

## **Transposition of Prose Narrative into Cinematic Narrative in the Assamese Film *Adjaya***

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**Abstract:** The focus of this paper is to test the narrative functionality of film adaptations in comparison to its source novel. Two most important traditional approaches to study the film adaptations are fidelity criticism and intertextuality. However in analysing film adaptations one must consider narrative to be the single most important elements which is shared by both medium. Hence this research paper includes various narrative aspects of the novel and sees how it is being realized in its cinematic counterparts. Part of the study also covers those elements of the novel which require adaptation proper or more comprehensively known as enunciation. Due to the aspect of adaptation proper a film stands of its own even if it is based on a previous source. This research takes into account one of the finest Assamese film *Adjaya* by the director Santwana Bordoloi which was adopted from the classic novel “Dantal Hatir Uweye Khuwa Haowdeh” by Mamoni Roisom Goswami. The conclusion this research may provide basis for most systematic and objective appraisal of what happened in the process of transposition from one text to another.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, Cinematic narratives, Cinema studies, Film Adaptations, Film Studies, Narratology

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Cinema as a medium of art, from the very beginning has been constantly drawing inspiration from the literary sources. Especially novels remain the chief source of its story. Both literature and film are pre-eminently narrative mediums. James Monaco states that film and novel stand close in that they share the same narrative capacities and tell stories from narrator’s perspective (Monaco: 2000). Hence there has been over reliance of films on novels for its narrative contents. It is proved by the fact that great numbers of films made in global markets are based on literary text of varying degrees. James Naremore mentioned in his introduction for “Film Adaptations” cites statistics published by variety “twenty percent of the movies produced in 1997 had books as their sources. Another twenty percent were derived from plays, sequels, remakes, television shows and magazine or newspaper articles” (Naremore: 2000). Yet it is very surprising to see that how little systematic attention given to the process of adaption study as far as academic discourse is concerned. Thomas Leitch (2000) in this regard “Adaptation studies have been practiced in a theoretical vacuum without a presiding poetics” (Leitch: 2003).

From the very beginning analysis of film adaptations are being done in the light of fidelity comparison. The film is being questioned by looking at its proximity to its source novel. How far it is successful enough to represent the narrative content of the novel? Fidelity criticism assume that that the text has one ‘single’ and ‘correct’ meaning which the filmmaker choose to adhere or to violate with. However, in recent times scholars have completely dismissed fidelity criticism as a valid tool for examining an adaptation. As Andrew said, “For some time, the leading academic trend has ignored this concern with fidelity, finding the vertical line that anchors a film to its literary substrate exasperating and constraining. Scholars today tend to detach the anchor and let the films they write about float free” (Andrew:2011). One such approach is to analyse the factors other than fidelity to source to determine the value of a film adaptation. These various factors are such as historical and cultural references especially when the film version does not follow hot upon the novel’s publication, production determinants, director’s predilections or genre conventions are crucial enough to shape the film its own identity. These factors are clubbed under one term intertextuality. It is important to note that more one considers the phenomenon of adaptation of novel into film the more one is drawn to consider the central importance of narrative to both. Therefore, so much attention has been paid to the original text’s contribution to the film. But what we failed to estimate the irreducible differences between the two narratives and what can and what cannot be transformed. Consequently two lines of investigation seem worthwhile a) in the transposition

process what is possible to transfer from the novel and b) what key factors other than source novels influenced the film version. A true reading of the film depends on a response to how cinematic codes and aspects of mise-en-scene work to create a particular version of the text.

## **II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the study is to determine, what distinctions can be made between what may be transferred from one narrative medium to another and what requires adaptation proper.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

The researcher has used content analysis method to study the proposed case study i.e. the novel *Dantal Hatir Uweye Khuwa Haodah* and its film version *Adajya*. Interviews of the director and film critics are taken for discussion. Secondary data consists of newspaper article, books, journals and other writings of importance to the study. The works of narratological theoretician Roland Barthes, Propps, Mcfarlane etc. and film theoretician Christian Metz, David Bordwell are being consulted while doing the study.

## **IV. BACKGROUND**

The film *Adajya* introduced a fresh air in the filmmaking genre of Assam. Director Santwana Bordoloi who was relatively unknown to that point, only two short films in her kitty, beautifully set up a poignant drama of three widows set in a village of South Kamrup district of Assam. Supported by superb photography, the story set in a wealthy and orthodox Brahmin family with a great religious aura and living off the income from their lands and the gifts of their disciples. *Adajya* narrates the story of two widows coming together as daughters in the family home, with a more independent daughter-in-law living alone in her house. But it is, above all, about the symbolic and singlehanded battle of beautiful Giribala, the youngest of three. She has the same aspirations as all the girls of her age and does not resign herself to the life of recluse barred from love and remarriage, which custom prohibits to widows.

The original novel was written by Dr Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami). She has been mentioned as perhaps the greatest woman writer in Assamese till today. She has written 30 books and hundreds of short stories. Her works are prescribed in syllabus in different universities. She has won several awards for her writings most notably Jananpith Award in 2000.

## **V. NARRATIVE AND ADAPTATION**

Narrative is an essential elements of any fiction be it literature or cinema. Narrative fiction means 'succession of fictional events' (Rimmon-Kenan: 2000). Narrative is common to both cinema and novels and it is of central importance to the phenomenon of adaptation of films. Hence to do a comparative analysis between a novel and film one has to consider its common element i.e. narrative.

In a text narrative performs various functions. Roland Barthes has defined the essence of a narrative function as 'the seed that it sows in the narrative, planting an element that will come to fruition later-either on the same (narrative) level or elsewhere on another level' (Barthes: 1966).

The most important kind of transfer possible from novel to film is located in the category of function proper. If one considers the Barthes categories than we have two distinct types of functions. These are i) cardinal function and ii) catalyzers. Cardinal functions are the hinge points of narrative or they refer to the actions which open up alternative of consequences in the development of the story (Mcfarlane: 1996). In other words they create risky moments in the narrative and it is crucial to maintain narrative fluency. Linking together the two cardinal functions create irreducible bare bones of narrative. Hence when a major cardinal functions is deleted and altered in the film version, it creates an altogether different version of the film when compares to its source novel.

## **VI. ENUNCIATION AND ADAPTATION**

Enunciation works as signifier of narrativity. The film version may retain all the cardinal function, character function or psychological patterns yet both at micro and macro level or articulation it may produce a very different response to the audience. This is possible to determine when the filmmaker sought to produce his own work of art in those areas where transfer is not possible. Cinematic enunciation is distinct from transfer, Enunciation considers those elements which are to create meaning in the film version and these are specific to the cinematic language system. The researcher considering Metz terms includes these elements into 'codes'. These codes are choose to manufacture, in a different signifying system, the narrative and affective responses similar to the novel sometimes notably dissimilar as well.

## VII. CARDINAL FUNCTIONS

As a starting point to consider how closely the filmmakers have sought to produce the original novel in terms of film, the researcher has closely observed the cardinal functions of the novel and films. A comparative analysis of the cardinal functions is given below in tabular form:

sl	Novel	Film
1	Indranath meets Iimon, daughter of JokramBhagawati, a religious preacher.	Omitted
2	Widowed young daughter of Gohain and sister of Indranath, Giribala returned to her paternal house after the demise of her husband.	Same as novel
3	Mark Sahib, an English scholar came to the village and stays in the Gohain's house.	Same as novel
4	The royal tusker went berserk.	Modified
5	Pandas came to invite Durga, aunt of Indranath for pilgrimage toKashi.	Same as novel
6	Durga shifts her belongings along with gold chain to XhoruGohainee's house after an altercation at home.	Same as novel
7	Giribala was caught having meat secretly at a religious dine.	Same as novel
8	Durga found her gold necklace missing from the treasury.	Same as novel
9	MahidharBapu, the helper and a disciple of XhoruGohainee was found in possession of lost necklace.	Same as novel
10	Durga left her home after an altercation with sister-in-law.	Same as Novel
11	Mark and Giribala become intimate	Modified
12	Giribala commits suicide during Agni Suddhi.	Same as novel
13	Indranath goes to visit agitated Ryots land after several warnings.	Omitted

The above list of cardinal functions may not be comprehensive enough, but the researcher argues that removing one of them could seriously impact the outcome of the events of the narrative. For example: removal of event 3 where Mr Mark Sahib enters the village can seriously change the dimension of the narrative. Similarly the removal of event 6, where Durga shifts her valuable jewellery to the house of XhoruGohainee that results in loss of the necklace which could have saved her dream of visiting holy place of Kashi and paying the last tribute to her deceased husband could have changed the entire narrative. These are few of the important events omission of which may change visual depiction of the novel. The last cardinal function of the novel i.e., event 13, where Indranath who was mistakenly murdered by the communist is one of the most important cardinal event is omitted in the film.

Since the movie purposely adapts only a part of the novel, it is obvious that numbers of cardinal functions are less in the film. Not only that these are also not chronologically arranged in same order with the source as well. For example: Event 1 where Giribala returns to her home happens much later in the novel.

As the director SantwanaBordoloi points out in an interview with the researcher that her intention was not to adapt the whole novel. Because she feels that it is beyond her capacity to justify such a huge canvas in a screen. There are many reasons: one of them being huge production cost and another, lack of technical personalities. According to her, "drama of three widows looks feasible in terms of scope and production value". Hence there has been wholesome reduction of character numbers and cardinal functions in the film.

## VIII. CHARACTER FUNCTIONS

Essential differences of character function lies on the level of perception in a film and a novel, drawing attention to the fact that "in the novel we as readers imagined (the character's) voice and gestures and facial expressions on the inner stages of our mind, now they are realized for us by a performer, filtered through (the actor's) acting style, with its grimaces, mannerisms, twitches, frowns. Thus the characters in the film are always presented at least subtly and differently compared to the source novel, in case of which the reader has to take an active role whereas in the film this work is partly performed for us" (Stam:2005). Hence, it is the researcher's duty to analyse the essential character functions retained in the film from the novel. For example: a character in the novel who acts as a protagonist may turn into an antagonist in the film. The character is retained but his motivation differs.

Following is the list of some of the characters of the novel:

1. Indranath: He is the protagonist of the story. According to Propps "a hero must possess certain good traits" (Propps: 1968) i.e. brave, honest, kind hearted. Indranath possess all of them. He saved the life of Elimon, a

poor girl, daughter of Jokram Bhagawati, fought for the rights of farmers and supported Giribala against all odds.

2. Boloram: A friend of Indranath and who plays the role of 'donor'.
3. Durga: Paternal aunt of Indranath. She plays the role of a weak feeble character.
4. Giribala : Other important protagonist of the novel and sister of Indranath. Whose search for her own meaning of life leads to denial of social norms and taboo which ultimately leads to a tragic ending.
5. Xhoru Gohainee: Indranath's widowed aunt who nearly takes the shape of a protagonist. She also plays the role of a 'helper'.
6. Muhidhar—One of the antagonist whose action becomes a hurdle in realization of Durga's dream.
7. Guimenni: Remains an 'informant' according to Propps.

According to Propps "... a film, in its selective way can preserve to a striking degree 'those functions of characters' which serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled" (Propps:1968). Dantal Hatir Uweye Khuwa Howdeh is a novel which might well reward a full Proppian analysis in its necessarily selective way. The film has preserved to a striking degree those 'functions of characters which serve as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled' (Propp:1968). Giribala is childish and adamant; Durga is typical of woman who has given up on her fate. Aspects of character motivation and those traits that give distinctive colouring to this or that character are less susceptible to transfer from novel to film, being in general the products of their verbal display with its different order of precision about what is not seen. However with the characters do (that is, their function in the narrative) is as amenable to audio visual as to verbal manifestation. In the film the classic hero traits were missing from the main protagonist Indranath and transferred these traits to Giribala. Other Propp-designated functions ('sphere of action') like abstention (Giribala leaving in-laws house), lack (her lack of politeness and mannerism), and interdiction (she is forbidden to break the traditional mores) are also clearly transferred. But like a true hero she could not stand against the tide of societal pressure that makes her a weak character. Other character functions include those of helper (Mark Sahib), Antagonist (Elder Gohainee), Informant (Guemenni). The character function of 'helper' (Boloram) in the novel is completely removed in the film.

## IX. ENUNCIATION

There are many cinematic techniques which could provide the equivalent to the discursive prose of the novel. These techniques involved Misc-en-scene, voice over, editing and sound track. Their deployments are essential in understanding the world of Giribala and the people of South Kamrup village in comparison of the Novel.

### 9.1 Editing

The film is utterly believable and hypnotic due to the supremely confident use of cinematic codes. These codes like the use of certain kind of shots and certain ways of suturing them are 'inseparable from the material of expression proper to what is called cinema' (Richard:1973). Many cinematic tools such as cuts, dissolve, fade in-out etc., and use of music and silence and varied camera movements are used in Adjaya proficiently. Here the researcher wishes to show how these codes relating to cinematic punctuations reordered those narrative functions and provide a new and powerful structure.

The example here is from the first scene of the film which opens with a long shot of Amaranga Satra. The daily work of preparing rice from paddy is going on, Guemenni waits in the veranda. There is an upbeat yet eerie music. Inside the house, Gohainis offering prayer and Indranath restlessly waits for important news. In another room Gohainee and Durga are sitting in a mood of despair. Suddenly a bullock cart enters the Satra, a person goes to the room and talks to Indranath. Their conversation is inaudible due to the background music which goes up in faster rhythm. Indranath goes inside the room and Gohainee walks up to him and suddenly both Durga and Gohainee broke into tears. The sequence ends with a fade in. Throughout the sequence there was no diegetic sound used rather a eerie music is played.

The next segment is connected through a fade out. The important news which was received in the previous segment and which was kept hidden from the viewers is now revealed in this segment. Guemenni, the housekeeper when putting the light on the room asks the Gohainee to stop crying saying- "Crying will not bring back your son-in-law" which gives the viewers the information of someone's demise. Hence it can be seen that all the careful handling of necessary cinematic tools by the director i.e. editing, music, camera movements, mise-en-scene all have combined here to showcase the adaptation proper of the film Adjaya.

The track and pan shot contribute significantly to this film's narrative elegance and fluidity.. The three minute long segment of Mark Sahib learning to read Sanchipat from Giribala is an example. The segment starts showing Mark Sahib and Giribala sitting distance apart in the same room. The segment ends showing both of them sitting next to each other in touching distance suggesting their closeness over the days of learning. The Montag like editing techniques is a proven example of authorial direction.

### 9.2 Flash-back

When Giribala returns to her maternal home after the demise of her husband, she stopped near by a forest in the return journey. The small lake by the forest reminds her of her childhood. She could dream of care free little running with a big smile. The camera then shows a shot of her ritual bath at that lake in the time of her marriage. These fragmented shots of alternate realities are combined together with many cuts. This flashback shots acquainted the viewers with the psyche of Giribala in just one scene.

### 9.3 Mise-en-scene:

Mise-en-scene refers to such matters such as setting, lighting, costumes, actors' facial expression and body language. It also includes lighting and camera placement and movement. The periodic resemblance of the story is faithfully visualised by the director. The film depicts Amranga Satra, house of the upper Brahmin class of pre independence era. Director creates an aura of pre independence era by carefully choosing the costume, make up, and other elements such as elephant, bullock cart, cycle etc. The movie was shot in real-location of South Kamrupi village. The women are dressed in distinct white handcrafted *mekhlachadar* which clearly suggest traditional mores of Assamese society.

### 9.4 Dialogue

The dialogues of this movie are overwhelmingly taken from the novel itself. The important observation here is the use of South Kamrupi dialects in the dialogue spoken by the characters. About the faithfulness of the film while transposing the dialogue, Santwana Bordoloi answers to the researcher that initially she thought of writing it in upper Assamese tone due to her proficiency in that language (it is important to note here that the screenplay is written by the director herself) and because it is more widely spoken dialect in Assam as well. But it is not long to realize that changing the dialect may result in loss of original emotion of those characters.

## X. CONCLUSION

It is hard to answer the question of fidelity. Cinema as an art form relies heavily on its cinematic elements. It has its own signifying system. Use of cultural codes, music and songs give it a different viewing experience. It is evident from the analysis Adajya is not a full adaptation of the novel. This was even mentioned in the title credit of the novel. The director Santwana Bordoloi, in an interview with the researcher, expressed her desire to portray strong women issues leaving behind other themes presented in the novel. The collective issues of opium cultivation and absorption by the people, the rising protest of communists, reformation of land laws which plays significant role in the narratives of the novel found no place in this film. Only those portion which are required to create the drama of three widows are visualized here.

Considering the narrative functions it is clear that much of the film's dialogue has been transferred directly. What is significant here that the distinct accent of South Kamrupia dialect has been used like the novel. In this regard the film has shown remarkable fidelity to the source.

The film may transfer the setting but realization of these settings, not only in their physical reality but in their atmosphere and metaphoric significance, is a matter of how Santwana Bordoloi's directional style works to create such illusions. There is major work of adaptation involved here; the writing can never tell us all about a scene, whereas the film is forced to fill its settings, as it fills its frame, with the paraphernalia of the world in which its action is set, creating a visual replacement for effects achieved by the writing.

As far as differences and dissimilarities are concerned; there has been distinct shift in the central figure from Indranath to Giribala in the film. Indranath pushed to the background in the film and remained a passive spectator. The film also omitted many key characters from the novel most notably Indranath's friend Boloram. By elevating Giribala to the role of protagonist, the film also changes the central reflector from Indranath.

It can be concluded that Adajya mostly stand as an own work of the art due its adaptation proper or enunciation as preceding analysis shown. Use of cinematic techniques such as voice-over and dream sequences, flash back etc. puts much of the attention towards the play of psychological patterns in the film. As per the classification of Geoffrey Wagner, Adajya should be called 'Analogy' (Wagner: 1975), which represents a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art.

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