and Dolly. This growing isolation makes him even more of a victim of Langda's plotting. Langda becomes the sole provider of both truth and proof, who, under threat, has no other option but to stage events in a way that proves Dolly's unfaithfulness. Noticing Omkara's excessive investment in the kamarbandh, Langda understands that the object can function as evidence without the need for

dialogue or extra questioning. In doing so, he operates not merely as a deceiver but as a technician of certainty, staging events that allow Omkara to “see for himself.”

Langda’s strategy aligns precisely with Omkara’s expectations. He arranges for Omkara to overhear Kesu from behind the shed, to spy through wooden slats, and to witness Billo throwing the waistband at Kesu while accusing him of infidelity. Langda planned for these moments to look as evidence in themselves. He utilizes Omkara’s lack of communication with any of his suspected traitors. Langda thus becomes the lens through which Omkara now interprets reality, making direct communication between Omkara and Kesu or Dolly unnecessary.

The more Omkara fixates on the proof, the rowdier he becomes with bursts of violence and threats. He demands that Langda bring ocular proof before the wedding ends, threatening him. Under these conditions, action becomes urgent for both Langda and Omkara. The doubt, the violence, and the threat leave no room for reasoning or thinking. Certainty is reached not through double-checking or communication but through different instances that can satisfy Omkara’s doubts rather than motivate him to communicate with either Dolly or Kesu. These elements of tension, doubt, fixation on proof, lack of communication, and entrusting truth to only one person come together to signal the collapse of mediation, exemplifying how a primitive mentality operates by projecting certainty and meaning onto objects, eroding relationships with people.

Section IV: Archaic Intrusion and the Expansion of Certainty

By the time the ritualistic preparations for the wedding begin, Omkara’s need for certainty already displaced dialogue. This shift is evident in the way he talked to his sister Indu about his doubts about Dolly. However, he disregards Indu’s observation that scriptures misjudge women—let alone mortals—mirroring the way he also ignores Dolly’s heartfelt admission that

she left her world for him. These two incidents mark how dialogue has been thrown aside in the name of proof-centeredness.

At this stage, when certainty is foregrounded at the cost of communication, the film introduces omens. During Dolly's Mehndi ceremony, a snake falls into the henna bowl, interrupting an otherwise regulated ritual space. The event is neither foreshadowed in the movie nor causally explained in the scene. The falling snake interrupts the Mehndi ritual as an abrupt disturbance. A ceremony intended to affirm union and continuity is thus marked by an image of threat and violation.

Omkaara interrupts his own ceremony and ignores the older woman's warning as he departs to attend to political matters. He acts with full intention and deliberately dismisses the rituals in favor of what he perceives as more necessary. By contrast, during Dolly's Mehndi ceremony, the falling snake confronts her as an event beyond her control. While Dolly expresses concern about the falling snake, those around her try to calm her down by dismissing it as a coincidence. While Dolly becomes worried after the snake falls, those around her try to calm her by treating it as a coincidence. This difference between Omkaara's deliberate act and the omen that seems to fall upon Dolly reflects what happens later in the story. This contrast is especially evident in the way certainty is forced upon Dolly. In this way, superstition does not appear as a response to an individual's beliefs, but rather as a result of failed communication, shaping how events are interpreted without being openly discussed.

While telling Dolly the love story of his parents, Omi presents the heirloom as a gift that symbolizes continuity and unity between a husband and his wife. Omkaara values the kamarbandh because it embodies love, trust, and overcoming social obstacles. He has not fully internalized the values and lessons from his parents' experience, as shown by his growing obsession with the lost heirloom and the way doubt gradually overtakes his reasoning. His obsession with this object as proof of Dolly's cheating leads him to abandon the same rituals

that blessed his parents' union. The same traditions that sustain continuity, symbolized by the heirloom, are abandoned by Omkara due to his obsession with losing it. Another instance of Omi disregarding communication occurs when he abruptly leaves his own Mehndi ceremony, despite the old lady's warning. With his fixation on certainty to the point of obsession, he neglects the very continuity and tradition he claims to revere. The movie's use of omens thus signals a fragmentation of the symbolic order in which fetishized objects become sources of authority while ritual mediation is abandoned.

At this stage, characters no longer circulate meaning through language or traditions, and certainty no longer relies on confirmation, interpretation, or communal validation. The violence that follows does not emerge as a reaction but as the only remaining form of action produced by a primitive mode of functioning. The following section examines how this closure is enacted through the killing and its aftermath.

Section V: Violence and the Exhaustion of Meaning

Omkara, threatening Langda, demanded proof of Dolly's affair with Kesu. Langda maximizes his manipulation and stages events that allow Omkara to witness what he takes to be the ultimate long-awaited proof. Omkara arrives at certainty through his own reasoning rather than persuasion. The retrieval of the kamarbandh completes the fetishistic circuit.

When Omkara threw the heirloom at Dolly, he saw it as confronting the accused with evidence of their unfaithfulness. For Dolly, however, it was a relief to get the heirloom back. Her innocent reaction spurs more hatred and revulsion in Omkara. His reaction underscores the object's fetishistic dominance over his interpretation of the world around him. With his certainty secured through the object as "ocular proof," Dolly's reaction holds no interpretive weight in comparison. Omkara's following actions of interrogating, demanding confession, and then killing Dolly are not an emotional reaction, but a necessity that is authorized by the

proof, the heirloom. With such authority of a fetishized object, language no longer holds meaning nor mediates it, which is evident in the way Omkara could not understand Dolly's reaction. He took her innocent looks and happiness of finding the heirloom as an admission of her affair. In this sense, Omkara's violent actions stem not from doubt, but from the false certainty created by deception.

The cycle of doubt and the fixation on the heirloom ends with the staged certainty that Langda planned and Omkara actualized in killing his wife on their wedding night. The consequences come in the form of a chain of impulsive violence and murder. These tragic ends lead other objects to take on new meanings.

Starting with the hanging bed, it was once a signifier of closeness, intimacy, and playfulness. It has now become a site of tragic endings. First, when Omkara chooses to strangle Dolly, her resistance and heavy breaths echo the earlier bodily closeness. What the characters previously communicated through intimacy and songs is now replaced by primal violence and forced silence. Thus, what remains at the end of the movie is the same bed with its squeaking sound, but now it is devoid of meaning; what was once a place of connection is rendered empty. Second, there is Indu's proximity to the bed. She leans on that bed, discovering what tragedy has befallen what was supposed to be a night to celebrate love. Discovering the heirloom and admitting that she once stole it, she realizes the motive behind Dolly's death. This revelation foreshadows the similar end of her relationship with Langda.

Turning to the sound element, Bhardwaj employs another method that converts linguistic techniques into sounds with greater meaning and impact. Shakespeare's *Othello* ends in speech, judgment, and narrative justification. However, *Omkara* ends with residual motion: the rocking bed, with its squeaking mechanical sound, replaces the tragic monologue and fills the void left by suicide and murder. The rhythmic motion and sound convey both the emptiness that enables such fixation and the helplessness experienced under an overwhelming psychic

burden. Othello's final monologue restores moral framing through language. Omkara, by contrast, does not justify any of his deeds. Omkara sings a song he had sung to Dolly so affectionately before losing the heirloom as his final words to Dolly. Omkara decides not to explain or defend his behavior. Before killing himself, Othello uses words to reframe and declare that he "loved too well." However, after both language and communication have failed, Omkara commits suicide. His fetish-built certainty is too heavy for both proximity and speech to bear. *Omkara*, as a movie, affirms the lack of meaning, which is replaced by the sound of the squeaking bed, while Othello restores meaning through belated narration.

The scene is an example of how the primitive mentality prioritizes immediate action, usually violent and impulsive, over communication. With meaning no longer sought after in a relationship through dialogue and reduced to material proof, the fetishistic fixation governs interpretation through the certainty it produces. Here, interpretation and negotiation no longer remain options. The violence that follows such conclusions remains as the only authorized action. Under such conditions, certainty does not leave room for other options or processes for repair, reflection, or the restoration of what has been lost, whether it is relationships, meaning, or space for reconciliation. Because of this loss, language, dialogue, and proximity lose their mediating function. The bed, in this sense, remains the final cinematic trace of this collapse, showing the continuity of the spatial element but not that of meaning. *Omkara* stages this tragedy cinematically, not as a moral error corrected too late, but as a failure of communication and the dismissal of attempts to restore meaning after reaching certainty; the certainty that relieves psychological pressure through impulsive violence.

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that jealousy and impatience are not the main causes of Omkara's tragedy. Instead, violence results from the fetishistic projecting of relationship ambiguity onto

a tangible object. In this context, certainty refers to a type of psychological fixation that precludes interpretation rather than just knowledge or truth. Action—more especially, violent action—follows as a necessity rather than a choice once this certainty is proven by tangible evidence. This mechanism is grounded in a post-Jungian understanding of primitive mentality as a latent psychological mode, in which projection and undifferentiation override reflective judgment.

The film employs cinematic devices, such as the heirloom, to visualize psychological processes, transforming them into central sites of projection, fetishism, and certainty. The film slowly shows how dialogue, testimony, and relational cues—including intimacy and care—are gradually displaced by “ocular proof.” With the demand for material evidence becoming more urgent, rituals and omens lose their mediating function until even spatial elements, such as the bed, reflect the collapse of the relationship. With the strategic use of image, sound, and object, Bhardwaj stages these processes visually and structurally rather than through explanatory dialogue.

Through its handling of speech, *Omkara* presents a fresh, imaginative interpretation of Shakespeare. In the final monologue of *Othello*, the story is first narrated, then justified, and finally morally framed. However, *Omkara* does not provide such an explanation. Even though Othello's realization comes too late, it still makes an effort to use language to restore meaning. On the other hand, speech becomes useless as a means of communication once Omkara attains certainty. Speech is reduced to a song that no longer expresses love and closeness and is later replaced by the indifferent squeaking of the bed. Omkara's final utterances do not explain or justify his actions, and his death occurs not after meaning is rearticulated, but after it has been exhausted. Bhardwaj intensifies the tragic logic by the impossibility of re-narration, enhancing it with residual motion: the indifferent squeak of the rocking bed.

This interpretation shows that tragedy arises from psychological certainty, rather than being solely driven by emotion. By using fetishism as understood from a Jungian perspective, we can understand violence when it becomes necessary rather than chosen. This framework applies to other adaptations in which the pursuit of certainty through ocular proof replaces interpretation, and objects take the place of genuine relationships. In similar tragedies, the quest for certainty that leaves no room for alternative interpretations is the main driver of the tragic end, rather than mere doubt or hamartia. Bhardwaj's adaptation of Othello thus presents tragedy as the depletion of meaning brought about by certainty itself, rather than as a moral error rectified too late.

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