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Interplay between Indian Literature and Popular Cinema
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1. Introduction

A study of film and literature together can produce an extremely enlightening confrontation. The researcher aims to explore the relationship between the two most important art forms of present era. The focus would be neither on film nor on written text but on understanding and appreciating each form on its own and in relation to the other. As Morris Beja writes: “such a pairing enables us to get a sense of all that they share, to be sure, but also of all the traits that they do not, so that one may grasp as well what is unique about each form.” (Beja xiii)

For decades, filmmakers all over the world have got influenced by great works of literature and transcribed it into flicks. There are many film adaptations of our favourite books ranging from children's books to classical literature to current day Best sellers. ‘The English Patient’, ‘Bridget Jones's Diary’, ‘Great Expectations’, ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’, ‘Trainspotting’, ‘Apocalypse Now’, ‘The Remains of The Day’, ‘Schindler's List’, ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest’, ‘The Namesake’ are a few examples of well-known film adaptations derived from diverse literary sources, ranging from novels, short stories, plays etc. The question which arises in mind here is “Are we creating a culture in which instant glorification is more important than the journey we take as readers?” On the flipside, film offers a different and sometimes a unique perspective of a given text. Many books would never have been read if it would not have been interestingly adapted for film. Adaptation of books into film is nothing new for the Indian film industry too and the impact of literature on films is almost as old as filmmaking itself. James Naremore opines that “literature has provided a young, voracious, financially vulnerable industry with an apparently limitless supply of proved raw material (Naremore 43).” Compared to Hollywood movies, one comes across less number of film adaptations in India. But their number is steadily increasing due to film directors' never ending quest for new stories, active marketing measures and box office success. In an era, in which people show a great apathy to literature and reading, adaptations can prove to be a key to renewed interest, excitement, pleasure and motivation. Though the history of adaptation is as old as films, there has always been a tendency to consider written text superior to the visual text. However, the

increasing popularity of the visual narratives over the written ones in the present times cannot be ignored. In his book *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader* Timothy Corrigan writes “One estimate claims that 30 percent of the movies today derive from novels and that 80 percent of the books classified as best sellers have been adapted to the cinema.” (2)

2. What is Adaptation?

Adaptation is translations of a literary text into the language of film. In her famous book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon describes adaptation as “a creative and interpretive transposition of a recognizable other work or works” and “a kind of extended Palimpsest and, at the same time, often a transcoding into a different set of conventions” (33). She also discusses the fact that adaptations from novel to film often result in deletion and contraction of certain elements from the original work (Hutcheon 19, 36). Whether adhering strictly to the source material or interpreting concepts derived from the original work, adaptations are necessarily extensions or interpretations of the original story. Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) defines adaptation as a “specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novel into film; drama into musical: the dramatization of prose narrative and prose fiction; or the inverse process of making drama into prose narrative” (19). Robert B. Ray in his article ‘The Field of Literature and Film’ writes:

“The film adaptation, in Derridean language, is not simply a faded imitation of a superior authentic original: it is a “citation” grafted into a new context, and thereby inevitably refunctioned. Therefore, far from destroying the literary source’s meaning, adaptation “disseminates” it in a process...” (Naremore 45) In introductory chapter of his book *Film and Literature*, Morris Beja writes, “written stories (novels) and filmed stories (the movies) are really two forms of a single art- the art of narrative literature.(Beja xiv)

Different eminent theorists have viewed film adaptations differently. George Bluestone who is a major commentator on the relationship between literature and film in the academic world called adaptation a new work of art: "like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point then diverge". He called a process of adaptation a mysterious alchemy. Andre Bazin saw adaptations as translations from a linguistic medium to a visual medium. Joy Gould Boyum believed that films based on great literary works were critical interpretation. Linda Hutcheon

call it a double experience because when we watch a film adaptation of book, there are two things going on in our mind. The viewer oscillates between the work he/she knows and the film he/she is watching and hence flips between the two-comparing, evaluating, noticing and hence creating a double experience.

3. Interplay between Film and Literature

The question that arises in our mind is what happens to novels or any literary work when they are translated into film? When finely crafted words and stories from literary work are turned into motion pictures, the movie makers including script writer, director and producer come across many challenges of putting feelings and emotions into gestures, thoughts into words, and descriptions into actions. They attempt to pull the characters and incidents out of the literary work and make them breathe in the reel world. Moreover, they try to adhere to the original message or the insight provided by the literary work by making minimal changes possible in order to save themselves from the charges of infidelity. In other words they try to remain faithful to spirit, soul or tone of the original work. While reading a novel or any literary work, one tends to visually imagine the characters and actions as described in the narrative. Hence using our own imagination, experience and knowledge, we create our own personal or unique picture of what we have read which would be obviously different in detail, depth and clarity from other individual. This personal history complicates the experience of viewing a film after having read the novel. A viewer enters the film with many prejudices based on an expectation generated by his or her imaginary perceptions and, in addition, how and to what degree he or she likes.

In an article '*From Book to Film: Simplification*', a film critic Lester Asheim writes:

“The nature of filmic presentation is an important factor, since the movie audience cannot, like the reader of a book, pause to digest a difficult concept, turn back to clear up a confusion, reread when a passage is difficult, or dictate the speed at which he will assimilate the material to fit his own particular abilities.”(293)

The notion of “fidelity” is essentialist in relation to both media involved. However there are certain aspects which should be noted while analysing the interplay between film and literature.

Film provides the viewer with an intensively visual experience whereas the book is more personal gradual journey through character development and imagination. Novel is a verbal medium whereas the film is mainly a visual medium. In other words, along with images, film has words and sound. The viewers not only get to watch but also get to listen while watching film. Moreover, in the film decoding of the meaning takes place with the help of facial expressions combined with words and actions.

Book is produced by a single individual; the film on the other hand is a collaborative project involving director, producer, cast and crew members as well as support staff of hundreds. Moreover books are relatively unaffected by the problem of budget whereas films are directly concerned with material and financial contingencies. The film is a group project as different matters like plots, dialogue and the various details are discussed at every stage of film making whereas novel writing is a personal experience as it an individual effort by an author. A novel can be written anywhere but a film requires a complex material infrastructure like camera, film stock, laboratories simply in order to exist.

In the opinion of a few critics, the experience of watching a film can't be compared to the experience of reading a book because they feel that movies in their effort to replicate the novel make it shallow and commercial experience. Films are commodities and they are designed specifically for the purposes of profit whereas real literature is never meant for profit.

The book is a single-track, uniquely verbal medium which has only words to play with whereas a film is a multitrack medium as it uses words (written and spoken), actions, music, sound effects, moving photographic images etc.

A book can take long hours or days to be read, and can indulge in the luxury of leisurely expression, whereas the film is at the mercy of the speeding celluloid that cannot turn back, dwell or diverge. Thus the consumption of the book as opposed to the consumption of film is determined completely differently. The time the reader devotes to book is determined by reader at the reader's pace whereas going to the cinema the viewer has to submit to the conditions and conventions of the filmic presentation. Novels make time more abstract than film does and the reader has to mentally create the allusion of continuity between events that are constantly interrupted every time a page is turned.

In the novel there can be all kinds of point of view. The novelist can position the reader into the perspective of the character by using first person singular pronoun or the author can use an omniscient narrator whereas in the film there is only one point of view that is camera.

The novel can devote number of pages to describe event shown in minutes in the film or skip over many years in a single sentence. On the contrary, the film cannot change, expand, dismiss or hold back time.

While adapting a literary work to film, the filmmaker or screen writer is bound to make certain changes because of three main reasons: (1) the demand of a new medium, to make certain crucial changes to highlight new themes (2) to emphasize different character traits, or even to solve problems they perceive in the original work (3) to make the original story interesting and applicable to a contemporary audience.

Films cannot be intelligent or reflective. As film critic Pauline Kael opines:

“Movies are good at action, they’re not good at reflective thought or conceptual thinking. They’re good at immediate stimulus, but they’re not a good means of involving people in the other arts or in learning about a subject. The film techniques themselves seem to stand in the way of the development of curiosity.”(Naremore 59)

In other words he wanted to prove that cinema inevitably lacks the depth and dignity of literature.

4. Adaptation of Literature into Film by Indian Writers

The world cinema is replete with movies based on literary works. As far as connection or bonding between film and literary work in India is concerned, it is evident since ages. Indian Film Industry is not untouched by this fast emerging genre. One of the earliest silent first full-length feature film Dadasaheb Phalke's Raja Harishchandra (1913) was based on a legend of Raja Harishchandra recounted in the Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the Black and White era, there have been several Hindi and other regional language books by Indian writers adapted to films. Literature has been considered to be a great source of inspiration for many Bollywood

films since late forties. Apart from mythological and historical novels, Indian cinema has adapted some of the masterworks of the novelists like Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya, Munshi Premchand and several other writers. Rabindranath Tagore's novels like 'Kabuliwala', 'Dak Ghar', 'Char Adhyay', 'Charulatha', 'Chaturanga', 'Milan', 'Teen Kanya', 'Natir Puja', 'Choker Bali', 'Uphaar', 'Shasti' were made into successful films with the same name. Likewise Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novels were made into famous films like Devdas and Parineeta. Premchand's writings inspired many films, including memorable ones by Satyajit Ray, *Shatranj ke Khiladi* (1977) and *Sadgati* (1981). Filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, and Shyam Benegal have seamlessly transformed the words on pages to dialogues on screen. *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* (1959) directed by Satyajit Ray were based on the novel of Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyaya. The other novelist Bimal Mitra's novel 'Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam' directed into a block buster hit film by Abrar Alvi. In 2003, the film 'Pinjar' and in 2005, the film 'Parineetha' were made based on Amrita Pritam and Sharad Babu's novel *Pinjar* and *Pornitha*. *7 Khoon Maaf* was adapted in 2011 from the short story *Susanna's Seven Husbands* by Ruskin Bond.

Adaptations of works from Indian English literature are relatively fewer in number but they do exist.

R.K. Narayan's 1949 novel *The Guide* was adapted into two film versions by Vijay Anand in 1965, one in Hindi starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, and another in English, the latter co-scripted by Pearl S. Buck. Anita Desai's 1984 novel *In Custody* was adapted by highly prolific and commercially successful Merchant Ivory Productions in 1993. Upmanyu Chatterjee's novel *English August* (1988) was adapted by Dev Benegal in 1994. 'The Blue Umbrella', directed by Vishal Bharadwaj is adapted from the novel of Ruskin Bond which earned the National Award for Best Children's film. Mala Sen's 'Bandit Queen' is a 1994 Indian biographical film based on the life of Phoolan Devi. It was directed by Shekhar Kapur and starred Seema Biswas as the title character. Directed by **Shyam Benegal** in 1978 'Junoon' is based on **Ruskin Bond's** novella *A Flight of Pigeons*. 'The Namesake' is a 2006 film directed by Mira Nair and is based upon the novel of the same name by Jhumpa Lahiri. 'The Japanese Wife' is a 2010 film directed by Bengali filmmaker Aparna Sen based on Kunal

Basu's short story of the same name. 'Lessons in Forgetting' based on the novel of the same name by Anita Nair is a 2012 Indian film produced by Prince Thampi for Arowana Studios and directed by Unni Vijayan that won the National Film Award in 2012. 'Junoon' directed by Shyam Benegal in 1978 is an adaptation of Ruskin Bond's novella *A Flight Of Pigeons*. Directed by Deepa Mehta, 'Midnight's Children' is a 2012 Canadian-British film adaptation of Salman Rushdie's 1981 novel of the same name. Another notable adaptations of Indian English literature include Chitra Benerjee Divakaruni's 1997 novel *The Mistress of Spices* adapted by Paul Mayeda Berges in 2005. *The Inscrutable Americans*, a novel by Anurag Mathur was adapted by Tri-Color Communications into a film in 1999. Rohinton Mistry's 1991 novel *Such a Long Journey* was turned in 2000 into a British Canadian co-production directed by Icelandic Canadian Sturla Gunnarsson. Vikas Swarup's 2005 novel *Q and A* is adapted by Danny Boyle and released in 2008 winning Oscar. *Kai Po Che!* is a 2013 film directed by Abhishek Kapoor based on Chetan Bhagat's novel *The 3 Mistakes of My Life*. *Hello* is a 2008 Bollywood thriller film directed by Atul Agnihotri based on Chetan Bhagat's novel, *One Night @ the Call Center*. *3 Idiots* is a 2009 film loosely adapted from the novel *Five Point Someone* by Chetan Bhagat. *2 States* is a 2014 India film directed by Abhishek Varman based on the 2009 novel of the same name written by Chetan Bhagat. .

Anthony Burges expressed his views on adaptation:

“Every best-selling novel has to be turned into a film, the assumption being that the book itself whets an appetite for the true fulfilment- the verbal shadow turned into light, the word made flesh” (McFarlane 7).

According to McFarlane:

“Adapting literary works to film is, without a doubt, a creative undertaking, but the task requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to recreate and sustain an established mood.” (McFarlane 7)

5 Conclusion

Literature and film are mutually exclusive endeavours, each with its own incontestably unique properties and effects. Film adaptations then can be seen in the context of a source text

generating other texts. Film adaptation aids to identify how a film text amplifies, ignores, subverts, transforms or extends the meaning of a source text. Film adaptations are best examined if they are viewed as autonomous works of art, independent from their literary source. Yet, the "fidelity" criterion, although avoided in academia, still prevails in media writings by both journalists and regular viewers whenever a canonical novel or play is transformed into an audiovisual narrative.

Only time will tell how well can these showmen recreate magic but the growing popularity of the novels amongst the filmmakers only makes our belief stronger that novels truly inspire – a filmmaker, a storyteller and an audience.

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