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Indian English Literature into Film A Journey

Literature, as we know, is one of the five fine arts. It is defined by R. J. Rees, as, "writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life." [1] Cinema is the youngest art form. Adaptation, i.e. text into film, is virtually as old as the cinema itself. But while adapting a literary work into a film, which itself is a creative process, it takes so many things to make or break the success and popularity of the original literary work and vice-versa. According to William Walsh "Literature can be read as the chronicle and embodiment of the state and the history of the language." [2] This statement is aptly applicable to cinema as well. Cinema, in fact, serves the same purpose as literature, though in a bit different and faster way. This paper attempts a critique and evolution of the sub-genre of adaptation studies; in the vibrant inter discipline of literature and film studies, with special reference to the creative adaptation of Indian English texts.

Both Indian English literature and Indian cinema, in a sense, are result of colonization of India. Both, born during the British time, transformed Indian studies and students in a big way. They influenced the image of India at the international level. World came to know India as projected by the Indian English Literature and Indian Cinema. Both the genres passed through similar stages of development, of evolution: imitative, reactive and self actualized, but the latter did it faster. Film making began in 1895 in the world and in 1911 in India. Thus, the century-long journey of cinematic adaptations from literary texts in India is truly a fascinating one. Leading film directors in India, whether from Bollywood or from regional cinema, have taken creative risks and challenges to render classics, short stories and oral narratives for the masses on the large screen.

The Hindi film 'Guide' by Chetan Anand, starring the great, late Dev Anand, based on R.K. Narayan's novel 'The Guide' is probably the first famous adaptation of Indian Literature into Cinema, Although the film was a commercial success and is popular even today, its glamorization was not welcomed by the author himself. Some of the renowned names from both literary and film fraternity are associated with adaptation Shyam Benegal's 'Junoon' based on Ruskin Bond's 'A Flight of Pigeons', Vishal Bhardwaj's 'Maqbool' on Shakespeare's classic 'Macbeth', Rajkumar Hirani's 'Lage Raho Munnabhai' on Gandhiji's autobiography 'My Experiments with Truth', Chetan Bhagat's 'Five point Someone' is turned into '3 Idiots', Premchand's story was later adapted by Satyajit Ray and was turned into 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi', Sharatchandra's 'Devdas' has been made into films several times by different directors with different actors with different interpretations and angles because of the creative space which the languages of cinema provide, Mani Ratnam's Roza in Hindi is different from 'Roza' in Tamil, Umesh Shukla's recent film 'Oh my God', which has revolutionized the thoughts of people on religion and has conveyed a strong messages to the society, has been based on his own play Kishan Vs Kanhaiya, Jhumpa Lahiri's 'the Namesake' tuned into a film with the same title, Shah Rukh Khan starrer 'Paheli' is based on Girish Karnard's 'Nagamandala', Khushwant Singh's 'Train To Pakistan' has been made into a film with the same title, G.B. Shaw's 'Pygmullion' has been turned into 'My Fairlady' in English and 'Santu Rangili' in Gujarati, Jane Austin's 'Pride and Prejudice' turned into 'Bride and Prejudice', Batman, Spiderman, Superman, James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, Harry Potter etc. the list is endless. All these examples prove the Shyamiana fame short film maker and director from Mumbai, Mr. Cyrus Dastur. Who himself has directed a play Intchaa based on the works of Mirza Ghalib, right in saying that "Literature is an important component of cinema".

Comparing literature with cinema is, to use the words of Dr. Ranjana Harish, former professor & Head. Dept of English, Gujarat University, Ahmedabad, like comparing "a giraffe with an apple." Literature is not open to all, whereas. cinema is very democratic. Cinema liberates us, literature bounds us. They both tell a story but it's not the story which matter. It's the way in which it is told that makes the difference. Producing a cinema. Putting many things like music, dance, songs, etc together, converting so many images into one, etc. is very difficult and therefore cinema is

non-static, dynamic. Cinema a product of Industrial Revolution is completely personal art. Dr. K. Hariharan, the Director/ L.V. Prasad Film & T.V. Academy, Chennai, further rightly compares these two different genres with, "A caterpillar and a Butterfly", because translation from one language into another language is questionable, than literature and cinema are completely different domains. Unlike literature, cinema is dependent on spectatorship and not readership. It's all about adapting the figures of speech from one form to another - from books into script into film.

Although, there is no denying the fact that literature will outlive cinema but as Prof. Saumya Joshi, a famous theatre personality, opines that 'cinema should be a part of literature as well as syllabus.' He believes that it should not be literature and films but films as cinema. In fact a number of lyricists like Anand Bakshi, Gulshan Bawra, Majrooh Sultanpuri, Niraj etc. have been proved better poets, lyricists than many of their contemporary Hindi poets. A film based on literature should be remade, revisited like Devdas: in order to derive another interpretation. Hitchcock who once said that 'The best films can be made from the worst novels' can be contradicted by the example like 'The Da Vinci Code' which was a clear novel but a very complicated film. It would therefore, be safe to state that cinema enhances literature by incorporating creativity.

Quality literature is missing from TV now a days. Gone are the days of 'Malgudi Days', one of the better adaptations of literature on television screen. The author R.K.Narayan was also happy for the director Shankar Nag for closely adhering to the story line. In order to succeed on screen, short stories and their adaptations need to have good content because of its limitations regarding star cast, budget etc. Of late on television we are served our taste in the serials like, 'Tarak Mehta ka Ulta Chashma', 'LaptaGunj', 'R.K.Laxman Ki Duniya' etc which are good adaptations of good literature. There is no denying the fact that cinema is for the masses, and an adaptation of a piece of literature for cinema is an essay to convert the class for the mass.

Unfortunately, today, the habit of 'reading books for pleasure', described as one of the chief reasons for studying literature by R.J.Rees, is decreasing. In this age of IT, people turn to an easier option of watching a piece of literature in cinema or on television for pleasure, entertainment and even for information and knowledge. Jean-Luc Godard's statement in this connection sounds very relevant: "When you get down to it, the most fantastic thing you could film is people reading."

The film adaptation, to conclude in Deridean 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. Seymour Chatman, a new critic, rightly advised readers of the cinema's limitations as well in an article and wrote, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)."[3]

End Notes:::::

- 1.Rees R.J.: English Literature- An Introduction for Foreign Readers – Macmillan, 2000.
- 2.Walsh William: R.K.Narayan – A Critical Appreciation, New Delhi : Allied Publishers, 1983.
3. Chatman Seymour : What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa), Critical Inquiry 7:1 (Autumn 1980).

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