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Adaptation From Literature: With Reference to R. K. Narayan's 'Guide' and 'Malgudi Days'

The most obvious and basic characteristic of man is the faculty of speech, the ability to use appropriate verbal and non-verbal signs for objects. Language, the system of speech sound, is also the system of communication. It is rightly regarded by N.S.S. Raman as "the irreducible constituent of any culture."^[1] Literature, a term derived from the Latin word *litterae*, is the art of written work. The word literature literally means "acquaintance with letters" and the pars proto term "letters" is sometimes used to signify "literature," as in the figures of speech "arts and letters" and "man of letters." R. J. Rees, connecting literature with communication and language in written form, defines it as "writing which expresses and communicates thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards life".^[2]

William Walsh, a renowned critic on R. K. Narayan, has written that, "Literature can be read as the chronicle and the embodiment of the state and the history of the language"^[3]. How justly applicable is this statement to cinema as well. As cinema is the dramatization of fiction and drama being form of literature, cinema serves the same purpose as literature though a bit differently. In fact both literature and cinema have their own peculiarities, advantages and disadvantages. But the very purpose here, through this paper, is to highlight the merits and demerits of both with reference to R. K. Narayan's 'The Guide' and 'Malgudi Days'.

Unfortunately, today, the habit of 'reading books for pleasure'^[4] described as one of the chief reasons for studying literature, by R. J. Rees, is decreasing. As more and more people of this scientific and materialistic age find it difficult to spare time for 'reading for pleasure', they turn to an easier option of watching a fiction in cinema or television serial for pleasure and entertainment. Hence the comparison in this paper is justifiable.

As Andre Bazin in his article 'Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest' says, "A novel is a unique synthesis whose molecular equilibrium is automatically affected when you temper with its form"^[5]. The problem of cinematic adaptation, however, is not absolutely insolvable. If we examine the countless American and European and a few Indian novels that are adapted to the screen every year, we will find that the films are something completely different from the novels, that they are the condensed versions, summaries film "digests". One also must first know to what end the adaptation is designed for the cinema or for its audience.

Most of the films based on novels merely usurp their titles. And the original work can only profit from such an exposure. But it has more to do with pedagogy than with art. The very aim and principle of cinematic adaptation is to simplify and condense a work from which it basically wishes to retain only the main characters and situations. However, the fact of the matter is that today's theatre going public is educated enough to have read the novel.

Adaptation is aesthetically justified, independent of its pedagogical and social value. In an aesthetic sociology of the masses in which cinema runs a relay race with drama and the novel and does not eliminate them, but rather reinforces them. The true aesthetic differentiations are to be made not among the arts, but within genres themselves. "Of course", as Bazin says, "adaptation for the public is inseparable from adaptation for the cinema, in so far as the cinema is more "Public" than the novel."^[6] The very word, digest though sounds contemptible at first, can have a positive meaning. But it could also be understood as a literature that has been more accessible through cinematic adaptation, not because of oversimplification it entails, but rather because of the mode of expression itself.

All things thought, we can imagine a reign of the adaptation, in which the notion of the unity of work

of art will be destroyed. The chronological precedence of one part over another, however, would not be an aesthetic criterion.

The shift from a single track, uniquely verbal medium such as the novel, which "has only words to play with" to a multi-track medium such as film, which can play not only words but also with theatrical performance, music, sound effects and moving photographic images, explains the unlikelihood of literal fidelity.

Along with character and performer, the cinema offers still another entity denied the novel: the dabber (post synchronizer). In India playback singers, who dub the moving lips of the stars on the image track, become famous in their own right. The cinema is both a synesthetic and a synthetic art. The famous definitions of cinema in terms of other arts- "Painting in motion", "Sculpture in motion", "Music of light" and "Architecture in movement" – call attention to the synthetic multiplicity of signifiers available to the cinema.

In the broader sense, the process of adaptation has much in common with interpretation theory for in a strong sense adaptation is the appropriation of a meaning from a prior text. The making of film out of an earlier text is as old as the machinery of cinema itself. Well over half of all commercial films have come from literary originals. Dudley Andrew in his article 'Adaptation' reduces the possible modes of relation between the film and the text, from several to three: "borrowing, intersection and fidelity of transformation."^[7]

Gombrich finds that all discussion of adaptation introduces the category of "matching."^[8] Like Bazin, he regards adaptation as a fact of human practice. In *Film and Fiction, The Dynamics of Exchange*, Keith Cohen tries to justify the scientific approach to questions between these arts. The mechanism of implication among signs lends Cohen to conclude that "narrativity is the most solid medium link between novel and cinema."^[9]

Roland Barthes described this sort of intertextuality that includes film and literature along with the other media by saying "The cultural codes....will emigrate to other texts; there is no lack of hosts."^[10] 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. Seymour Chatman, a new critic, advised readers of the cinema's limitations. But as Robert B. Ray in his article 'The Field of Literature and Film' writes, "Although film and television and now computers, have steadily supplanted the book as our presiding means of communication, we continue to live in a period of transition, with the two forms, word and image, existing side by side."^[11]

R. K. Narayan, as has been rightly described by William Walsh, "is the new voice in English in India in the 19th and 20th centuries."^[12] Some of his novels and short stories have been adapted and dramatized in Hindi, English and other regional South Indian languages.

Narayan's most popular novel "The Guide" published in 1958, for which he was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960, was adapted by Vijay Anand as "Guide", a Hindi movie. Although, the film was proved to be a hit on the box office and liked by the mass and is still liked, Narayan himself was not happy with the way the film was made and its deviation from the original text. He, therefore, wrote a column in 'Life Magazine', "The Misguided Guide", criticizing the film.

The film is not an adaptation of the novel "The Guide" but simply based on it is mentioned in its titles. So, a few changes here and there, to suit the taste of the mass, are expected. But if we read the novel and watch the movie carefully, we find quite a few changes made in the original text just to serve the purpose mentioned earlier.

"In "The Guide", Narayan derivates from the traditional mode of narration; part of the story is told by the author and part in the first person by the hero himself."^[13] As the novel opens we find, Raju, who has just been released from prison, is after meeting the talkative barber, sitting on the banks of the river (Saryu), which is one of the identities of Narayan's Malgudi. But in the movie, the entire locale background is shifted to Udaipur. Chittod is also mentioned in the film. Thus, Malgudi, is regarded as the real hero of all the ten novel and all short stories written by Narayan, is entirely eliminated from the scene. In the flashback Raju shown speaking different Indian regional languages

to different tourist is a good attempt to popularize the movie in different parts of India. Like in reading novel, one has to be very alert and attentive, while watching the movie, in order to link the story because of the excessive use of the flashback technique. The narration moves backward and forward, in a zigzag manner. The past and the present are juxtaposed, the one serving to illuminate the other. The Soliloquies are also used to good effect by the director, in order to remind the audience of the past and what the characters think at present. In the film it is briefly but clearly explained through the song "Yahan Kaun Hai Tera..." how Raju became a 'Swami', how he was misunderstood as one, though he does not object at Bhola's (Velan in the novel) addressing him as 'Swami' at their first meeting.

True to its original text, Raju in the movie is shown as a complex character. Unlike a typical Hindi movie hero, he is ordinary. So, he is both a hero and an anti-hero at the same time. The evergreen romantic actor Late Dev Anand perfectly fits in the character of a born romantic Raju. His knowledge of human psychology is the secret of his success not only as a 'railway guide' but as a 'spiritual guide'. The climax of the film, like that of the novel, depicts his predicament and the end, his spiritual regeneration. Though in the last scene of the film, Rosie and other characters are shown mourning and lamenting the death of Raju whereas the novel ends on a note of ambiguity.

The fascinating Waheeda Rehman plays the complex character of Rosie beautifully. Her personality, her passion for dancing, her vitality and her sanity and wisdom everything suits to the character of Rosie. But in the film, Rosie is shown having the suicidal tendencies: thrice she attempts to commit suicide by one way or the other; all the time is saved by Raju. The song "Aaj Phir Jine Ki Tamanna Hai..." though melodious, but looks misplaced especially after Marco asked her to go home and immediately after her second attempt to suicide there was no reason to enjoy. The character of Marco is also tempered within the film – along with his other features like his love for Archaeology, his eccentricity, his harshness to and neglect of Rosie, he is shown as impotent in the film. If so, then how was he shown romancing with the servant girl? Just to give impetus to Rosie to love Raju?

Although, the songs are melodious and popular, but they are one too many and quite frequent and thus, sometimes hinders the progress of the plot. S. D. Burman's music is melodious. The beautiful and symbolic picturization of the song sequence "saiyan beiman" and "kya se kya ho gaya" is impressive. Along with the melodious songs and music, the picturesque visual effects, impressive and puny dialogues, wonderful direction and marvellous acting by the finest actors add to the entertainment value of the film.

All things considered, we can conclude that the film gets over in 3 hours, while the reading of the complete novel takes days. For the masses, watching a film entertains more than reading a novel. It is less expensive in terms of time, energy and concentration. Moreover, some of the stories from his well-known collection of short stories, 'Malgudi Days', along with portions of his two novels 'Swami and Friends' and 'The Vender of Sweets' have also been dramatized in the form of a television series entitled "Malgudi Days" which was a success. Narayan was also happy with the adaptations and complimented the actor-director Shankar-Nag and the producers for sticking to the storyline in the original books.

Just as in the novels, so also in the short stories, the setting is always provided by Malgudi. It has been said that Malgudi is the real hero of Narayan's novels, and so it is of his short stories. As one up Narayan's collections of stories, the first thing that strikes the eye is their immense variety. He has written on every conceivable subject between heaven and earth. There are stories dealing with the supernatural, with children, with animals, with human relationships of all shades and kinds, with the different professions, with various social evils, customs, traditions, superstitions etc., sometimes in a humorous, sometimes in an ironic-satiric vein.

As Seymour Chatman, a new critic, rightly says in this connection that, "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)."^[10] So we can conclude by saying that in today's age of cinema and television and now even computers and 3-G, 4-G cell phones, many of the habits of the common people including the habit of reading and writing literature have also changed. Hectic life style, shortage of time, decrease in reading class of people despite the abundance of literary output, commercialization of both fiction (literature) and film, entertainment value attached to cinema and TV etc are all among the reasons for the dramatization of more and more literary works. And how handling of plot, theme, characters, costume, narrative technique, script, action, direction, music,

songs etc. can make the dramatized version different from its original literary work. Yet they both serve their own purposes in their own different ways.

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