

**Film Adaptation, Transcreation and Fidelity: A Critical Analysis of *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa***

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In *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa*, Govind Nihalani set before himself the task of putting his knowledge, his trope and his artistry at the service of a tale by Mahashweta Devi. No matter how we judge the process or success of the film, its "being" owes something to the tale that was its inspiration and potentially its measure. The most critical central step in the transformation of the source text to the screen is the writing of the screenplay. This screenplay often undergoes multiple revisions and changes prior to production. The screenplay reflects the crucial decisions of writer/ director, and ultimately that determine how and to what end the film imitates or departs from its original text. The film is itself an artistic sign with a given shape and value, if not a finished meaning. As Dudley Andrew says:

Adaptation claiming fidelity bears the original as a signified, whereas those inspired by or derived from an earlier text stand in a relation of referring to the original... (2004, 122)

In the act of film adaptation, a director begins with the raw stuff, the subject matter of a short story, novella, or novel, of a play, history, biography, or with a poem, song, or folk tale. Adaptation can be classified into three types: loose, faithful, or literal. In fact film adaptation is a new trend for the industry and it is gaining prominence owing to the fact that everybody is now on the lookout for that elusive script that would set the box office on fire. This particular film adaptation is based on 'concentration strategy' i.e. the film presentation is faithful to the original text. The paper intends to foreground the cinematic techniques, as adaption is generally based on the process of deleting, editing and adding something to reduce to into the effect of "estrangement". The critical analysis of this film has put various issues in perspectives, where a text fails to convey to some extent. However when the two different genres are selected for scrutinizing their representations of the same story, the task becomes quite demanding. Only a close study of film and novel version of the same narrative

can reveal with great clarity the peculiar powers of two media. Once these peculiarities are grasped, the reasons for the differences in form, content and impact of the two versions strikingly emerge.

## I

From the earliest days of cinema, adaptation has been nearly as common as the development of original screenplays. The relation between literature and film has, in recent years, become the object of increased attention among practitioners of both the art forms. Adaptation – the reworking of a verbal text or another artefact for a new audience in a different genre or media – is as old a practice as cultural production itself, yet its systematic study – adaptation studies – is only a recently emerging discipline. Literature foregrounds the language and literariness whereas film rarely does it. Adaptation is not merely repeating another work, nor as an expressed intention that juxtaposes itself to another expressive intention rather it is the recreation and reappearance in another discursive field, of an element, a plot, theme, characters etc. that has previously appeared elsewhere. Reappearance is a new discursive event that locates itself in a certain time and space in society, one that, at the same time, carries within it the memory of an earlier discursive event.

Within this reappearance, what matters is the development of a new communicative situation. This interrelation which is deeply related to the modernist world view finds fascinating expression through the work of modern literatures both for those who argue for the distinction of the two media as well as for those who believe that two genres are parallel and analogous. In discussing the aesthetics of film adaptation, the basic question pertains to what the literary text gains and losses in the process of celluloid transposition. No doubt the two are distinct art forms yet the narrative is the common element of both. While films are gestural, literature is representational. Films embody and describe literature. Literature is pre-technological but its literary critical terminology is now used by films. A film is a collaborative effort while books embody the solitary journey of a writer which is then presented to another single -individual, the reader.

The fact that viewers are always being exposed to the multiplicity of signifiers contained within the space of a frame or series of frames has implication for the adaptation of verbal material; for example, as it relates to the representation of characters and settings. What we receive as information from the mis-en-scene may be less susceptible to the film-maker's

control (because of the strongly spatial orientation of the film and because of the simultaneous bombardment by several kinds of claims on our attention) than what viewer receives from the linear presentation of words on the page. So the difference is not only in the forms but also in the way how the message is delivered to the audience. In some cases, people tend to say that movies can be screened from a literary work as the novel and movie has the same structure. However all this is not as simple as it apparently seems. In fact the relationship between film and literature remains age old, interesting, and complicated.

Films can be viewed as a means of telling the story in a different way or translating the story into a different language. As a result, a filmmaker not only translates a novel for the screen; rather, he or she becomes the author of a new work. There is a constantly growing supply of plays, novels and short stories that might adapt well to the screen. When a director takes over a strong framework (from a literary work or from a life situation) and substitutes his or her own choice of main elements, an entirely new work can emerge, because everything else, including the main issues, get affected. The present paper has tried to discuss how the text works out as film/cinema. Moreover the story of a film is not only retold but recreated through the process of cinematography. In this way both film and the novel represent separate institutions, each achieving its best results by exploring unique and specific properties. The present paper intends focusing firstly on the critical study of "verbal text" and "visual text" and secondly the endeavour is to see how a film adaptation becomes trans-creation of an author. In this way the director becomes the re-creator of the visual text. In a film, the director uses space as a fiction writer does, his camera becomes the "Pen", which moves, describes and records cinematically. This visual technique he uses can be analyzed in cinematic terms: long shots, close ups, wide angle zoom, freeze frame, still focus, dissolve, slow motion, dolly shots, panoramic shots and so on the camera is first and foremost an apparatus for objectively registering the world, little more than a tool without any narrative function. The present film has been made with the effect of chiaroscuro. The extensive use of the close up shots make the film speaks much more than a novel. In the novel, the reader perceives what he/she reads and imagery is constructed in the mind. Thus sometimes it is difficult to bring unity between the spoken words and hidden thoughts. In the film through visual images, spectator's subjectivity is controlled by the camera. The viewer can see what the filmmaker wants to make the spectator to see.

The fact is that the actual transforming of the product from print to screen is not a simple or uniform process. A director cannot just film the book because the structural and perceptual aspects of the divergent media are not directly compatible. Among the several noteworthy

distinctions, one major difference is that the film is structured in such a way as to provide an abundance of detail to the spectator through subtle variations of light, inflection of colour and nuances of physical expression that are available through photorealistic rendering. This capacity lends itself well to maintaining a focus on specific details as opposed to larger concepts and themes that might be more central to the novel. Several theorists have observed that film requires a 'unity of action not just of theme and that for the most part, the action takes precedence over theme' (Mccaffery, 1967, 14). Linda Hutcheon refers to adaptation in her *The Theory of Adaptation* as "an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (2006, 8). Hutcheon also explains the doubled definition of adaptation "as a product and process, and that using such a definition is "one way to address the various dimensions of the broader phenomenon of adaptation" (22). Before engaging in any analytical approaches to a specific literature-to film adaptation a close reading of both the fiction and film becomes a must. Although Hutcheon asks: "Are some kinds of stories and their worlds more easily adaptable than other?" (15). She goes on to say that linear realist novels are more adaptable to the screen than experimental novels. However this is not necessarily the case. Because the present text doesn't follow linear narrative style rather it is based on flashback narrative style. Since the source text has been made into the film, it is adaptable, but experimental in nature. Nihalani has used the flashback technique perfectly in his film-making.

There is also the question of what the filmmaker is being faithful to. Is it the novel's plot in every detail or the spirit of the original? It usually isn't the plot details because movies must condense a thirty hour read into a two hour film. Because of this, characters and plotlines may be condensed or changed. Point of view may be altered to allow for a more "cinematic" experience. These may also be changed to make unpleasant or dated aspects of the film more palatable to mainstream audiences. Finding the spirit of the novel is also problematic. Film offers a variety of focused and sustained camera angles. It expands or contracts our experience by virtue of the absence of the space-time continuum. Shots in separate spaces are edited together. Different times can be spliced, joined, or blended. The everyday sequential chain of experience is removed, intensified, or rearranged.

## II

In the present context there is an express purpose and a mission of both the author as well as the director to convey an idea that critiques life and society and make one understand the phenomenon of naxalism in this postmodern world. Again adaptation here by Nihalani is not merely transference from literature to cinema but is to make one political conscious. It is well

known fact that Bengal has always been the home of revolutionary fervour and intellectual ferment. In the late sixties, Bengal was riven by political strife. Infact the very idea of making a film on Mahashweta's novel suggests Nihalani's appreciation if not an endorsement of the point of view expressed by the great writer in *Mother of 1084*. It is a revaluation of the same situation after a gap of twenty years. Though Govind Nihalani, is true to the spirit of the translated text, and though Mahasweta Devi herself had given a most heartening endorsement for the performance of Jaya Bachan in the lead role of the mother, for serious viewers across Bengal, the film seemed to have failed in capturing the haunting memories of the turbulent 70's and the actual Naxalite movement seemed too insipid. Yet considered from the psycho-sociological angle, the film can be called successful in the depiction of the lead role of Sujata, the mother, who is the prototype of every urban Indian woman who pretends to have established a great channel of communication with her children, but seldom digs deep to understand what might be bothering them. And after she does, she often gives up, saying that she cannot handle them anymore. Nihalani's visual art is an attempt towards not only bringing plight or sympathy for naxalites, but also to provide political consciousness to a common man, who fails to understand the dreams and visions of young people like Brati. The difference between two media has resulted in the manipulation and condensation of the end part. Sujata is shown writing her experience on her diary. And then Brati appears and sits beside her. The spectator knows that Brati is not alive, he is dead and yet he continues to live. The mis-en-scene symbolically depicts that an activist can never be allocated in the society and revolutionaries like Brati have a continual existence in the memories of his mother. Here he dwells in the memories of his mother, Sujata and his struggle is carried on by her in her own way. Thus these are certain film parts which establish the uniqueness of visual art. The irony of activism has been shown more covertly. Some episodes are added and changes have come to play down the importance of the social and political issues as rendered in the novel.

The differing structural and perceptual qualities of text and film allow for different sets of options with regard to the transmission of narrative. Point of view and time, two crucial elements of narrative, can be used quite differently in each case. Three discreet types of duration occur across literature and film: duration of the reading/viewing, duration of the narrator's telling, and duration of the narrative events. However the aesthetic aspect gets unfolded with the subjective camera and through the use of specific cinematic techniques. The analysis shows that the sequence of event is same but the end is different. All the three parts of the novel are yoked together in the film. Throughout the film, the viewer observes the transformation of its protagonist Sujata. The director supplements the performing potential present in the text, with cinematic tools available to him. In the film there is a lapse of twenty

three years between the night of celebration when Sujata collapses, and the present situation when Dibyanath and Sujata both are shown old and aged. Dibyanath is depicted as a transformed man. In the beginning of the film he does not like to talk about Brati, but he mellows down at the end and wants to meet Nandini. Thus certain changes have been presented in the character of Sujata as well as in Dibyanath's character.

As concerns the structure of literary and cinematic works, the novel and the film have used different and significant narrative codes. Visual codes help to present physical character and the space to the spectator. Sound codes contribute considerably to the emotional effects in the film as do cultural codes regarding the understanding of the era, its atmosphere and conditions. Another important observation is that the novel is more open-ended than the film that provides the spectator with a final scene where the viewer confronts with Sujata's incarnate face of "Shakti". This scene can be interpreted as the sparks of activism. One should regard adaptation as an individual and unique work of art in its own world. The film ends as it begins, with Sujata – the only difference being that she is now much more at peace within herself and with the surroundings around her. With better understanding of the situation around her, Sujata now feels closer to her son than she had ever felt before.

The novel enacts Devi's own passage from urban middle-class domesticity to the larger sphere of what would be her focal subject and concern, the age-long exploitation of the tribals and the landless peasantry in rural eastern India. As far as film is concerned the tools in the hands of the director are different than those of the writer. The primary distinction between the novel and film arises from the fact that the former is a verbal medium, whereas film is essentially visual. Cinema is celebrated for its storytelling ability as much as theatre, and with equal artistic values. Therefore the intertextual frame is predominately activated and the adaptation rests on a situation that refers primarily to the textual or verbal world. The screen and the printed page have been nearly inseparable since the very first black and white movies flickered in dark theatres more than a hundred years ago. Thus a new artistic work then features this original sign as either its signified or its referent. There is certainly much to analyze from comparing a given novel with its filmic adaptation both in ideological and narrative terms. Here it will not be a question of studying film –novel relations, but rather how a film adaptation moves certain steps forward than its original text or how a new text emerges out of an adaptation. Though poetry has been projected in both film and fiction, film brings out all together a different kind of effect in the film. Here it can be assumed that Nihalani planned for a particular effect that has been achieved, but the spectator might still

see something in the film that the director did not plan for a viewer to see, much like a novelist can not possibly know the myriad of ways his/her novel will be interpreted.

Nihalani adapts the novel faithfully as the character of Sujata, Brati, Nandini and Dibyanth are presented most faithful in nature. And it's opposite; there are various parts, where the film veers from the novel. For example Sujata's mother-in-law is not presented in the film. Nihalani presents the patriarchal order and subjugation of women through a husband - wife relationship only. Moreover Nihalani takes the narrative forward by editing the last part of the film. He actually makes the end of the film more meaningful and enlightened. Yet Nihalani has succeeded in foregrounding the phenomenon of Naxalism. The film dramatically and technically reinvents the book in filmic form, yet both from the basic premise of naxalism and mother-son bond. Keeping these ideas in mind, the study has made an effort to provide an overview of the film adaptation including both the reading of the film and the reading of the text. It has attempted to explore how the aspect of naxalism has been depicted through two different media. These mediums have been perceived differently.

One may originally experience the difference between a novel and film as nothing more than a vague dissonance—dissatisfaction with the comparison that we cannot identify. This induces critical thinking, pushing us toward clarification through closer comparison. Through this critical thinking, we are likely to get a better understanding than we had before of both works and the media that convey them. The Comparative study may help us to identify what it is about a literary or cinematic work that we like or do not like. Without something to compare with, these likes or dislikes often manifest as vague anomalous states that we cannot quite define. This work shows that Hutcheon's Adaptation theory insights regarding the reading of the film and the novel can be very useful in understanding some important aspects of the film adaptation. Since it shows that a film adaptation is not a mere translation or transformation of specific signifiers, it is a 'transcreation', which stands as a 're-creation' of a director.

From the ongoing discussion it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that Mahashweta Devi's *Mother of 1084* and Govind Nihalani's adaptation of the novel are both masterpieces in their own right. Much of the novel's uniqueness owes to the use of different literary techniques and moreover memory plays a significant part, through which we perceive the novel's description of characters, space, time and history. In Mahashweta Devi's written text the plot is condensed into the scenic space of a single day through the device of the mother recalling, a year after, the events that followed the morning when she was summoned to



identify her son lying dead in the police morgue. Through this device of dramatic condensation, Devi achieves an admirable concentration of effect. In the end, however, it is not the technical superiority of print on bound pages that proves the lasting value of the book. Neither is it the cinematography effect alone which proves the superiority of visual text nor technology, rather it is the physical reality of a piece of art which determines its uniqueness. The film employs a multiplicity of techniques, but its greatest impact upon the novel is perhaps in this very visual aspect.

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