

## FILM AND LITERATURE: ADAPTATION AND APPROPRIATION

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### **Abstract:**

This research paper examines the intricate and multifaceted relationship between film and literature, highlighting the significance of adaptation and appropriation in the creative process. The paper explores the unique artistic qualities of each medium, including their narrative structures, character development, and thematic exploration. It delves into the complexities of adaptation and appropriation, discussing the challenges and benefits of transmuting literary genres into cinematic forms. The paper also examines the concept of cultural appropriation and its implications, emphasizing the need for filmmakers to engage with the original material and cultural influences with integrity, empathy, and a dedication to promoting tolerance and comprehension.

Key words: Adaptation, Film, Literature, Storytelling, Appropriation

### **Introduction:**

The lasting symbiotic relationship between literature and film has continued since the beginning of cinema, due to the significant visual qualities that are inherent in both creative mediums. The realm of cinema has demonstrated a proactive inclination towards embracing and assimilating concepts, frameworks, and methodologies that were once the sole domain of literature. This paper aims to investigate the complex interrelationship between film and literature, focusing on the processes of adaptation and appropriation. The realm of literature and film serve as deeply subjective artistic mediums that inherently lend themselves to multifaceted interpretations, thereby stimulating intellectual discourse. Both exert influence and are subject to the influence of cultural, social, and political contexts. They possess the capacity to question established norms, provoke intellectual contemplation, and inspire societal metamorphosis through the use of storytelling. The realms of film and literature often delve into the exploration of universal human emotions and experiences, thereby fostering the intellectual exchange surrounding complex subjects such as identity, sorrow, affection, and the dynamics of power.

### **Literary and Cinematic Narratives:**

Both literature and film employ narrative structures to engage and enthrall audiences, evoking profound emotional responses and conveying intricate plotlines. However, they employ disparate methodologies and tools to achieve their objectives. Literature predominantly consists of written words, wherein the reader's faculty of imagination plays a pivotal role in constructing vivid mental images and interpreting the narrative. On the contrary, film seamlessly amalgamates various sensory elements, including cinematography, editing, sound design, music, and acting. Film and literature, in their respective forms, function as the quintessential manifestations of human intellect, encapsulating the profound depths of human thought and creativity. A person embarks upon deep introspection concerning various methodologies to aptly convey the intricate essence of human experiences, with the ultimate objective of expanding the boundaries of enlightenment. Upon initial examination, it becomes evident that there is a notable scarcity of acknowledgment and support for the complex interrelationship between the craft of cinematography and the domain of literary representation. Delving into the annals of ancient human civilization reveals the intricate connection between the artistic mediums of cinema and literature. The onset of the 19th century marks the commencement of a symbiotic relationship between the domains of cinema and literature, characterised by progress and fruitful collaboration. The domain of cinema originally cultivated strong associations with both the medium of photography and the realm of fine art. In contrast, the domain of literature primarily confined itself to the realm of print, thus assuming a relatively unchanging and lasting form. The domain of literature encompasses a myriad of genres, each imbued with its own distinct attributes and aesthetic virtues. These literary classifications encompass the succinct and evocative sphere of short stories, the immersive and expansive realm of novels, the captivating and performative domain of dramas, and the lyrical and expressive sphere of poetry. The conspicuous observation can be made that the employment of letters is a pervasive convention within the domain of literature, attributable to the fact that all literary compositions are crafted in a written medium.

### **Adaptation and Appropriation:**

The concepts of adaptation and appropriation in films are intricate and sometimes controversial components of the filmmaking process, giving rise to inquiries about creative interpretation, novelty, and cultural sensitivity. Adaptation is the conversion of a source material, such a literary work or historical event, into a film story. On the other hand, appropriation includes the stealing or recontextualization of aspects, concepts, or tales from a distinct culture or creative tradition. Both

techniques have garnered both acclaim and scrutiny within the film business and among viewers and critics.

Movie adaptations provide filmmakers a chance to creatively reinterpret and rework pre-existing narratives, effectively bringing them to life using the visual and storytelling techniques unique to cinema. Successful adaptations, whether they faithfully recreate classic novels or reimagine historical events, provide fresh perspectives on old stories. They invite viewers to interact with timeless themes and characters in innovative ways. Nevertheless, the process of adaptation presents difficulties, as filmmakers must skilfully manage the intricate task of respecting the original source material while simultaneously making artistic decisions that are suitable for the medium of cinema. Straying excessively from the original material might potentially alienate fans, while adhering too closely may restrict the film's capacity for creativity and innovation.

Appropriation in films, especially when it entails taking from cultures or traditions different from one's own, has ignited discussions on cultural portrayal, genuineness, and morality. Although cultural interchange and cross-cultural influences have enhanced the film industry, appropriation may sometimes result in the distortion, stereotyping, or exploitation of marginalised cultures. Filmmakers must approach appropriation with compassion, respect, and a dedication to genuine portrayal, while honouring the voices and viewpoints of the culture being appropriated.

Over the last several years, conversations on adaptation and appropriation in films have gotten more sophisticated, indicating a heightened understanding of the moral and artistic consequences of these actions. Filmmakers and viewers are actively participating in important discussions on the conscientious and considerate reinterpretation of established storylines, as well as the ethical implications of cultural appropriation and portrayal.

### **Case Studies:**

The paper examines several instances of adaptation and appropriation in films. Adaptation and appropriation in films provide filmmakers with a potent storytelling tool, allowing them to draw inspiration from many sources and reinterpret storylines for fresh audiences. Nevertheless, these techniques also include the need to engage with the original material and cultural influences with integrity, empathy, and a dedication to promoting tolerance and comprehension. Given the continuous

development of the film industry, it is crucial for filmmakers to use intentional and self-reflective approaches when adapting and appropriating information. It is important for them to recognise the impact of their artistic decisions on the broader cultural context. An exemplary instance of adaptation is the cinematic masterpiece *The Shawshank Redemption*, helmed by Frank Darabont and adapted from Stephen King's novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption*. The film adeptly conveys the concepts and characters from King's literary work to the medium of cinema, thereby capturing the spirit of the tale. It utilises the visual and emotional language of film to immerse spectators in a captivating narrative. The adaptation keeps true to the fundamental aspects of the novella while making required modifications for the move to the screen, showcasing the creative capacity of adapting tales across various media platforms.

Conversely, the act of incorporating narratives and cultural components may be seen in films such as *The Lion King*, which drew inspiration from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and traditional African folklore. The film used Shakespearean motifs of betrayal, family relationships, and redemption within a storyline situated in the African savannah, effectively assimilating various inspirations to create a unique and cherished tale that resonates across many cultures. The incorporation of Shakespearean ideas into a different cultural setting has sparked discussions, yet *The Lion King* demonstrates how adapting well-known stories can create fresh and captivating storytelling experiences.

A further instance of appropriation in the realm of cinema may be seen in the film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, helmed by the renowned director Ang Lee. The movie incorporates the visual and thematic aspects of ancient wuxia literature and martial arts films, blending them with a modern sensibility and a global appeal. *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* demonstrates the power of appropriation to create a distinct and culturally meaningful cinematic experience by combining ancient Chinese storytelling and martial arts traditions with cinematic narrative methods.

Both adaptation and appropriation include the innovative reinterpretation of pre-existing tales, enabling filmmakers to provide new viewpoints and analyses of well-known themes, therefore captivating viewers via unique approaches. Nevertheless, it is crucial for filmmakers to engage in these activities with reverence, perceptiveness, and a dedication to genuine portrayal, especially when including aspects from many cultures or traditions. The process of adapting and appropriating stories in films highlights the dynamic and always changing nature

of storytelling. It also demonstrates how films have the ability to revitalise classic narratives and connect different cultures via the medium of cinema. As filmmakers push the limits of adapting and appropriating, they may provide a platform for significant discussions and comprehension across many tales and cultures.

In his essay "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," André Bazin discusses the issue of digests and adaptations, which is often examined in the context of literature. However, literature is simply a small component of a much wider phenomena. Consider the art of painting, for example. An art museum may be seen as a compilation, since it houses a curated assortment of artworks that were originally meant to be shown in a distinct architectural and ornamental setting. However, these pieces of art remain unique. However, let us now consider the hypothetical museum put out by Malraux. Through photographic reproduction, the artwork is fragmented into many facets, refracting its original form. In turn, it replaces the original picture with easily available images of varying proportions and colours. Photography, in essence, serves as a contemporary alternative to engraving, which historically served as the only imprecise "modification" accessible to art enthusiasts. It is important to acknowledge that the adaptation and summarization of original works of art have become very common and regular to the point where it is almost difficult to challenge their presence in today's world. To illustrate my point, I will use examples from the field of movies. (Bazin, André-19-27)

André Bazin asserts that multiple writers, critics, and filmmakers have questioned the artistic rationale behind adapting novels into films. However, there are few instances of people who actively oppose this practice, refusing to sell their own books or adapt the works of others, or declining to direct such adaptations when presented with enticing offers from producers. Therefore, their theoretical argument does not seem entirely warranted. Typically, they assert the singularity or distinctiveness of each genuine literary piece. (Bazin, André-19-27)

Renowned novelist Virginia Woolf emerged as one of the discerning critics who expounded upon the subject of film adaptation in the year 1926. In her literary discourse, she astutely observed that the cinematic renditions of the most celebrated novels of our time often traverse their narrative terrain in a rather clumsy and inelegant manner. Thus, the words are articulated in monosyllabic form, inscribed in a manner reminiscent of the crude penmanship of an uneducated adolescent" (Woolf Virginia, 3).

Linda Costanzo Cahir posits that when appraising cinematic adaptations of literary works, it is imperative to recognise their inherent nature as translations of the source material. It is of utmost importance to grasp the fundamental distinction that exists between the lexical entities denoted by the terms "adaptation" and "translation." The categorization of films that draw inspiration from literature as "adaptations" is a commonly employed term. However, it is imperative to discern that the term "adapt" itself conveys a more nuanced significance, denoting the act of modifying the framework or operation of a given entity with the intention of enhancing its prospects of endurance and proliferation within a novel milieu. In order to undergo adaptation, an entity must undergo a transition to a novel environment. During the course of adaptation, the fundamental organism remains unaltered while undergoing modifications, which frequently encompass notable mutations, with the aim of more effectively aligning with its novel environment. (Por Linda Costanzo Cahir 14)

The act of adapting a cinematic work or embarking upon the art of filmmaking represents a pivotal and forward-thinking juncture in the ongoing development of humanity as a whole. The cinematic medium possesses a distinct ability to depict individuals hailing from diverse societal echelons, effectively capturing the intricacies of their respective trials and triumphs. The inclusion of such an image serves to augment the palpability and verisimilitude of literary compositions. Films possess a profound allure due to their captivating visual and auditory spectacles, even though they can convey the same content as written text. A literary encounter epitomises a solitary, unisensory endeavour, while the act of engaging with cinema fosters a communal, multimodal experience that accentuates the present instant. There is an irrefutable truth that films serve to augment one's visual literacy, while literature, on the other hand, serves to enhance one's verbal literacy. One can posit a cogent argument establishing a correlation between the realms of literature and film. To categorise the art form of cinema as a subsidiary division of the realm of literature. The medium of film can be regarded as a historical artefact rather than an abrupt phenomenon that materialised within society. Throughout history, people have observed the practice of transposing an image from its original source material, rendering it far from a novel occurrence. Since the inception of the film industry, it has been in existence.

All film adaptations of books are essentially transformations, since they convert a written work from one medium to another, possibly reaching new or expanded audiences. However, many adaptations, whether they be of novels or other generic forms, sometimes include

additional levels of transposition. These adaptations not only change the genre of their original texts, but also alter their cultural, geographical, and chronological contexts. (Sanders Julie, 25)

Film adaptations predominantly centre their attention on the task of transposing literary or theatrical compositions into the medium of motion pictures. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that a plethora of adaptations have emerged from a diverse array of sources, encompassing both renowned works of fiction and non-fiction literature, comic books, and various other origins. Famous literary and theatrical works have been the mainstay of many nations' cinema industries since the silent era, and this pattern has persisted throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. But one could posit that William Shakespeare holds the distinction of being the most frequently adapted literary figure. Shakespeare's theatrical works have transformed into cinematic productions of notable distinction. An example of such adaptation is a grandiose epic tale that takes place in mediaeval Japan, named *Kumonosu-jo/Throne of Blood* (Japan, 1957), deftly directed by Akira Kurosawa. Another noteworthy example of the diverse adaptations that have been brought to fruition is the lively and exuberant Bollywood musical rendition of his work, known as *Angoor* (India, 1982). The phenomenon of adaptations frequently occurs within specific temporal and spatial parameters, as exemplified by the British heritage cinema of the 1980s. Numerous cinematic works exemplify a discernible degree of introspection pertaining to the intricate process of adaptation.

Julie Sanders, in her book "Adaptation and Appropriation," contends that appropriation often results in a notable divergence from the original text, giving rise to the formation of an entirely new cultural product and sphere. This metamorphosis is often accomplished via the mechanisms of interpolation and criticism, as well as the shift from one genre to another. Sanders argues that appropriations have a more complex and interconnected relationship with their intertexts than a straightforward film rendition of a well-known classic would suggest. (Julie Sanders, 34).

Julie Sanders astutely underscores the interdependence of adaptation and appropriation upon the literary canon, which serves as a collective reservoir of narratives, motifs, personages, and ideas, from which artists draw inspiration to craft their imaginative reinterpretations. In order to fully appreciate the reshaping or rewriting of an adapted text, the spectator or reader should be able to engage in the interplay of similarities and differences between the original sources or inspiration. However, it is not necessary for the spectator or reader to have prior knowledge of

this in order to have their own experience of the adaptation. Nevertheless, many collections of written works and primary sources, such as myths, fairy tales, and folklore, inherently rely on this mutual understanding and availability. These forms and genres have a readership and audience that spans many cultures and frequently different time periods. They consist of stories and tales that transcend cultural differences and are passed down through generations, although they may undergo changes and translations along the way. They actively engage in a communal knowledge network and hence serve as valuable resources for adaptation and revision. (Julie Sanders, 57).

Film adaptation allows filmmakers to creatively rework and remake an existing work in a visual and cinematic format. It enables the examination of various narrative methods and the conversion of literary components into audio-visual encounters. Film adaptations have the potential to faithfully replicate the source material, effectively capturing the fundamental qualities of the original work while remaining loyal to its storyline, characters, and ideas. These adaptations often connect with fans of the original and provide a fresh viewpoint via the use of visual narrative. Notable instances of accurate adaptations are *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003).

But during the first phase of Indian cinema, several filmmakers made efforts to adapt the works of Shakespeare, and these films played a crucial role in familiarising the Indian film industry with Shakespearean literature. Mehdi Ahsan's 1935 Indian film *Khoon Ka Khoon* was an adaptation of Shakespeare's Hamlet, while J. J. Madan's 1941 Hindi film *Zalim* was based on *The Merchant of Venice*. Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ramleela* (2013) is a Gujarati interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet*. *Angoor* is a cinematic adaptation of the Bengali comedy film *Bhrantibilas* (1963), which in turn was derived from a play of the same title by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar's play was directly inspired by Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. *Hamshakals*, directed by Sajid Khan, was a cinematic adaptation of the classic film *Angoor*.

## Conclusion

The foundation of my paper on literature and cinema will rely on Sanders' perspective on "adaptation" as a novel modality that has the capacity to reach diverse or supplementary audiences. However, numerous adaptations of novels and other generic forms often involve

additional levels of transformation. These adaptations not only change the genre of the source texts, but also alter their cultural, geographic, and temporal contexts. In many cases, the process of "appropriation" leads to a complete departure from the original text, resulting in the creation of an entirely new cultural product and domain. This transformation is often achieved through the inclusion of additional content and critical analysis, as well as the transition from one genre to another.

My paper has significant potential to understand the dynamics of adaptation and appropriation that was done in Indian Cinema through the adaptations of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare's effect on Bollywood and other Indian tales has been significant from its inception, with Shakespeare's works deeply ingrained in the imagination of the Indian people. My paper examines four film adaptations to make this argument. Vishal Bhardwaj's films *Maqbool* (2004), *Omkara* (2006), and *Haider* (2014), which are cinematic adaptations of Shakespearean plays, namely *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet*, respectively. Hemanta Kr Das' debut film, *Othello*, incorporates some elements from Shakespeare's play *Othello*. The Assamese cinematic production entitled *Othello* diverges from the canonical text penned by Shakespeare, yet the discerning scriptwriter places significant emphasis on two fundamental aspects within this cinematic endeavour. Firstly, the exploration of racial discrimination within our societal fabric is deftly portrayed through the nuanced depiction of diverse skin tones. Secondly, the strategic utilisation of Shakespeare's literary oeuvre serves as a narrative device, effectively illuminating the intricate socio-political milieu that characterises the region of Assam. This paper aims to illustrate the modifications, reconstruction, and reinterpretation of William Shakespeare's plays worldwide, as well as the incorporation of Shakespeare into Indian cinematic discussions from the beginning of Indian cinema. Shakespeare has been assimilated into the cultural and social fabric of India, turning him into a prominent figure in the country. Shakespeare's themes have transcended linguistic and cultural boundaries in contemporary times, attaining a worldwide status that extends beyond the Western world. This study aims to analyse the interpretation of Shakespeare in Indian popular culture.

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