Intersemiotic Translation

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Editorial

It is a well known and well attested fact that Roman Jakobson in his seminal essay “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” broadly categorised the process of translation as ‘Intralingual’, ‘Interlingual’ and ‘Intersemiotic’. According to him “Intersemiotic Translation” is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems”. The aim of this issue is therefore to discuss theoretical and practical problems of Intersemiotic Translation and to focus on the debates surrounding it. The present issue is an attempt to question whether the practice of translation can be viewed as ‘transmutation’, ‘transposition’, ‘adaptation’, ‘intermedial’, etc from Western methodology or can it exist or be practised through ‘Anuvad’, ‘Rupantar’, ‘Tarjuma’, ‘Vivartana’, ‘Chhaya’, ‘Ul Urai’ and other terms of cultural transaction from Indian epistemology. This issue also traces the journey of the text across the landscape of practice i.e., from Page to Stage, Page to Screen, Page to Ether and the other way round and allows a diversity of meanings to be created, exchanged and disseminated.

This issue titled “Intersemiotic Translation” has focussed on the act of translation in visual medium where several contributors speak about adaptation and explore the issues i.e., performability, actability and speakability. This issue tries to problematize different ‘ways of seeing’ in which cultures define and re-define themselves through their representation in various semiotic domains. This issue also focuses on non-verbal, performative and cultural aspects as well as staging problems from different perspectives.

C. G. Shyamala in her article “Your face,…is as a book where men/ May read strange matters...” focuses on ritual and performing arts of Kerala and tries to locate these as a discursive field in which the definition of filmic adaptation is constantly problematized and redefined. Swanil Choksi in her paper ‘... as if a magic lantern...’: The Cinematic Aspects of
T. S. Eliot’s Early Poetry tries to ‘analyse the possible cinematic techniques that Eliot interpreted in his writing unwittingly’ and argues that ‘his style has a parallel in cinematic techniques that were being used at the time’. In the next article titled “Market value of intercultural translations and adaptations in Indian theatre: A Sample”, Sumathi Nagesh discusses consumer culture on the practice and performance of Indian theatre of the urban, cosmopolitan kind taking two adaptations of Shakespeare and Ibsen. The focus of the next paper “Locating Film Adaptation in Intersemiotic Space” written by Abhinaba Chatterjee is screen translation in the conjuncture of written and audio-visual space. In the next paper titled “Murasaki Shikibu Translated Literature: Text and Images in Genji Monogatari”, Gisele Orgado analyzes Murasaki Shibiku as a translator through her seminal novel Genji Monogatari. In her article “From 3-D to 2-D: Translating movies into novels”, Aatreyee Ghosh tries to problematize the simplistic relationship of ‘source’ and ‘target’ and addresses the didactics of audio-visual translation.

Sananda Roy has explored the semiotics of adaptation in Rituparno Ghosh’s films in her scholarly paper titled “Adaptation and Ideology: A Study of Rituparno Ghosh’s Films”. This paper is followed by a page to screen case study done by Minakshi Kaushik in her paper titled “Revisionary Adaptation: Bride and Prejudice as Intersemiotic Translation”. Rajalakshmi N.K. in her article “Text and context- Problems in reading translated folktales” has discussed folktale translation and its reception in the context of Indian subcontinent. Andy Lung Jan CHAN in “Interlingual and intersemiotic transfer of Indian cinema in Hong Kong” has traced the reception of Indian cinema in Hongkong and placed it in the axis of interlingual and intersemiotic practices. This volume also contains five immensely skilfully done translations. This is an effort made to disseminate and familiarize these very important vernacular texts to the world of the reading public who because of the language barrier could not possibly read them in their source language.
I shall be failing if I do not acknowledge my gratitude to all the contributors on the eve of my debut as editor. It would not have been possible to bring out this issue without the full support from the Editors and Co-editors and co-operation from the editorial board and the reviewers. We are a small journal run by a very small team and we are trying to mirror how Comparative Literature and Translation Studies walk hand in hand. Each volume is the result of a lot of hard work on the part of every editor, co-editor and the reviewers. But our efforts would have been futile if the contributors would not have supported us with their scholarly articles that help in enriching our journal and making it better. I would like to thank all of them and hope that the love and support we have received so far will grow and every time we will be able to present to the world of academia a volume of standard scholarly researched articles and translations.

Rindon Kundu,

Issue Editor.
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‘… as if a magic lantern…’: The Cinematic Aspects of T. S. Eliot’s Early Poetry

Abstract

The membrane between cinema and literature has been porous since the former’s inception. This is true even though Eliot and some of his contemporaries looked down upon cinema as a mass medium. In this paper I analyse the possible cinematic techniques that Eliot interpreted in his writing unwittingly. I argue that his style has a parallel in cinematic techniques that were being used at the time. I examine his use of the montage, voyeuristic tendencies and the senses Eliot’s poetry evoked and their affinity to cinema.

Keywords: T. S. Eliot, cinema, montage
Main Paper

From the time the cinema became popular, there were contradictory reactions to it. Julian Murphet and Lydia Rainford examine the various comments made by Leo Tolstoy, who was excited with this new ‘little clicking contraption with it revolving handle’, and Virginia Woolf, observing that cinema is able to ‘[smooth] away’ the inconveniences of time and space, and F. Scott Fitzgerald expressing his unhappiness at the subordination of the ‘strongest and supplest medium’ ‘to a mechanical and communal art’ (Murphet and Rainford 4). The literary world was threatened and intrigued by this new medium that was appropriating literary techniques and which at the same time was a completely different mode of experience.

Yet this new mode of expression and experience is representative of the changes occurring in the twentieth century, of the need for innovation to express the unique experience of living in the period before the Great Wars, and the restlessness with the established way of life, and the old order. Woolf’s description of the experience of reading T. S. Eliot illustrates clearly the distaste ‘of the old usages and politenesse of society…’, and the preference to make ‘dizzy and dangerous leap[s]’ from ‘line to line’ likening herself to an acrobat. Murphet and Rainford attribute Woolf’s skill to transport us from London to Bourton without the cumbersome ‘drawn-out writing’ of the nineteenth century novel to the influences of cinema on the literature (2). Colin McCabe, in the same volume explores the idea that literature cannot be examined if segregated from visual media (16). Thus though there was some amount of dissatisfaction with the medium, it was gaining popularity and was influencing the literature of its time.
The membrane that divides cinema from literature is porous. Critics and theorists alike have discussed the idea that modernist texts were influenced by the new medium of film, or conversely, that the medium of film had an impact on the literature of the age (Trotter 1). David Trotter gives us a less restrictive model to help us analyse the relationship between the two: ‘the model of parallelism’ (3). This model looks at the influence cinema and literature had over each other. It allows one to look at the time period as it was, a time of change, new ideas, experimentation and uncertainty.

This need for a ‘new mode of symbolism’ was felt amongst the filmmakers and film theorists as well, one that was not dependent on literature but was developed enough to convey ‘thought or consciousness in visual terms’ (Marcus 348). The media were interacting and mingling with one another: writers/poets were writing scripts for movies and in turn filmmakers were increasingly becoming interested in adapting popular novels of the time to films. There was a commonality in goal amongst filmmakers and the literary avant-garde; they were striving to refine their respective media (Marcus 350). One such contemporary poet attempting to refine and redefine his medium was T. S. Eliot.

**Montage**

Eliot has been famously preoccupied with the breakdown of language. As he put it, ‘[o]ur civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various complex results.’ His assertion was that the poet must be increasingly ‘comprehensive’ and ‘more allusive, more indirect, in order to force… language into his meaning’ thus emphasising the need for newer and more effective means of expressing and representing the human experience (Eliot *Selected Essays* 289). This is something he strove to do with his own poetry in various ways.
The silent film was symptomatic of this sort of breakdown in language. With the few scattered intertitles and the very obvious plot lines the movies were meant only for momentary pleasure. In this the poetry of T. S. Eliot is very different from the early cinema. However with the advancing of cinema as a medium and with the polishing of cinematic techniques like that of montage, cinema began to exploit rest on the audiences’ ability to derive connotative meanings from images.

For Sergei Eisenstein, often referred to as the father of montage, for instance, the language of cinema went beyond the narrative remarks and dialogues flashed on the screen. His genius lay in his ability to use images in specific sequences to evoke a strong emotional reaction from his viewers. He used not only the already established technique of montage and developed it, but he also used techniques that traditionally are associated with Literature, like the caesura, metaphor, the use of and development of motifs, and metonyms.

When I refer to the technique of montage I mean the juxtaposing, organising and blending of seemingly disparate or non disparate images that have been placed in rapid succession one after another, to bring out the commonalities between them and to make further connections between the two or more images. Eliot used montage in several ways. We can see it in his style of images heaped upon images, tonal breaks and his use of the epigraph. I will explore each of these individually.

In exploring Eliot’s use of images one is struck by the way he heaped image upon image. Here is a section from his *Preludes*:

The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands. (Eliot *Collected poems* 13)
Individually the images are bleak and when they come together they create an absolutely desolate landscape. Eliot’s use of montage is unique because of the skill with which he is able to bring disparate and seemingly unconnected ideas and words together and create an experience, which is at once unusual and universal. It is unusual in as much as it is poetry like never before and universal because it expresses a reality of human life and experience.

Again in the *Preludes*:

- His soul stretched tight across the skies
- That fade behind a city block,
- Or trampled by insistent feet
- At four and five and six o’clock; (Eliot *Collected poems* 13)

The way *Preludes* has been written in four parts makes it seem like poetic descriptions of four scenes written out for a film. They could be placed one after another or amidst other scenes portraying an equally desolate picture. The scenes flicker in front of our eyes, abrupt yet poignant.

Tonal breaks in his poems are quite striking and add to the element of the breakdown of communication. The tonal breaks add further to a feel of montage. These tonal breaks are juxtaposed with the overlapping images, and refrains; these give the poems a structure that the disparate and seemingly random images deny it. In *Prufrock* we see the women coming and going “Talking of Michelangelo” and the “yellow fog” appears repeatedly among other repetitions.

The breaks in Eliot’s poetry are very obvious and abrupt; the reader is required to make the associations and connections between the images and link between lines he marks off as sections.
... And how should I begin?

. . . . . . . . .

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?…

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

. . . . . . . . .

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully! ... (Eliot *Collected Poems* 5)

There are unexpected breaks in the telling of the narrative and the imagery. When we begin our journey with Prufrock we have a sense of the physical reality of the place in which Prufrock stands, perhaps at his rooms, as he says ‘Let us go’, leading us to believe he is yet to begin his journey. But as we go along with him in the account we realise that it is the narration of the anticipation of what Prufrock will encounter on the journey; he visits the places and people in his mind. We see the ‘half deserted streets’ and ‘The muttering retreats’ in Prufrock’s mind as opposed to him actually seeing these streets with his own eyes as he narrates his journey to us (Eliot *Collected Poems* 2). This is what makes *Prufrock* a unique interior monologue. What we see isn’t Prufrock’s physical relocation from one place to another but a journey through Prufrock’s mind. As we go further in Prufrock’s mind journey to the party/gathering he wants to avoid so much, we delve deeper into his psyche: he begins to talk about the ‘bald spot in the middle of [his] hair’ and still deeper with ‘…I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker…’ (Eliot *Collected Poems* 6). We see Eliot using this technique of montage to create Prufrock’s psyche. It is in fact the technique of montage
used expertly by Eliot that makes the interior monologue accurate and believable. There is an overlap of images through the verses forming a sense of contiguity through the confusion called Prufrock. The commonality in the images that hold Prufrock together are the literary translation of the montage.

Eliot’s use of the epigraph is also significant. In the epigraph of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” we see a section from Dante’s famous medieval text *The Divine Comedy* from the canto called *Inferno*. Here Guido is speaking with Dante, giving him reasons for the ready confession of the guilt that landed him in Hell. The epigraph in Prufrock has cinematic value and adds to the drama of Prufrock’s internal monologue in two ways: the first being that the nature of the literary device of the epigraph and the text from which the epigraph has been taken, Dante’s *Inferno*, and the second the use of a foreign language. Using this intertextuality Eliot evokes the desired image of Prufrock’s inner world tormenting him. This epigraph, taken from a dramatic sixteenth century text and from a well known and dramatic point in its narrative, helps create and supplement the drama in Prufrock’s narrative.

As Frederick W. Locke quotes F. O. Matthiessen’s opinion of the function of the epigraph: ‘… the closed circle of Prufrock’s isolation is sharply underlined by inscribing this speech from the *Inferno*…’ (Locke 52). Locke goes on to state that ‘Guido’s narrative suddenly becomes a dramatic action’ when we read ‘Let us go then, you and I…’ (Locke 52). Thus the two seemingly disparate literary characters come together and are linked by a commonality of situation.

The epigraph also adds to the poem by virtue of this direct connection between the situations in which Guido and Prufrock find themselves. Guido as well as Prufrock are in hell; the only difference being that Prufrock burns in a hell of his own making, a place existing only in his consciousness, but affecting every aspect of his life. Both confess their deepest darkest secret because they feel safe. Guido confesses to a man whom he believes to be trapped in hell,
never to return to the world and spread knowledge of his infamous act. Whereas Eliot is analysing in his own mind the consequences of attending a social gathering (possibly a party?).

Eliot’s juxtaposed characters, Locke argues, seem to amalgamate into the figure of Guido-Prufrock, this kind of double vision that is enabled by the presence of the epigraph followed immediately with Prufrock’s ‘Let us go then, you and I…’ (55). Locke talks about how the ‘words of Prufrock have a strange way of becoming the words of Guido…’, and that the word ‘then’ in Prufrock’s first spoken/thought line gives a sense of continuation from Guido’s words into Prufrock’s. When read in this light a variety of cinematic possibilities for the dramatisation of this scene come to mind; the image of Prufrock, unknown to him, being linked with a historical and literary figure like Guido adds greatly to the visual aspect of the poem. A complex cinematic representation presents itself where Guido and Prufrock reside in one body, having a linked consciousness. Yet Guido is quite the spectral figure and his presence eerie. Either way the crisis of the moment, as we read it, is undeniable.

This crisis continues ‘[t]o lead you to an overwhelming question…/Oh, do not ask, “what it is?”/Let us go and make our visit’ (Eliot Collected Poems 2)

In Preludes we also see a montage of images, perhaps the most poignant of his poems. A. A. Mendilow, talks of the ‘structural discontinuity’ that, for me, translates into the technique of montage we observe in the Preludes (Mendilow 320). The breaking up of the poem into four sections is a part of this structural discontinuity and gives the reader a feel of the cinematic montage; the two general descriptions of the atmosphere on the street at day break and on a winter evening, juxtaposed yet having much in common; and the other two descriptions of two unnamed characters adding to the picture already created. The striking use of the pronoun ‘you’ in sections one and three of Preludes, makes the poem an even more personal
yet an impersonal experience. This montage simultaneously exemplifies the fractured nature of life in Eliot’s time, while involving, for the first time, his readers to experience this alienation and isolation by using his rhetoric. The bodies in the poem are fractured too. We see their ‘hands/That are raising dingy shades…’, their hair, ‘the yellow soles of [their] feet’, their ‘short square fingers’, their eyes and even their souls are not spared. Everything is seen in isolation from everything else nothing seems connected except in its disjointedness and their pathetic, dingy lives. A voyeurism of the pathetic kind.

This way of writing helps us experience the unique modern condition first hand. It creates a new way to experience the neurosis of an ordinary person.

**Eliot and Voyeurism**

Cinema takes us into the lives of the characters we see. It has a voyeuristic quality that allows the viewers a look into the lives of characters that do not know we are privy to their deepest darkest corners of their lives.

We see this intrusiveness in Eliot’s poetry too. With Prufrock we are privy to his mind, each and every thought. It is an interior monologue like never before. The lines are edited by Eliot but only in style, not the content of Prufrock’s thoughts. We are privy to Prufrock’s most absurd ideas, all his perversions and obsessions. So much so that in a moment of passionate energy as he fails to try and explain his agony he shows us his inner neurosis: “But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on the screen”.

But it doesn’t end there, we see a voyeurism of the physical kind too. We see Prufrock “pinned and wriggling on the wall”, his bald spot that he is so conscious of, “But how his arms and legs are thin!”, “Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter”. 
We see the women intimately too: “Arms that are braceleted and white and bare/(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)” (Eliot *Collected Poems* 5). It is as if the camera lenszooms in on the various parts of their bodies and zooms out resuming the neurotic tale.

The voyeurism in the *Preludes* is of a different kind. It is a looking through the window of an ordinary person’s bedroom, as if we have an intimate view of the lives of the thousands of defeated ordinary people. He paints a clear picture of the person, grimy and dejected.

    Sitting along the bed’s edge, where
    You curled the papers from you hair,
    Or clasped the yellow soles of feet

    In the palms of both soiled hands. (Eliot *Collected Poems* 14)

We’re even privy to the souls that are “stretched tight across the skies”, “or trampled by insistent feet” (Eliot *Collected Poems* 14). Nothing is private in this picture. The private is the public. Just as cinema takes us into the bedrooms and tells the stories of the private lives of people.

**Evocation of the senses**

In her book *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics*, Sara Danius analyses the changes in modes of experiencing of the period and how they were affecting and changing the literary forms. She says in her introduction that the ‘basic propositions of [her] inquiry… revolve around… the specific ways in which categories of perceiving and knowing are reconfigured in a historical situation in which technological devices are capable of storing, transmitting, and reproducing sense data, at the same time articulating new perceptual and epistemic realms. Hence the problem that so many modernist texts and artifacts stubbornly engage: how to represent authentic experience in an age in which the category of experience itself has become a problem’ (Danius 3). This period was also known
as the second industrial age, due to these technological advancements. Amongst these advancements, innovations in the field of cinema figure as important innovations. Cinema along with cars, trains, trams, telephones, was altering notions of time and space. This underlines the need to discuss the way Eliot describes the experiences of the senses and the effects of his poetry has on our senses.

Eliot had the reputation of an innovator, and someone who experimented with is art. Ezra Pound’s evaluation of Eliot and his art after having read *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* was that Eliot had ‘modernized himself on his own’ and that he has also ‘modernized the monologue’ (Mayer 5). Experimentation and innovation were the most crucial aspects of Modernism. One of the key areas of advancement were, refining the way the experienced reality was expressed, in a more complex and closer to life way. Thus bringing them closer to the study of the revelation of human emotions and sensorium. Eliot’s tackling of human emotions and relations along with the evocation of the senses was incisive, and highly accurate. Cinema too is about this complex, multi sensory experience.

The sensuousness of Eliot’s poetry was very different from the most famous sensuous poets, the Romantics. The first line of *Prufrock*, for instance comes as a mild shock to those who are used to reading the Romantics:

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherised upon a table; (Eliot *Collected Poems* 2)

The first two lines, when read in context of the title of the poem one would expect descriptions of a wonderful romantic evening. However we are in for a rude shock with the third line. The images in his poems may be unreal but they are being used to show a very real experience. He portrays the bleak existence as he saw it, using unexpected images.
Eliot’s *Preludes* is another such poem. It lends itself to a reading of the evocation of the senses albeit a different kind of experience. Eliot amalgamates the experiencing of all the five senses, in his own unique way in his *Preludes*:

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o’clock.

The burnt-out ends of smoky days. (Eliot *Collected Poems* 13)

In four lines we have the sense of smell, touch and we also have a synaesthetic image in ‘The burnt-out ends of smoky days’. *Preludes* inherently has cinematic value by virtue of consisting of highly evocative images that are beyond cinema and also give new expression to the changing modes of experiences. They are poetic, yet it reaches beyond earlier literature and is beyond cinema.

Thus the construction of this synaesthetic gaze through which we see the characters and the setting is through Eliot the narrator’s eyes. We experience the surroundings, as Eliot wants us to. The line ‘His soul stretched across the skies/That fade behind a city block…’ is one of those Eliot images, which is hard to imagine and does not make much sense, yet evokes a sense of pathos (Eliot *Collected Poems* 14). The image conveys a sense of loss of identity, where his body is missing and his soul has been subsumed by the city. This image is essentially a visual one from both the poet’s and from the reader’s point of view; whereas earlier in the first two sections of *Preludes* we smell ‘steaks in passageways’ and ‘faint stale smells of beer’ and we can hear the ‘showers beat/On broken blinds and chimney –pots’ and ‘the sparrows in the gutters’ (Eliot *Collected Poems* 13-14). I would like to look at each sense individually and how Eliot uses his images to create the atmosphere as he does.

The first two sections of *Preludes* describe a landscape, the first portraying a lonely winter evening; Eliot uses the pronoun ‘you’ evoking a feeling of aloneness in the reader, there is a
connection with the poem and for a minute one imagines oneself on that empty street with
‘The grimy scraps/Of withered leaves about your feet/And newspapers from vacant lots’. In
the second section of Preludes we see a nameless, faceless mass of people carrying on their
daily drudgery, with such apathy that even the morning does not dawn but ‘comes to
consciousness’. The atmosphere is filled with hopelessness and lethargy, and there seems no
way out of it.
The next two sections are about two more individuals one woman and a man. The third
section begins with the pronoun ‘you’ once again, using the same technique to gain a certain
amount of closeness with the reader:

You dozed, and watched the night revealing

The thousand sordid images

Of which your soul was constituted;

They flickered against the ceiling. (Eliot Collected Poems 14)

This is an extremely visual series of images; Eliot has painted a moving yet pathetic picture
of this woman who probably is battling depression or is wallowing in apathy, sitting in her
dirty apartment, unwashed, falling in and out of sleep, unmoving. The word ‘flickering’
especially has a cinematic context. Trotter claims that the flickering in this section of
Preludes is mechanic as opposed to the line from Prufrock (‘I have seen the moment of my
greatness flicker,’) where there is a suggestion that ‘the flickering is that of a candle, or lamp’
(131). Trotter quotes H. V. Hopwood’s Living Pictures (1899) complaining about the rattling
sound of the projector and the flickering image on the screen: ‘There is little doubt but that a
continual rattle impinging on the ear tends to intensify irritation caused to the eye by flicker
on the screen, and it is towards the minimising or concealment of this same flicker that
attention is at the present time most strenuously directed’ (131). This direct allusion to
cinema in the poem again evokes the sense of sight. The allusion in a melancholic poem like
the *Preludes* may be looked upon as suggestive of Eliot’s attitude towards and opinion of cinema. The medium associated with the ‘sordid images’ evokes a negative reaction in Eliot. Cinema is not the place of entertainment for Eliot, instead a place for ‘The thousand sordid images/Of which your soul was constituted’, flicker (Eliot *Collected Poems* 14).

Thus we see how the use of montage and other literary tools help Eliot write the kind of poems he did; sharp, incisive, precise and insightful.

**Conclusion**

Eliot’s poetry has a lot that is visual about them, and this visuality is not merely just the physical presence of one character or another or the putting together of images, and it is not merely about the cinemacity of his images; rather it is about Eliot using the tools already available to him to create a new experience, in form of the final product he creates, and a new way of experiencing it, by reinventing his art. This new way of experiencing reality, to me, is very close to cinema; the way he looks at his characters and expresses his thoughts has the feel of a camera lens zooming in and zooming out of the lives of his characters. The lens is able to scrutinise the psyche of the characters and their settings, yet it is also the same lens that creates them, giving Eliot the upper hand while analysing. It guides us to the darkest aspects of modernity and the mind of the modern man.
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Page number 18–32 has been deleted from this journal as we received a serious complain of plagiarism against the author of the article which was printed on the pages from 18 to 32. So, we removed the article, ‘Adaptation and Ideology: A Study of Rituparno Ghosh’s films’ by Sananda Roy. We hereby also declare that IJCLTS will never accept and/or publish any article/translation/book review/interview written/done by this author. IJCLTS suspends Sananda Roy for ever from any kind of association with the journal.

By Order

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Abstract

The acts of translation and adaptations have been intrinsically linked with each other in the arena of translation studies as well as comparative literary studies. Both these forms have mutated and evolved to bring in new hues into the area of study. Traditionally whenever adaptations have been mentioned, it has been in relation to the simplistic relation between the source and the target adapted text. This paper would look to complicate the simple understanding of translating and adaptations by looking into the art of novelization of movies which have either been based on original or adapted screenplays and the various nuances that such novelizations take into account. In studying such cases, this paper would then try and define the tropes of these newer forms of translations and adaptations.
Main Paper

The novel as a literary form has always had an interesting journey in terms of trying to bring it within the purview of definitions. One of the fundamental questions that has plagued the form was how to define it—whether in terms of length, linguistic feature, or something else. As one deals with the long eighteenth century we came to a sort of consensus that the novel as a genre was an open-ended ‘creature from an alien species’\(^1\). The moment one tries to contain it in a certain category one is posed with a new set of contradictions which threaten the initial thesis. It has various facets and forms and the most important fact is that it is ever evolving. It moulds itself according to the need of the century and the public and thus, the novel that we see today in the twenty-first century bears little resemblance to the initial works of fiction which were termed a novel.

In this age of movies and sitcoms, it isn’t very unbelievable that the popularity of the novel has lost some of its sheen. But there seem to be a new trend that has emerged in terms of its popularity. It is a curious thing that in spite of a dwindling readership, all recent popular movies have been more or less translated into the novel form. What seemed more striking was the fact that certain movies have been made from existing novels or comic series and yet there has been a novelization of those movies as well with a plot structure and a narrative style quite distinct from the actual work. Thus, one can see that the process of adaptation seemed to have gone full circle wherein it had not merely stopped at translating from written version to the visual one, but come back in a modified form in the written form. So the question arises why such novelizations? Only to cash in on the popularity of a movie? But then wouldn’t it be easier to bring out comics or t-shirts or DVDs with extra footage rather than a product which would not really attract a lot of people. While talking to my peers, I found that most of them held these so called ‘novels’ as nothing more than a money making strategy. The commercial side of it is that the producers only bring out novels of their movies when they are assured that the cost of production would be much less than the profit earned.

\(^1\) Mikhail M. Bakhtin, ‘Epic and Novel’, pp-4

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While these mercantile reasons are indeed a major reason for these pop-lit novels, it is also imperative to see whether this is the only reason to such creations.

The first question that arises is that even if for mere mercantilism, why choose the form of the novel? Why not the epic or the ode or a verse? For this we have to realize that unlike the other forms as in the epic or the ode, the novel is an evolving genre and thus, not closed to new interpretations. The problematic of a novel is its being problematic. Moreover the novel as a form is closer to human life than the other forms. The inner form of the novel according to Georg Lukacs, is “the process of the problematic individual’s journeying towards himself, the road from dull captivity within a merely present reality—a reality that is heterogeneous in itself and meaningless to the individual—towards clear self recognition”\(^2\). Moreover the epics are a rendering of an already known outcome, whereas in case of a novel, it is a mysterious journey towards understanding of oneself which no one can really predict. Thus, while the epic does not allow a development of a sense of familiarity and so cannot actually have a “low” agenda of mere entertainment, the form of the novel with its open-endedness allows this entertainment factor. Moreover, Lukacs points out “unlike other genres—[the novel] has a caricatural twin almost indistinguishable from itself in all inessential formal characteristics: the entertainment novel which has all the outward features of the novel…”\(^3\) Thus, it becomes clear why the novel form has to be chosen for the rendering of these celluloid stories into the prose form.

On digging deeper, one finds that movie novelizations are not a current fashion but have been there since the time that movies came into being. Motion pictures in Italy, as a number of historians have demonstrated, have given expression to a distinguished body of movie writing. Pierre Leprohon, for example, has observed: “No other country can boast as large an output of cinema literature; and books and magazines on the subject still abound in Italy today”\(^4\). This started since the early twentieth century with the appearance of *Il romanzo film*,

\(^2\) Georg Lukacs, ‘The Inner Form of the Novel’, p 80

\(^3\) Ibid. p73

\(^4\) John P. Welle, “Film on Paper: Early Italian Cinema Literature, 1907-1920”, p-288
a bi-weekly publication of film novelizations, directed by Lucio D'Ambra. Another important work of interest was Luigi Pirandello’s film novel, *Si gira!* (Shoot!), later republished with the title *Quaderni di Serafino Gubbio operatore* (Notebooks of Serafino Gubbio Cameraman, 1925). Pirandello's film novel has long been considered one of the highpoints in the development of film discourse in the early decades. Indeed, according to Gavriel Moses, *Si gira!* constitutes nothing less than the beginning of a new literary genre, that is, the film novel, founded by Pirandello and carried forward by Nabokov, Isherwood, Percy, and others. Other than Pirandello, there were many other works on Italian motion pictures, specially the presentations of plots in a serialized form in the famous Italian film magazine *In Penombra*. In 1907, Gualtiero Fabbri published a novella entitled *Al cinematografo* [At the Cinematograph] which relates the story of a young intellectual, Gastone Fedi, who frequents the film screenings at an urban cinema for three consecutive evenings, where he falls in love with the movies and with a certain young lady whom he meets there. In addition to shedding light on film audiences, film genres, and various discourses circulating at the time, this novella provided insights into the origins of Italian film journalism. Two other important works which deserve mention in this context are *Fantasio Film: Il romanzo del cinematografo* (Fantasy Film: The Novel of the Cinematograph, 1919) by Ettore Veo, which was published serially in the pages of *In Penombra*, and *La repubblica del silenzio: racconto di costume cinematografici* (The Republic of Silence: A Tale of Cinematic Customs, 1919) by Enrico Roma. However in spite of great efforts from scholars and cinematic geniuses, the novelization of films did not much flourish in Italy. But this technique was received with much interest in France and America. In France in 1915, movie novelizations became known as *film racconte* or *cine-roman* and several such novels were published in serialized forms.

However, it was in America that the concept of film novelization received much recognition. It was in 1911 that the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* came into being which aimed at ‘fictionalizing’ current films into prose story forms and illustrating them with movie stills. The editors of the magazine sought to combine as Katherine H. Fuller notes “an ample supply of action-packed fiction in the translation of movie melodramas to written prose, with an
already existing market eager to read such stories”\(^5\). Along with the *Motion Picture Story Magazine* came *Photoplay* which also catered to this insatiable market of interest towards movies, film stories and stars. Anthony Slide, writes that these story magazines provide a “fascinating glimpse of the almost moribund idea that filmgoers would not only want to see the films but also read the stories, adapted from the screen, in a far more detailed form than the cinema could provide”\(^6\). By 1916, multi reel films were being adapted to the prose form which often extended to book length fiction. In the most general form, these story magazines fictionalized narrative films made or released by Hollywood's major as well as minor studios. Whether based on hoary classics, Broadway plays, Shakespeare, short stories, children's books, topical bestsellers, or original screenplays, the digests extended from four or five to twelve pages of varying column widths and numbers. The magazines ranged in length from sixty to a hundred pages per issue, with the number of digests in each issue running from eight to as many as sixteen between the 1930s and the 1950s and to as few as four in the 1960s and 1970s as circulations declined. Each digest was illustrated with star photographs and production stills and lists each film's cast, studio, and writers (both of the screen-play and of any other source from which the screenplay was adapted). Director, producer, and the author of the prose form were sometimes named, sometimes not. It is interesting to note that sometimes more than a single prose version of the same film story were circulated and the difference in the plotlines of these story lines were enormous. Moreover these fictionalizations did not only aim at a women audience but also catered to a large number of male readers with stories on wars, detective fiction, adventure films and westerns. These magazines came with slogans such as “Read your movies- then see them” or “Coming films in story forms” in order to lure the audiences and also help the audience form a response to the films.

Randall Larson in his *Films into Books* describes three types of movie tie-in: the reissue of a pre-existing novel that has been adapted into a film (for example, the "photoplay editions" produced by Grosset and Dunlap and World Publishing, illustrated with film stills, that began

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\(^5\) Katherine H. Fuller, “Motion Picture Story Magazine and the Gendered Construction of the Movie Fan”

\(^6\) Anthony Slide, “Fan Magazines”, p-385
to appear in the silent era. Or even the new versions of *Q and A* titled as *Slumdog Millionaire* or even *Namesake*); the novelization of a film or television screenplay[ as in the case of Graham Greene’s *Third Man*]; and finally an original novel based on the "characters, concept, and setting" of a movie or television series[ example being Disney Productions such as *Hannah Montana* series based on the popular kids series, or *Full-House* based on the sitcom or movies such as *High School Musical* adapted by N.B Grace from the popular teen movie of the same name with the original screenplay by Peter Barsocchini]. The reason novelizations exist, claims a writer of *Star Trek* books, is that audiences want "to not only relive the experience they got in watching the movie, but they want to find out a little more, understand the character a little more, see a scene that wasn't in the movie but could have been. It's up to the novelizer to try and give them that value"7. The ability to "browse back and forth in the text," to acquire what Larson calls a "parenthetical perspective" that the film does not have the time or the means to provide, is what gives the novelization its appeal. That the novelization is different from, not merely more of, the movie seems to be supported by the increased production of novelizations even after the widespread introduction of technological forms like video cassettes and DVDs.

However film novelizations are not simple scene by scene translations of a movie. There goes a lot of work into the translation of a movie into a fictionalized novel. The first step towards novelization is the selection of the author. The production time for a novelization is usually four to six weeks, during which time the author is given a copy of the screenplay. Many a times, the novelizations are written during the filming process and thus, there sometimes remain stark contrasts between the novel and the film version of the same story. The perpetual problem faced by a film novelist is the fact that the story already exists and yet they are given the responsibility to give it a new form. Moreover, sometimes the novelists are not even made aware of the changes in the script and the final cut of the movie, thus, leading to clash of presentations. A good example of this would be the differences that are so apparent in the film and the novel version of the movie *Mrs. Miniver*. The film version of *Mrs. Miniver* opens with Kay Miniver (Greer Garson) running distractedly down a crowded London street with a cheerful music in the background, worried about whether or not it would be extravagant to buy a hat she covets. However the novelized version opens:

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7 Ibid., pp-14-17

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It was the England of the man with the umbrella, of the peace in our time fallacy, the England smug in its little oasis of security, its eyes held steadfast to the mirage of indolence and easy living. And the man smiled as he looked down from his window at the swarming crowd of shoppers below, at the store windows so enticing with their displays of frivolous luxuries, ... and turning to his stenographer began dictating. For years he had been sending these reports to Germany. He had written of the upper class, clinging tenaciously to its ancient privileges, of the poor steeped in their insular prejudices, so blind to the significance of ideological changes in Europe. Now it was of the middle class he was writing, the class which, he pointed out, had once been the bulwark of England's greatness but today, moved by a frantic urge to ape the luxury and ostentation of the class above them, had no aim in life save the preservation of its own material security. There was no doubt, he went on, that self-indulgent as it had become, comfort-loving, materialistic, the middle class of England in its decadence, would offer little resistance to the world domination of a master race.8

One can easily sense that the easy rendering of the film version has been mutated into a darker presentation of the crass materialistic world of the American culture. In the fictionalization, it is only in the second paragraph that the character of Kay Miniver materializes into the narrative. Similar discrepancies can be observed between the film and the novel adaptation of The Phantom Menace of Star Wars. While the novelization opens with Anakin Skywalker pod racing, the movie opens with two jedi knights in an imperial starship being attacked by the trade federation system. Moreover in an interesting twist, the fight scenes in the movie between Obi-wan Kenobi, Qui-Gon Jinn and Darth Maul are more intense in the novel version than the film version.

The novelized versions also carry stills from the movie. This poses a new kind of problem to the novelist. While in a movie, what can be shown through a mere expression has to be expressed in much detail in the story form. For example in the movie, Sylvia Scarlett, the last shot is placed next to a photo of a curly-haired and eye-lined Aherne, and the caption of the

8 Movie Story, 1942
Another curious problem that is usually faced by a film novelist is the question of signifier. While in a movie certain things might come out to signify certain major themes, the novelist in his interpretation of the screenplay comes up with new signifiers which might have completely contrasted meanings. Moreover the signifiers can be changed from the movie to the novel or serialized version just for marketing strategy to provide different points of view. A good example of this is the popular cult movie *Gilda*. This movie has been serialized in three different versions. The movie is basically told over in a voice-over by the character of Johnny and has a homoerotic tone in it. In the first version that came out in the 1946 *Movie Story* magazine, the story is quite tamely and linearly retold. However, the story is told not from Johnny's point of view but in a third-person omniscient voice, but it emphasizes Johnny's feelings and understanding of narrative events and only occasionally injects notes that readers might construe as supporting the aforementioned homoerotic subtext (for example, references in the second paragraph to the “enticing bulge” in Johnny's pocket “toward which the gunman's hand was purposefully reaching”). The second version that came out in the 1946 *Screen Romances*, fictionalized by Ladd Banks presented altogether a completely different point of view which has no point of similarity with the former one. Though the plot line remains the same, there is much more language about Johnny and Ballin's relationship, about how difficult Johnny finds it to “appraise” his elegantly dressed friend, how Ballin leads a “gay life”, about how a “man who makes his own luck ... recognizes it in others,” how Ballin turns his “openly vulnerable” eyes on Johnny, about how he has to be sure that Johnny has “no woman” in his life, to which Johnny replies, “No woman anywhere” (the *Movie Story* version omits this scene and its dialogue entirely, replacing both with terse statements about how Johnny talked himself “straight into a job as Mundson's assistant,” his “intense loyalty to the strange Ballin Mundson [born] of genuine admiration”),and finally a mention of Gilda and of Johnny's “dazed, bitter mind,” which refused to take in the fact that Gilda was Ballin's wife. Even when Johnny kisses Gilda, the famous sadomasochistic “I hate you so much that I could die from it” kiss, the story reads, in contrast to the film and to the milder rendering in *Movie Story*, that after he “crushed his lips...
down onto hers, ... abruptly, he pushed her from him, every loyalty in him revolted by what he had done.... He cried out, ‘Ballin! Ballin!’”. The ending continues this tone of sexual ambivalence. Movie Story version ends with basic fidelity to the screenplay and film, “In Gilda's shining eyes, [Johnny] saw his future. Arm in arm, they faced north, toward America-toward home”. However in this latter version the ending is presented as: “Gilda said, unsteadily, ‘As you were saying, Johnny, before we were so rudely interrupted-’ Obregon smiled-and, his arm linked through Uncle Pio's, went quietly out of the softly darkening room”. Obregon is the policeman who has been trying to bring the now-dead Ballin to justice for running an illegal cartel in Argentina, and Uncle Pio is the washroom attendant. Reading this story version, one would never know that the film's final shot is of Johnny and Gilda, with no Obregon or Uncle Pio stealing the final spotlight.

Another interesting case of the problematisation in the narrativisation of the screenplay and the movie and the adapted novel is the novelization of the cult horror movie Sixth Sense by M. Night Shyamalan and adapted by Peter Lerangis. Now the major problem that Lerangis faced was that Shyamalan, as he was to direct the movie himself, did not give any explicit details in the screenplay. Lerangis is not new to novel adaptations of movies having successfully written the novelized versions of the movies Sleepy Hollow and the much popular Batman Begins. So, there were three levels of differences that cropped up. One was the difference between the screenplay and the movie, the second between the movie and the adaptation and finally the adaptation and the screenplay. In short, the plot line revolves around the special powers of 8-year old Cole who can see ghosts and how Dr. Malcolm Crowe helps him come to terms with this power and through this help alone for a wrong diagnosis earlier in his life. Now the crux of the story lies in the fact that Crowe himself is dead, shot by the earlier patient whom he could not help, and does not know that. There were certain signifiers in the movie which would have given away this fact, for example, Shyamalan in his screenplay had included a scene where Crowe would grimace with pain in the abdomen suddenly, thus, giving away to the audience that this was where the bullet had hit him. But in the movie this scene was deleted. Moreover, after Malcolm is shot, Cole Sear is the only other character who interacts with him in dialogue. In both the script and the film, Malcolm is present (but unnoticed) during a conversation between Cole's mother Lynn and a child psychologist. In the script, Malcolm speaks one line of dialogue in this sequence,
making Lynn seem to be responding to him when she is actually responding to the psychologist. In the film, this line is omitted. Interestingly in the movie the colour red becomes an important signifier, the colour which suggests dramatic action. Thus, the colour of the church door that Cole goes in for protection is red, so is the tent that he builds as his sanctuary, red is the colour of the shawl that Mrs. Crowe wears when Malcolm Crowe tries to speak to her in her sleep, she also wears a red dress on the anniversary and finally the door knob to Malcolm’s study which he fails to open is also red. However, such an important signifier is altogether suppressed in the novelization of the movie. There is also an interesting distancing in the novelization which is absent in the film. When Cole confesses to Dr. Crowe that “I see dead people… Walking around like regular people. They don't see each other. They only see what they want to see. They don't know they're dead” there is always a tension in the movie whether the audience would be able to catch the suppressed message that Cole is actually in a way referring to Dr. Crowe. But such a feeling of intensity is missing from the novelized version. But then, the final understanding of Dr. Crowe’s delusions is much better rendered in the book than it is realized in the film. Thus, the novel becomes twice removed from the actual screenplay and in a way becomes a creation unto its own.

Another fascinating side of novelization of movies comes in the problems posed by the adaptations of musicals. A musical is all about unbound action and music, both not possible to depict in a novel. To understand the complications faced by the adapter, I am taking into account two famous teenage cult movies of the present generation, both Disney productions—Hannah Montana and High School Musical. The former is the story of a young teenage musician who leads a double life of being a regular girl and a superstar and how that ends up complicating matters about her own sense of identity. Given the fact that Hannah is a singer, the movie is peppered with numerous songs and dance sequences which are impossible to present in the novelization. A certain song called ‘Hoedown Throw down’ forms an important part of the narrative as the superstar Hannah connects with her Southern roots. However in the novelized version, this song is conspicuously missing and instead it has been compensated by stills from the movie. An exact similar condition is faced in the movie High School Musical too adapted by N.B Grace. The final sequence of the movie ends in the

9 M. Night Shyamalan, The Sixth Sense
basketball court where Troy Bolton has succeeded in winning both the match and acting in the spring musical with his girlfriend Gabriella Fontez and everyone breaks into a typical musical style song and dance fiesta. This final musical rendering is missing from the book and this in a way makes the book’s ending a bit bland as compared to the movie. Thus, then the question arises then what is the use of the novelized versions of these musicals when they add nothing to the movie and instead end up becoming tamer and blander versions of their more successful counterparts? Many people who do not follow the Hannah Montana series found the dual-life concept of Hannah and Miley confusing and could not really understand that both were the same. The reading of the book cleared this dilemma and also presented in depth Hannah/Miley’s relation with her near and dear ones. Miley’s relation with Lily is clearly presented in the book, which incidentally is given quite a shallow rendering in the movie. Similarly the problems faced by Troy Bolton and also his mental state is analysed in much better details than the treatment it received in the movie. What enriches these novelizations is a new perspective of the author to the same old story and also the pictures which help in visualizing the sequences.

The novel has survived since the long eighteenth century to the present day. What has changed is its presentation of itself. The novel has always targeted to influence and entertain its readers. In present day scenario, the films have become the new novels. Films not only entertain but they also educate, but they still require the novels with them to complete this ambitious task that they have taken upon themselves. Novelization of movies isn’t great literature; in fact mostly it is quite low literature that only attracts a very narrow sect of people. Yet, it is important in the present era of technology as it brings back reading into vogue, it makes people realize that while the visual medium is fast and more easier to comprehend, it cannot encompass within itself the small idiosyncratic nuances that the written novel, however badly scripted, can. Thus, while movies are entertaining, to realize their true depth we still need them to be novelized, because a novel “tells of the adventure of interiority; the content of the novel is the story of the soul that goes to find itself, that seeks adventures in order to be proved and tested by them, and, by proving itself, to find its own essence”10.

Works Cited


Author Details

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Interlingual and Intersemiotic Transfer of Indian Cinema in Hong Kong

Abstract

The history of Indian immigration to Hong Kong can be traced to the 1840s, when Hong Kong became a colony of the British Empire. However, Hong Kong Chinese people’s knowledge of the local Indian community is limited. The stereotyping of Indian culture in the Hong Kong movie Himalaya Singh shows that Indian people and culture are often distorted and negatively portrayed in the media, and the secluded Indian community in Hong Kong is marginalised and neglected in the mainstream media. In recent years, Indian cinema has gained popularity in Hong Kong, but this survey of the Chinese movie titles, trailer subtitles and other publicity materials of four Indian movies (Slumdog Millionaire; 3 Idiots; English, Vinglish; and The Lunchbox) show that the films have to be recast and transfigured during interlingual and intersemiotic transfers so that it can become more accessible to Hong Kong Chinese audiences.

Main Paper

1. Introduction

The history of Indian immigration to Hong Kong can be traced to the 1840s, when Hong Kong became a colony of the British Empire. In the social and economic development during the early colonial days, Indian people played an important role. Some Indian families have lived in the territory for generations and consider Hong Kong their home. According to Kwok and Narain, about 2,700 Indian soldiers participated when the Union Jack was hoisted in January 1841, and in the 2011 population survey carried out by the Hong Kong Special
Administrative Region government, there were 28,425 Indians living in the territory, a tenfold increase.

Quite a number of Indian people living in Hong Kong are extremely wealthy. According to The Tribune India (July 8, 2007), it was estimated that there were more than 1,000 Indian millionaires (in US dollars) in Hong Kong, the most notable being Hari Harilela, who owns nine major hotels in Hong Kong (such as the Holiday Inn Golden Mile), the Westin Resort in Macao plus hotels in Bangkok, Montreal, Sydney and London. However, there are also Indians who are less well-off and have problems assimilating into the local community and moving up the social ladder. In recent years, there have been calls for the Hong Kong government to offer Chinese as a second language courses for Indians and other ethnic minorities in the territory. According to Stephen Fisher, Director General of Oxfam in Hong Kong, “Many of [the Indian people] still face the problem of being unable to learn Chinese. Some may know how to speak it, but cannot read nor write” (South China Morning Post, 18 September 2013).

Hong Kong Chinese people’s knowledge of the local Indian community is limited, and Indians are seldom seen in the mainstream media. This situation has changed somewhat only in recent years (e.g. Gill Mohindepaul Singh, a Hong Kong-born actor of Indian descent, has become a regular face on Chinese television shows). Indian people tend to live in certain regions of Hong Kong (the Eastern District of Hong Kong Island, and Tsim Sha Tsui, Yau Ma Tei and Shum Shui Po in Kowloon). According to the Study on Racial Encounters and Discrimination Experienced by South Asians commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong, local Chinese generally accept South Asians (of which Indians are a significant proportion) as part of Hong Kong society, but:

[T]here had been little social interaction between local Chinese society and the South Asian community. The two appeared to co-exist in parallel; each got on with its own life and had little to do with the other. South Asians rarely seemed to be participating in Hong Kong society, not socially, culturally, or politically. The local Chinese community was aware of the presence of South Asian Hongkongers, but they might not have noted the absence of South Asians in Hong Kong Chinese’s social, cultural and political scene. (ii)
The second part of this paper briefly examines how Indian culture is portrayed in the mainstream Chinese media, using a Cantonese movie (*Himalaya Singh*) as a case study. Part three discusses how Indian movies are distributed and promoted in the Indian community in Hong Kong. Then, based on four Indian movies publicly released and shown in Hong Kong cinemas, part four examines the interlingual and intersemiotic transfer of Indian cinema to Hong Kong Chinese culture, using film titles, trailer subtitles and movie posters as research materials.

2. Representation of the Indian culture in Hong Kong’s mainstream media: *Himalaya Singh* as a case in point

Indian culture is seldom represented in Hong Kong’s mainstream media. Therefore, very little research has been devoted to this area. In this paper, one conference paper and one master’s thesis are examined. These two publications devote a significant part of their discussion to a Hong Kong commercial movie set in India, *Himalaya Singh*. The movie was released in 2005 and directed by Wai Ka-fai, who is a two-time Best Director in the Hong Kong Film Awards (2002 and 2009). The movie poster is shown in Figure 1.

Fig. 1 Movie poster of *Himalaya Singh*

This film tells the story of Himalaya Singh (Ronald Cheng), a not-so-bright yoga instructor who has lived in the Himalayas his entire life until, when the movie opens, his parents kick him out to marry his betrothed, Indian Beauty (Gauri Karnik). Himalaya, however, is in love
with a Chinese girl named Tally (Cherrie In), who is not too pleased to hear that he is engaged to another girl. She goes on a rampage, determined to turn Himalaya into a jerk and punish Indian Beauty with an unhappy marriage. At the same time, two traveling hoodlums, who have drunk a memory-loss potion and cannot keep track of who they are, add chaos to Himalaya’s already miserable situation.

This “farical, pseudo-Bollywood comedy” (Sung 117) was shown during the Chinese New Year in Hong Kong in 2005. Chinese New Year is an important festival for Hong Kong people, and this movie grossed US$2 million in the box office. Despite its financial success, the movie illustrates a stereotypical image of Indian people in the Hong Kong mainstream media. Although the word Singh (in Cantonese sing) can also mean “star” in Chinese, it is a common Sikh surname which appears in a large number of Cantonese films and television programs in Hong Kong to denote Indians, Pakistanis or even South Asians in general.

In Srinivas’s paper, he argues that “this [Himalaya Singh] is a significant film because it foregrounds the issue of how popular texts, in spite of their politically regressive/objectionable representations, might be attempting to address the questions and problems posed by the globalisation of cultural commodities” (72). In Himalaya Singh, an Indian man says, “I sold curry in Chungking Mansions, killed people in Mongkok; I was also imprisoned in Stanley”. This representation, that all Indians are criminals, is without question objectionable and stereotypical. But there are also misrepresentations of Chinese people. There is one scene showing Chinese eating snake. Therefore, Sung is correct in her summary of this movie:

In terms of common misconception/misrepresentations, in which Indians and Chinese are essentialized and homogenized, this film represents a symbolically simple but remarkably discriminatory conceptualization of Hong Kong/Indian relationship and beliefs (118–119).

3. Distribution and promotion of Indian movies in Hong Kong

The distribution and promotion of Indian movies in Hong Kong is little documented. There are two major companies distributing Hindi films for the Indian community in the territory. According to their websites, both have been around for nearly a decade. One calls itself “the largest Indian entertainment company in Hong Kong for Hindi films” and other says that it “has been in the entertainment and event management business since 2005”.

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One of them states on its website that it has distributed blockbusters like *Sarkar* (2005), *Krrish* (2006), *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* (2006), *Don: The Chase Begins Again* (2006), *Guru* (2007), *Gandhi, My Father* (2007), *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Ghajini* (2008), *Kites* (2010) and *Dabangg* (2010). Perhaps the most notable film is *3 Idiots* which the company helped to have shown in the 34th Hong Kong International Film Festival (2010). The movie was then in public release in Hong Kong in September 2011 and holds a box office record of over US$3 million (higher than for *Himalaya Singh*). Due to the significance of this film, it is discussed again later in this paper.

These Indian movies are often shown in “special sessions” on Saturday or Sunday in one of cinemas in Tsim Sha Tsui, where a lot of Indian people live. A ticket costs US$20–25, which is more than double the price of an ordinary movie ticket in Hong Kong. The tickets for these movies are sold through a shop in Chung King Mansions in Tsim Sha Tsui or by calling the company’s telephone hotline.

A writer for the Independent Media Hong Kong has provided a description of these movie-going events as follows:

> These events will not be publicised in the Chinese media and the organisers do not care to send press releases to the Chinese media. Therefore, how could ordinary Hong Kong people know about these events? But it can be quite fun to attend these shows, because if you go there, you will be the only Chinese. The Indian movie-goers will dress up and there will be a really big crowd. (Lu)

We can see that there is not much interaction between the Hong Kong Indian community and mainstream society. However, according to a study by Hong Kong Unison (a governmental organisation founded in March 2001 to advocate policy reforms for ethnic minority residents in Hong Kong), in 2006, mass media played an important role in the shaping of the Hong Kong Chinese perceived image of ethnic minorities in Hong Kong: 27.3% of respondents said that their perception of ethnic minorities comes from cinema and TV programs, and 21.6% responded that it is from newspapers and magazines. The group thus urges the media to be objective about ethnic minorities.

4. **Interlingual and intersemiotic transfers of Indian Cinema in Hong Kong**
Although Jakobson (1959) conceptualised inter-semiotic transfer (including but not limited to image) as a valid form of translation more than 40 years ago, it is only recently that this area of intercultural transfer has activity received more attention. In 1992, in an article titled “Film (Adaptation) as Translation: Some Methodological Proposals”, Patrick Cattrysse urged scholars worldwide to expand the field of translation. He said: “there seems to be no valuable argument to keep reducing the concept of translation to mere cross-linguistic transfer processes. The scope has to be extended to a contextualistic semiotic perspective” (68).

In the following, four “Indian” movies, Slumdog Millionaire (2009), 3 Idiots (2011), English, Vinglish (2012) and The Lunchbox (2014) are examined for their interlingual and intersemiotic transfers. The term “Indian movies” here is used in a liberal sense because Slumdog Millionaire is a British Indian drama film directed by Danny Boyle. However, the movie was hugely popular in Hong Kong and earned a record US$1 million in its opening weekend, making it the second biggest opening in 2009. Since then, more Indian movies have been introduced into Hong Kong for commercial release. The research materials used in this study include movie titles, trailer subtitles and other publicity materials.

4.1 Translation of movie titles

In a research study of the foreign film titles in Hong Kong (Cheang), it was shown that most of the translated titles in Hong Kong are domesticated, probably reflecting a stronger sense of local identity. The translation of 3 Idiots in Hong Kong Chinese is 作死不離三兄弟 (zoksei batlei saamhingdai). The meaning of “3” is retained as 三兄弟 (saamhingdai) meaning “three brothers”, but the meaning of 作死 (zoksei) is a bit difficult to explain. This Cantonese dialect can be literally understood as “taking the road to ruin” but it is also used by people to reprimand those close to them who do something silly or dangerous to look for trouble. In the age of the Internet, it is also used by Chinese netizens to comment on a stranger’s remarks (Shenzhen Daily, 1 May 2014).

The translation of the Slumdog Millionaire is also interesting. Komal Nahta commented, “There was a problem with the title itself. Slumdog is not a familiar word for majority Indians” (Reuters, 30 January 2009). The term “slumdog” also causes problem when translated into Chinese because there is no equivalent term. Instead, the movie title was translated into 一百萬零一夜 (jatbaakmaan ling jat je or One Million and One Nights) when it was released in Hong Kong. “One Million” has been used because it is an allusion to the
popular TV game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” However, this movie title can also be interpreted as a reference to *One Thousand and One Nights*, which is a collection of West and South Asian stories and folk tales compiled in Arabic during the Islamic Golden Age.

The other two movies, *English, Vinglish* (2012) and *The Lunchbox* (2014), did not do as well in Hong Kong as the two movies discussed above. They grossed US$230,781 and US$151,765 respectively. And the translation of these two Indian movie titles adopted the same method, that is, allusion to a previous blockbuster. *English, Vinglish* and *The Lunchbox* were translated into Hong Kong Chinese as 紐約精華遊 (*naujoek zingwaajau* or A Tour of the Best in New York) and 美味情書 (*meimei cingsyu* or A Delicious Love Letter). The former alludes to *The Holiday* (*jyunfan zingwaajau* 緣份精華遊) (2006), a romantic Hollywood comedy starring Kate Winslet, Cameron Diaz, Jude Law and Jack Black. The latter alludes to *Love Letter* (*qing shu*), a 1995 Japanese film directed by Shunji Iwai, which had a box office record of US$3.8 million in Hong Kong in 1995. *Love Letter* has been lauded as one of the ten best romantic movies in Asian cinema by the *South China Morning Post* (9 February 2014).

From the above translated movie titles, we can see that Indian movies tend to be recast using local terms of reference. The titles are either vulgarised (*3 Idiots*) so that they can cater to a broader audience or exoticised (*One Million and One Nights*) so that they might be easier for cultural consumption. Although Hong Kong boasts movie festivals from various countries or genres every year (e.g. Hong Kong Jewish Film Festival and Hong Kong Lesbian & Gay Film Festival), Indian culture is still marginalised in the territory. Take the Indian Independent Movie Festival organised by the Hong Kong Arts Centre in late 2012 as an example. The title of the festival was “You Don’t Belong” and the poster portrays a highly stereotypical image of Indian culture. The poster is shown in Figure 2.
The colour yellow is used because Hindus consider yellow a sacred colour. The elephant probably represents Ganesh, the elephant god, a widely worshiped Hindu god and one of five main Hindu deities. The English letters at the top of the poster have also been printed in a way that imitates Modern Standard Hindi.

4.2 Trailer Subtitles

Trailers, a form of film advertisement, have great importance in the publicity and promotion of a film. They play a particularly crucial role in Hong Kong because trailers can be viewed not only on television and on the Internet but also on most of the LED display boards in the metro stations. The trailer subtitles are always bilingual, so they are important materials for our intercultural analysis. The subtitles of 3 Idiots and English, Vinglish movie trailers are the focus of analysis in this section.

According to Yau, since the early 1990s there has been a trend “for subtitlers to use Cantonese to translate colloquialisms, slang terms, swear words, and sexually explicit or suggestive language intended for entertainment, e.g. comedy, romance and action” (565). This seems to be the case for 3 Idiots, a comedy about three university students in India. A lot of colloquial expressions which are commonly used among young people in Hong Kong can be found. For example, 巴打 (baadaa or bro) is a colloquial term used by male online forum users to greet each other. The female equivalent of this is 絲打 (sidaa or sis.) Slang terms related to movement have also been used. Examples include 閃 (sim or disappear like a flash) and 龜速 (gwai cuk or move at the speed of a tortoise). These two terms are so new that they cannot even be found in A Dictionary of Cantonese Slang: The Language of Hong Kong Movies, Street Gangs and City Life (2005) published by the University of Hawaii Press. This indicates that colloquialisms can change extremely fast, particularly in an era when mobile communication demands more concise and crisp language.

In English, Vinglish, a housewife enrolls in an English course while she is in New York, to stop her husband and daughter from mocking her English skills. Because this is basically a movie about culture shock and clashes, a lot of cultural features (both Indian and American) are included. For example, ladoo, a ball-shaped sweet popular in Indian, is mentioned. This dessert is made of flour, sugar and a number of other ingredients such as cardamom, cloves.
and cashews. In the subtitle, ladoo has been translated as 甜奶球 (tim naai kau or sweet milk ball). Although this rendition manages to provide a description of the shape, taste and ingredients of this sweet, it may be a bit bland and cannot arouse the interest of the viewers. Another example is that the protagonist has not come across the term “jazz dance” and mispronounces it as “jhaans dance”. The translator seems to have used creativity and translated it as 雀屎舞 (zoeksi mou or bird’s poo dance). An Internet search shows that the Chinese term is indeed quite often used in blogs and discussion forums. This term may sound a bit vulgar but it should be able to trigger laughter among the audience.

4.3 Movie poster

Word of mouth and celebrity endorsements play an important role in the promotion of movies. And the promotional poster for The Lunchbox illustrates how an Indian movie can be reframed so that the potential movie-goers find meaning and respond to it in a meaningful way. In Figure 3, we can see that, on the left, there are endorsements from a number of Hong Kong celebrities.

Fig. 3 Poster of the movie “The Lunchbox”

These celebrities include writers, film critics and radio deejays. Modern written Chinese (as well as English) is read from left to right, so Chinese endorsements seem to occupy a more prominent position than do the English ones. One Hong Kong celebrity, Chip Tsao, a famous columnist, wrote “The Lunchbox has shown the flavours of the early works of Lee Ang [a Taiwanese-American film director who won an Academy Award for Best Director twice, first for Brokeback Mountain (2005) and most recently for Life of Pi (2012)]”. Tang Siu Wa, another writer, said “This movie is an Indian middle-aged man’s version of [Wong Kar-wai’s] In the Mood for Love”. The above references, together with the translated title, A Delicious Love Letter, attempt to reframe this movie so it becomes accessible to the Hong
Kong Chinese audience who are more familiar with Ang Lee and Wong Kar-wai than with Ritesh Batra (the director of The Lunchbox).

Though frames of reference are a necessary part of the human experience, they also show that Indian movies are a cultural commodity that Hong Kong Chinese may not be very familiar with, so they have to be reformulated to become more accessible.

5. Conclusion

The above discussion shows that, although Indian cinema is no longer just for domestic consumption in India and has gained popularity in many parts of the world, it has to be recast and transfigured during interlingual and intersemiotic transfers so that it can become more accessible to Hong Kong Chinese audiences. The stereotyping of Indian culture in the Hong Kong movie Himalaya Singh also shows that Indian people and culture are often distorted and negatively portrayed in the media, and the secluded Indian community in Hong Kong is marginalised and neglected in the mainstream media. Having said that, from the above movies, we can see that Indian culture has indeed become more visible in Hong Kong in recent years. As a result of the government’s efforts in introducing Chinese as a second language courses to Indian youth in Hong Kong and enhancing the linguistic rights of the ethnic minorities, it is believed that status of Indian culture in Hong Kong will improve and command a less peripheral or even more central position.

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Locating Film Adaptation in Intersemiotic Space

Abstract

Although adaptations from literatures into visual/moving images have been in vogue, the area has remained under-theorized and continues to be studied in reference to its conformation to the original. With the positing of ‘Intersemiotic Translation’ by Roman Jakobson, as also with the increased theorization of translation processes, the area of film adaptation requires to be viewed in terms of a ‘transformation’ of the written text into visual and motion picture. This paper is an attempt to locate the process of film adaptation in the intersemiotic space in an endeavor to study and analyse them independently.

Main Paper

Film adaptation is a research area that remains surprisingly under-theorized and motion pictures inspired from literary works are still primarily evaluated in terms of fidelity to the “sacred” originals. Scant attention is given to filmmakers’ innovative techniques, and no goals or aesthetic criteria have been clearly set for film adaptation. Yet, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida and others have clearly demonstrated that an “original” work is an abstract notion hard to define and virtually impossible to duplicate in film. Since it is always possible to make a film out of a novel, the controversy at the basis of film adaptation is not feasibility. The debate rests essentially on a misconception of the objectives of film adaptation and on a misunderstanding of the transformation process.

In 1992, in an article titled “Film (Adaptation) as Translation: Some Methodological Proposals”, Patrick Cattrysse urged scholars worldwide to expand the field of translation
claiming that: “although some theoreticians try to broaden the concept of translation studies, this does not apparently happen without difficulties” (68). He concluded by adding: “there seems to be no valuable argument to keep reducing the concept of translation to mere cross-linguistic transfer processes. The scope has to be extended to a contextualistic semiotic perspective” (68).

The intersemiotic aspect of culture is due to the partial overlap of signs and languages or sign systems of different arts – first, on the level of independent existence of these languages and texts created in them (e.g. film and theatre). The existence of a text as different simultaneous texts (e.g. novel, film, performance, picture, etc) on the level of mental interference is the second. The third: the level of projection to the propositional textual or intertextual background. At the intersemiotic description of culture the recognisability of sign becomes important and also the fact that this recognisability takes place not only in reception of individual holistic texts, but also in fragmentary reception process. In the intersemiosis of culture, making sense and the hierarchisation of signs does not depend merely on texts – the same signs can belong to different texts and sign systems, and possess different meanings in different systems. Understanding cultural perception mechanisms is the basis for the understanding of the interlingual, intertextuality, interdiscursivity and intermediality; thus the ontology of signs of different cultural texts is based on the nature of intersemiosis.

The peculiarity of an intersemiotic space is, indeed, both multiple reading and multiple interpretations carried out simultaneously through the help of different sign-systems. Re-reading and interpretation in the intersemiotic space is comparable to Roman Jakobson’s description of intersemiotic translation or ‘transmutation of signs’ – ‘an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems’. (Jakobson, 1992) However, the simultaneity of translation processes in culture raises, on the one hand, questions about the perceptual unity of the translation of a concrete intersemiotic translation and, on the other hand, the perceptual vagueness as a result of the fusion of the transformations in culture. On the level of both a single text or its transformation, and all possible transformations, there is reason to remember the words of Nelson Goodman: “Conception without perception is empty, perception without conception is blind.” (Goodman, 1978) Conceptualisation, de- and reconceptualization in culture are equally probable and depend on the peculiarity of the processes of cultural auto-communicative processes i.e., on how texts, types of texts and their transformations are understood.
Sign arbitrariness perhaps has some plausibility for language, yet if it comes to resemble ‘motivation’ it challenges the very structural explanation. Moving images are so obviously ‘motivated signs’ that it becomes highly counter-intuitive to maintain an arbitrary relation between the expression and the notional content. An example of the problem and fitting into the textual details would be the casting of Alan Rickman in the role of Professor Severus Snape in the adaptations of Harry Potter series. Though Rickman is a very talented actor, he was also fifty-five years old when the first movie was released, whereas at the start of the series Snape is supposedly only thirty-two years old. While one might think that the age difference does not matter so long as the appearance is appropriate, the difference – particularly as it’s more than twenty years – has an effect on that as well. In the book, part of Harry’s perception of Snape is that “his eyes were black like Hagrid’s, but they had none of Hagrid’s warmth. They were cold and empty and made you think of dark tunnels.”

Snape’s youth, coupled with his demeanor, present a more tragic juxtaposition in the book than they do in the film because in the film that juxtaposition does not even exist. How can it when the embittered contempt that emanates from the character is easily understandable, rather than jarring, in the lined face of an older actor?

The picture (as a motivated sign) has a relation to the ‘real’ or otherwise put, to the Lifeworld, and therefore as an iconic sign it must rest on a more generic level. There must be some characteristics that appear in all pictures (including the moving) since it has turned out that children who grew up without pictures may without difficulty recognize the object depicted.

Practical analysis of cultural texts, their intersemiotic nature as simultaneous existence as transformations in different sign systems raises the need to bring together two problems. One of them is the analyzability of a text taken individually and the second is the analyzability of a text located in intersemiotic space. This, in turn, raises an important methodological problem about those immanent parameters of a text that are connected with material and composition, and about the universal parameters – such as the chronotope – that are independent of the material of the text and apply to text expressed in different sign systems.

The great number of literary works adapted to the screen by international film directors is a testimony of the obvious mingling of literature and cinema, as well as the influence of literary works on narrative strategies of motion pictures. We should not overlook that, as soon as cinema evolved from an erratic and loosely controlled flow of life images to
become sheer narrative in the mid-1900s, it often borrowed its plots from literary sources in an attempt to translate and recreate them on screen. The ambivalent nature of film adaptations that “can be seen as a kind of multileveled negotiation of intertexts” (Naremore, 2000) seems an appropriate point of departure toward laying the foundation of an aesthetics based on a dialectical exchange between literature and cinema. It seems that one of the major misunderstandings about motion pictures stems from their heterogeneous nature. They are made of diverse components – films are altogether written text, speech, sound, music, performance and images – and evaluating their aesthetic properties is a major challenge. Given that the term ‘adaptation’ was first used to describe a particular mode of translation long before it was applied to cinema, we can assume that the long tradition of translation studies, spanning from Plato to Derrida, provides a helpful background for the building of a film adaptation theory.

In novels, we often come to know characters best not through what they say, but through what they are thinking or what is said about them in the narration. A narrator mediates the meaning of what we read through his or her point of view: a coming-of-age story reads differently if we hear about what happens from the point of view of the person growing up than if we learn about it from the person’s mother, sister or teacher. But in film, the narrator largely disappears. Sometimes a narrator’s perspectives is kept through the use of a voice-over, but generally the director, cast and crew must rely on the other tools of film to reproduce what was felt, thought and described on the page.

For example, consider the famous scene from the 1998 film adaptation of Rebecca where the narrator, a young, naïve girl, who has just become the second wife of the wealthy Maxim de Winter, first meets Mrs. Danvers, the forbidding housekeeper of his estate, Manderley. Rebecca’s terror and awkwardness, revealed in two pages of first person narration in the book, are made clear to the viewer in the film simply by the way Mrs Danvers first emerges from the shadows with just her severe face lit and the way camera lingers there uncomfortably, making the viewer cringe with the same fear that the new Mrs. De Winter feels.

The major difference between films and books is that visual image stimulates our perceptions directly, while written records can do this indirectly. Film is a more direct sensory experience than reading – besides verbal language, there is also colour, movement, and sound. Yet film is also limited: for one thing, there are no time constraints on a novel, while a film usually must compress events into two hours or so. For another, the meaning of a
novel is controlled by only one person, the author, while the meaning we get from a film is the result of a collaborative effort of many people. Film also does not allow us the same freedom a novel does – to interact with the plot or characters by imagining them in our minds. For some viewers, this is often the most frustrating aspect of turning a novel into a film.

Translation and adaptation share major common characteristics on etymological, cultural and textual aspects.

The first similarity that comes to mind, when comparing adaptation with translation, is semantics. Used during the Middle Ages to define a specific practice of translation, adaptation was considered as a sub-genre of translation. The same term was later applied to cinema in 1912, to qualify the transfer from written material to visual images. It is, like translation, viewed both as a state and a process of transformation epitomizing a subtle blending of sameness and difference. Inspired by a literary work, but not quite equivalent to it, adaptation, whose main purpose is to bring across and to modify, claims its “differing” status from the start. Therefore, it would be more fruitful to view them as hybrid products containing traces of a source text rather than plain clones. Their task is rather significant since adaptation not only replicates a primary text, but, as Walter Benjamin stressed it, they also ensure the afterlife of the original and the propagation of cultural elements contained in it. In “On Language as Such and on the Language of Man” Benjamin argues, as a philosopher in favour of an ontological equality of source and translated texts. As one commentator, Diego Fernandez puts it, “human languages, in Benjamin’s conception of language, maintain a relationship of affinity – not through being like each other or similar to each other, but through kinship.” Translation thus becomes a matter not of similarity or identity (translated text copies source text) but of affinity in difference (translated text and source text are two objects, separate yet akin and equal in value). The 1916 essay affirms: “Translation attains its full meaning in the realization that every evolved language…can be considered as a translation of all the others,” perceiving translation as a succession not of similarities but of transformations, and thus pointing towards a vision of source and translated text as ontological equals. Benjamin here argues against the idea of a translation as a mere simulacrum of the original, adumbrating a counter-model of difference in equality: ‘a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the
translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.’

The second significant feature shared by translation and film adaptation is at the level of cultural transfer. As we know adaptation or translation is more than a sheer linguistic shift since it entails the transmission and communication of “cultural capital”. In ‘Constructing Cultures’, André Lefevere stresses the major role played by translation in the dissemination of literary works and claims that: ‘cultural capital is transmitted, distributed and regulated by translation, among other factors, not only between cultures, but also within one given culture.’ The aim of translation is to clarify the question of equivalence and examine what constitutes meaning within this process. Nowhere is this question normative, however. Translation is defined as a process of the transformation of one text, constructed through a certain semiotic system into another text, of another semiotic system. This implies that, when one decode information given in one language and codifies it through another semiotic system, it becomes necessary to modify it, even if only slightly, since every semiotic system is characterized by its own qualities and restrictions, and no content exists independently of the medium that embodies it. In this rewriting of a text in a new system of language as the cinema, new mechanisms of representation may be perceived, since the procedures must take into account poetic and discursive aspects of the new medium.

Discussing the process of adaptation as translation, Cattrysse notes that it is a mistake to consider translation as something more related to faithfulness to the source text than any other kind of adaptation. From the author’s point of view, adaptation as translation also follows criteria of approximation and distance from a source text and thus it cannot be separated from those employed in translation practice. The central idea of Cattrysse’s discussion is that linguistic or literary translation and film adaptation are distinguished under the perspective of the process of production, because the filmic process of creation occurs in social contexts different from those of reception process since the social context of reception of a literary text is different from that of a cinematographic one.

Cattrysse’s work is based on the Polysystem Theory of Translation, the research which has been conducted by Gideon Toury, Theo Hermans and Itamar Even-Zohar. The use of these theories are appropriate for the study of film adaptation because both translation and film adaptation studies are concerned with the transformation of the source-text, under conditions of invariance, “a term used to denote the concept of immutability of elements of the source text in the translation process”, that is, those conditions in which the nucleus is
retained while a relation is established between the initial and resulting entities. The invariant represents features common to source and target texts. A nucleus is retained during the process of transformation from one semiotic entity to another functional entity and which is made up of a potential element of another secondary cultural system.

There are three main reasons a filmmaker or a screenwriter might make major changes in adapting a literary work to film. One is simply the changes demanded by a new medium. Film and literature each have their own tools for manipulating narrative structure. In a novel, a new chapter might take us back to a different time and place in the narrative; in a film, we might go back to that same time and place through the use of a flashback, a crosscut, or a dissolve, such as the various techniques the filmmakers in Wuthering Heights employ to keep the complex narrative coherent.

Sometimes filmmakers make changes to highlight new themes, emphasise different traits in a character, or even try to solve problems they perceive in the original work. Allan Cubitt, who wrote the screenplay for the 2001 film Anna Karenina, says in an interview on the MASTERPIECE website that he always felt Vronsky's suicide attempt was ‘undermotivated’, and therefore he tried to strengthen the character’s sense of rejection and humiliation in the film version.

Sometimes this means subtle substitutions or additions of language or props that are more recognizable to a modern audience, at other times it means depicting events or characters in the novel in a way that better fits a modern sensibility.

What is transposed from one semiotic system to another, or in the present case, from literature to cinema, is the meaning of a sign. The sign, as it stands for an object and as it conveys a meaning will produce an idea. Every process of translation – as an act of semiosis – follows that pattern: an individual experiences a sign (a text) that stands for, or refers to, a phenomenon, in the world and that creates some sense in his/her mind. That sense is a sign equivalent to that first sign and is further developed into another sign, perhaps another text or maybe a film.

Because the object of representation can be nothing but a representation, its meaning can be nothing but a representation too. Filmic version of books makes part of an endless series of representations, of which the written text is the object. As the text itself is a representation of another representation, the first object proves to be infinitely removed from the sign at any point in the semiosis chain. Intersemiotic translation illustrates perfectly the
action of signs: cultural artifacts or symbolic signs grow away from the initial object that started the semiosic process.

It is the interseiotic cohesion which explains the interaction of numerous linguistic features that form text and meaning in film discourse. The module that provides a schema for the investigation of the moving image is based on a theory that allows Systematic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis (SFMDA) as a tenable yardstick for the analysis of film discourse. In this schema represented in a diagram, the unfolding image appeals to the eye; while the unfolding text appeals to the ear. In the illustration, the two strands independently but implicitly connect to the mind which cognitively creates a narrative film discourse. The figure below elaborates this claim as pointer to interseiotic cohesion in the moving image text:

The provisions of the diagram above show an interseiotic circuit of how two strands – image and text (visual/verbal) integrate to make meaning in context. The interseiotic cohesion is first initiated by a linguistic reference item that is endophoric, pointing to an exophoric circumstance which slightly draws down to an extralinguistic object/subject which is visual. This interaction, at spatio-temporal levels, is found to cohere also at levels that either flashback or flash front, in order to generate narrative context in a moving image text.
Thus, variation in semiotic systems is not per se an obstacle to understanding the processes underlying film adaptation if we accept a system of analysis which is target oriented. Acknowledging the composite nature of this/these discourse(s) allows us to view and analyse its elements, as long as we heed the fact that it is the film itself which constitutes a text and that any specific observations must eventually be contemplated against the Gestalt of the text. Films can then be deconstructed into their constitutive elements (sensorial supports, semiotic systems) and these can offer ground for meaningful comparison with other, more traditional, types of text. In other words, the voice of film is not one voice but polyphony of voices.

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**Market Value of Intercultural Translations and Adaptations in Indian Theatre: A Sample Study.**

**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to understand if popular discourses on the “west” influence the commercial success of an intercultural theatre performance. This paper seeks to realize the effects of consumer culture on the practice and performance of Indian theatre of the urban, cosmopolitan kind. In the context of consumer culture, if a play is considered a product, my research attempts to understand the process of production and the factors ensuring its success. To study this theatrical conundrum I will use the framework of intercultural performance studies and post-colonial studies.

Theorists of intercultural theatre such as Philip Zarrilli, Patrice Pavis, Rustom Bharucha, Eugenio Barba and others have discussed issues pertaining to the politics of intercultural exchange. But the question of consumer culture has not been addressed at length in their works. Two plays- *Nothing like Lear*, an adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, and *Balura Gudika*, an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s *The Master Builder* in Kannada will serve as the primary data for analysis. Using dialectic method I will approach the visual performances through the theories mentioned. I will examine newspaper reviews, the audience turn-out for each performance, and the marketing strategies used by online ticket sellers like Indianstage etc. to promote these plays. I will also study the influence of
institutionalised theatre events like the Delhi Ibsen’s Festival that sanction the success of a play.

I aim to base my findings on interviews with directors and theatre audiences. This interview method will be used to identify the practice of intercultural theatre through theories of reception. My paper will venture into this yet unexplored contemporary theatre space to understand intercultural theatre through the market value of plays and the changing nature of the cosmopolitan, urban theatre-goer.

Keywords: Indian Theatre, Theatre Translation, Adaptation, Intercultural Theatre, Cosmopolitan Theatre, Consumer Culture.

Main Paper

Introduction

With the world-wide-web shrinking boundaries, the emergence of a new cultural space has been a reality for some time now. Indian theatre did not pledge its eternal reverence to the West anymore. Indianising a western product to suit specific cultural context is more important than preserving the original and its authenticity. The West was explored for its ideas and inspiration. The concept is similar to what Bharucha called “to seek the familiar in the unfamiliar, the unfamiliar in the familiar” (Bharucha 2001: 24). Media and globalization has created in the Indian psyche a mini-model of the West. West is familiar and very alien at the same time. Sirkku Aaltonen has noted, “Foreign play texts which represent either imperialistic or emotional reality familiar to us are admitted into the theatrical system more easily than those that are not compatible with our way of looking at the world” (Aaltonen 2000).

To assume the “west” as an implicit category has its contradictions. Hence, I use the term “west” in this paper with great caution and all its implications for a post-colonial context like ours. This paper will uncover the various complexities and meanings of the concept of a “western” text in the age of globalization. The research will focus on the governing factors of adaptation from the written page to a theatrical stage in the current global, multi-cultural, metropolitan scenario. Hence the research will briefly deal with the politics of translation and
adaptation, while being grounded in contemporary multicultural theatre exchange space. The nature of cosmopolitan societies in India is such that people are urged to negotiate between their regional culture, and a global identity as circulated by media. Intercultural theatre produces a sort of third space where Indian and global texts and performances intermingle to produce a new text that belongs to neither spaces but is part of both. This complex relationship between Indian theatre spaces and global texts has given rise to intercultural theatre in the contemporary Indian space. It is this theatrical product that is the object of discussion in this paper.

Post-colonial context:
Post-colonial translation theories were a ground-breaking phenomenon as it challenges European norms and rules of theatre translation. As Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi have aptly coined the phrase “Empire translates back”, the colonies, through English gained access to various texts. It also meant that to stand against canonical theories, English was a key tool. Bassentt and Trivedi have explained that, “the widely shared post-colonial wisdom on the subject is that the Empire can translate back only into English, or into that lower or at least lower-case variety of it, English”. English texts seemed more profitable than writing in a native tongue. The lucrative market promoted a new species of Global English, writing in which assured monetary and cultural results. From a capitalistic view, profits for English texts and performances were far more lucrative.

With this powerful linguistic tool, the purposes of translation had drastically transformed. Theorists like Emily Apter coined the term “neo-colonial” to understand the new phase of relationship between east and west. Further, she describes the contemporary situation as “decolonizing intralinguistic bilingualism”1.

Understanding Audience response to Intercultural Theatre:
As a public event, a theatre study is only complete with audience response. An attempt was made to tackle the problem of individual difference in audiences and to what extent does the text (performance) regulate audience response. To analyse response and

reactions the most apt tool in the literary toolbox was psychoanalysis. Susan Bennett has remarked, “Freud’s interest in audience response is evident from his discussions of Hamlet and Oedipus Rex” (Bennett 1997). The reader of performance is not only seeing the play but is simultaneously seeing what s/he wants to. The question arises if a theory could be formed on such individual understandings of performance. Can there be an underlying structure that yields a general reader response?

A classification of theatre audiences is provided by Clifford Williams (as qtd in Bennett 1997). He has opined that the popular theatre audience’s qualification of admittance is the possession of entrance money. Immediately, a class classification emerges as determining theatre-going culture. The ability to afford to watch a play was only an elite activity. This has however changed to mean that by theory, anyone can be a theatre goer. Performance studies have often questioned academic authority on theatre participation. Edging towards being a mass-culture, performance theorists conceive “all audiences as potentially active participants who can authorize artistic experience.” While in favour of a “counterelitism,” has theatre really become a space available for all members of a population? Do they have to right to determine the cultural relevance of a performance? When new perspectives of theatre as a cultural industry took shape, there was a need to study and seek out audiences. The underlying assumption being that theatre was an entertainment industry that contributed economically. At the end and beginning of this industry was its audience. Traditional understanding of an audience-performance relationship was to be soon replaced by consumer-producer relationships.

Theories of reception failed to quantitatively point out how meaning was produced and perceived by audiences. Desperately, statistical and questionnaire methods were used as means of measure. Theatre Analysis: Some Questions and a Questionnaire by Pavis was one such attempt. The shortcomings of this method is quite obvious, Pavis mentions, “I felt a similar sense of mistrust towards statistical studies based on the psychology of the reception of a work of art and towards sociological investigations into the social origins and the taste of the theatre going public” Pavis recognised the need to “verbalize” audience reactions to the

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following set of questions. The need for such methods of recording was to finally inch closer
to “a dialogue between the production as it happens and the production that the spectator
sees.”

Another fruitful technique is to observe theatre as a cultural industry by analysing the
various machines involved in production and reception. The mechanism of this industry is
based on exploiting certain emotional attachments or popular trends. These general thematic
emotions make a text seem universal in a sense that it is very much part of everyone’s world.
The struggle of a mother in Mother Courage, problems and treatments of elders in Im not
Rappaport, the delicate father-daughter relation in Lear are all emotions that can be evoked
in a majority of audiences. While fanatically revolting again universals in Peter Brook’s
Mahabharatha, Bharucha admitted that Peer Gynt was, “always already Indian...but more
specifically Kannadiga” (Bharucha 2001). Translator and/or directors cash on these emotions
that somehow seem to surpass all intercultural differences.

Discussing intercultural theatre reception in the age of globalization has led to media
forces in contemporary society that determine and influence on production and reception.
Media plays a crucial role in setting trends, following which allows acceptance into specific
social systems. Theatre going can be seen as one such trend among the urban middle-class
and upper-middle class sections of society. The act of theatre-going can be classified as a
sub-culture-- a part of mainstream social practices but also indicates a selective group of
people belonging in it. From the William’s description of audiences, it is obvious that
particular theatre-goers take pride in their ritual of theatre going. Who are these people? “The
theatre-going audience is predominantly middle class, middle aged and affluent”⁴, says
Simon Stewart while describing the cultural practices of theatre goers. Such a statement,
however generalized, entails all the elements of monetary and cultural choices that Williams
discussed. It also leads to an important concept- silver disposition. The term coined by
Stewart, indicates conspicuous consumption such as dining out, dressing up and spending
money and opting theatre as a leisure past time. Theatre-goers volunteer to be a part of a
culture that involves opting for the well-established or the current trend. This trend may be
part of a larger popular culture. But elements from the same are selected, through silver
disposition, creating a sub-culture of theatre goers. In this context, Pierre Bourdieu’s

⁴ Stewart, Simon. “Culture and the Middle classes”, Ashgate Publishing Ltd: 2010
Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste is enlightening. He notes that people choose the best theatres, the most expensive seats and often go out to eat in an expensive restaurant, all part of the practices involved in theatre-going. “Choosing a theatre is like choosing the right shop, marked with all the signs of quality and guaranteeing no unpleasant surprises or lapse of taste,” he explains. Thus, advertising these plays help audiences to pick the kind that they suit their taste. An ongoing cycle of demand and consumption of plays is created. Such practices are different from the habitual activities like television watching. Although the elitist canon associated with theatre-going has be deconstructed by the rise of popular culture, entry to cultural practices are still marked by boundaries like urbanity, monetary and time investment, rituals of social practices and the cool factor associated with watching a play as part of a night-out in the city. Whether or not audiences conform to these rituals marks their entry point into this sub-culture.

Eminent to the working of theatre industry, are indicators declaring what a “must-watch-play” is. During high modernism, the verdict of an aesthetic performance was issued by academics. In contemporary times, academic theory does not have authority on popular cultural choices but other cultural signifiers decide what is the new “in thing,” the canon. These indicators may be media, capital, educational institutions, specialized theatre spaces, statistical validations like blockbuster and bestseller, accreditations like Booker Prize, Tony awards, Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards etc, and through institutionalized academies, international theatre festivals and newspaper critics. Any theatre event that has been validated and approved by one or more of these indicators, is deemed fit for cultural consumption. Once validated, the same texts, theatre events and playwrights will be circulated as an assured source of capital. In such a case of “commercialized internationalism” excludes many choices as not popular. Jones observes the contemporary theatre market to comment: “One of the most commercialized internationalist theatrical phenomenon is perhaps the international festival circuit, where the local rarely plays a role, subsumed as it is into a dominant globalized and globalizing aesthetic”. Besides Shakespearian festivals, the annual Ibsen festival at Delhi is a fitting example. This

centralized event attracts international attention, reemphasising that Ibsen’s plays in translation, in India, are a sure sell.

The post-colonial context of this research adds another major indicator of cultural capital. When ads and promotional events indicated a play is to be an adaptation, like all goods foreign, attracts attention. Information on the plays are circulated by websites, ticket booking sites like Indiastage, theatre reviews in mainstream newspapers reinforce the foreign source of the play. In the next section of this paper, I attempt to analyse the chosen sample plays- Nothing like Lear and Balura Gudikara. I will focus on audience turn-out, marketing strategies used for promotion, and the various platforms that add to the cultural value of these plays. In addition to these parameters, I have also quoted relevant parts of interviews with the directors, actors, and audiences in some cases. These excerpts will help understanding the thought processes involved in the production and consumption of these two theatre performances.

Data Sample 1: Nothing like Lear

Adaptation from

King Lear by William Shakespeare

Nothing like Lear is a Company theatre production directed by Rajat Kapoor. The play is a one-man show with the actors Athul Kumar and Vinay Patak taking alternate turns to play the part of the clown. The adaptation is a post-modern, post-structural rendition of Shakespeare. I will be analysing the performance held on 2 December 2012 at Rangashankara, Bangalore. Belonging to the contemporary theatre genre, this play sheds light on the nature of a cross-section of Indian theatre at present.

I met the director to ask him more about the adaptation process, the reason for his choice of Shakespeare. On being asked why he chose Shakespeare, Rajat replied, “The reason why we keep going back to Shakespeare is because there is a familiarity there, something that holds relevance for our lives today. Shakespeare’s themes are interwoven with some personal experiences to produce a new kind of performance. “So I can say that Nothing like Lear is a bit of Shakespeare and a bit of us,” Rajat Kapoor remarks.
Printed on the ticket for *Nothing Like Lear*, the audiences are aware that they play they have chosen to watch is an adaptation. Whether such a disclosure is intended by the translator cannot be ensure in all cases, however a fancy towards acclaimed playwrights and plays could increase the demand for intercultural translations. The recurring use of specific texts and playwrights accentuates their brand value. In reminiscence, the Indian school curriculum is rich with popular playwrights. Many know Shakespeare as dearly as native texts, and many more know him better than Kalidasa. With such an early familiarization with foreign plays and playwrights, attraction to them is inculcated and reinforced by the Indian education system as well. A more daunting question is really how foreign are these plays to the Indian context?

On the flipside, Shakespearean translations can be understood as “mimicry”- a concept part of postcolonial theory popularised by Homi K Bhabha. Mimicry can be defined as, “When colonial discourse encourages the colonial subject to “mimic” the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer’s cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of those traits. Rather, the result is a ‘blurred copy’ of the colonizer that can be quite threatening”. This “blurred copy,” is similar to the coloniser but is dissimilar all the same.

This particular adaptation has drifted far away from the original while fundamentally still being the same. The play brings Shakespeare closer to the Indian audience, rather than transporting them to Lear’s times. The director claimed that is he knows the play is a success when a girl came up to him after the performance and said, “I’m going to call my father now.” 7 According to Kapoor, the immediacy of the performance is the key to its success. Once again, a familiarity within the text appeals to the directors as formula for a profitable production.

The tickets sold for the performances mentions that *Nothing like Lear* is based on a Shakespearian play. Even if the audience doesn’t recognize Lear, he will recognize Shakespeare. Therefore, the theatre audiences reading about the upcoming play could be attracted to familiar trends. The “silver disposition” of the modern day urban audience as discussed earlier, is applicable here. An online reviewer posting in *The Hindu*: Citizen Review writes, “we watched, expecting lines from the original to hit us any minute, and they

7 Hamara movie, “Rajat Kapoor on his play 'Nothing like Lear’”, Youtube clip, Apr 1, 2013

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did when we least expected it.”\textsuperscript{8} Thus, the target audience of this play is assumed to have basic knowledge of Shakespeare and his works.

An example of audience turn-out will better explain why foreign is a popular brand. The first of its kind theatre space in Bangalore, Rangashankara, Bangalore, is a platform for theatre performances from around the world. The theatre space seats 320 people at a time. \textit{Hyavadana} by Karnad performed by Benaka Theatre Company headed by T. S. Nagabharana, a well-known TV personality, theatre artist, director and producer; and \textit{Nothing Like Lear} directed and adapted by Rajat Kapoor, well known film and theatre director; these plays were performed in Rangashankara on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} and 11\textsuperscript{th} December 2012, respectively. For the former, 50-52 individuals lavishly occupied the empty theatre. On the other hand, tickets of the latter play was sold out two days before the actual performance and a staggering number of audiences who were squeezing and adjusting to find a seat in the overwhelmingly full theatre auditorium.\textsuperscript{9} The example reveals a twofold conclusion-- it comments on the demographic nature of Bangalore’s population and reemphasises the lucrative nature of plays in adaptation.

Bangalore city is a display of the globalised economy and the concept of a global citizen. The class of audiences marked with silver-disposition are thus a mixture of audiences from various Indian states and otherwise. Although they may live in the metropolitan city, they are oft not familiar with the native tongue. From the above example, it is safe to conclude that theatre-goers in Bangalore are a mixed linguistic and cultural demographic. They appreciate a night-out in the city after a busy week. Tickets at Rangashakara are normally priced at 100 for Kannada plays and 200 or more for English plays. English plays thus stand out as the logical choice to reach and please such a diverse demographic. “Among urban theatregoers none of these other languages (Bengali, Kannada, Malayalam and Gujarati) has the currency and accessibility (some would say the cachet) of English”, says Dharwadker.\textsuperscript{10}

\textsuperscript{9} These statistics are from first hand observations
Online ticketing franchises like Indiastage track the trends and preferences of audiences on a regular basis. They are aware that English plays are more popular and profitable. Eventually, as an outcome of such poor turn-outs, Indiastage now sells tickets to only selected vernacular plays. Did Indiastage lower the demand by regulating sales or did the demand influence their marketing strategy? The industries that profit from intercultural exchange regulate the availability of performances. By decreasing the number of plays they are selling tickets for, they are both creating market for certain products (plays) and affirming their aesthetic value. There may no more be a state-regulation on theatre, but as Bharucha reminded, there is most definitely an economic regulation. To imagine the worse, such regulations may entirely discourage production of less popular vernacular plays. Profits and demand are the major forces governing cultural production. There is only an illusion that the audiences can access any play or product. But in reality, they can access only what they are being provided with. Whether the limitations may come in terms of language access or accessing the product itself, the post-industrial audience, as Adorno, T. & Horkheimer have described, is reduced to statistics on research organization charts, and are divided by income groups into red, green, and blue areas.”

Data Sample 2: Balura Gudikara

Translation and Adaptation from

The Master Builder by Henrik Ibsen

The play was translated into Kannada by B. Suresh and directed by B. Jayashree. Performed by the Spandana Theatre Company, the play was performed as part of the Annual Delhi Ibsen Festival 2010.

Initiated in 2008, the primary objective of the Delhi Ibsen Festival (DIF) was “to establish a platform for promoting long term institutional artistic and academic cooperation and dialogue in the areas of literature, performing arts as well as social- and political

issues”12. The director of the festival Nissar Allana said in an interview with The Hindu, Allana that the Delhi Ibsen Festival’s target group as “post ‘post-colonial’ generation”. He explains that theatre practitioners that emerged after the ‘90s seek to reconnect with the global theatre tradition, but are often faced with “modern challenges of space and the domination of television”13. It is to such an audience that contemporary Indian theatre has to cater to. In other words, the audiences of these plays are both part of a mass-culture as well as possess silver-disposition.

The play Balura Gudikara is an adaptation of The Master Builder in the Veeragase folk theatre form particular to Northern Karnataka. Translation and adaptation in theatre is a deeper dramaturgical process than text-to-text translation.

The pretext of the folk based theme for Delhi Ibsen Festival (DIF) 2010 could be construed as the factor influencing appropriation of Ibsen in a folk-based theatre performance. The DIF is providing a platform or a demand for plays that are based on Ibsen’s text but creates a nostalgic association with the regional folk identities. Hence, there is a demand in both the local as well as the global cultural market for a product like B Jayshree’s play. The DIF is conducted annually under the patronage of the Norwegian Embassy. Indian renditions of Ibsen have a market far from any geographical or cultural boundaries.

Having said this, has cosmopolitan theatre practice been reduced to such a market driven attitude? Or is there room for ideological critique? Preceding the discussions above, I felt that there is also an ideological influence in choosing western texts. Cosmopolitan modernity demands to appropriate the west in our own terms so it enables a better way to deal with cultural differences. This however does not mean minimising differences, but understanding western texts and trends through specific differences. What would Ibsen write if he wrote in Kannada? How would his character speak if they belonged to a specific Indian milieu? In intercultural theatre, we need to inch one step forward. How would a Kannada reader understand Ibsen? As is the case in Balura Gudikara, Ibsen was appropriated as he would be understood by Kannada readers. For instance, the adaptation associates the

12 www.norwayemb.org.in/NR/rdonlyres/.../101550/ibsen2.doc
destruction of ego with mythology. By alluding to the story of Shiva and the Verrabhabras, B Jayashree has attempted to make sense of Ibsen’s play through specific roots.

The first staging of the play was on 5.12.2010 in the Delhi Ibsen Festival. Director Nissar Allana said that, “The Delhi Ibsen Festival 2010 is unique in every way, because it encompasses an aspect of Ibsen’s work and theme, rarely discussed; Ritual, Tradition & Folklore. In the Indian context, this is especially important, because it helps us define our own point of contact with Ibsen. We have to see him, not as a stranger in our midst, but bring him into our own environment and into our minds, in a manner that he becomes familiar and endearing.” All plays of the festival where directed to match the folk theme of the year. In practitioner’s terms, Allana has explained the post-modern approach to appropriating the west from one’s own locus. As noted in the prior discussions translation in theatre is a means of “seeking for the familiar in the unfamiliar”.

In the adaptation of Ibsen’s Master builder as Balura Gudikara, the play cannot be considered as western solely based on their content. However, it cannot be considered as part of the veeraghase folk tradition of Karnataka as well. Such plays are of a new, hybrid variety that belongs to a third space that negotiates between two cultures. This third space is imaginary and need not be confined to one geographical location. It is an ideological space created as a result of the interaction between ideas, cultures, languages and theatre systems.

**Conclusion**

Theatre of the post-modern times is seen as a commodity culture driven by media and images. Understanding the nature and process of intercultural theatre during this time has been the main objective of this research. Cosmopolitan Indian theatre today has an economic and cultural bond with the west as shown its effects on theatre production and reception as well.

Owing to the cultural investment in Indian arts and products, it is necessary to treat intercultural theatre as a product, governed by the rules of market value, demand and supply. Production is increased and modified on the terms of demand. If so, contemporary Indian theatre is responding to the demand for western appropriations. In Indian movies as well as music, western forms and themes are being adapted to bring the Indian audiences closer to
the west, simultaneously bring the west closer to specific Indian audiences. Ibsen is made relevant to a specific Indian audience and Verraghase is made relevant in the global context.

In the specific example of B Jayashee’s adaptation of Ibsen, we have to observe the place of Indian theatre in the contemporary global scenario. The platform for which the play was first directed was the Delhi Ibsen Festival. Funded by the Norwegian Embassy, the Festival is open for global audiences as well. Indian plays represent the ways in which Ibsen is continued to be appropriated. The language or cultural difference is not a barrier in the global market rather; it celebrates the reincarnation of Ibsen through specific Indian theatre and cultural practices. Hence, there is an increasing demand for a unique representation of texts and this newness attracts investments for various sources.

The market value of intercultural theatre depends on its newness and the ability to create an amalgamation of western elements with specific Indian frameworks. If we treat intercultural theatre exchange as a cultural industry, its process is based on what sells best?

To answer the question what is the nature and process of intercultural exchange in theatre, cultural or market-oriented trends influencing this exchange have been examined in this research. Upon understanding the politics of intercultural theatre exchange, the power relations between the two cultures in contact will become clear. The changing relationship between India and the west has been the main reason for the change in the nature of intercultural theatre. Hence, in conclusion, the factors that have led to an urban, cosmopolitan kind of theatre practice are political, cultural and most of all, market-oriented.

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Murasaki Shikibu Translated Literature:

Text and Images in *Genji Monogatari*

Abstract

The millenar work of Murasaki Shikibu, *Genji Monogatari*, of the classical Japanese literature, is considered the world’s first literary novel written by a woman. Through this study, an attempt is made to point translational routes of this seminal work, originally written in Japanese of the Heian period (794-1185) and later translated into modern Japanese. Widespread in the West, primarily through translations into English, its relevance in the cultural and literary scene has encouraged the publication of versions circulating in various languages. In summary, one can say that *The Tale of Genji* encompasses all of the translation variants advocated by Roman Jakobson (1969), constituting mainly a process of intersemiotic translation equally and extensively discussed by Julio Plaza (1987), as it is in the form of literary texts; the interpretation of fine arts - most famous paintings being in *e-maki*; the translation of poetry; the convergence of the visual arts - such as dance, cinema, opera or theater plays; plus the adaptation to *mangas*; exploring various aspects beginning from the verbal language and vice versa, passing through other semiotic representations. The question of image being of utmost importance to the contemporary, the issue of literature originated imagery, and its intertwined relationships, take central stage; after all, literature is image as are other art forms such as the theater, painting, and cinema, which also manifest through imaging.
Main Paper

*Genji Monogatari - The work*

*Genji Monogatari* is often regarded - and almost unanimously - as the oldest literary novel, though perhaps it would remain still unknown for a long time to western readers had it not been for the translations of Arthur Waley and Edward G. Seidensticker, this century, respectively between 1921-1933 and 1976, with *The Tale of Genji* (Puette, 23). Though written over a thousand years ago, between the end of the 10th century and the beginning of the 11th, it is one of the greatest works ever published in the literary world, not only in Japanese scope, cradle of its creation, but also in the west, becoming “[...] more often compared with modern European works like Proust’s ‘À la Recherche du temps perdu’ than with products of its own Heian period” (Puette, 145).

The story, written in 54 chapters, chronicles the life and loves of Prince Genji, the young, handsome and talented son of the Emperor with Kiritsubo, his favorite consort, who would become sick and die shortly after because of the contempt and hatred suffered from the other consorts of the court. The Emperor, in an attempt to assuage his suffering, marries Fujitsubo, with whom his son, Hikaru Genji, would fall in love.

The plot, thereafter, lists incestuous relationships, family conflicts, love games with male polygamy and female resignation that make up the private life in the palace. Parallel to this environment favorable to conspiracies, intrigues and betrayals, a life of luxury, court’s dalliance, fostered profound psychological implications, meticulously detailed by the author, from the idle life in the palace, where ethic codes were guided by precepts speaking of ephemeral illusion and fleeting appreciation of beauty or physical pleasures.

Notable for its sleek style, the complex representations of characters and the descriptions of human emotions, the tale unfolds presenting around 400 characters, establishing itself as a major difficulty for readers - and translators - of *The Tale of Genji*, because almost no character in the original text has a given name. Characters are, instead, called by their function or the role they play on the court, whether an honorific title or even a relationship or family connection with other characters - which can change completely depending on movement and diegetic space of scenes.
One of the reasons why *Genji Monogatari* is regarded as a great work of literature concerns its literary features which allowed it to transcend the barriers of time, as well as cultural boundaries, and continue to sensitize all sorts of readers. Howbeit, it would seem that one of the obstacles faced by modern readers in search of appreciation for the novel bears on expectations and invalid stereotypes in which they, inevitably, tend to interpret it, given that at the time of the narrative - Heian (794-1185) - refers to an extremely distant socio-cultural setting that protrudes from modern Japan.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of the work is constant concern of its characters with the search for artistic skills. Men and women of the aristocracy sought to bespeak themselves through the art of dressing elegantly, calligraphy, music, and particularly poetry. In *The Tale of Genji*, the most important of all the virtues, aristocratic criterion by which every man and woman of the court was evaluated, consisted, essentially, in the inherent sensitivity for tenderness and compassion towards things, especially with the traditional arts. Thence, nothing fascinated them more than compose, recite or play instruments.

The expression *aesthetic aspect* is considered to relate to all of the arts and nature, however, in the literary world it is believed its most perfect demonstration can be discerned through verbal poetic expression. In *Genji*, there are approximately 800 poems composed throughout the novel, representing not the formal Chinese poetry created by men as a contests in court, but the genuine Japanese poetic form known as *tanka* or *waka*, consisting of 31 syllables arranged in five verses with, respectively 5, 7, 5, 7 and 7 syllables (differently from *haikai* - or *haiku*).

The composition of this kind of poetry would normally be attributed to brief moments of inspiration, being used primarily as a means of communication between lovers and friends. Searching to suggest meanings beyond those the expressions themselves did, the images in these poems were used as a way to subliminally suggest emotions, and, therefore, often associated with flowers, trees or other aesthetically similar images accordingly.

**Genji and Translations**
Despite endless debates over the fidelity to the said “original text”, it should be noted that the work of Murasaki Shikibu is becoming better known thanks to the retexualizations which it has receiving over the years, both in Japanese language and other languages to which it has been transcribed. The huge spatial and temporal gaps separating the source records of Murasaki Shikibu’s novel written in the Heian period Japanese from current translations, lead to transformations motivated by implications of linguistic and cultural nature that, invariably, reinforce the emergence of new interpretations and representations, further underscores the lack of inherent or intrinsic connotations and/or latent senses in the seminal text.

Naturally, it would be foolish to imagine reading processes exclusively upward, much less identical interpretations. While abstraction, no verb searches to escape the curse of Babel, given, ignoring the classic separation between form and meaning, language drifts and morphs according to local tones, carrying with itself referential universes. Indeed, certain versions crystallize for longer periods for reasons of linguistic, social and political prestige. However, inexorably, faced with other realities, other times and places, the narrative meanders and changes. An anachronism that leads us not to a static feature, but, instead, towards said continuous movement, albeit its edges never reunite, i.e., although there is no definitive translation, recreations of the novel, in their guidelines, retain the splendor of the diegetic spaces represented in their mutations.

Published in many countries and translated into the major languages of the West - amongst which Spanish, French, Italian, Arabic, besides Portuguese (of Portugal) and several other languages are listed, reaching estimated 30 languages into which it has been translated so far, although still unpublished in Brazil\(^1\). Concerning the East, specifically in relation to *Genji Monogatari* and the approach of the development of Japanese literature, studies and research were also carried out in India, in the mid-1950s, when the first translation of *The Tale of Genji* appeared in Hindi (1957), followed by others in a few Indian languages like Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Urdu and Assamese (Sachidanand, 1) - all these translations were based on English sources, as some of the mentioned above, turning *The Tale of Genji* into a translational challenge. By analyzing a few excerpts in the classic original language and in modern Japanese, and then translations originated from these, one can expect versions to be

\(^1\) For more information regarding *Genji Monogatari* translations, visit: <www.worldcat.org> Web. 30 March 2013.
“similar”, after all they have all arisen from a common source. Notwithstanding, translations, of course, differ in broad aspects. This metamorphosis process, inexorable and inherent to processes of language exchange, has restricted chances of access to reading original texts to etymologists, historians and linguists. Translation, then, emerges as a key resource, essential to the access to Heian period Japanese by the general public.

From the reading of the Japanese narratives, especially those from yesteryear, it is possible to face the “other”, and feel the presence of specific elements of a culture, distinct from elements in our own experience. Thusly, understanding what the other announces, one can partake in an universe of meanings. Such partaking provided by linguistic and language.

Despite the fact Murasaki Shikibu’s narrative vividly presents details of jealousy, possessiveness and obsession which characterise the darker and destructive romantic side of love, there is a deep gap between the world of Genji Monogatari and the world in which we live. Today, the work is read primarily in modern Japanese, as translated by the hands of writers such as Yosano Akiko (1912-13, 1938-9), Tanizaki Jun’ichirō (1939-41, 1951-4, 1965) and Setouchi Jakuchō (1992; 1996). Likewise, it would be important that readers from other cultures could count on guidelines in order to access the curious world of intrigue in the court during the Heian period (Puette, 18).

Under the aforementioned viewpoint, Gérard Genette (2009) presents his theoretical model in which paratextuality assumes a fundamental role, as does paratranslations. To the author, all text is done with strengthening and monitoring of a certain number of productions, verbal or otherwise, as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations, which we do not even know should be considered, but, nonetheless, surround and extend it, in order to present it, to make it present, to ensure their presence in the world, its “reception” and consumption, aiding not only the reader but also the critic, not specialized and/or familiarized, in this case, with Japanese customs in the territory hitherto unknown.

Paratextuality as a literary resource

The paratextual references circumscribing the classic literary works, especially those attached to the text and of educational characteristic, play the role of register and composition paths
traversed from its embryonic state developed in the context of oral literatures, passing by its manuscript recreations, and subsequently, in printing.

Through explanatory text, integrated to the base-text, some of the decisions made in the interpretative and translational processes, fundamental to the processing of textual peculiarities that require prompt treatment, are exposed. In addition, the paratext acts in a complementary way, compared to a two-way route, as it emerges as means to prepare the reader to a more conscious approach of the translated work, while preparing said translation to the reader. It is observed that the use of paratext is even more necessary in the case of works which comprehension depend, chiefly, in knowledge of its cultural, linguistic and historical environments, such as *Genji Monogatari*, given the urgency and necessity to modulate aspects that might suffer attenuating hindrance, especially on the coordinates of space and time, with fluctuations of meaning motivated diachronically, from its inception to present understanding, or even in relation to synchronic juxtaposition inherent to each group readers’ own linguistic reality.

This is the case herein discussed, i.e. *The Tale of Genji*, in which illustrations presented, e.g. about musical instruments, court’s clothing, and even basic geography, can not be deemed crucial to understanding the story, but do, however, provide essential information as well as expand the cultural knowledge of the reader in relation to historical matters specific to the nipponese universe. Matter-of-factly, from these introductions, the western reader now has more references so as to more harmoniously address the realities of Murasaki Shikibu’s tale (Puette).

It is accepted that literary works, when undertaken, are not comprised exclusively of a single text to be read. Indeed, according to Genette (2009), all text comes into being from its reading. In turn, all reading takes place within a context. Every center is defined from its margins. Therefore, it is assumed that it is not exactly the center that defines the boundaries, but rather, that the movement of the surroundings is responsible for the settling of the work. Amongst the components that contribute to the definition of the status of the text, paratexts are highlighted. These kinds of contributions to the main text, of textual nature, establish an intimate connection with the subject they involve, helping definite its place, shape and likelihood of producing meanings.
In terms of stratification for scientific study, paratextual elements allow for the composing of a long list, namely: titles, prefaces, notes, quotes, glossaries, bibliography, illustrations, etc. - to what Genette calls specifically *peritext*, covering not only the verbal, but also non-verbal sphere, which incidentally have with one-another, a continuity relationship, more so than a dependency relationship.

These constitutive aspects reproduce the text as a discursive force, and somehow make up the literary work even before it becomes a *book*, as if the text was trapped in their own fringes, thus giving it existence. In the case of *Genji Monogatari*, among researched sources, other types of paratexts are found comprehensively and, why not say abundantly, many in the form of attachments, such as maps of the geographical location where the novel would have taken place; architectural representations from inside the palace, so that the reader could transport him/herself and witness *in loco* places where parties, meetings and events happened; plus numerous paintings and illustrations depicting scenes from the novel.

Considering image as the central issue of fundamental expression for the fields of literature, theatre, painting, cinema and others, one can say that *Genji Monogatari* covers all variants of translation advocated by Roman Jakobson (1969), namely: interlinguistic; intralinguistic; and intersemiotic. Being constituted mainly of a intersemiotic translation, or *transmutation*, equally and widely approached by Julio Plaza (1987), in the form of the literary text, the interpretation of art, the translation of poetry and convergence the visual arts, passing by other semiotic representations starting from verbal communication and vice-versa.

From *Genji Monogatari* several other works were produced. Related paintings - the most famous being in *e-maki*; opera stagings and theatre plays; cinematographic films (released in 1951; 1957; 1961; 1966; 2001 and 2011); animated feature films (released in 1987 and 2008); cinematic TV productions; and *manga* adaptations - the currently famous Japanese comics - were some of the many productions drawn from the literary work.

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2 *E-maki* is a horizontal, illustrated narrative form, which combines both text and pictures, painted on a handscroll.

3 An English-Japanese bilingual version in *manga*, by Waki Yamato, adapted from the *Genji Monogatari* novel, is very popular among young Japanese.
Furthermore, through intersemiotic translation different senses can be stimulated, causing the receiver to see the difference between of signs, both in their qualities as in their uniqueness.

**Illustrating Genji**

The creative spirit that flourished with *Genji Monogatari* also touched the visual arts, which resulted in the development of a secular style of painting, known as *yamato-e*, regarded as the classic Japanese style. This secular painting evolved from a combination of several factors. And, according to records, there was some influence from a legacy of paintings in Chinese narrative, especially on Buddhist topics, of which only a few, dated before the Heian period, are still preserved.

The exact contribution the Chinese narrative painting may have given to the formation of *yamato-e* in Japan remains uncertain, however, the style, the narrative method and artistic premise of existing Chinese narrative paintings are very different from Japanese works of the Heian period. A Chinese tradition that could have influenced the paintings in the Japanese narrative was the narrators-monks who recited the texts accompanying the paintings. Apparently, narrators-monks explained the painted scenes reciting the texts to their audience (Murase, 7).

However, the emergence of narrative painting in Japan may be more closely linked to the Japanese practice of supplementing *waka* poetry - previously mentioned - with paintings, than with Chinese influence. The *waka* poetry expresses emotions succinctly, since it is, by definition, very laconic. In the 9th century, *waka* and paint were inseparable, both in a
thematic sense, as in physical. For example, *waka* poetry was often written within an area especially reserved in the painted canvas. Currently there is no copy of such 9th century paintings, but their existence is recorded in anthologies of poems, and there are examples from later periods (*ibid*, 8).

Researchers consider these fragments of prose, inspired by the narrative in painting, as the precursors of romantic literature in Japan. The arts of painting and literature depend on one another so closely that some scholars believe paintings served as a kind of memory bank at a time narrative tales were not written but passed down orally. “Painting and literature seem to have worked hand in hand to develop the plot of the tale, one leading the other to the next stage.” (Murase, 9). The first records of existing *Genji* paintings date from the early 12th century, about a century after the novel was written.

The text of Murasaki Shikibu is characterized by having arisen from the compilation of manuscript copies attributed to the author. The story goes that, in view of the popularity of *Genji Monogatari* among members of the imperial court, many manuscripts emerged in parallel, contributing and participating in the composition of the narrative. In fact, there are no documents written by Murasaki Shikibu (Seidensticker, v). However, the stylistic lines, clues and history traces allow us some degree of confidence.

At the time, in lack of appropriate presses, the first readers of the work of Murasaki Shikibu caught borrowed the author's own manuscripts, copied them, passing them along amongst members of the court. Some, while copying successive chapters, added their own illustrations to scenes of movement or commissioned such drawings from friends or even professional artists to illustrate the text, and gradually rolls the paintings, the *e-maki*, took shape. In some cases, the paintings ended up becoming the main focus, and the text was then shortened to a minimum necessary to explain each scene.

It was natural that the work was illustrated, given painting was an important characteristic of the cultural education of the aristocrats of the Heian period. "*The Tale of Genji* continued in succeeding centuries to serve the inspiration of countless screens and picture scrolls.” (Setouchi, Keene, Horton, 9).
The simple and delicate fans - a daily necessity to Japanese lifestyle - have become common ways of disseminating illustrations of *Genji*. The basic iconography was also widely publicized appearing in card games and sea shells used in popular games as well as several other expressions in book form, *e-maki's* and canvasses. In recent times we find examples, like the release, by the Japanese government, a new 2,000 yen currency note, which stamp bears the portrait of Murasaki Shikibu, besides illustrating an excerpt of the famous scene from *Suzumushi*, part of the “*The Tale of Genji Picture Scroll*” national treasure from the 12th century.

The gesture reflects the unwavering popularity of the classic piece, admired by its readers in the Heian court thousand years ago and still a bestseller (Setouchi, Keene, Horton). More recently, in commemoration of the 1,000-years anniversary of the novel, we have the characterized logo of the United States’ online services and software multinational enterprise *Google* as an example - biggest proof of continuous movement between yesterday and today, classic and modern, with imagery as the central issue of fundamental importance to the contemporary.
Conclusions

Translation constitutes a practice as old as the languages and handwritten copies - as of Murasaki Shikibu - make up over time and space, in turn, authentic recreations that assimilated nuances and retouched letters to the composition of new texts marked, themselves, by the cultures for which they were translated.

Images being of fundamental importance to the contemporary, the question of imagery arisen from literature and its intertwined relationships takes central stage, after all, literature is image as are other art forms such as the theatre, painting, and cinema, also manifested through images. Translated into many languages, currently there are different versions of Genji Monogatari, in the form of mangas, textbooks, movies or even cartoons. However, one might speculate that, if current trends bring forth benefits such as permanent dissemination of the work, there is, nonetheless, in a way, the possibility that such adaptations will distance themselves from the original, presenting interesting albeit imprecise future, to these secondary works that seek to portray the legends of Genji.

Due not only to linguistic differences between the Japanese language and other western languages, but also to socio-cultural, historical, anthropological and policies intrinsic to the work and that involve hic et nunc - respectively space (here) and time (now) - pertinent the plot, one considers it complex content, which memory remains alive and intermittent simultaneously, hidden in the details, lying inserted in this void between past and present, continually moving between yesterday and today. In summary, it is concluded that one should not seek the whole, its entirety, much less a driving source, since the attention is above everything in the in-between spaces.
Works Cited


Author Details

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Revisionary Adaptation: *Bride and Prejudice* as Intersemiotic Translation

Abstract

This paper entitled ‘Revisionary Adaptation: *Bride and Prejudice* as Intersemiotic Translation’ begins with outlining some theoretical positions on the kind of changes that result from a novel’s translation into film. For instance, critics like Dudley Andrew, Seymour Chatman and Gaston Roberge are used to demonstrate how narrative description and expanded time in novels get compromised in favour of the focus on the present in films. This is followed by a discussion of film language vis-a-vis literary language where again theoreticians like Christian Metz, Vsevolod Pudovkin and Umberto Eco have been utilised to discuss the visual impact of films in comparison to the wordy one of novels. Finally, the case of *Bride and Prejudice* has been used to demonstrate first a few transitions from the sign system of novels to that of cinema in terms of language and expression, like the directness of presentation in films versus the description oriented reader response anticipation of novels. Secondly, the more important inference of this last section is about Gurinder Chadha’s ideological subversion of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* through her location in South Asian Diasporic Cinema whereby she accords the dimension of transnational and cross-cultural migrations and marriages and a representation of diasporic Indians’ identities to the novel. The subversion thus lies in her ‘Indian’ interpretation of the western classic, which is ‘Indianised’ in the process.
Main paper

Roman Jakobson’s famous categorisation of intersemiotic translation as a translation between two sign systems has led to various speculations on what the nature of the exchange involved is and whether it follows exactness. The question has moved beyond what is lost to consider that also which is gained in such a translation. The screen adaptation of literary works provides cinema not only with new texts, but with new norms and models that redefine cinematic codes. R. Barton Palmer in ‘The Sociological Turn of Adaptation Studies: The Example of Film Noir’, points out, “In fact, from a transtextual viewpoint, the filmic adaptation of literary texts is especially interesting since the borders transgressed involve divergent signifying systems and practices. Filmic adaptation, to describe it in terms of structuralist theory, is inter- (not intra-) semiotic.” (259). The method is to look for corresponding units in the two sign systems, considering the ramifications of their signification. Due to this, cinema is also able to incorporate a study of representation and ideologies. Outlining the theoretical postulations on these developments, it is in the light of such transference and alternative-discourse construction that the present paper shall look at Gurinder Chadha’s adapted film Bride and Prejudice (2004).

Adaptation as Intersemiotic Translation

The practice of adapting works of fiction like novels or short stories into films, as intersemiotic translation, concerns the creation of a system of signs in cinema that can be rendered coherent to the linguistic sign system. It can thus be seen as concerning aspects of reproducibility in terms of representation, at one level. But the practice as well as theory of cinema moves away from such a narrow conception of adaptation since it would merely imply a replication, without much creativity or artistic endeavour involved in it. Rather, it has been felt that adaptation has to be seen as a re-creation which results in the creation of a new and different work of art after the original has undergone the process of re-presentation. The view in favour of an authentic representation of the

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1 See Roman Jakobson’s ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’ (1959).
source text in film, assumes that there is an essence or core to the text that must then be brought out through cinema.

The debate then hinges around authenticity and change. What remains faithful to the fundamentals of the source text is seen as authentic and that which diverges from and transforms the original is marked as inauthentic and infidel. Writing on adaptation in ‘Adaptation’, Dudley Andrew argues:

Fidelity of adaptation is conventionally treated in relation to the “letter” and to the “spirit” of the text, as though adaptation were the rendering of an interpretation of a legal precedent. The letter would appear to be within the reach of cinema for it can be emulated in mechanical fashion ... More difficult is fidelity to the spirit, to the original’s tone, values, imagery and rhythm, since finding stylistic equivalents in film for these intangible aspects is the opposite of a mechanical process. The cineaste probably must intuit and reproduce the feeling of the original. It has been argued variously that this is frankly impossible ... (464).

Hence, at one level, (and maybe at a very basic level that relates to the very presumption that adaptation can be an authentic reproduction), it is not merely the desirability but also the possibility of fidelity in adaptation that is called into question. It is argued that the difference in the modes of signification that literature and films function through, dismantles the equation of representation between the two. The components of one cannot be exactly replaced by those of the other. It is felt that to assume such an equation, the expression will have to be considered as detached from the vehicle of conveyance. Such an analysis emphasizes the fact that certain messages are best transmitted through one medium, and that even if the possibility of their transmission through another medium remains, the equivalence of transmission through both modes must be ruled out. Andrew puts it thus:

Since signs name the inviolate relationship of signifier to signified ... how is it possible to transform the signifiers of one material (verbal) to signifiers of another material (images and sounds)? It would appear that one must presume the global signified of the original to be separable from its text if one believes it can be approximated by other sign clusters ... One would have to hold that while the material of literature (graphemes, words, and sentences) may be of a
different nature from the materials of cinema (projected light and shadows, identifiable sounds and forms, and represented actions), both systems may construct in their own way, and at higher levels, scenes and narratives that are indeed commensurable. (465).

Apart from these primary issues there are other specificities of cinema and literature that are considered as having a bearing on adaptations. One aspect often taken up is that of perspectives. With its ability to ‘say’ things, literature is considered as more emphatic in its presentation of viewpoint. On the other hand, cinema is, in comparison, viewed as a mode that can better ‘show’ than tell. This is not to say that cinema is incapable of offering opinions, but to assert the idea that the configuration of perspectives in both the modes is different and reflecting a perspective as it appears in one mode through another mode would entail creative crossovers. In the process, it might so happen that the point of view offered in the source may, at times (even consciously) be shifted, transferring the focus elsewhere and transforming the message eventually. Seymour Chatman provides details in ‘What Novels can do that Films can’t (and vice versa)’:

The fact that most novels and short stories come to us through the voice of a narrator gives authors a greater range of flexibility than filmmakers. For one thing, the visual point of view in a film is always there: it is fixed and determinate precisely because the camera always needs to be placed somewhere. But in verbal fiction, the narrator may or may not give us a visual bearing. He may let us peer over a character’s shoulder, or he may represent something from a generalized perspective, commenting indifferently on the front, sides, and back of the object, disregarding how it is possible to see all these parts in the same glance. (453).

The manner of conceptualising spatiality and temporality is another dimension that undergoes transformation in cinema when transferred into it from a literary source text. For, in cinema, events appear as if in the present, as if they were going on right now. A sense of imminence pervades the film. The immediacy of the events makes them throb with reality, making the experience of the audience more quickly transported to the film’s world. The passage of time is, to a degree, felt more in novels than in films where the narrative is not conjured gradually but is immediately there, to be seen and apprehended. In films, it is only later that the movement of time and evolution of space,
comes into the consciousness of the viewer. The primary act is one of spatial and
temporal realisation (in many cases, identification); and the summoning of faculties in
the first instance to conjure the location of events and characters, is relegated to the
arena of literature. Gaston Roberge has summed these arguments up in *The Subject of
Cinema* (1985):

> The space of the novel is conceptual, but its duration, established with words, is
> experienced, thus lending its authenticity to the space ... Whereas the novel is
> always in the past (there must be someone to tell a story and the story must have
> happened before it can be told), the film, on the other hand, is always in the
> present: the film story is always in the process of happening ... In a film a spatio-
> temporal fiction, analogous to reality, is established. (60-61).

Such analyses make it clear that reading a work of literature and watching a film are
two very different experiences. The appeal of each of these artworks lies in different
aspects. Therefore the merit of film adaptations as intersemiotic translation cannot be
judged simply by the degree of their similarity to the source text. Rather it has to be
probably understood through the dynamics of cinema and its own method of articulation.

**Cinematic Language**

To understand film adaptations as astraddle two different systems of semiotics, it is
imperative to arrive at some sort of understanding of the language of cinema and also on
how it can be seen as different from the language of literature. One issue is that of
narrative which has already been dwelt upon in the previous section. A central
connection established between narrative and the form in which it appears is that of
character and the impact produced upon character development by narrative. Critics
acknowledge that cinema and novel have in common the element of particularity in
terms of dealing with events that are of specific significance to the characters involved
and that these particular situations bring out the character to the audience/reader. Yet, it
has been felt that the novel is more conducive in showing the development of characters
than the film which has a compressed form. This serves to create a distance between the
languages of the two art-forms rendering them only partially exchangeable.

To turn to the components of cinematic language, critics have differed in accepting
both a correspondence as well as a divergence between linguistics and film language.
This testifies to the adaptability of the written to the filmic scene and also brings out the
nuances that must be kept in mind during adaptation. Needless to mention, it also raises the important idea of the “untranslatable”, which are some elements that appear best in one medium and might not be absolutely expressed in another. This again drives home the fact that in adaptation as intersemiotic translation, due to a degree of non-correspondence in the two languages, the element of transformation and re-creation comes in and even becomes welcome.

In Speaking of Films (2005) Satyajit Ray discusses the similarities between cinematic and literary language which, according to him, D.W. Griffith first discovered: “... a film must tell a story through various scenes which are further divided into various shots. Each shot is like a sentence or a word. It speaks just like the spoken word, but its language has essentially to do with images and visual material.” (46-47). Thus, just as a novel ‘describes’ events as they happened, a film ‘shows’ them as happening. Just as a novel portrays dialogue, a film presents interaction and conversation. The difference is here seen mostly in the visual aspect of cinema which offers a multidimensional experience to the audience.

Others, like Susan Sontag feel the need to caution oneself and also move beyond detecting similarities. Sontag affirms the distinction between the two modes, even while observing similar developments in the two genres. Hence, in ‘A Note on Novels and Films’ she writes: “The cinema has its own methods and logic of representation, which one does not exhaust by saying that they are primarily visual. The cinema presents us with a new language, a way of talking about emotion through the direct experience of the language of faces and gestures.” (243). This emphasizes the fact that a literal transposition of the written word on to the filmic scene may not be feasible. Sontag thus warns those who would gauge intersemiotic translation on the basis of faithfulness towards the original. The stress on the inevitability of transmutation in intersemiotic translation is thus a point well-taken.

For the Soviet auteurs Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin the creation of narrative through montage – the building up of the scene, the sequence and the complete film – by contrast (for Eisenstein) and accumulation or addition (for Pudovkin) is of

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2 Refer to ‘Film Form’ (1929) by Sergei Eisenstein and ‘Film Technique’ (1926) by Vsevolod Pudovkin.
primary significance. Yet others like Christian Metz and Umberto Eco\(^3\) have dealt with aspects of structuralism and semiotics in film language. Metz observes a lack in this language in that it does not possess a system or even the double level of articulation that is present in verbal language. Eco, on the other hand, finds cinematic language superior to verbal because he sees three levels in cinematic language: ‘figures’ (colours, shape, etc.), ‘signs’ (referent) and ‘semes’ (whole picture). This provides for the appearance of a multiplicity of gestures at the same time, making the interpretation complex.

The exploration of such a diversity of angles with respect to articulation in cinema and its coinciding (or otherwise) with literature points towards the richness of the exchange that happens between the two media. The instance taken up in this paper, *Bride and Prejudice*, can be analysed to an extent within this framework, though there the transformation of literary language intertwines in considerable ways with an ideological inflection, the theory surrounding which will be now discussed.

**The Ideology of Adaptation**

The possibility of divergence from the original has provided room for subversion in film adaptations. As they say, repetition is not always for reiteration. Repetition, if done with a difference, can serve as non-conformist behaviour and can dismantle hegemonies. Thus adaptation as intersemiotic translation serves a political purpose too. It represents the ideas of the source text from the contemporary point of view and therefore makes it new and fresh. Along with this, many a times, it also alters the ideological bent of the original for questioning and challenging. It can do so by either developing differently some theme or characterisation of the source text or by imparting it a new dimension altogether. Andrew rightly stresses on the need for a ‘sociological’ turn in adaptation studies:

... adaptation, while a tantalizing keyhole for theorists, nevertheless partakes of the universal situation of film practice, dependent as it is on the aesthetic system of the cinema in a particular era and on that era’s cultural needs and pressures. Filmmaking, in other words, is always an event in which a system is used and altered in discourse. (469).

\(^3\) Refer to ‘Film Language’ (1968) and ‘On the Notion of Cinematographic Language’ (1971) by Christian Metz and ‘Articulations of the Cinematic Code’ (1976) by Umberto Eco.

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The product of intersemiotic translation in films will therefore bear the stamp of the auteur. In which case, the hierarchical equation between the original and the imitated no longer sustains itself. The adaptation is as much originally creative as the source text. It is different since it has a different message to convey. The reason why it relies on the source text is not imitation but re-interpretation which has a politics of its own. It serves the purpose of undoing the dominant discourse and of bringing into its purview the marginalised and the peripheral. What stands as the canon of suppression, thus stands the risk of being decanonized. Roberge throws light upon this aspect of adaptation: “... adaptation fulfils an ideological function. It comments on basic texts. It reabsorbs the texts within a particular culture. At the same time, the resultant adapted work is a search for self-identity.” (219).

As translation from one system of semiotics to another, adaptation brings out something altogether novel, with its own understanding of the issue at hand, so that the reference to the original for comparison and resemblance becomes irrelevant. At the same time, one also has to be conscious of the deliberate distortion or suppression of marginalized voices in adaptation that might have been present in the source text. The above discussed elements of film adaptation as intersemiotic translation will become clearer on their application to *Bride and Prejudice*.

**Bride and Prejudice: A Cultural Crossover through Intersemiotic Translation**

If one were to talk about retaining the essence of the original (Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)) then *Bride and Prejudice* would not be seen as a success. Martin Henderson is in no way the haughty and class-conscious character that Austen wrote him as. Unlike Elizabeth Bennet, Chadha’s Lalita never grows as a character in the film. The viewer hardly comprehends her transition from a prejudiced person to one who learns to appreciate Darcy. Some crucial elements in the novel have either not been dealt with or are ineffective, like the classic scene where Lizzie enters Bingley’s house in a shabby state, fatigued and disoriented after a long walk. Darcy’s proposal does not embody the same gravity as it does in the novel.

To talk about generic transitions in techniques of presentation, a brief analysis might imply the general drift of the changed modalities. One significant event in the novel is the first ball-scene. For the purposes of this paper, it is crucial for more than one reasons. To begin with, it introduces the character of Darcy. In the novelistic technique, the
presentation of his character is indirect. The impressions of the people around him of his nature, build his character for the readers. The people in the ball pronounce him as haughty, arrogant and disagreeable and the readers approach him with that framework of opinions. The perspective and point of view of the author is clear. The readers’ response towards Darcy is therefore premeditated. One knows how to interpret him even before one has been introduced to him. The filmic introduction of Darcy, on the other hand, is direct. While in the novel he gradually assumes a character in the readers’ mind, in the film he appears in fullness, right there, in front of the spectators’ eyes when he is introduced. Therefore the ‘image’ in which he first appears, remains in the mind. This image unfortunately fails to capture the nuances of the description. In the film Darcy’s appearance is somehow muddled with the simultaneous presence of other important characters around him (Eco’s “triple articulation” taking a toll?). The other characters present around him are not able to provide that framework of opinions that is achieved by the novel. Or perhaps, to suffuse the ‘image’ with this kind of a multidimensionality of a plural lexicon became too daunting a task. Therefore, the point of view of the auteur about this character remains fuzzy.

This scene serves another important function, which is that of delineating the ball as a representation of the late 18th and early 19th century British culture. Such balls were both a means of socialising as well as counter practice to quell the insecurities arising due to occurrences like the Napoleonic Wars. The exchange that happens in conversation during the ball described in the novel, offers us with a view into the anxieties of young unmarried women in search of grooms; and through the responses towards Bingley and Darcy, also about class consciousness in Victorian England. To shift to the novelistic method of depiction, such inferences are presented to us through the narrative description of the conversation amongst those present. There is very little direct speech. This serves to focus on the general mood and ambience of such balls as well, along with developing the opinions about specific characters and issues. The film, in this case adds to the rather dragged description that the novel gives. It shows the celebrations as actually happening, they are more immediate in this sense. It bodies forth a bustling, active world full of revelries. Though the ball is replaced by wedding celebrations, it is because this justifies the Indian setting.

The third reason why this scene becomes important is that it is the first encounter between Darcy and Elizabeth. The novel provides their responses towards each other in
broken shifts, one after the other. It is left to the readers’ imagination to cohere the two responses as reflecting the introduction of the strained relationship that the two characters will experience for the most part in the novel. What the novel stresses upon is the lack of interest and interaction between the two characters so that in terms of the space and time that these characters share together for the first time, there is no simultaneity, no “here and now”. This affords room for pondering and reflection by the reader. This is of course part of the kind of experience that the novel offers the reader – the possibility of withdrawal and isolation. Not that a film cannot be ‘paused’ while viewing, but that a pause in watching a film comes as an interruption because of the experience-in-the-present that a film is. In the film this initial encounter of Darcy with Lalita is interactive. There is a simultaneity in the sense that their eyes meet and an admiration for Lalita’s beauty registers in Darcy’s mind. So the removed and critical reveries that each has about the other do not come across as both immediately get dragged into a song and dance sequence. The appearance of this sequence is interesting because at several points in the film, what is achieved by narrative description is, in the film, accommodated in the songs which make it even more possible to take a leap forward in time along with adding a dramatic rhythm and euphoria to the visuals.

Hence the traditional complaint of leaving out intricacies of the interaction between these two central characters can also be answered by the argument that intersemiotic translation inevitably involves a selection of the translatable. What appears as the dominant element of the text, in so far as it represents some central idea, is taken up for translation while the rest must be unavoidably compressed. This is as far as the difference in the process of signification is concerned. One has not fallen into the same old trap of hierarchising the novel over the film. Rather, the aforementioned points were to merely assess what changes in presentation result when images replace words.

The stronger aspect of *Bride and Prejudice* as intersemiotic translation, however, resides elsewhere. Chadha, while not preserving the spirit of Austen’s novel, nevertheless grants another interesting dimension to *Bride and Prejudice*, which is worth discussing.

Chadha is an Indian diasporic filmmaker living in Britain. She belongs to the South Asian Diasporic Cinema, which chooses as its subject the negotiation of the socio-political and economic repercussions of multiple migrations. In ‘South Asian Diaspora
in Film’ Jigna Desai points out that the processes of the formation and reception of this cinema configure, challenge and reconfigure South Asian diasporic identities. Film is one of the most popular cultural products in the South Asian culture which crosses national boundaries. Desai elaborates on how Hollywood occupies a dominant position in global cinema. But Indian cinema ranks first in figures of production if the output in terms of number of films is considered. However, none of these cinemas can adequately encapsulate the experience of the diaspora. South Asian diasporic cinema occupies a middle zone between these two cinemas. It is these films that significantly affect representation of South Asian diasporic identity and culture, since they very often address this diaspora’s experience and because their audience includes both the West and the East.

Interpreting Austen’s novel from this standpoint, Chadha develops interesting arguments in *Bride and Prejudice* about the phenomenon of cross-cultural and transnational marriages, which is fast becoming common. The storyline being positioned within the dynamics of the new transnational economy, Chadha captures a view of cultural mingling. Several elements of the novel are deployed in the film to produce a probable framework. The Indian setting appears as apt in this context, because the marital anxieties of Jane Austen’s novel still apply to the arranged marriage scenario in India. Like Mrs Bennet and other women in Austen’s work, Mrs. Bakshi and her company engage gleefully and wholeheartedly in the business of marriage. The middle-class existence to which they seem to be confined makes their uncertainties and insecurities regarding their daughters’ weddings, credible. Marriage also becomes an outlet from the limiting convention-bound familial lives for the younger females.

Migration to foreign countries, both by men and women, is becoming a common occurrence in India as well as in other nations. Women migrate both for their own jobs and education and also for the reason that their husbands shift abroad for jobs. Such migrations thus happen in the material conditions of globalization. (However, particularly for women, migrations are not always empowering.) In such circumstances, interaction with citizens of other countries also leads to cross-cultural marriages. In Asian cultures marriage becomes a marker of respectable social identity and is an integral part of one’s happy familial life. Chadha depicts both the cross-cultural and transnational aspects of these marriages. Lalita’s friend Chandra is ruthlessly practical (“I am not a romantic”, she says to Lalita) and marries Mr. Kohli who is anything but...
attractive. “No life without wife”, he comically maintains. Chandra marries him for financial security, guaranteed by Kohli’s business and money in Los Angeles. So in this marriage, Chadha is able to describe transnational marriages which do not entail marrying into a different racial culture. Also through this, Chadha throws light upon the marital practices of diasporic Indians who though settled abroad, cannot reconcile themselves to the idea of marrying a ‘foreigner’ and corrupting their offspring’s lineage, and would hence, want an Indian wife. This marriage therefore depicts the insufficiency of the experience of a diasporic lifestyle for some, and concealed under the comedy is a chauvinist male’s desire to continue the heterosexual, non-defiled socially secure life. This marriage is obviously an overriding of the female’s desire under the burden of economic pressures.

Balraj and Jaya’s wedding is also transnational but not racially cross-cultural. However, it has a more humane dimension in that Jaya and Balraj fall truly in love with one another. Balraj, falling prey to his sister Kiran’s (and Darcy’s) machinations about the class differences between him and Jaya, initially starts distancing himself from Jaya and heads back to London without marrying her. This again, exposes another facet of such transnational marriages. Arranged, at times, with economic gains as the sole motive (as would possibly be Kiran’s and Darcy’s intentions), they can be demeaning and treat the girl as just another ware in the marriage market.

Lalita and Darcy’s marriage is a further development upon this theme, with several other dimensions opened up for analysis. The question of class between Elizabeth Bennet and Will Darcy is here transformed by Chadha into one of race (or nationalities). Reviewers of the film often object to this, complaining that why make Darcy American, when it would have made more sense for him to be a wealthy Indian!

However, one could, alternately look at it from the point of view of the South Asian Diasporic Cinema. As mentioned earlier, this cinema sets out an alternative mode of representation of South Asia and the South Asian diaspora as one of its prime motives. There are people like Kohli who regard India as devoid of financial prospects, aping the western lifestyle as a conspicuous sign of their ‘modernisation’, and yet again, those like Balraj, who are under the burden of looking up to the supposed intelligent prudence of their western friends. Chadha’s representation is honest and also reveals harsh truths about the South Asian diasporic community. On the other hand, Darcy is pitted against
them as a racist. He looks at India through western eyes. Against the aristocratic class concerns of Austen’s Darcy, here it is Darcy’s orientalism, which leads Lalita to exclaim, “I thought we got rid of imperialists like you!” As such, the Darcy-Lalita union serves as a case of cross-cultural marriages, but with a difference, in that Lalita’s desire does find a vent. Finally, Darcy’s love for Lalita (and the consequent marriage) makes him see the real India. One sees a changed Darcy – flaunting ‘Indian’ signifiers with the ‘tilak’ in the last scene, joining in the Indian mode of celebrations through dhols, proving his newly acquired awareness and appreciation of Indian culture.

Further, Lydia’s elopement with Wickham is here transformed into the return home of the prodigal daughter, which not just pays deference to Indian norms of ‘upright morality’ but also wins a point against deceptive ‘foreigners’ out to mislead gullible teenage girls. The adaptation thus has a lot to do with a postcolonial perspective against a text written during the heydays of British colonialism although the novel (or the film) does not include explicit references to it.

The cross-cultural and transnational marriages in Bride and Prejudice go towards depicting South Asian women as more assertive and independent (as were the middle-class, though intellectually sophisticated, Lizzie and Jane). This challenges notions of women’s docility and lack of sexual and social agency in India, (and by implication, other South Asian countries) that the West may harbour. It shows that women here too can confidently stand up to the demands that an increasingly globalizing economy challenges them to. Chandra’s case problematises the issue of their agency, but pitting it against Lalita’s decision, Chadha offers the possibility of transgression and assertion.

Similar themes were explored in Chadha’s own Bend It Like Beckham (2002). But whereas Bend It Like Beckham portrays a multiracial romance involving a diasporic Indian woman, Bride and Prejudice tackles the issue from the point of view of Indian women residing in India and then migrating through a cross-cultural or transnational marriage. In dealing with ‘foreign’ men, therefore, these women are in a way already compromised as far as their familiarity with alien cultural practices is concerned. Women’s vulnerability in becoming partners to such marriages is therefore kept tellingly alive.

In ‘Migrant Brides, Feminist Films, and Transnational Desires’, Desai aptly argues that heteronormativity is a significant dimension of these films and the topos of
communal wedding celebrations “functions as a way to suture the deterritorialized nation together” (228) and “properly deposits the modern woman in a teleological trajectory in the West where her emancipated self belongs.” (229). But Chadha goes a step ahead and problematises the issue of women’s agency. More importantly, Desai points out that a similar South Asian Diasporic filmmaker Mira Nair’s film Monsoon Wedding (2001), while also dealing with marriage mores in India, “…can avoid the issues of race and racism” (222). Chadha’s Bride and Prejudice, however, under the guise of deference to the source novel, is able to bring up the racial and cross-cultural question in the Darcy-Lalita marriage.

The standard view on adaptation often positions the source text as high art and adaptation as mass culture. Chadha, however, redefines the norms in a way, by subversively combining high culture and popular culture to produce something entirely new. A classic English novel is jestingly blended with lots of local colour and Kohli-humour to produce a film on the lines of Bollywood masala. Indulging in ‘kitsch’, Chadha good-humouredly pays homage to Bollywood in the song featuring the singer Ashanti in the beaches of Goa, introducing what reviewers of the film term ‘Las Vegas magic’. In effect, as part of a culturally hybrid cinema, Bride and Prejudice is able to extract the classic Pride and Prejudice from its ‘aura’ (to use Walter Benjamin’s term) and adapt it to the culturally eclectic scene of contemporary art.

Chadha attempts to transform Austen’s satiric comedy of manners into a tale of upcoming Indian mores on matrimony. With the exception of some flaws like an inert Lalita, lack of character development and inadequate fleshing out of thematic concerns, the film nevertheless, is able to body forth a different and engaging take on its source novel. Its failure to win any kind of laurels for this attempt can perhaps be attributed to the fact that even today many people see “…adaptation as a fall from textual uniqueness and self-containment because it involves both the severing of the text’s genetic connection with its creator and the confection of another version of what could not (should not?) be produced.” (Palmer, 261).

In the interchange between the semiotics of cinema and those of the novel, in terms of language and articulation, a contraction of narrative and time happens in the film which is the surrender to the addition of pace. The visuals, sound and music make the text more alive and present. What the film gains most in, is the revisionary ideologising of the
novel that gives a postcolonial critique of the hangovers of Eurocentric imperial values about India and Indians. It is a Western canonical text that Chadha thus subverts. The visual world of *Bride and Prejudice* is the creation of an alternative language through elements that are representative of some crucial elements of Indian culture: vibrancy, colour, gusto, loud music of *dhols* and a lot of loud-mouthed chatter. The language of this film is the language of the average middle-class Indian – a language replete with the tinkling of bangles, the everyday quarrels of middle-aged married couples, the anxieties and hopes of young dreamy-eyed girls and the spirit of communal celebration. Intersemiotic translation in this film is also intercultural. Thus the language of this film transforms the very aesthetics of perception and brings in a whole new way of knowing and perceiving.

**Works cited**


Author Details

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Abstract

It is the endeavor of every artist to present thought processes through a medium of expression that would rejuvenate a lived experience and hence reiterate the cause of interest. The manner in which the artist employs subtleties and nuances of art to portray physical and verbal dramatic devices justifies that art has the potential to unravel the covert impressions of the character and concomitantly raise a plethora of emotions in the mind of the observer. This way, the observer not only appreciates art but also frames own justifications to critique the performance. Working within this framework, this paper intends to analyze how traditional ritual art forms and martial art are employed by film directors in stage-to-film adaptations. Such depictions provide clues to locate human demeanor, behavioral tendencies and mental manifestations that are crucial to the plot. At this juncture, the focus shall converge on the deployment of Theyyam, the traditional art form of Kerala; Kalaripayattu, a martial art and the other art forms poorakali and kelipatram in the Malayalam films, Kaliyattam (1997) and Karmayogi (2012), the adaptations of Othello and Hamlet respectively. As these are films from Kerala, they truly represent their respective geographical cultures and codes that include life- style, perspectives, art forms, rituals, customs and traditions.
Like the idea of the meme, a story too can be thought of as a fundamental unit of cultural transmission: “a basic unit of inheritance allowing the accumulations of adaptations.”

(Aunger176)

The above line iterates the fact that our culture has disseminated enhancements and media that have necessitated the need or desire for more stories. Infact, the stories are told, over and over again; however, these retellings are images that appear on film, television, in video games and theme parks. According to MacFarlane, the reason for this tendency is “the lure of a pre-sold title, the expectation that respectability or popularity achieved in one medium might infect the work created in another” (7). Literary adaptations have pedagogical value in teaching a nation about its classics and its literary heritage. Literary adaptations have given film the respectable cachet of entertainment as art and for more than ninety years, the process of adaptation has attracted critical attention than any other film related issues.

A type of derivate work, film adaptation is the transfer of written work to a feature film. A common form of film adaptation is the use of novel as the basis of a source for a feature film. It is believed that adaptation of a play into a film is far more challenging than the adaptation of novel; one of the basic reasons is that drama is more complicated than a novel. “Stage to film adaptation” is a term used to describe motion picture that has been adapted from a stage play. Sanders observes that adaptation is an attempt to make texts “relevant…viaproximation and updating” (19). There are various types of adaptation. Transposition is the type which adapts the texts as accurately as possible. Commentary is the form which alters the original and analogy uses the original text as the point of departure. But these broad classifications and explanations may be misleading because the number of categories is limitless. She reiterates, “Transposition takes a text from one genre and delivers it to new audiences in cultural, geographical and temporal terms” (21). The varying usage of Shakespeare’s works Othello and Hamlet in the Malayalam films Kaliyattam (1997) and Karmayogi (2012) respectively include not just borrowing the story and presenting it on screen, but more significantly in making a shift in culture and incorporating the traditional folk culture and rituals of Kerala. Hence, these adaptations are transposition in type.
Kerala boasts of a long tradition of performing and ritual arts. These art forms impart Kerala, its unique character and make up its essence. Religious and social history contribute to the origin of these arts and thus make them part of the social life of an average man. Handed down through generations, the performing and ritual arts of Kerala are very much a part of the religious festivals and social events. Traditionally, these art forms were performed in temples or in social gatherings. Some of these performances were night long events and hence they led to social bonding and interaction. These folk traditions, art forms and rituals define the culture of Kerala. Folk culture refers to a culture traditionally practiced by a small, homogenous, rural group of people. The terms “custom” and “tradition” are often used interchangeably, but they are synonymous. Tradition is an inherited, established or customary pattern of thought, action or behavior. Tradition is more like a cultural continuity in social attitudes, customs and institutions. It is a characteristic manner method or style; belief or story or a body of beliefs or stories relating to the past that are commonly accepted as historical though not verifiable. Custom is a usage or practice common to many or to a particular place or class, practice and considered an unwritten law. Custom is a repeated practice, a whole body of usages, practices or conventions that regulate social life. It is the body of ceremonies or rites used in a place of worship. In other words, it is a detailed method of procedure faithfully or regularly followed. Like others, rituals are the established form or a ceremony or the order of words prescribed for a religious ceremony. Rituals are a system of rites, a ceremonial act or action. Ritual also means the actions with intentional symbolic meaning undertaken for a specific cultural purpose, such as a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood and may reinforce broader community, social bonds. The tradition of classical dance and arts in Kerala dates back over a thousand years. UNESCO has recognized some of the art forms as the part of world heritage.

_Theyyam_ is a popular ritual dance of North Kerala, particularly in the traditional Kolathunadu, of the present Cannanore and Kasargod districts. The _Theyyam_ ritual dance is exclusively performed by the male members of the traditional low caste groups like Malayan, Vannan and Velan. Malayans are one of the sole custodians of the _Theyyam_ ritual dance of northern Kerala. There are around four hundred _theyyams_ and each has a mythological story behind it. The expressions and colors of each _theyyam_ are different. _Kelipatra_ is usually performed by yogi communities; a symbolic form of begging to evoke the myth of Lord Shiva. _Kalaripayattu_ has always been a part of the martial tradition of Kerala since ancient times. It is believed that the Chinese systems of Kung fu and karate owe their origins to the
martial art of Kerala. Poorakkali is a conglomeration of martial art, dance, music, poetry and philosophy.

Theyyam is an artistic dance form where metaphysical thoughts and expressions of immortal souls are impersonated to a believer through a mortal body. Director Jayaraj said in an interview with Sobha Warrier, “Even before Kaliyattam happened, I had this strong desire to make a film with Theyyam as the backdrop” (Jayaraj). Emotions in Othello are expressed through dramatic devices such as asides, silences and pauses, but the film uses Theyyam as the mode through which the protagonist Perumalayan gives vent to his emotions. Jayaraj continues, “…when I thought of a story with Theyyam as the backdrop, Othello came to my mind because of the schism in his mind” (Jayaraj).

Kaliyattam opens in the premises of a temple where Perumalayan performs the Theechamundi theyyam and his friend Paniyan plays the comic character, Komalikolam. Komalikolam in Theyyam is employed to provide comic relief. The word kolam means figure or shape and Komalikolam means the figure of a joker. Paniyan’s face is covered with a mask made up of coconut leaves. He runs around the temple premise as the people rejoice at his antics. The komalikolam in theyyam is meant to be performed before the actual theyyam ritual to provide relief to the spectators before the main theyyam performance takes place. In the Theechamundi theyyam intensity of emotions is very high. Prior to this theyyam, the komalikolam is performed to ward off the evils affecting it. Perumalayan is a Theechamundi, that is, one who walks on ambers. A theyyam artist performing theechamundi is supposed to be very daring and Parumalayan’s performance as theechamundi is admired by all the villagers. A respected performer, Perumalayan is envied by Paniyan. Unni Thampuran, an upper caste rich man informs Paniyan about the secret marriage between Perumalayan and Thamara, (Lotus) the pretty daughter of the village head. Paniyan is upset as he cannot perform the Theechamundi theyyam and his reputation as komalikolam is quite demeaning. Thamara’s father respects Perumalayan while he performs theyyam. As the performance progresses, the performer enters into a trance and becomes the deity he portrays. The aura that the performer creates and the mystic mist of colors it renders makes it a magical experience to the viewers. Perumalayan, thrown into fire many times denotes the number of times Prahlada enters into fire. The scheduled castes are the untouchables of Kerala’s complex castes system. It is interesting to note that social inequality and degradation gets inverted during a theyyam performance. These untouchables
then become the very deities that the upper class worships. Thamara’s father, an upper caste seeks the *theyyam*’s blessings and complains to the deity that a man of lower caste has betrayed him and married his daughter. Perumalayan naturally blesses him. When Perumalayan takes off his costumes and becomes an ordinary man, Thamara’s father showers abuse.

Thamara admires the dark and well-built Perumalayan and his artistic abilities. To the anguish of her father, she marries the artist. Perumalayan accompanied by his new wife, his assistant Kanthan, his trusted friend Paniyan and his wife Cheerma return home. Paniyan decides to plot against Perumalayan and destroy his marital bliss as revenge against the wrongs meted out to him by Peumalayan. Paniyan persuades Perumalayan to be suspicious of Kanthan and Thamara and the seeds of suspicion of Thamars’s fidelity are sown. When Thamara strongly recommends withdrawal of restrictions on Kanthan, Perumalayan’s inner conflicts are expressed through different violent *theyyam* performances that intermittently serve to present his wavering states of mind.

Perumalayan is invited for a grand festival of *theyyam* known as *Perumkaliyattam*, a *theyyam* festival performed at intervals of twelve or more years in some temples or *kavus*. He begins spiritual observance and rigorous fasting for participating in *Perumkaliyattam*. After some days, Thamara notices the loss of the silk robe and become sad. On the day of *Perumkaliyattam*, Perumalayan asks Paniyan to provide him evidence of his wife’s relationship with Kanthan, which Paniyan readily promises. Perumalayan, meanwhile, consciously keeps apart from Thamara who is in sorrow. She cannot understand the reason for her husband’s indifference. Meanwhile, Paniyan plants the silk robe near Kanthan while he sleeps as evidence of Kanthan and Thamara’s relationship. Perumalayan’s conflict is shown in the form of many theyyamkolams with raudra rasa dancing violently. It may be his conscience that expresses his anger, jealousy and revenge.

Paniyan seeks revenge after planting the silk robe near Kanthan and asks Perumalayan to stand apart and watch Kanthan’s reactions while he questions him about the silk robe. While Paniyan speaks about Kanthan’s relationship with the local village girl Dhamayanthi, Perumalayan, wild with anger as his wife has deceived him resolves to kill her on the night he would be performing *Theechamundy* and requests Paniyan to kill Khanthan. Thamara laments her sufferings to Cheerma, who consoles her that she would be forsaken by her husband. Unni Thampuran complains to Paniyan that he has received nothing from his efforts.
and money but Paniyan convinces him that he would take necessary steps. Unni Thampuran attacks Kathan and they get wounded. Paniyan injures Kathan’s leg and kills Unni Thampuran too to hide his identity. Paniyan has succeeded in inducing paranoia and jealousy in Perumalayan. At night, Perumalayan in incomplete attire, confronts Thamara and smothers her to death in bed. The paintings on his face add vigor to his enactment where revenge and anger overpower his expressions. Regarding this, in an interview with Shoba Warrier, Jayaraj says, “Othello loves Desdemona so dearly at the same time wants to kill her. When such a man becomes a *theyyam*, I could make him express both the emotions very clearly. I saw in *Theyyam* the best opportunity to express a split personality” (Jayaraj). Perumalayan tries to justify his actions to the distressed Cheerma by accusing Thamara of adultery. When Perumalayan mentions the silk robe as proof, Cheerma realizes what Paniyan has done. It is too late when Perumalayan realizes his folly from Cheerma, whereupon Paniyan kills her. Realizing the truth, Perumalayan overpowers Paniyan and crushes his body with a huge stone, cursing him to live the rest of his life a cripple. For his part, Paniyan refuses to explain his motives to Perumalayan, vowing to remain silent.

Now, in utter depression and remorse, Perumalayan gets ready to perform *Theechamundy* in colorful costumes. The ceremonial attire complete, and the traditional fervor intact, Perumalayan runs wildly and embraces the huge ritual fire of *theyyam* to commit suicide. The music and background score contribute to heighten the overall effect of the scene. The sounds of *chenda* and pyrotechnics fill the air, especially at the time of the *theyyam* performance. In the traditional concept of *theyyam*, the artist assumes a divine dimension while performing. Accompanied with vigorous gyrating movements, the spiritual observance the artist has undergone makes him resistant to burns. But Perumalayan’s divinity is left incomplete as the murder of his wife is considered sacrilege. In expiation of his sin he submits his life to God for his foolish action of killing his innocent wife. The background score is fully filled with the sounds of traditional percussion instruments like *chenda*, cymbal, *perumbara*, *udukku* and *kuzhal*, which exclusively enhance to express the diverse levels in *theyyam* more vividly. The interplay of light and shadows, the sounds of the musical instruments, the *theyyam’s* colorful costumes and dancing and the intimate scale about the desired dimensions of the mind’s landscape provide a deep analysis of the complexities of the human mind.
It is the natural rhythm of the traditional art forms that provides a visual entertainment with rich colors of masks and dances. As with costume there is a strong coded element in the facial expressions and body positions held by performers. These codes, broadly referred to as ‘body language’ are part of everyday life. The presentation of characters by actors using body language is a key element in the creation of a ‘performance’. Body movements can also be used to express both change of emotion and change of time. In the interview with Warrier director Jayaraj recalls, “In Birmingham, there was a film festival of all the Shakespearian adaptation. Kaliyattam was also selected for the festival. I am happy to say that my film was very well appreciated, which I feel is because I used a very traditional Kerala art form to tell the story of Othello’” (Jayaraj). The film is well-localized and imbibes the spirit of Shakespeare’s original, but still retains its uniqueness due to its cultural references and influences of Kerala. This attempt by the director was the impetus behind other adaptations, the most conspicuous being Karmayogi.

Karmayogi is an adaptation of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Shakespeare’s longest play, and the most powerful with a story line capable of seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others. The locale of Karmayogi is set in the feudal era and is shot amidst the picturesque landscape of Kerala. “Adapting a play like ‘Hamlet’ for film is a big challenge for any filmmaker. But, that has been my greatest dream and I enjoyed every bit of the challenge,” said Mr. Prakash, the director of the film (“Next in Line”). The story revolves around tradition, relationships, wealth and combat. Unlike the original Hamlet, the play portrays the loss and turmoil in a man’s life, depicting heart wrenching emotions like jealousy, suspicion, betrayal, hatred, vengeance and greed.

Karmayogi is set in Ekarajyam where the rich feudal families own and rule the land. Rudran, a kalaripayatu exponent faces a reversal of fortune after the death of his father Rudran Valyagurukkal, the head of the Chathothu family (a village manor). The film opens with a narration which explains the ritual art Kelipatra because this art form is unfamiliar to the present generation. Chathothu manor boasts of fight sequences of kalaripayattu in its premises. The head of the kalaripayattu is Marmani who leads the group of practitioners. The manor is all set to celebrate the wedding of Bhairavan and Mankamma. The atmosphere around the Manor is gloomy and intense because Mankamma’s wedding to Bhairavan has been arranged a few days after Rudran Valyagurukkal’s death. Following the tradition of the yogi community, Mankamma marries Valyagurukkal’s younger brother Bhairavan. Mankamma, based on the character of Queen Gertrude looks sensous; she is vain and over concerned about her beauty.
Bhairavan theyyam is performed in front of his home commemorating the begging ritual of Lord Shiva.

One night, Rudran has a nightmare in which his father appears and claims that it is the actual spirit of his father Rudran Valyagurukkal the spirit discloses that his father was murdered by his brother Bhairavan who had poured poison into his ear. The ghost demands that Rudran avenge his death. Rudran’s friend Shankuni also informs that he had dreamt of Rudran Valyagurukkal, revealing the truth about his death. This incident changes Rudran’s attitude to life. Following his father’s steps as a Kelipatra, he turns a yogi to perform the ritual Kelipatram – a symbolic form of begging to evoke the myth of Lord Shiva. The beggar’s bowl is said to be filled and it is believed that the filled bowl is handed over to these yogi clan of people. When Rudran becomes a Kelipatra, he faces many hurdles on his path before fulfilling his goal of becoming a perfect Kelipatra. Rudran, following the elder members of his community, decides to redeem their tradition, leaving behind wealth and other material possessions.

Rudran begs at every doorstep in Ekarajayam in the traditional costume of Kelipatra- dressed in red, the whole body smeared with ashes and a bell in hand to inform the arrival of Kelipatra his journey begins. Kelipatras are not supposed to speak and their arrival is announced by the sound of the bell. Early every morning he reaches the temple and takes bath in the river nearby. Wearing a turban, carrying a bowl and a stick on one hand and a bell on the other, Rudran reaches Kidathan’s house, where he is mocked and ridiculed. Unmindful, Rudran continues to beg. Kidathan’s daughter Moonumani loves Rudran but Kidathan disapproves their relationship. Moonumani offers some rice to the Kelipatra, who after facing the four directions, makes three rounds and continues his journey to the next home. Kidathan, while complaining about Rudran’s decision in becoming a Kelipatra, derives secret pleasure at Mankamma’s discomfort. Though Mankamma asks Kidathan to send Moonumani to change Rudran’s attitude, he remains resolute. Only a person with passion and dedication can complete the ritual. Rudran’s confused state of mind expresses doubts about the ghost’s nature and intention, claiming these reasons for his inaction.

Perturbed by Rudran’s continuing deep mourning for his father and his increasingly erratic behavior, Bhairavan sends a spy in order to find out the cause of Rudran’s changed behavior. Rudran quickly discerns the situation and the arrival of Koma Panicker presents him a solution. A famous Poorakali artist, Koma Panicker agrees to perform Poorakali to trap
Bhairavan and Mankamma. Koma Panicker assures Rudran that his Poorakali performance would closely resemble the murder of Rudran’s father. If Bhairavan is guilty, he would definitely show signs of guilt as his deed would be revealed.

A group of artists arrive the next night, as preparations for Poorakali begin. Rudran requests Shankunni to carefully watch over Bhairavan as the impressions formed in Bhairavan’s mind would definitely be revealed during Poorakali. Poorakali has two domains: Pooramala and Marathukali. During Marathukali, Panicker recites a verse and asks the opponent some pertinent questions. The yogi dancing answers these questions while Rudran interprets the characters and their actions. Rudran announces the next stage of Poorakali performance—Panchali sutrayogam which means a state when a person appears after his death. Rudran welcomes two characters Hari and Haran where one inquires about the death and the other reveals the truth. They are in a conversation about a mysterious death in Ekarajyam. Hari reveals that while he was asleep a man had murdered him by pouring poison into his ear. Bhairvan, astonished, suddenly rises and screams to stop the performance. Tightly holding on to Mankamma’s hand he flees into the manor. Shakespeare’s ‘Murder of Gonzago’ is depicted in the film through Poorakali.

Bhairivan complains to Mankamma that Rudran’s intention is to crucify him for his father’s death. Mankamma summons Rudran to demand an explanation. On his way to his mother’s chamber, Rudran passes by Bhairavan who is seen in prayer in front of Valiyagurkkal’s portrait, but Rudran hesitates to kill him, reasoning that death in prayer would aid Bhairavan to attain Moksha or salvation. In an attempt to safeguard his name, Bhairavan kills Kidathan and blames Rudran for the crime. Bhairavan approaches Marmani, an experienced kalarippayattu practitioner to murder Rudran. Moonumani, meanwhile wanders acting erratically. Her brother, Kanthan back home from his kalarippayattu training is shocked at his father’s death and sister’s madness. Bhairavan convinces Kanthan that Rudran is solely responsible for both. Moonumani dies rather mysteriously and this disappoints Rudran. In a state of absolute frenzy, Kanthan attacks Rudran, but the timely arrival of Mankamma stops the fight. Bhairavan proposes a kazhchhapayattu (duel) between the two. With the help of Bhairavan, Kanthan poisons the tip of his sword so that a mere scratch would mean imminent death. In the duel called Ankatthattu, Rudran and Kanthan appear wearing the katcha—a long strip of cloth worn in a specific manner.
They aggressively fight with each other and in the ensuing scuffle Rudran makes use of Kantan’s own poisoned sword against him. Mankamma learns the truth regarding Bhairavan’s betrayal from Marmani and sacrifices her life by having the poison. Just before her soul departs, she orders Rudran to avenge his father’s death. While dying, Kathan reconciles with Rudran and reveals Bhairavan’s murderous plot. Bhairavan’s attempts to save his life go in vain as he is smothered to death by Rudran. Unlike *Hamlet*, Rudran lives, but he discards all the materialistic pleasures by becoming a *Kelipatra* again. *Karmayogi* incorporates this passion to follow one’s tradition into the narrative. It explores the journey from indecision to the final act of vengeance. Though “Some episodes in the play are told in a different manner in the movie. The exact period of the story is not mentioned in the film,” confesses Prakash (“Next in Line”), this Malayalam adaptation interweaves the culture and ritual of the ancient land and its narration glorifies the tradition and rituals of medieval Kerala that continues to maintain its fervor.

Both the films retain the original plot, yet portray them in different geographical locations. The films highlight the survival of opposing cultures and foreshadow their ultimate reconciliation. The folk cultures and art forms are packed with passions and emotions to appeal to the senses and to evoke emotional reactions from the audience. Sometimes, they even discard rationality in order to probe into the inner psyche of the viewers. The directors also attempt to preserve or restore rituals and tradition by incorporating them into films. Art and folk traditions reveal that art, religion and learning are not matters of individual experience, skill and creative activity but are processes of sharing common meanings, purposes and values. These art forms, rituals and tradition have been a powerful healing tool right from the ancient times, with their ability to effect deep transformation in its performers and the audience alike, creating harmony within the individual and between society and nature.

**Endnotes**


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Mayilattam, Mohiniattam, Oppana, Ottamthullal, Pulikali, Theyyam, Vadakkanpattu are some performing and ritual art forms of Kerala.

2. **Theyyam** or **Kaliyattam** is performed in the temples of Malabar in Kerala. The performer after wearing a silk cloth round the waist and a crown on his head stands with devotion in front of the Devi temple. The **Theyyam** gets possessed and performs a rhythmic dance called *urayal* when the deity enters the body of the **Theyyam**.

3. According to local lore, the male members of the Yogi community are known as **Kelipatras**.

4. Considered the mother of all martial arts, legend traces the 3000 year old art form to sage Parasurama- the master of all art forms. **Kalaripayattu** originated in South India.

5. **Poorakali** is one of the prominent ritual art forms of northern Kerala and forms an integral part of Pooram festival celebrated during the month of *Meenam* (March - April). Young men dance around the *nilavilakku* (traditional lamp). The dance involves masculine movements and acrobatic, martial arts steps. **Poorakali** is celebrated to praise and please the god of love Kamadeva. The performers come from different sects of society like Thiyyar, Nambiar, Maniyani, Mukkuvan, Meyon, Chaliyan, Aasari, Moosari, thattan, and Kollan.

6. **Theechamundi theyyam** – ritual fire dance of Malabar presented during the night. This performance is based on the mythological story of Hiranyakashipu, Narasimha and his disciple Prahlada. In **theyyam**, the number of times Prahlada is thrown to the fire resembles the number of times the **theyyam** enters the fire. This way mythology is related to performance. The rather scientific part of the same is that when chicken pox or the other sort of virus born diseases pervades in villages, it is believed that the germs are burnt and the villagers will be saved from the epidemic. The body of the dancer is decorated with tender coconut leaves. With vigorous chanting, at the climax of the dance, the performer jumps on top of a huge bonfire. It is believed that because of the arduous spiritual observances the dancer has undergone he becomes resistant to burns.

7. **Perumkaliyattam** is the festival of preparation of grand “Panthal Mangalam” of Muchilot Bhagavathi in Kannur, Kerala. Panthal Mangalam was a ritual performed as recently as sixty to seventy years ago in North Malabar. This ritual is performed when girls reach around twelve years of age. Even though **Kaliyattam** is performed over six
days, preparations start months before.
http://www.karipodymuchilot.com/perumkaliyattam.html

8. *Bhairavan Theyyam* is a divine God of ‘Pananmar’ and had peculiar magical background. *Bhairavan Theyyam* is a favourite God of ‘Pananmar’ and had an impressive myth regarding the deity. ‘Yogis’ worship all these deities as their divine God. http://www.theyyamcalendar.com/history/bhairavan

9. Legend has it that the evolution of *Kelipathram* goes back to the day when there was an argument between Lord Brahma and Lord Vishnu on who was the master of the three worlds. When it came to be known that Lord Brahma had lied about certain facts, in a fit of rage, Lord Shiva cuts off one of his five heads. In penance, Lord Shiva goes around the earth, seeking alms with that skull for twelve years. The Yogi clans are considered to be descendants of Lord Shiva, and *Kelipathram* is their art form.

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Carmen

It was eleven in the night, when my taxi screeched to a halt in front of an old crumbling gate. The driver, opened the door, climbed out and put my suitcase on the footpath hurriedly, and extended his palm out to me for the fare.

I was in doubt. ‘Is this the place?’ I asked.

Yes, he said, with full confidence.

I got down and the taxi vanished in the gloom of the night. I stood standing on a deserted footpath in front of the gate. A solitary figure in the dark lane.

Pushing the gate, I realized that it was closed. I then knocked at a small window above the wicket-gate, which opened, and spilt more darkness onto the ill-lit lane. I peered inside like a thief and could just about spy out a half-lit courtyard, where two girls sat in their night-clothes, whispering to each other. At the end of the courtyard, there stood an old dilapidated
building in ruins. For a moment, I was reminded of my old school in Ghasiyari Mandi in Lucknow, from where I had passed Matric under Benaras University.¹

I looked back at the lane where complete darkness prevailed. Suppose, I asked myself, this was a den of smugglers and pimps? What then? All I knew was that I was in a strange city in a strange land, knocking at the gate of an unknown old building, which resembled Ghasiyari building.

One of the two girls came towards the window.

‘Good evening, is this YWCA?’ I smiled hesitantly. ‘I had sent a telegram to reserve a room.’²

‘We didn’t get your telegram, and unfortunately all the rooms are booked’, she replied.

The other girl now came up and said, ‘This is the girls’ hostel. Ordinary guests are not allowed to stay here.’

I was perplexed. What now? Where will I go so late in the night?

The second girl, looking at my confusion, melted a bit and smiled. ‘No matter, don’t worry, come inside. Jump over the wicket-gate.’

* ‘Carmen’ is a short story in Urdu by noted author Qurratulain Haider

¹ Ghasiyari Mandi is the name of a locality in Lucknow.

² YWCA is Young Women’s Christian Association.
‘But the rooms are all full. Will there be space for me?’

‘Yes, yes. Don’t worry. We’ll think of something. Where can you go at this hour, in the middle of the night?’

I picked up my suitcase and climbed over the wicket-gate into the courtyard. The girl picked up my suitcase, I hurried after her.

‘It’s just the matter of one night. I have some friends here. I’ll call them up tomorrow.’

‘Don’t worry.’

The first girl said ‘Goodnight’ and went away.

We went up some steps, reaching a long veranda at the corner of which stood a small room. A beautiful curtain with red flowers hung in front of it, seeming a strange addition to these shabby surroundings. The girl lifted the curtain and went in. I followed her.

‘I stay in this room. You may sleep here for tonight.’

She dragged my suitcase inside and took out a clean towel and a fresh bar of soap from a ramshackle closet. Along one wall of the room, there was a bed with a mosquito-net. An
almirah and a dressing-table were at the other corner. It looked exactly the way girls’ rooms in girls’ hostels look, all over the world.

The girl took out a bed-sheet and a blanket from the almirah, spreading them quickly on the jaded durri on the floor beside the bed. On the bed, she spread a clean bed-sheet and dropped the mosquito-net over the sides.

‘Here. Your bed’s ready.’

I was embarrassed. ‘I’ll sleep on the floor’, I said.

‘Never. You’ll be eaten alive by the mosquitoes. I’m used to them.’

Saying this, she sat on her make-shift bed on the floor. ‘My name is Carmen. I work in the daytime in an office, and research at the University in the evenings. My subject’s Chemistry. I am also YWCA’s Social Secretary. Now tell me about your-self’ she smiled.

I told her, yawning with exhaustion at the end of what had been a long day.

‘You’re tired, go to sleep’, she observed, and kneeling down on the floor, said her prayers and went to sleep.

Next day, the YWCA building came to life. Girls in house-coats with towels wrapped around their heads, were thronging the bathrooms. The smell of coffee was wafting out to the veranda. A few girls were brushing their teeth in the corridors. ‘Let me show you the
bathroom’, Carmen said to me, leading me to a room at the end of a long corridor off the veranda. It was old and shabby with a lone tap and a single clothes-hook on a wall. The floor was cracked and uneven. There was a ventilator above the door, from which a few snatches of a song could be heard.

I stood there and thought. It’s so strange. This bathroom has been here in this house in this city for ages, unaware of my existence, and yet here I am in it today. What a strange idea.

I bathed and came out to the veranda, where a plate of breakfast was waiting for me on a small rickety table. All the girls milled around me and Carmen introduced me to them. In no time at all, we were all laughing like old friends. Girls are the same everywhere, I thought.

‘I think I should call up my acquaintances’, I said, sipping tea.

Carmen gave a naughty smile. ‘Yes, why not? Call up your celebrity friends and go to them. Who cares about us? Isn’t that so, Rosa? Do we care about her?’

‘Not at all!’ chorused the girls in jest.

After a while, the girls got up to leave. ‘We’re going to work. See you in the evening! smiled Magdalena.

‘In the evening?’ Amelia quipped. ‘In the evening, she’ll be sitting in a country club!’

After they’d left, including Carmen, I went to call up my friends.

Army Medical Chief, Major General Kemo Gildas, was a friend of my uncle, during the war.

Mrs Antonia Costillo, wife of a multimillionaire businessman, was also a social activist whom I had met at an international conference.

Alfonso Vilerra, famous journalist and novelist of this country, had come to Karachi once.
‘Hello, hello! When did you arrive? Why didn’t you inform us? Where are you staying? There? Good God! Is that a place to stay?! We’re coming directly to pick you up.’

All of them said the same thing to me over the telephone. My last call was to Don Garcia del Pridos. He was an ambassador in a western European country once, where I had met and struck up a friendship with him and his wife. His secretary picked up the phone and told me that they’re holidaying in the mountains and she connected my call to their holiday mansion there.

Mrs Costillo came and picked me up soon after that in a Mercedes. Looking at the things in Carmen’s room with a disapproving eye, she picked up my suitcase. I was going to stay with her in her house, but this sudden realization somehow jarred me – How could I leave them and go? I wanted to stay with Carmen, Amelia, Bernarda, Rosa and Magdelena.

‘May we let the suitcase be? We’ll think about it in the evenings’ I suggested.

‘But you’ll be very uncomfortable here’ she protested.

Later, when I came back that night, I found Carmen and Amelia stuffed into the small window above the wicket-gate, waiting for me.

‘We’ve arranged a room for you today’ they said eagerly. I was happy to know that. At least tonight, Carmen won’t have to sleep on the floor. At the end of a long hall, off the veranda, was a damp room with two beds. One of the two beds was for me. On the other, Mrs Soriel sat smoking a cigarette.

Thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of age, she was a woman with sad eyes. It was difficult to say which part of the world she belonged to, by looking at her face. Half- sitting and half-lying on the bed, she began to speak.

‘I am from Kaam’
‘Where is that?’

‘It’s a small island in the Pacific Ocean, ruled by Americans. It’s such a small island that there’s just a dot under it, instead of its name, on the map of the world’ she said and added as an afterthought, ‘I am an American citizen, you know.’

‘Is that so? Kaam?’ I was surprised. There are so many places we don’t know, or have never heard of, which are inhabited by people, who are just like us.

‘My girl has eloped with a violin-player. I’ve come here to take her back with me. She’s just 17 but very rebellious. This young generation…’

She suddenly sat up.

‘I had cancer…’

‘It was breast cancer’ she said sadly. ‘Otherwise, 3 years ago, even I was normal, like others.’

There was intense sorrow in her voice. Her eyes had become hollow and unseeing.

‘See’, she said and pulled at the collar of her nightgown. I quivered and closed my eyes. To see a woman who has been deprived of her physical beauty – such a terrible thought, it was!

After a while, Mrs Sorian stubbed her cigarette and went to sleep. The moon began to peep through the bars of the window. Magdelena’s singing which could be heard every night, also ceased. That night, in the deathly silence of the house, I felt a strong urge to cry my heart out.
In contrast, next week flashed by in a haze of parties, social events, cultural functions, and intellectual discussions. The days whizzed by in the beautiful and elegant houses of Mrs Costillo’s friends. Evenings in the glittering parties about town. People of all sorts – authors, intellectuals, politicians, journalists – came to Mrs Costillo’s house, engaging in witty and animated conversations with each other, and I, in the English idiom, was ‘enjoying’ myself very much.

I would come back to YWCA every night. Sitting at the rickety table in the veranda, the five girls would be eager to listen to the day’s events.

‘Wow! How wonderful all this is!’ Rosa would say. ‘We’re in the same city but we had no idea about these … fairy-tale places.’

‘These super-rich people – what do they do with so much money?’ Amelia would ask.

Amelia was a school-teacher. Rosa was a stenographer. Magdalena and Bernarda were learning the piano and violin in a music school in the city. All of them belonged to the lower middle class.

One Sunday morning, Carmen was busy preparing to go to Mass. I opened the almirah, looking for something, when a soft woollen rabbit fell out. I reached up to the top shelf to put it back and saw a whole bunch of soft toys.

‘There are my child’s playthings,’ Carmen said, brushing her hair in front of the mirror.

‘You have a child?!’ I stared at her in shock. Carmen – an unwed mother?

Eyeing me in the mirror, she blushed and turned around. ‘You’re mistaken’ she laughed. She came to the almirah and took out a blue Baby Book from the lower shelf, her face radiating warmth and joy.

‘Look! This is his Birthday Book. When he’ll turn 1, he’ll do this’ pointing to the first page. ‘When he’ll turn two, he’ll say these things. I’ll paste his pictures here.’

She sat down leisurely on the bed, crossed her legs, shook out paper-cuttings of beautiful American children from the Baby Book and spread them around her on the bed.
'My nose is so flat, you know, and Nick’s is even flatter. Can you imagine how our child is going to look? That’s why I have to look at these pictures years and months before he is born, so that the poor child doesn’t take after us!'

‘You’re crazy! And who is this Mr Nick?’

She turned pale. ‘Don’t ask about him. My heart will break if I talk of him.’

But after that, she spoke of Nick every night.

‘I’m so ugly, you know, but Nick says that he loves my mind, my heart and my soul. He’s seen so much of the world. He has beautiful girls for friends. But he doesn’t mind my ugliness.’

Coming back from church, walking along the bay, ironing clothes in the ill-lit hallway at YWCA – Carmen told me her love story. The story about Nick and her. Nick was a doctor and had gone abroad for training in heart surgery and loved her passionately.

At night, I was back to sleeping in Carmen’s room, as Mrs Soriel had been successful in bringing back her daughter and the girl was staying with her.

One night, I was adjusting the mosquito-net before sleeping. Carmen was on the floor.

‘Nick…’ she sighed.

‘So, where is he nowadays?’ I asked.

‘Don’t know.’

‘Why don’t you write to him?’

‘Do you believe in God?’

‘That’s a long answer. Tell me why you don’t write to him’

‘First answer my question – do you believe in God?’

‘Yes’ I said, more to keep to the point than out of faith.
‘So, do you write letters to him? I believe in Nick as much as you believe in God…’

The lights had gone off in the building by now. The trees in the dark courtyard were swaying in the wind. The faded red curtain with flowers, was flapping madly at the door. I went and shifted it to one side. ‘It’s a beautiful pattern’, I returned to the bed.

Carmen was lying on the floor with eyes shut. Hearing me, she sat up and said slowly.

‘Nick and I had gone on a long drive in the mountains. Are you listening?’

‘Yes, go on.’

‘On the way, he said, let’s meet Don Remo. He was his father’s friend and a cabinet minister. He had a villa in his district up in the mountains. When we drove up to the house, we saw little girls in white frocks coming out of a school. It was like a dream. We waited for Mrs Remo in her stately drawing-room. The minister was not at home. There was a doll’s house stuck onto a wall, which looked odd in that elegant room. Nick and I smiled at each other conspiratorially at this display of incongruity. Mrs Remo served us tea and showed us around. The bathrooms had black tiles and the guestrooms had huge divan-beds with red floral tapestry around it. Nick said to me in a whisper, ‘Extremely bad taste’. And I said to myself, Not at all. I will buy exactly the same bed and the same tapestry for my house. After this, whenever I walked past shop-windows in the market-place, my feet would stop on their own whenever I would see that expensive red floral pattern. When I walk past that Chinese restaurant…’, she kept on, ‘my heart sinks when I see that green lamp hanging above that corner table where Nick and I had spent an evening once…’

It was late, and I was getting tired of this story. I straightened the mosquito-net and said, ‘Tell me something. If you love this Nick so much, why didn’t you get married to him?

‘I had to live on a far-away island for 10 years,’ she said sorrowfully.

‘We used to stay here earlier. During the war, our house was destroyed. I lost my mother and two brothers. Only my father and I survived. Baba was a school-teacher in a school and he began to suffer from TB. I took him to a sanatorium which was in a far-away island. The
treatment was expensive so I started working in the sanatorium’s office and also gave tuitions to the children of local land-owning families. But Baba’s treatment became more expensive by the day. Then I had to mortgage our pineapple orchards. Even then Baba didn’t get well… I used to commute from one island to another in boats, tiring myself out to death, teaching spoilt imbecile children of rich people. Even then Baba did not get well. I met Nick 10 years ago at a fiesta. Those days whenever I came to the capital, he would meet me. Three years ago he proposed marriage, but Baba was so unwell that I couldn’t leave him dying there. Around that time, Nick had to go abroad. When Baba died… I came here. I work in the daytime here and next year, I’ll submit my thesis at the University. I want to buy back my family’s orchards. Nick wanted to help me but I don’t want to take any money from him before marriage. His family is proud and for a girl, her self-respect is very important. Self-belief and self-respect. If I ever get the feeling that Nick looks down upon me… Asleep, are you? Okay, goodnight.’

Next day as usual, Carmen was at the breakfast table, getting things ready. Mrs Soriel was going back to Kaam. She had come to an agreement with her future son-in-law, who was here since morning. A thin young man, he sat like a timid cat in a corner of the courtyard. There was a hint of excitement in the air. The girls seemed to be in good cheer. I was inexplicably happy too. Life gives us these moments of happiness very rarely and they are very precious.

Carmen quickly finished her breakfast and went to work. ‘If you did not have plans with your friends, I would have taken you out on a jeepney-ride through the narrow lanes and bylanes of the city’, Magdelena said.³

‘There’s a Cadillac outside waiting for you’ Rosa came and told me.

‘Cadillac! Wow!’ chorused the girls.

‘These big cars which come for you… they make me quite speechless’ Bernarda said. I embarrassingly brushed aside their comments and came out, with my back-pack on my

³ A Jeepney is a kind of auto-rickshaw.
shoulder. I was going to stay with Don Garcia, the ex-ambassador for two days at his villa in the mountains.

Don Garcia’s uniformed chauffeur deferentially closed the door of the Cadillac after me. The city was a blur as the car sped up towards the hills. On the top of the hill, Don Garcia’s Spanish-style villa could be spied from afar. Fog lurked in the valleys. White and purple flowers were in bloom. The car swept into the driveway and stood at the porch. Tribal men and women-servants greeted me while the butler opened the door of the car. Don Garcia and his wife Donna Maria were waiting for me. White carpets, golden furniture and expensive decorative items, similar to the pictures in Life magazine, caught my eye in the house.

After a couple of hours, Donna Maria took me on a tour of the house. Going up a flight of stairs to the first floor, I saw a six-month old girl, dressed in fancy baby-clothes, in an elegant cane-basket in a bay window over looking the garden. She was so pretty that I left Donna Maria and immediately went up to her. A beautiful young American woman, sitting next to the basket, rose up and shook my hand, smiling.

‘This is my daughter-in-law’ said Donna Maria.

We three women stood there and indulged in baby-talk with the child. In the afternoon, the child’s father joined us for lunch.

‘This is Hose, our son,’ said Don Garcia.

Hose would have been around thirty-five. He looked very handsome in his blue shirt and white trousers. Evidently he was in love with his pretty wife and incessantly talked about his daughter. The evening passed in merriment and at night, I went up to bed to sleep in my room which was full of expensive objects I was too scared to touch.

Two days later, the Piridos family returned to the capital along with me. After dropping his parents at their town-house, Hose started the car to drop me to my destination. He and his wife Dorothy had come back from America two weeks back, and a major chunk of their
luggage was waiting to be retrieved from the custom-house. Soon, he stopped the car in front of a five-star hotel.

‘What happened?’ I said

‘You’re staying here, aren’t you?’

‘No, dear Hose, I’m staying at YWCA.’

‘YWCA?! Good God! Why?...Okay, let’s go there. But didn’t you find a room here? You should’ve informed Daddy when you came here.’

At that moment, I had a sudden thought. I had met people from all walks of life, but Hose and his parents belonged to one of the ten wealthiest families of that country. His family was one of the strong pillars of the ruling class of society. Social and political power was theirs to command. It was difficult, nay almost impossible to explain to them, why I had liked staying at YWCA so much.

Hose stopped the car at the corner of the lane as a group of Chinese men were crowding the street. It was late at night when I entered YWCA and everyone was fast asleep. I stole into the mosquito-netted bed stealthily. Carmen was sleeping peacefully on the floor. On her side, lay a picture of St Thomas, lit up by a ray of light from the lamp outside.

At four in the morning, I woke up and walked softly to the bathroom. I was leaving that day. Creeping inside the old shabby bathroom for the last time, I turned on the tap, and the water rushed out with such force, that it startled me. After bathing, I returned to the room and packed up quietly, so as not to wake Carmen. Just then I noticed that she had vanished.

‘Breakfast is ready’ she said, coming back to the room after a while. She had phoned for the taxi too.

‘So, how was it?’ she asked, pouring out the tea.

‘Very interesting.’

‘Who are these friends of yours? You didn’t tell me.’
I was about to speak, when I had a sudden thought. I went to the room and took out a new Benarasi sari from my suitcase. ‘Your wedding gift, in advance’ I wrote on a piece of paper and slipped both the sari and the note under Carmen’s pillow.

‘Taxi’s here! Taxi’s here!’ Carmen called out.

We picked up my suitcase and I sat in the car. As the taxi was about to move away, Carmen stuck her head outside the small window where I had seen her first, and shouted ‘But you didn’t give me your address!’

I wrote down my address on a piece of paper and gave it to her. I remembered something suddenly. ‘Carmen, YWCA didn’t give me my bill!’

‘Don’t talk nonsense.’

‘Arre, but this isn’t your personal house.’

‘You were my guest, so you don’t have to pay a bill’

‘Don’t talk nonsense.’

‘You don’t talk nonsense, and now go, or you’ll miss your plane. And remember, you have to come for my wedding when I send you the card. I won’t listen to any excuse. Nick will be so happy to meet you.’

But both of us knew how difficult it would be for me to come this far again.

‘Goodbye Carmen’, I said and smiled.

‘Goodbye!’

Carmen went on waving to me for a very long time. The taxi sped away in the morning fog, away from Carmen and the girls and the old building which had been my home for a short while.

At the airport, the plane was waiting. I was walking across to it, when I heard Don Garcia’s voice behind me ‘Nick, let me just buy a cigar, will you?’

‘Okay, Daddy.’ That was Hose.
I turned around in surprise. Hose was smiling at me. ‘So we’ve reached at the right time, haven’t we? You didn’t think that we wouldn’t see you off, did you?’

‘Hose?’ I asked with a sinking heart, ‘What is it that Don Garcia called you just now?’

‘Nick. It’s my other name. When Daddy’s being affectionate, he calls me Nick. Otherwise it’s Hose. Why?’

‘No reason.’

We started walking back to the airport lounge together.

‘Why did you go to America?’ I asked softly, as if in a trance.

‘To specialise in heart surgery. I had told you remember? Why?’

‘Yes. Do you know… Did you ever know…’

‘Is something wrong? What’s happened?’

‘Nothing, nothing. No reason’, my voice sank, as realization dawned upon me.

The loudspeaker was blaring – ‘Passengers of Pan-America! Passengers of Pan-America!...’

‘Oh, it’s already time for departure, is it?’ Nick said in surprise. Don Garcia came to me affectionately with a cigar in his hand. I thanked both father and son, and said goodbye, joining the long queue of passengers walking to the aircraft.

From the round window of the wheeling aircraft, I saw Don Garcia and Nick standing at the balcony overlooking the hangar, and waving their white handkerchiefs in goodbye. The plane started to rise from the ground.

Far away from where I sit today, are a cluster of islands surrounded by thunderous clouds in dangerous seas, called the Philippines. Inside an old dilapidated building, in a colourless locality, in its large and glittering capital Manila, in that country, there is a Philippino woman named Carmen, with a flat nose and an angelic heart, who collects toys for her yet-unborn child and waits in vain for the god she loves to return to her.
The story is based on the short story ‘Carmen’ by Qurratulain Hyder and is one of her oeuvre which is comparatively lesser-known. Set in the cluster of islands we know as The Philippines, it is a story about the aspirations and dreams of the lower-middle class. The nameless narrator is a tourist who stays for a while in the YWCA hostel in Manila, and forms a bond of friendship with the girls who live there. Through her, we get an insight into the unchronicled lives of millions of poor women who struggle throughout their lives for both financial and emotional sustenance. The main protagonist Carmen is one of them, and her romantic fate, revolving around her lover Nick, forms the crux of the story. It is the inevitable failure of Carmen’s love story that becomes the climax of the narrative, and invokes a caustic comment on the widening gap between the haves and the have-nots in the modern world. Carmen, in this way, becomes not only a symbol of romantic failure but also social inequality in today’s world, and combines the twin concerns of love and materialism.

Qurratulain Hyder (January 20, 1928 – August 21, 2007) is one of the most celebrated writers of Urdu fiction. She began writing at a time when the genre of Urdu novel was yet to take deep roots as a serious form in the poetry-oriented world of Urdu literature. She purged the Urdu novel of its obsession with fantasy, romance and frivolous realism and instilled in it a fresh sensibility by exploring a realm of ideas hitherto unexplored.

A prolific writer, Ainee-Aaapa, as she was popularly known, has written some 12 novels and novellas, four collections of short stories and as well as a significant amount of translation of classics. Aag Ka Darya (River of Fire), her magnum opus, is a landmark novel that explores the vast sweep of time and history, and is often compared to classics of world literature such as One hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. It tells a story that moves from the fourth century BC to the post-Independence period in India and Pakistan, Hyder received the Jnanpith Award in 1989 for her novel Aakhir-e-Shab ke Hamsafar (Travellers Unto the Night). She received the 1967 Sahitya Akademi Award for Patjhar Ki
Awaz (a collection of short stories), Soviet Land Nehru Award in 1969, Ghalib Award in 1985, and was conferred Padma Shri by the Government of India for her outstanding contribution to Urdu literature in 2005. She died in 2007 in New Delhi after a protracted lung-illness. Her novels and short stories have been translated into English and other languages since then and in the words of English novelist Amitav Ghosh embodies ‘one of the most important Indian Voices of the 20th Century.’

**Translator Details**

Nawazish Azim is a Lecturer at Aliah University (Kolkata) as well as a Doctoral Research Scholar at the Centre of English Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University (New Delhi).
"Dear, are you listening?"

"What is it—"

"Hasn’t the tailor delivered my new suite yet?"

"No. I’ve sent for it three times."

His wife answered back as she lay on the bed. A hint of irritation in her voice.

"Oh bother! What a nuisance. What should I wear to work now—"

"Wear that old one and go, no one will know the difference...."

"I do that always, this time I thought I’d wear a new one. But why didn’t the tailor deliver it?"

"How would I know? I heard he’d gone to join a rally protesting against us. It seems we don’t give them a fair wage for their service—"

His wife turned on her side to sleep some more.

"Where is my vest—"

"Look in the alna, it must be there hanging on the clothes horse."

"Oh bother. The two front buttons seem missing from the coat. Dear, do we have buttons in our house?"
His wife lay silent.

“Dear, are you listening?”

“Ahh, I’ve had my fill of your troublesome fuss. As it is I couldn’t sleep the whole of last night—”

Grumbling continually the lady rose from her bed. Took two buttons from a box, brought out the needle and thread too.

“O heavens! You’ve taken out two buttons of two different colours—”

“None of the buttons here match or are of the same colour. Give me your coat—”

“Won’t it look unattractive?”

“Oh, no one can tell. Now, give your coat to me—, give it quick—”

He had to hand the coat to her.

“Won’t you prepare the morning tea?”

“Last night I made some and kept it in the thermos. So I wouldn’t have to get up so early this morning... thought I would catch up on my sleep. But can I ever enjoy that luxury with you around—”

“It is five-fifteen already, be quick, hand me my coat fast—”

“Oh, hold your horses a moment, I’ll just finish it, I don’t have ten arms, do I—”

At last the button got stitched on. Surya Dev donned on his old suit, drank a somewhat stale lukewarm tea and appeared at his signature zodiac post, the Ram..er.. the Aries.

And Sangya Devi lay down languidly on her bed once again.
Ticket

After the office hours, Sitangsu was in a hurry to catch the tram at the Mission-Row road. Suddenly he came across with Manasi Mitra. She was also waiting for the tram. Manasi addressed a very sweet smile to Sitangsu which showed their early acquaintance. Then she turned her face to the opposite direction from Sitangsu. It seemed that now Sitangsu could catch the tram with no hesitation, now she would not gaze at him. Though he used to go in second class, but today he should go by first class in order to show his manliness. All he was thinking because of Manasi, but Manasi did not look back at him. Now Sitangsu himself was gazing at her and till that time he found a young, dashing boy stood beside her with a suitcase. Manasi was very friendly with that boy; they were exchanging a very happy conversation. Now a days, whenever they met each other they just crossed each other by greeting a smile, they never let the cat out of the bag. For them this was nothing exceptional. They were close friends, studied at Scottish Church College. Sitangsu and Manasi developed a good relationship during their college days due to some debate magazine. After their college life, Manasi joined a govt. job and Sitangsu worked at an insurance company. Now Manasi could recognize him, it was enough, yet his spirit could not took it.

Sitangsu felt restless even after he was in first class because of a huge crowd in tram. He was feeling regret because he could travel to the second class. In every sphere of life, the first class people were less, but in this tram the crowd of first class people was more.

The tram reached Bou Bazar through the Lal Bazar. None of the first class passengers got down, rather the passengers, who were sitting, sat more firmly after looking at the tired
passenger with mercy, nobody intended to get down. Strange …!!! All were going to the last stoppage…!!!

Till that time the conductor was invisible in the crowd. But then he came into notice; started to ask for the tickets. Sitangsu was feeling more upset because of that woman friend he had to spend more than five paisa in order to show his manliness. But the ultimate result was that she never bothered to talk to him for whom he did not get into the second class compartment. He reproached himself for his foolly.

`Ticket’- asked the conductor. Sitangsu with great mercy entered his hand into pocket, very slowly. The busy conductor asked another man to pay and went forward leaving him; perhaps he thought to take the pay when he would return. Sitangsu felt comfortable by thinking that he would get down very soon and would not have to pay for the ticket. Rest of the way he would walk in order to save five paisa. Throughout his lifetime, he never cheated any conductor. Such activities hurt his self-respect. But that day he changed his ideology. Why should he not cheat? Everybody had cheated him. He got only eighty rupees salary and for that, he had to work for twelve hours in- a-day. In the third week of every month the arrear started. His wife, Mallika always used to taunt him for this. She said “leave that job, which cannot provide the security for bread, what does it value to do that job? Office bearer gets more salary than you”

Sitangsu answered with smile “If they get what I can do?”

Mallika shouted with irritation “You are laughing…??? How can you laugh…??? We have only one son and we are not capable to feed him properly. Look at our neighbour, he does not have any job yet he has the ability to make money. Everyone can, only you can’t. Why…?”

Sitangsu could hear the harsh sound of his wife even in the crowd. A kind of pity aroused and pronounced some words in his heart that she was right, everybody could why not him. Again, he accused himself for that kind of madness; he could easily come by second-class compartment. In the mean time, the conductor came before him and asked for the ticket – “Ticket please…”

Sitangsu became irritated to see the man who puts on the khaki*. But Sitangsu started to look at the moving world of outside, he didn’t look again at the conductor. The setting sun made him sad. It made him feel that life was a vale of tears where happiness was like a flash of
lightening, which came from the dark mass of cloud. He could not recall when he last felt joy in his heart naturally. The conductor left the place and Sitansgu got down at the next station, one station before his destination, as he did not want to take the risk.

Yes…He did it. Sitansgu cheated the conductor, his heart filled with delight. A man, who earn money more than crore* in the black market, perhaps would not be so happy the way Sitansgu expressed his happiness. Nothing harder, tried making it possible. He never smoked cigarette in the last days of month. But that time he got a cigarette from his regular store as he had cheated five paisa from the conductor. The shopkeeper Fatik Das was astonished by that attitude of Sitansgu. He enjoyed the cigarette with great pleasure and thought not to think much about the struggling life.

When he got into the house, he did not get rid of his shoes that day; perhaps he wanted to show his manliness to his wife as well. It appeared that he had invaded the kingdom of Alexandre as he had cheated the tram conductor. Mallika was teaching Binu, their son, a kind of poetry. Binu came to his father the moment he entered into the house- “Hey….Baba*.” Mallika replied with polite irritation “What should I do for that?”

Mallika became gentle at night. She looked beautiful. Perhaps it was because the laundry man had delivered the new saree* which she had given last week and in the morning she got angry at first because of that. While removing his shoes Mallika asked with gentle smile, “Have they paid you on 29th this month?”

“Why…???. Is there any tradition that an insurance agent should smoke cigarette only at the beginning of the month?”-Sitansgu answered. Surprised…!!! Mallika did not mind him; rather she again smiled and said, “Did I say that? If you wish you can but I am habituate to see that you generally smoke beedi* at the end of the month that is why I asked you”.

Binu came and asked his father “What have you got for me baba?” Mallika beat him with affection and said “What should he bring for you naughty boy? Go and study”. Binu once looked at his father’s pale face and again interrupted “I thought today is the first day of month”. Malllika shouted at him and asked him to study. Actually Sitansgu used to buy chocolate, biscuits for Binu at the beginning of every month and generally Sitansgu used to smoke cigarette when he gets salary. But this time it was something different because he cheated the tram conductor and with that five paisa he got the cigarette.
“Baba* ticket”- Binu again asked. When Sitangsu could not bring anything for Binu he used to console him by giving him the tickets of the tram. But that time it was also not possible for him.

“Don’t have the ticket” Sitangsu answered.

Mallika asked in generosity” why…?? Did you walk the whole way?”

Sitangsu strangely laughed at Millika, “It is not necessary to get the ticket to come by bus.”

But the little conductor of Sitangsu expanded his hand and asked like the conductor

“Ticket babu*.”

-Narendranath Mitra was born in 30th January, 1917 at Faridpur which is now in Bangladesh. Though his first published article was poem he soon shifted, his stream to prose. His first publishes Mrittyu o Jibon publishes in 1936 in ‘Desh’ patrika. Dehomon, Headmaster, Mahanagar, are just a few among the thirty-five novels he has written. He became popular because of his vast colection of short stories. Asamatal is his first collection of short story. He gave a treasure of short story. He wrote near of about five hundred short stories. Among those, a few had been chosen for making films in Bollywood film industries.

Translator Details

Eeshan Ali (Translator): M.Phil. from ISM, Dhanbad. M.A. in “English and Comparative Literature” from Pondicherry University, Pondicherry. He is the author of A Companion to 50 Indian English Authors. He has also done a project on the Narendranath Mitra’s “Galpomala”. He has edited books, titled Studies in Mahesh Dattani’s ‘Tara’and Studies in Mahesh Dattani’s ‘Bravely Fought the Queen’. His areas of interest are Graphic novel (politics of representation), Translation Studies and Indian English literature. He can be reached @ eeshan.amu08@gmail.com.
Rain on the Sea

(Translation of Samudrampai Vaana poem of Vimala)

How marvelous dreams they are!
As the shiny rainbow in the sky
After rain
As the fragrance of earth embrued in first showers
As the rain drops slipped onto head
From casuarina trees
As the warmth kiss
Of the dearest on latent eyes
As the meek smile of an infant in the lap
As the red flag fluttered like a pigeon
Amidst the hands for the first time
How mellifluous dreams they are!

During the last evening twilight you know
Danced with happiness
While it was raining on the sea
Enkindling the stars on lighthouse

Compared to the unwritten old message written by moon
On the forehead of forest
Sang aloud the relationship
Of sea, forest and moon
Like the broken tides, dreams’re scattered away

He is no more now
Who made secret announcement with blinking eyes
Joining my hand with a collective dream
He was murdered
The much exclaimed crazy mother is no longer too
Who sprinkles laughter
Adjusting her covering forelocks
There are no traces of the rivers of touch that
Flowed among the joined hands

Excuse me!
The deceitful language of today’s palmist
Cannot be understood

Loving - cursing the sea
Many more people departed
Embracing the tragic, dark and ruined memories

Standing under the ruined lighthouse
I urge the sea stretching hands
To give at least some pieces
Of the old dreams of the other day

In the shaded darkness of evening twilight
On the landscape where earth and sky meet
Looking forward….
For a lightning bird to visit
Listening to the rain on the sea….

Vimala is a poet, short story writer and script-writer. She is a consultant of Aman Vedika Rainbow Homes for children from marginalized and stigmatized backgrounds. Her literary works have been translated and published in various books and journals in Hindi and English. Two of her poems are included in BA curriculum in Andhra Pradesh. Her best known published works include: Adavi Uppogina Rathri (The Night of the Forest’s Uprising), Mrigana (Searching) - anthology of poems in Telugu. Maa (Mother) is translated into Hindi. Email: vimalamorthala@gmail.com

Translator Details

Naresh Annem is a translator and Asst. Professor of English at University of Agricultural Sciences, GKVK, Bangalore-65. He is a research fellow in Translation Studies at CALTS, University of Hyderabad. His areas of interest include Translation, Indian Writings in English and Postcolonial Literatures. Email: nareshannem@gmail.com
DHOBI GHAT
A NOVELLA

ABOUT THE MOVIE

Dhobi Ghat (also known as Mumbai Diaries) is a 2011 Hindi drama film directed by Kiran Rao in her directorial debut. The film stars Aamir Khan, Prateik Babbar, Monica Dogra, and Kriti Malhotra and is produced under the banner of Aamir Khan Productions. Aamir Khan plays one of the lead roles in the movie as a painter. Academy Award winner Gustavo Santaolalla was signed to compose the score and soundtrack of the film.

Dhobi Ghat had its world premiere in September 2010 at the Toronto International Film Festival. It was released in cinemas on 21 January 2011.
Introduction

I’ve always found movies very fascinating. The way a two hour movie can chronicle lifetimes of people in it has been a topic of my interest since a very long time. Most movies speak a language of their own, where meaning has to be understood by the audience in the subtle indications made in the movie. It is this language, that determines the potency of a movie. An intelligently made movie says a lot without making things too obvious. It stimulates one’s imagination, and interpretative skills.

For a lot many people, even today, Hindi cinema, or most of it at least, remains a frivolous enterprise that mainly revolves around singing and dancing, and a lot of drama, mostly abstract. But in the last few years, there have been a lot of movies that have strongly stood their grounds in challenging this assumption about Bollywood movies. Dhobi Ghat (2011), is definitely one of those movies.

The story of four people, Munna, a dhobi, Shai, a US based investment banker, Arun, an artist, and Yasmin, a housewife, Dhobi ghaat brings with it a soulful portrayal of their lives, and the crossroads at which they stand in finding a place for them in the city of Mumbai. Immigrants from different places, and belonging to different classes of society, these four people, their aspirations in life, their dreams, their dilemmas, and the way their lives cross each other’s, against the backdrop of the city that never changes, and is as welcoming as it is indifferent towards these people, Dhobi ghaat presents a face of Mumbai life that is different from the usual representations of the city that never sleeps.

Taking up this project, an attempt to adapt Dhobi Ghat into a novella was partially because of my admiration for the movie, and partially because of my curiosity to see how it turns out on paper. In a movie, many things are only indicative, and subtle hints need to be picked up by the audience to understand the finer nuances of the lives of the characters shown in the movie. Dhobi ghaat is full of such pregnant situations. In the novella, one of my main concerns has been picking out, and developing on those strands that were left open ended in the movie. When I did my presentation on the adaptation of Vishal Bhardwaj’s “7 Khoon Maaf”, I tried to explore the nuances of adapting a novella into a film, the way many things have to be left out unmentioned, have to be altered in order to fit the sociological/commercial
appeal of the movie, or have to be added to add more credibility to the contexts used in the movie. While working on this novella, I’ve tried to walk backwards from there, somewhat.

One of the main challenges was to contain the entire narrative of the film in the structure that I had in mind, of perspective narration, by all four main characters. By the end, because of the constraints of time and space, I had to modify my original intentions a little. The novella now has the perspective narration of two characters, and through their eyes, the other two are also portrayed. However, the prologue and the epilogue, respectively, focus on Munna and Yasmin, respectively, in order to grant them the agency they deserve in the novella. If I can, sometime in future, I’d like to write a Part 2 of the novella, which would deal with Munna’s and Yasmin’s perspectives, and look at their sides of the story more closely. In this novella, only Arun and Shai have the agency to express their thoughts. However, through the prologue and the epilogue, I’ve attempted an insight into the other two characters, and have created a base for the build-up of the story in the imagined Part 2.

Inevitably, in the process of adaptation, some characters got left out, some got highlighted more than they were in the movie. However, there was one character which I’ve portrayed as it was in the movie, from both the perspectives, because I felt it was the soul of the movie, that character. It’s the old lady who lives in Arun’s neighbourhood. The silent, impassive observer, who takes in everyone’s emotions, happiness, pain, all of that, but is indifferent, and goes on in the same state as before, always knowing, yet never responding. Like the city of Mumbai, which is privy to the emotions of all those who come to it, seeking shelter, and their rightful place in the city.

Translating linguistically, across mediums, and across perspectives, simultaneously, was interesting, but also extremely difficult at times. Most of the times, I was not only translating the language, but the expressions, the reactions, the body language, the contexts, the surroundings, all of that. This novella has been one of the most dedicated works of mine in the recent times. I hope it does justice to the movie.

Contents
Prologue

He sat with his elder brother in a small, dingy chawl room, with a glass of cheap tharra in his hands, laughing at a comic scene in the movie playing on the 14” TV in front of them. An elderly woman sat on the ground, cooking on a kerosene stove. And a young boy of about fourteen tried to study with his fingers in his ears, trying to shut out the noise around him. After a while, he grudgingly told his mother to hold his two elder brothers responsible if he fails in the exam next day.

Hearing that, still smiling, He turned and told Salim, the elder brother, that He needed to leave. It was time for his job. Salim jokingly asked him “When are you going to leave that filthy job of yours, miyan?” He simply smiled, and left. He was already late that night. As he hurried to his ‘area’, on his way, accidentally bumped into a car. Thankfully, it had stopped before it could hurt him. He stumbled for a moment, and hurried off again.

With a torch in his left hand, and a long lathi in his right, he went around in the murky darkness of the alleys of north Mumbai, eyes focussed, senses alert. Speed and precision was very important in his Job. When they had taken him in, they had given him a daily quota of thirty kills each night, six nights in a week. If he was to fall short of it, they wouldn’t pay him.
He did not like this job. Who would, he’d often think. But then, to survive in this city, to fend for himself and the family, and to save for the future he dreamt of, just the meagre money out of his day job won’t suffice. One needs money, and contacts to become an actor. All those things, portfolio, audition tapes and all, they won’t come for free. And this job paid better than any other options he’d had. Sometimes he would think about the job as unethical. One was talking about lives here. He had never even hurt a fly, all his life, and now...

Probably that was why he was scared of letting people in into this dark secret of his. God forbid, If tomorrow, someone he likes looks at him like this, doing what he had to for money, would she think of him as a monster? Would she be disgusted at the filthiness of the job? Would she still like him after knowing this secret of his? This was his biggest fear, which gnawed at the back of his mind day and night. Once he would save a sufficient amount of money, he'd leave the job, and try out in Bollywood. All those actors in the posters, stuck across the tin walls of his corner in the Kholi, he’d spent years trying to build his body like them. And Salim always said he had a nice face. May be, he would make it big someday. Then no one would need to know this part of his life, ever.

His train of thoughts came to an abrupt end when suddenly he saw some movement near the pile of trash, lying in a dark corner of the alley. He silently tip toed near the pile, ears stretching out for the sound of any further movement. He waited, with baited breath, hand grasping his lathi into a firm grip. After several moments of silence, he saw his victim, who tried to hide under the trash in a flurry of movement. But He was trained for this moment. The trick was to stun the victim by shining the torch in its eyes, and then with quick, powerful strokes of the lathi, whack it to death. This one was strong. It took him quite a few strokes of his weapon to make his kill, this time.

When he was done, the rat lied dead, its blood gushing out of the intestines that had come out of his split up stomach, where the lathi had struck, with full force, again and again. Indifferently, He picked it up by its tail, put it in the sack of dead vermins he carried with him, and started looking for his next victim.

When his shift was over, He went back to the area where he lived. There was a railway track behind his chawl. Every night, after coming back from his job, he took a bath at the leaking water faucet near the tracks. He could not go to his kholi smelling like that. Somehow, this
bath was the most soothing part of his day. It felt like the water washed off all his filthiness, all his guilt, all his sins.

After the bath, he’d quietly sneak into his kholi, afraid of waking up khala or chotu. Salim wasn’t usually around by this time. He had his own demons, and not asking him about them was something He had learnt very early in his Mumbai life. He’d then lie down on his bed, looking at the posters of Salman Khan on the wall, hoping to wake up less tired.

After hardly a couple of hours of sleep, he’d have to get up at the crack of the dawn, to go to the ghat. Collecting laundry from the twenty houses that he worked for, washing them, drying them, ironing them, then stacking them according to each house, and delivering back, all of it, was both tiring and time consuming. But then he enjoyed that. Most of his clients belonged to the higher middle class, or the upper class societies of Mumbai, and to be able to see their lives so closely, made him feel like a part of it.

And there were other perks, too. Arun Sahib, a painter, was always generous with his tips while paying in for the month. Weird, though the man was. Lived alone, after his wife had left him, and gone with their son to Australia, he’d been through a rough patch. He had to knock at his door for an hour one day, and threaten to call the police to get Arun to open the door. Arun had looked so devastated that day, that He had made tea for both of them, and had sat with him for a while, too. Then there was Mrs Malini, who was not only generous with her money, but with a lot of other things, as well. Middle aged, slightly plump but attractive Mrs Malini had been very kind to him, one afternoon, about two years back, when he had come to deliver clothes to her place, and she was alone in the house. Since then, it had been a mutually understood system of giving and taking between them. He really liked some of the nice, colourful T-shirts she would give him, from time to time. She was a difficult lady, however, and lately, it had become tiring and monotonous for Him, her generosity. But then, beggars could not be choosers.

A few days back, he had taken up a new house. It was there that he had seen her for the first time. She wasn’t extraordinary beautiful, but there was something about her, a kind of openness, a freeness of manners he’d never seen. She was like a gush of fresh air. He’d not gotten a chance to talk to her directly. He’d seen her only twice, after all. The first time, she was talking on the phone with someone, as Agnes, her maid, had come to collect the clothes, and the second time, she was leaving for somewhere in her car, as he’d reached the ground.
floor of the building where the apartment was. She didn’t see him, but he’d taken in eyefuls of her with him, both the times...

She was the last thing Munna thought about, before finally falling asleep.

Arun’s story

1.

It was not raining that afternoon, for a change. The flat was located in a crowded area of old Mumbai. The property dealer had seemed quiet enthusiastic about the place. “Just the way you wanted. A clear view of Old Mumbai. If you look from the balcony, you can see the Aga khan tower right there. Unlimited lease, attached toilet bathroom, and the station is nearby too. Yes, the kitchen is a little small, but then I don’t think you are going to cook much, anyway.” He’d told me.

The place was not in a very good condition. In fact, at some places, it was practically in a shamble. Bare walls, paint stripping off, glasses missing in a couple of ventilators. Even the ceiling fan was missing from its hook on the ceiling. “After a couple of paint coats, it’d be as good as new. You are a painter yourself, you’d know, anyway.” The property dealer had continued his monologue.

I usually don’t talk much. I didn’t, that day as well. It was not because the property dealer won’t stop speaking. Well, probably partially that too, but mainly because of the way that place seemed to speak out to me. It had something to say to me, a story of its own. I could feel it in its bare, greying walls. As I stepped out in the balcony, overlooking hundreds of similar houses all around, I realised that i wanted to hear it, too.

On my way out, in the adjoining flat, I saw an old lady. She was sitting on a chair, absolutely still, a walking stick in her hand, and no expressions on her face. She seemed to be looking at me, but there was no change in her expression as I passed by, looking at her. I felt a little strange.

2.
Social gatherings are really out of my comfort zone. And socialising there myself, a nightmare. I try to stay away from such social situations, mostly. But sometimes, it becomes unavoidable to not turn up for some of them. Especially, if the gathering in question happens to be an exhibition of my own paintings. The clink of wine glasses all around, people pretending to understand and appreciate my paintings when most of them probably wouldn’t be able to tell the difference if those paintings were hung upside down, weird women telling me how many paintings of mine they have in their homes, art pimps pretending to be interested in my work... all this makes me feel claustrophobic, and i crave for fresh air.

It was a lot like that on the day of my painting exhibition. “Building”, I’d named it, my collection – a tribute to the immigrant artists, who built the city of Bombay, and hoped to find their rightful place in it for themselves, someday. For some reason, this collection was really close to my heart. Perhaps because of the long time I’d taken to finish it up, or perhaps because there was too much of me in it.

I like Vatsala, my promoter. She is a work driven, intelligent woman, probably in her early forties, and is really good at her job. The way she handles my unsocial, almost antisocial tendencies, and balances them out with her excellent people skills, is admirable. She is attractive, too. We’ve had a good professional relationship, always, and taking in account the few occasions when we’ve slept together, something of a personal relationship too. But like I said, she knows how to balance things out, and that includes mixing the right amount of pleasure with business. Adult, consensual, no strings attached sex, good for both, a workaholic with no time for love, and an estranged husband and father, who still yearns for love, or something like that.

I was as uncomfortable as always in there, when Vatsala came up to me, and pushed me on the stage to speak about my paintings. She wouldn’t take no for an answer. Defeated, I had to go. After stuttering a few uncomfortable words, and raising a toast to Bombay, my muse, I squeezed myself out of the situation. And then, when I was trying really hard not to look too bored with the usual compliments characteristic of these kinds of places, I met her.

She was different. A lot less pretentious, a lot more alive. Like a waft of fresh air. It was easy to talk to her. An investment banker, an NRI, in India on a research grant, “for a change of scene”, she said. While we were talking, someone accidentally dropped wine on her beautiful, pearl white shirt. I offered her to come to my place to change. She agreed.
We came home. Between glasses of wine, photograph books, soft music, and a lot of conversation, I don’t remember when our fingers brushed first, entwined around each other with ease, and we melted away into each other with the night, softly, beautifully.

3.

It was beautiful, the night that had passed. But in the morning, the darkness of the night dawned on me. My life, like my flat now, the one that I was leaving because the lease had run out, was packed up in boxes. Boxes I wasn’t yet ready to open. Boxes that she had seen the night before, but I could not let her see what all I’d hidden inside them. When she woke up, her freshness, her vivacity, made me feel guilty of being selfish. I was not ready for freshness, perhaps, and this much, so soon, would consume me, all of me. I considered myself to be a loner, I always have. When I tried to explain my dilemma to her, in telling her that I was not the relationships kind, and I don’t usually do something like this, and she shouldn’t think of last night as more than a... I couldn’t find a word for it, she had understood my hesitation, and with a composed, yet angry “You know what Arun, its cool!”, had left my flat, banging the door behind her. Leaving me cursing my horrible people skill, again.

When the doorbell had rung again, I’d furiously wished it to be her. It was Munna, my dhobi, instead. I asked him if he could continue coming to my new place, and wrote the address for him in his address diary when he said he would.

4.

I shifted to my new flat. With a fresh coat of paint the property dealer had ensured for me, the flat looked much better. I arranged my furniture, set up my books, cleaned the flat in general, and unpacked the new canvas for my new painting.

It was in the old wooden cupboard in the flat that I’d found it, that discoloured aluminium box. Inside it, wrapped in a dirty rag, were several small trinkets. A silver fish, which was probably a surma-daani, a silver chain with a pearl ring in it, a box mirror, two photographs—one of a young boy, probably 15 or 16 years of age, and the other of the same boy, with an elderly lady and a young girl, probably in her early twenties. At the bottom of the box, there were three video cassettes, with the labels “First letter”, “Second letter” and “Third letter” on them.
I’d called up the property dealer to inform that the previous tenants had left some of their belongings in the room. He'd told me to throw them away.

I wish I had listened to him.

Instead, out of sheer curiosity, and some amount of voyeurism we Indians have in abundance, I’d decided to watch the tapes.

5.

The first tape, labelled “First letter” had begun with the sweet, happy voice of a girl, who was taking a video of her husband with the video camera he’d got for her. Her voice reflected her fascination with the camera. She wanted to send a picture of herself with her husband to her brother, Imraan. The husband seemed to be a quiet man, who was not very responsive to her. The first time I saw her face, was when she turned to record herself, in the mirror. She was the girl in one of the pictures. Not very beautiful, but the innocence on her face, and the purity of her smile gave her a unique attraction. I instantly liked her, something about her.

After the abrupt end of the first sequence, the next sequence was shot with the camera resting still on a dining table. She sat down in front of it, and spoke to it, as if speaking to her brother, Imraan, instead of the camera. Among her happy accounts of her new life in Bombay, I got to know that her name was Yasmin, and she had come to Bombay just three months back, with her husband, after marriage. She promised her brother a tour of Bombay through her video camera, before she hurriedly got up from the table at the ringing of the doorbell.

I could not help but smile at the vivacity of this young girl. She was so cheerful, so excited. A little nervous, but ready to drink in life with all eagerness. I tried to locate the position of her dining table in the room. It was straight across the length of the room, at the other end. I could tell by the position of the window. But then why did she look straight across when the doorbell rang? The door was in the other direction, altogether.

I replayed the part where the doorbell had rung, and she’d looked across. She seemed to be looking exactly at the place where i was sitting.

It was a weird feeling, funny, yet, I don’t know... but i liked her, all the same. She was nice.

I continued watching it.
6.

I woke up on the sofa next morning. I had dozed off watching the tape, I guess. I got up, went to the balcony to stretch myself up a little. Through the window in the flat across mine, I could see a Bai, cooking food, with the amazing speed all Mumbai Bais are famous for. In the next window, a man sat reading the newspaper, taking sips of his tea.

They were the same people Yasmin had recorded in a part of her tape. I’d watched it last night.

It was odd, and surreal, seeing them doing the same things as they had done in the video Yasmin had recorded. But then, being used to a lot of surreal experiences as an artist, I’d shrugged it off then.

7.

Turned out Yasmin had also recorded the strange old lady in the adjoining flat. I was relieved to see that the old lady had not replied to Yasmin’s greetings as well, hadn’t as much as turned her eyes at her. Even though this was strange behaviour, I felt better on not being the sole object of her disinterest and indifference. At the same time, like Yasmin, I too, wondered... why was she like that... what had happened to her?

I was shaken out of my thoughts by Vatsala’s call. I paused the tape and talked to her. Turned out she was standing right outside my flat. She looked happy, as always, and cheerfully asked me if I’d been holed up in my apartment watching porn all this while. Then, she casually picked up one of Yasmin’s tape. I was surprised at the way i jumped at her to snatch it away from her. I felt irritated, and somewhat angry, at the way she playfully ran off with the tape. It was a weird feeling, like someone was trying to look into something very personal, something that was only mine. When I finally cornered her against the kitchen slab and snatched the video away from her, the change in her expression made me realise that she had not run off with the tape because she was curious about it. She had done it, perhaps, to get cornered like that. However, she’d read my expression too, and in a moment she shrugged it off, simply saying “what...not in the mood.” Balanced Vatsala, as always.
We went out for lunch. I was quiet, trying to make a boat out of the table napkin the whole time, while Vatsala had told me about the sales of my painting, and other business opportunities. However, her visit was not about a regular business briefing this time. She had got an invitation to showcase my work in a renowned art gallery in Sidney. I remember looking up at her when she told me this, in all her enthusiasm. And for the first time in our business relationship, perhaps, I shared her enthusiasm.

I’ll get to see Shiv, at long last, I thought. He had turned six, that year.

8.

I sat with my sketchbook that night. There was a sequence in Yasmin’s second tape where she had recorded her visit to a bangle shop. It was one of her most beautiful recordings. The colours of the bangles, were like the colours of Yasmin herself, happy, glistening in the yellow light, huddled up, yet there for everyone to see. She asked the shopkeeper for pink bangles, and wore them in her free hand. As she shot her hand full of pink, shimmery bangles, I marvelled at the beauty of that simple sight. Just a hand, transformed into art with those bangles, and the way she wore it, it was more beautiful than anything I’d seen in a long time. I wanted to draw it, to capture the beauty of Yasmin’s recording in my own art. With bold strokes of my pencil, I’d drawn Yasmin’s hand in my own, touched her slender fingers and pink bangles with the tips of my fingers on paper. Looking back, I realise, it was then, that Yasmin had become my muse...

9.

Yasmin had also recorded her bai, ‘Lata bai’ and her daughter Vanita. I remember smiling to myself while watching Vanita recite Tennyson’s “The Brooke”, with brid-ges in the place of bridges, and rid-ges in place of ridges. She had a curious pronunciation, that girl. Lata bai did not seem too comfortable with the idea of Yasmin shooting her, but was a sport, at the same time. She even told Yasmin about Vanita’s dancing and singing. Vanita shied away, and did not dance, even after Yasmin’s request, and smiling, lata bai got back to work.
Knowing about Lata Bai made me feel, for the first time since I’d started watching the video tapes, that perhaps I had a chance of finding out Yasmin. I went to the Watchman of the building and asked him about Yasmin, and also about Lata Bai. Although the Watchman said he didn’t know anyone by that name, and would try and find out, he did not look very convincing to me. Nevertheless, I gave him some money as an incentive to do my bidding. Without much hope, I came back.

The Old lady next door was sitting in her flat, in the same position she always sat in, still, expressionless. I don’t know if it was a sudden sense of politeness for my neighbour, or Yasmin’s effect on me, I smiled and said hello to her. As expected, she did not reply, just stared back, silently, with eyes as quiet as before.

10.

It rained that night. Rained the way Yasmin had recorded in her camera, continuously, soaking the entire city in its conquest. I stood in the balcony, sipping whiskey, and looking out, into the vast expanse of rainy sky. The drops of rains reminded me of life, love, laughter, and longing. Feeling them from a distance, glistening on the canvas of sky made me yearn to reach out and touch them, let my fingers feel the life in them, and be alive, yet again. I was ready to open those boxes today, and take out the colours I had kept in them. I took them out, and with a stroke of red on my new canvas, set out to capture the vivacity of life on it, in all its colourful glory... Yasmin’s life, and in it, mine too...

I remember looking at my first few strokes, and that gush of happiness I hadn’t felt in a long, long time.

I must have slept well that night.

11.

Running into Shai that day, all of a sudden, and that too, in my neighbourhood, was surprising, for more than one reasons. I cannot say I’d never thought about Shai and that night afterwards, but whenever I had, that had led me into the thought of meeting her again, I had always imagined myself to feel really embarrassed. But when I saw her that day, I simply
felt the happiness and pleasant feeling of running into an old friend, which was surprising. Turned out one of her father’s construction sites was in the neighbourhood, which she frequented to get photographs of the site, as a part of her research project. I invited her to my place, for a cup of coffee, and she accepted, with some hesitation.

As we started talking about how life had been, since we’d last met, I remembered how easy it was, to talk to her. This time, her freshness did not make me step back. For some reason, I was ready to take it in. She seemed to have noticed the change in me, too, and told me I seemed happier, which made me happy, in turn. That was a compliment I had not got in a very long time. As I apologised for being an asshole the other night, I decided to ask her out for a visit to Ellora caves to make up for my behaviour, when the doorbell rang.

It was Munna, my dhobi. I did not want to lose out on my time with Shai, so I told Munna to come the next day. I said it in all cheerful politeness, but there was a strange expression on Munna’s face that I could not understand. I decided not to pay much attention to it, and came back to Shai after closing the door. I asked her if she’d like to visit the Ellora caves. But she was a little disoriented, suddenly, and did not hear me, I guess. Then she suddenly got up, and left in a hurry, saying she had to go see someone. I was a little taken aback by her reaction, and wondered if I’d moved in too fast. I don’t know, perhaps I had. What else could have made her leave like that, all of a sudden?

12.

Yasmin’s recordings were random, and yet they seemed to chalk out a pattern in my life. She had recorded her visit to a beach one evening, and also the *Ganpati Visarjan utsav*, where she’d probably gone with Vanita. Every time I would see her, I’d feel more connected to the world, both hers, and mine.

I’d taken out Yasmin’s Pandora box that day. After going through all the trinkets in there, I decided to take out the silver chain with the ring from them. I cleaned it and wore it around my neck. I could feel my muse closer to my heart now. It’s hard to say if I was in love with her, by then. I just know that my life had begun to have some meaning yet again, and this time, I wanted to hold it tight unto me, with all my strength. Yasmin’s accounts of all things
mundane had brought me back in the world again, among people, and I was becoming a happier man, as Shai had noticed, too.

I went to the sea beach that day, the same one where Yasmin had gone, and had written her name on the sand. It had got washed off by a wave, every time, but she had written it yet again. The same sea had touched her feet, and as I stood barefoot into the waves at the shore, I yearned to feel her touch in the waters that washed over my feet. I wanted to be able to feel her, with all my senses.

While walking on the shore, I found a small idol of Ganpati lying on the sand...

That night, I walked about in the crowded lanes of old Mumbai, among all those people, without any discomfort. It was a Friday, and also the first day of Ramzaan, so the market was abuzz with people who had come for their first Ramzaan Iftaar enjoying the sight of people, of the world around me, of the world Yasmin had made come alive for me.

I came back home, and touched Yasmin’s painting with my fingers again, to transfer all of her lingering unto me on the now colourful canvas.

13. It was a rather curious co-incidence, that in the first sequence of the ‘Third letter’, My Yasmin talked about her fear of Bakreid. It made me feel like a companion to her, someone who was walking side by side with her, witnessing her life. Isn’t that the purpose of having your soul mate, someone who witnesses your life, and keeps an account of it, someone who is special, and would mean more to you than the world? I don’t know when I had become so involved with her, but I know that I had almost become an extension of her by that time.

It was the first time I’d seen her a little sad. It worried me.

14. When Yasmin had started off the next sequence by talking about her marriage, i had a vague idea where it was going to lead. Still, with baited breath, i’d kept hoping that it’ll all be fine. But when she finally told Imraan that her husband was cheating on her, something broke inside me. I felt it, right there. The sadness in her face, the seriousness in her pauses, the
silence of her eyes, all of it penetrated through me, searing my heart. She was sad, my Yasmin, and here I was, suffering in her pain, but helpless to help her...

Vatsala had chosen a very bad time to call me that day. For the first time in my life, I had shouted on her.

I worked through the night that day, adding shades of blue, here and there, on the canvas of Yasmin’s life. It was almost over, my painting.

15.

I remember that day, clearly. It was like any other, normal Mumbai day. I was adding some finishing strokes to my painting, as I’d put the “Third letter” tape to play on my TV screen.

I remember hearing Yasmin’s voice, as background music to painting. It had taken me a while to realise what she was saying. And a longer while to react to it. To leave my brush, run to the TV, and replay the Video again, madly hoping for it to change this time, hoping for whatever I’d heard her saying, to be something else, something my happy, vivacious Yasmin would generally speak about, not what she just said, in the shortest sequence of her tapes till now. The buzzing sound of the blank dotted screen after the silence she’d left behind in her words grew louder and louder in my ears, till it began to deafen me, as I sat there, haplessly, at a loss of words, at a loss of reactions.

I touched her ring that I had worn around my neck, trying to feel her essence through it, and grew more and more disoriented at not being able to feel it anymore. She had helped me find myself when I was lost, and now I was lost again, with her. I remember simply sitting on the sofa, for a long, long time, staring into space, trying to look for my lost Yasmin, trying to reach out for her, yearning to feel her warmth, her safety, her laughter again. I’d sat there for hours, looking blankly at the ceiling, until It had come to me, crashing into my senses, the absence of the ceiling fan from its hook on the ceiling...

I had run out of my flat. It was my fault. I had wanted to hear out its story, and now that I knew it, I could not bear to be there anymore. After yearning for so long to be able to feel her again, when I’d finally felt her, it was not like anything I remember her to be. It was like a chill, that had spread through my senses in an instant, and had rendered me unable to breath.
As I’d gasped for breath, lying on the floor outside my apartment, I remember seeing the Old lady next door turn her eyes to me for the first time. I don’t know if it was my imagination, but I felt like I’d seen an expression of sympathy, of understanding in those eyes, even if only for an instant. Before I could hold onto it, she turned away, again, her stance still, her eyes expressionless, yet again.

I gave my property dealer a call the same day...

16.

My painting was the first thing I’d unpacked in my new apartment. In fact, it was one of the only things that I had unpacked. Most of my other things lay packed into boxes, lots of boxes, all around the place. It stood by a wall of my room, quietly, beautifully. A lot of red, smudged, sponged and scraped by some yellow, some bright blue, and a little black, too. And where all these colours melted into each other, there I’d painted Yasmin’s beautiful face, holding them all into a moment of her expression. She’d lived for me in my painting, and in its completion, had left me forever. But she’ll never be gone for me, never completely, at least. On the blank, bare walls of my life, she’ll always be there, like her painting, looking back at me with those eyes full of life, and that face, bright as sunlight, my Yasmin... Yasmin Noor!

Shai’s Story

1.

It was my second day in India. Tired of being an NRI investment banker in US for a couple of years now, I needed a break from things out there, a change of scene, some fresh air, and some time for myself. So when I’d received my research grant to work on “small and marginal businesses” in India for a couple of months, I couldn’t be happier. Staying away for two months, from US, from Ross and his memories had looked like a really good idea. I’d gone away with the hope that he’ll be out of New York, with his Godforsaken girlfriend, by the time I would come back it’d be easier for me to get back to my life without him around. Plus my research project required me to do something I loved doing anyway, taking photographs.
That day, however, Pesy, one of my closest friends in India was taking me to some art exhibition. We’d left late, and while the driver was hurrying off (he even bumped the car into someone on the way), Pesy kept assuring me that nothing important in Mumbai started before 10. Kind of used to the American fetish of punctuality, I had felt a little uncomfortable with this concept, but then, I’d reminded myself that I was here, on a break, so I needed to chill.

My dad being an art connoisseur, I have had a lot of exposure to art, particularly paintings. I don’t brag about it, but all these years of artistic taste acquisition had at least enabled me to be able to tell the good paintings from the bad ones. The paintings here, in this exhibition, were beautiful. There was a sense of belongingness in them, a sense of unification. The collection was called ‘Building’ and the artist, Arun, in the very few hesitant words he spoke on stage, had said it was about the immigrant artists who’d built the city of Bombay, hoping to find their rightful place in it someday.

He was cute, Arun. The way he would stand there, clearly uncomfortable, with people all trying to force a conversation with him, there was something about it that made me want to talk to him. So when Pesy went and talked to him, relieving him of the burden of tolerating a big business bore’s strategies, I took my chance.

Surprisingly, he was very easy to talk to. In fact, we hit off really well. I told him all about my stay in Mumbai, and was telling him about my research project when a woman standing nearby dropped wine on my shirt. I was pissed, but then that’s the downside of parties like this. Everything has to be carefully wrapped in pretention. Obviously, I couldn’t say anything. Arun offered me a change at his place, which was nearby, and I gladly accepted.

His place was dimly lit, full of boxes everywhere. I guess he was between houses. He had a very nice collection of books on photography. We had some more drinks, and sifted through a lot of them. In the dim, yellow light of his living room, inebriated with wine, I didn’t even know when our fingers started tracing each other’s fingers... it all seemed like a moment in some dream. We danced too, swaying softly with the music, containing ourselves into each other. I’m not sure about the last thing I remember of that night. Perhaps it was the touch of his fingers on my face, the brush of his stubbled chin near my shoulders, his fingers playing with the ring in my toe, or the moment when both of us had looked at each other with a smile in our drooping eyelids, warm, and content...
I had woken up in his warm bed next morning. The room seemed different in sunshine. It seemed barer, stark. I looked around for something to wear, since my shirt last night was completely spoilt by the wine stain, courtesy that lady in the exhibition. One of Arun’s shirts was lying on the chair. It was blue, and as I sat on the bed for some time, taking in his smell from the shirt, I smiled to myself.

As I came out wearing that shirt into the kitchen, Arun was standing at the window, sipping his coffee and smoking a cigarette. I had my camera in my hand. Hearing the click of the camera, he looked at me. He seemed different... I don’t know, a little tense, and a lot more serious perhaps. He asked me for coffee, and as we both sat down sipping from our cups, I started talking to him about his apartment, the art at our home, things like that. But his responses were so measured and few, they made me increasingly uncomfortable. I first thought he was hung over or something. His face was impassive; his eyes that had been so transparent the previous night were opaque now.

After a long spell of forced conversation on my behalf, when I was almost giving up there, he suddenly said “I’m quite a loner, i keep to myself, and I don’t usually do this.” It was not what I had expected, but sensing a start, I had replied “I’m glad u don’t usually do this Arun, I mean, hey, I don’t either!”

But somehow, something in my answer made him cringe yet again, and when I was already very confused about the entire thing going on, his next sentence completely stumped me.

“I’m not the relationship kinds at all, and I’m really sorry if I led u into believing that this was more...”

“than just a shag?” I could not stop myself from saying it. I mean, what was wrong with him? it was such a beautiful night, and he was so warm, and tender, and passionate, there was this connection that I could feel, and the morning right after all that, he was like someone else.

I felt hurt, and humiliated. I just picked up my stuff, and left. He got up, mumbling something about not meaning it ‘that way’, but I was done with this weird guy.

“You know what Arun, its cool!” these were my last words before I had banged the door behind me as I hurried out of the apartment.
3.

A few days later, I was talking to Pesy about this entire Arun thing. Pesy has a peculiar way of thinking that includes making fun of everything I say. But then, deep inside, I know he cares a lot about me, and would stand by me when I’d need support. I was trying to explain that night to Pesy, what I had shared with Arun, the connection I had felt with him, and how I’d really felt that he was special, amidst his lewd jokes about sexual positions, and condoms, when the doorbell rang.

Agnes, my caretaker, got the door. It was the dhobi. He’d got my laundry. I told Pesy I’d call him back in a while, and a little irritated, sat down to check the clothes the dhobi had got. The third or the fourth cloth in the stack was the white shirt I’d worn that night to the exhibition. For some reason, it had turned blue.

I don’t know why I’d felt so angry at that moment. Perhaps all the repressed anger about what that night’s events had turned into the next morning came onto me on looking at that shirt, and before realising it, I ended up shouting on the dhobi.

However, the look on the poor guy’s face made me regret my sudden reaction immediately. He was so taken aback, and looked humiliated. He politely asked me to give it to him again, so that he could fix it. I cooled myself down a little, feeling sorry for taking it out on him like that, and gave the shirt to him. He had begun to hurry his way out, when I asked him his name. “Zohaib”, he’d replied, and by the time I said “Zohaib, I am Shai...” I guess he was already down the stairway.

I remember how bad I’d felt for the rest of the day.

4.

It had been a long time since I’d seen a hindi movie, and more so in a Theatre. So when Pesy wanted to take me along for a hindi movie with him, I’d gladly accepted the offer. It was running in a multiplex in some snazzy shopping mall.
I was surprised to find Zohaib standing outside the multiplex with a group of friends. However, once I’d seen him, out of my determination to make up for my mindless reaction earlier, I decided to go up to him to say hi. I don’t know if he was trying to avoid me, but I had to call him out thrice before he heard me, and he was standing barely a few hands away.

I said Hi, and asked him which movie he’d come to see. Turned out he’d come to watch Yuvraj too, the one I’d come for. He was a little ill at ease, while talking to me, and would hardly make eye contact, and the people he had come with, were busy dividing their time between gawking at me, and exchanging glances at each other. I stood with him for a couple of minutes, and then went inside the theatre. It was awkward, but I felt better, a lot better afterwards. I had had no right to shout at the poor guy like that, after all.

5.

For the next few days, I had so less to do in life. I’d simply doodle about in my apartment, eat random things at random times, and watch television. TV channels here were so amusing. In US, I’d hardly had time to sit and watch TV at leisure since my college days. So even wasting time on programmes where women would sleep at night with full makeup on their faces, and a scene about eating an omelette would also involve three close up shots, sensational background music, and lots of drama, did not seem to be waste of time.

However, the real reason behind this aimless existence of the last few days was a little different I guess. I could fool the world around me, but how could i fool myself. I’d been to Arun’s apartment a couple of days back. He didn’t live there anymore.

I wish I could stop thinking about him...

6.

Zohaib, the dhobi had come to return my shirt that day. It was as good as new this time. Partially happy, and partially still determined to make him feel better, I invited him inside for a cup of tea.
I asked him to sit on the sofa, and with some hesitation, he sat there. My camera, and some of its accessories were lying on the table, and he immediately asked me If I was a photographer. He seemed very pleased to know that I clicked pictures as a hobby.

While Agnes made tea, I asked him about his life. He was an immigrant from Bihar, Darbhagna or someplace, I can’t remember now. When I asked him the reason behind his coming to Mumbai, he’d simply said, “There wasn’t enough food there. I’d be hungry all the time. It’s better here.” It was a little embarrassing, me sitting in my antique and artwork clad drawing room, talking to this guy who could happily reminisce about getting beaten up during his early working days by the owner of the hotel he used to work in. It was like talking to someone from some other universe.

And when the tea came, to my horror, I realised that Agnes had decided to increase my embarrassment exponentially by getting Zohaib’s tea in a glass tumbler, and mine in a bone china cup. Glaring at her, I took the glass tumbler for myself, so that Zohaib could take the Bone china cup. As if to make up for the loss of her intentional rudeness towards him, Agnes asked him

“Munna, this blue shirt does not belong to Saheb. Whose shirt have you misplaced?”

Simultaneously, Zohaib and I tried to take it in our hands, respectively, and said “Arey, Its Arun sahib’s”, and “It’s mine” respectively, at the same time. Surprised, I asked him how did he know Arun. He said he did his laundry too. I asked him if he could give me his address. He offered to give the shirt back to Arun himself, but when I insisted, He gave me his address.

As I sat there, happy at this new development, suddenly, Zohaib asked “Will you take my pictures?” A little surprised, I immediately started taking out my camera, when he added, “No, not like this, the portfolio kinds.”

Smiling, I asked him If he wanted to become a model. With some hesitation, he replied that he wanted to be an actor.

I gave it a quick thought, and said yes to him. I had never done something like this, It’d be a new experience, and I’ll have something to do to keep me distracted from Arun. And then, I could ask him to let me click his pictures at work also, which would make a good addition to my research material.
We fixed a day for the shoot, and as I stood up to escort him out, I asked him, “So your name is Munna as well?” Smiling, he replied, “Yes, you can call me that...”

7.

I had Arun’s new address now, and however much I tried, I couldn’t give up the urge to go see him once. I was not sure if I was ready to meet him just yet, or if I even wanted to meet him. But I just wanted to feel his presence, feel some part of that night come alive again, in seeing him. After a lot of coaxing, I asked Pesy to come with me to the place where Arun had taken his new apartment.

We sat outside his apartment for a long time. I was tense, so tense that I readily took a few puffs out of Pesy’s cigarette to ease myself out, and yet, I was oddly happy. When I saw Arun come out of his apartment and enter a local madrasi food joint, first I ducked down, and then tried to get Pesy to come with me to the joint. However, Pesy would take only that much of my non sense, and asked me instead to abandon this stalking business and go eat someplace nice. I realised he was right, and resigned, nodded to him.

On our way out of locality, I suddenly saw a construction site. It said “Nial Constructions” on the board outside it. That brought a big smile to my face.

It was time to call up Mr Ashok Nial, my beloved Dad!

8.

It was the day of Munna’s photo shoot. He came wearing a white hi-neck pullover that day, and I admitted to myself that he was handsome, undoubtedly. However, he seemed a little upset in the car, while we were being driven to the place where I’d planned the photo shoot.

When I asked him If there was something wrong, at first, he did not say anything. But when I asked repeatedly, he asked me why we weren’t doing the shoot in the studio. I tried to explain to him that I wanted his portfolio to be fresh, different from others, natural. He somehow didn’t seem to like the idea that much. Guess he wanted a traditional, old world kind of
portfolio only, and no matter how much I tried to explain that shooting the portfolio in the open would make it different, he stayed adamant on a studio shoot.

I stopped trying to convince him when he finally offered to pay for the studio, and asked me if I even wanted to do the shoot. Strangely obstinate, this guy was. Perhaps this tract of the male species exists across the variety of their existence, in all ages, in all classes, all around the world. Resigned, I took him to a studio in Borivali that belonged to one of my uncles.

Between his really amusing poses of various Bollywood actors, that he’d probably picked from their posters, and practised over God knows how many years, I managed to take some really nice natural shots, thankfully. At one point, when the colour of the T-shirt that he was wearing was sure to poke in the eye of anyone looking at its photo later, he asked me if he should pose shirtless. I had said yes, what issue would I’ve had. He was a handsome guy after all, and turned out he had a well-made, nice body.

I think I’d checked him out quite well before clicking his shirtless photos.

9.

I was relieved when Munna liked his photographs. The way he had reacted back in the car, I was a little apprehensive he won’t like them. Well, actually I wasn’t that apprehensive, but then I thought if I’d put it like that in front of Munna, he’d probably feel more confident, and comfortable about them.

I asked him to stay over for tea, and while I was making it, he quietly asked me if I liked him...in the pictures, he’d quickly added. Smiling to myself over his naivety, I told him I liked his pictures very much.

I guess he must have smiled too, behind my back.

10.

Courtesy my dad, I’d got the permission to click pictures in the construction site in Arun’s locality. The manager of the site had seemed proud to have someone photograph their
progress. As soon as he left, I found the most convenient spot on the site from where I could get the best view of Arun’s apartment. I set my camera there, and sat, taking his pictures.

He was watching something on his TV, some kind of a videotape, I guess, for he had a recorder attached to the TV. And he was also drawing something in a sketchbook, something from the TV. Strange guy, I’d thought. But then as Pesy says, one can never be sure about these artist types. They can get going with anything, anytime.

I don’t know why I wanted to shoot him, and why was I spending so much time obsessing about a guy who’d as good as shrugged me of the next morning after spending a night with me. It was a little degrading to my own self, and I had always thought myself to be a proud girl. But there was something about this guy that did not let me get over him. It was not just the making love part, though I can’t say that hadn’t been good. There was something beyond that, some kind of a connection I myself couldn’t understand, like something unfinished, between the two of us.

As he went about in his apartment, oblivious of my eyes, or the lens of my camera, I tried to capture him from that distance, not just with my camera, but also with my eyes, my heart and my whole body.

11.

Munna had agreed to take me to the Dhobi ghat, at long last. I clicked his pictures at every step of his work, from the washing, to the drying, ironing and the stacking part. Everything there, all of the ghaat, was something I’d never seen, never ever been to. To the naked eye, it’d have looked chaotic, and probably a little dirty too. But to the eyes of my camera, it was beautiful. And the most beautiful was Munna’s innocence shining in the monochromes of black and white I’d shot the pictures in.

Munna told me a lot of things in his life, about his elder brother, Salim, who was the closest person to him in his family, his aunt, his younger brother, his acting dreams, everything. With the pictures, I captured a slice of Munna’s personal life too, in my memory.

The only thing left to shoot now was the delivery part, for which Munna took me to someone’s flat in a posh area of Mumbai. As I stood adjusting the settings in my Camera
inside the elevator, suddenly, Munna asked the Liftman “What are you looking at, bey?” By the time I realised that feigning to look at the camera around my neck, the liftman was enjoying an accidental glimpse of my cleavage, which Munna had noticed and hence gotten onto him, we were out of the elevator.

The door of the apartment was opened by a helper, I guess. When the lady of the house came out, a middle aged, slightly bulky woman, probably a housewife, and I asked her for permission to take a picture of clothes getting delivered, she glared at me as if I had trodden upon her territory and was trying to appoint myself the queen of her underworld. It was weird, her reaction. After Munna stacked up the clothes, she sent the maid to ask him to go and talk to her. Munna said he’d come some other day, and we left.

On our way out, I jokingly told Munna, “I don’t think she’s going to leave you alive, My God, the way she looked at me!” To my surprise, Munna did not smile.

12.

I went with Munna to a small eating joint that night. It was a cafe kind of a place, that served everything from the desiest of dishes like samosa and badapav to an indianised version of Chinese, Italian and continental dishes. Between cups of tea, and helpings of food, I’d asked Munna about Arun, as nonchalantly as I could. Since the day I’d been to that construction site, my yearning for Arun had increased manifold, and I still couldn’t bring myself to go and meet him. However, I had to do something to stay involved in my obsession, and hence, I’d thought, why not ask Munna.

At first, Munna had not seemed very willing to talk about this. Knowing Munna for some time now, I could tell the forced indifference in his voice and actions when I’d asked him about Arun. Nevertheless, he told me Arun was separated from his wife, and son, who now lived in Australia. The wife was beautiful, and taller than Arun, Munna said. After she left him, Arun was devastated for weeks. Wouldn’t open the door, wouldn’t take any visitors. One day, Munna after half an hour of door banging, Munna had to threaten Arun that he’ll call the police If Arun didn’t open the door, to get him to open the door.

As if I needed to know all this, to make the already unsettled feelings about Arun overwhelming, and consume me all together in their intensity. I’d quickly changed the topic
by asking about Munna’s love life, to which he had coyly replied that he didn’t like anyone, ever, till now. Immersed in my thoughts of Arun, I’d smiled at him, and told him He’d get someone very soon.

It was raining by the time I left that cafe. It rained the entire night that night. And I, leaning against the big glass window of the porch, trying to feel the soothing coolness of the raindrops through the glass, unto my being. As raindrops rolled down the frosted glass I leaned against, I remembered the single tear that had rolled out of my smiling eyes that night, when his toes had teased my toe-ring, and his lips had caressed my neck, while his hand had gently cupped my bare shoulder...

I’d burned all night...

13.

The next morning, I knew I had to go see him...even if from a distance, but I had to feel his presence there, somewhere. And so I went to his locality yet again, in broad daylight this time.

Call it co-incidence, or a wish fulfilment, I spotted him on the street outside the construction site. I had thought of this moment over and over, many times, in the past few weeks, since that night, and it was exactly the way I’d imagined it to be. I looked at him, and I tried to hide my face away, trying to pass unnoticed. However, that day, he spotted me, and to my embarrassing surprise, he called out to me. What option did I have then, but to turn to the direction of his voice and act surprised.

He looked different, yet again. He told me he’d shifted to that area, and his apartment was nearby. After an awkward pause, he invited me upstairs to his place for a cup of coffee. I smiled, and said yes to him, and a YESSSS to myself.

This place was nice, nicer than the previous one, and I felt that inspite of my bias towards his previous apartment. It was airy, bright, and there was a sense of cheerfulness about it. As Arun made coffee for both of us, we talked about the progress of my research, local sightseeing in Mumbai, and a band of other topics. He was happier, a lot happier than when I’d seen him last. I wondered what had brought about that change. Between our
conversations, Arun apologised for being a ‘complete asshole’ the other night, and smiling, I told him to stop saying that. It felt so nice to be able to reach out to him again, to be able to sit and soak in his presence. I was eagerly taking it all in, the reality of this moment, when the doorbell rang.

As Arun cheerfully opened the door, I casually turned myself in that direction to see the visitor.

It was Munna.

When he saw me there, sitting at Arun’s coffee table, the change in Munna’s expression snapped me out of my reverie. There was no reason for me to feel bad about being at Arun’s place, nothing to hide. But for some reason, it suddenly felt strangely odd and embarrassing to be there. Arun told Munna to come the next day to collect clothes, and came back to sit with me. He was saying something about the Ellora caves when I felt like I had to go talk to Munna.

I hurriedly thanked Arun, told him I needed to meet someone, and left his apartment. I saw the look of surprise on Arun’s face, but at that moment, nothing seemed more important to me than going to Munna.

As I rushed out of the apartment, into the street, I saw Munna walking with his bi-cycle in his hands, with slow, small steps. I ran to catch up with him. I told him he’d promised to take me to Nagpaada that day, and then later, for the movie ‘Hello’, in the multiplex. Initially, he looked indifferent and a little hurt. But when I requested him, with a lot of pleases, he finally smiled, and agreed to it.

The strange feeling in my heart vanished, just like that.

14.

I went to Nagpaada with Munna that day. Nagpaada, Munna had told me was one of the oldest areas in Mumbai, and a home to many small scale industries. A very crowded area, with tall skyscrapers on one end, and clusters and clusters of Chawls on the other, Nagpaada represented the true spirit of Mumbai. We went to small itar shops, the local fish and
vegetable market, the flower sellers, the cobblers, the animal skinners, and even the ear cleaners. I captured visual testimonies from all of them in monochromes, in my camera.

That evening, it was the first Friday of Ramzaan, and Munna had told me that some of the best eating joints of Mumbai were in Nagpaada. He took me to some of the meat shops, where I had the spiciest food of my life, and thoroughly enjoyed it. Munna did not let me pay for the food, and told me I was his guest for the evening.

After Nagpaada, we went to a multiplex to watch the movie “Hello”. I can’t say about the movie, but I enjoyed Munna’s company, and when the movie ended, I invited him to my apartment.

It was raining again, and the weather was at its softest best. As I sat with Munna, across the coffee table in rain shelter, sipping whiskey, and talking about a lot of things, everything his and everything mine, I felt a sense of companionship, and a lot of affection towards this boy, who was so simple, so transparent, and so pure. The hardships of his life had not affected his character, and his characteristic naivety. Looking at his face and the happiness therein, I closed my eye for a moment.

I woke up on the chair, next morning, wrapped in a shawl. I had had a good night’s sleep.

Agnes seemed a little cross with me, however. As she served me my morning coffee, she quietly said- “Baby, stay away from the dhobi guy. He is just over smart. No education, nothing. You should not hang out with likes of him.”

15.

I had covered a lot of areas for my research. The only major marginal occupation left was that of Night rat killers. I’d asked Munna about it, but he’d told me he had no idea about any of it, and for some reason, had reacted in a strange manner. After that, I thought it’d be best if I didn’t bring up the topic in front of him. I was going to do this by myself, sometime in that week.

That night, I went clubbing with Pesy and Anandi. After a few rounds of drinks, Pesy had this idea of crashing at his farmhouse at Khandala, for a wild night out. When I told them I’d promised Munna that I’d go with him for some local sightseeing, both of them started with
their sarcasm on me, with phrases like “Oh, Shai’s Munna time”, and “C’mon, how much can you hang out with your dhobi ya! You don’t even know the first thing about him.” to shut them up, I decided to go with them.

Pesy was in a mood to smoke up that night, and I wouldn’t have minded a joint or two myself. He knew some drug supplier called Salim, who he said dealt in really good stuff. He called him up, and asked him to meet up at someplace en route to Khandala.

I was sitting in the back seat of the car, Pesy was at the wheel, and Anandi was sitting beside him. They took the stuff from Salim and paid him off. I, in the meantime, looked out through the glass. Salim had not come alone. He had come with someone, who leaned against the wall and looked into his mobile while Salim was making his deal with Pesy. I looked closely at the guy leaning behind Salim. As Salim moved away, having taken the money, I got a glimpse of the other guy.

It was Munna.

Was Pesy right when he said I didn’t know the first thing about Munna? Or was I being too hypocritical and judgemental about him for selling drugs, when I was the one buying it?

16.

Later that week, I went to a crowded locality in North Mumbai, where Agnes’s friend worked as a watchman. He was to be my guide in the photo shoot of the night rat catchers. He led me towards a narrow alley, and asked me to wait for the Rat catcher to come. According to him, there were two of them working in that area.

As I waited there, adjusting my camera to night settings, I saw a dark shape coming towards the heap of trash sprawled out in the middle of the alley. In a few minutes, he started looking into the trash for signs of his victim, poking his stick into the heap. He held a long flashlight above his head. When he finally found the rodent, he stunned it by shining the flashlight in its eyes, and then with swift strokes of his laathi, once, twice thrice, he killed it. I started with my camera as soon as he came in action. After the first two unclear pictures taken in night mode, I decided to take one with the flash on. As the camera flashed in the darkness of the alley, the rat catcher, stunned, looked in my direction.
It was while taking the third picture with the flash on that I had realised the familiarity of the face of the rat catcher.

Munna froze dead in his tracks, turned his back at me, and ran away in the opposite direction.

I did not know what to think, and what not to, and while waiting for my car to pick me up, I stood numb, at end of the street, unthinking.

17.

A sense of loss, a deep feeling of loneliness, and a tinge of betrayal, these were my few next days. I did not understand why Munna had kept those parts of his life hidden from me. And I was not sure if I was more surprised or sympathetic or hurt because of it. I knew that I had my own secrets as well, secrets Munna can never be privy to, never be a part of. Were these then his secrets that were not meant for me to see?

It looked like he’s changed his cell phone number. My calls would never get through. I went to look for him at the Dhobi Ghaat, too. He was a dear friend, inspite of everything. I needed to talk to him, no matter what.

Day after day, I would go and wait there, for Munna. He was nowhere to be found. Visiting the Dhobi Ghaat became a part of my daily life, for the next few days.

I also went to Arun’s place, to return his shirt, and give him the photograph I’d taken of him on the morning after the exhibition. The big lock at the door greeted me at his apartment.

There was an old lady, sitting in a chair, in the apartment next door. I asked her if she could keep the package for Arun so that he could take it from her once he was back. She simply looked at me, not taking in a word of all that I’d said. I decided not to leave the package there.

18.

Several days later, during my customary visit to the dhobi ghaat, I saw Munna again. When I called him out, he looked at me in with surprise, and was it fear? I won’t be able to tell. This
time, I was in no mood to let him go, so I ran after him. Finally, after running for a while, he bumped into someone, and fell down. I caught up with him, and gave him my hand to stand up back on his feet.

Munna was looking away, throwing pebbles into the stream down the terrace. After the long, initial silence, I asked him What was the problem, why had he stopped attending my calls, or coming to the ghaat, all of a sudden... when he cut into my sentence with “Salim is dead.”

While I was still trying to think how to react at this sudden blow from his side, he went on about the gang war that got Salim killed. After him, Munna was now the only earning member of the family.

I could only say, “All this happened, and you did not even inform me? Aren’t we friends anymore?”

He scoffed, and said, “Yes, We are Friends.”

Partially to change the topic, and partially because I needed to know, I said “I haven’t been able to find Arun either. Looks like he’s changed his house too.”

To my surprise, Munna replied “Painter saala! You like him, isn’t it? He must have gone to Australia, to re-unite with his ex-wife. He has a child also, there.”

And then looked away again.

After some more moments of uncomfortable silence, I decided to leave. My heart was heavy, with the realisation of the end of one of the most affectionate relationships of my life. I hugged Munna, asked him to call me up someday, to try and meet me, but I could have been talking to a wall. He was silent, expressionless, and far far away.

I sat in my car and left.

19.

As I sat wondering about the nature of human relationships, love, desire, friendship, affection, disillusionment, and trying to locate where I stood at the crossroads of all of them,
a knock on my car window broke my reverie. The car was standing at a traffic signal. And Munna was standing outside the window.

Smiling, I opened the window, and looked at him. With his characteristic smile, the one that was missing from his face when I’d met him earlier, he gave a crumpled piece of paper in my hand, as the signal turned green. By the time I could react at all, Munna had gone, the car had left him far far behind.

The piece of paper had an address written on it in pencil.

Arun,

52, Fatima Apartments,

Opposite Prabahodhaan.

During the rest of my journey, the piece of paper lied crumpled in my hands, as I felt tracks of warm water on my cheeks...

This was the end, then, was it?

Epilogue

Third Letter, Last part

“Imraan Bhai... This is my last letter.

I don’t know whether it’ll reach you, but could not go away without bidding you good bye, or at least thinking that I said good bye to you. I do not know what is left inside me, but whatever is there, still, it surely is the part of me that was preserved by the love of you, Abbu, and Ammi. May Allah give you all health and happiness, always. I pray to Him in all earnestness, to grant me the burden of any ill fate you might have in future, and deliver you from it. I’ll gladly bear all of it, and take it with me, where I intend to go.

Please don’t be angry with me, bhai... I’ve tried my best. Sometimes, life does not leave too many options for us to choose from. In that case, the strongest of us choose the hardest way, and keep going. You know me well, bhai... you were always the stronger out of the two of Us. It is very hard to keep going now. The pain is too much. And I am not strong like you, to be able to bear it all. All these months, I’ve given life my best shot. But now...
Try and explain to Mum and dad as well... Now you are their everything. Study well, become something in life, and make them proud. Do everything for them that I wanted to do, but never could, was never let to. But no matter what you do, be an honest man, always, and never break someone’s heart.

Bas, Bhai... Cannot... I’ll always be... there.

Appendix

Chawl – a name for a small rented living space, something like a cluster of huts. They are often 4 to 5 stories with about 10 to 20 tenements, referred to as kholis, which literally mean 'rooms' on each floor.

Tharra- Country liquor

Miyan- an address term, something like ‘mister’

Lathi- a big wooden stick

Khala- Aunt

Chotu- an affectionate name for someone young

Salman Khan- a film actor, very famous for his body, and body baring acts

Dhobi- Washer man

Ghat- the place where the washer men wash clothes.

Surma-daani- a case made of metal to keep handmade kohl

Bai- a domestic help who comes everyday to clean the house, cook food, wash clothes etc

Ganpati Visarjan utsav- the final day of Ganesh chaturthi, a festival of Lord Ganesha, on which the idol of the deity is immersed in the sea with a lot of fanfare.

Ramzaan- the holy month of abstinence in Islam

Iftaar- the time when the daily fast ends on each day of ramzaan
Bakreid- a Muslim festival, that happens after the end of Ramzaan

Bey- an insulting address, something like ‘hey’ said with a lot of rudeness.

Desiest- Most Indian possible

Samosa- an Indian snack

Badapav- Indian form of Burger

Nagpaada- A muslim populated locality in Mumbai, famous for its marginal businesses

Itar- handmade perfumes

Saala- Sister’s brother. Used as a slang word in this connotation, something akin to a bastard.

Bhai- Brother

Abbu- Affectionate term for father

Ammi- Affectionate term for mother

Allah- God

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