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Villains

A Comparison of the Antagonists of *Omkara* and *Othello*

The film *Omkara*, in its adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, remains true to the major story line of the play while also changing many aspects to create differences between the two. One of the ways in which *Omkara* departs from *Othello* is through deliberately taking Iago, the evil character in *Othello*, and transforming him into the more human, and less villainous, character of Langda.

Langda, in *Omkara*, is the parallel character of Iago in *Othello*, and, as far as the general plot is concerned, the film creates a close analogy between the two characters. Langda is the antagonist of the story, the cause of the tragedy which is the culmination of the film, just as Iago is in *Othello*. The story is the same: Langda is angered by Omkara's choice of Kesu over himself for general, just as Iago is angered by Othello's choice of Cassio over himself for lieutenant. Both the characters of Langda and Iago use lies and insinuations, along with the help of a secondary character (either Raju or Roderigo), to bring the respective main characters, Omkara or Othello, to maddening suspicion against their loved ones. Scene for scene, Langda's actions match up well with Iago's, and the adaptation, as a whole, is very true to the original.

However, there are many small departures *Omkara* makes from *Othello*, as any such adaptation will have. One of the themes of these departures can be seen in the film's depiction of the antagonist, Langda. Though the actions of Langda match up well with those taken by Iago in *Othello*, there are still noticeable differences between the two; these differences combine in order to make the antagonist Langda less of a villain than

his counterpart, Iago, in *Othello*. The film achieves this in two ways. One is by creating certain scenes which allow the audience to sympathize with Langda or at least understand his viewpoint. Another is by removing or muting many of the aspects which show up in *Othello* which portray Iago as a conniving, scheming villain.

The first way in which the film lessens the evil we see in Langda is by allowing the audience to empathize with Landa's situation. In *Othello*, there is no sympathy felt for Iago, throughout the play. From the beginning to the end he is seen as a villain, with no room to doubt. In *Omkara*, on the other hand, Langda is a character to which the audience has an ability to relate, even though he is seen performing evil actions. This is achieved through delving into Langda's motives for revenge, and showing them in a more human light.

In *Othello*, the reason why Iago hates Othello is given briefly in the beginning; Iago tells Roderigo that in response to Iago's requests to become Othello's lieutenant, Othello replied, "I have already chosen my officer.' And what was he? Forsooth, a great arithmetician, one Michael Cassio." (1.1.17-20). While Iago feels that this was a great injustice done to him, the reader is not necessarily compelled to think the same. In *Omkara*, however, the storyline starts earlier than the time of the first scene of *Othello*, and the film actually shows Omkara's choice of Kesu over Langda, as opposed to only referring back to it in conversation. In this scene, the ritual where Langda is to choose his replacement, Langda, as well as others around him, believes that he will be chosen as the new general. There is a buildup of expectation, at which point Omkara hands Langda the ceremonial plate, and it seems as if he is about to place the beads on Langda, signifying his choice. At the last moment, however, Omkara turns to Kesu and appoints

him as the new general. This choice is unexpected, both by the audience and by Langda, and the shot of Langda's fallen face, full of with disappointment and hurt, is meant to be deeply felt by the audience.

This scene moves the viewer to sympathize with Langda, in a way that Iago's simple explanation of his hate towards Othello does not. The viewer of this scene feels as if Langda actually deserved to be appointed (and it indeed seems he would have been had Omkara not thought Kesu would help draw more political votes); the audience senses that that something rightful is stripped from Langda when Kesu is appointed.

Another way in which the viewer is led to sympathize with Langda arises from the film's depiction of Kesu's character. While Cassio, in *Othello*, is seen by the characters other than Iago as an courageous man who is able to fight, Kesu, in the film, is portrayed more as a smiling, charming man who does not belong in the place of a fighter. Cassio seems to have been chosen rightly to be lieutenant, while in *Omkara* there is special mention that the reason Kesu is appointed is not for his own merits but rather because he will draw the college students' votes. There are no additional motivations given for Cassio's appointment, and no reason supplied to believe Cassio is not worthy to be appointed, with the exception of Iago's complaints about the fact. Kesu seems less worthy of the position of general than Cassio seems for that of lieutenant.

An example of this comes after Kesu is appointed general; everyone is celebrating in a club, and Langda goads Kesu to drink, just as during the festival in *Othello*, Iago presses Cassio to drink as well. Kesu is then seen partying with the other men and Billo; however, when Raju smokes next to Kesu after being told not to, the audience sees Kesu explode. He begins beating up on Raju, and fighting him madly. Now, it is true that a

parallel scene exists in *Othello*; however, in *Othello*, we do not get to see exactly what wrong Roderigo has done to Cassio, while in *Omikara* it is very clear that all that set Kesu off was the petty act of Raju smoking near him. In *Othello*, we know that Roderigo tries to incite Cassio, but we do not see Cassio flare up at the actual wrongdoing; we only see the aftereffects. By showing Kesu's overblown reaction to Raju's small offence, instead of just referring to it after the fact, Kesu seems less worthy of being general, a position that requires resilience instead of uncontrollable drunkenness, and this in turn makes Langda seem more right in his claim.

Against this depiction of the charismatic but soft character of Kesu, Langda is portrayed as a character who would fit well in the position of general. Langda is very masculine and strong willed, and perhaps only Omikara is seen as a more powerful character. The difference between Kesu and Langda is more pronounced in *Omikara* than the analogous difference between Cassio and Iago in *Othello*. Thus Langda, against this backdrop, is seen as justified in his claim that Kesu was given the position of general which was rightfully his own.

The second method the film uses to create a less villainous antagonist in Langda comes through underplaying Langda's willful plotting against Omikara. In *Othello*, Iago is seen scheming at every turn. In *Omikara*, though, Langda appears less a catalyst for events and more as someone who takes advantage of the way events play out.

In *Othello*, Iago is seen from the beginning planning his revenge on Othello. Indeed, in just the first scene Iago says about Othello, "Though I do hate him as I do hell's pains, Yet, for necessity of present life, I must show out a flag and sign of love,

which is indeed but sign”(1.1.153-156). In *Omkara*, on the other hand, Langda does not come off as conspiratorial as Iago. One of the reasons for this is that *Omkara* begins the story at an earlier point than *Othello* does. While in *Othello* Iago is seen from the first planning his revenge, *Omkara* begins before Omkara chooses Kesu over Langda, and therefore shows Langda before he begins looking to revenge. It is not until later in the film that Langda decides to take action against Omkara. The scene that reveals this takes place on a bridge, with Langda and Raju talking. Raju taunts Langda about the injustice done to him by Omkara when Kesu was chosen over him; a transformation occurs on Langda’s face as he realizes that yes, a wrong has been committed against him. It is only at this point that Langda appears to decide to do something about what Omkara has done.

The difference between Langda and Iago is subtle but appreciable. Iago is seen as a villain who from the start is plotting his revenge against Othello. Langda, on the other hand, is portrayed as a man who, once realizing a wrong that has been committed against him, decides to take action to avenge himself. While Iago comes off as an unreasonably wicked character whose desire for revenge is warped and disproportionate, Langda’s decision comes as an understandable consequence of a chain of events.

In addition to depicting the motives of Langda as more reasonable, the film makes other small modifications to make Langda seem less of a conniving character than Iago. *Omkara* glosses over the scenes of *Othello* in which Iago is seen detailing his plans for revenge. For instance, in *Othello*, the viewer knows that Iago specifically tells his wife to steal Desdemona’s handkerchief. Emilia says, “I am glad I have found this napkin...My wayward husband hath a hundred times wooed me to steal it”(3.3.292-295). In *Omkara*, however, there is no indication that Langda asks Indu to steal the ritual wedding belt.

Indu, after finding it on her own, wears it for Langda because she wants to; Langda does not plan to have the belt, but upon seeing it realizes its usefulness and takes advantage of the situation. Instead of going out of his way to carefully plan his revenge, as Iago does, opportunities which help Langda's cause seem to fortuitously show up, and Langda recognizes them and utilizes them for his revenge.

Another example where the scheming characteristic of Iago becomes muted in Langda comes in the buildup to Cassio's or Kesu's drunken fights. In *Othello*, an entire scene is devoted to Iago telling Roderigo that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio, and explaining to him how to provoke Cassio in order to start a fight. In *Omkara*, Langda does not lie to Raju and tell him that Kesu and Dolly feel anything for each other. In addition, though it seems as if Langda does direct Raju to provoke Kesu, we do not hear what he tells him. Thus, in *Omkara*, the plotting characteristics of Langda are not perseverated upon as they are in *Othello*.

Another difference between Iago and Langda can be seen in their relationships with Roderigo and Raju, respectively. In *Othello*, Iago uses Roderigo for his own purposes, and is not connected to him in any other way except for use: for money, and as a pawn to advance his own revenge. About Roderigo, Iago says, "If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trace for his quick hunting, stand the putting on, I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip" (2.1.284-286). In *Omkara*, though, there is a sense of friendship that exists between Langda and Raju before Langda begins planning his revenge. Langda seems to care about Raju and the fact that he is so despondent about his loss of Dolly, and not to only be using him for his own purposes. Thus, while Iago exploits Roderigo solely

for his own machinations, Langda, though he certainly also uses Raju, does not base his relationship with Raju entirely on manipulation.

One of the clearest ways the film highlights the difference between the characters of Langda and Iago comes in the very last scene of the film. In *Othello*, after Desdemona is killed and Emilia reveals Iago for who he is, Othello demands of Iago why he has done what he has done. Iago responds simply, “Demand me nothing; what you know, you know. From this time forth I never will speak a word”(5.2.300-301). Afterwards, Iago is tight-lipped, and shows no regret for his actions, only a strong will. The parallel scene with Langda and Omkara is similar, except that Langda, though he also vows that he will no longer speak, also adds that he no longer knows what is right and what is wrong, that he has confused the two. It is a small, but unmistakable, indication that Langda is suddenly aware of his own wrongdoing and awful actions. It is in this final scene that the audience senses an inkling of regret from Langda, who has been caught up in actions he only now sees as evil. This is a clear departure from the cut-and-dry villainous character that Iago represents.

After watching the film, there is no question that the antagonist of the story is Langda, just as Iago is in *Othello*. However, with its subtle departures from the play, *Omkara* is able to create a character in Langda that is much more complex than Iago’s. Langda is not the unambiguous (and rather artificial) villain that Iago is, but rather a character with depth and complexity. Thus, with the changes *Omkara* makes to present Langda in a different light than Iago is shown in in *Othello*, the story becomes more realistic and transforms itself into account that is at once more meaningful and rich.

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but rather However, Omkara succeeds in transforming the character of Iago into the more complex character of Langda, who is not entirely evil. Small but meaningful changes create a ___ which leads to a more true to life and meaningful story.