

Hello From Call Center: The Journey Of A Fiction To Film

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Abstract

In these days the best-seller fictions are leaving their traditional domain of the bookshelf and have come to live in the land of the motion pictures. Science has discovered an easy path for those who would rather 'watch' a novel than read it. Cinema has transformed the black and white reality of the print into vibrant and moving images for the world to see. "Hello"— a Bollywood movie directed by Atul Agnihotri, is an example of one such movie where one could 'watch' a novel. The movie is adapted from "One Night @ Call Centre" one of the best-seller novel of Chetan Bhagat. The present paper would discuss on the attributes of the English novel and the various transformations it has undergone to become a full size Hindi commercial movie. The objective of the discussion would be to explore the dialectical relation between these two forms of art in the context of the present day scenario of globalization.

Keyword: Chetan Bhagat, Bollywood, Film Studies, Popular Literature

At the outset we need to reconsider the fact that certain best-sellers have been leaving their traditional domain of the book shelf and coming to live in the land of motion pictures. Indeed technology has discovered an easy path for us to "watch" a book than read it. And watching cinema has certainly transformed the black and white reality of the print into vibrant and moving images which is supposed to be the most powerful means, to get moved. "Hello", a Bollywood movie directed by Atul Agnihotri is an example where one would watch a best-seller. It is being adapted from Chetan Bhagat's "One Night @ the Call Center". In this paper I shall try to discuss certain features of the transformation of the best-seller has undergone in order to become a full-size Hindi commercial film. Alongside, I would try to point out that after the fiction made into a film, what kind of relationship may exist between these two different forms of art.

Bhagat's novel appeared in the year 2005 as an evidence of the great leap forward of Indian commercial fiction in English. It sold out in million copies making him India's top best selling fiction writer. As an author he carved his own niche; his books are circulated prominently within the country and those can be regarded as reasonably distinct from the

“literary fiction” in English which has larger- than- Indian presence. But the language being English the best-seller of Bhagat under discussion, not unlike his other books might have missed the non-English knowing masses. Agnihotri must have read Bhagat in original, but in transcreating the fiction into film he took recourse to a language very different from the author’s. One aspect of the language used by the film maker is verbal and in this particular sense he has shifted from English to Hindi in order to reach out to a larger audience. The film script is based on Chetan’s fiction but it does not exactly follow the fictional text. Apart from the reorganisation of the entire plot, the film uses dialogues different from those which has been used in the fiction.

Example: Fiction- In Chapter- 2 when Shyam comes running towards his office pick-up van the driver says “*what Sahib late again?*”

But in the film the driver says : “ *Kyun Sahib aaj bhi aage baithoge?*”

Example: Again in the same chapter *Military Uncle* inquires to the driver when the office pick-up van reached late by saying ‘ *Late?* ’ and gave a - ...*it must be your fault look to Shyam.* But in the film the director has ignored this incident completely.

At the same time however, it retains some dialogues intact from the fictional text.

Example: Another character named Shefali, who happens to be Shyam’s colleague cum stop-gap girl-friend , calls him *Eddy teddy* and herself *Curly wurly* and their introduction scene in the film retains the same dialogue that exists in the fiction – *Curly wurly is sad*

Eddy teddy is very bad....I leave in 10 min...

The use of Hindi is thus adumbrated with English, reversing Bhagat’s use of occasional Hindi in-side his English text. The effect of this typical use of verbal language is that the film gets a scope of retaining a dual identity. On one hand it is Bhagat’s fiction made into a Hindi film, and on the other it is an independent Bollywood melodrama that has used some elements of Bhagat’s text.

Another linguistic aspect is certainly visual though not independent of the verbal aspect discussed earlier. Both the fiction and the film dramatize the anxieties that many Indians are feeling over the redefinition of middle-class social structures and norms in the context of globalization as a metaphor for social change. Contemporary middle-class Indian anxieties around globalization revolve around wide spread perceptions of growing Westernization among youth and young adults and the threat of corruption these pose. In black and white, this narrative of anxiety opens with a frame story which recounts a train journey from Kanpur to Delhi. During the journey, the narrating author meets a beautiful girl. The girl offers to tell the author a story on a condition that he has to make it his second book. After a lot of hesitation the author agrees. The story was about six persons working in a call centre. One night they got a phone call from God within the story, which comprises the bulk of the book, relates the events that happen one night at a call centre. Told through the eyes of the protagonist Shyam, it is a story of almost lost love, thwarted ambitions, absence of family affection, pressures of a

patriarchal set up, and the work environment of a globalized office. The God's voice in the story comes at a point of crisis at the middle of the night and it tells that God will save the characters in the story from certain death if they promise to strive for what they really want in life, not succumb to the exploitative demands of others. This encounter encourages all of the characters to reassess the directions their lives are taking, and to implement drastic changes. Visually, the movie "Hello" starts with a thud as a Rockstar played by Salman Khan jumps off a chopper and dances to "Bang Bang Bang" on a stage where – needless to say – he takes off his shirt to flaunt his finely waxed chest and abs to a crowd of swooning and fainting girls. Thereafter, the rockstar in his long leather over coat and conspicuously visible hair implants retires to a lounge to rest while a technical snag in his chopper is being fixed. Then and there walks in a beauty, played by Katrina Kaif who tells him a story. This very shift of opening in the film from that of the fiction is but a shift from the world of realism to the world of fairy tales. The way Bhagat has seen the characters and the society in which they live in, appear very different from the way it is seen by the director. The degree of difference between Chetan in the fiction and Salman in the film is indeed quite equal in the degree of difference of the fictional narrative and the filmic images. If repulsion is intended by Bhagat towards the lives of his characters as being portrayed by him, the visual language of the film lures the audience into the life of the corporate world and its discontents. In brief, the anxieties are actually celebrated in the film.

Atul Agnihotri as a director has used the well known stars of Bollywood like Salman Khan, Katrina Kaif, Arbaaz Khan, Amrita Arora, Isha Kopikaar, Sharad Saxena , etc., to play the character in his film. One of the perennial problems of the star-cast is that the audience enjoying the film chiefly as a piece of entertainment find difficult to get out of the influence of the stars they have been fond of. The appearance of the stars thus become much more important than the message the film intends to give employing various filmic techniques. What is generally understood by cheap entertainment becomes the central concern of the commercial cinema when various item songs and dances are being added to a dazzling star – cast. There is no hesitation to admit that Atul Agnihotri's handling of Bhagat's fiction includes all these characteristic features of Bollywood melodrama. Certainly this must have contributed in allowing the film run for several weeks in the cinema halls. But how much justice it has done to the fiction, there could be serious doubts.

Chetan Bhagat is a commercial writer and time and again he has proclaimed that his fiction differs greatly from the fiction of say Salman Rushdie or Upamanyu Chatterjee. But it is worthy to be noticed that as an author he never separates himself from serious social issues. Some very good films on Bhagat's fictions like *The Three Idiots* or *Kai Po Che* may provide ample proof in this regard. However, Atul Agnihotri's treatment to "One Night @ the Call Center" has really made Bhagat "commercial" in literal sense of the term. I would like to conclude the paper by drawing everybody's attention to one very powerful instance of how

the film could directly influence the fiction on which it is based. A serious issue for another seminar on *Film to Literature* this could be a guiding clue in its own accord. If we look at the cover of the seventy second impression of Bhagat's *One Night* we would witness Salman Khan standing tall in the middle clustered around by the other stars. "Now a Major Film Called 'HELLO...' Directed by ATUL AGNIHOTRI" is written on top of the cover imposing the film's identity on the fiction. Who knows this cover might have increased the number of Chetan's readers. Once Shashi Tharoor wrote about Bhagat's fiction, "...pitch-perfect, his observer's eye keenly focused on nuances and detail...One Night @ the Call Center has struck a chord with India's young – and it clearly has – it is more for its depiction than its politics, its diagnosis rather than its prescription." Don't we expect "Hello" from the "Call Center" intervening the commodification that has been going on in the name of turning fictions into films?

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