

Shakespeare

Unchecked Ambition

Shaheen Khan

The ambition of Lady Macbeth

Mmm, ambition. Don't we all have it? I sort of wish I was a bit more like Lady Macbeth and the Macbeths actually. Well, the play is about ambition and about what happens when ambition goes, not too far, but sort of unchecked in yourself. We are all ambitious. We all want to get ahead. We all want that, you know, the crown, but we know that we're not going to do certain things, you know? Because we feel we're good people and you can't do that, it's wrong, whatever. But in this play they see an opportunity. And it's interesting that actually Macbeth for me, at the beginning of the play, he's a good guy to me. He's like, 'Yeah, I really want that but of course I'm not going to kill him to get it.' And then his wife, she's like, 'He's not going to do it, is he?' And then what happens in the end? She realises, you know, 'Naught's had, all's spent, where our desire is got without content.' And you think, yes, you realise that now. It's like all of us in a way. You know, when you absolutely really want that house and your stomach's churning or whatever it is that you desire so badly, a car or any material thing. In the end you get it and then it loses its lustre.

A British Asian production of *Macbeth*

So many Indian films and stories have taken their inspiration from Shakespeare that obviously they relate to it and it's relevant for them. And so for us taking our Asian version of *Macbeth* through Britain was quite extraordinary. The British Asian audience loved it as did a lot of white audiences actually. What a lot of white people really liked was that they saw a different take on a lot of the Shakespeares they had seen. I mean, for example, our witches were hijras. Now, hijras in India are actually transvestites, transgender. They're actually seen as the third gender. For me that was very exciting using the hijras as the witches in *Macbeth*. And the audience loved it. And it was interesting because there were people who said, you know, they've seen lots of *Macbeths* but they've never seen that kind of interpretation of the witches. And there was this lovely woman at one of the venues and she'd come with her children and she said, 'It's really interesting because this is their first *Macbeth*. I've seen lots. And my first *Macbeth* was typical witches with the pointy hats. And their version which they will take with them through their lifetime will be these, you know, half-men, half-women in these beautiful, colourful clothes.' I think also we found quite a lot of comedy in the witches as well. Which I think is great because you don't want the witches to just be these one-dimensional, you know, spooky kind of thing. You kind of want them to be a bit more. And what I loved about our *Macbeth* was actually there was quite a lot of comedy for such a dark piece. Somehow the hijras managed to bring something special.