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Challenges in Adaptation: Interplay of Tradition and Innovation

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Editorial Note

MEJO (the MELOW Journal of World Literature) is a double-blind, peer-refereed e-journal brought out annually by MELOW, the Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World. It is a reincarnation of the previous publications brought out in a book or printed form by the Society since its inception in 1998.

MELOW is a leading academic organization of its kind in India. Its members include college and university teachers, scholars, and critics engaged in the study of literature, with particular emphasis on World Literature. The organization convenes at least once annually for its International Conference and also organizes a Mini MELOW Conference each year, thereby fostering sustained scholarly engagement. Committed to maintaining the highest academic standards, MELOW nurtures emerging scholars while providing an intellectually vibrant forum for all academics in the field of literary studies.

Papers presented at MELOW conferences are subjected to a rigorous process of peer review, selection, and editorial refinement by a specially constituted board of editors before publication. In its early years, the Society chose to publish selected proceedings in book form. Over the past decade, however, it has established the practice of bringing out an annual scholarly journal. In response to evolving academic priorities and the growing importance of digital dissemination, MELOW has transitioned to an online platform. This initiative has culminated in the launch of *MEJO*: The MELOW Journal of World Literature, which extends the Society's commitment to sustained and accessible scholarship in the field.

Following each conference, MELOW issues a Call for Papers on the designated theme across prominent academic platforms worldwide. Scholars and faculty from across the globe submit their work for consideration each year. The submitted papers undergo a rigorous peer-review process, and a panel of reviewers selects essays for publication from the revised submissions.

This is the tenth volume of *MEJO*, the MELOW Journal. This issue contains essays selected from the 2025 conference held at CUHP, Dharmshala, India and also invited essays on the main theme.

We at MELOW wish you happy reading!

About MELOW
MELOW (The Society for the Study of the Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the World) was first set up in 1998 as MELUS-India. It is an academic organisation among the foremost of its kind in India. The members are college and university teachers, scholars, and critics interested in literature, particularly world literature and literatures across borders of time and space. The organisation meets every year at an international conference. It seeks to maintain academic standards, encourages younger scholars, and provides a forum for senior scholars in literature.
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ISAAC SEQUEIRA MEMORIAL FUND

Professor Isaac Sequeira
(5 January 1930 – 7 September 2006)

Professor Isaac Sequeira from Hyderabad, who worked at Osmania University and was closely associated with the ASRC, Hyderabad, was a mentor and patron to several generations of academics in India. His sad demise in 2006 created a void hard to fill. We at MELOW wish to keep alive the memory of our patron and guiding light, who played a key role in all the activities of our organisation.

MELOW has created the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund, from which a special prize called the **ISM Award** is given for the best paper presented at our conferences (see the details below). *
There is also a **Special Invited Lecture** by a person of eminence funded by the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Fund. Several individuals have come forward to offer contributions towards the corpus and donated generously to the ISM fund.
Donations of Rs. 1,000 or more may be sent in cash/by draft/NEFT payable to MELOW at Chandigarh. For details, contact melusmelow@gmail.com

* The ISM AWARD

- In memory of Prof Isaac Sequeira, MELOW annually awards a prize for the best paper presented at its conference. The award comprises a certificate and a cash prize of Rs. 5,000.
- The competition is open to Indian citizens who are members of MELOW. The participant/delegate should be less than forty years of age at the time of the conference and follow the stipulated deadlines, and submit the abstract along with the complete paper before it is presented at the conference.
- The MELOW Executive appoints a panel of judges.
- If required, these rules may be amended by a simple majority of members present and voting at the conference.

Contents

1	**Keynote Address** **Dependence, Liberation, and Creativity: Reclaiming the Power of Adaptation** *Iffat Maqbool*	1
2	**Isaac Sequeira Memorial Lecture** **Adaptation and Translation: Reversing a Hierarchy** *Harish Trivedi*	14
3	**Across Rivers and Roots: Ethical and Ecological Worlds in the Writings of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Contemporary Indian Women Authors** *Trần Thị Vân Dung and Nayan Deep S. Kanwal*	28
4	**Hybridity, Carnivalism, and Commercialization: Trans-Cultural Adaptation of Traditional Myths in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*** *Yuhe Chen*	46
5	**Haiku After Adaptation: On the Fate of An Oriental Genre in the Western World** *Adela Kuik-Kalinowska*	57
6	**From Pages of Literature to the Frames of Comics: Examples of Edgar Allan Poe and George Orwell** *Daniel Kalinowski*	69
7	**The Mutuality of Adaptation in/of Percival Everett's Works** *Sanjay Mukherjee*	85
8	**Adaptation as Transformative Reimagining: Analysing Shiv Kumar Batalvi's *Luna*** *Harjinder Kaur*	96
9	**From Folktale to Franchise: Rapunzel in the Age of Adaptation** *Shefali*	110
10	**Between the Ancient and the Animated: Visual and Narrative Adaptation of Select Epic Characters of *The Mahabharata* in Grant Morrison's 18 Days** *Pratishtha Thakur*	119

11	"To Win is to Lose Everything and the Game Always Wins": The Politics of Fidelity in Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* and its Screen Adaptation *Bashabi Gogoi*	131
12	Re-inventing of Sita's Character through the Analyses of Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramyana* *Vinod K. Chopra*	148
13	Understanding Satyajit Ray's Filmic Approach to Ibsen: A Comparative Study of *Ganashatru* and *An Enemy of the People* *Sharif Atiquzzaman*	163
14	Politics of Adaptation and Consumerist Subversion in the Filmic Representation of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* *Richa*	169
15	*Requiem for a Nightmare*: A Comparison of Daron Aronofsky's Film with Hubert Selby Jr.'s Novel *Manthan Dhiman*	181
16	Against Forgetting: *Haider*, *Hamlet* and the Politics of Remembrance *Towfeeq Farooq and Khursheed Ahmad Qazi*	193
17	Divine Spectacle: The Cinematic Rebirth of Indian Epics *Monika Supahiya*	218
18	Exploring the Nuances of Neo-Noir: A Study of Graham Moore's *The Outfit* *Poorva Gulati and Shivani Larojya*	231
19	Epic Voices, Feminist Fires: Reimagining Sita and Draupadi Across Genres *Ayushi Khera*	238
20	Tracing the Transition of Vikram Seth's, *A Suitable Boy* from Text to OTT *Mandeep Kaur*	256
21	Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning and Alteration of Narratives: An Analysis of *The Hate U Give* *Shreya Bhatia*	266

22	Palimpsests of Green Gables: Intertextuality, Identity, and Ideology in *Anne with an E* *Sunaina Jain*	277
23	*Othello* to *Omkara*: Caste, Social and Political Hierarchy in Vishal Bhardwaj's Adaptation of Shakespeare *Puja Majhi*	291
24	The Sacred and Its Adaptation: Negotiating Folklore and Scriptural Authority *Asmita Sharma*	306
25	Mannequins on the Stage: Contemporary Theatrical Adaptations as a Socio-Cultural Discourse on Gender Fluidity *Angadbir Singh Kakkar*	319
26	Feminist and Political Erasure: *The House of the Spirits* Novel vs. Film *Aastha Choudhary*	335
27	Plurilingualism and the Problem of Translation/Adaptation: A Study of Select Sufi/Bhakti Poems in Bangla/Hindi Translation *Azhar Uddin Sahaji*	342
28	**Visual Hermeneutics as Adaptation: Translating Sufi Mysticism Through The Aesthetics of Presence** *Badrunissa Bhat*	357
29	**Tracing the Echoes of Partition through Brushstrokes, Panels and Cinematic Lenses** *Kusum Bhatia*	381
30	**Adding Nuances of Postcolonial Arguments to Shakespeare – A Study of Selected Novels under Hogarth *Shakespeare Series*** *Bhakti Vaishnav*	394
31	Poetry as 'Passage': Symbolic Adaptation and Cultural Memory in the Poetry of Meena Alexander *Smita Ajgaonkar Nayak*	406
32	Journey of *The Blue Umbrella* from Text to Screen: Signposts Missed, Milestones Achieved *Navdeep Kahol*	430

Keynote Address
Dependence, Liberation and Creativity: Reimagining the Power of Adaptation

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The Adaptation Question

I want to begin by examining the question of adaptation not in the strict sense of a relation between a prior text and a secondary text but with the deeper question of adaptation and its interrelationship with authorship and originality. The concept of 'originality' is a perplexing academic debate with proponents and detractors forcefully claiming either legitimacy or the impossibility of the idea. While this is not a key concern of this paper, it might provide a useful framework for understanding the practice of adaptation as we understand it today.

Tied up with the question of originality is authorship and modern debates destabilize the idea of the author as a fixed, sovereign creator of the text and posit authorship as an indeterminate and fluid category. Rejecting the individual-as-origin of the text, theorists like Harold Bloom, T S Eliot, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault have questioned the centrality of the author by positing oppositional formulations. So, we have an Oedipal struggle with the parent author, an allegiance to tradition, the idea of relationality of texts, and of course as some kind of definitive blow, the death of the author. What these postulations also share is the foregrounding of language and its primacy in creating literary texts, a kind of emptying out of any subjective element in the authorial personality. It is language that speaks, and writing is the circulation of language itself. One important implication of declaring the author as dispensable is the corresponding entry of the reader into the creation of textual meaning. We are reminded that readers, instead of being passive receivers of texts are conscious agents of interpretation, textual meaning is dynamic, temporal and transactional rather than static and spatial.

However enticing the postulation of a depersonalized author may sound, there will always be scope for the individual dimension, what Jonathan Bates identified as 'the irreducible subjective

core." Despite being already constructed and created by linguistic and ideological structures and metamorphosing into a scriptor, a subject, the author can be claimed as a living and breathing entity, and one can here posit the idea of human singularity. In literary theory, human singularity is the unique, unrepeatable quality of a literary work, and its simultaneous participation in generic codes and norms. The reader's encounter with the singularity of the work is a recognition of the otherness that compels a change in his or her frameworks of understanding and feeling, every reading therefore is singular in that the reader and context of reading will always be different. Derek Attridge in *The Singularity of Literature* points to a literary text as an event and much like Barthes, stresses that literature involves the text and its reader in a complicated and creative cultural, historical and temporal relating. Basing his argument on the ideas of invention, alterity and singularity, he establishes how this trinity lies at the heart of art as a practice and as an institution.

Determining exactly how unique something should be to be considered "original" is a concept that can be wrestled with incessantly. However, modern scholarship has also demonstrated that borrowing and originality can be compatible. If literature is a matrix built on a networking of many factors like cultural memory, linguistic structures, universal archetypes, borrowing is not only universal but inevitable. And therefore, there is no right or specific way to determine how much borrowing constitutes a dearth of originality.

In contemporary times, with the inevitable decrease of the realm of traditional originality, the idea of what it means to be an author has changed considerably. John Barth's influential essay on narrative fiction, "The Literature of Exhaustion" drew attention to the proliferation of literary forms and conventions resulting in a state of saturation or used up-ness of literary forms (Barth, *Literature of Exhaustion*.) In a companion essay "Literature of Replenishment" he offers a counter, by arguing that through a process of synthesis and transformation, "Artistic conventions . . . [can be] deployed against themselves to generate new and lively work" (Barth, *Literature of Replenishment*.) One can perhaps conclude that in artistic production, exhaustion and replenishment are complementary rather than oppositional categories. In today's digitally controlled culture, where endless repetitions,

remakes, sequels, mashups and remixes are far more dominant than the 'original', the idea of originality and authorship gets increasingly complicated and challenging.

Adaptation Studies: Shift from Fidelity

After this brief prelude about the slippery terrain of authorship and originality, I now come to the theme of the seminar which is adaptation. There are two broad ways of approaching the term— one, that adaptation is as old as literary production (the idea that stories beget stories or texts beget texts) and the second is our current understanding of adaptation as an overt attempt at re-working or retelling a source text and transferring it via another medium and thereby creating a new or target text. As a cultural practice, adaptation signals a dialogue and movement between texts and has immense potential for expanding the debates around intertextuality, authorship, originality and canon-making. Adaptation is also a context-dependent process which draws its meaning from the readings (and / or viewings) offered or enabled in a given socio-temporal and cultural context.

As an academic discipline, Adaptation Studies is highly multidisciplinary and traverses literature, film studies, and digital media. Characterized by a dynamic and ever evolving aesthetic paradigm, it is one of the most hard-to-describe theoretical fields. However, one can identify points of origin, development and evolution. Once fixated on the literature vs film equation, adaptation studies have diversified and produced a rigorous body of scholarship and given the staggering diversity of adaptation today, especially in the post-digital era, a standardized idea of adaptation is not only impossible but undesirable.

The point worth making is that it is precisely because adaptation will never be bound by a single standard since the impulse and aim of adaptation will always vary that adaptation studies continue to throw up heterogenous models even as we speak. Another important implication for the scope of adaptation studies is its immense cross genre focus, making it particularly relevant in today's cultural climate of media convergence or the media continuum.

The earliest attempts at adaptation in a cross-genre sense are from literature into film and it is primarily these two aesthetic categories that have formed the staple of adaptation studies in the early

decades of the 20th century. Identified as the prehistory of adaptation studies, this phase is indecisive and inconclusive for its generalized observations about fiction and film rather than a focus on adaptation per se. As a clue, we can go to Virginia Woolf's 1927 short but revealing essay "The Cinema" which she wrote as a response to a screening of a silent German expressionistic horror film (Woolf). Writing from the standpoint of a virtuoso modernist, Woolf is trying to come to terms with this new artistic medium, is receptive to the psychic undercurrents that the visual medium can represent, and its then-current limitations such as an over-reliance on literary material: "The alliance is unnatural," declares Woolf about the adaptation of novels into movies. "Eye and brain are torn asunder ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples. The eye says, "Here is Anna Karenina." A voluptuous lady in black velvet wearing pearls comes before us. But the brain says, 'That is no more Anna Karenina than it is Queen Victoria" (Woolf). She complains "that moviemakers, instead of relying on the inherent properties of cinema, harness the making of images to storytelling by way of literature," presumably failing to understand that "the cinema's distinctive power involves creating a new kind of visual experience" (Woolf). Woolf's own fiction is highly cinematic and would later be transformed into very successful film adaptations but here the essay provides an entry point into the nascent phase of adaptation. With time, a rigorous disciplinary road map begins to appear.

The early phase of adaptation studies is characterized by its dependence on the novel-film equation and what is famously called the fidelity factor. While the burden of fidelity still haunts many approaches to adaptation, it is now viewed as a futile approach and vehemently rejected as the sole condition of a successful adaptation. However, its persistence still hovers, and fidelity has also been called the 'undead spirit' in adaptation studies

The preoccupation with literature and film continues in what Thomas Leitch calls the 1.0 phase of adaptation studies, although the methodological and disciplinary boundaries also begin to emerge around this time. A foundational work is George Bluestone's *Novels into Film* (1957) which addresses the question of adaptation by referring to the 'mysterious alchemy' by which books become films and goes on to establish the two as distinct aesthetic genres although the work has been critiqued

for its shortsightedness regarding the potential of cinema. He points out: “Changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium.” Perhaps the first theorist to bring to light the notion of medium specificity, Bluestone takes away attention not only from fidelity but is in line with Linda Hutcheon’s classic work *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006, 2012) which makes a case for understanding adaptation not as product but as process. Brian McFarlane’s *Novel to Film* (1996) similarly deplores the fidelity approach by arguing: “The insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of adaptation, it tends to ignore the idea of adaptation as an example of convergence among the arts, and it marginalizes those production determinants which have nothing to do with the novel but may be powerfully influential in film.” The work provides rich insights into adaptation but like Bluestone’s is heavily reliant on film and text and follows the case study model by examining film adaptations of some major Euro-American novels.

By the 1990s the field has expanded exponentially. However, it is with Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* that the turn from fidelity and adaptation’s moment of legitimacy arrives. Hutcheon provided a redirection for adaptation studies and subsequent theorists have particularly relied upon and expanded on her formulation of adaptation not as product but as process. Hutcheon rejects fidelity criticism and its obsession with fidelity and alludes to an inbuilt hierarchy between text and film as stemming from ‘iconophobia’ and ‘logophilia’ (Hutcheon 18). Interestingly, this binary between a primacy accorded to the written word or literature and aversion to the visual has been reversed in contemporary culture where it is the visual that has now completely overtaken the written. One could well argue that quick adaptation has become the default practice of our culture where the interface between different screens, the instant transfer of ‘content’ between gadgets has added impetus to the act of adaptation.

Going back to fidelity, the fidelity factor is based on the premise of a hierarchical recognition of literature as a primary and somewhat superior form where the sole purpose of an adapted text is to conform to the ‘original ’and any blatant departure or deviance is viewed as ‘tampering,’

‘interference,’ ‘violation,’ even ‘desecration’. This points to two things: one a presumed hierarchy between distinct mediums which need to be examined on their own aesthetic terms and not by recourse to conflating the demands of both. Second, that adaptations should only work backwards- and be always subservient to some imagined obligation to a prior text. While a default relationship always exists with the original work, Adaptation Studies has benefitted greatly from looking ahead. In more academic terms, these are identified as the archival and teleological approach. Conventionally, adaptation had most often been theorized in archival terms: that is-adaptations were defined primarily with reference to their source texts as if the adaption had a responsibility towards the source text-one of them being to recreate the ‘spirit’ or ‘essence’ of the original text. On further scrutiny, the essence or spirit of a work is seen as a highly subjective and often partisan approach to a text. It sees the text as a closed entity frozen in time and space whereas as was argued in the beginning of this paper, there is endless potential for re-interpretation and re-configuration. Modern readings for example have been more alert to racism, misogyny, sexism and other ideological biases in source texts. What has fortunately gained momentum is the teleological approach- a looking forward which is more descriptive and analytical, free from any anxiety or judgement. This descriptive model has opened the field immensely as it poses questions directly related to the demands of the adaptive process- the fascinating exchange of media, the creation of new and even novel texts, in other words the approach that views the source-target relationship as dialectical rather than one of dependence. What fidelity criticism missed is that the transference of a story from one medium to another involves a creative rewriting of the codes of one medium into a completely different one. The idea of medium specificity which dominated adaptation studies for long needs to be examined in some detail.

One of the most evident gaps in fidelity criticism is the lack of attention to medium specificity. Adaptation involves not replication but transference from one genre or medium to another and since each art form has its own communicational strategies and aesthetic demands, adaptation involves a cross-genre enrichment that goes beyond the pursuit of fidelity. Therefore, adaptations can not only

transform but perhaps even amplify the meaning and scope of a source text. And this is nowhere exemplified better than in film and theatre and musical adaptations of literary texts not to speak of graphic and digital narratives. Because the book gets transferred into a film or a play or even a comic or graphic text, there are new and compelling ways in which the primary text is reimagined.

One recalls many powerful adaptations that have not only 'brought to life' but enhanced the source text. Cinematization, unlike literature, is a multitrack medium and has various expressive modes. Particularly, sound, image and performance all blend into a narrative that can at times 'better' the original. One can recall powerhouse performances that have reimagined and resurrected our favourite literary characters. Hamlet has been played by as diverse a range of actors as Sohrab Modi, Laurence Olivier, Mel Gibson and Shahid Kapoor and each actor plays Hamlet in the same-yet-different manner, as if there is an ongoing interplay between various Hamlets - enriching and transforming the prototype along the way. An Ajay Devgan re-enacting an Othello infuses a rural Indian avatar thereby multiplying the trajectory of the Shakespearean hero (Bhardwaj, *Omkara*). The music of both *Haider* and *Omkara* by Vishal Bhardwaj attests to the amplifying nature of an adaptation - whether it is the opening song of *Omkara* with its ominous overtones of "*sabse baday ladayya rai Omkara*" or the chilling lyricism of the same song "*Jab parnalun say khoon bahay*". The song functions not only as a parallel to the introduction of Othello in Act 1 but is a peculiar, culturally located and creative intervention in the reimagining of Othello's power and vulnerability (Bhardwaj, *Omkara*). In the same film, the song "*naina thag lengey*" becomes a musical representation of the theme of visual mistrust that surrounds the Shakespearean tragedy. Similarly, the Bismil song in *Haider* is both a counterpart to 'the play within a play' and a spectacular Bollywood style dance and song intervention that is beautifully choreographed to enact the theme of betrayal (Bhardwaj, *Omkara*).

Going back to the phases of adaptation studies, it is in adaptation studies 2.0 wherein the intertextual approach is adopted by becoming attentive to all forms of adaptation. The novel-film equation is now not the sole domain of adaptation studies and popular culture is equally used in

addition to the literary canon, adaptations can now include transformations from not only text to film but film to text called novelization, film to comic book, comic book to film and even video games.

In *Adaptation Revisited- Television and the Classic Novel* Sarah Caudwell incorporated TV adaptations of canonical novels which lead to further expansion of the canon of adaptation. Kamilla Elliot in *Revisiting the Novel / Film Debate* is skeptical about the absolute demarcation between film and literature. Instead of media specific dualities or binaries, she posited a reciprocal or analogous model in which both adapted and adapting texts were already deeply implicated in signifying systems and therefore did not run counter to each other but converged on many points. As we all know, a film is always already a script, cinema possesses literary qualities and literature can be cinematic. Robert Stam in *Literature through Film* and *A Companion to Literature and Film* reoriented Adaptation Studies by establishing adaptation as an intertextual impulse that is at the heart of every text that springs from and in turn generates other texts. Drawing on Gerard Genette, Julia Kristeva, etc., Stam proposes adaptation be viewed as intertextual dialogism and foregrounds Genet's terminology especially the coinages, hypo text and the hypertext. So, a hypo text is a base text from which a series of hypertexts emerge, and because the dynamic is non-linear, the scope for hypertexts is limitless. Stam also stresses on adaptation as a form of translation whereby a model of inter-semiotic transposition becomes possible.

Purposive Adaptation

Adaptations also need to be viewed as purposive, which is referred to as 'transformative reimagining'. No text is ever created out of a cultural vacuum and is always susceptible to ideological scrutiny– adaptation has productively contested dominant discourses providing alternative viewpoints and it is here that adaptation has proved immensely beneficial in examining the canon and the unilateral flow and reception of ideas. One can recall powerful adaptations of English canonical texts that foreground a previously mute or marginal perspective—*Robinson Crusoe*, *Tempest,* and *Jane Eyre*, have been rewritten to unveil the politics of race and gender hierarchies implicit but not acknowledged in the

original text. The term transformative therefore points towards the act of alteration that creates unlimited potentialities.

Transformative reimagining retroactively impacts the foundations of their source texts; and in doing so, they unsettle the literary canon, which as we all know is far from neutral or apolitical. By opening the canon to interrogation, these adaptations inject new dialogical life into known narratives. Adaptations from non-western cultures and the global south have proved remarkably successful in producing a counter-canon to the western literary canon which is being increasingly viewed as incompatible with the needs of the present world. Since a transformative reimagining critically evaluates its source text(s), analyzing and problematizing its tropes and authority by writing them anew, it becomes an act of literary criticism itself. Adaptation-as-process (and therefore writing-as-process and reading-as-process) interrogates stereotypes and problematizes norms in source texts and encourages readers to engage in a similar process. Discovering new possibilities for a known narrative allows readers to reconceptualize and destabilize their own notions of individual truth. For example, reading a fairy tale adaptation with a colored protagonist, watching a woman superhero save the world, has immense potential for reader empowerment. As an instance of the fraught ideological complexities of postcolonial adaptations, Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* both undercuts Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and plays with the trope of the exotic moor as depicted in *Othello* (Salih 45). Tayeb Salih's assertion "Othello there is no Othello, Othello is a lie" is a rejection of Othello's tragic nobility and an instance of disidentification, colonial critique and authentic self-fashioning (Salih 46).

While canon expansion is certainly an outcome of purposive adaptation, studies also point out that adaptation, particularly of canonical English writers like Austen and Dickens (serializations etc.) has ensured that they enjoy a permanent afterlife in literary culture. Arguing that adaptations tacitly bestow longevity and canonicity to select works, this approach posits that since certain texts get regularly adapted and appropriated their staying power or cultural longevity gets solidified via adaptation (Barth, *The Literature of Replenishment*).

Moving on to some examples of adaptations, let me begin with the English canon. In adaptation studies the Shakespearean canon has perhaps the longest afterlife as his work has been adapted from nearly every possible corner of the world making him our greatest contemporary.

How does one view a Shakespearean adaptation? Taking a reverential, essentialist view of the universal genius of Shakespeare would have meagre significance in the adaptation process and would insist on his position as the fixed unshakeable voice of a single culture. However, things are not that simple - Shakespeare was a master at adaptation and most of his plays are based on earlier sources (Barth, *The Literature of Replenishment*). Taking a cue from this, the Shakespearean text - already an intertext, adapted into something new and far removed from the source, is then just a first in a series of adaptations which adaptation studies today calls the hypertext continuum. Rather than view the modern adaptations of Shakespearean through the prism of error and infidelity, any Shakespearean adaptation is an act of what adaptation studies calls creative infidelity, the hermeneutic motion present in adaptation by opening up a prior, classic text and transforming it into a contemporary narrative these adaptations are reflective of their authors and times more than Shakespeare (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*). Because Shakespeare has been appropriated, adapted in India more than in any other non-western culture, it is worthwhile to briefly talk about the Indianization of Shakespeare, which begins in the colonial era and has continued well into the present. From theatre to folk performances to mainstream Bollywood cinema, vernacular and regional transmutations, Shakespeare has undergone a range of cultural and temporal relocations. The implications are many: indigenization, transculturation, and revisioning. The desi Shakespeare offers a feast of adaptations, ranging from the faithful to the more radical. Vishal Bharadwaj's film adaptations have rightly earned critical acclaim for their dexterous use of Shakespeare to present a localized tale as well as run counter to the original to further his individual artistic vision. Similarly, other canonical English writers have been reopened, now with a critical eye to redress the colonial equation and ideological premises of English cultural complacency. Tanika Gupta has been successful in transcultural adaptations or what has been termed

cultural boomeranging whereby her alterations of Dickens and Ibsen have immense political value as interventionist theatre.

Adaptation as a "cultural practice" in Today's Digital Culture

Going along with Thomas Leitch's chronology, we are going through phase 3.0 or even post 3.0 phase of adaptation studies. The major redirection in this phase is of course towards an embrace of digital culture, which offers what is called read / write literacy as opposed to read / only literacy of print culture (Leitch, *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*). There is incessant global movement and transfer of texts leading to a new kind of digital creativity. Also, digital media allows audience immersion thereby pointing to a new-found agential role for the erstwhile reader /audience (Leitch; Jenkins). One of the reasons why adaptation studies needs special attention is because we are surrounded by new and at times whacky forms of adaptation and our scroll time attests to this, remakes of songs, remakes of remakes, tik tok, memes etc. Blurring the boundaries between audience and creator, this new media landscape has newer implications for the state of adaptation studies (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation)*.

Situated in this state of media convergence or media continuum, adaptation studies today is comfortably placed within the fluid boundaries of culture studies. Here, it is viewed as a cultural practice that embraces pluralism, is inclusivist, transgresses media and cultural hierarchies, is willfully cross-cultural, more web-like than straightforwardly linear in its creative dynamic. A kind of present-day practice totally attentive to new interchanges and shifting models of adaptation (Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*). However, conversely, the instant and ephemeral nature of today's digital adaptations can prove counterproductive, making adaptation studies a catch-all phrase to include everything. It is here that one can posit the role of media literacy which promotes discernment and critique of the flood of content that assails us minute by minute. Similarly, as far as the pedagogy of adaptation studies is concerned, there are innumerable challenges. How can adaptation studies be effective at a time when we speak of a crisis in the Humanities, a crisis bordering on apathy and dysfunctional imaginations? The humanities student no longer reads, let alone grapple with a text,

Cinema-if at all it grips their attention, is entertainment. How can we restore critical acumen? In today's classroom, and I speak from experience, reading texts and corelating them with films is frustrating. In such an impasse, one can only speculate about the efficacy of teaching adaptation studies. Or can a remix, a tik-tok, or a mash up give us an entry point into teaching adaptation effectively to today's generation. Can adaptation atudies revive both forgotten pursuits - reading and film? I leave that open for all of us to ponder.

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The Isaac Sequeira Memorial Lecture
Adaptation and Translation: Reversing a Hierarchy

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I do not know if I deserve the honour you have done for me by inviting me to deliver the Isaac Sequeira Memorial Lecture this year, but now that I am here it may be in my best interest not to express such doubts. In fact, after the elaborate, flattering, fulsome and therefore immensely gratifying – introduction that I have been given by the Chair of this session, Professor Unni Krishnan, I may be forgiven for feeling that a memorial lecture has already been delivered – for me! This feeling is not mitigated but only enhanced by my recalling, and now publicly disclosing, the fact that Professor Krishnan is an old student of mine. May all of us teachers have such worthy and appreciative students.

Isaac Sequiera, the Multiethnic, and the American Moment

Professor Isaac Sequeira (1930-2006) was, to invent a phrase, a legend in his own lifetime while remaining fully and affably grounded and therefore immensely popular. I met him only a few times but he was the kind of person who, once met, is never forgotten. He lived in Hyderabad; I lived in Delhi. Our paths crossed only occasionally, for he visited Delhi seldom and I went to Hyderabad only infrequently, so it was wholly to his credit that we promptly got on first-name terms. Over the last week or two, I have spoken about Isaac with some common friends who knew him well for they had lived and worked with him in Hyderabad, notably Professors Mohan Ramanan, Sukhbir Singh, Sachidanand Mohanty and Sumanyu Satpathy. And if there is one striking thing about Isaac, it is that even now, nobody mentions his name without warmth suffusing their memories and their hearts. While I regret not having known him better, I feel fortunate to have known him at all.

He was, among other things, one of the pioneers of the study of Popular Culture in India. In those pre-postcolonial days, the Popular Culture that we could study as an academic subject came to us from abroad; *their* Popular Culture was *our* Popular Culture. Similarly, when British Popular Culture

entered the scene, it arrived through writers such as Agatha Christie — who was as unfamiliar and as "foreign" to many of us as Shakespeare. The contradictions of the "popular" in Anglophone circles in India are many, and one of the first scholars to negotiate these complexities with home-grown assurance was Isaac.

In fact, his abiding reputation in this regard rests on his equal mastery of American and Indian popular cultures, which was something he displayed constantly in his teaching and writings. What many remember with the greatest affection about Isaac is the delightful way he demonstrated the influence of Hollywood music on Bollywood songs. He would first sing a Hollywood number, and then the Bollywood song that had borrowed — or stolen — its tune, and as he sang, he would sway gently to both. Sometimes, when he didn't feel like singing, he would simply whistle. Have you ever known a professor — of English, Hindi, Telugu, anything — who whistles in class? Try it yourself and you may be thrown out. But Isaac carried it off naturally, with great aplomb. Apart from American Popular Culture, Isaac had a deep love for the local cultural forms which were popular in Hyderabad, and would regularly go to *mushairas* and *qawaali* performances in the city. He could sing those verse forms too equally well, and would relish the local equally with the global.

There was another important aspect to Isaac's achievement: his foundational association with American Literature and with MELUS/MELOW. Subsequently, Professor Manju Jaidka has stepped forward to do sterling work in running MELUS and then MELOW all these years. This is the 26th annual conference now — what an achievement! Everyone who has attended these conferences knows how much she personally contributes, how she leads from the front and inspires her team. I have helped run a couple of associations myself over two decades (including the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies and the Comparative Literature Association of India) so I know and can fully appreciate the labour and the human skills involved in sustaining such conferences year after year.

This association began as the study of Multi-ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS) and has grown into the study of Multi-ethnic Literatures of the World (MELOW). In the expanded

agenda read out today by the Vice-Chancellor in his inaugural speech (from a script most probably provided by Manju!), "multiethnic" can become meaningful only when it is also multicultural, and it is of course not fully multicultural until it is multilingual. Isaac was a living example of this. His ancestors were Saraswat Brahmins from the Konkan region in Goa who converted under Portuguese rule, and Isaac thus grew up as a Roman Catholic. Later, when he was a boy, his family moved to Hyderabad, and Isaac imbibed Hyderabadi culture as if he had been born into it. If there was a person who embodied the "multi-ethnic" in the full, liberal sense of the term, it was Isaac Sequeira. It is only apt thus that this association honours him through this annual lecture.

Let me conclude this remembrance and tribute by sharing with you a poem written for Isaac by his admirer and friend Professor Mohan Ramanan who was a younger colleague of his in Hyderabad. Few people have poems written *to* them — and fewer still by accomplished poets.

For Isaac Sequeira

I knew you Isaac

Through the confessional--

No, not the chaplain's privileged box,

But with the articulated angst of Sylvia and Robert and John:

And I longed to hijack you, Isaac,

To have you all to myself alone --

But you are the King of the Carnivalesque --

You are the people who demand your attention –

You become them;

Thank you Isaac for your Johnsonian

Clubbish love.

For being there when we needed you, your unignorable presence.

A presence which was a fullness of Being;

Can we ever forget the baritone of your voice,

Your cheery laughter, your affectionate wink,

And nudge—

Your wit and your witnessing of wit?

You will always remain our own –

Our Bhishma, our Pitamaha.

The only begetter of all of us in love with America,

And the idea of America.

This poem was written many decades ago, of course. Our intellectual and cultural romance with "the idea of America," and our being "in love with" America and their "confessional" poets who were once in vogue and are familiarly named in this poem by first names (identifiable as Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell and John Berryman), marked a historical phase in our intellectual life that lasted broadly from the mid-1960s to the end of the 1980s. That was a period when we fed on shiploads after shiploads of wheat imported from America against payment in rupees, and out of that Rupee Mountain the Americans built and set up what was probably the best facility for American studies outside America, the American Studies Research Center (ASRC) in Hyderabad -- which then they summarily wound up not long after the USSR disintegrated in 1989 and the Cold War came to an end. That American Indian Summer, so to call it, has long passed, but it represents a significant moment in the evolution of English Studies in India, and Isaac exemplified that moment as aptly as any other professor of English in India.

Adaptation vs Translation

And now to the theme of my lecture, which is centred round two related propositions and arguments. The first of these is that in my understanding, Adaptation (and let me capitalize the terms for the sake of clarity) is not the younger, footloose, disreputable sister of Translation, which in contrast is seen as being faithful, virtuous, and so close to the original as to be its double. Rather, I argue that in terms of lineage and chronology, free-spirited Adaptation, with all the "liberties" it takes, is the elder sister

of the prim, proper, and often sterile practice of Translation. Here, a key question worth asking is: *When is a good translation not an adaptation?*

My second proposition is that from a broad survey of world literary cultures from antiquity to now, it becomes clear that classicism, imitation, retelling, and Adaptation have traditionally been valued higher than originality and uniqueness in a literary text and their "faithful" rendition through strict Translation. In this long view, originality in fact is a late entrant and a largely romantic obsession. Before the Romantics, hardly any English poet wanted to be "original." Dr. Johnson proudly declared that his major poem, "The Vanity of Human Wishes," was modelled on a Latin poem. This was for him not an embarrassment but a mark of poetic skill, virtuosity and maturity. The notion of originality began with the Romantics, and it remains an elusive and even impossible romantic concept. Anyone who claims originality is, to that extent, not in touch with reality and tradition.

Let me now move on to substantiate these propositions by offering illustrations from a wide range of literary works. The *Naadiya Sukta* in the *RigVeda* is the oldest and the finest Creation hymn that I know. It begins by saying that in the beginning there was neither non-existence nor existence. Perhaps the dark lay enveloped in the dark, and even the gods may not know what came first for they themselves were created only later. Possibly, then, there is someone up there watching it all who knows – and possibly even he does not know! This hymn thus speculates, with befitting humility, on the impossibility of knowing how the world began and what its origins were. If we are to speak of an "Indian Knowledge System," as we now often seem obliged to do, let us begin here, with this poetic utterance of sublime speculation and the profound admission that knowledge cannot trace its own origins.

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* — our earliest literary texts — also deny the idea of origins. Valmiki is often called the *Adikavi*, the first poet, but he is clearly not the first narrator of the Ramayana story. His own text shows that the story he goes on to narrate was already widely known and recited, and for Valmiki's creative convenience, an executive summary of it (so to say) is recited

to him right at the beginning of his *Ramayana* by the sage Narada. Similarly, the author of the *Mahābhārata* is known as "Vyāsa," which literally means "compiler." This inordinately long and lose-limbed epic grew over centuries, negating the very idea of a single, original text.

Across India, the great Ramayanas in Tamil, Hindi, Bengali, Assamese and other languages all openly acknowledge their debt to Valmiki before striking out in new adaptive directions. Kamban's humility — "Valmiki is milk; I am only a cat lapping it up" — is charming and at the same time a declaration of creative freedom.

The opening verses in Tulsi Das's Hindi *Ramayana* are even humbler and more widely intertextual. He acknowledges a whole range of sources -- the Puranas, the various Agamas and the Nigamas, the *Ramayana* by Valmiki, and then he slips in modestly the admission that he has taken "something also from elsewhere" — *kvachidanyatopi* –this "something" being his own creative and adaptive genius. None of these many Ramayanas has in our literary tradition ever been regarded as a mere translation; they are all treated as original texts and even independent scriptures in their own right. Incidentally, the Thai Ramayana, titled the *Ramakien*, is regarded as a national epic, even though the country is largely Buddhist. So much for the idea of a single and unique Original.

In Sanskrit poetics too, the idea of literary originality is firmly put in its place. There are two kinds of stories, we are told: those that a particular writer invents, which are called *katha*, and those that are already known and prevalent and which a writer re-tells, which are called *aakhayika.* It is the latter which involve a truer test of a writer's inventiveness and creativity – or, if you like, his "originality" -- for his task here is to make the familiar new.

Abroad too, until about 200 years ago, i.e. the advent of Romanticism, no one had any use for claiming to be original rather than adaptive, as seen above in the case of Dr Johnson. In her highly erudite and enlightening keynote lecture here this morning from which we have all benefitted, Professor Iffat Maqbool noted, among other things, how Shakespeare seldom invented any new plots but picked them up from either Roman and British history and legend or from preceding writers.

When I taught Shakespeare for many years, I often invited the students to compare the plots that Shakespeare borrowed or stole as they were with the far richer versions that he transformed them into in his own plays, for therein lay his supreme genius. My favourite example here was the Spanish writer Matteo Bandello who died two years before Shakespeare was born and who provided Shakespeare with the plots of as many as four of his plays. And Bandello's highly popular digest of 214 stories and novellas was, in turn, not his original work either but a compilation and adaptation of the various literary and oral sources that he had collected. The search for a pristine Original is an ever-receding horizon while Adaptation is the very ground beneath our feet.

Modes of Adaptation: Imitation and Incommensurability

Adaptation as a form of secondary creation is radically different from Translation, for it manifests itself in many forms that are anathema to the stricter practice of Translation. To "imitate" a classic author or text used to be a widespread and notably flexible practice, as seen in the case of numerous English poets of the Neo-Classical Age. Dr Johnson, mentioned above, had "imitated" Juvenal, Alexander Pope and the Earl of Rochester imitated Horace, and the shape-shifting Ovid was widely imitated too by poets who in turn shifted the original Ovidian shapes. What imitation meant in nearly all such cases was that the English poets took over broadly the form and the tone of the Latin texts, but packed the content with topical British references to update and contemporize their own works. The bottle was old but the wine new.

In India, naturally enough, imitation worked very differently. Because of the lack of the printing press and definitively determined poetic corpuses, and the lack equally of the characteristically Western affirmation of each author's individuality, admirers and followers of poets like Kabir Das and Sur Das felt free to add poems of their own composition to those composed by their favourite poets, not as egotistical fakery but as humble submissions. In the verses that they so added, they did not omit to include the authenticating signature phrase "Kahat Kabir…" (Kabir says…) or "Surdas kahi…" (Surdas says…), to make their imitation credible and complete.

Modern editors and translators of the works of these poets feel obliged first to decide how many of the Kabir couplets which ostensibly bear his signature are really his, and the number varies from about 400 to 800. In the case of Surdas, the figures range from about 250 to about 900. An Indian scholar, Purushottam Agarwal, speaks of an "upa-Kabir" (a sub-Kabir or deputy Kabir), and a Western scholar, John Stratton Hawley, speaks of a "Sur Tradition." In all such cases, it was an admirer of Kabir or Surdas deferentially imitating the poet he admired and merging his ego and creative self seamlessly and tracelessly into his admired poet's.

To return to English poetry in this audience almost wholly comprising teachers of English literature, one may look at a vital example of a work intended to be a translation which was dismissed on good authority, however, as a poor imitation. This was Alexander Pope's translation of Homer, which proved immensely popular and sold very well among the newly emergent reading public who revered Homer on hearsay but did not know Greek. Emboldened by their acclaim, Pope had the temerity to ask one of the greatest classical scholars of his times, Dr Richard Bentely, who was Master of the Trinity College in Cambridge, how he liked the translation, only to receive the crushing reply: "It is a very pretty poem, Mr Pope, but you mustn't call it Homer!" The moral to be drawn from this admonitory tale is that what is accepted by many monolingual readers as an excellent translation may still, by a bilingual expert's standards, be merely a divergent adaptation. To be regarded as an adaptation is perhaps the ultimate fate of all would-be translations.

To illustrate the cultural incommensurabilities inherent in the act of translation, we may wish to look at a couple of works from the Indian languages recently translated into English to great international acclaim, through each being awarded the International Booker Prize, given for a work of fiction translated into English. The difficulties in translation begin in each of these cases with the very titles. The Hindi title of the novel by Geetanjali Shri, *Ret Samadhi*, has been translated as *Tomb of Sand*, which is perhaps even more evocative than the original title, except that it may evoke associations which are perhaps more relevant to English usage than to the work being translated.

Thus, *Tomb of Sand* may put some readers in mind of a castle of sand, which is child's play and no sooner made than destroyed. It may also remind some rather more literary readers of Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," which too is about sand being all that remains after the mightiest of buildings have crumbled over time. As if to acknowledge the difficulty of her task, the translator Daisy Rockwell has prefaced her translation with three dictionary definitions in English of the word "*samadhi,*" the first two of which do not mention the word "tomb" at all and thus do not help her cause. One may mirror this paratextual device by looking in turn at the dictionary meanings of the word "tomb." Most of these do not mention "*samadhi*", but all of these offer the words "qabr" and "maqbara" -- which are widely inappropriate in the cultural context of this novel.

Heart Lamp, Banu Mushtaq's collection of short stories which won the International Booker, similarly seems to cling close to the Kannada title of this work, *Edeya Hanate*, and similarly seems to disregard two factors: one, that *Heart Lamp* sounds odd and unidiomatic in English, because unlike in the accepted formations in English like "safety lamp" or "oil lamp" or "table lamp," *Heart Lamp* seeks to be metaphorical and not just a physical description.

Such compound words as used in this translation by Deepa Bhasthi are common enough in the Indian languages, where the title would readily signify a heart which burns like a lamp. By sticking close to such a local collocation, Bhasthi's literal rendering here paradoxically seems to function as an adaptation for the English reader. Similar is the case with a phrase that occurs later in this book: "Her heart fell." This seems literally faithful, but for the reader of this book abroad, this will have to be aligned with an already prevalent phrase such as "her face fell" to make any sense (We may recall that translations of foreign works can qualify to be considered for the International Booker prize only if they were published in the U.K. or Ireland). If the translator with her literal faithfulness to the original will not adapt to the accepted usage in the target language, possibly to show that her decolonial nativist *heart* is in the right place, her target reader must make the necessary idiomatic adaptation for the translation to work.

Conclusion: Copyright, Survival, Articulation

Thus, one way or another, all translations seem to be compromised into functioning as adaptations, either subconsciously and willy nilly on the part of the translator, or in their liberal (or condescending) reception of the exotic by the alien reader. Either way, adaptation seems to be a necessary condition of a translated text's creation, transmission and reception. Indeed, adaptation would seem to be the natural state of all things as they exist and move forward in time. Darwin's theory of biological evolution was said by him to be based on the principle of the survival of the fittest but it can perhaps be more aptly described – and was so described by his collaborators and successors -- as survival of the species that proved the most adaptable to the changing circumstances. Many species that were fitter than human beings seem to have perished, and though demonstrably weaker, we humans survived because we adapted better.

Notwithstanding, adaptations are still regarded as lacking the proximity, the integrity, and indeed the fidelity that marks a translation and its relationship to the original text. The key term here that is used to distinguish a translation from an adaptation is that it is "faithful" to the original. On the other hand, an adaptation is often said to have taken "liberties" with the original.

But it is not often noticed that this so-called faithfulness and liberty-taking come from another context which is charged with sexist patriarchal bias. It was traditionally with reference to the sexual conduct of women that the term "faithfulness" was used, and a close synonym for this highly prized feminine virtue was chastity. Women were required to be sexually chaste before they married, and after marriage to be faithful to their husbands. There was, of course, no such requirement or expectation from men.

As if to turn the knife in the wound, another related saying became current in the twentieth century to the effect that translation is like a woman; if it is beautiful, it cannot be faithful, and if it is faithful, it cannot be beautiful. The importation of such highly discriminatory terminology and comparisons into Translation Studies reinforces some of the most reprehensible patriarchal stereotypes, and it is high time we sensitized ourselves to its obnoxious implications and abandoned

the mind-set behind this metaphorical usage. A happy consequence of the devaluation of "faithful" translation would, of course, be an increased validation of the practice of adaptation.

Finally, one may consider yet another factor, from a very different but equally exploitative context, which serves to strengthen the expectation that translations will be "faithful" to the original and stick close to it. It is the law of copyright. It supports the practice of close translation because if the translation drifts far enough away from the original, it may complicate the enforceability of the copyright law, which is meant to ensure that the original text remains the private property of the author for a specified period and continues to yield an additional income through the fee chargeable for translation rights. This would seem a laudable measure if it only supported the author, but the copyright remains in force for a long period after the death of the author, which extends to 60 years in India and 70 years in the U.K., Europe and the U.S.A. It thus continues to benefit the successors and inheritors of the author for no talent or achievement of their own but for having been born in in the right genealogical circumstances.

Though some rudimentary provisions for copyright were instituted in a few Western countries from the eighteenth century onwards, it became an internationally prevalent legal obligation only with the Berne Convention in 1886. But even now in India, this rule is observed as often in the breach as it is in observance. Many publishers, especially in the Indian languages, are loath to pay royalties to their authors even during their life-time, and few translators of Indian or foreign literary works into Indian languages even think of going to the trouble – and expense – of obtaining copyright permission. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, they may be harking back to the good old days when literature was called *sahitya* and was a collective and freely participatory activity, as we saw above in the cases of Kabir and Surdas.[1]

The notion of translation being a strictly controlled and regulated activity is thus supported by a deeply prejudiced patriarchal metaphor of fidelity on the one hand, and a brazenly capitalist commercial provision of copyright on the other hand which restricts the free circulation of an author's work for decades after his life-span. Adaptation, in contrast, is a freer exercise, imaginatively

responsive to the original text and responsible to it, but also imitative of the creative practice that produces what are called original texts. There would, then seem to be every reason in the world for adopting Adaptation as the mainstream mode for transmitting literary texts to readers in other languages.

To the various arguments and considerations put forward above, one may in conclusion add one more. Just as human survival is necessarily a matter of adaptability, so is all human articulation through speech. We formulate something to say in our minds but the way it actually comes out in speech is not quite that but at best a close approximation of it. It all depends on our own expressive capability, the suitability of the occasion, and the potential receptivity of the person being addressed. All speech is thus an expedient adaptation of the abstract notion of what we set out to say. As the Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad "Faiz" put it:

Dil se to har mua'mala, kar ke chale the saaf ham

Kahne men unke saamne, baat badal badal gayi.

In a rough translation – or ready adaptation -- this means:

I had sorted it all out in the privacy of my heart

But when I had to say it to her, it changed and changed again.

Something similar has happened to the present lecture too – inevitably.

Thank you.[2]

Notes

1. While there are conscientious observers of copyright law, their efforts do not always meet with felicitous outcomes. In the 1980s, I wrote to King's College, Cambridge, seeking permission to translate E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* into Hindi, the copyright being held by the College. I received instead a curt response suggesting that I translate one of Forster's short stories—one unrelated to India. At the time, I had already earned a PhD from Britain on Virginia Woolf, a close friend of Forster, and had published an article in a birth-

centenary volume honouring Forster (Macmillan, London, 1979). Ironically, I later discovered that a professor of Hindi at the University of Allahabad had translated *A Passage to India* into Hindi as early as 1947—the year of India's independence—without either Forster or King's College, Cambridge, being any the wiser or wealthier. (Forster, incidentally, had predicted that India might not attain freedom for another five hundred years.)

2. This lecture was originally delivered as an unscripted talk and has been revised—or adapted—into its present form from a transcript kindly provided by Professor Manju Jaidka.

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Across Rivers and Roots: Ethical and Ecological Worlds in the Writings of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Contemporary Indian Women Authors

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Abstract: This paper undertakes a cross-cultural literary analysis of select works by modern female authors from Vietnam and India—specifically Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's *The Endless Field*, *Sông*, and *Water Chronicles,* alongside short stories and thematic fiction by Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali. It explores the interwoven motifs of ethics, environmental awareness, and cultural values, emphasizing how these writers, informed by their regional identities, spiritual insights, and gendered perspectives, construct morally and ecologically charged narratives.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's stories, deeply embedded in the life and lore of the Mekong Delta, depict lives shaped by environmental decline and the erosion of ancestral customs. Indian counterparts such as Desai, Hasan, and Ali articulate ecological consciousness through urban, religious, and gender-based struggles, reflecting transformations in social and cultural memory. Across both contexts, the female experience becomes a prism for interpreting shifting ecological and moral landscapes.

By employing close textual analysis and incorporating direct citations, this study examines how personal and collective suffering are reframed through narratives of ecological sensitivity and ethical depth. Comparative tables—detailing publication dates, literary forms, and textual dimensions—support the analytical framework and facilitate a structured transnational comparison.

The paper contends that these women writers, working across geographical and cultural boundaries, reimagine environments of displacement and resilience. Their literary worlds chart paths of endurance grounded in memory, myth, and moral reflection, contributing to a broader South and Southeast Asian dialogue on the interconnectedness of humanity, culture, and the natural world.

Keywords: Cultural Beliefs; Ecocriticism; Ethical Imagination; Gender and Environment; Postcolonial Literature; Short Story Comparison

Introduction

In recent decades, comparative literary studies have increasingly focused on transnational and transcultural approaches to understanding regional narratives of displacement, identity, and ecology. This paper contributes to that emerging discourse by examining select works of contemporary female authors from Vietnam and India, particularly through the lenses of ethical storytelling and environmental sensitivity. Women writers from these regions—shaped by complex histories of colonialism, modernization, and ecological disruption—have turned to fiction not only as a mode of expression but as an act of moral witnessing. Their literary landscapes speak across rivers and borders, rooted in local lifeways yet resonating with global themes of climate crisis, gendered marginalization, and the ethical reimagining of community.

Vietnamese and Indian literary traditions, though historically distinct, share postcolonial trajectories that foreground themes of survival, spirituality, nature, and justice. In the contemporary context, women writers have become particularly powerful voices, using narrative fiction to challenge patriarchal and anthropocentric paradigms. By invoking intimate geographies—from the muddy deltas of the Mekong to the urban and semi-rural topographies of India—these authors offer meditative responses to environmental degradation, displacement, and cultural loss. This inquiry explores how select Vietnamese and Indian authors map ecological trauma and moral questioning onto stories of personal and collective struggle.

Nguyễn Ngọc Tư is an acclaimed Vietnamese writer whose creative range spans short stories, novels, poems, and essays. However, this study focuses solely on her short stories and novels, especially *The Endless Field*—her most celebrated short story, adapted into a popular film—and her two novels, *Sông* (River, 2012) and *Water Chronicles* (2020). These works are compared with short stories or short story–derived content by Indian writers Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali, all born in the 1970s and prominent in postcolonial literary discourse. To support comparative rigor, the following table provides basic bibliographic and quantitative data:

Author	Work	Genre	Approx. Pages	Year
Nguyễn Ngọc Tư	*The Endless Field*	Short Story	~70 pages	2005
	Sông (River)	Novel	~160 pages	2012
	Water Chronicles	Novel	~200 pages	2020
Kiran Desai	"The Sermon in the Guava Tree"	Short Story	~15 pages	1997
	Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard	Novel	~200 pages	1998
Anjum Hasan	*A Day in the Life: Stories*	Short Stories	~256 pages	2018
Samina Ali	*Madras on Rainy Days*	Novel	~290 pages	2004

Table 1. Comparative Bibliographic Overview of Selected Works by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali.[1]
Source: *Authors,* 2025

This table above presents genre, publication year, and approximate length of each text selected for the study, facilitating a balanced transnational comparison of literary scope and format.

Figure 1. Map overlay showing the Mekong Delta and urban regions of India (Bangalore, Darjeeling) featured in the texts
Source: *Authors,* 2025

Methodology

This paper adopts a comparative literary methodology, grounded in close textual analysis and thematic synthesis, to explore how selected female authors from Vietnam and India construct eco-ethical narratives. Texts were selected based on literary merit, thematic alignment with ecological and ethical concerns, and representation of gendered perspectives. Quotations from primary sources are included to demonstrate narrative voice and stylistic nuance, while analytical commentary offers contextual and cultural interpretation.

The comparative lens allows for transnational cross-reading—highlighting convergence in narrative motifs, but also divergence in sociocultural framing. To enhance clarity, the analysis is supported by structured comparative summary tables arranged across five key dimensions: setting, themes, narrative style, cultural values, and socio-ecological transformation.

Analysis

A compelling moment in Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's *The Endless Field* (2005) captures the intricate interplay between human morality and ecological vulnerability. In one poignant scene, Tư writes, "In a flash,

Figure 2. Geographic Anchoring of Literary Settings: A comparative literary map highlighting key settings in the works of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư (Vietnam) and contemporary Indian women authors—Desai, Hasan, and Ali—spanning rural, urban, and diasporic landscapes
Source: *Authors*, 2025

he found himself slack, caught a piece of vase, he leaned against the ground. Outside the land of *Mut Ca Tha*, there seems to have been a big change" (Nguyễn, 2005, pp. 26–27). This passage encapsulates the father's emotional collapse, framed against a backdrop of shifting terrain that mirrors both environmental decay and familial disintegration. The reference to *Mut Ca Tha* resonates on multiple levels—it is not only a geographic signpost but also a metaphor for the irreversible changes taking place within the physical and moral landscape. Through restrained yet evocative prose, Tư fuses the psychological fragmentation of her characters with the degradation of Vietnam's riverine ecology, inviting readers to see the land as a witness to, and participant in, human suffering and ethical reflection.

Kiran Desai's *The Sermon in the Guava Tree* (1997) offers a satirical yet insightful commentary on morality and societal perception. At one point, the eccentric protagonist advises, "If your child is playing with a dead smelly mouse... throw away the mouse and take your child indoors to wash his hands" (Desai, 1997, p. 90). Delivered from the vantage of a guava tree, this whimsical sermon exemplifies the absurd yet oddly profound guidance that the character imparts to his fellow townspeople. The simplicity of the metaphor cloaks a deeper critique of societal hypocrisy, suggesting that moral clarity often comes from outside conventional authority. Through this playful narrative, Desai subtly exposes the gap between public virtue and private behavior, while demonstrating how the natural world—here represented by the fruit-laden orchard—becomes a retreat from social artifice and a site for ethical reflection, however unorthodox.

In Anjum Hasan's short story "The Stranger," from *A Day in the Life: Stories* (2018), the protagonist reflects on the rhythms of his solitary days, noting: "I do try to give some kind of shape to my days—watching the blackbirds with my morning coffee; walking with the late afternoon sun when there is one; helping, because I was inveigled into it, the landlord's middle-school-going boy and girl with their homework; just sitting around reading in the evenings as I drink brandy with hot water, or bad wine, or whisky with ice on summer nights when it's really warm and I'm feeling like I might start to be sorry for myself" (Hasan, 2018, p. 4). This meandering, almost diaristic narrative

voice reveals the character's quiet search for identity and meaning amidst the banalities of urban life. His routines—marked by birdsong, liquor, and reluctant tutoring—become a meditation on modern alienation, where emotional inertia reflects the larger disconnection between self and society. Hasan's prose, observational and intimate, articulates the nuanced anxieties of post-liberalized India, portraying a world where environmental and emotional landscapes are equally unstable.

Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days* (2004) presents a powerful meditation on gender, religion, and societal control through the lens of bodily discipline. Describing a rigidly patriarchal community, the narrator observes: "This was a Muslim neighbourhood, where women did not leave the house unveiled, not even girls as young as six, their bodies yet indistinguishable from boys'" (Ali, S. 2004, p. 58). This observation crystallizes the early indoctrination of female modesty and the culturally enforced conflation of morality with physical appearance. By foregrounding the age at which veiling begins, Ali underscores the precocious burdens placed on female bodies within traditionalist frameworks. The neighbourhood, shaped by religious codes and social surveillance, functions as both a physical and ideological enclosure. Through Layla's conflicted navigation of faith and freedom, Ali weaves a narrative rich with environmental symbolism—particularly rain—as a cleansing and destabilizing force that mirrors the protagonist's internal transformation. Her critique is not of religion per se, but of how it can be co-opted into systems that limit feminine agency and ecological intimacy. To better understand the geographic and cultural milieus shaping these narratives, the following map visualizes the key literary settings explored in the selected works.

Thematic and Narrative Convergences

Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's *The Endless Field* paints a haunting portrait of a father and his children adrift in southern Vietnam. The emotional wounds they carry mirror the slow erosion of the Mekong Delta, suggesting an ecological grief entwined with human suffering. Tư's prose is simple, yet evocative, immersing readers in muddy waterways and broken silences. *Sông* and *Water Chronicles* expand this vision, presenting intimate vignettes of life on and beside rivers, shaped by climatic volatility and moral ambivalence.

In comparison, Kiran Desai's *Hullabaloo* in the Guava Orchard offers a satirical yet poignant exploration of escapism and environmental retreat. The protagonist's withdrawal into nature is both a rejection of societal norms and a desperate search for inner clarity. The guava orchard, lush and teeming, becomes a surreal sanctuary reminiscent of the pastoral worlds that Nguyễn depicts, albeit framed in postcolonial absurdity.

A Venn diagram illustrating shared thematic terrain—such as ethical and ecological worlds—

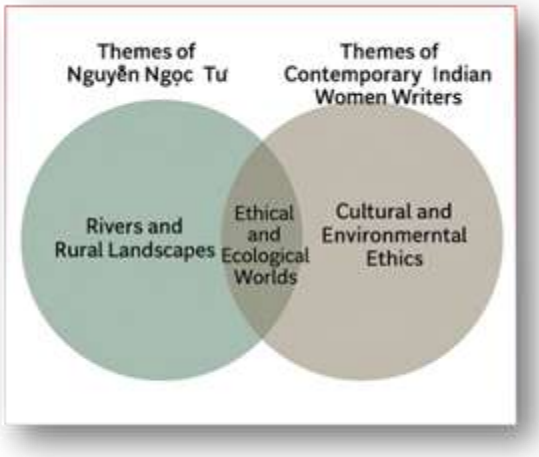

Figure 3. Thematic Convergences and Divergences in the Works of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Contemporary Indian Women Writers
Source: *Authors*, 2025

while distinguishing Nguyễn's focus on rivers and rural landscapes from the Indian authors' emphasis on cultural and environmental ethics.

Anjum Hasan's *A Day in the Life* navigates urban and semi-urban spaces in India, focusing on

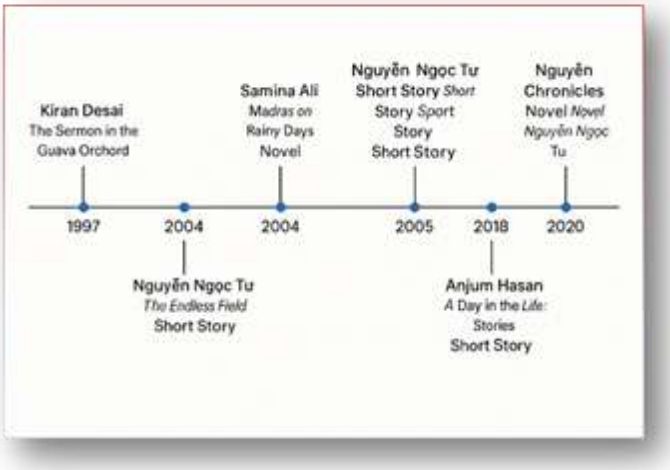

Figure 4. Publication Chronology of Selected Works by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali
Source: *Authors,* 2025

characters suspended between tradition and modernity. The collection is less rooted in specific

landscapes but vividly captures internal dislocation that mirrors the outer world's instability. Hasan's prose is observational, almost cinematic, revealing the slow, grinding changes that transform identities and spaces alike.

Samina Ali's *Madras on Rainy Days* pivots toward diasporic and gendered experiences. Set in Hyderabad, the novel explores the friction between inherited Muslim traditions and contemporary womanhood. Rain, rituals, and bodily metaphors offer ecological and ethical textures to the narrative, linking Layla's personal awakening to a larger environmental and cultural awakening.

Cultural Beliefs and Environmental Ethics

These authors do not merely present ecological backdrops; they infuse cultural beliefs and environmental ethics into their storytelling. For Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, the landscape is alive with memory, superstition, and resilience. Her characters speak in whispers, metaphors, and silences that evoke Buddhist and animist traditions interwoven with a deep reverence for water. The rivers and canals are not just settings but moral participants.

Desai and Hasan use humor and irony to probe cultural contradictions. Their protagonists struggle under societal expectations but also inherit ecological sensitivities that appear in food, festivals, and weather patterns. Samina Ali goes deeper into faith-based ethics, exploring how Islamic tenets intersect with female agency and ecological consciousness. Her rain-soaked scenes pulse with sensual and symbolic life.

Differences and Divergences

Despite these thematic overlaps, the narratives differ in structure, tone, and ideological framing. Tư's minimalism and fatalism contrast sharply with Desai's playful absurdism and Hasan's modernist introspection. Ali's narrative is confessional and transformative, anchored in psychological realism. While Tư offers episodic glimpses of rural survival, the Indian writers are more invested in social mobility and psychological evolution.

Furthermore, Tu's focus on the Mekong Delta gives her work a grounded ecological specificity, whereas the Indian authors engage with diverse landscapes—from orchards to cities to ancestral homes—and use them as mirrors to evolving personal and collective ethics.

Toward a Shared Ethical Ecology

Together, these texts articulate a gendered, ethical ecology that transcends national boundaries. They challenge readers to consider how women writers from Asia conceptualize environmental loss, moral complexity, and cultural transformation. They also provide a space where ecological and ethical concerns are rendered in feminine and culturally rooted idioms, resisting homogenized global narratives.

These works demonstrate that literary engagement with nature is not merely nostalgic or symbolic but deeply ethical, questioning modes of consumption, community, and care. By doing so, they offer a framework for comparative literary ecocriticism that centers female voices and regional epistemologies.

To contextualize the comparative framework, the following timeline outlines the publication years of the selected texts, underscoring the temporal spread and socio-literary backdrop of each work. This timeline visualizes the chronological progression of the primary texts examined in this study, highlighting temporal patterns in thematic evolution and offering historical context for cross-cultural literary comparison.

Setting and Atmosphere

This table below outlines the geographical, cultural, and emotional environments of the narratives, highlighting how setting shapes mood, tone, and thematic direction in each text.

Author	Setting Highlights
Nguyễn Ngọc Tư	Rural Mekong Delta; floating homes, rice fields, environmental fragility.

Kiran Desai	*"The Sermon in the Guava Tree"* — whimsical orchard/treehouse in small-town India.
Anjum Hasan	*"The Sermon in the Guava Tree"* — whimsical orchard/treehouse in small-town India.
Samina Ali	*"The Sermon in the Guava Tree"* — whimsical orchard/treehouse in small-town India.

Table 2. Comparative Summary of Setting and Atmosphere in Selected Works by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Contemporary Indian Women Authors.
Source: *Authors*, 2025

Themes and Motifs

This table identifies and compares central thematic concerns—such as ecological loss, memory, gender, displacement, and cultural identity—demonstrating how each author uniquely articulates these motifs within their respective socio-cultural contexts.

Author	Themes & Literary Concerns
Nguyễn Ngọc Tư	Grief, ecological decline, gender suffering, spiritual detachment, rural survival.
Kiran Desai	Escapism, nature as refuge, critique of bureaucracy, gender roles, absurdity.
Anjum Hasan	Alienation, temporality, disillusionment, post-liberalization anxieties.
Samina Ali	Bodily autonomy, cultural duality, arranged marriage, religious ethics, water symbolism.

Table 3. Key Themes and Recurring Motifs Across Selected Works by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali.
Source: *Authors*, 2025

Narrative Style and Techniques

This table compares the authors' narrative structures, points of view, language choices, and use of symbolism or literary devices, illustrating how form enhances thematic delivery and reader engagement.

Author	Style Features
Nguyễn Ngọc Tư	Sparse, lyrical, metaphor-rich, atmospheric realism.

Kiran Desai	Satirical, whimsical, third-person omniscient with irony.
Anjum Hasan	Minimalist, observational, realist with poetic touches.
Samina Ali	Confessional, symbolic, emotionally intimate, spiritually rooted.

Table 4. Narrative Styles and Literary Techniques in the Works of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Contemporary Indian Women Authors.
Source: *Authors,* 2025

Cultural Beliefs and Environmental Ethics

This table below explores how indigenous knowledge systems, spiritual traditions, and moral worldviews inform each author's portrayal of ecological responsibility and cultural continuity, emphasizing the ethical dimensions rooted in their storytelling.

Author	Cultural & Ecological Sensitivity
Nguyễn Ngọc Tư	Buddhist/animist influence; water as sacred, traditional roles, fatalism.
Kiran Desai	Satirical take on traditional beliefs, environmental retreat through humor.
Anjum Hasan	Irony toward modern Indian traditions; loss of ecological awareness in urban life.
Samina Ali	Islamic ethics, spiritual femininity, rain as moral cleansing, critique of patriarchy.

Table 5. Intersections of Cultural Beliefs and Environmental Ethics in Selected Works.
Source: *Authors,* 2025

Transformation and Urbanization

This table compares how each writer portrays the tensions between tradition and modernity, rural decline, urban expansion, and the shifting dynamics of identity, belonging, and displacement in a rapidly transforming socio-cultural landscape.

Author	Societal Observation
Nguyễn Ngọc Tư	Disintegration of rural life, youth migration, ecological commodification.
Kiran Desai	Urban-rural divide, critique of consumerism and governance.
Anjum Hasan	Lives of workers and students under modern pressures; cultural alienation.
Samina Ali	Tensions of tradition and diaspora, spiritual-modern identity negotiation.

Table 6. Depictions of Societal Change and Urbanization in the Works of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư and Selected Indian Authors.
Source: Authors, 2025

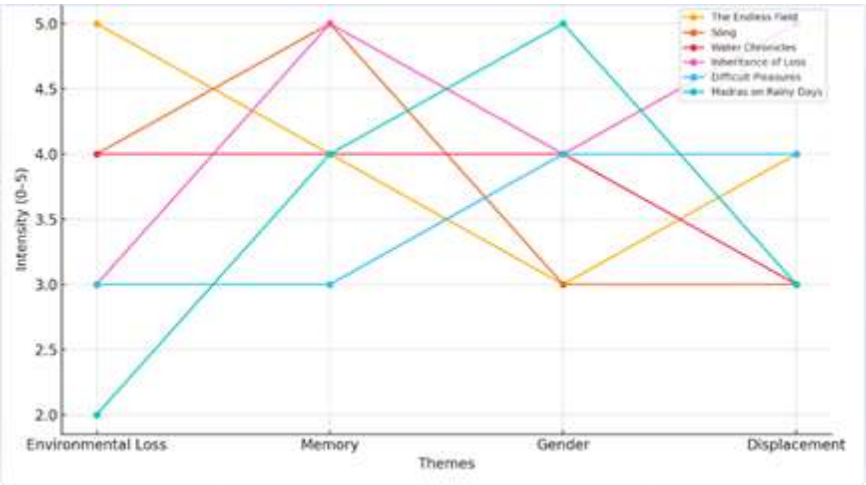

Figure 5: Thematic Intensity across Selected Works, illustrating the comparative presence of key themes (Environmental Loss, Memory, Gender, Displacement) in the six literary texts discussed.
Source: *Authors*, 2025

Feminine Subjectivity

Both Vietnamese and Indian narratives draw deeply from myth, ritual, and oral traditions to frame women's experiences within culturally rooted yet evolving ethical landscapes. Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's stories often echo Vietnamese folklore, where rivers, ancestral spirits, and the unseen world interact with human agency. This interweaving of myth and realism heightens the emotional and moral resonance of loss, longing, and resilience. Similarly, Indian writers like Desai and Ali invoke cultural memory—whether through colonial residues or nuanced portrayals of Muslim womanhood—to reframe feminine subjectivity as both rooted in tradition and actively renegotiating its boundaries.

Such literary use of cultural symbolism becomes a mode of reclaiming the marginal voice. Women in these narratives are not only characters but custodians of ecological memory—guardians of desecrated rivers, disrupted rituals, or fractured homes. They embody the contradictions of

modernity and heritage, acting as moral witnesses to both ecological degradation and cultural transformation.

Conclusion

Through their distinct yet interconnected visions, Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali remind us that rivers, orchards, homes, and rains carry not only poetic resonance but also profound ethical and ecological significance. These physical and metaphorical spaces reflect both the fragility and resilience of cultures in flux, embodying a deep entanglement of memory, identity, and environment. The landscapes in their stories—whether submerged deltas, overripe orchards, urban apartments, or diasporic interiors—act as conduits for moral reflection, displacement, and survival.

In traversing different geographies—from the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam to the urban sprawls of Bangalore and the diasporic enclaves of the Indian subcontinent—these authors reveal the shared struggles and aspirations of communities facing ecological degradation, patriarchal structures, and cultural dislocation. While each writer grounds her narrative in a specific cultural and environmental context, their thematic overlaps—especially in terms of gendered vulnerability, ecological memory, ethical imagination, and the search for rootedness—enable a transnational dialogue that is both timely and transformative.

The comparative method employed in this article has not only highlighted the convergent ethical concerns that animate these works but has also emphasized the importance of storytelling as a tool for ecological and moral witnessing. Literature becomes a terrain where the personal becomes political, where trauma can be reinterpreted through cultural myth, and where the feminine voice reclaims its authority in reimagining the world.

By bringing these voices together, this study affirms the power of comparative literature to forge intercultural empathy, deepen ecocritical awareness, and stimulate ethical engagement across borders. It bridges the Mekong with the Ganges, the orchard with the delta, the personal with the planetary, and memory with imagination. These women writers, in weaving tales of sorrow and

resilience, do more than reflect the world—they reshape how we perceive the relationship between human lives and the landscapes they inhabit.

In a world increasingly defined by environmental uncertainty and cultural fragmentation, the literary visions of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Desai, Hasan, and Ali remind us that literature remains a vital, redemptive force—a river of meaning that flows across boundaries and nourishes a shared ethical ecology.

Limitations and Future Research

While this comparative study offers a meaningful cross-cultural exploration of ecological and ethical themes in the works of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư, Kiran Desai, Anjum Hasan, and Samina Ali, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the scope of primary texts is necessarily selective. Although the chosen works are representative of each author's broader thematic concerns, they do not encompass the full spectrum of their literary output. Other genres—such as poetry, memoir, or essays—were excluded, which may limit the interpretive breadth concerning gendered ecology and ethical imagination.

Second, the linguistic and translational dimension presents inherent challenges. Much of Nguyễn Ngọc Tư's work was accessed in English translation, potentially filtering out nuanced cultural and linguistic textures present in the original Vietnamese. While the Indian authors write primarily in English or have been widely translated, region-specific idioms and sociolinguistic depth may still be diminished in comparative cross-readings.

Additionally, the article's theoretical lens—grounded in ecocriticism and ethics—could benefit from expanded frameworks. Future analyses might incorporate intersectional feminist theory, postcolonial spatial studies, or indigenous ecological epistemologies to deepen the inquiry and open new interpretive avenues.

Future research could extend this comparative lens to include a broader corpus of Southeast and South Asian women writers, especially those from indigenous, rural, or marginalized linguistic communities. Such inclusion would further enrich the understanding of how ecological consciousness

is shaped by local cosmologies, oral traditions, and subaltern worldviews. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating literary analysis with environmental sociology, urban studies, or gendered geography may also yield valuable insights into the nexus of narrative, ecology, and lived experience.

Moreover, transmedia storytelling—such as film, visual art, or digital media adaptations—presents a fertile area for exploration. For example, the cinematic version of *The Endless Field* offers opportunities to examine how ecological and ethical motifs are reframed across platforms and audiences. Comparative studies that incorporate male voices or juxtapose literary representations with institutional and policy discourses on climate, gender, and sustainability could further illuminate the role of literature in both reflecting and challenging dominant narratives of development and resilience.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the interpretive complexity of literary symbolism itself. Each symbol within a literary work is a crafted aesthetic element that may carry layered and culturally contingent meanings. As such, understanding these symbols requires an immersion not only in the thematic concerns of the text but also in the writer's stylistic choices, creative tendencies, and broader artistic vision. As noted in Vietnamese literary discourse, "to discover the meaning of such symbols, we must really penetrate the style, creative tendencies, and the entire artistic world of the writer or poet" (Từ điển Wiki). This underscores the necessity for future research to adopt close reading practices sensitive to symbolic nuance and to engage with the literary worlds of these authors

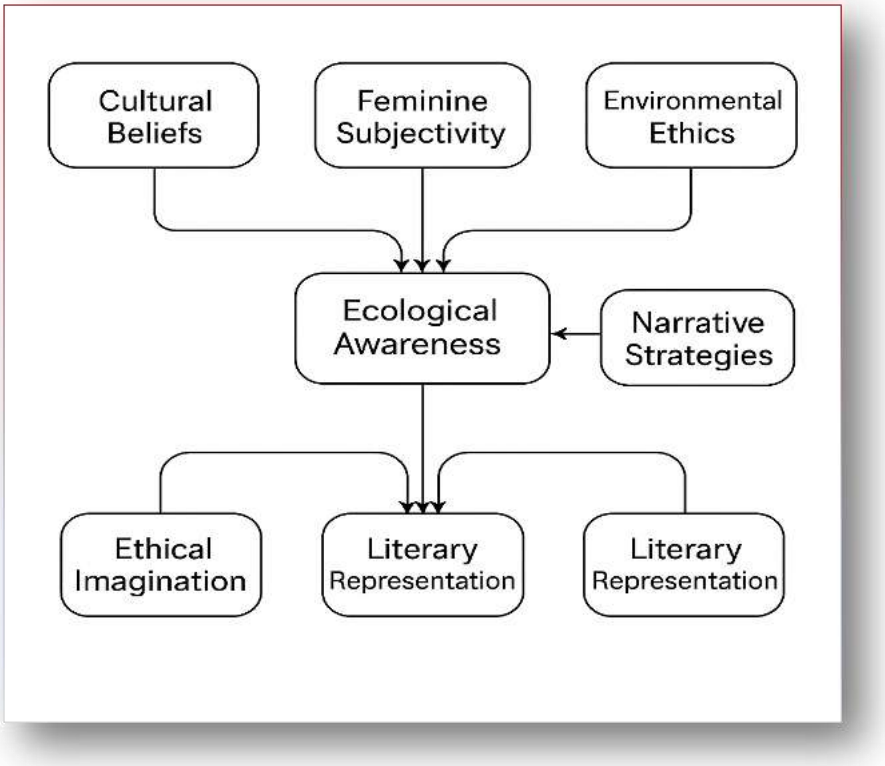

Figure 6: Conceptual Framework Diagram
Source: *Authors,* 2025

in their full artistic, historical, and cultural depth. The figure 6 illustrate the conceptual interlinkage between cultural beliefs, feminine subjectivity, environmental ethics, and narrative strategy.

Notes

1. Desai's short story acts as a foundation for her novel; Hasan's work is a collection of complete short stories; Ali's novel is cited for its thematic relevance due to lack of standalone short stories.

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Hybridity, Carnivalism, and Commercialization: Trans-Cultural Adaptation of Traditional Myths in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*

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Abstract: Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* adapts traditional myths under the postcolonial and late capitalist context through a magical realism narrative, presenting characteristics of hybridity and carnivalism, and it is ultimately commercialized by the culture industry. This process not only exposes the creative potential of cultural adaptation but also reveals the perpetual cycle of symbolic violence in neocolonialism. Many traditional mythological elements in the novel have been transplanted into the post-colonial historical narrative and present as a hybrid. For example, Saleem, who is based on the mythical prototype of Vishnu, has a mixed identity and cracks in his body. At the same time, the new myths, such as the myth of nation, share similar logic while making use of traditional myths. The novel itself turns into a myth of consumption, making traditional Indian myths a cultural commodity and an exotic spectacle. The magical realism narrative used in the novel has the characteristics of carnivalism, parodying the traditional mythological narratives. Rushdie, by vacuuming the sacred core of mythological prototypes, turns religious symbols into satirical metaphors for post-colonial politics. His infinitely expanding signifier alleviates the heaviness of historical violence. He tries to write the empire back in English, but his writing still relies on Western modernist and post-modernist techniques. Similarly, his attempt to create a new Indian myth as a whole is also destined to fail, just like Saleem turned into pieces in the end. Ultimately, the adapted myths generate resistance yet reveal the asymmetric structure of knowledge hegemony.

Keywords: *Midnight's Children;* Myth, Hybridity; Carnivalism; Commercialization

> "'Blue,' the young priest said earnestly. 'All available evidence, my daughter, suggests that Our Lord Christ Jesus was the most beauteous, crystal shade of pale sky blue.'" (103)

When Mary Pereira asks about the color of God, she receives a bizarre response from a young priest who attempts to reconcile Christianity with the Hindu imagery familiar to his audience. His claim that Christ was "blue" invokes the iconography of Hindu deities such as Krishna, who is traditionally depicted as blue-skinned. Rather than resolving theological differences, however, the priest's explanation exposes the awkwardness of such cultural synthesis. The image of the "blue God" thus becomes a metaphor for the broader dilemma of trans-cultural adaptation in *Midnight's Children* (1981): myths and religious symbols are reshaped into hybrid forms in an effort to bridge divides of religion, race, caste, and culture, yet these hybridizations often generate new ambiguities instead of harmony.

This tension is most powerfully embodied in the novel's central pair, Saleem Sinai and Shiva. As mirror images of one another—switched at birth and symbolically opposed—they echo the dualistic structures of Hindu mythology. Their names evoke divine prototypes: Saleem's association with creation and narrative consciousness parallels aspects of Brahma or Vishnu, while Shiva's name directly invokes the god of destruction. Yet these mythic archetypes are relocated within the secular, political reality of post-Independence India. In this way, Rushdie reworks ancient Hindu mythology within the modern nation-state, producing characters who are at once mythical figures and historical subjects.

In Hindu mythology, Vishnu is the maintainer, the embodiment of kindness and benevolence, possessing all-powerful abilities to protect and maintain the universe and its order. This precisely corresponds to the heroic image of Saleem in the novel, who has the ideal of saving his country. The character Shiva in the novel is directly named after the great deity Shiva in Hindu mythology, who is a destroyer and possesses a dual personality of reproduction and destruction, creation and destruction. This corresponds to the image of Shiva in the novel as a villain who is violent and power-driven and has a large number of illegitimate children. The essence of Rushdie's endowing of Saleem and Shiva with superpowers is to transform the collective trauma of India's post-colonial nation into a perceivable mythological symbol system through a narrative strategy of magical realism. Saleem's

psychic nose and Shiva's violent knees are not only modern variations of Hindu deities, but also political indicators carrying colonial memories and ethnic conflicts.

However, the romantic spirit of classical heroes seems out of place in modern Indian society. Despite their mediocre status and doomed endings, modern heroes still exhaust their limited strength to resist the absurdity of the age, composing a tragedy of the era imbued with irony. Though Saleem has possessed numerous divine powers similar to those of Vishnu since his birth, the influence of these divine powers on reality is very limited. Ever since Saleem was walloped hard by his father for claiming that he could hear the words of the Archangels, he has realized that the secrets of his superpower must not be revealed. And his power was not big enough to realize his ideal as Vishnu—that is, to maintain the harmony and unity of the new India. The division of the world caused the cracks in his body and mind to grow wider and wider. After his death, he was trampled into dust by thousands of Indians. In the novel, Shiva can easily take others' lives with his knees, but compared with the power of the great god Shiva, it is also very limited: throughout his life, he wanted to obtain money and power through fighting and hard work, but under the high pressure of totalitarianism, his personal power became insignificant, and eventually his superhuman martial strength and reproductive ability were completely eliminated. The divine castration of Saleem and Shiva is essentially a self-colonization process that reduces native Indian mythology to mere performative symbols. When he attempted to establish a "loose federation of equals" (Rushdie 220) through the Midnight Children's Conference, his words were mixed with the paradoxical rhetoric of Gandhian nonviolent resistance and British parliamentary democracy. This schizophrenic ideological collage points to the cognitive dissonance experienced by postcolonial intellectuals in their misappropriation of traditional resources.

Furthermore, *Midnight's Children,* represented by Saleem and Shiva, were not only castrated in terms of divine power but also physically and mentally. This violence extends far beyond mere physical punishment; it is a precise dissection of the body by the power mechanism. The reproductive organs, serving as dual carriers of biological reproduction and cultural symbols, are its target. Their

destruction not only cuts off the possibility of bloodline continuation for the rebels, but also destroys the spiritual foundation of the sacredness of the body in Hindu tradition. The modern discipline techniques described by Foucault here demonstrate their complexity: the Indira regime both inherited the biological control logic of colonial rule and adopted the symbolic violence of pre-modern sacrificial rituals. This hybrid form of power reveals the deep anxiety of post-colonial countries in establishing the legitimacy of their rule. By publicly revealing the process of objectizing body fragments, those in power elevate disciplinary violence to a power spectacle with deterrent effects, causing onlookers (including readers) to unconsciously internalize the ideological boundary of "normal/abnormal" in the contradictory experience of physical discomfort and the thrill of novelty. As for the castrated *Midnight's Children*, having lost their divine radiance, they no longer become the focus of the text, and the magical realism narrative transforms into a realistic one.

India's new myths also face challenges from ancient myths. The New India attempts to position August 15, 1947 as the temporal origin of the nation, erasing the land's prior history and memory—precisely aligning with the operative mechanism of myth: evacuating the historical complexity of original signs through deformation. Yet people gradually discover that the absurdity of the bizarre and terrifying political events unfolding in New India rivals that of India's ancient myths: "... so that people were seized by atavistic longings, and forgetting the new myth of freedom reverted to their old ways, their old regionalist loyalties and prejudices, and the body politic began to crack" (Rushdie 245).

Liberalism, in its self-proclaimed vision, aspires to safeguard individual liberty, plural coexistence, and cultural autonomy. Yet, in the Indian context, its actual functioning within the apparatus of the state often manifests as selective liberalization—a distribution of freedoms primarily serving the economic and political consolidation of dominant power blocs. When liberalism is reduced to an instrumental discourse, religious, caste-based, or ethnic identities tend to assert themselves as forms of resistance. The linguistic autonomy movements in various states, separatist tendencies in the Northeast, and the Kashmir conflict collectively illustrate the unsustainability of

coercive integration in a plural society. At the same time, Hindu epics and myths constitute India's cultural genome. Their symbolic systems—embodying the principles of Dharma, cyclical reincarnation, and polytheism—transcend spatial and social boundaries, providing the deep cultural grammar of an imagined community. Even under the pressures of colonial modernity, these myths persist as a cipher for resistance. The mythical narrative of the golden age—its fantasy of oneness—is not a historical reality, but rather functions as a compensatory signifier that offsets the identity anxieties engendered by modernity. The *Midnight's Children* possess ancient mystical powers with connections to India's primordial deities—"they can be seen as the last throw of everything antiquated and retrogressive in our myth-ridden nation" (Rushdie 200). At birth, the *Midnight's Children* embodied limitless potential undefined by national myths, but during the sterilization campaign, surgical scalpels not only castrated their superpowers but also symbolized the systematic eradication of heterogeneity by the national myths. Here Rushdie executes a dual deconstruction: exposing Indira's mythmaking while simultaneously implying, through Saleem's identity as a "castrated prophet", that all alternative myths inevitably face co-optation.

Back to the "blue God", the priest then tried to cite the Picts and the blue Arab nomads to explain that there *are* people who have blue coloured skin—the attempt to prove an untenable view of this encyclopedic argument creates a carnival and dramatic effect, which deconstructs the sanctity and the transcendental truth of myths. Salman Rushdie also discussed about myths as defined by Roland Barthes in *Shame* (1983): "Few mythologies survive close examination, however. And they can become very unpopular indeed if they're rammed down people's throats" (251). In this sense, myths disguise power relations as eternal truths by concealing their historicity, but once their artificial nature and ideological functions are exposed, the legitimacy of myths will be questioned. In the meantime, Rushdie's carnival writing style also corresponds with the characteristics of myths, which present themselves and expand their symbolic signifier to the greatest extent. Just like Barthes writes in the first chapter of *Mythologies*, titled "The World of Wrestling," he offers a detailed interpretation of the myth of wrestling: "The virtue of wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess" (Barthes 13).

The exaggerated postures and performances in wrestling vividly excite the audience, reflecting the principles of classical art: “This emptying out of interiority to the benefit of its exterior signs, this exhaustion of the content by the form” (Barthes 16-17). *Midnight’s Children*, to some extent, embodies the style of classical art described by Barthes, filled with exaggerated and captivating characters, actions, plots, and imagery. The significance of fairness, meaning, motivation, and outcomes in the performances yields to the overwhelming impact they create. For example, the presentation of the superpower of *Midnight’s Children* parodies the narrative of traditional myths, which spares no details at all:

> Those children born in the last seconds of the hour were (to be frank) little more than circus freaks: bearded girls, a boy with the fully-operative gills of a freshwater mahaseer trout, Siamese twins with two bodies dangling off a single head and neck — the head could speak in two voices, one male, one female, and every language and dialect spoken in the subcontinent; but for all their marvellousness, these were the unfortunates, the living casualties of that numinous hour. (Rushdie 198)

The extravagant and exaggerated depiction of some of the *Midnight’s Children* that have superpower, shows a cynical attitude towards the traditional myths, even adding some seemingly digressive satirical commentary about the numerous languages and dialect in the subcontinent. But meanwhile, when writing about the spectacles of Indian slums, Rushdie makes jugglers and “circus freaks” appear like they also have some superpower:

> ... she (Parvati) had grown up amid ventriloquists who could make stones tell jokes and contortionists who could swallow their own legs and fire-eaters who exhaled flames from their arseholes and tragic clowns who could extract glass tears from the corners of their eyes; ... (Rushdie 199)

These grotesque arts constitute a dual subversion of official discourse: On the one hand, they deploy the grotesque body to counter the “normative rational body” extolled by colonial modernity—analogous to the “public square” theorized by Bakhtin as the vessel of folk carnival culture, wherein

folk laughter culture dismantles hierarchical order by degrading the sublime and elevating the lowly (Bakhtin 89). On the other hand, they manifest the slum—as a second world antithetical to official culture—through its inverted, chaotic, hallucinatory and peculiar visage. Yet this subversiveness becomes co-opted by consumer logic as exotic spectacle. The poorness of the slum gets spectacularized into a theatrical stage gratifying the voyeuristic desires of the middle class, while genuine structural oppression vanishes within the carnivalized narrative.

After India's independence and its entry into a consumer society, religion and deities also became subject to commodification. For instance, the Arjuna Indiabike that appears in the novel takes its name from the heroic archer in the *Mahabharata*. The bow and arrow of Ajuna symbolizes the sacred duty and the glory of war, while the bicycle was the most common means of transportation for civilians in India after its independence, representing the daily struggles of ordinary people. Rushdie deconstructed the sublimity of traditional epics by endowing the bicycle with the name of the hero. Ironically, the owner of the company was a Muslim, and Ajuna's warehouse was eventually burned to ashes by a gang of Hindu arsonists called "Ravana." Ravana is the core villain in the Indian epic *Ramayana*, also known as the "Ten-Headed King" or "the Roaring Rakshasa King." The arsonists, named after Ravana, not only indicated their Hindu stance but also hinted that they were the mob like ten-headed demons, and even more so, they burned the factories, shops and warehouses of Muslim merchants who did not pay protection money, just as Ravana, after abducting Sita, had his minions torch the camps of the monkey warriors. The struggle between "Ajuna" and "Ravana," which seems like a mythical holy war between heroes and demons, is in reality a conflict of interests between Muslim merchants and Hindu gangs: "behind this fagade of racial hatred, the Ravana gang was a brilliantly-conceived commercial enterprise" (Rushdie 72). The sanctity of religion was stripped away and turned into a tool for plundering goods and money.

The commodification of gods not only appropriates religious symbols, but also replaces traditional religious practices through the creation of "consumption rituals." These maintain consumers' emotional attachment through pseudo-sanctity, as exemplified by the fabrication of the

new religious guru—Lord Khusro. Originally named Cyrus, he was a childhood companion of Saleem. In school plays, he played girls' parts in school plays, excelled academically, and even gave expert lectures on female anatomy. Yet under the manipulation of his fanatically religious mother, Mrs. Dubash, he was packaged as "Only True Lord" and "the most successful holy child in history; in no time at all he was being hailed by crowds half a million strong, and credited with miracles" (269). Advertisements featuring Lord Khusro saturated public spaces, catapulting him to immense wealth complete with a luxury liner and an aircraft. Ironically. This powerless guru ultimately drowned attempting to walk on water. Thus, an ordinary, childlike boy—utterly ignorant of the religious propaganda surrounding him—became both an object of worship and a vehicle for profit. The narrator sharply exposes this deception: "In all those years, did no person understand that what Mrs Dubash had done was to rework and reinvent the most potent of all modern myths—the legend of the coming of the superman?" (Rushdie 270)

The American superhero comic *Superman* is a modern myth wrapped in the shell of modern technology, which undoubtedly follows the same formula as that created by Lord Khusro. In modern society, the myth about Lord Khusro is artificial rather than naturally formed, and the goal of this deification movement is also obvious, that is, to create a religious idol and a consumption symbol, so that people can enthusiastically contribute their money.

Furthermore, Hanif's failure to be the only realistic writer working in the Bombay film industry, also signaled that the traditional mythological narrative had fallen from its pedestal and become a secular commodity. "Hanif was fond of railing against princes and demons, gods and heroes, against, in fact, the entire iconography of the Bombay film" (Rushdie 244), believing that these elements were the continuation of India's dream of five thousand years and were illusions detached from reality. The images of deities and monsters in traditional Indian films originally carried the sacredness of religion or culture, but in the film industry, they were mass-produced as entertainment consumer goods and became commercialized gods for public entertainment. This appropriation of myths strips away their spiritual core and simplifies them into visual spectacles that

attract audiences. The narrator comments on this: "in the temple of illusions, he had become the high priest of reality" (Rushdie 244), suggesting that film has become the new religion of modern society. In traditional religions, deities have been replaced by fictional characters on the screen, and audiences' obsession with movies is like believers' worship of deities. This transformation reveals the alienation of religious symbols in consumerism—sacredness is replaced by entertainment, and faith is dominated by box office demand.

Similarly, in a consumer society, individuals find themselves bound by a relentless torrent of desires, yearning for spiritual fulfillment and externalized expressions of their subjective essence. This fuels the emergence of secularized deities and consumer idols—celebrities. In *Midnight's Children*, Jamila Singer embodies precisely such a meticulously packaged and hyped star idol. While her enchanting voice earned her modest recognition, it was the mystique deliberately crafted around her that catapulted her to nationwide fame in Pakistan: "fabricated rumors claimed she had been involved in a terrible, disfiguring car-crash, compelling her to perform completely veiled. Audiences could only glimpse her silhouette through a hole cut in a chadar with gold thread" (Rushdie 313). Jamila became a highly symbolic vessel—a projection screen for consumer desires and an idealized image of perfection. She was fervently worshipped as a divine figure, even as the public remained profoundly ignorant of her true nature. In *Midnight's Children*, Indian society emerges as a mythological theatre staged through commodities: Hindu deities shed their religious context to become cultural merchandise in the consumer world, while mundane goods themselves are imbued with divine halos, transforming into fetishized objects of modern society.

Salman Rushdie's postcolonial narratives, while attempting to deploy indigenous myths against Eurocentrism, often inadvertently replicate the epistemological framework of colonial knowledge production. The novel's appropriation of Hindu symbols forms a hidden genealogy with the Oriental spectacles in 19th-century colonial literature. Shiva's violent imagery is reduced to a mode of "subaltern resistance," thereby perpetuating Western stereotypes about barbaric revolutions in the Third World. Meanwhile, Parvati's fantastical journey across the India-Pakistan border using

the basket of invisibility reduces complex territorial disputes to supernatural adventures, obscuring structural violence in geopolitics. As Edward Said observed: “The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (Said 2). Rushdie’s English narratives remain trapped within the inherent violence of imperial language—his magical metaphors transmute from critical weapons into consumerist labels, becoming standardized symbols of postcolonial exoticism. His elite perspective suspends the narrative between imperial nostalgia and nation-building fissures.

When Rushdie employs the narrative framework of *One Thousand and One Nights*, he simultaneously mimics Indian oral traditions and caters to Western expectations of Oriental talesca “meta-story” about the mysterious East. *Midnight’s Children* is packaged as a “commodity of cultural difference”, and its exoticism becomes a passport for transnational capital circulation. Yet its global journey reveals a cruel dialectic: the more fiercely Third World cultures resist, the more readily their heterogeneity transforms into commodified symbols of difference. As Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argued, the culture industry falsely satisfies people’s desire for rebellion while psychologically castrating them, reducing them to mere consumers. The cultural industry not only satisfies these customers, but also tells them that they must passively accept the consumer goods provided by the cultural industry (Horkheimer and Adorno 94-136). From this perspective, *Midnight’s Children*, as a consumer product of the cultural industry, seems to criticize reality, but this precisely weakens its resistance in reality. When Hindu deities and colonial memories are displayed together in the window of world literature, and when Saleem’s chutney factory becomes a specimen for cultural studies, what we see is not only the mythologization of India, but also the domestication of heterogeneous experiences by the global cultural production system. This domestication will not cease unless we re-understand “consumption” itself—not the possession of symbols, but the continuous questioning of the mechanism of meaning generation.

Rushdie’s textual strategy itself has fallen into the cognitive hegemony he criticizes, and the pursuit of a “purely Indian” aesthetic has also become a neocolonialist myth. Although *Midnight’s*

Children makes extensive use of Indian traditional myths, dialects and proverb, his adaptation of James Joyce's techniques of stream of consciousness, his parodies of Jorge Borges' maze narrative, and his transformation of García Márquez's magical realism all reveal the prominent genes of European modernism and postmodernism in his technical lineage. The duality of this narrative strategy precisely confirms the subjective predicament of postcolonial intellectuals—they have no choice but to deconstruct the empire with imperial language and criticize the West with Western forms. This dual interpretive approach, which simultaneously examines its representation of the "nation-state" and the "Third World" while emphasizing the "Indian-style" self-referential narrative techniques, leads to an inevitable yet paradoxical outcome: the fact that its ideology is rooted in the highbrow culture of the modern metropolitan bourgeoisie becomes obscured, while core issues unrelated to nationalist or Third World discourse—yet central to its narrative essence, ranging from the cultural logic of transnational capitalism to the subject predicament of postcolonial intellectuals—are systematically suppressed.

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Haiku After Adaptation: On the Fate Of An Oriental Genre In The Western World

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Abstract: This paper examines the historical evolution and cross-cultural transformation of haiku from its origins in Japanese literary and Zen traditions to its contemporary manifestations in American and European contexts. By situating haiku within its philosophical and aesthetic foundations, the study emphasizes its distinctive mode of perceiving reality, grounded in attentiveness to existence and the experiential possibility of *satori*. Rather than construing haiku as a strictly religious expression or as a representation of a personalized Absolute, the paper interprets it as a poetic practice informed by Zen meditation, artistic discipline, and philosophical reflection.

Through a comparative analysis of Oriental tradition and Western adaptation—including particular attention to Polish literary reception—the study interrogates the tension between classical haiku and its modern reinterpretations. It considers the extent to which contemporary haiku preserves its original cognitive and experiential depth, and to what degree it has been reshaped by processes of cultural translation, aesthetic fascination, and global literary fashion. The paper ultimately argues that the transnational circulation of haiku reveals both the durability of its minimal form and the complexities inherent in its adaptation across divergent cultural and spiritual paradigms.

Keywords: Haiku; Zen Aesthetics; Satori; Cross-Cultural Adaptation; Literary Modernity; Transnational Poetics; Minimalism; Japanese Literature; Western Reception; Polish Haiku

This essay seeks to examine selected issues pertaining to the development and transformation of haiku within Asian, American, and European literary contexts. It situates contemporary haiku practice within the historical and philosophical tradition from which the genre emerged, emphasizing its distinctive mode of apprehending reality. At its core, haiku articulates an experiential awareness of the existence of all things—an attentiveness that, within the framework of Zen aesthetics, may

culminate in *satori*, a moment of insight characterized by radical openness and an intimation of unity with the cosmos. Such experience does not correspond to a personalized conception of the Absolute, nor can it be reduced to a narrowly defined religious phenomenon. Rather, it gestures toward a form of transcendence grounded in artistic practice, philosophical reflection, and meditative discipline.

By reconstructing the historical trajectory of haiku, this study clarifies the position of contemporary global haiku and interrogates the tensions that arise between its classical foundations and its modern adaptations. Particular attention will be devoted to the divergence between traditional ("old") haiku and its contemporary manifestations, including its reception and transformation in American and European contexts, with special consideration of its development as a short poetic form in Poland. Finally, the essay explores the mechanisms through which haiku has been culturally adapted for modern audiences, questioning to what extent contemporary practice preserves the genre's original experiential authenticity and to what extent it reflects aesthetic fascination or literary fashion.

Haiku emerges from the cultural and aesthetic traditions of premodern Japan and is deeply intertwined with both religious practice and artistic discipline. Although it would be reductive to claim that haiku is exclusively a product of Zen Buddhism, the genre's development was profoundly shaped by Zen epistemology and its emphasis on immediacy, intuition, and disciplined attentiveness (Suzuki 33–36). Zen practice, grounded in meditation and the systematic emptying of conceptual thought, seeks to dissolve the illusion of separateness and to cultivate direct, non-discursive insight into reality. Such insight is frequently described as an encounter with the "suchness" (*tathatā*) of phenomena—an apprehension of things prior to intellectual abstraction.

This mode of perception resonates strongly with the poetics of classical haiku. Rather than offering commentary or metaphorical elaboration, haiku aims to present the object or moment in its irreducible particularity, situated within the immediacy of the present. As Alan Watts observes, a genuine haiku "sees objects in their uniqueness, without commentary—the Japanese call this view of the world *sono-mama*, 'just as it is' or 'simply so'" (Watts 195). The haiku moment thus becomes an

aesthetic correlative of Zen awareness: an event of perception grounded in the "here and now," free from overt didacticism or metaphysical abstraction.

At the same time, scholars have cautioned against oversimplifying the relationship between haiku and Zen, noting that the genre also evolved from earlier poetic forms such as *renga* and was shaped by broader literary and social conventions (Shirane 41–45). Nevertheless, the convergence between Zen aesthetics and haiku poetics—particularly in the works of Matsuo Bashō—reveals a shared commitment to immediacy, simplicity, and the disciplined articulation of transient experience.

Haiku also derives part of its aesthetic sensibility from the tradition of Japanese ink painting on silk and paper. We may therefore observe a compelling interartistic phenomenon: a literary genre emerging in close dialogue with a visual medium. The etymological and aesthetic associations of haiku are often linked to *haiga*, a style of painting that combines image and text and that developed in relation to *zenga*—the spontaneous ink paintings produced by Zen monks, frequently accompanied by poems or aphoristic inscriptions drawn from Zen teachings and *mondō* dialogues (Shirane 63–67). In both *haiga* and haiku, the principle of expressive economy prevails; image and word alike seek to capture the immediacy of perception through suggestive minimalism.

The literary origins of haiku are equally significant. The form evolved from *renga*, collaborative linked-verse compositions in Japanese literature that could consist of thirty-six, one hundred, or even one thousand alternating three- and two-line stanzas (Blyth 25–28). During the seventeenth century—often described as a "golden age" of Japanese literature—the opening stanza of the *renga*, known as the *hokku*, gradually acquired autonomy. Detached from its collaborative matrix, it developed into an independent, unrhymed poem structured according to the 5–7–5 syllabic pattern. Initially referred to as *haikai*, these brief compositions were later designated *haiku*, particularly following the reforms of Masaoka Shiki in the nineteenth century (Shirane 44).

Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694) is widely regarded as the most influential figure in the consolidation of the form. His poetry elevated the *hokku* beyond wit or playful improvisation,

imbuing it with philosophical depth and refined aesthetic discipline. Among the most frequently cited examples of his work is the celebrated poem:

An old silent pond…

A frog jumps into the pond,

splash! Silence again.

(Bashō qtd. in Blyth 104)

Bashō's legacy shaped subsequent generations of poets. His immediate circle of disciples formed an influential poetic community, and the tradition was further developed by Yosa Buson (1716–1783), Kobayashi Issa (1763–1827), and, later, Masaoka Shiki (1867–1902), who played a decisive role in modernizing and formally codifying haiku.

In both traditional Japanese painting and haiku, nature constitutes the shared field of representation. Flowers, birds, butterflies, cherry blossoms, chrysanthemums, ancient pines, the autumn moon, and the cyclical succession of seasons recur as central motifs. Spring and autumn, in particular, function symbolically, evoking the rhythms of birth and decline, vitality and transience. As one haiku observes:

This autumn—

even the birds and clouds

grow old.

(Bashō qtd. in Shirane 210)

Haiku may thus be understood as a poetics of impermanence. It registers the fragility of existence and the inevitability of transformation. Nothing remains fixed; all phenomena are subject to flux. The metaphysical dimension of haiku emerges precisely from this attentiveness to transience—an awareness that does not deny change but instead renders it luminous within the brevity of the poetic moment.

The haiku literary genre established a presence in Polish literature even prior to World War II, largely due to the efforts of Leopold Staff, who translated the French collection *Chinese Flute*

(1922), thereby introducing Polish readers to the formal and aesthetic principles of East Asian short poetry (Staff qtd. in Żuławska-Umeda 15). Haiku resurfaced in the mid-1970s alongside a renewed Polish interest in Oriental literary and philosophical traditions. The literary monthly *Poezja* responded to this cultural moment by publishing, in the first issue of its 1975 annual, a selection of theoretical and literary texts alongside translations devoted to haiku, thereby facilitating the genre's initial circulation among Polish audiences (Żuławska-Umeda 22).

During the 1980s, interest in haiku persisted and intensified; however, its readership remained largely confined to a specialized circle of literary enthusiasts and scholars. Works such as *Haiku with Classic Examples of the Genre* and *Old Japanese Poetry*, both edited by Agnieszka Żuławska-Umeda, played a particularly significant role in codifying the genre and providing reference points for emerging poets (Żuławska-Umeda 45). Since the 1990s, haiku has experienced what may be described as a veritable "explosion" in Poland: collections, anthologies, and pocket editions of the genre have proliferated, and established literary authorities have actively engaged with it. Leszek Engelking, for instance, published *Haiku: One's Own and Others'*, while Czesław Miłosz presented English-language translations of haiku in a specially curated and aesthetically decorated collection (Engelking; Miłosz).

Contemporary literary magazines now frequently compete in publishing haiku, reflecting both the genre's growing popularity and its integration into mainstream literary culture. Moreover, Polish poets have begun experimenting with innovative forms and modifications of classical haiku, producing works that depart from the traditional Oriental template while preserving the genre's core aesthetic focus on brevity, attentiveness, and the evocation of transient experience.

In recent years, haiku has manifested as both an internalized element of Polish literary creativity and a reflection of the genre's growing popularity within the national literary landscape. This phenomenon, however, has elicited a spectrum of critical responses. Some commentators, such as Darek Foks, have critiqued haiku as intellectually superficial, overly facile, or lacking vitality, prompting calls for a reevaluation of its artistic significance (Foks 42). Beyond questions of

aesthetics, haiku has emerged as a psycho-sociological phenomenon: its circulation, reception, and adaptation offer insight into the cultural dynamics of contemporary literary life. As Kazuo Sato documents, dozens of journals dedicated to haiku are published in Western countries, while hundreds of periodicals devoted to the genre appear annually in Japan, underscoring its enduring transnational resonance (Sato 17).

Since the 1990s, the proliferation of haiku in Poland has been particularly striking. Collections, anthologies, and pocket editions have multiplied, reflecting both scholarly interest and popular readership. Established literary figures have actively engaged with the form: Leszek Engelking has published collections of his own and others' haiku, while Czesław Miłosz has curated and translated English-language haiku into visually and aesthetically distinctive volumes (Engelking; Miłosz). Literary magazines now compete to feature haiku, and contemporary poets have introduced experimental adaptations, altering traditional form and freeing compositions from the constraints of classical Oriental models. These developments demonstrate haiku's capacity to evolve as a living poetic practice, simultaneously respecting its heritage and negotiating new cultural contexts.

Haiku, in forms varying in fidelity to the original Japanese model, was initially adopted by prominent Polish poets, whose engagement with the genre combined formal experimentation with artistic self-awareness. Stanisław Grochowiak, for example, explored haiku in his collection *Haiku-obrazki*, demonstrating both technical skill and an acute consciousness of the poetic tradition he was engaging (Grochowiak 17–21). Other influential figures, including Jerzy Harasymowicz (*Zielnik*, *Żaglowiec i inne wiersze*) and Ryszard Krynicki, also drew inspiration from haiku, adapting its brevity and attentiveness to nature within their own literary idioms (Harasymowicz 33; Krynicki 48).

Beyond these pioneering writers, a broader cohort of lesser-known poets attempted to emulate the masters, often with less distinction. For these "minor poets," haiku became both an aspirational form and a site for experimentation, but their imitative efforts frequently lacked the originality and depth exhibited by Grochowiak or Harasymowicz. Nevertheless, the genre's visibility grew steadily: by the 1980s, and particularly during the 1990s, three-line compositions were increasingly featured

across literary magazines, reaching not only specialized journals but also regional weeklies and daily newspapers' literary sections (Żuławska-Umeda 56). In this way, haiku moved beyond the circle of literary specialists, achieving a degree of popular circulation that positioned it as a recognizable and influential form within contemporary Polish letters.

During the 1980s, haiku appeared only sporadically in Polish literary magazines. Established journals such as *Poezja*, *Twórczość* (*Creativity*), and *Literatura* (*Literature*) published relatively few texts related to this genre. In contrast, newer, more community-oriented magazines, which sought to engage readers and present international literary trends, began to feature haiku with greater frequency (Żuławska-Umeda 67). Since the 1990s, *Czas Kultury* has played a particularly prominent role, regularly including literature connected to Oriental traditions, including Japanese forms. Other influential periodicals, such as *Literatura na Świecie* (*Literature in the World*) and *Brulion* (*Notebook*), also contributed to the dissemination of haiku through translations and critical commentary (Żuławska-Umeda 72).

Haiku was further introduced to Polish audiences through specialized anthologies, such as the 1993 collection *Drogi karmy i ścieżka dharmy* (*The Ways of Karma and the Path of Dharma*), which presented American-style haiku alongside traditional Japanese forms (Sato 45). Publications issued by Buddhist associations, including *Droga Zen* (*The Way of Zen*) and *Smok Wadżry* (*The Vajra Dragon*), initially limited in circulation, also played an important role in popularizing haiku and extending its reach among readers interested in spiritual and philosophical perspectives (Sato 48). These magazines consistently integrated haiku as a key component of their literary worldview, reinforcing its cultural significance.

The definitive institutionalization of haiku in Poland occurred with the creation of the specialist magazine *Haiku* in the 1990s, reflecting both the genre's growing popularity and its capacity to sustain a dedicated publication. The magazine features classic Chinese and Japanese haiku alongside contemporary imitations, and nearly every issue includes essays or sketches exploring the philosophy of haiku, as well as theoretical and literary commentary on the genre (Żuławska-Umeda

78). This development underscores the maturation of haiku as a recognized and respected literary form within the Polish cultural landscape.

Haiku's popularity in Poland has increasingly extended beyond traditional literary contexts such as books, magazines, and authorial events, entering the domain of mass media. For example, during "Japanese Day," Radio Bis organized an autumn haiku contest on its literary program, inviting listeners to submit compositions by telephone. Dozens of haiku were recited on air, and the contest jury, consisting of Prof. Mikołaj Melanowicz, Ewa Tomaszewska, and Robert Szybiak, awarded prizes in a highly publicized event. The rapid and enthusiastic response from participants highlighted the genre's widespread appeal, which has since expanded further with the rise of the Internet as a platform for literary engagement (Żuławska-Umeda 102–105).

Haiku's reception in Europe and North America dates back to the latter half of the nineteenth century, when Western interest in the East was partly a response to the crisis of values in industrial societies. The succinct, contemplative form of haiku offered a literary counterpoint to technological overload and information saturation (Higginson 12–15). After World War II, Western engagement with Japanese culture intensified, catalyzed in part by the presence of American personnel during the occupation of Japan and the subsequent dissemination of Japanese art and aesthetics upon their return. In the United States, the Beat Generation poets—including Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, and Diane di Prima—embraced haiku as a source of formal innovation and spiritual insight (Shively 33–37). Mitsu Suzuki, a Japanese haiku master and author of *A White Tea Bowl*, also contributed to the American haiku movement while living in exile. Institutional support for haiku in America emerged through organizations such as the Haiku Society of America, which promoted the genre via publications and the dedicated journal *Frogpond* (Higginson 45–50).

Through these transnational developments, haiku demonstrates its capacity to function as both a literary and cultural phenomenon, adapting to diverse audiences and media while retaining its characteristic brevity, attentiveness, and contemplative depth.

The adoption of three-line poetry in the West raises the question: are these Western compositions equivalent to the haiku created in Far Eastern literary traditions? Sociological and cultural contexts have produced significant differences in Western haiku, resulting in formal, thematic, and aesthetic divergences. For instance, George Swede's one-line haiku—"Night begins to gather between her breasts"—and Ernst Jünger's so-called "mantras"—"Laurels, gathered in greenhouses"—illustrate both the experimentation with lineation and the thematic departure from classical models (Swede 22; Jünger 105).

In Western adaptations, the traditional 17-syllable structure underwent fundamental reform, with both verse length and form becoming more flexible. Thematically, early American haiku often retained the focus on nature and the "trifles" of everyday life, yet subsequent waves increasingly reflected technological, cultural, and social transformations: for example, a poem depicting an inflated doll in a pornographic shop juxtaposed against a rainy winter evening ("A rainy winter evening – / An inflated doll slumped over / In a porn shop") highlights the intrusion of urban modernity into a form historically associated with natural observation (Higginson 48). In many cases, representations of nature are replaced by consumerist imagery, as in "In the doll's head / Clippings / From newspapers."

Moreover, Western haiku often introduces eroticism, a motif largely absent from classical Japanese models. This erotic element appears both subtly—"Late August, / I bring him a garden / In my skirt"—and more provocatively, with overt sexual imagery, as in "Orgasm is coming / In the apartment next door / Someone is flushing the toilet" (Swede 57). These innovations illustrate the capacity of haiku in the West to adapt to new cultural sensibilities while simultaneously challenging traditional aesthetic expectations.

A distinct category within Western and contemporary haiku consists of compositions characterized by grotesque, playful, or satirical elements. This tendency appears in both American haiku and the Russian adaptation of the form. For example, Vladimir Shinkarev's *Stone Garden* and *Hokku, Tanki, and Armored Transporters* feature darkly humorous juxtapositions of mundane and

absurd situations: “Fyodor greedily put his mouth to the bottle – / And suddenly it was empty. / Maksim didn’t know whether to laugh or cry” (Shinkarev 34).

Similarly, Polish poet Dariusz “Brzóski” Brzóskiewicz explores the grotesque and whimsical within haiku in works such as *Haiku* and *Golden Thoughts of a Dog*. In the poem “Finished Frania / Finished Rysio / And they went to the same class,” Brzóskiewicz juxtaposes childlike simplicity with a subtle dark humor. In another piece, *About Eaten Swans*, he introduces absurdity and gentle satire: “Somewhere out there they fly / Two swans / Waving their necks / They are already feeling sick from being constantly fed bread” (Brzóskiewicz 21). These examples demonstrate the flexibility of the haiku form, which, while rooted in brevity and attentiveness to perception, can also accommodate grotesque, playful, or ironic modes of expression.

Here’s a polished, academically framed version of your paragraph, preserving your voice and argument, enhancing clarity and cohesion, and adding suggested MLA-style citations:

Haiku, a literary genre originating in Japanese culture, first attracted the attention of Western intellectuals in the nineteenth century. Early efforts to translate these works into English, French, or German met with mixed success, often preserving the three-line structure but failing to convey the cultural, religious, and philosophical underpinnings of the form, as well as its formal constraints, such as the 17-syllable pattern (Higginson 14). During the twentieth century, Western writers continued to adapt Japanese haiku or compose their own three-line works, drawing less upon Japanese contexts, Buddhism, or Taoism, and more upon European religious traditions—particularly Christian mystical poetry—and indigenous aesthetic movements such as Impressionism and Surrealism (Shively 22–24).

It was not until the mid-twentieth century, with the emergence of the Beat Generation, that haiku found a fully coherent expression within Western culture. Poets such as Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Diane di Prima engaged with Buddhist philosophy and sought cultural equivalents within American or European contexts to evoke concentration, transience, and spiritual discovery (Higginson 48–50). Their adaptations popularized haiku in the West, ensuring its

permanent incorporation into Western literary practice and establishing the genre as a recognized medium for both formal experimentation and philosophical reflection.

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From Pages of Literature to the Frames of Comics: Examples of Edgar Allan Poe and George Orwell

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Abstract: Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, comics have increasingly asserted themselves as a significant form of contemporary cultural expression. No longer regarded merely as a subordinate or entertainment-oriented genre, comics and graphic novels have developed distinct aesthetic strategies and interpretive frameworks, establishing themselves as autonomous artistic media. This transformation is particularly evident in adaptations of canonical literary works, where textual and visual translation generates new aesthetic configurations that both depend on and depart from their sources.

This article examines selected adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, analysing the dynamics between fidelity and creative transformation. Drawing on Gérard Genette's theory of intertextuality and hypertextuality, as well as contemporary comics studies, the study investigates the role of the literary source text, the selection and reconfiguration of plot elements, the visual concretisation of metaphor, the construction of narrative space and character, and the emergence of new semantic layers within the comic medium. Particular attention is paid to the tension between adaptation as reinterpretation and adaptation as aesthetic equivalence. The analysis demonstrates that while some adaptations function primarily as illustrative or abridged versions of literary originals, others transcend their models and operate as independent works of art. In the context of a broader cultural shift from logocentrism to pictocentrism, comics should therefore be approached not merely as derivative forms but as participants in a distinct interpretive discourse.

Keywords: E. A. Poe; G. Orwell; Comics; Graphic Novel; Adaptation; Intertextuality / Hypertextuality; Pictocentrism; Visual Narrative / Intermediality

Adaptation of Literature to Other Fields of Art

The adaptation of literature into other artistic media has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, approached from multiple methodological perspectives. Within the research tradition, scholars have examined the phenomena of quotation, travesty, and pastiche, elucidating both the motives behind and the techniques involved in such transformations (Genette 1982). The adaptation of literary elements into theater, film, and other performative media has also been extensively analyzed, revealing the interplay between textual fidelity and creative reinterpretation (Baetens and Frey 2015). More recently, attention has turned to the migration of literary characteristics into emergent media, particularly digital environments such as video games, highlighting the continuing evolution of narrative forms in technologically mediated contexts (Chute 2017). Among these forms, comics and graphic novels constitute a compelling site for adaptation studies, providing a hybrid space in which textual and visual semiotics intersect.

For the purposes of this study, I adopt an intertextual approach inspired by Gérard Genette (1982) alongside insights from contemporary comics scholarship, including the works of Jan Baetens and Hugo Frey (2015) and Hillary Chute (2017). As a scholar operating within the Polish academic context, I also draw upon the contributions of Jerzy Szyłak (1999; 2000; 2016) and Wojciech Birek (2009; 2014), whose research represents the most significant Polish perspectives on comics studies. It should be noted that the incorporation of diverse theoretical frameworks introduces a degree of arbitrariness in my terminological usage and interpretative stance; nevertheless, this approach reflects the ongoing scholarly debate concerning the autonomy of comics as a medium.

A central point of contention in comics scholarship concerns the extent to which graphic and textual elements should be analyzed independently versus in conjunction with literary traditions. Proponents of the former position emphasize the autonomy of comics as works of art, with distinct historical roots (extending from prehistoric rock paintings), unique expressive techniques (graphic panels, text strips), and an independent interpretive discourse (Sabin 1996; Lopes 2009). Conversely,

advocates of the latter perspective argue that comics are fundamentally interdependent, drawing upon literary achievements and the visual language of painting, a claim substantiated by the inherently heterogeneous interplay of text and image within the medium (McCloud 1993; McCloud 2006). In the following analysis, I align with the latter understanding, focusing on the adaptation of classic literary works into the comic form, specifically examining examples from the oeuvres of Edgar Allan Poe and George Orwell to illustrate the processes and strategies involved in such transpositions.

Without entering into detailed terminological debates, my primary focus lies on the phenomenon of transforming literary artistic expression into multimedia forms, particularly comic books and graphic novels. Within this process, one can observe clear instances of intertextuality, wherein a text is present within another text, manifesting through quotation, allusion, or structural reference (Genette 1982). Equally notable are examples of metatextuality, in which one artistic medium comment upon or reflects the conventions of another, producing a dialogue between forms (Genette 1982). These phenomena, long examined in literary studies, are here explored through two illustrative examples from the world of comics, providing a framework to analyze how discrete elements of literary expression—such as narrative, characterisation, temporality, spatiality, and ethical or aesthetic values—are transposed into the visual-verbal language of sequential art.

A detailed examination of these cases enables a critical evaluation of the adaptations in question, including considerations of authenticity, fidelity, and creative reinterpretation. To what extent are these adaptations mechanical and reproducible, versus original, inventive, and intentionally "unfaithful" to the source material? What impact does a given adaptation exert on the perceived status of the original literature, and conversely, how does it contribute to the cultural and aesthetic legitimacy of comics as an autonomous art form? My discussion focuses on the most salient aspects of comic book adaptation, particularly the transference of narrative structures, character construction, and the temporal-spatial organization of literary worlds into the semiotic frameworks of comics. This analysis is not intended to assert the superiority of literary texts over comics; rather, it highlights cultural and aesthetic developments in Western artistic practice since the mid-twentieth century,

reflecting a marked shift from a historically dominant logocentrism toward what has been termed pictocentrism (Mitchell 1994).

Entertainment Comic: *The Fall of the House of Usher* by Edgar Allan Poe

Among the multiple motivations underlying the production of comic books, one of the most salient is the deliberate creation of a work that is simultaneously compelling in its textual and visual dimensions. Here, "attractiveness" encompasses simplicity of artistic expression, accessibility to a broad readership, and the capacity to evoke aesthetic and emotional engagement. Comic books derive value not solely from narrative content but from the pleasure of reading, facilitated by the legibility of the text and the clarity and compositional effectiveness of the visual design, as orchestrated by authors and graphic artists (Szyłak 2000). Rather than experimenting with formal or avant-garde techniques intended to render their work idiosyncratic or esoteric, creators typically prioritize the communicative efficacy of the textual and visual narrative, ensuring that both elements effectively capture and sustain the reader's attention.

This orientation toward pleasure and accessibility is particularly evident in adaptations of literary works into the multimodal language of comics. Comic renditions of Greek myths or Western European literary classics, for instance, are primarily designed to prepare readers for engagement with the original texts rather than to serve as comprehensive substitutes for them. Within the simplified, schematized narrative and pictorial framework presented by comic book authors, the emphasis is on enjoyment and entertainment rather than philosophical, ideological, or complex artistic interpretation. Readers seeking to explore the intricate artistic strategies, ideological frameworks, or aesthetic depth of the source material must consult the original literary work in its verbal medium. In this sense, entertainment-oriented comics fulfill functional and cultural roles distinct from those of literature, providing aesthetic gratification and narrative accessibility without the expectation of exhaustive literary analysis (Jones Jr. 2011).

Let us consider a representative example. In 2023, the comic book *La Maison Usher*, with text by Jean Dufaux and artwork by Jaime Calderon, was published in French, drawing upon Edgar

Allan Poe's seminal horror narrative *The Fall of the House of Usher* (Dufaux and Calderon 2023). The English original underwent significant compositional modifications, not primarily due to translation issues, but in order to adapt the story to the multimodal conventions of the comic book medium. Jean Dufaux, a prominent Belgian scriptwriter and journalist with extensive experience in historical and horror-themed comic series, employed a strategy of "unfaithful" adaptation characterized by intertextual play and thematic reconfiguration. Rather than incorporating direct quotations from Poe's text, Dufaux constructs a narrative thematically aligned with the original story. The characters—including the narrator Damon, his cousin Roderick Usher, and Roderick's sister Madeline—are present, as is the eponymous decaying mansion, which sustains the gothic atmosphere. However, the textual elements are wholly reinterpreted, demonstrating the liberties afforded by the comic form to reshape classical literature for visual and sequential storytelling.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the narrative elements derived from Poe's original work are extensively transformed in the comic book to fulfill aesthetic and dramaturgical functions. A striking example of this transformation is evident in the altered characterization and backstory of the narrator. In Dufaux's adaptation, the narrator emerges as a young card player named Damon, residing in Baltimore and emotionally entangled with a prostitute named Nina. Initially, Damon's journey to the Usher mansion appears motivated by the need to flee from criminals to whom he owes gambling debts. However, the narrative ultimately reveals that the carriage conveying him to the Usher residence was orchestrated by Madeline Usher herself, seeking refuge from her malevolent brother by summoning her cousin. Consequently, this rendition constructs a markedly different biography for the narrator than the one delineated in Poe's original, illustrating the liberties afforded by the comic book medium and the creative strategies employed in what Genette (1982) would term a "transformative" intertextual adaptation.

The plot of *La Maison Usher* exhibits significant narrative innovations, particularly in terms of character development and plot construction, which foreground motifs of betrayal absent in Poe's original work. The adaptation introduces secondary figures drawn from the urban underworld,

including various card players and criminals with whom the protagonist maintains connections, such as King Leon and Black Snake. Additionally, Dufaux and Calderon incorporate episodic characters in the form of reanimated corpses, appearing in the final sequences and intensifying the gothic atmosphere of decay and destruction. Perhaps the most striking narrative modification—transcending pastiche or parody—is the inclusion of Edgar Allan Poe himself as a character. Rendered with facial features recognizable from historical iconography, Poe functions simultaneously as a participant in the narrative and as a meta-observer, recording the events that will ultimately comprise *The Fall of the House of Usher*. This introduces a paratextual dimension to the adaptation, as the comic reflects upon the act of literary creation and the specific artistic choices employed in narrativizing the story (Genette 1982).

Viewed holistically, the narrative of *La Maison Usher* shifts focus from the collapse of the Usher family to the adventures of a young card player, Damon, who, while fleeing urban criminals, arrives at the home of his cousin Roderick Usher and learns of Madeline Usher's death. As he comforts Roderick, he observes the latter's descent into madness and uncovers the sinister nature of his obsessive attachment to his sister. Damon is ultimately powerless to confront or punish Roderick, and the spectral appearance of Madeline precipitates her brother's demise, culminating in the literal collapse of the Usher mansion. These narrative transformations indicate that Dufaux's adaptation operates less as a faithful literary transcription than as a standalone story, resembling a crime-thriller designed to satisfy contemporary readers' appetite for suspense and excitement (Dufaux and Calderon 2023; Chute 2017).

This storyline is concretized through the artistic interpretation of Spanish illustrator Jaime Calderón, who employs a convention of realism in rendering the comic. The characters are depicted with meticulous attention to photographic accuracy, encompassing bodies, faces, gestures, and expressions. They are situated within backgrounds of natural or urban landscapes, maintaining optical perspective, proportionality, and compositional harmony. Calderón's panels are predominantly colorful, rendered in warm tones, and arranged chronologically to reflect the narrative sequence of

events. The characters are most often presented in what is referred to as an "American shot," which allows for a balanced depiction of figures and their surroundings. Calderón employs varied angles, privileging expressive close-ups of faces while reserving wide landscape perspectives and occasional grotesque distortions for narrative emphasis. The comic as a whole is structured cinematically, with a multi-threaded narrative that organizes sequential events into thematic clusters subordinate to Dufaux's plot (Calderón and Dufaux 2023; Chute 2017).

The vibrancy of the frames, the rapid pacing of events, the introduction of new characters—including Edgar Allan Poe himself, figures of criminals, and reanimated corpses—and the narrative perspective centered on the young protagonist all contribute to a reinterpretation that significantly alters the semantics of the original text. The adaptation diverts from the melancholic atmosphere and decayed elegance characteristic of Poe's story, substituting instead an adventure-thriller mode dominated by a young, romanticized protagonist. Psychological depth and metaphysical resonance are largely absent, replaced by a sequence of puzzles and narrative events, most of which are resolved, leaving the aura of mystery that Poe meticulously cultivated largely unexplored (Dufaux and Calderón 2023).

Graphic Novel and Literary Adaptation: George Orwell's *1984*

The history of comics may be divided into several distinct stages of formal and thematic development. Following the period in which comics consolidated into book-length publications of several dozen pages, the medium underwent significant aesthetic and narrative transformations (Eisner 1985; Szyłak 2016). Subject matter gradually shifted away from the dominance of superheroes toward protagonists who more often embodied vulnerability than extraordinary power. By the end of the twentieth century, a substantial body of such works had emerged, prompting critics and publishers to distinguish them from mainstream entertainment comics through the designation "graphic novel." The term *comic book* thus remained associated primarily with shorter, serial publications oriented toward entertainment and frequently featuring characters endowed with supernatural abilities. In contrast, the term *graphic novel* came to denote works aspiring to artistic ambition, formal

experimentation, and thematic complexity (Baetens and Frey 2015; Konefał 2015). As graphic novels gained visibility within the literary marketplace, art critics increasingly began to treat them as serious cultural artifacts. Characters ceased to function merely as eccentric or exaggerated figures, and plots were no longer confined to formulaic structures typical of genre entertainment.

An example of a graphic novel characterized by restraint and relative fidelity to its literary precursor is *1984: The Graphic Novel*, illustrated and adapted by Fido Nesti and published in 2020, based on George Orwell's dystopian classic *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell; Nesti 2020). This adaptation demonstrates a pronounced respect for the original narrative structure and ideological framework. While the text necessarily undergoes substantial abridgment in order to condense Orwell's extensive novel into a 214-page illustrated volume, the central thematic and political premises remain intact. The omissions primarily concern descriptive and discursive passages, allowing the visual medium to assume part of the burden of world-building and atmospheric construction. Importantly, the narrative architecture—divided into three parts in the original novel—is preserved in the graphic adaptation.

Although psychological introspection and extended philosophical reflections—particularly those concerning Newspeak and linguistic determinism—are significantly reduced, the adaptation does not fundamentally alter Orwell's central critique of totalitarianism. Instead, it foregrounds the dramatic dimension of individual existence within a surveillance state, translating ideological oppression into striking visual imagery. Notably, the adaptation retains an extended excerpt from the subversive book attributed to Emmanuel Goldstein, an uncommon strategy within graphic storytelling, which typically avoids lengthy textual insertions. This decision signals a marked fidelity to the literary source and suggests that the adaptation seeks not to reinterpret or subvert Orwell's work but to provide a visual equivalent of it. In this sense, the graphic novel aspires less to creative transformation than to interpretative translation, privileging equivalence over innovation.

The most important ideological factors of George Orwell's novel – the anonymity of man in the civilisation of the past, the negative aspects of the existence of the state, the attempt to rebel against

the apparatus of oppression, and the final defeat of the main character – remain intact in Brownell and Nesti's graphic novel. This effect was achieved more quickly than in the original literary work, but just as vividly. From a literary point of view, Brownell and Nesti's graphic novel is therefore a faithful, authentic and successful adaptation.

The illustrator of *1984: The Graphic Novel*, Fido Nesti, likewise demonstrates a pronounced fidelity to Orwell's literary vision, particularly in the visual construction of principal characters—Winston Smith, Julia—and in the representation of the interiors and industrial landscapes of dystopian London (Orwell; Nesti 2020). Nesti adopts a restrained, predominantly monochromatic palette. The pervasive darkness and muted tonal range correspond closely to the pessimistic and oppressive atmosphere of Orwell's narrative. The chromatic austerity reinforces the emotional climate of surveillance, alienation, and existential confinement that defines the novel's world.

Moreover, the compositional density of the pages contributes significantly to the adaptation's interpretative coherence. The accumulation of numerous small panels—sometimes exceeding a dozen per page—produces a visual impression of spatial compression. This formal strategy evokes the claustrophobic conditions in which the characters exist, visually mirroring the novel's depiction of psychological and social suffocation. Nesti employs expansive landscape perspectives sparingly; when distant horizons do appear, they are typically associated with moments of dream, memory, or romantic intimacy. Such visual openings correspond closely to Orwell's compositional contrasts between the mechanized rigidity of totalitarian reality and fleeting experiences of subjective interiority. The graphic novel thus reproduces, through visual means, Orwell's structural opposition between confinement and imagined freedom.

Nesti also maintains consistency in the physiognomic construction of characters. Faces are rendered with realistic precision and convey a broad spectrum of emotional states. The artist frequently employs strong directional lighting, which sharpens facial contours and casts elongated, almost surreal shadows. Yet this chiaroscuro technique does not produce grotesque distortion; rather, it intensifies psychological tension while preserving realism. Most scenes are bathed in the cold glow

of artificial illumination, visually reinforcing the absence of natural light that characterizes Orwell's dystopian universe. Sunlight and moonlight—symbols traditionally associated with renewal or transcendence—remain largely inaccessible to both the literary and graphic protagonists.

Taken together, these artistic decisions suggest that the adaptation does not merely condense Orwell's narrative but seeks to translate its aesthetic and ideological architecture into visual form. Unlike the more transformative strategy observed in *La Maison Usher*, Nesti's work operates within a paradigm of visual equivalence, striving for fidelity not only to plot but also to atmosphere, symbolism, and structural composition.

The costuming of the characters in *1984: The Graphic Novel* is likewise of interpretative significance. The garments evoke, on the one hand, the utilitarian austerity of workers' uniforms and, on the other, the standardized attire historically associated with members of twentieth-century communist regimes. This visual strategy reinforces the novel's emphasis on collectivism, conformity, and the erasure of individuality. Particularly striking is the representation of Big Brother. Although rendered with stylistic originality, the image inevitably recalls the iconography of totalitarian leaders such as Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin. Nesti deliberately avoids visual diversification in his portrayal of this figure. Instead, he reproduces a single, standardized likeness, repeatedly disseminated through newspapers, posters, and, most prominently, the omnipresent telescreens. The relentless multiplication of this face—characterized by its penetrating gaze and severe moustache—intensifies the atmosphere of surveillance, persecution, and ideological domination. Through this formal decision, the illustrator concretizes Orwell's literary construction of symbolic authority, proposing a visual equivalent that neither contradicts nor reinterprets the novel's ideological premises (Orwell; Nesti 2020).

The combined textual and graphic strategies employed in Brownell and Nesti's adaptation exemplify a model of equivalence between source text and visual reinterpretation. The script's selective abridgement and the artist's restrained aesthetic choices do not fundamentally alter the semantic core of Orwell's dystopia. Rather than reshaping or problematizing the original, the

adaptation preserves its philosophical and political thrust while translating it into a distinct visual-verbal language. In this respect, the graphic novel demonstrates that adaptation need not entail semantic displacement or ideological revision. Instead, it may function as a parallel artistic articulation—one that maintains the integrity of the literary original while simultaneously inaugurating a new mode of aesthetic experience. The result is not a reinterpretation that competes with the source text, but a reconfiguration that confirms its continuing cultural resonance within a different medium.

The Expansion of Comics in the Art Market

In the contemporary circulation of cultural goods and within the broader context of the commercialization of art, even the canonical achievements of literature increasingly assume the status of commodities. This transformation is not merely the consequence of global economic mechanisms but also a symptom of deeper civilizational shifts in modes of production, distribution, and reception. Literature, like any human creation, participates in systems of reproduction and consumption, a process already diagnosed by Walter Benjamin in the 1930s in his reflections on mechanical reproduction and the changing aura of the artwork (Benjamin 1980). For literary works to function effectively within mass cultural circulation, they must be accessible, widely distributed, strategically promoted, and accompanied by critical commentary that frames their reception. Consequently, representatives of the literary field—publishers, institutions, critics, and authors—have established national and international festivals, awards, and promotional structures designed to sustain literature's cultural presence and stimulate its continued production.

At the same time, one may observe an intensified intermedial dynamic in which literary works increasingly enter into relationships with other artistic domains. Canonical texts become reference points and narrative resources for music, visual arts, theatre, cinema, video games, and comics. Through repeated adaptation and reinterpretation, these works often undergo such extensive formal and semantic transformations that the resulting artifact bears only partial resemblance to its source. In such cases, the adapted work acquires autonomy and demands analytical tools distinct from those

traditionally applied to literature. Comics provide a particularly illuminating example of this phenomenon, as they combine verbal and visual codes within a unified semiotic system and thereby reconfigure the literary material they appropriate (Beaty 2013).

Focusing specifically on the aesthetic relationship between literature and comics, the mutual interactions between these two modes of artistic expression—and the adaptation techniques that structure them—have long attracted scholarly attention. Adaptation studies, intertextual theory, and comics scholarship alike have examined the mechanisms by which narrative, character, temporality, and ideological content migrate from the literary page to the sequential panel, revealing both tensions and creative possibilities inherent in such transfers. Juliane Blank, for example, wrote about this in the following words:

> There is no denying that literary adaptations in comics represent something of a rend. This development is largely linked to the "hype" surrounding comics under the banner of the graphic novel term, from which literary adaptation in comics has benefited in several respects. In the last ten years, an international market for literary adaptations in comics has increasingly established itself. Almost every comic publisher also serves this genre, some organize literary adaptations in their own publication series. In 2007, a publishing house was founded in England that initially specialized exclusively in comic book adaptations. A further confirmation of the "hype" can be seen in the fact that publishers who have not yet published any comics also include literary adaptations in comics in their range – obviously in the hope of being able to benefit both financially and improve their image from a result (Blank 2015, 15).

The literary and sociological phenomenon outlined above warrants further clarification, as a discernible pattern emerges within contemporary adaptation practices. On the one hand, there exists a pronounced tendency to adapt literature for the broad audience of popular or mass culture. In such cases, adapters employ simplified graphic strategies, reduce narrative complexity, and substantially abridge the original text in order to enhance accessibility and marketability. The resulting works

prioritize clarity, pace, and visual immediacy over interpretative depth. On the other hand, a contrasting current within comics and graphic novel production seeks not simplification but dialogue. These adapters approach literature as a space for intertextual engagement, metatextual commentary, and formal experimentation. Rather than merely translating the original into visual form, they transform the traditional literary medium into a new verbal-visual sign system, striving for originality—even at the cost of overt divergence from the adapted source.

An examination of the evolving perception of comics and graphic novels reveals that this dynamic has historical precedents. The trend initiated by Andy Warhol, a central figure of pop art, remains particularly instructive. Warhol's comic-style portraits of emblematic figures of Western intellectual history—such as Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Franz Kafka—visually relocated representatives of "high" culture into the aesthetic domain of mass reproduction and consumer circulation (Goldstein 2000). Through vibrant graphic stylization, canonical figures became accessible within the logic of popular culture, illustrating the permeability of boundaries between elite and mass artistic forms. Warhol and his successors effectively demonstrated that the symbolic capital of canonical works could be repackaged for the consumer market without entirely relinquishing their cultural prestige.

This process extended beyond visual portraiture into broader textual and graphic adaptation practices. Religious, philosophical, and scientific works increasingly underwent transformation into comic book series, illustrated albums, and graphic novels (Jones Jr. 2011; Weiner 2012; Kalinowski 2021). In such adaptations, creators typically selected the most visually compelling episodes of the original works, condensing narrative structures into concentrated scenes and prioritizing dramatic turning points. Adaptation also necessitated decisions concerning narrative voice and stylistic strategy. While traditional comic books tend to privilege dynamic dialogue and action-driven sequences over extended descriptive passages, graphic novels frequently reintroduce more sustained narrator-driven commentary, thereby negotiating between literary discursiveness and visual storytelling. Despite this effort at balance, the resulting works often diverge substantially from their

literary prototypes in aesthetic configuration. The transformation of medium inevitably produces a shift in expressive logic: what was once articulated through linguistic complexity becomes reorganized within a multimodal framework governed by sequential imagery, panel rhythm, and visual symbolism.

Beyond the literary dimension of adaptation, the graphic component of comics constitutes an equally decisive factor in the transformation of canonical texts. Every creator of a comic book or graphic novel must determine a distinct artistic style through which the adapted narrative will be mediated. This stylistic decision manifests itself within individual panels, where conventions of realism, fantasy, expressionism, or grotesque deformation generate specific aesthetic and interpretative effects. The selected visual idiom may either facilitate a meaningful dialogue with the literary source or, conversely, distance the adaptation from it. In this sense, graphic style is not a neutral vehicle of representation but an interpretative act in itself. The illustrator must anticipate how scenes, atmospheres, and psychological tensions originally articulated through verbal means can be transposed into visual composition—through framing, perspective, colour palette, panel rhythm, and spatial arrangement—before the adaptation is materially realized.

In conclusion, the aesthetic properties of comics and graphic novels confirm their status as artistic forms grounded in a complex and multidimensional process of literary transformation. Adaptation in this medium is not a merely mechanical transfer of narrative content but a semiotic reconfiguration in which textual and visual codes intersect to produce new layers of meaning. Simultaneously, the commercialization of culture enables adapters of classical literature to attain public visibility and market recognition, contributing to the economic success of publishers while extending the circulation of canonical works. From a broader cultural perspective, the adaptation of literary classics into comics and graphic novels exemplifies the pictocentric orientation of contemporary society, in which visual modes of communication increasingly dominate over exclusively verbal forms (Mitchell 1994). Within this framework, comics and graphic novels evolve beyond the status of derivative adaptations and assert themselves as autonomous discursive

formations. It therefore becomes increasingly untenable to regard them solely as secondary to literature; rather, they should be recognized as constituting a distinct artistic and theoretical discourse within the contemporary cultural landscape.

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The Mutuality of Adaptation in/of Percival Everett's Works

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Abstract: Human being's endeavor 'to fit in' the social world has always been beset with the problems of hierarchy and exploitation across the lines of race, gender, class, caste, nationhood and religion among others; and literature has been chronicling and representing this human adaptation before the adaptation of such predicaments amongst literary and other art forms. The Booker shortlisted and Pulitzer winner African American novelist Percival Everett (b. 1956) can be described to be in the thick of adaptive exchanges, in the sense that his works get adapted into films, and he keeps adapting both real and imaginary people into his poignant and funny and immensely ironic narratives. The proposed paper would endeavor a study of four of his novels: *Erasure* (2001, turned into a film titled *American Fiction* in 2023) that satirizes the adaptation of a narrative and language by a black author that would be considered by the market-driven (and racial) publishing world as 'authentic black'; *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009) employs adaptation of issues from several films starring the first black Academy-award-winning Hollywood male actor Sidney Poitier; *The Trees* (2021), a novel that adapts (while inverting) the real incidents of arbitrary killing of black people starting movements like Black Lives Matter; and the Pulitzer-winning 2024 novel *James* that re-imaginatively adapts *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* Everett's Menippean satire thus simultaneously adapts, and is adapted from the Antebellum Period to a post-slavery to a (supposedly) post-racial reality in America. The section on the varied adaptations in Everett's works is prefixed by a brief terminological discussion on 'adaptation' and the opinions of some canonical African American critics on why it is still very difficult by the Blacks to adapt to the American life where the White discourse still marginalizes them.

Keywords: Adaptation; Authentic Black; Menippean Satire; Antebellum Period, Black Lives Matter

I - Adaptation: A Conceptual Clearance

Human life on this earth has been one of evolution and adaptation, and so, in the broader sense, adaptation is the story of human beings' fitting in into the natural scheme of things or realities around them, and gradually adapting their lives from nomadism to sedentism thereby leading to the foundation of societies and civilizations. From its Latin etymology (*adaptare*) through other European languages like Old French (*adapter*), the verb ' to adapt' takes on meanings of 'to fit' (something, for some purpose), 'to adjust', 'to join', and 'to undergo modification'. In comparative literature, 'adaptation' means the process of changing the medium of a text and transforming it into a text in another medium – most commonly the transformation of a novel into a film, and lately, vice-versa, thereby bringing in a comparative and critical estimate of the two texts through two other nearby terms in comparative literature – influence study, and intertextuality. Also, in the context of the discourse on alternative modernity, adaptation couples with hybridity to critique a conventional homogeneous concept of Western modernity by exploring indigenous and local cultures resisting wholesale Western implantation of - say for example, the capitalist mode of economy - and ascribing to local ways of life that can be called 'modern', albeit under the constantly growing forces of globalization.

The fact of human adaptation to their physical realities happened much before their endeavors towards artistic adaptations. Yuval Noah Harari, in his text *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2011), has traced the history of humankind's evolution from the species labelled as Homo Sapiens through their varied adaptations which he has traced as various revolutions – from the cognitive, 70000 years ago to the scientific revolution 500 years ago, to the industrial revolution 200 years ago, to our present age when we are actually in the throes of adapting to a world of artificial intelligence and robots. Included in this history is the representation of the human world through language describing things both real and imaginary. There is an interesting section in this text where Harari shows how the imaginary is not the false thereby making us recollect the distinction Aristotle had made in his *Poetics* between poetry being more *probably* real than factually real making the probable

reveal more essential human actions and behaviors and thus coming closer to universal truths rather than just the temporal ones.

> Over the years, people have woven an incredibly complex network of stories. … The kinds of things that people create through this network of stories are known in academic circles as 'fictions', 'social constructs' or 'imagined realities'. An imagined reality is not a lie. … Unlike lying, an imagined reality is something that everyone believes in, and as long as this communal belief persists, the imagined reality exerts force in the world. (35)

Within the matrix of this communal belief in imagined realities incorporating literature, one theory proposed by archetypal critics like Northrop Frye is the evolution of literary genres and adaptation to their historical and cultural realities through a recurrence of archetypal patterns.

> Total literary history moves from the primitive to the sophisticated, and here we glimpse the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a relatively restricted and simple group of formulas that can be studied in primitive culture. If so, then the search for archetypes is a kind of literary anthropology, concerned with the way that literature is informed by pre-literary categories such as ritual, myth and folk tale. (Leitch 1308-09)

Anthropology and history inform us that societies established themselves through establishing different hierarchies amongst human beings, on the basis of division of labor, competence, gender, class, race etc., the last criterion incorporating the long history of slavery from Africa to the Americas and the perception that still lingers on in the White society that people of color are far removed from artistic and intellectual arenas making them invisible from things that matter, especially whitewashed from creative and critical discourses. All through the twentieth century, critics of race and ethnicity studies from W. E. B. Du Bois to Henry Louis Gates Jr. to bell hooks have been engaged to break the implied myths that are perpetuated to ghettoize Black identity and culture, and can be variously enlisted as:

- Blacks were slaves;
- Blacks are laborers;

- Blacks are, and can only be, servants and house-helps;
- Blacks are poorly educated, and therefore are capable of only menial jobs;
- Blacks can't be intellectuals, and therefore intellectual discourses are beyond their understanding;
- Blacks speak a funny lingo with wrong spellings and grammar; and,
- The arts produced by colored people can only be considered under labels such as 'African American' or 'Black', never mainstream.

In an address in Chicago in 1926 – later published as "Criteria of Negro Art" - W. E. B. Du Bois opines that the White society feeds them with the question in a rhetorical and hegemonistic way – "After all, what have we who are slaves and black to do with Art?" (Leitch 870) – suggesting that the basic requirements of food, clothing and housing keep the Blacks so helplessly embroiled that Art is quite beyond their reach, and thus they are deprived, according to Du Bois, of 'Beauty, Truth and Goodness'. This in turn is probably responsible for certain statistical data peddled around as realities about Black communities, that there's more obesity, alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, higher risk of sex under the influence of substances and drug use, etc. Ironically, the hegemony among the Black community that 'white is best' is so deeply entrenched that even when they produce a distinct art form, they are hesitant, even guilt-ridden to claim it as their own, as Langston Hughes writes in an essay titled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926):

> [J]azz to me is one of the inherent expressions of Negro life in America: the eternal tom-tom beating in the Negro soul – the tom-tom of revolt against weariness in a white world, a world of subway trains, and work, work, work; the tom-tom of joy and laughter, and pain swallowed in a smile. Yet the Philadelphia clubwoman is ashamed to say that her race created it and she does not like me to write about it. The old subconscious "white is best" runs through her mind. Years of study under white teachers, a lifetime of white books, pictures, and papers, and white manners, morals, and Puritan standards made her dislike the spirituals. And now she turns up

her nose at jazz and all its manifestations – likewise almost everything else distinctly racial. (Leitch 1195)

Henry Louis Gates Jr., one of the most prominent African American cultural critics and theorists, and W. E. B. Du Bois Professor of Humanities at Harvard is best known for meticulously proving false the stereotype that the Blacks are devoid of intellectuality, and to prove this point he went on to edit with Nellie McKay *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* in 1997. But in an earlier essay titled "Talking Black: Critical Signs of the Times", Gates Jr. trifurcates Black literature and criticism into three prominent phases: the first one, running almost till mid-twentieth century, where much of the energy is spent in refuting the false White discourse that African American's "*could not* create literature (Leitch 2433)" and therefore, by default, had no literary-critical tradition. Then came the wave of mostly White male European literary theories from Marxism to poststructuralism that African American thinkers and writers learnt 'in the master's tongue' and felt a sense of empowerment that however did not bridge the hierarchy. Yet, with the beginning of a third phase sometime towards the end of the 1980s, the hopeful fact was that Afro-American literature was slowly getting institutionalized in many White colleges and universities. However, the important question was to what extent was this adoption also a co-option. And, an even more important question was that, if African American writers and critics used the critical-theoretical language of the White Europeans and Americans when in reality these theories have always been oblivious to Black literature and life, then "Can we, as critics, escape a "mockingbird" relation to theory? And can we escape the racism of so many critical theorists, from Hume and Kant through the Southern Agrarians and the Frankfurt school ((Leitch 2435)?"

II Percival Everett

Percival Leonard Everett II (b. Dec 22, 1956) has till date written 24 novels, and counting his poetry and short story anthologies, and children's fiction, has written more than 30 books. This paper would endeavor a study of four of his novels, all published in this century, and all bothered by – besides the invisibility of the Black people – the pervading thought of what narratives to adapt, and in what kind

of (English) language, so that literature fulfils its function of authentically representing life, in this case, that of the Black people. One technique employed by Everett is to adapt a famous Black person or a character into his own narrative thereby making a connection between the period of that person or character and the author's own contemporary time. The protagonist of the first novel considered here, *Erasure* (2001), named Thelonious Ellison, nicknamed Monk, is named after the American Jazz pianist and composer Thelonious Monk (1917 – 82). The surname Ellison reminds us of the African American author Ralph Waldo Ellison (1913 – 94), famous for his book *Invisible Man* (1952) where a Black protagonist travels from the American Deep South to Harlem in New York constantly troubled by the feeling that because he is a black man, he is 'invisible' to the majority Whites.[1] Thelonious Ellison, the protagonist in Everett's novel *Erasure* is a nearly invisible author because what he writes cannot prove that he is 'black enough'. So, the paradox between Ralph Ellison's 1950s and Everett's 2001 is that the protagonist in Ellison's novel was invisible because he was Black, and the protagonist and his work in Everett are invisible because they are *not* black. Over half a century then, the American society has changed from being unconscious about the presence of the Blacks to being hyper-conscious about them to pigeon-hole them according to their concept of who is a Black. *Erasure* was adapted into a film titled *American Fiction* in 2023, and like the novel, it too satirizes the adaptation of a narrative and language by a black author that would be considered by the market-driven (and racial) publishing world as 'authentic black'. There are 21 films prefixed 'American' on Amazon Prime alone from *American Beauty* to *American Psycho* to *American Underdog* each one employing the adjective American in a positive sense identifying a typicality that defines the Americanness. *American Fiction*, a debut film by director Cord Jefferson winning three awards for best adapted screenplay in 2024[2], however uses the title with a heavy irony in at least three senses, that, a) if it is an American fiction, then it is not true because it is 'fiction', b) it can only be a fiction and therefore not believable because it is about the Blacks, and finally c) it can never be a book about Black Americans because the English used in it is not African American English. It is like the Langston Hughes poem 'I, Too' where the speaker reminds himself and his readers that he, the black

brother, awaits for a tomorrow to be taken seriously; that his time has not come in the present, that today he is a mere figment, not counted, simply, a fiction. The black brother can sing and speak as eloquently as the white, but unless he sings or speaks in a black tongue, unless he adapts to the stereotypical 'Black', he will never be counted and differentially accommodated.

The next novel, *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* (2009) playfully employs issues of adaptation of personal and social identity as the protagonist of this novel shares his name with the first black Academy-award-winning Hollywood male actor Sidney Poitier (1927 – 2022), one of the last surviving stars from what is termed as the Golden Age of Hollywood[3] that included just three or four actors of color. The protagonist's mother, Portia Poitier – the name Portia reminding us of the legally clever and economically astute character in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* – by an eccentric act named her son Not Sidney Poitier, and invested every dime she had in a little-known company in the 1970s called Turner Communications Group, later becoming the famous Turner Broadcasting System. Portia Poitier had amassed so much of the Turner company stock that Ted Turner – who is a character in this novel, very warmly drawn; but not so his one-time spouse, Jane Fonda who is caricatured – pays Portia a visit, and after her death, willingly, and non-exploitatively becomes Not Sidney's guardian. Among the four novels considered here, *I Am Not Sidney Poitier* is the most tender in its portrayal of human relationship, between Whites, Blacks and the Browns too – there's a Gujarati character in this novel named Podgy Patel who is Not Sidney's accountant, is absolutely non-corrupt although he knows he can cheat his master, and is completely focused on increasing his master's wealth according to the rules of the land. Yet, in this quasi magic realist novel with real life people as characters – there's Sidney Poitier, Ted Turner, Jane Fonda, and even the author Percival Everett does a self-adaptation and appears as a character occupying a sizeable space in his own novel, doing what Everett does in real life, teach in a university where the fictional character Not Sidney goes to study – the real issue is perhaps about adapting a life to make a life. In real life, we are born with a name given to us – a name that then for most of us stays till our death – and then grow up adapting and shaping a personality to the name through the challenges of race,

class, gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality etc. – these discourses being woven through language and ideology.

The Trees (2021), nominated for the Booker in 2022, is a novel that adapts (while inverting) the real incidents of arbitrary killing of Black people, often by the police, starting movements like Black Lives Matter. Generically, the novel adapts the plot and pace of a crime thriller mingling with it its sub-genre, the whodunit[4] with more than ample theatricality of the *danse macabre*. Its plot is an adaptation from the historical event in Mississippi in 1955 when a fourteen year old African American boy Emmett Till was violently murdered by two White men just because he allegedly spoke to a White woman at her grocery store. These two killers were later acquitted by an all-White jury under the Jim Crow laws of racial segregation and hierarchy enacted in the American South since late-nineteenth century and were only abolished with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. The inversion Everett achieves in the novel is that instead of Black people getting lynched in real life, it is the Whites who get killed, and two Black detectives try to solve the murders. The inverse adaptation of reality in this novel is a kind of providing a wishful revenge against years of hate crimes committed by White Supremacists, or a hypothetical narrative for the White readers to make them realize the wrongs they inflicted, and their institutions like the police department still inflicts upon the Black community.

Finally, in the Pulitzer-winning 2024 novel *James* Everett re-imaginatively adapts *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), but this time from the slave Jim's point-of-view. Jim was the slave in Huck's family in Mark Twain's text, but here he has a far larger textual space, is more intelligent than nearly all the Whites, and is in fact the narrator. In the process, Everett unbinds and unravels the nearly two hundred and fifty official years of the history of slavery in America, and critiques the ongoing inequities and injustice faced by the African American community in present-day America. So, for an author like Everett belonging to the African American community himself, writing in the third decade of the twenty-first century one hundred and forty years after Twain's text was published, his own literary text is a corrective take spanning from the Antebellum Period[5] in

American history to the present with an investigation into the continuous lack of the subject position of African Americans. At one level, *James* is the story of a slave's resurrection – Jim stages his death and manages to flee to the American North with his unmarried 'wife' and daughter adopting the new name James. At a another level, *James* is the remembrance of a few runaway slaves like William Wells Brown (1814-84), whose novel *Clotel* (1853) is generally considered as the first novel written by an African American; and, those like Venture Smith (1729 – 1805), kidnapped and sold into slavery when he was six.[6] Becoming an adult, he could buy his freedom and documented his life through one of the earliest autobiographies by an African American.[7] Thus, as much as Everett makes his character James adapt these early slave prose narratives, by implication, he also asks us to imagine that there were hundreds of runaway slaves who were caught and tortured to death. An attempt to record one's own life is, quite literally, a threat to life; there's an incident in *James* where a young slave is whipped and hung to death for stealing a pencil stub.

Everett's Menippean satire[8] thus simultaneously adapts, and is adapted from the Antebellum to a post-slavery to a (supposedly) post-racial reality in America. At a deeper level *James* – as well as his novels like *Erasure* – is an African American writer's deep rumination on the dilemma of adapting to the version of the English language that would come closest to representing the entire gamut of history and experience of the Black community. Out of this dilemma comes a brilliant strategy where Everett simultaneously lampoons the White stereotype that blacks are poor at language and thought, and reinforces the African American identity through the distinct flavour of the English language used by them. And yet, these two versions of the language is the indicator of the reality (that people like Jim/James are slaves), and the desire (that they want to be free transacting their activities in the world just like the White Americans). And in the meantime, there are two separate and hierarchical worlds, governed by the two versions of the same language. Language – the very material substance of literature – is thus at the same time proof of consciousness, a tool to adapt the lived experience, and a record of reality.

Through cycles of learning and unlearning, ironically, adaptation carries a perception of impurity. Since dominant discourses are always established by those in power the alternative/ emerging discourse cannot fully escape comparison. There is therefore a very thin line of division between adaptation and acculturation.[9] Percival Everett's novels with their depiction of Black lives (both real and desired) make us aware not only of the intra-racial racisms, or, racial discrimination within the African American community, but, at a larger scale, of the insufficient approximations in the concepts of authenticity of human lives; and that meanings in human society are arrived at necessarily through a complex and bittersweet process of adaptation.

Notes

1. The unnamed narrator of *Invisible Man* becomes literally “invisible” after falling into an open manhole while fleeing a racial riot in Harlem. The manhole is sealed, trapping him underground, where he remains in a subterranean space for twenty years.
2. The Academy Award, the Writers Guild of America Award, and the Critics’ Choice Movie Award.
3. Stars of the Golden Age of Hollywood included Humphrey Bogart, Clark Gable, Audrey Hepburn, Gregory Peck, James Dean, Laurence Olivier, Bette Davis, Ingrid Bergman, Marilyn Monroe, and Greta Garbo, among others; these were all White actors.
4. A crime thriller and a whodunit often overlap generically. A whodunit is a subgenre of detective fiction in which the central mystery concerns the identity of the culprit. A crime thriller emphasizes suspense, danger, and the protagonist’s struggle to overcome a crime-related threat, typically with greater urgency and faster pacing.
5. The Antebellum period, or Antebellum South, refers to the era in the southern United States from the conclusion of the War of 1812 to the beginning of the American Civil War in 1861.

6. The name “Venture” was given to him by his first enslaver, Robinson Mumford, who purchased him for four gallons of rum and a piece of calico. He later adopted the surname “Smith” from Oliver Smith, his final enslaver.
7. Venture Smith’s autobiography is titled *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture,* a *Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America,* Related by Himself.
8. Menippean satire is a form of satire, usually written in prose, that attacks mental attitudes or ideological positions rather than specific individuals. It often blends allegory, philosophical reflection, and elements of the picaresque.
9. Acculturation refers to the process of adopting the cultural traits, values, and practices of another culture through sustained contact.

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Adaptation as Transformative Reimagining: Analysing Shiv Kumar Batalvi's *Luna*

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Abstract: This paper analyses Shiv Kumar Batalvi's *Luna* as a transformative reimagining, drawing insights from Linda Hutcheon, who propounds the idea that "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication." It explores *Luna* as an 'announced' adaptation of the Punjabi folktale, i.e., *Qissa Bhagat Puran,* written by Qadaryar. The adapted text fuses the poetic legend with the dramatic framework of Western and Sanskrit drama and transforms it into a verse play. It offers a profound shift in narrative perspective and interrogates the stereotypes. The *qissa* tradition focuses on episodic structure and pays little attention to the art of characterization, whereas the genre of poetic drama grants freedom in exploring characters. The story is subverted to create space for Luna, who has otherwise been portrayed as the 'Other' in the source text. In this text, Luna courageously encounters questions relating to sexual restraint and gender identity. She views Puran as both a beacon of hope for fulfilling her physical needs and a means to uphold her elevated socio-economic standing, which she achieved through her marriage to Puran's father, King Salwan. Puran and King Salwan also contest with collective social consciousness and face questions relating to religion and morality. Thus, the text decomposes the cultural discourse and advances a process of 'cultural revision' and may turn out to be, in Homi K. Bhabha's terms, a 'third space' where cultural identity gets negotiated.

Keywords: Transformative Adaptations; *Qissa; Luna;* Genre; Characterisation; Third Space; Gender; Batalvi

Introduction

Meaning does not reside within texts as a stable or inherent property; instead, it is constituted through the dynamic interplay of language, textuality, and cultural discourses. In this context, Roland Barthes

famously asserts that “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (146), thereby rejecting the notion of a singular, authorial meaning. Consequently, texts are best understood not in isolation; instead, they exist within a network of intertexts, shaped by their cultural, historical, and aesthetic contexts. Robert Stam builds on this poststructuralist idea by saying, “The literary text is not closed but an open structure (or, better, structuration, as the later Barthes would have it) to be reworked by a boundless context.” The text feeds on and is fed into an indefinitely permutating intertext, which is seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation” (57). Within this framework, adaptations can be read as visible sites of intertextuality, highlighting the dialogic relationship between the source text, its adaptations, and a wider body of cultural narratives.

Theoretical Framework

Building upon the idea of textual openness, Linda Hutcheon's foundational work, *A Theory of Adaptation*, conceptualizes adaptation as “an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This “transcoding” can involve a shift of medium (a poem or film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation” (7-8). Such transformations—whether retelling a story from a different perspective or relocating it within a new cultural milieu—generate interpretations that are manifestly distinct from their source. Adaptation should also be seen as a process that brings together the creative choices made by the adapter and the ways that audiences receive the work (Hutcheon Adaptation 8). This process necessitates deliberate decisions regarding what to retain, modify, or omit, while simultaneously inviting an active and participatory mode of interpretation. As a consequence, adaptation emerges as a dynamic space of interaction between texts, creators, and readers, where meaning is continuously negotiated and reshaped in response to new contexts, ideological frameworks, and cultural imperatives.

Extending Hutcheon’s argument, Suzy Woltmann further adds to the discussion by highlighting the transformative potential of adapted texts. These transformations often reflect contemporary values and societal shifts, thereby enriching the dialogue between past and present.

They serve as critical commentaries that can challenge existing narratives. Woltmann argues that adaptations are transformative when they "critically evaluate its source text(s), analyzing and problematizing its tropes and authority by writing them anew," thereby functioning as "a form of literary criticism" (1).

Adaptations are better considered transformative rather than autonomous textual spaces, since they derive much of their significance from an ongoing engagement with prior narratives. Linda Hutcheon illuminates the discursive nature of texts by saying, "The past as referent is not bracketed or effaced…it is incorporated and modified, given new and different life and meaning" ("The Politics of Postmodernism" 182). In this sense, literary adaptations expand the reach of the ur-story, enabling new audiences—particularly those unfamiliar with the original—to encounter and reassess it within altered formal and ideological contexts.

Furthermore, Woltmann highlights the political and ethical potential of transformative adaptations. These adaptations may have the capacity to recuperate marginalized voices that have historically been silenced or sidelined on the basis of gender, sexuality, race, or social status (2). They also serve to "interrogates stereotypes and problematize norms in source texts" (2). They critically reimagine canonical texts by addressing their gaps, silences, and oppressive assumptions. In doing so, they unsettle established hierarchies of authority and expand the literary canon (3). Hutcheon also points out that they "destabilizes both formal and cultural identity and thereby shift power relations" (*Adaptation* 174). From this perspective, adaptations can be read, in Homi K. Bhabha's terms, as an "in-between space" where cultural difference gets articulated, negotiated, and re-signed rather than being fixed (1).

Qissa Tradition and Source Text

To begin with, *qissa* is primarily a genre of narrative that relies heavily upon episodic structure and archetypal characterisation. Rooted in oral and folkloric traditions, it typically reinforces normative values related to gender, duty, and social order. As defined in *Vishav Punjabi Kosh*, Vol. VII (Bhasha Vibhag, Punjab), *qissa* is "a narratological and objective poetic composition in which a long story is

told through word pictures in a very dramatic manner with the help of metaphors, similes, words, etc." (349). The entry further notes that this distinctive Punjabi poetic form bears affinities both to epic poetry and to English romances or ballads, while in Hindi such compositions are referred to as '*Akhyaan*' (349). Historically, *qissa* emerged in the medieval period and gained prominence between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. They were usually composed in verse and performed orally, often with musical accompaniment, functioning simultaneously as popular entertainment and moral instruction. By embedding local cultural values within legendary or semi-historical narratives, *qissa* had an important effect on the development of collective memory.

At the same time, the Punjabi *qissa* tradition itself may be understood as an adaptive form. Many *qisse* rework oral legends and folktales such as *Heer-Ranjha*, *Mirza-Sahiban*, and *Sohni-Mahiwal*. Predominantly love narratives, these texts often reflect strong Islamic or Persian cultural influences. However, the *qissa* of Bhagat Puran stands apart from this dominant pattern. Rather than centering on romantic love, it foregrounds an existential crisis and reinforces normative cultural values prevalent in mediaeval Punjab. As Akshaya Kumar observes, it is "the only kissa which does not have an overt Persian or Arabic connection," a distinction that points toward "its pre-mediaeval genealogy" (133). This particularity makes Bhagat Puran's narrative significant as a source text and further underscores the critical stakes of Batalvi's adaptive intervention.

Moreover, the *qissa* of Bhagat Puran has not become obscure; on the contrary, it enjoyed immense popularity in both secular and religious circles during the seventh decade of the twentieth century, the time period of Batalvi's active literary career. At that time, it was performed widely—sung by celebrated Punjabi artists such as Lal Chand Yamla Jatt and Kuldip Manak. Even *Kavishri Jatthas* sang it on religious stages. This widespread cultural acceptance, popularity and circulation make it a powerful prop to offer a critique of the mediaeval patriarchal value system and offer an alternative worldview, as Batalvi deeply realises that "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation, is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets

and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead" (Eliot 49).

A renowned critic, H.S. Gill, analyses the legend of Bhagat Puran within an existential anthropological framework. He moves beyond the myth and explores questions relating to moral and psychological tensions. Though he considers it a universal meta-narrative of the human condition, he finds that "its contradictory strands lead to such compositions whose ends are always loose. They can be stretched in many directions. Several interpretations are possible, but each interpretation has serious consequences for our cultural development" (429).

While the historical, political and cultural aspects are ignored and a touch of universality prevails in Qadaryar's Bhagat Puran, Batalvi contextualizes it as an adaptation that "is always framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum" (Hutcheon, *Adaptation* 142). Akshaya Kumar investigates the cultural genealogy of the *qissa* and demonstrates that it is a cross-cultural adaptation of 'Oedipus Rex,' rewritten by incorporating local cultural elements. The patriarchy found in Punjabi culture reshapes the narrative, and the Greek narrative of incest is replaced with the narrative of renunciation (134). He finds that Batalvi further transforms the narrative into one that represents the subaltern, reflecting the cultural politics of his time (133).

Luna as Transformative Adaptation

One of the most significant ways in which this transformation is affected is through Batalvi's deliberate shift in genre—from *qissa* to verse play. This choice appears to be motivated by a nuanced understanding of form as inseparable from meaning, as T. S. Eliot suggests, "To create a form is not merely to invent a shape, a rhyme or a rhythm. It is also the realization of the whole appropriate content of this rhyme or rhythm" (57). In this light, the shift in genre signals not merely a stylistic alteration but a fundamental rethinking of narrative possibilities.

Batalvi compares the genre of *qissa* to the Western epic and observes that both traditions narrate the lives and experiences of common people. Drawing on T. S. Eliot's assertion that poetic drama is not designed merely for amusement but functions as a "drama of ideas" intended for a

discerning, educated audience (54), Batalvi's selection of the genre appears highly deliberate and ideologically informed. In *Luna,* the narrative assumes a philosophical and contemplative mode, foregrounding ethical dilemmas and interior conflicts. In the "Introduction" to *Luna*, Batalvi openly acknowledges his indebtedness to the earlier *qissa* tradition, stating that the storyline and principal characters are inherited from Qadaryar; the text differentiates itself through the ideological sensibilities of the present time (ix).

Batalvi, primarily a poet, found verse to resonate more deeply with him than prose. Sukhdev Singh Sirsa, too, opines that Batalvi's mode of representation, poetic language, and choice of symbols are the result of his critical understanding of the changes happening in the socio-historical situation and the resultant Punjabi lifestyle (27). The lengthy genre of poetic drama offers space for the representation of new thoughts and opens up the possibility of reinterpreting the myth in a modern context. He not only purposefully chooses the form but also modifies it to suit his thematic concerns.

Rather than retelling the entire *qissa*, Batalvi chooses to focus on its central crisis: the encounter between Prince Puran and Luna. His version retraces the circumstances that led Luna to desire the prince and the subsequent punishment she faced. In doing so, he presents what may be called an 'incomplete' version of the story, one that deliberately narrows its scope. This incompleteness, however, is not a weakness; instead, it allows Batalvi to foreground the tensions between collective consciousness, public morality, and individual crisis. Ultimately, he concludes the narrative in a manner that aligns with his larger aim—namely, to expose and interrogate the shifting ideological frameworks of his time.

He resonates with the postmodern critical stance when he says, "How can a modern poet follow that tradition blindly when there is no finality about any issue" (Batalvi x). He opines that there are multiple realities and alternative interpretations available for similar situations and believes that artists, like scientists, carry the tradition yet take a departure from it to choose their own one. He expands his argument by stating that the artist combines a traditional story and images into a new compound, inviting new interpretations (x).

This text boldly challenges and contests notions of fixed authorship. Even Batalvi does not position himself as the "owner" of the *qissa* but rather participates in an ongoing cultural dialogue, acknowledging the text as inherently intertextual and historically layered by stating that, "My story is primarily based on the version found in Qadaryar's *Puran Bhagat* and ends with the severing of the hands and feet of Puran" (Batalvi viii). His rewriting transforms the myth into what Barthes calls a "neutral, composite, oblique space" (142).

It fuses folklore, lyricism, and modernist anxieties. Against the writing of a fixed moral tale dictated by a singular authorial voice, the text engages with multiple voices—Luna's, Puran's, and society's—all of which clash, contest, and overlap. In this way, Batalvi enacts the ultimate postmodern gesture of relinquishing interpretive control and releasing the story into the domain of interpretation. He thus embodies Barthes' vision of the text as a space where "all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (142).

According to Robert Stam, adaptations alter the plot, characters, and perspectives of the original text, and Batalvi undertakes the task by reshaping the plot of the qissa. Following the conventions of Sanskrit drama, Batalvi opens the text with *Nati* and *Sutradhar*, who stand as a chorus in the poetic drama. Vinay Dharwadker observes in his translation of *Shakuntala* that the *sutradhara* functions as one who "'holds the thread' of continuity and coherence running through the work" (222–23). In Batalvi's adaptation, however, the *Nati* and *Sutradhar* depart from convention by appearing in an intimate scene of lovemaking. By doing so, they introduce the audience to the core issue of the story, : unrequited bodily desires, encapsulated in the line, "Verily, no water can quench/The thirst of roused passion" (Batalvi 3), as well as the longing of a young woman for her lover, "There is now a dirge of separation—the ardent lover is gone" (Batalvi 3). In their exchange, they sketch the flora and fauna and the mythic atmosphere before the main plot unfolds.

They create a kind of narrative distance between the writer and the audience, keeping the stage aware of its storytelling act, and hence serve a meta-theatrical role, similar to that of a chorus or prologue found in Greek drama. By blending the Sanskrit tradition of 'prastāvanā' with Western verse

drama, he successfully creates a hybrid and intercultural space that is at once rooted in indigenous literary heritage and modernist experimentation. This hybrid space foreshadows the adaptive strategies that structure the play as a whole.

Batalvi refers not only to the *qissa* of Bhagat Puran but also to the entirety of oppressive patriarchal authority throughout mythical times. He refers to "Raven's throne", which should be torn apart by women by striking like "lightning and thunder." Through the metaphor, he transforms Luna from a fallen woman into a mythic symbol of resistance. He exposes that myths have been manipulated to control female desires, and they can be rewritten to liberate them. Batalvi even further tries to carry the rule of probability over plausibility. He changes Puran's age from being twelve to eighteen or twenty years to make it probable that he could be sexually attractive.

Character Reconfiguration

As a postmodern transformative adaptation, it foregrounds marginalized voices and challenges the notion of universal human experience. The text expresses gendered subjectivities that disrupt dominant histories. Batalvi himself points out that "The story-line and other characters such as Salwan, Puran, Luna, Ichran and her father Chaudal (the king of Udainagar), have been borrowed from Kadaryar. The difference, if any, lies in the ideology prevalent today" (Batalvi ix). Without a doubt, the characters carry cultural memory, and we reinterpret their actions by discussing their motivations. Batalvi also admits in his "introduction" that he has created various imaginative characters to serve as props alongside historical figures, allowing him to explore the inner workings of his characters (ix).

Luna

In the folktale, Luna has been assigned a stereotypical role as being "the embodiment of lust, temptresses and the hand-maidens of the devil, designated to deceive and mislead" (Batalvi xi). She is represented as "the other" for the male hero. She is a jealous stepmother who tries to seduce her stepson, Puran. But he rejects her advances, reminding her of her role as a mother. Luna is enraged. She falsely accuses him of molesting her. Puran was punished, mutilated, and exiled. Thus, Luna

challenges such an image of a woman. In the adaptation, she is portrayed as a deeply human character, shaped by poverty, patriarchy and caste oppression. She articulates her identity in biological terms, stating, "I am passion-fire, O mate/I carry May-heat in one breast, and June-heat in the other" (Batalvi 39), and challenges her mythical construction. She jumps into the intellective pursuit where she confronts the individual crisis and collective consciousness.

Ira, Luna's friend, observes that, since mythical times, women have been denied the agency to speak for themselves, remarking that a "woman is a voiceless bird" (Batalvi 41) and that "if they speak out, they are condemned and abandoned by society" (Batalvi 42). In contrast, Luna challenges the societal norms governing gender roles. She critiques the objectification of women entrenched in patriarchal structures and envisions a utopian world where women can raise their voices "without fear". Her position aligns with Simone de Beauvoir's claim in *The Second Sex* that women have historically been regarded as the other—"She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other" (26). She condemns "the vanity and pride of those who treat her as an object of carnal desire" (Batalvi 44). For Luna, challenging patriarchy begins with reclaiming one's agency. Responding to Ira, she invokes the mythical era of "Bloody Raven's throne" (Batalvi 43), an epoch marking the silencing of women, to emphasize the deep roots of this oppression. She calls for defying normative values and superstitions tied to 'modesty' and 'acceptance.' Mathri, Luna's friend, reminds her of the reward she received for marrying King Salwan—liberation from caste constraints—raising her from "a lowly untouchable/ To royal grandeur/ Making a shallow puddle/ A mighty Ganges" (Batalvi 47). Yet Luna rejects such material elevation, choosing instead bodily autonomy and emotional fulfilment, declaring, "I, an untouchable/ Want an untouchable groom" (Batalvi 47).

Luna deliberately chooses Puran to challenge King Salwan's authority. On one hand, Puran would fulfil his sexual desires; on the other hand, he would help Luna maintain the status quo she gained by marrying King Salwan, which freed her from her caste. Kunt, King Varman's wife, exposes

the hypocrisy of caste-based morality as she says, “Then if Luna marries my brother, how will she remain an untouchable?” (Batalvi 35), and Mathri, Luna’s friend, also reminds Luna about getting purified after getting married to King Salwan. King Varman too exposes the feudal patriarchal system that stands intact behind Luna’s marriage as he reveals the benefits for Luna and her family for getting married to King Salwan: Luna would acquire a world-famous man as her husband, and her father would be given unlimited rewards. Baru’s last words to his departing daughter, Luna, also remind her about their poverty, comparing it to “Lion’s incarnation” (Batalvi 54) and “the birth of a daughter to a poor man is a curse” (Batalvi 54), and he advises her to accept her fate. Thus, choosing an ordinary person could have thrown her out of the palace and brought punishment for both. Thus, Prince Puran is the right choice to challenge the authority of the king. Puran’s acceptance of Luna’s offer could have stood as a challenge to his father’s authority. By enjoying the sexual win over Luna, Puran could have taken revenge on the King for putting him into the dungeon and depriving him of the joys of the palace and a comfortable and luxurious life. Thus, the King could have got punished for both Luna and Puran, who are both prey to his authority, as Luna points out, “I thought we would share each other’s grief” (Batalvi 100). H. S. Gill points out that there is reason for Luna to cross the limits, as “Luna is literally a captive of the wealthy king…” Her human condition is miserable. She had probably been meditating on her destiny in the confinement of her palace. She is a wild bird in a cage (436).” By not accepting the advances, Puran invites Luna’s wrath. Here she could be compared to a stepmother: “Kaikeyi, the step-mother of Rama had banished him from his kingdom” (Batalvi x), who takes stepchildren as her counters.

King Salwan

In Qadaryar’s *Bhagat Puran*, the King Salwan functions as a conventional patriarch. People take his desire for a young wife for granted. By contrast, in the adaptation, he becomes a psychologically complex character. Batalvi even invented Salwan’s confidant—King Varman of Chamba—as an explicitly imaginative device that externalizes his inner conflicts. King Varman forces him to confront his bodily desires and his ageing masculinity: “But yours is a case of infatuation. / Dream-snakes

poison in your blood circulation" (Batalvi 33). King Salwan confides in his companion that Ichran has failed to fulfil his physical cravings: "Colourless was Chaudal's oven, / Colourless its fire. Puran's mother, Ichran, / Did not wear beauty's attire" (Batalvi 24). He admits that he has enjoyed the sexual encounter with her, but she could never possess his heart. He struggles to appreciate their physical interactions fully. He still has "unrequited" desire: "My poisonous dream-snake,/ Like the tongue of a flame,/ Was dazzlingly bright" (Batalvi 24). He further describes that he had almost accepted his fate and had been moving ahead in his life when he got the good news about the birth of his son, Puran, whose birth seemed like "a ray of light" (Batalvi 26). Yet Puran was sent to the dungeon for the next eighteen years after consulting the astrologers. And he was completely broken. Prof. Gill believes that this lack of touch has proved to be exceedingly frustrating for the father. It is the one and most crucial reason for looking for another relationship, as a "psychic cure" (406-407). Yet Salwan is well aware of the consequences of unnatural relationships and the destructive force of unchecked desires: "The flame of the fictive snake abides. / Once stung, no man ever survives. / But the dream snake is only a dream, / An illusion of the mind" (Batalvi 29). Yet he is so carried away by his passions that he ignores Luna's low caste. However, Luna is too young to be his companion, and it frustrates him more.

Puran

Batalvi reimagines Puran less as a heroic figure and more as a subject, shaped by a series of dehumanizing circumstances. Although "the very name 'Pooran' is highly Sanskritic, and stands for the high Hindu ideal of 'wholeness' as the ultimate truth of life" (Akshaya 133), his predicament seems to contrary, as he himself admits, "Nobody is Puran" (Batalvi 99). His eighteen-year confinement in the dungeon condemns him to "lonely seclusion" (Batalvi 98). When he comes out, he feels ashamed of his father's act of second marriage, confessing, "The vipers of black deeds/ Of my father sting" (Batalvi 98), a line that signals inherited guilt rather than personal moral failure. His sense of displacement deepens when his mother leaves for her father's house, rendering him "a stranger in my home" (Batalvi 99). He reflects on his situation: "All efforts for happiness were met/

With pain and suffering,/ On this earth,/ From the first day of birth" (Batalvi 99). As H. S. Gill observes, such conditions harden him emotionally and turn him into "a little monster" (438). At the same time, Luna's threatened retaliation—"Luna will destroy the color/ of this house, this family" (Batalvi 105)—forces him to confront contestation between the individual consciousness and the collective one. Caught between these opposing forces, he likens himself to "a featherless bird" destined to fall before it can fully live (Batalvi 139). In this context, H.S. Gill observes, Puran, "who would perpetuate the House of Salwan, Puran whom Luna wants to possess, is sacrificed at the altar of passionate non-existence" (438-439), stands at the threshold. Thus, he emerges as a luminal figure who is compelled to bear the punishment and quit the world: "All my aspirations are now dead/ I would like to quit this world" (Batalvi 99).

Concluding Remarks

Batalvi's *Luna* may be understood as a modern reconfiguration of the Punjabi qissa, one that draws upon oral narrative traditions while remaining responsive to contemporary ethical and cultural concerns. The text appears to function as a space of cultural negotiation in which the cultural memory of Qadaryar's narrative coexists with Batalvi's ideological reframing. Instead of settling the conflict between tradition and critique, the text emphasizes their interaction, encouraging readers to navigate between two temporal-spatial contexts: the inherited moral framework of the source text and the humanist inquiry expressed in Batalvi's verse. In this sense, the adaptation aligns with Hutcheon's argument that "multiple versions of a story exist laterally, and not vertically" (*Adaptation* 169). The adaptation thus emerges as an "in-between" zone in which plural temporalities and moral logics coexist. Read through Homi K. Bhabha's notion of "Third Space"—"which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistorized and read anew" (39). In short, *Luna* can be considered as a critical spatial intervention that repositions the *qissa* tradition within modern Punjabi literary and cultural discourse.

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From Folktale to Franchise: Rapunzel in the Age of Adaptation

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Abstract: This paper critically examines how the enduring narrative of Rapunzel, a classic fairy tale, is radically transformed when adapted across diverse genres, resulting in different narratives and themes. Moving beyond a simple folklore of passive rescue, modern adaptations present reinterpretation of themes, plot, and characters and mark a shift from traditional to modern outlook of confinement, rescue, freedom, and self-discovery. The story of Rapunzel has been retold through animation, graphic novels, theater, literature, and digital media, each medium reshaping the narrative in its own creative way. To investigate these shifts, this study draws upon Adaptation Theory, particularly Linda Hutcheon's framework, which holds adaptation as both a product and a process of reinterpretation across media and contexts. Adaptation is not seen as secondary or derivative but as a dynamic cultural act that reimagines stories in new forms to sustain relevance and evoke fresh meanings. This theoretical lens enables a deeper understanding of how core motifs are retained or reworked to reflect contemporary sensibilities and ideological shifts. Despite these shifts the core elements of identity, imprisonment and freedom serve as a narrative anchor. By analyzing selected adaptations namely Disney's *Tangled* (animated musical), *Rapunzel's Revenge* (graphic novel), Barbie as *Rapunzel* (animated film) the paper examines how the core story of isolation and self-discovery is re-imagined. These inter-genre analyses reveal that the continuous adaptation of the Rapunzel is not merely a creative reinterpretation but a dynamic cultural process through which the narrative remains relevant despite the timeless boundaries and hence acts as a mouthpiece of human condition.

Keywords: Fairy Tale; Animation; Adaptation Theory; Self-Discovery; Narrative; Reinterpretation

Introduction

The journey of the fairytale from folklore to franchise represents a significant evolution of storytelling, where traditional oral narratives were adapted, redefined, and eventually got expanded into popular multimedia culture. This progression involves a shift from anonymous, community-based storytelling to more structured, author-driven narratives, and finally to commercially driven entertainment empires. Fairytale originally began as oral stories told within communities to entertain, teach lessons or preserve cultural values. Rooted in folklore, these stories often carried moral lessons and reflected the social norms of their times. They were passed down from generation to generation orally, often evolving with each retelling. With the advent of the written collection by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the 19th century, tales experienced fixity and standardization. The term "fairy tale" was first used by Mdamed'Aulnoy in the late 17thcentury. It is argued that "[f]airy tales are characterized by the presence of magic and wondrous elements" (Storyteller). Mary Hoffman contends, "What makes a story a fairytale is a little bit of magic that stirs the imagination, and it doesn't matter where it comes from. It can be a pumpkin that is turned into a beautiful coach, a talking animal that can make a wish come true or a spell that turns a handsome prince into a beast."

Authors like Charles Perrault and the Brothers Grimm later popularised the literary fairy tale by collecting and publishing traditional folktales. Early fairytales were all about social norms, gender disparity, harsh punishments, where women held a passive role and waited for the prince charming to rescue them from the tower. However, as storytelling moved from oral tradition to global reimagining, the tales too changed, and more emphasis was laid on independence, agency, and self-discovery. Robert H. Hock explains, "telling a folk tale is a natural art, but writing a folk tale down is an act of translation (…) it require(s), therefore, an even greater artist to make this rendering live once more, to make this translation from the living voice into a true tale that you could only hear in your head as you read it but also continue to hear it in your ears" (qtd. in Hoffman). Fairy tales, with their timeless narratives and archetypical characters, have a remarkable ability to endure across generations and cultures. Fairy tales, passed down through generations, have long been a narrative of passive rescue and tower confinement. Far from being static and continually re-imagined, they reflect

the values and complexities of new generations, whether through adventurous and empowered portrayals or symbolic and imaginative imagery.

The present study investigates three movies and one graphic novel, namely, *Oh, Rapunzel* (1996), *Barbie as Rapunzel* (2002), *Rapunzel's Revenge* (2008), and *Disney's Tangled* (2010). While these works differ radically in form, ranging from experimental art film to children's fantasy, graphic novel and animated blockbuster, they collectively demonstrate how an original story is retold, reframed and reinterpreted across genres. *Oh, Rapunzel* differs significantly in tone and style from later commercial retellings; its presence highlights how even avant-garde art engages with fairy-tale traditions, showcasing that Rapunzel is not only adapted for popular entertainment but also re-imagined in more critical and symbolic ways. This paper analyses the theme of "Same Story, Different Narrative: Moving across Genres," and examines how the Rapunzel story generates multiple versions across different genres. To frame this discussion, the present examination draws on the Theory of Adaptation (2006) by Linda Hutcheon, which argues that adaptations are not just derivative copies but creative reinterpretations shaped by medium, context, and audience. From this standpoint, the researcher will explore and trace how the same ur-story (Rapunzel) is told differently across genres, media and cultural moments, and why these shifts are important. In its earliest representation, the tale focused on the cautionary narrative, emphasising morality, obedience and consequences of desire. Oral narratives depicted Rapunzel as locked in a tower by Gothel, often punished for her parents' mistake. She sings and waits for the prince to come and rescue her from the tower. In the 19th century, when the same story was collected and published by Grimm Brothers, it reflected the anxieties of the age, especially in the middle-class German society that was influenced by female sexuality. In the Grimms Rapunzel, the girl is locked in the tower to preserve her chastity. When she innocently asks why her clothes are tighter (an oblique reference to pregnancy in early versions), it reflects the fear of pre-marital sex and the need to control women's bodies. This echoes the society's obsession with purity, chastity, honor, and the protection of female reputation. The tale stresses the fear of punishment that comes when rules are broken. The parents' theft of rampion

(Rapunzel plant) leads to the loss of their only child, and Rapunzel's disobedience in meeting the Prince results in her suffering. Nineteenth-century Germany considered obedience to parents, church, and state as the cornerstone of social order. Anyone failing to abide by that virtue would face the harsh consequences. Moreover, female agency was considered a threat during that time. Their desires were seen as dangerous and destabilizing that can erode any society to the core. Rapunzel's longing to connect to the outside world, and her secret meetings with the prince, are framed as a major transgression leading to harsh consequences–Imprisonment, exile, and suffering. To protect family honor was always a female responsibility; it was gendered and closely tied to women's chastity; if found guilty of any sexual disobedience, she would be punished. Her punishment serves as a moral lesson to children/ readers (primarily the female audience) for upholding the moral standards of society. Fairy tales were reshaped by Grimm to act as a moral instruction for children (especially girls) warning against any sin, disobedience, and temptation. Rapunzel's suffering and redemption mirror Christian ideas of sin, punishment, and salvation.

The first adaptation considered by the researcher here is an experimental art film *Oh, Rapunzel* by Cecilia Condit and Dick Blau. It is set in a Philadelphia estate and narrates the story of Condit's mother. The film reconstructs the Rapunzel story not as a children's fantasy but as a metaphor for psychological and social trauma that women go through. Condit highlights the psychological weight of isolation and the haunting ambiguities of liberation through the depiction of her mother. The film begins with the haunting question, "Mother, why didn't your mother like you very much?" This reference highlights the emotional state of tension and psychological trauma that follows. Rather than retelling Rapunzel explicitly, Condit recaptures key motifs of the tower, long hair and the notion of rescue as symbolic frameworks. These symbols are infused into real-life documentary scenes, reframing them as metaphors for ageing, confinement, and the complex roles that women inhabit. This is not as linear and structured like other adaptations and retellings, but offers more like a dream narrative where the past, memory and fantasy overlap and reiterate time and again. Furthermore, analyzing this approach of Condil with Julie Sander's concept of revisionary adaptations, which

argues that adaptations not only translate a story into a new medium but also transfigure the source material too by infusing it with new thematic, cultural or aesthetic dimensions. *Oh, Rapunzel* can be seen as a revisionary adaptation; while it retains the core elements of Rapunzel's narrative, it reaffirms it through symbolic storytelling and imaginative recreation of the traditional theme. The movie moves back and forth between Condit's mother's life history and the symbolic framework of the Rapunzel tale. The masked or surreal figures that are encapsulated by the director in the frame embody fear, repression, and hidden aspects of identity. This surreal/dreamlike approach links *Oh, Rapunzel* to the broader Rapunzel's tradition by challenging the older order and showing the same motifs of captivity, longing and the hope of release. Moreover, the movie exemplifies and reflects the social, cultural and artistic currents of the 1990s, when experimental art often turned to fairytale as a major framework for exploring identity, confinement and trauma. The "tower" becomes the symbol of both domestic and social confinement and a depiction of the mother questions traditional roles of women. As Marina Warner observes in her essay "After 'Rapunzel'," the tower is not simply a setting but a place of restriction and ignorance. This echoes the theme of confinement just as Rapunzel is locked in a tower; her mother is locked in the role of caregiver, stripped of her identity and individuality beyond domestic duty. It is worth noting here that unlike *Barbie as Rapunzel, Disney's Tangled* and *Rapunzel's Revenge* which all rely to some degree on the conventional objectification of women (slim , long blonde hair, tall, fair) that serves as visual pleasure for the audience Condit here takes a radically different approach and hence equating it to Laura Mulvey's notion of male gaze, which argues that mainstream cinema often reduces women to objects of beauty and desire, Condit's film rejects such objectification and beautification. Rapunzel in this work is not a glamorous figure with long blonde hair and slim body, but a fragmented character caught in a cycle of silence and isolation. By refusing to beautify her female characters, Condit explores and focuses her narration on the psychological aspects of her actresses/ characters that underpin the whole story. This stark difference is something worth celebrating and deserves attention alongside commercial adaptations. Her version refuses to objectify women, thereby opening space for a feminist re-reading of the tale.

After the unsettling, dreamlike reinterpretation of *Oh, Rapunzel,* the tale moved in a radically different direction with the release of *Barbie as Rapunzel* (2002), which transforms the Grimm's moral heavy tale into a children's fantasy tied closely to consumer culture. Unlike Condit's experimental art film, which reframed the fairy tale as a metaphor of psychological and social confinement, *Barbie as Rapunzel* acts not just as a popular film but as a significant part of Mattel's (the company that owns Barbie) strategy to expand Barbie into multimedia. The film reworked the fairytale to fit Barbie as a brand name symbolizing creativity, independence, fashion, female bonding, and female agency. The film was designed for global expansion as a part of a moral entertainment and marketing strategy. In the film, Rapunzel is no longer depicted as a passive figure awaiting rescue but as a creative and imaginative person. The villain is more stylized, and emphasis on punishment is removed. The focus lies on Rapunzel's courage, independence, and sense of self-discovery. By the late 20th century, there was growing concern over the traditional fairytales and their idea of being too aggressive, violent, and morally rigid for the readers of a young age. Adaptations like *Barbie as Rapunzel* and *Disney's Tangled* softened these elements, replacing punishment and fear with imagination and empowerment. At the same time, films like *Barbie as Rapunzel* and *Disney's Tangled* mirror the era's increasing emphasis on female agency, independence, and skills. The narrative shows the late 20th-century trend of optimism and family-oriented storytelling, offering a happy ending, moral lessons about courage and kindness, instead of a strict warning of disobedience.

Another shift in the progression of the theme discussed above can be seen in the movie *Disney's Tangled* (2010). Tangled is a Walt Disney's animated studios reimaging of the classic Grimm Brothers fairy tale Rapunzel. The story follows Rapunzel, a young princess with magical golden hair that has healing and restorative powers. Kidnapped and locked by Mother Gothel (a vain woman who uses Rapunzel's hair to preserve her youth) in a secluded tower, she longs to see the outside world. Her life changes when she encounters Flynn Rider, a charming thief on the run who stumbles upon her tower. Rapunzel leaves the tower for the first time, embarking on a journey of adventure, self-discovery, and love. This story combines the themes of love, humour, courage, and

action with the themes of freedom and personal growth. The tale represents the postmodern era and its influence on the character of Rapunzel. Rapunzel in this movie is adventurous, witty and curious, longing to explore the world rather than remaining a passive victim. The 21st-century theme of personal growth and self is given importance. By choosing to escape the tower and assert her right to live beyond the command of Mother Gothel's control, she embarks on the journey of self-liberation and self-reclamation. This version exemplifies the principle of transmedia storytelling, as described by Henry Jenkins, which says a single narrative exists across multiple media and platforms, reaching diverse audiences while retaining recognisable core elements. By transforming the traditional Grimm's tale into an animated film that emphasises agency and adventure, *Tangled* not only appeals to children but also becomes a key aspect in gender roles and empowerment.

The next significant reworking can be traced in *Rapunzel's Revenge* a graphic novel written by Shannon and Dean Hale and illustrated by Nathan Hale. It takes its inspiration from the Rapunzel fairy tale in the act of its renewed recreation. Instead of a helpless maiden trapped in a tower, Rapunzel is portrayed as a bold, adventurous heroine who takes control of her destiny. The theme of long hair, traditionally a symbol of passivity and imprisonment, is reconstructed. The hair becomes her greatest weapon, which she uses as lassos, whips, and ropes to fight villains and navigate landscapes. Her hair is no longer a symbol of beauty, but becomes a literal weapon that help her fight villains. Unlike *Barbie as Rapunzel*, where her creativity and imagination become freedom, here Rapunzel's long hair becomes a symbol of her strength and brings alive her fighting spirit. *Rapunzel's Revenge* centres on justice, liberation, and reclaiming power. It is less about romance and more about defeating tyranny and restoring balance to her world. Her partnership with Jack is based on teamwork and equality, rather than serving as an orthodox story of a prince rescuing her. The theme of female agency and reclamation is mirrored in that age of that time. By the early 21st century, literature and media emphasized more on the aspect of women as strong and independent beings. They are more focused on higher goals, rather than physical beauty and the embellishment of appearances. As Jack Zipes argues, fairy tales are never static but constantly adapted to reflect the political, social and cultural

anxieties of their time, often becoming sites of resistance against dominant ideologies. Graphic novels became more accepted in schools and libraries as legitimate literature. *Rapunzel's Revenge* demonstrates how the fairy tale as a genre is flexible and adaptable in nature.

The theme of 'Same Story, Different Narratives' becomes more fluid with the depiction of Rapunzel in different genres. The oral and Grimm versions present a tale of punishment and fear, the films reshape the story into one of creativity, independence, and empowerment aimed at children. By making it a part of commercial and globalised culture, these adaptations fit perfectly in the theme of the same story but different genres. Cecilia Condit's experimental short film further enriches the narrative landscape by bringing forth the theme of imaginative imagery, surreal symbolism and psychological complexity. Film not only engages adult audiences but simultaneously challenges conventional storytelling. Even in its experimental form*, Oh, Rapunzel* echoes recurring themes seen in *Barbie as Rapunzel*, *Rapunzel's Revenge* and *Tangled:* confinement, struggle of autonomy and dynamics of maternal authority. Together, these adaptations exhibit how a single Ur-story (original story) can be reshaped not only into children's fantasy or animated musicals, but also into graphic novels that mix fairy tale tradition with entirely new cultural settings and storytelling modes. *Oh, Rapunzel* complements and contrasts with the mainstream storyline and graphic adaptations, revealing how the same story can inspire empowerment, embarks adventure, and stimulates introspective reflection. Meanwhile, The Grimm's version reflects the 19th century German anxieties about punishment, obedience, sexuality, and family honour. *Barbie as Rapunzel* transforms the story into a consumer-friendly children's fantasy emphasising creativity and empowerment. Here, the agency comes from her artistic talent rather than violent rebellion. *Disney's Tangled* modernises the tale into Disney's blockbuster full of psychological complexities, humour, and romance. *Rapunzel's Revenge,* meanwhile, explodes the tale into an action-packed, thrill-based American Western adventure. The same basic structure of a girl trapped, isolated, and ultimately finding freedom exists in all these genres, but the narrative emphasis, cultural values and audience expectation shift radically with the adaptations and with the sense of contemporaneity.

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Between the Ancient and the Animated: Visual and Narrative Adaptation of Select Epic Characters of *The Mahabharata* in Grant Morrison's 18 Days

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Abstract: Epics, whether ancient or modern, are not merely narratives; they are dynamic cultural blueprints that continue to evolve across cultures and time with each retelling, reflecting the moral, political and imaginative horizons of the societies that engage with them. The ancient Indian epics, *The Ramayan* and *The Mahabharat*, are some of the exemplifications which embody the collective values and ideals of the Indian ethos. As Devdutt Pattnaik mentions in the dedication to his book *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana,* "In one, the protagonist is a kingmaker who can move around rules, while in the other the protagonist is a king who must uphold rules, howsoever distasteful they may be."

As culturally embedded narratives, epics have undergone diverse generic adaptations over time, with comic books emerging as one of the more recent and dynamic mediums of their representation. One such recent and masterful example is the comic book series, *18 Days* by Grant Morrison, which reimagines the ancient epic within a futuristic and stylised visual framework, blending mythic motifs with contemporary narrative and aesthetic sensibilities.

The research paper aims to critically examine how the comic book series reinterprets the epic through a shift in genre, medium, and cultural context, and to explore how this adaptation reconfigures the characters of the epic, revealing contemporary perspectives on heroism, divinity, and moral complexity within modern frameworks of myth-making. It shall also place 18 Days within broader discussions of adaptation, transmedia storytelling, and the role of genre, particularly Cyberpunk, in shaping new narrative possibilities for classical epics.

Keywords: Adaptation; Cyberpunk; Contemporaneity; Myth-making; Representations

Introduction

Epics throughout literary and mythological history have been passed on across generations as embodiments of cultural blueprints, highlighting culture, language, ethos and traditions. Among the corpus of epics produced in India, The Mahabharat is an epic whose relevance remains unmatched in terms of its interpersonal, political, spiritual and mythological aspects, whether it's superhuman demigods striving for power, struggling with political strategies and the inevitable consequences of their actions, or the spiritual and metaphysical teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, the epic has everything for it to be deemed a "living epic." Much like any other literary text, epics have also been adapted, adopted, and abrogated across different generic forms. As Hutcheon opines:

> First, seen as a formal entity or product, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This 'transcoding' can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel), or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation… Second, as a process of creation, the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation; this has been called both appropriation and salvaging, depending on your perspective…Third, seen from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation. (Hutcheon 7,8)

Similarly, *The Mahabharata* is a text that has always thrived on retelling, reshaping and recontextualising. While originally composed in Sanskrit verses between 400 BCE and 400 CE, Bhasa's dramatic reinterpretations around the 2nd century CE present alternate and tragic perspectives on the epic. What followed were several regional vernacular retellings in the medieval and early modern era, namely Perundevanar's *Bharatha Venba*, an 11th-century Tamil rendition of the epic in 12,000 verses; *Kāśīdāsī Môhābhārôt*, a 16th-century re-telling of the epic in Bengali by

Kashiram Das and several more. This was followed by K.M. Ganguly's first complete English translation of the epic in the 19th century.

Apart from textual literature, *The Mahabharata* has also taken the form of stage, folk and oral performances like the Yakshagana, the tradition dance-drama originating in Karnataka along with Wayang kulit, a form of shadow puppetry originating from Indonesia which dramatizes episodes from both The Ramayan and The Mahabharat, alongwith B.R. Chopra's groundbreaking television series, *Mahabharat*, which aired between 1988 and 1990, making it a landmark Indian television adaptation of the epic. Such reinventions are possible mainly because *The Mahabharat*, like any other epic, has a fluid structure, despite its complex plot, with multiple characters who exhibit moral ambiguities and arcs. From ancient scriptures passed along orally to their vernacular variants, film and TV adaptations, the epic has thrived across generations.

Another genre that has substantially grown over time in its portrayal and retellings of the great Indian epic is comics, which have emerged as a dynamic, modern medium of retelling epics. A comic book series which has emerged as a prime example of the same is *18 Days* by Grant Morrison, with illustrations by Mukesh Singh. *18 Days* covers the story of the war of Kurukshetra from *The Mahabharat*, blending mythic motifs with futuristic and stylised sensibilities of the cyberpunk subgenre of Science fiction. Initially published as a story bible with detailed notes on the characters, events, weapons and artistic style of the series in 2010 and as a comic book series between 2015 and 2017, 18 Days masterfully captures the essence of the Indian epic and blending it with the comic book tradition of the west- amalgamating ancient *astras* with futuristic technology and portraying the original linear narrative of the story in a non-linear mode. Apart from the narrative structure and the cyberpunk elements, *18 Days* also reconfigures the characters from the epic through shifts in terms of genre, medium and cultural context by placing these characters who are deeply rooted in Indian ethos at a global level and offering perspectives on heroism, moral complexity and divinity.

Comics in this case become a uniquely powerful, multi-modal form for epic narratives, and Morrison's choice of a comic book series for retelling the story of this immense epic gives it a

cinematic, globally accessible yet stylised form that appeals to young and old alike. For Morrison, the real appeal of the epic lies in the characters who, despite being demigods and supreme warriors, are flawed in their own unique ways:

> It has the best cast of characters of pretty much any myth I think… and they're so human, it's very different from the myths in the west where people are superhuman characters like Hercules or Achilles. But in this one, everything that makes them heroic winds up destroying them and that's why I love it. It really fits the times because it's looking at the heroic ideal and then we have an 18-day war… (Interview with Brian Walton from Nerdist News during San Diego Comic-Con on the Geek Week Stage, 2013)

The adaptability of *The Mahabharat* does not simply lie in its narrative structure but in the characters of the epic as well, because they embody the moral, political and spiritual dilemmas. Furthermore, through a multi-modal lens, the visual elements and dialogues of each character deliver a deeper message than what simply meets the reader's eye. This shift to comic and cyberpunk is not merely cosmetic in its approach-it reflects the survival of the epic in a world saturated by media, proving that its characters remain relevant as they negotiate futuristic anxieties.

Visual and Pictorial Elements

One of the most striking facets of character adaptation in Morrison's *18 Days* is its innovative visual and pictorial representation, especially because it merges traditional epic symbolism and characters with contemporary cyberpunk elements and aesthetics. For Hutcheon, "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication. And there are manifestly many different possible intentions behind the act of adaptation: the urge to consume and erase the memory of the adapted text or to call it into question is as likely as the desire to pay tribute by copying" (Hutcheon 7). A key aspect in this regard is the costumes and attire of the characters. For instance, the character of Arjuna transforms from a dhoti-clad, exiled warrior in the initial issues of the series to a cybernetically enhanced archer clad in high-tech battle gear, reflecting how Morrison situates the struggle for dharma in the third age. This reconfiguration implies that in contemporaneity, moral dilemmas are no longer fought through a

purely ascetic, self-disciplined moral compass, but are mediated by technology, echoing cyberpunk anxieties linked with the posthuman condition.

Bhima's weapon takes inspiration from the tradition of Marvel and DC comics, for it is called "the techno-atomic mace, World-breaker," which is fuelled by the energies of his armour; similarly, Duryodhana's mace is called "Shatterstar" much like Thor's "Storm-breaker" in the Marvel cinematic universe, a detail which has been deliberately crafted to appeal to a contemporary global audience, signalling a direct convergence of epic weaponry with global superhero iconography. While this globalises *The Mahabharat* for the contemporary reader familiar with the Marvel and DC cinematic universes, it also raises questions about cultural translation and whether this amplifies, for instance, Bhima's heroism, or does it risk portraying him as a mere derivative comic-book superhero archetype or not. This synthesis not only redefines the physical appearances of these iconic figures but also amplifies their narrative roles and thematic significance in the unfolding of the events of the story. The use of glowing neon colours for the bows of Arjuna and Karna, the metallic textures and the dynamic armour plating visually signal a radical departure from traditional portrayals, especially from the tradition of Amar Chitra Katha, embedding the character of Arjuna, for instance, within the cyberpunk milieu while retaining the heroic motifs of the original text in a recognisable format. Furthermore, *18 Days* retains the concepts of *Gandiva*, the Solar Astra, the *Brahmastra*, and the *Vimanas*, and amalgamates them with cyberpunk elements. The chariots in the original epic are replaced with spaceships and battleships floating over the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

In the web series, the character of Krishna undergoes a dynamic shift, especially when he delivers the message of the Bhagvad Gita-Krishna transforms from a two-dimensional character to a three-dimensional one as Krishna reveals his cosmic, universal form—the Vishwaroop. Krishna's transformation and revelation demonstrates a rather unique capability of comics as a medium: sequential art can render the complex concept of divinity both visually and instantaneously as compared to textual descriptions, which primarily rely on metaphor. The most metaphysical moment in the epic is therefore reframed not only as a visual spectacle, but also as a metaphorical

transformation of divine revelation into cinematic awe. The panels which portray the episode of how the hundred Kaurav brothers were born take on a rather dark colour scheme, with Ved Vyasa brutally cutting the mass Gandhari gave birth to into a hundred and one pieces. The Rishi Markandeya from the original epic is depicted as a wise spirit in blue hues, with cogwheels around him as he tells the story of the four ages and how things will unfold at the end of the third age, the point when the battle of Kurukshetra takes place. Abhimanyu enters the battlefield, manoeuvring a spaceship as Duryodhana peers at the battlefield through a pair of tech-binoculars. When combined, these visual and pictorial reimaginings depict how *18 Day*s adapts *The Mahabharat* in the contemporary style of comics without losing sight of its epic origins. These innovations suggest how the characters of the original epic, when filtered through the multi-modal medium of comics, become global icons who remain rooted in their traditional ethos simultaneously.

Dialogue and Language

Apart from visual reinvention, the adaptation of the multitude of characters in *18 Days* is also articulated through each character's distinct dialogue and language. The dialogues are an amalgamation of contemporary conversational tones with ancient gravitas. For instance, in the fourth chapter of the second volume titled "Draupadi, The Greatest Astra", Draupadi's narrative dialogue reads, "They say I am the most beautiful woman in this age. But then, men say this. And they say that of most queens, don't they?" This not only reflects Draupadi's unwavering spirit, but at the same time delivers its impact with a tone rather informal if compared with the sensibilities of the original text. Morrison resists the tendency to portray both Draupadi and Hidimba as objects of male desire and reclaims their narrative voices, aligning the adaptation with contemporary feminist discourses, accentuating agency and wit as central aspects to their characterisation rather than passivity. On the other hand, Krishna's speech embodies his dual role in the battle of Kurukshetra through the juxtaposition of his timeless wisdom blended with sharp wit while still retaining the philosophical depth of his character. This creates a hybrid register that preserves his role as both a charismatic political strategist and Arjuna's divine counsellor, an element suited to contemporary storytelling,

where the audience is accustomed to witty mentors in comic and film traditions. In contrast, Duryodhana's speech is marked by a rather aggressive rhetoric, allowing him to emerge as a clear antagonist whose language reflects his ambition, making him recognisable among the global audiences as the archetypal villain in comic-book traditions. His dialogues are terse, confrontational and belligerent, especially in comparison to Yudish's (Yudhishtir) dialogues, which are mostly measured and reflective. Moreover, Morrison's narrative rather simplifies the ethical complexity of Duryodhana's character, since his grievances are rather ambivalently rooted in questions of justice and legitimacy in the original epic. The dialogue reveals interpersonal dynamics between the characters, especially in terms of heightened tension, alliance or rivalry, which Morrison reveals through his use of modern speech patterns and rapid exchanges, allowing him to revitalise these epic characters in contemporaneity.

Characterisation and Personality

The portrayal of heroism surpasses the binaries of good and evil in Grant Morrison's *18 Days*, as it embraces a rather delicate spectrum of moral and political complexities which mirror modern ethical sensibilities. Characters who were once the embodiments of virtue and Dharma are reinterpreted with a certain amount of psychological depth that reflects their internal conflicts, moral ambiguities and contradictory demands of duty, especially in the case of Karna, and personal desire, as is the case with Duryodhana, within a dystopian, cyberpunk-infused landscape.

For instance, the character of Arjuna continues to be the archetype of a warrior struggling with ethical dilemmas, and this inner turmoil is amplified in 18 Days through both visual and narrative elements. This reframes him not only as the ideal warrior but also as a hero negotiating his fragmented identity, an element central to the cyberpunk genre's broader concern with instability of selfhood and alienation. Similarly, Karna, a character typically celebrated as the tragic hero, is depicted with layers of moral tension. Despite having complete knowledge of his parentage and past, his fierce loyalty to Duryodhana places him at odds against the Pandav brothers, and Morrison's adaptation continues to highlight his honour and personal code, which invites the sympathies of the readers despite his clear

antagonistic position against the Pandavas. Duryodhana's character in *18 Days* takes on a clear antagonistic role as well, as opposed to his morally ambiguous depiction in the original epic. By intensifying Duryodhana's antagonism, Morrison trades the epic's moral ambiguity for a comic-book simplification of heroes versus villains, foregrounding The Mahabharat's unique capacity to stage ethical dilemmas without resolution. On the other hand, while retaining his role as the political strategist and moral compass in the events of *The Mahabharat*, Krishna's role in 18 Days takes on a more pragmatic, enigmatic take as a character whose methods and motives provide the readers with a reflection on the nature of Dharma in a fractured world and confront the complexities of leadership and morality in a dystopian age.

Narrative Role and Development

The plot and narrative structure of *18 Days* is majorly non-linear as opposed to the original epic. *18 Days* opens as the Pandav brothers, in exile, are joined by Krishna as Markandeya foretells the future of the third age and the onset of the fourth. In contrast, the original epic uses a multi-layered narration—with Sauti, a wandering bard, narrating the story of the epic in front of sages in the Naimisharanya forest, where Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna, was performing a snake sacrifice to avenge the death of his father by snakebite. In contrast, it is made clear that it was Ved Vyas who originally wrote the epic. From this point onwards, the story of the original epic is strictly linear, but this is not the case with *18 Days*, in which the characters' backstories are mostly revealed through flashbacks as the main narrative strictly follows the eighteen days of the war of Kurukshetra. Morrison not only reinterprets the plot structure of the original epic but also reshapes the narrative roles and developmental trajectories of key characters, aligning them with both the epic's original sensibilities and the cyberpunk-infused narrative style of Morrison's adaptation.

Genre and Medium Influences on Character

The adaptation of characters in *18 Days* is almost entirely shaped by the interplay of genre conventions and the storytelling capabilities of the medium of comics. The fusion of the grand Indian

epic with the cyberpunk genre is deliberate, allowing the narrative to explore the themes of technology, identity and dystopia through the visual and narrative strengths of comics. The cyberpunk genre is characterised by high tech yet low life, dystopian settings, explorations of the integration of humans with technology, with neon-lit visuals and its exploration of posthumanism. These elements are evident in the technologically advanced cybernetic weapons and armours of Arjuna and Karna, which not only symbolise their prowess but also their engagement in Morrison's futuristic power structures.

While the medium of the comic allows for spectacular and engaging visual reimaginings, it also imposes certain constraints, especially in terms of condensed internal monologues moulded into concise dialogues and captions. By embedding *The Mahabharat* within this framework, Morrison situates the epic in conversation with contemporary anxieties about technology, artificial intelligence and posthuman identity. The struggle for establishing dharma thus becomes a meditation on the future of humanity in the face of technological dominance. In this context, comics as a medium condenses the philosophical enquiries of the epic into colourful panels and concise speech bubbles, prioritising visual spectacle and immediacy. While this creates availability and accessibility for global audiences, it also reframes the epic into a cinematic, entertainment driven idea.

Cultural and Ideological Context

In terms of myth-making, *18 Days* operates at the intersection of the ancient Indian epic tradition and contemporary global culture, which creates a narrative that both honours the mythological foundation of the original epic and, at the same time, transforms it in contemporaneity. In a similar light, Morrison linked the origins of Superman with the origins of Karna:

> You even find like the character Karna who's one of the best characters in Mahabharat, a very conflicted man who's working for both sides almost… he's fighting against his brothers… That character, like Superman, was placed in a basket and sent down the river like Moses, so Karna was the (kind of) origin of that Superman idea of a mother and father sending the son down the river of destiny and hoping his life will work out and eventually becomes this incredible figure

at the centre of mythology. So we are drawn in very much the same archetypes as all the great stories of the past.

By establishing a link between Karna and Superman, Morrison universalises *The Mahabharat* by placing it in a discourse with Western archetypes. At its core, *18 Days* discusses the tension between tradition and modernity, since it utilises the cyberpunk genre as a lens to explore how classical narratives and characters can be reimagined to reflect contemporary issues. The characters portray complex motivations that resist binary categorisation, which mirrors contemporary discourses on the multiplicity of truth and conventional ideas of morality. This pluralism invites readers to reconsider the foundational values of the epic juxtaposed with evolving social and political realities.

Reader and Audience Reception

The reception of *18 Days* is significantly influenced by the dynamic transformation of the classical epic into a contemporary adaptation, accentuating both its cultural resonance and the challenges the audience can possibly face in interpreting a transmedia text. The cyberpunk-infused characterisations invite readers on a global scale to reconsider their notions about heroism, ethical and moral ambiguity, and political justice. For readers unfamiliar with the original text and the multitude of characters and their respective lores, *18 Days* presents the traditional ideas of *astras*, *vimanas*, weapons, boons and curses in a way which is easier for such audiences to comprehend without making it overwhelming. For this reason, the names of several characters are also altered or shortened—Yudhistir becomes Yudish; Dhritrashtra becomes King Drith; Ghatotkacha becomes Gatok or Gatokacha and so on. This deliberate shortening of names not only renders the epic legible to global audiences who are unfamiliar and rather intimidated by Sanskritic nomenclature, but it also highlights compromises of cultural translation at the same time. The availability of *18 Days* across different mediums—whether it is a comic book series or a digital web series on platforms like YouTube, makes it possible for the readers to find Morrison's morally complex characters relatable. Arjuna's doubt, Karna's internal conflicts, Draupadi's resilience and Bhishma's conflicted stance are elements from the original epic which resonate with audiences accustomed to "grey" protagonists in modern storytelling. For Indian

audiences, the adaptation not only evokes nostalgia for generations that grew up watching B.R. Chopra's *Mahabharat* on television, but also encourages critical reflection on tradition and cultural identity in the digital age, especially given its graphic storytelling medium.

Conclusion

One of the reasons why *The Mahabharat* has survived across centuries and generations is because of its openness to transformation and not merely its fidelity to a fixed source. Grant Morrison's 18 Days repositions the characters of the epic within a hybrid medium of the global genre of cyberpunk science fiction and comics through multimodal visual strategies that range from futuristic armour to innovations in dialogues, names and pictorial representations to place the epic in contemporaneity. Simultaneously, *18 Days* places The Mahabharat within global visual culture by amplifying the original epic through cyberpunk tropes rather than diminishing it. What emerges as a result is a reinterpretation of epic characters dealing with questions and dilemmas about heroism, moral ambiguities, duty, fate and divinity.

In conclusion, *18 Days* underscores the vitality of epics and their reimagining of epic characters in the twenty-first century, which further reflects what Hutcheon calls "repetition without replication." The characters remain recognisable as epic figures; however, they are transformed through visual stylisation, dialogue and narrative framing to mirror the sensibilities of the contemporary age. Ultimately, *18 Days* becomes a dynamic text-a living constellation of epic characters rooted in contemporary culture-proving that as long as its characters continue to evolve, *The Mahabharat* will never cease to speak.

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"To Win is to Lose Everything and the Game Always Wins": The Politics of Fidelity in Vikram Chandra's *Sacred Games* and its Screen Adaptation

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Abstract: Adaptation has been central to the Indian filmmaking process with filmmakers crafting their cinematic pieces inspired from literature. This paper will attempt to study the novel and the Netflix screen adaptation of Vikram Chandra's novel, *Sacred Games*. It will concern itself with postmodernism as a distinctive mode of writing and attempt to analyze the narrative strategies employed by the author Chandra and the makers of the Netflix adaptation. Fiction has been a productive site for postmodern narrative experiments with writers choosing innovative ways of structuring the narrative. This paper attempts to study how the plot in *Sacred Games* displays its flexibility of narrative manipulation and multiplicity of interpretation which are central to postmodernist thought. Employing Linda Hutcheon and Brian McFarlane's theories of adaptation and Robert Stam's fidelity theory, the paper will try to explore how the makers, while conforming to the prerequisites of Netflix, have tried to be faithful to the text by envisioning its essentially dystopic nature through thematic episodes whose titles foreshadow the events that transpire. The two- season web series of *Sacred Games* gives ample canvas to the makers to harness the cinematic potential of the text. They can reframe this neo-noir crime story and investigate the life/death binary while interrogating questions of identity, morality, religious fundamentalism, the cycle of karma and the "character" of the Bombay urban landscape. Fidelity, for Stam, is a "chimera" and the present paper will endeavour to study the profundity of the adaptation process through an analysis of Chandra's novel and its screen adaptation.

Keywords: Postmodernism; postmodern narrative experiment; literature and film, fidelity

I

> Adaptations are obviously not new to our time … Shakespeare transferred his culture's stories from page to stage and made them available to a whole new audience. Aeschylus and Racine and Goethe and da Ponte also retold familiar stories in new forms … The critical pronouncements of T.S. Eliot or Northrop Frye were certainly not needed to convince avid adapters across the centuries of what, for them, has always been a truism: art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (Hutcheon 2).

Adaptation has been central to the Indian filmmaking process with filmmakers crafting their cinematic pieces inspired from literature. This paper will attempt to study the politics of fidelity in the novel and the Netflix screen adaptation of Vikram Chandra's novel, *Sacred Games*. It will concern itself with postmodernism as a distinctive mode of writing and attempt to analyze the narrative strategies employed by the author Chandra and the makers of the Netflix adaptation. Fiction has been a productive site for postmodern narrative experiments with writers choosing innovative ways of structuring the narrative. This paper attempts to study how the plot in *Sacred Games* employs postmodern strategies like narrative manipulation and multiplicity of interpretation. Drawing from adaptation theory, it will try to explore how the makers, while conforming to the prerequisites of Netflix, have tried to be faithful to the text by envisioning its essentially dystopic nature through thematic episodes whose titles foreshadow the events that transpire. The two- seasons of *Sacred Games*, India's first Netflix original series, gives ample canvas to the makers to harness the cinematic potential of the text. Season 1 directed by Vikramaditya Motwane and Anurag Kashyap and Season 2 directed by Anurag Kashyap and Neeraj Ghaywan reframes this neo-noir crime story and investigates the life/death binary while interrogating questions of identity, morality, religious fundamentalism, existential dread, the cycle of karma and the "character" of the Bombay urban landscape. Season 1 was hugely successful, featuring in *The New York Times*' "The 30 Best International TV Shows of the Decade", while Season 2 released in 2019, received a mixed response from viewers.

Postmodernist fiction deliberately blurs the distinction between high and low culture with the employment of pastiche and eschew the possibility of any meaning at all. As Hutcheon says in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, "Postmodernism has called into question the messianic faith of modernism, the faith that technical innovation and purity of form can assure social order, even if that faith disregards the social and aesthetic values of those who must inhabit those modernist buildings" (11-12). Most postmodern fiction is intertextual, a mosaic of references to or quotations from other texts. In advocating experimentalism in form, the postmodern novel critiques the philosophical mirror theories of truth and attempts at reconceptualizing the concept of 'realism'. Fiction thus becomes an unfolding of a dream, a literal agonistic struggle that involves ontological confrontations.

The paper attempts to discuss the postmodern aesthetics and narrative strategy employed in Vikram Chandra's 2006 novel *Sacred Games* and its 2018 Netflix screen adaptation through the lens of fidelity politics. Chandra's writing, with its highly individual traits, skillfully employs fabulist imagery, magical realism, political satire etc. His first novel, *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) is a magical realist tale which consists of a series of inter-related stories stretching across continents and centuries. He brings together disparate elements and presents us with a medley of fiction, mythology, folklore and history in their contemporaneity. His first collection of short stories, *Love and Longing in Bombay* (1997) is a collection of five haunting stories set in Bombay with titles linking them to the Hindu concepts of duty (*Dharma*), strength (*Shakti*), love (*Kama*), economy (*Artha*) and peace (*Shanti*). In this novella, one story begets another in a kind of concentric narrative structuring which both formalizes the storytelling act and gives a kind of didactic entertainment. Chandra's second novel, *Sacred Games*, is a novel of epic dimensions that delves deep into the life of police detective Sartaj Singh (already featured in 'Shakti') and the criminal underworld of Ganesh Gaitonde, the most wanted gangster in India. Chandra felt that he had "unfinished business with the character of Sartaj Singh", and this divorced, insomniac policeman works as a perfect foil to the dreaded gangster. As Patricia Leigh Brown says, "… *Sacred Games* delves into many emotionally charged worlds of contemporary India, in particular the spidery links between organized crime, local politics and Indian

espionage that lie below the shimmering surfaces of its economic renaissance. Money and corruption form the golden thread. In interweaving narratives and voices, *Sacred Games* takes on even larger themes, from the wrenching violence of the 1947 partition of India to the specter of nuclear terrorism".

II

Adapting such a huge novel for the screen is an arduous task, as Thomas Leitch says, for here the "standard tactics of adaptation—selecting some obligatory speeches, characters, scenes, and plotlines and dropping others; compressing or combining several characters or scenes into one; streamlining the narrative by eliminating digressive episodes; reworking dialogue so that it is either more epigrammatic or more severely functional—are clearly inadequate" (Leitch 129). Therefore, the OTT medium with two seasons running into 16 episodes is an ideal alternative for the makers. The titles of each of the episodes are unique and serve as a portent for some significant incident that occurs in it. Season 1 derives its titles from Hindu mythology; for example, Episode 1 titled *Ashwathama* refers to the powerful, invincible warrior, son of Drona. It is noteworthy that Gaitonde calls himself Ashwathama; he remains alive through his story even after he is physically dead. Episode 3 titled *Atapi Vitapi* refers to the demon brothers who maliciously lured unsuspecting travelers and cannibalized them but were finally defeated by sage Agastya. This episode introducing Guruji is used to demonstrate the convoluted ethics of religion, where solace is sometimes bartered for commodification, consuming the very soul. Episode 7 is aptly titled *Rudra*, the manifestation of wrath, wherein we are witness to Gaitonde, blinded by rage, going on a killing spree of Suleiman Isa's men and Muslims in particular, to avenge the brutal murder of his wife Subhadra. The final episode of Season 1 titled *Yayati* explores the father-son relationship which is one of the conspicuous themes of the series. Gaitonde claims he had three fathers, with Guruji, his third father, being the most important one. Sartaj also realizes his father's connection to Gaitonde, and how he had tended to him while the latter was imprisoned. It was Dilbagh Singh, Sartaj's father, who advised Gaitonde to find a spiritual guru for himself in the quest for mental peace.

Along with Hindu mythology, the Season 2 episode titles were also inspired from Buddhist, Islamic and Jewish mythologies. For example, episode 4 titled *Bardo* refers to the liminal space between death and rebirth in Buddhism. Here Guruji tells Gaitonde that happiness can be ensured only if he sheds his mortal self and takes rebirth in a different spiritual avatar. This in a way prompts Gaitonde to become the proverbial Angel of Death in episode 6 titled *Azrael* when he agrees to Guruji's apocalyptic plan to bomb the city of Mumbai and establish a new world. The concluding episode of Season 2 titled *Radcliffe* is a reference to the line of demarcation between India and Pakistan. This episode is an adaptation of the *Insets* sections of the novel where Chandra narrates the story of Sartaj's mother and her family and the devastating consequences of the Partition of India, the mindless sectarian violence that ripped families apart. The violent nature of this tragedy created a huge gulf between these two nations, an atmosphere of extreme antagonism and hostile suspicion, the penalty which Mumbai has to pay. This episode also establishes the relationship between Sartaj and Shahid Khan, the fact that they are cousins unknown to each other. The series ends on a cliffhanger with Sartaj trying to defuse the nuclear bomb set by Shahid Khan, a bomb that Guruji and his followers like Batya Abelman has premeditated to decimate the city.

The novel, aimed at a mature audience, soon achieved cult status following its adaptation. The adaptation attests to Geoffrey Wagner's second "possible" category which is "open to the film-maker and to the critic assessing his adaptation", i.e. "commentary", "where an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect … when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation" (qtd. in McFarlane 10-11). Following Klein's three main "approaches" to adaptation, the Netflix series subscribes to both the first and second ones, i.e."... fidelity to the main thrust of the narrative, to the author's central concerns, to the natures of the major characters, to the ambience of the novel, and, what is perhaps most important, to the genre of the source", and the approach which "retains the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting or, in some cases, deconstructing the source text" (Klein 9-10).

III

Adaptation as a "theory" is relatively new, and to engage with larger theoretical issues, it is necessary to analyze the trajectory of the different mediums of adaptation. Each medium is unique with its distinctive artistic expression and its own set of challenges; therefore "the medium-specific theorist believes that 'each art form has its own domain of expression and exploration ... determined by the nature of the medium'" (Carroll qtd in Cardwell 44). While theorizing adaptation, it is imperative to think critically about what it means to adapt and appropriate and then engage creatively in the act of adapting.

The narrative in *Sacred Games* gives the author the opportunity to intervene between the reader and the story, and the authority to render a scene as he sees it rather than as people see it. Through a homodiegetic and a heterodiegetic mode of narration, this gritty saga of violence draws on the best of Victorian fiction, mystery novels, Bollywood movies and Chandra's first-hand research on the streets of Mumbai. As mentioned earlier, the urban landscape of Bombay is the real protagonist, a corporeal repository of life, love, loss, memories and amnesia, a place where dreams can be turned into reality. As Sartaj muses:

> …there were men like Ganesh Gaitonde and Suleiman Isa, who had begun with petty thefts and had gone on to own fleets of Opel Vectras and Honda Accords. And there were boys and girls who had come from dusty villages and now looked down at you from the hoardings, beautiful and unreal. It could happen. It did happen, and that's why people kept trying. It did happen. That was the dream, the big dream of Bombay. (Chandra 226)

There are two main plots: one, the hapless but honest cop Sartaj's quest to discover why Gaitonde blew his brains out after holing himself in a supposedly impregnable structure, interwoven with Ganesh Gaitonde's memoirs of his own criminal career, and the other is Satraj's own life and career. The two major narratives progressing with reasonable fluidity conjure up a kaleidoscopic vision of a city in perpetual motion- glittering and squalid, pullulating with energy, grossly overpopulated and chaotic, driven by the volatile forces of ambition, despair and religious ardour, a witness to the

unfolding of events and a participant in the karmic cycle. The novel revels in its binaries, blending noir, Hindu mythology, espionage, moral ambiguity and philosophical inquiry with both Sartaj, and Gaitonde, his nemesis, grappling with fundamental questions, which do not have clear answers. The Netflix adaptation negotiates fidelity not as being faithful but rather as an ideological act by condensing and modifying much of the source text, emphasizing more on Gaitonde speaking from beyond the grave, along with a focus on an apocalyptic narrative. Gaitonde's metafictional narration alternates with Sartaj's investigations of his death. Employing elements of detective and popular fiction, the novel in its epistemological aspect, places utmost importance in accumulating information, which is precisely what Sartaj does as "this popular genre has been drawn upon repeatedly by contemporary literary novelists in order to endow their material with a dynamic structure" (Gregson 73).

The spectral Gaitonde appears in the narrative and begins his story with: "So, Sardar-ji, are you listening still? Are you somewhere in this world with me? I can feel you. What happened next, and what happened next, you want to know" (Chandra 51). The novel was already rife with cinematic potential and the hypertextuality of the novel's narrative is restructured for coherence on the screen. There is also a new speculative timeline introduced with a sinister conspiracy involving an imminent nuclear holocaust, which makes the series a hybrid potpourri of crime thriller, detective, and science fiction tropes. Early adaptation theories focused mainly on faithfulness to the original, but it has now evolved to move beyond fidelity-based debates to consider the larger ramifications of adaptation. As George Bluestone says, "... the film adapter, beyond understanding the limits and possibilities of his medium, must make a serious adjustment to a set of different and often conflicting conventions, conventions which have historically distinguished literature from the cinema and made each a separate institution" (45). Therefore, a complex story like *Sacred Games* necessitates employing media-specific storytelling approaches like the OTT platforms wherein viewers engage more profoundly with the text.

Chandra's narrative triumph lies in the way he interweaves contemporary events into his text, how crime-solving can make police and criminals strange bedfellows and the way organized crime has worked its way into Bollywood. Chandra has limited Sartaj's sphere of activity and made his knowledge more partial than Gaitonde's. Gaitonde's narrative reveals his psyche when he muses:

> For the overwhelming majority of people, gangsters and spies only existed as figures of light, as glittering and temporary notions thrown up by electronics and celluloid. But I was in fact a gangster and spy, and so I knew well what was possible. My own life had taught me what was real, and I knew that what men can imagine, they can make real. And so I was terrified (Chandra 800).

Gaitonde kills Chhota Badriya without any qualms, only because his elder brother Bada Badriya was a traitor. Sartaj, like his father before him, is a good policeman and detective, but with all his idealism, he succumbs to the murky system, taking bribes, as the system itself depended on it. He even betrays Parulkar to acquire his promotion, which led Parulkar to commit suicide. The character of the mysterious hitman Malcolm Mourad created for the series who kills without qualms and slices off Sartaj's thumb after capturing him creates the necessary trauma so typical of potboilers. Violence on screen can elicit a strong emotional response because although there is awareness that these are not factual incidents, yet the fact that the viewer sees it leads to an immediate effect. A more visceral response is generated than the novel because of the sensory input which startles the viewer. Linda Seger says that unlike a novel where "we can receive only one piece of information at a time, … a film is dimensional. A good scene in a film advances the action, reveals character, explores the theme, and builds an image" (16). Being part of a family with close connections to Bollywood, Chandra has an insider's perspective on the workings of this unholy nexus between Bollywood and the underworld. So, the novel is "rife with characters with topsy-turvy moral compasses". Chandra himself has said that since they live in constant fear, "they construct a comprehensible moral universe for themselves", and since they know their "death is already written", they view murder as "part of the divine play of the Lord" (Leigh Brown). So, the title *Sacred Games* feels apt.

The novel's dramatis personae includes a wide range of female characters who contribute to the darkly glittering mosaic that Chandra has constructed. His control over the narrative structure is remarkable even while he builds up these very layered stories and finds significant tasks for them to do. In fact, Jojo Mascarenas finally is the catalyst to Gaitonde's doom, for she taunts him and his manliness:

> 'Shall I tell you the truth, Gaitonde? You are a coward. You used to be something, you used to be a man, but now you are a trembling little madman hiding in a pit'…'You, you're not a man…You bought women, so you think you're a great hero. None of them even liked you, you bastard. Without your cash, you wouldn't even have been able to come near them'… 'what a pathetic, weak little rat you are. You think you're anything in front of a woman like Zoya? She told us that she never got one good night in bed out of you' (Chandra 855).

Jojo Mascarenas is mainly seen because of Gaitonde's trauma. The adaptation reduces many of its women characters to mere plot devices, depriving them of their agency. The very competent RAW agent Anjali Mathur, a perceptive and intelligent figure in the novel, is killed off early in the series. Kukoo, the transgender character, and one of Gaitonde's molls, is newly introduced in the series to lend an exoticism and thereby sustain viewer engagement. The character of Batya Abelman, Guruji's woman Friday and loyalist in Season 2 appears to have some semblance of authority as she seems to have a deeper purpose, believing in Guruji's intention to bring back Satyug once again on earth. A layered character, Batya struggles with her beliefs and vulnerabilities, but has come to terms with the evil within. Thus, fidelity to the gender specific issues in the novel is sacrificed for the sake of dramatization. The conflicts and subtexts in the novel are much too complicated, like the relationship between Sartaj and Parulkar or between Sartaj and his ex-wife Megha, which in the Netflix narrative are rendered in a one-dimensional manner. However, these creative re-imaginings and subversions construct a new visual experience, something that the written text cannot, thereby enriching the narrative.

IV

While shuttling between the past and the present, Chandra's narrative technique gives us a sense of the changes and continuities that have shaped modern India. The story of Sartaj's mother, Prabhjot Kaur or Nikki, and Shahid Khan's mother Navneet, Nikki's beloved older sister, are inextricably embedded in the narrative, even while Sartaj "himself was distanced from it, not quite separated but gone away somehow, like a planet that had spun out too far from its sun" (Chandra 89). The story of Gaitonde's origins is convincingly mapped out to give an idea of how he eventually became the monster wanted by the law. Earlier, Gaitonde was "a poor man with a rich man's problems"; he was intent on amassing wealth and nursing an alienating superiority complex. But, as his material possessions and wealth multiplied, he found himself in a world of mirrors, which holds menacing secrets in its womb. He tries to reinvent himself continuously but struggles with his identity, becoming increasingly disillusioned. The undercurrent of Hindu nationalism is tangible when Gaitonde accepts Swami Sridhar Shukla, a Hindu guru and nationalist, a spiritual adviser of international renown, as his spiritual mentor. This plotline with the Guruji becomes prominent in Season 2. Here, Chandra brews a potent mix of spirituality with crime with its justification: "For the ordinary person, who sees only randomness, the world is just depressing. When you move along a little, you start to see its real loveliness. Then you realize that this exquisite perfection is terrible, it is frightening. When you conquer this fear, you know that beauty and terror are the same thing, and this is as it should be. There is no need for fear. For the world to be beautiful, it must finish. For every beginning, there is an end. And for every end, there is a beginning" (679). Amplifying the novel's religious themes, Guruji sermonizes to Gaitonde on the illusion of reality: "Reality itself, the real reality, is a madman's vision, a hallucination that the small individual human mind cannot hold" (731).

But the "existentially confused" Gaitonde finds out that Guruji is only a modern-day Machiavelli, and he was a pawn in the bizarre scheme of things. He realizes this after shooting Jojo dead in the safe house:

> In this clarity, I could see that Sridhar Shukla- Guru- ji- had been right. I couldn't stop it. I couldn't stop anything. I was defeated. He had beaten me, because he knew me better than I knew myself. He knew my past, and he knew my future. What I did, or didn't do, was irrelevant. Or worse, it was entirely relevant. Whatever I chose to do would contribute to his plan, would end in fire. The world wanted to die, and I had helped it along. He had set up the sacrifice, and every action of mine was fuel. I couldn't stop it. (Chandra 857)

Guruji in Season 2 preaches about a warped idea of enlightenment, a return to Satya Yuga, which is nihilistic. Without direct political indictment, the adaptation critiques right-wing extremism choosing to avoid naming contemporary political figures for fear of censorship. The fundamentalist cult led by the wily Guruji advocates a kind of paranoid nationalism, a dystopian vision of *moksha*, where mass sacrifice, or mass cleansing begets a new dawn. This is not the teachings of our scriptures, but a distorted ideology which spells doom. The adaptation depicts the valorizing of death over life through queer fundamentalist logic. In this nuanced reworking and dialogical relationship between the source text and the adaptation, the politics of fidelity is sometimes molded by the politics of reception, involving a more radical transformation. Reactions to screen adaptations have always been polarized but an astute audience is always the best judge.

Chandra's final triumph is evident in the way he concludes Gaitonde's narrative told by his ghost in an utterly realistic, and at the same time fantastical manner. It was imperative for Gaitonde to tell his story to "somebody good, somebody simple", "somebody who had seen me not merely as Ganesh Gaitonde, but a human being". He chose Sartaj to hear his final revelations because Gaitonde was convinced that "despite all your Sardar- ji preening, you were moved by me. Our lives had crossed, and mine had changed for ever" (Chandra 858).

The life/death binary is depicted as metaphysical where Gaitonde's death in the beginning of the novel and his enigmatic warning to Sartaj emphasizes that life and death is a cyclical process. Gaitonde justifies his need to talk about himself and he continues to do so from a liminal space which blurs the lines between life and mortality: "Listen to me. If you want Ganesh Gaitonde, then you have

to let me talk. Otherwise Ganesh Gaitonde will escape you, as he escaped every time, as he escaped every last assassin. Ganesh Gaitonde almost escaped even me. Now, at this last hour, I have Ganesh Gaitonde, I know what he was, what he became"… "I do it for love. I do it because I know who I am. Bas, enough" (Chandra 859).

Gaitonde is a criminal without qualms, but his actions have a context, framed within the trauma and sufferings of his life. The trajectory of his life is underscored by his hubris and thereon to the *maya* that consumes him. Sartaj too, even when wrestling with his own demons, both personal and professional, rises to the occasion and takes the bull by the horns. Being a Sikh, he had never really practiced his faith, but his increasing disillusionment with the system is replaced by a sense of self-worth and self-realization, representing a karmic awakening. In the series, initially a passive character and even complicit with corruption, Sartaj redeems himself by undertaking the hazardous task of disarming the nuclear bomb; the final scene is left ambiguous, but this decision of his suggests an ethical rebirth.

The novel, along with parody, pastiche, appropriation or intertextuality, also employs multilingualism with local slang, profanity and patois to create a polyphonic effect. The series retains this with the Netflix staples like violence, gore, drugs, sex and cliffhangers to pander to the politics of cultural legibility. This is very crucial for screen adaptations as it facilitates understanding, and helps to navigate through the story, even when challenged with opacities at times. The novel with its layers of meaning calls for great dexterity on the part of the filmmaker to adapt it and make it comprehensible to viewers. Chandra delves into philosophical introspection in the novel, but the series without betraying the essence of the original, pivots to interrogate questions of power structures, government surveillance and biopolitical interventions. These deviations need to be appreciated for the way in which the adaptation tries to negotiate between the source text and the demands of audience expectations. Existing cultural narratives are reexamined, and new meanings are constructed which enhance the comprehension of the story. As Julie Sanders says, "Adaptation

studies needs to be understood as a field engaged with process, ideology and methodology rather than encouraging polarized value judgements" (24-25).

V

While discussing narrative and interpretation, Ira Bhaskar says that, "The reader/viewer's response to the narrative would dynamize his "perceptual, cognitive and affective processes", and the act of interpretation would then be concerned as much with understanding the text as with understanding our conceptual schemes and our temporal location in a world that may or may not be similar to the world of the text. Interpretation, then, is a dual-pronged activity- directed both outward to the text and its world and inward to ourselves and our context, in a mutually illuminating move" (390).

It is important to remember that while reframing *Sacred Games* for the OTT medium, the "adaptation is a text in itself, not a 'version' of a standard whole; and the text which an adaptation constitutes cannot simply be classified, explained or interpreted in terms of its being such an end-product or version" (Cardwell 20). There is talk about adaptation theories' resistance to theory, but "rather than solely adapting adaptation to theories, theories also need to adapt to adaptations" (Elliott 32). Kamilla Elliott goes on to say that "adaptations teach us that theories cannot predict or account for adaptations in all times and places, not only because the field is too large, but also because adaptations are always changing and adapting. Any theory of adaptation must therefore itself incorporate process and change. Adaptations admonish us to move continually beyond our present ideas and methodologies" (34). Thomas Leitch believes that an adaptation theory attuned to intertextuality, revision, and rewriting has unique potential as the "keystone of a new discipline of textual studies less ideologically driven, and therefore more powerful, than either contemporary literary or cultural studies" (20). We tend to use words such as *infidelity* and *betrayal* "when we have loved a book", but the "adaptation has not been worthy of that love" (Stam 54). But this reiteration about issues of fidelity and the implication of the supremacy of literature over film can hinder and inhibit the study of adaptation, restricting it from evolving. The adaptation of *Sacred Games* depends on the tapestry of intertextual references to maintain its efficacy of transposition. It is inevitably a case of selective perception and interpretation.

The touchstone of fidelity is how the makers reimagined the canvas of the novel in all its fullness and the convincing way they portray it. As Cardwell says, "Adaptations are rarely studied for themselves — rarely is interpretation valued as much as theorising; broader theoretical issues take precedence over local aesthetic concerns" (69). The adaptation is "based on the optical principle known as persistence of vision" (14), and the camera becomes an "artistic instrument", and therefore, "free to use almost endless variations" (15).

VI

The fidelity question has hounded the discourse of adaptation since its inception; as McFarlane says, the "discussion of adaptation has been bedevilled by the fidelity issue, no doubt ascribable in part to the novel's coming first, in part to the ingrained sense of literature's greater respectability in traditional critical circles" (8). Robert Stam considers fidelity a "chimera" and the possibility of "strict fidelity" very "questionable" (55). He has also criticised the valorising of literature over cinema which can reduce potential adaptations to mere derivatives. McFarlane contends that "there will often be a distinction between being faithful to the 'letter', an approach which the more sophisticated writer may suggest is no way to ensure a 'successful' adaptation, and to the 'spirit' or 'essence' of the work". He also says that "the fidelity approach seems a doomed enterprise and fidelity criticism unilluminating" (8-9). While adapting a literary text, Andrè Bazin observes that it would be advantageous for the film-maker to have "enough visual imagination to create the cinematic equivalent of the style of the original, and for the critic to have the eyes to see it" (20).

While referring to Stam and Leitch's views on fidelity, Glenn Jellenik in his essay "On the Origins of Adaptation, as Such: The Birth of a Simple Abstraction" reiterates, "For example, Robert Stam asserts, "The question of fidelity ignores the wider question: Fidelity to what?" (57), and Thomas Leitch argues, "Fidelity to its source text … is a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense"" (161). He further goes on to say that there is a "misbegotten urge to valorize fidelity. Fidelity is primarily driven by the fallacy of the begged question: our modern notion of adaptation actually enters the

culture via fidelity criticism. Thus, our cultural definition of adaptation is shaped by and emerges out of a central notion of and desire for fidelity, making it difficult to conceive of adaptation criticism without it" (9-10).

Adapting *Sacred Games* also contributed to a renewal of interest in the book itself as it added to the body of analysis, interpretation and critique of the text. An analysis of the differences between the text and the Netflix series is useful for a critique of the latter by delving deep into the question of what the makers sought to accomplish by adapting it, which is important in asserting whether the adaptation was successful or not. Jarrell D. Wright while discussing fidelity argues that "while the transposition of a narrative from a textual medium to the cinema might be able to explain the fact that the narrative has changed, the characteristics of cinema as a medium cannot explain why particular changes are made instead of others" (180). Frederic Jameson in his essay "Adaptation as a Philosophical Problem" is of the opinion that "the novel must give rise to a filmic adaptation that is not only governed by a wholly different aesthetic, but that breathes an utterly different spirit altogether" (217).

VII

The purpose of this paper in examining the text and screen adaptation of *Sacred Games* was to study how adaptation has evolved beyond fidelity debates by incorporating intertextuality, medium specificity, viewer agency and ideological ramifications, creating a framework for understanding how stories travel and transform across contexts. The novel interweaves the lives of the privileged and the downtrodden, the famous and the infamous, an uncompromising scrutiny of an urban landscape with all its aesthetics and frailties. This magnum opus rendered on screen also situates its core on the transitoriness of human existence and questions of morality, its narrative framework and character arcs underscored by the life/death binary. This genre-bending, multilayered and nuanced saga of flawed characters told in a compassionate manner is also a philosophical parable for the nation itself, a tribute to contemporary India.

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Re-inventing of Sita's Character through the Analyses of Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramyana*

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Abstract: Of late, experimenting with mythology has become a fabulous trend. The writers who retell the stories from mythology enjoy creative liberty as they do not retreat back in fear of crossing the *laxman rekha* set for writers, rather they perceive mythology from the perspective of modern readers and adapt it accordingly. These writers enjoy adding new hues, colours, flavour and undertones to the existing literature. There is no denying the fact that they have not only popularised the mythology but have also made it vox populi. They have added a new tinge to the research as well. Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* has rightly asserted that adaptation transposes a specific medium into another generic mode and such an adaptation makes a straightforward effort to make the text relevant to present day audiences. Adapting the epic Ramyana, Devdutt Pattaniak retells the Ramyana in *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramyana.* Though the writer renders fresh twists to the epic, he nowhere seems to play with the basic elements that remain unfailing till the end. In this paper, the endeavour of the researcher will be to analyse Devdutt Pattanaik's book to explore how his version of the epic is different from that of the real one. The focus of the study in this paper is to explore how Valmiki's sita and Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita differ significantly in their narrative and characterisation.

Keywords: *The Ramyana*, Mythology, Devdutt Pattanaik, Sita, Valmiki, Adaptation

The history of retelling and adapting literature is very old. Homer's great epics, *The Iliad* and The *Odyssey* have been adapted and retold repeatedly by various authors for the new readers from different perspectives. These retellings have rendered new interpretations and shades to the original epics. In ancient times, stories were told and retold by word of mouth as an integral part of oral traditions. Till date, Homers epics have been adapted into comics, movies, poems and novels. And by doing so, the audience and creators have consistently sought spaces for, what Catherine Coker

states, “exploration, reinterpretation, and reimagining of existing stories and their associated subjects.” (Usmani and Fatma 433)

Indian mythology—as a rich and wide-ranging collection of stories, legends and epics— has offered authors and story tellers across the globe a decent material to read, appraise, and even recreate. In doing so, the authors change forms of conventional mythology to address the issues that the modern society of today come across. However, the authors do not change the basic plot or essence of the story by allowing it to remain original. Since these stories have been passed down from one generation to the other and people’s faith and culture has remained unshakable for the centuries, the incessant upsurge in the mythological content is not a matter of disbelief. This is deep rooted faith in mythology and its teachings that each retelling or adaptation reinterprets texts from mythology to create narratives with the aim to address the concerns in mythical narratives and by doing so a modern twist is rendered to the narrative chosen from mythology. This fact is proved true in relation to Raja Rao who looks back to the Indian mythologies and connects them with the contemporary events and lends to them a peculiar native colour and resonance (Jhajhnodia 31). Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pier Paolo Piciucco have aptly asserted that Raja Rao draws “inspiration from the Indian myths and legends, episodes and anecdotes, and creates an ethos all of its own” (Qtd. in Jhajhnodia). His novel, *Kanthapura* is a fine example in which anti-colonial awareness is raised through characters. The novel tells the story of Indian freedom movement from the perspective of an old rural woman. The critics have appraised the novel as a fabled tale of Ram’s victory over Ravana, embodying the triumph of good over evil. Likewise, R.K. Narayna, Raja Rao’s contemporary, also draws upon mythology—Puranas and other Indian scriptures— and intertwines his tales in the backdrop of myths. In his *The Man-eaters of Malgudi* the myth of Bhasmasura has been explored in order to establish a pattern of self-destructive development in the modern times. (32-33)

Besides Raja Rao and R K Narayana, the well-known Indian authors who have adapted and retold mythology are Amish Tripathi, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni, Devdutt Pattanaik, Anand Neelakantan, Ashwin Sanghi, Kavita Kane, and Anuja Chandramouli. They perceive mythology from

the perspective of present-day readers by reimagining and remoulding ancient stories and characters to suit their readers' taste. These authors have displayed interest in retelling and adapting the mythology as it deals with universal themes that have not lost their lustre and relevance even today. The all-encompassing themes, such as love, duty, morality, and human condition are dealt with so finely that they not only entertain the modern readers but also inspire them to face the challenges and concerns in life. Obviously, these authors have done yeoman's service by passing down traditions by retelling mythologies as this process helps preserve cultural heritage and traditional stories and in this way history is also kept alive as mythology does contain historical and cultural references. In addition, retelling mythologies plays an important role in exploring unexplored themes, motifs and characters.

The Ramyana was composed in 200 B.C, and even today it continues to be one of the distinguished Indian epics. It is one of the most valued Hindu epics that has been retold and reinterpreted in various forms of arts, literature, and media. It is not for nothing that the epic itself has 300 versions of itself (Kulkarni 712). The epic is adapted and retold not only in various Indian languages, but also by Southeast Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia etc. The basic story line remains unchanged in these versions. However, there are minor alterations, such as in the Philippines' version of *the Ramyana* there is no fire ordeal to purify Sita after the rescue. The story ends with a safe arrival home (Francisco 109). In this way we see how the great Indian epic, *The Ramyana* serves, across many countries, the treasure house of Indian narratology. Priyanka P.S. Kumar expresses her views, "The two great epics, *the Ramyana* and *the Mahabharata* provide many stories and sub-stories which form the richest treasure house of Indian narratology. Apart from providing an infinite number of tales, they provide an umbrella concept of fictional resources that appeal to the Indian mind…. They cover all areas of human psychology and resolve many intellectual and moral questions. These features of the epics provide profuse scope for retelling." (793)

Continuing this series of retelling, Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita*: *An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramyana* (2013) is a fine example of retelling of the *Ramyana* that offers a renewed insight into the

epic story, concentrating on Sita's character, choices, and significance in the narrative. Though the writer renders fresh twists to the epic, he nowhere seems to play with the basic elements that remain unfailing till the end. In this paper, the endeavour of the researcher is to analyse Devdutt Pattanaik's book to explore how his version of the epic is different from that of the real one. The focus of the study is to explore how Valmiki's Sita and Devdutt Pattanaik's Sita differ significantly in their narrative and characterisations. The book undoubtedly delves into Sita's thoughts, feelings, and experiences, making her a central figure in the narrative. The Valmiki's Ramyana, in its base and structure, is constructed on the notion of patriarchy where the main hero Ram is celebrated as the centre point of the narrative. He enjoys an adequate amount of textual space as compared to Sita, Ram's wife, who is seen as a typical ideal wife, and is exposed as "passive, subservient, docile, self-sacrificing and intensely loyal to her husband" (Halder and Mishra 2084). She voluntarily accompanies her husband into exile and unwaveringly supports him despite the trials and tribulation she comes across. Owing to these typical traditional traits that strengthen patriarchy and, at the same time, shape its perception of women's morality, Sita in Valmiki's Ramyana is often praised and portrayed as an exemplary role model attracting approbation. However, Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita*: *An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramyana* justifies how the modern retellings of *the Ramyana* has kept the quintessence of the epic undamaged and provides counter-narrative to fit the mythological story into its modern-day rendering.

Pattanaik's *Sita* is not a simple retelling of Valmiki's Ramyana, rather a re-examination of "Sita's depiction and its influence on Indian narrative tradition, norms, and culture" (2091). Pattanaik juxtaposes culture with nature. Culture implies that society is bound by rules, whereas nature neither conforms nor imposes any boundaries. He makes a fine use of metaphors, motifs, patterns and symbols to solidify his standpoint. Pattanaik's suggestive prose style brings with the full intensity all emotions, such as affection, love, greed, lust, loyalty and malice. By doing so, the author does not give any reinterpretation in itself, rather it tells the same story as we know it but from the perspective of Sita. Besides, he also brings to the mind of his readers the lesser-known back stories of

Rishyashringa—the son-in-law of Dashratha— who arranges a *yagna* so that Dashratha may father sons. (Pattanaik 15). Valmiki's *Ramyana* does not refer to Rishyashringa as a son-in-law. Later versions turn Rishyaranga into son-in-law perhaps to dismiss allusions that Rishyashringa was brought to perform niyoga, an ancient practice of getting a hermit to make childless women pregnant (16). Pattanaik also mentions Sunaina, the mother of Sita (17). Though Valmiki's *Ramyana* does not mention the name of Sita's mother. The name Sunaina or Sunetra comes from later regional works (18). He also tells the story of Kaikeyi as the brave queen who served as the king's charioteer and saved his life. The story of saving Dashratha's life in battle also comes from later narratives (69). It is again Pattanaik who acquaints the readers to Sita as inquisitive and intelligent girl.

Valmiki scripted the larger-than-life *Ramyana* in Sanskrit in 2nd century (Tyagi 1). This epic has predominantly established gender norms and roles in India, especially in capturing the larger concept of womanhood. Sita has appeared as a well-intentioned role model of emulation for feminine principles, suitably allied with oft-quoted episodes from the classic text. Nevertheless, Devdutt Pattanaik challenges the traditional image of Sita in his book, *Sita*: *An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramyana* and offers a more diverse detail than the previous renditions presented centuries ago. His narrative is constituted around Sita. She is presented as a human being having humane qualities, in contrast to the Goddess image as rendered in numerous ancient texts. Pattanaik reveals, in the words of Arunidhati Venkatesh, "details that we seldom hear about, lesser-known back-stories…she is independent, not abandoned (1). Komal Tyagi has precisely affirmed, "The powerful writing of this book reveals the details that are seldom heard about in Valmiki or Tulsidas's versions of the *Ramyana*, which only appear as tales that venerate and equalize King Ram and Ikshvaku clan with no particular emphasis on smaller incidents related to the female characters." (2)

Pattanaik's book delivers the message of giving value to the girl child. In the one hand Dashratha discarded his daughter, Shanta, for want of a son, on the other it is Janaka who feelingly adopts Sita. It is when the farmers invited their king to be the first to plough the land with a golden hoe. "Suddenly the king stopped. The furrow revealed a golden hand: tiny fingers rising up like grass,

as if drawn by the sunshine. Janaka moved the dirt away, a baby, a girl, healthy and radiant, smiling joyfully, as if waiting to be found" (Pattanaik 9). Though the daughter is not his, he asserts that fatherhood is derived from the heart rather than biological reproduction. He hugs the child stating, "This is Bhumija, daughter of the earth. You may call her Maithli, princess of Mithila, or Vaidehi, lady from Videha, or Janaki, she who chose Janaka. I will call her Sita, she who was found in a furrow, she who chose me to be her father" (10). Today when girl child is not welcome and sex ratio is alarmingly decreasing, Janaka appears a motivating force to love girl child and give them a due space. Here, it is worth mentioning that Devdutt's portrayal of Sita interrogates conventional norms and challenges us to visualize historical truth. Janaka wishes to explore the human mind and body, the universe encompassing the body, and all the Veda signifying knowledge. This aspirations springs in his heart as he is inspired by Sulabha, a visionary and remarkable woman. He organises a meeting of all learned scholars from Aryavrata so that they may share their knowledge and wisdom on Vedas. Thus is arranged a global gathering of scholars in Sita's domain to help to widen the human perspective (Halder and Mishra 2092). How Sita is imparted knowledge and education right from her childhood is clear from the lines, "Sita attended the conference with her father, at first clinging on to his shoulders, then seated on his lap, and finally following him around, observing him engage with hundreds of sages, amongst them Ashtavakra, Gargi and Yagnavalkya." (Pattanaik 19)

Devdutt's Sita strongly champions the cause of women's education as it is central to Indian culture and their role in compilation of the *Upanishads* cannot be repudiated. Nevertheless, it is a matter of concern that the present generation that are well versed with mythological texts through folk performance, never observe the same happening in Videha. On the contrary, they are witness to how women are kept at bay from higher orders of knowledgeable and scholarly learning. It is observed that erudite female philosophers and writers were negligible in number as compared to male sages. Women philosophers who got the opportunity of receiving education were revered as Goddesses, and amidst all that, the notion of their being human is lost in oblivion. It is not for nothing that John Stuart Mill expresses his anger at this, "Nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which

Hindus entertain for their women…. They are held in extreme degradation, excluded from the sacred books, deprived of education" (Tyagi 5). There is no doubt that Sita becomes a torch holder to champion the cause of women for education and honour in society. If we can aspire for Ramrajya, why can't we envisage 'Sitarajya' where women are held in high esteem and not denied of their rights? Sita can become a role model of women to scale heights of success in the field of education.

Sita is portrayed as inquisitive with a thirst for gaining knowledge in every field and this provides an antithesis of gendered role-division in *Sita*. Sita wondered: "who fed hundreds of sages who had made Mithila their home, who gave them a place to sleep, who filled their pots with water to moisten their mouth parched by intense conversation?" (Pattanaik 22) This inquisitiveness and concern reveals her philanthropic bearing. This desire to satisfy her keenness leads Sita to her mother's kitchen, "Before long, Sita found her feet around the kitchen: peeling, cutting, churning, pickling, streaming, roasting, frying, pounding, mixing, kneading, experiencing various textures, aromas, flavours and chemistry. Her senses became familiar with the secrets of spices, and every kind of nourishment provided by the plant and animal kingdom" (22). Sita's desire for knowledge makes her well versed with the knowledge of both the worlds of culinary and the court. She is one step ahead of her parents as "Sita's father never knew of the world that was the kitchen. Sita's mother never knew the world that was the court. But Sita realized she knew both. This is how the mind expands, she thought to herself. This is how Brahma becomes the brahman. She has the privilege of both—seeker of wisdom as well as transmitter of wisdom. Valmiki's *Ramyana* portrays women as delicate. Sita is represented as docile and Urmila as sleeping for fourteen years awaiting her husband, Lakshmana. Mandavi and Shutkriti are not mentioned post-marriage. However, they are assigned significant roles in Pattanaik's *Sita* as bright ladies who relish engaging in talks. (Halder and Mishra 2093)

Consequently, Sita becomes a role model for the present generation. If a princess can learn to master various talents, why not all women around the world? It is only because Janaka offered opportunities to his daughter, whereas the women today are mostly devoid of that. Even today, girls

are forced to opt for the profession that teach them how to serve in a better way whereas boys are given the choice to choose from a variety of professions. Ann Oakley, a British sociologist and supporter of the Women's Liberation Movement comes down strongly on the side of culture as the determinant of gender roles. She says, “Not only is the division of labour by sex not universal, but there is no reason why human culture should not be diverse and endlessly variable. They are the creation of human inventiveness rather than invincible biological forces” (Haralembos and Heald 373).

Pattanaik’s Sita is not docile and feeble, rather she is a strong woman having strength of mind, body and heart. She is given the responsibility of cleaning the entire palace. She enters the armoury with the intention of cleaning cumbersome Shiva’s bow. Despite being warned by her sisters she retorts, “Still it needs to be cleaned” (Pattanaik 47) She effortlessly picks up the bow with one hand and vigorously wipes its under surface with the other. The Valmiki’s *Ramyana* does not depict Sita as having strength to lift the bow, but it is part of the folklore from where Pattanaik has picked up the episode (48). Since women cannot be expected to be strong as they are looked down upon for having masculine features, Sita’s act led to an instant shock. It is shocking that her strength is marked with her limitations. On the contrary if such strength is displayed by men it is considered fortitude in men and is eulogised accordingly. Even today, women sportspersons in the field of Kabaddi, boxing and wrestling appear disagreeable even after winning laurels for the country.

Pattanaik depicts how Sita and her sisters are not docile. They resist wherever necessary. When Ram kills Tadaka, the Videha sisters—Urmila, Mandavi and Shrutakriti—challenge the process of her last rites and shower questions about birth, death, nature, equilibrium, and resurrection. Like an environmentalist they ask the logic behind destroying forests, thus, giving a strong message to procure ecosystem. The questioning and challenging tone is seen with amazement. “It did not escape Vishwamitra’s notice that Janaka’s daughters asked questions like Gargi of the Upanishad; Dashratha’s Sons preferred obeying commands. Different seeds nurtured in different fields by different farmers produce very different crops indeed.” (41) Komal Tyagi has summed up precisely:

> In the ideal *Ramrajya*, such talent was befitting only to fetch a suitable groom but in hypothetical 'Sitarajya', the sisters (female scholars) could possibly be sages theorizing concepts and producing academic treatise. The enormous intellectual base was not put to the purpose of national development or larger comprehension. The repositories of such knowledge were given away in marriage, and the academic and martial intellect was neither employed for domestic bliss nor compilation of national framework of laws. (7)

Pattanaik not only interprets Sita's character as having physical strength but she is also depicted as strong at heart. When Ram's mother articulates her concern about the well- being of her sons during exile, Sita with unique confidence and poise reassures her, "Mother. Do not worry for your sons. In summer, I shall find shady trees under which they can rest. In winter, I shall light fires to keep them warm. During the rains, I shall find where we can stay dry. They are safe with me." (Pattanaik 82). Thus she proves equally phlegmatic and stoic like Ram. Sita, here, is not demure as she has mind of her own. She rebukes Ram for not being man enough and for being afraid of taking his wife along (83). She convinces Ram strongly and tries to dispel his doubts about her strength:

> I do not need your permission. I am your wife and I am supposed to accompany you, to the throne, into war and to the forest. What you eat, I shall taste. Where you sleep, I shall rest. You are the shaft of the bow that is our marriage; you need the string to complete it. My place is beside you, nowhere else. Fear not, I will be no burden; I can take care of myself as long as I am beside you and behind you, you will want for nothing. (82)

Here, Sita displays exceptional quality of being not dependent on others and thus refutes the conventional belief that women are reliant on men and need protection of their male counterparts. Pattanaik does nowhere seem to endorse women's reliance as daughters, wives, sisters and mothers. He has strongly undermined the notion of women's dependence on men. Though Sita is projected as tiresome, dependent, and trailing in the ancient versions of *Ramayana*, Pattanaik's Sita, in his retelling, seldom behaves as a dependent and helpless woman. She becomes a perfect

companion and human being when she arguments on dharma, nature, charity, mistreatment, and selflessness.

In the retelling of Pattanaik, Sita is rendered animal lover and a naturalist. Whereas Ram and Lakshman enjoy hunting, Sita is pained to see animals being killed. She questions Ram, "Must you hunt these poor beasts?" And once she asks, "Can't you just enjoy them as run through the forests, towards pastures or prey, or away from predators?" (121) She conveys the great message to the people of today who harm nature for their selfish motives and create imbalance in environment. She is not a passive listener to the conversation between Ram and Lakshman. She argues with them on any subject that needs attention. She seems to support independence when she says, "These days in the forest, I am sure you think they are bad. But I think they are good. There is so much freedom here in the forest, no rules and rituals and rites that bind us back home." (122).

Sita is a woman of great will power and self-confidence. She is not afraid of her abductor, Ravana as she refused to look at her abductor. She would not give him the satisfaction of seeing her wail and whimper in fear (134). She is a judicious planner who can make use of her wits during crisis. When worried how Ram would know where she is being taken by Ravana, "She pulled off her armlets and anklets, the chains around her neck and her earrings, and began dropping them below, hoping they would create a trail for Ram to follow" (135). Thus, she manages to maintain her poise during predicament and proves herself a planner in the teeth of quandary. Sita is shown here not as helpless but as alert and resourceful. Realizing she cannot escape; she thinks of a way to let her husband know her whereabouts.

Sita's philosophy of love is remarkable. This philosophy of hers guides today's generations. She is not ready to accept Trijata's opinions that Ravana loves Sita as he gives all she wants and protects her jealously. Sita backlashes at this:

> This is not love. He does not see me. He just wants to possess me, and finds it frustrating that I do not submit to him. Love is not about power, it is about giving up power, a voluntary submission before one's beloved. Love is about seeing; I see Ram,

and Ram sees me. I have shown Ram my vulnerabilities without trepidation and so has he. Ravana cannot love another because he sees no one, not even himself. (145)

Sita is presented in this book as a philosopher and guide. Sita's words appear strange to Trijata in whose custody she is entrusted with in the Ashok Vatika by her abductor. Trijata repeats everything she hears to the women of Lanka, "She (Sita) does not consider herself inferior to men, even though she willingly walks behind her husband" (146). Trijata is astounded to think what gives so much confidence to Sita. Sita is not only an exceptional cook, planner, philosopher and guide but also a physician, motivator and sportsperson. "She knew herbs that could heal, cure skin rashes unblock noses and aid the movement of bowels. And most exciting of all, she showed them board games that they could play" (147). It is the power of her motivation every house in Lanka People are seen playing board games designed by Sita. "She turned Lanka into a playground where everyone laughed and smiled." It is this power of Sita that Ravana wife, Mandodari is forced to tell Ravana, "You set out to conquer her heart. And she has ended up conquering all over our hearts. Let this wonderful girl go" (147)

Sita is so fearless that even in the house of her abductor, she replaces the taste and aroma of demons' food with that of prepared by her. "So enticing was the resulting aroma that other rakshasa cooks came to the Ashoka grove and asked Sita for cooking tips" (225) This swapping of aroma symbolises victory of good over evil.

Sita also symbolises power and destruction of evil. It is post Agni-priksha—an incident most debated and for which Ram is questioned. Sita is seated next to Ram. They are attacked by a thousand-headed demon said to be the twin of Ravana. "Before Ram could reach for his bow, everyone saw an incredible sight. Sita suddenly transformed. Her eyes widened, her skin turned red, her hair came unbound, and she sprouted many arms with which she grabbed the sticks and stones of the vanaras and the sword and spears of the rakshasas…. She ripped out his entrails, chopped away his limbs, crushed his heads, broke his knees and drank his blood" (254). Everyone was stunned by the realization that Sita was Gauri who was Kali. "She had allowed herself to be abducted. She had

allowed herself to be rescued. She was the independent Goddess who had made Ram the dependable God" (254). This episode justifies that Sita was equally strong and had power to fight back. Komal Tyagi has rightly asserted, "The meaning of their strength and willingness to serve (both women and tribals) has been misconstrued into submission. If only one could reverse the image; and imagine that Ram was abducted, then Sita too could have raised an army and brought him back, after all, Devdutt's Sita has better Military familiarity and finer resource management skills" (9). Yes, she is right. If the women can join army today and fight fierce battles, why could Sita not fight ferociously?

The episode of Agni-pariksha holds crucial implication in restricting and defining the boundaries for the female in India. Vinod K. Chopra highlights how woman's honour and chastity is held dear and valued in Indian society:

> It has been observed that in most national histories, the countries have idealised virtues of woman and public roles of men. Mythology, too, reinforces these perceptions. Sita and Savitri are two characters held up as ideals of Indian womanhood. However, Sita had to prove her fidelity and chastity by undergoing a trial by fire since she had been in Ravana's custody for a while. She is to most Hindu women the epitome of the proper wife. She represents the ideal towards which all should strive. (119-20)

Pattanaik's *Sita* brings us closer to meaningful dialogue between Sita and Lakshman immediately after the Agni-pariksha episode and subsequent desertion:

> 'Ram is dependable, hence God, I am independent, hence goddess. He needs to do his duty, follow rules, and safeguard reputation. I am under no such obligation. I am free to do as I please: love him when he brings me home, love him when he goes to the forest, love him when I am separated from him, love him when I am rescued by him, love him when clings to me, love him even when he lets me go.'
>
> 'But you are innocent,' said Lakshman, tears streaming down his face.
>
> 'And if I was not? Would it then be socially appropriate and legally justified for a husband to throw his woman out of his house? A jungle is preferable to such an intolerant society.'

…. with a smile, she said 'I know the forest well, Lakshman. I remember more years here than in the palace. Do not worry about me. I am not happy with this situation, but I accept it and will make the most of it. Thus I submit to karma without letting go of dharma.' (278-79)

Sita stays back in the forest. She has a quality of being calm in every situation. Here, she seems much poised and calmer as compared to Ram. She believes, "when the farmer abandons the field, the field is finally free to return to being a forest." (279) This man-woman communication in *Sita* indicates the fact that the female is a 'natural scientist'. She knows how to strike a social equilibrium through grooming of individual personality by choosing appropriate principles of cultivation. "She could choose between being a manicure garden or a feral forest whenever required, which leads the readers to believe that this retelling of the mythological text sows the seeds of feminism." (Tyagi 10)

Finally, Sita also strikes an amicable bond with the Sarupnakha who is in pain. Through the character of Sita, Pattanaik highly speaks of the female alliance—a sort of sisterhood. She sets an example by consoling Sarupnakha. Sita accepts that though both are wronged by men but she does not feel pain, hate or rage against anyone. She inspires her, "Ram and Ravana come and go. Nature continues. I would rather enjoy nature" (Pattanaik 281). This specific instance restores peace in the mind and nature. And this is, no doubt, built upon the pattern of a shared understanding of the core issues that influence women universally leading to their possible solutions. On a larger context, this event between Sita and Sarupnakha paves the way for the hope of love and understanding even between enemies. Thus to conclude, Pattanaik's narrative counters the conventional viewpoint of women as dependent. He portrays Sita as independent. The conception this retelling endeavours to place is to withstand an "equilibrium in political engagement, create a contemporary socio-cultural atmosphere for all genders, and offer fresh viewpoints on social comprehension." (Halder and Mishra 2094)

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Understanding Satyajit Ray's Filmic Approach to Ibsen: A Comparative Study of *Ganashatru* and *An Enemy of the People*

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Abstract: Satyajit Ray's filmic adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's play *An Enemy of the People,* titled *Ganashatru*, offers a keen exploration of how Ibsen's theme resonates with Indian audiences. Ray's skilful handling of the complex socio-political landscapes inherent in both Ibsen's original narrative and his own adaptation ensures that the essence of the story is effectively transformed into the Indian context. This task requires a profound understanding of themes such as truth, morality, and societal responsibility, and Ray adeptly integrates them into his adaptation. While doing so, he encounters multifaceted challenges, particularly in the delicate task of translating dialogues, which demand linguistic precision and the original dramatic tension inherent in Ibsen's writing. He carefully maintains the theme's emotional weight and philosophical depth while resonating authentically within an Indian cultural context. This balance maintains the drama's tension and urgency, making the moral dilemmas relevant. Moreover, Ray artfully integrates elements of Indian culture, enriches the narrative and makes the themes more accessible to local viewers. His success in these adaptations is the outcome of his deep understanding of the source material, combined with his innovative technique of storytelling, which ultimately creates a bridge between Western literary traditions and Indian cinematic expression.

Keywords: Adaptation; Cinematic; Narrative; Dramatic; Balance; Indian

The paper aims to explore how Satyajit Ray, by adapting Ibsen's play, critiques the social and political landscape of India. He particularly focuses on the religious exploitation by the influential quarter of society and the suppression of scientific truth by the power dynamics. Ray's transformation illustrates the central conflict between a doctor's revelation and the opposition of socio-political pressure that prioritises self-interest over greater welfare. Adapting a stage drama for film presents numerous

technical challenges. Additionally, the paper also intends to examine how skillfully Ray handles the tasks.

An inquiry into the existing literature concerning the adaptation of *An Enemy of the People* to *Ganashatru* is exiguous. Despite the inadequacy, a few critics contribute valuable insights into their interpretations and responses through various texts in journals, books, and newspapers. It harnesses secondary sources and descriptive analysis, complemented by impactful references to both theatre and film acting.

In Henrik Ibsen's original play, Dr. Thomas Stockmann uncovers contamination in the tourist baths of a Norwegian town, leading to conflict with his brother, the mayor, and community figures who prioritise economic gain over public health. Initially supported by the local newspaper editor, publisher, and townspeople, Stockmann faces growing opposition and is branded an enemy of the people for trying to expose the truth. The play focuses on the conflict between individual morality and the tyranny of power dynamics.

Similarly, in Satyajit Ray's film set in an imaginary West Bengal city, Dr Ashok Gupta discovers contamination in holy water from a temple, posing an epidemic threat. His brother, Mayor Nishit Gupta, dismisses the warnings, prioritising tourism over safety. Attempts to alert the public through the press are blocked, and a public meeting ends with Dr. Gupta being labeled anti-religious. They successfully agitate the mob against him, although he says, ‘I respect others’ religious sentiments and cannot think of attacking their religious beliefs even in my dream’ (Ganashatru 01:20:42). But they hurl abusive words at him, and finally, he is proclaimed as the enemy of the people.

When adapting Henrik Ibsen's stage drama to a film, significant modifications are necessary to address the shift in cultural context from 1882 Norway to 1989 India. While Ibsen's narrative, centered on Dr. Stockmann's discovery of contaminated baths in Norway, emphasizes the conflict between scientific truth and economic interests, Ray shifts the focus to religious bigotry and the contamination of a temple's holy water in West Bengal. ‘The idea of the temple is Ray’s masterstroke

because it brings a political-religious context and makes Ray's film truly Bengali in ethos and highly topical throughout India' (Robinson 342). He skillfully adapts the play's theme to the Indian context.

Notable changes include reversing the age of the doctor from Ibsen's younger character to an elder brother in Ray's version, which highlights progressive traits in Dr. Ashok's character. Certain characters from the original play are omitted, like the tannery owner Morten Kiil and two sons of Stockmann to broaden the narrative's focus on societal corruption rather than personal conflict. New characters, like Ranen, signify a youthful drive towards scientific understanding, anchoring the film's relevance to Indian audiences. Overall, Ray's adaptation retains core themes while adapting them to resonate with India's cultural and political landscape. These inclusions and exclusions have been made to reflect different connotations of the theme Ray intends to convey. Here, this authorship is important as 'authorship is always a way of looking at films, and obviously other ways exist as do other questions' (Gerstner 28).

In the original play, Morten Kiil is depicted as a tannery owner possessing a large share of the public baths. It is suspected that the contamination of the bathwater results from the tannery wastes. However, in Ray's adaptation, as the source of contamination is an underground pipeline, this character becomes irrelevant to this theme, and by removing Kiil, Ray emphasises the more extensive themes of corruption and abuse of institutional power. In the original play, Kiil lures Dr. Stockmann to purchase shares of the baths for his family's security, which he refuses to accept on ethical grounds. So, the exclusion of Kiil shifts the focus from a family conflict to a wider societal issue. In doing so, 'to all thinking Indians, he provided the opportunity, even when he starkly depicted the coarsening of India's moral fibre, to reach out to the essential humanity which lies within them' ('India's Satyajit Roy'). It's also a way to tailor the narrative to the specific cultural and political context of India, making it more relatable to the Indian audience. In such adaptations, 'a change of language is involved; almost always, there is a change of place or time period' (Hutcheon 145).

At the end of Ibsen's play, Dr. Stockmann is sacked from his job; Petra, his daughter, is also dismissed from her teaching profession, and his two sons are expelled from their school. In the face

of all these calamities, isolation, and alienation, Dr. Stockmann exhibits a kind of determination. He says, '...at present, the stupid people are in an absolutely overwhelming majority all the world over' (Ibsen 111), and 'The strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone' (155). In Ray's adaptation, Dr. Ashok faces the same lot, but he finds some support and solidarity from a quarter of the people. Despite Dr. Gupta's defeat by the corrupt allies, Ray's 'Ganashatru' concludes on a note of optimism, 'I may be an enemy of the people, but I have many friends. I am not alone' (Ganashatru 01:34:00).

Transforming a stage drama into a film involves several technical challenges, such as converting stage-based performance styles to the movie screen format, adjusting to the limitations of settings and locations, and managing audience reactions of theatre and cinema. Additionally, filmmakers encounter issues with editing, dubbing, background music, and more. Theatre acting requires exaggerated gestures and a high-pitched vocal delivery to reach the last audience, while film acting requires a more subtle, nuanced approach. Film actors need to learn how to use the camera, adjusting their performance to its perspectives.

Theatrical performances often utilise a limited number of sets, while movies can be filmed anywhere. What made Ray produce a film like 'Ganashastra'? It is a drama on the screen as it is mainly an indoor film. It was shot in three main indoor settings: Dr Ashok Gupta's home, the editor's office of 'Janabarta,' and the hall-room of 'Nutmandir.' The two consecutive heart attacks of Satyajit Ray in 1983 and 1984 seriously impacted his health and prevented him from working for five years. Even after his recovery, he was not able to work on location, and the shooting of 'Ganashatru' was largely confined to these interior sets. Despite the limited indoor settings, it plays a significant role in the film's visual storytelling. The framing and character positioning successfully convey the narrative of the story. While relying only on indoor settings might be seen as a limitation, it can be an opportunity for better character interactions. It also allows Ray to explore the passage of time and the impact of events on characters in a unique way. As a master of visual storytelling, Ray, despite using recurring settings, removes the monotony by utilising different angles that create a sense of rhythm

within the film. As for the film's style, Ray says that although 'Ganashatru' is restricted to the studio, it will not be in any way theatrical. It is ultimately a chamber piece. ‘We are dealing with words, words, words. But of course, we are using the camera as intelligently as possible’ (Malcolm 2). But “there is a common belief among film enthusiasts, particularly among those who have watched Satyajit Ray’s films quite keenly, that *Ganashatru* is, by far, his worst film... The film suffers from some extremely poor technical treatment…” (Chattopadhyay 169). And there are other groups of people who are tempted to agree with the statement that Ray has transformed Ibsen into Ray in *Ganashatru* (Robinson 343).

The decision to shoot the film indoors due to his health issues serves to adapt Ibsen's play's setting, focusing on a small town and its inhabitants. The Story's projection is well-suited to the confined space of an indoor set. Shooting 'Ganashatru' indoors allows Satyajit Ray to work within his physical limitations, although it does not limit the film's artistic and narrative essence, but rather enhances and explores its potential in a new dimension. Ray was conscious of removing the last trace of theatricality from his work. He told Andrew Robinson in an interview, “I found that for once one could play with human faces and human reactions, rather than landscape, Nature in its moods, which I have a lot in my films. Here I think it is the human face, the human character which is predominant” (Robinson 341).

Adapting a drama into a film encompasses several crucial components, such as core themes and characters, narrative structure, foundational elements, the processes of condensing and expanding, visual storytelling techniques, pacing and tone, a balancing act, honoring the source material, casting and performances, technical considerations, and more. Ray adeptly pinpoints the central message and emotional essence of the drama, meticulously selecting the elements that are vital for the film adaptation. He recognizes the emotional undercurrents despite changing some plot details. A piece of literature requires significant condensing and expanding to fit the film's length and match the visual narrative. Translating dialogue and actions into visual storytelling and using camera angles to convey emotion, Ray has successfully done the task. While some changes were inevitable,

Ray's adaptation remained true to the spirit of the original drama. Casting actors who can embody the characters convincingly is crucial for bringing a story to life, and Soumitra Chatterjee, Dipankar Dey, Ruma Guha Thakurata, Mamta Shankar, Dhritiman Chatterjee, Suvendu Chatterjee, and Manoj Mitra definitely performed as per the demands of the roles. Cinematography, editing, sound, background music, everything creates a cinematic experience. Overall, 'Ganashatru' is a significant cinematic work of art that effectively adapts Ibsen's play while offering a powerful commentary on Indian society.

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Politics of Adaptation and Consumerist Subversion in the Filmic Representation of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

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Abstract: The visual representation of literary works is powerfully considered by theorists like Linda Hutcheon, who argue that adaptations are "repetition with variations." Nonetheless, cinematic adaptations of literary texts have been critiqued by Thomas Leitch, for whom "the primary motive of fidelity in the most well-known adaptations is financial, not aesthetic" (128). According to Leitch, literary property has all the rights to 'presell' itself to the viewers who have never gone through a literary work. We live in a consumerist society, like the film producers do, who are as much the participants in the rat race of 'commercial hits' as all of us are. Kazuo Ishiguro's popular novel *Never Let Me Go* also falls prey to this Benjaminian notion of 'mechanical reproduction'. The Filmic adaptation of Ishiguro's novel lacks the interpersonal human emotions and psychological depth, thereby lending prominence to the politics of commodity culture. However, the 2010 adaptation of the novel centres on the theme of a love triangle between Tommy, Ruth and Kath. The re-presentation of Kath's emotional first-person narrative is missing to an extent that it loses its sentimental depth, and there emerges the question of artistic fidelity that has to be owed to the novel. The core themes of the novel are subverted to shift the narrative from the commodification of clones, and the harsh philosophical undertones are softened by the producers to serve the likes of the global theatrical viewers. Moreover, "adaptation offers a scandal to aesthetics" (Leitch 7), which explores the idea of ethics and fidelity to a literary work. The paper seeks to identify the politics of contestation and subversion of bestselling novels to reach wider audiences, along with the commercial politics of adapting fiction into a cinematic text.

Keywords: Politics; Adaptation; Subversion; Filmic Representation; Consumerism

Adaptation studies is an interdisciplinary field that explores the transformation of a literary text from one medium to another. Adaptation studies have a Greek origin, where the epics of Homer were not just read but also performed on the stage. Moreover, Shakespearean plays were also influenced by the pre-existing works of playwrights such as Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd and many more. Therefore, it can be construed that transmedia adaptations have been commonly practised in Western cultures for ages. Even many of the blockbuster films in contemporary times are made up from the novels. Moreover, many famous comic books, short stories, non-fiction, autobiographies and mythologies have been adapted to films with the aid of interpolations and inculcations. George Bluestone, in his seminal work titled *Novels into Films* (1957), observes that till 1955, fifty per cent of the films were adapted from novels. He argues that novels cannot be compared to films because of the different demands put forward by media and thus alterations in the source texts become mandatory for these adaptive endeavors.

Additionally, a novel can take hours to indulge and comprehend the themes thoroughly whereas a film has temporal limitations, loaded with action and superficiality which considerably numbs the core idea of a novel, "The novel can give pages to the description of minutes and skip over years in a sentence; but while a film can dismiss time, it cannot expand it or hold it back to examine it in many facets" (Bunker). Novelists rely on language that is metaphorical and symbolic in its approach, which many times is largely compromised in films. Also, novels are written for a limited audience who understand the varied dimensions of language, while their adaptations are made to take care of the demands of people belonging to different age groups, different cultural backgrounds, learned or illiterate and so on. "The film is a group project–plots, dialogue and all the rest of the details are discussed and determined in council – in comparison with the lonely and individual efforts of the novelist" (Bunker). A film is a result of the collaborative efforts of the screenplay writer, director and other crew members; therefore, creative ownership is difficult to attribute, whereas in the case of a novel, it is a singular effort based on the experiences of a novelist's life.

Linda Hutcheon defines adaptation via relying on its dictionary meaning, which is "to adjust, to alter, to make suitable" (7). For her, adaptation is a creative process which further decrypts the written words for theatrical audiences by reconstructing an original work. Thus, this shift in medium allows a narrative to be explored from a different perspective and offers interpretations that may vary in their appropriations and salvaging. This collaboration results in intertextuality, which leads to a deeper understanding and nuanced interpretations of a text. Her opinion on adaptations is affirmative because she views this transformation as a process of re-creation. In contrast to her views, many critics argue that adaptations retain an essence of their original work, making it problematic to present them as original entities.

Moreover, Thomas Leitch, a renowned adaptation studies scholar, believes that the adaptation academics support the violation of the integrity of a work through their support for filmic adaptations, and reviewers also try to prove their superiority over academicians. He upholds the opinion that "The two constituencies most likely to be scandalized by adaptation as such, then, are academics, especially literature teachers, who do not happen to be adaptation scholars, and movie reviewers who do not happen to be academics" (6). In filmic adaptations the integrity or fidelity owed to the source text is often overlooked by most of the directors to portray their filmic adaptation as a creative experiment. Additionally, "...adaptations rarely achieve anything like fidelity because they rarely attempt it" (Leitch 126). When a text is being 'adapted' or 'translated,' it owes fidelity to the original text, but the core idea of the parent text has been compromised in films like *The White Tiger,* released on Netflix, which was a plain cinematic experience as compared to Arvind Adiga's novel of the same title. From the standpoint of fidelity, adaptations become questionable in several cases where a source text is altered to a great extent, while many of them are already present in the market to compete with each other. Meanwhile, in this never-ending business of adaptations, every creation needs to be different, as "the primary motive for fidelity in the most widely known adaptations is financial, not aesthetic" (Leitch 128). Even the timeless texts like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Gone with the Wind*

are coerced into a film, cutting dialogues and crucial episodes which appear to be unjust to their source texts.

Regardless of the efforts filmmakers put into their projects, they employ dazzling effects and motifs that have nothing to do with the original work. Robert Stam also notes, “infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization, and desecration all connoting ghastly acts in one form or another” (qtd. in Georgy) are some of the acts that alter the essence of the texts adapted. The films based on these texts have had massive commercial success and received positive reviews, but the response was without going through the books themselves, as most viewers may not be aware of the books. In the Indian context, films like *Fitoor* (2016), *Aisha* (2010), and *Saawariya* (2007) are adapted from *The Great Expectations*, *Emma* and *The White Nights,* respectively. According to a review by *The New York Times*, the experience of *Saawariya* is visually enchanting but “it is pretty well drowned in Bollywood style” with “...colourful costumes, bellybuttons, almost kisses and 10 pumped-up, achingly sweet songs” and still could not live up to the expectations. Likewise, the cinematic experience of the Hindu mythological epic *Ramayana,* as *Adipurush* (2023), directed by Om Raut, faced a massive backlash from Hindu devotees because it had no story at all. The film lacks consistency with childish dialogues and unnecessary VFX, which could not fulfil the prospects its viewers had anticipated.

Films generally present fixed visuals at a constant pace of events, leaving less interpretive freedom for viewers; by contrast, reading is a different experience from watching films, as a reader engages in a dialogic process while interpreting a book. The symbols and metaphors used in a book are open to multiple interpretations before the reader opens it. Individuals from various cultural backgrounds, preconceptions, languages, and psyches align with and relate to the novel's comprehensive approach. There are many contradictions between what we read and what we see. As a result, the scope of thought-provoking capacity of a text cease when viewed in a cinematic representation. To transform a narrative, screenwriters rewrite stories, reducing their complexity so they can be interpreted by the cinematic audience. “The contemporary definition seeks to crystallise

the way the story is transformed when it is adapted from one sign system into another" (Vallittu 160). In this process of rewriting the script, the core script of the text is altered to make it performance friendly. As the medium shifts from the paper to screen, the depth and complexity of the novel are compromised, "Adaptation transposes a specific medium into another generic mode. In the course of doing this, it trims and prunes along with adding, expanding and interpolating" (Sanders 18). Thus, altering and reducing the length of a text becomes inevitable for a filmic adaptation.

The intentional subversions in the storylines of the source texts are a political act. In the cinematic adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), the assumption that all the characters must be white and the unnecessary love triangle disappoint the book readers. Also, there is a use of unnecessary erotic content to lure young audiences to theatres. These are some money-making tricks often employed by film producers for massive box office collections. Walter Benjamin has stated such ideas in his seminal essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" that the mechanical reproduction does not work on the principle of ritual but "politics" (6), and the function of art is reversed.

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) is set in an unknown future, where human cloning is normal, and they are brought up in a boarding house named Hailsham. It is a mini world where the students (clones) are otherized and exploited in an unconventional way. The novel starts with Kathy H saying, "My Name is Kathy H. I'm thirty-one years old" (Ishiguro 3), narrating the novel from a first-person point of view. She states, "I've been carer of donors for over eleven years" (Ishiguro 3), reminiscing about her life from childhood to ultimate realisation about her future and eventually her final encounter with the horrific truth of her life. She acquires a tape of Judy Bridgewater and listens to her song "Never Let Me Go" holding her imaginary child which she can never have, "I'd grabbed the pillow to stand in for the baby, and I was doing a slow dance, my eyes closed, singing softly... 'Oh baby, baby, never let me go...'" (71). Kathy H's realisation that she can never grow old naturally, nor could she give birth, shatters the readers along with Kathy. While

reading the book, the reader learns about the fates of Tommy D, Kathy H., and Ruth C through Kathy's memories and stream of consciousness.

The novel's adaptation with the same title was released on 3 September 2010. It is directed by a British director named Mark Romanek, and the screenplay is written by Alex Garland. The film was released by DNA Films Films. The star cast of the film includes Carey Mulligan as Kathy H., Keira Knightley as Ruth and Andrew Garfield as Tommy D. All the main leads are British actors, and thus there is a "...dreamlike parable of Britishness — a particularly miserable Britishness, a Britishness which submits numbly and uncomplainingly to authority..." (Bradshaw). While Ishiguro's novel is about marginalisation and otherization, its tone is eerie, which gradually results in horror, an unexpected turn known to the reader from the very beginning. Contrastingly, the casting director did not try to depict the alienation and emotional vacuum of Hailsham. The casting of the film is done in a way where the fundamental notion of alienation seems missing in the adaptation, which could have been portrayed better by selecting the right actors. It would have represented a cut above by starring some interracial actors. Hailsham, in the novel, is a haunting void and a place where human evil is fundamental and systematic. Moreover, when we go through the novel, we find Kathy and Tommy to be best friends till the last part. Whenever Tommy is bullied for his disinterest in the arts, it is Kathy who tries to defend him. In the novel, Ruth is in a relationship with Tommy, but the adaptation portrays a love triangle among Tommy, Ruth, and Kathy.

Additionally, the filmic representation portrays a clash between Ruth and Kathy as Ruth says, "I know what you think, Kathy, I know you think that Tommy and you would have made more natural couple and you believe that there is a chance that Tommy and I would split up some day" (*Never Let Me Go*) which is not there in the novel. This unnecessary addition blurs thought-provoking aspects of the novel, such as what it means to be sterile. What is soul? How powerful fate can be? Moreover, Ishiguro has tried to introduce the characters distantly, lacking a detailed description, whereas in the filmic adaptation, the directors have failed to depict his intentional failure. The title of the novel *Never Let Me Go* is based on the motherhood instincts of Kathy in Hailsham. She is a clone who will be

donating her organs in the coming years of her life. In Hailsham, she gets a CD of Judy Bridgewater's songs in which she finds a song "Never Let Me Go". She plays her favorite track during a random evening, holds a pillow close to her chest and starts imagining a child while listening to the word 'baby' in the song. This episode raises several questions about Kathy's humanity, allowing the reader to delve deep into the questions, such as: Does Kathy have a soul? What is it to be a human? Kazuo Ishiguro, in an article, mentions, "What struck me about this title was the sheer impossibility of what was being requested. 'Please hold me for a long time' would be reasonable... there are times when we human beings wish, from the depths of our souls, for something we know to be beyond anyone's reach" (*Literary Hub*). Therefore, the title has an essence of pleading for something that can never be achieved, such as the 'baby' she imagines while listening to the song, as well as their fate as donors. Ishiguro has tried to highlight the commonality in the suffering of the clones and humans trapped in an unavoidable trap of fate and misery.

In the filmic adaptation, this aspect, which adds to the main theme of the novel, is eradicated like anything, "Meaningful conversations and significant scenes that the screenwriter Alex Garland has scrupulously extruded from the novel" (Manohla). The film portrays a scene where Kathy is trying to control her sexual urge while listening to this song, in order to give a sexual quotient to the audience. Additionally, the novel ends with a sense of loss, longing, and the fragility of human connections. During Kathy and Tommy's last meeting with Madame in the novel regarding the deferral, the conversation is deep and sentimental where Madame talks a bit about their remembrance of Kathy listening to that song saying, "I thought some foolish student had left the music on. But when I came into your dormitory, I saw you… a little girl... dancing sympathetically" (266). There is a melancholic feeling that makes the reader sorrowful for humanity as a whole: "I saw a new world coming rapidly... Very good. But a harsh, cruel world" (267), whereas the film ends with a feeling of Kathy H being alone and the viewers feeling bad just for Kathy. The last conversation is a very thoughtful dialogue between both of them and Madame, which is shortened in the film. This scene in

the novel has strong potential to stir readers' sentiments, but it feels short and superficial as one watches the adaptation.

In contemporary times, audiences develop a kind of fascination for some characters and stories. As a result, fandoms are being created, and the work unfolds to a wider audience through media. In transmedia storytelling, from a novel to film, there comes a semiotic shift in verbal and behavioural signs. Therefore, the narration of the story shifts when the medium changes: “In the case of transmedia storytelling, the emphasis is strictly on narrative, and each medium involved in the storytelling practice is assumed to do what it does best” (Jenkins 96). People try to connect through media and take part in activities others are in. This communitarian feeling among people finances film businesses “... transmedia storytelling practices may go well with marketing strategies of the industry aiming at creating blockbusters” (Schillar 100). People are urged to see their favourite fictional characters on screen, and film industry executives promote this, fueling the race for blockbusters. Moreover, transmedia authorship generates “collaborative authorship” to “encourage audience partnership” (Vallittu 102); thus, fandoms also participate enthusiastically in the meaning-making in a unique way through different cultural contexts. These reasons “should be considered seriously by adaptation theory, even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general” (Hutcheon 95).

Additionally, the politics of the bourgeois to create copies and the tendency of the proletariat to consume whatever is available in the market are other reasons for this. The adaptations and remakes of those adaptations are expected to meet certain box-office targets. “Replicas were made by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain” (Benjamin 2). Ishiguro is a Nobel Prize-winning writer and thus, a brand face for production houses. Most of the films are adapted from popular books to influence and persuade more readers to see their favourite characters. Walter Benjamin contends, “The presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (3), which means that the concept of authenticity comes from the originality of a work. Nothing can be called authentic without the existence of the

original. Additionally, the mechanical reproduction of a work can never achieve the touch of originality. Benjamin contends that in contemporary times, the ""... film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations" (13), which means that through spectacle and effects, film-makers promote a distorted reality that film industry is trying hard to spur the interest of the masses through illusion-promoting spectacles and dubious speculations" (13), which means that through spectacle and effects, filmmakers promote a distorted reality that is manipulative in nature. It is the politics of film production that generate such illusions, promoting the dominant ideology of the capitalists. In the film *Never Let Me Go*, the beautiful shots, the background music, the unnecessary love triangle, and the visual submission of the clones to their fate distort the novel's effect, which otherwise is deeply psychological and emotional. A reader has plenty of time to understand a book's nuances, but a film has its own temporal limitations. Hence, the deep capitalistic undertones and narcissistic, self-serving humanness become explicit in adaptations. The film appears to be a romantic tragedy rather than a political dystopia. The visuals of any film serve as an anaesthesia for the masses, numbing them to deeper interpretations of the motifs and symbols. As a result, the aura and authenticity of a work disappear. This subversion of the core ideology of the novel is more or less political, deviating it from some serious themes to melodrama and entertainment.

To conclude, the analysis demonstrates how films, soap operas and other popular forms of transmedia adaptations are political at its core. The approach and target of screenwriters is starkly different from that of novelists. Additionally, the storytelling also transforms when the medium changes. This subversion from the core elements of the parent script is a result of capitalist mind play as well as the consumerist tendency of people. Mostly, the common crowd goes to the theatre for entertainment and nothing much. As a result, films are released to cash on from the leisure of the masses, not critical analysis. After studying the nuanced language of *Never Let Me Go* and then watching the filmic adaptation, it can be said that the film was a hollow and superficial experience. The most thoughtfully written parts were missing which failed to evoke genuine emotions like the

novel. Adaptations are also called re-creations which are different from translations, therefore, adaptations cannot and should not replicate the source text but offer its own perspective on the novel.

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Requiem for a Nightmare: A Comparison of Daron Aronofsky's Film with Hubert Selby Jr.'s Novel

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Abstract: Hollywood adaptations are often charged with diluting the bleakness of a source material for the sake of creating a more palatable experience for the audience. For instance, in *I Am Legend*, the novel's central moral ambiguity was omitted from the movie to portray Will Smith as a typical monochromatic "hero." However, there are some brilliant exceptions to this where the film adaptation managed to produce a viewing experience that was far more disturbing than its literary counterpart. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, this paper will analyse and compare one such example: Darren Aronofsky's 2000 adaptation of Hubert Selby Jr.'s novel *Requiem for a Dream*. By analysing Aronofsky's use of certain camera techniques, hallucinatory editing, intense background score, and mise-en-scène, this paper will explore how the film attempts to capture the themes of addiction and self-destruction on the big screen. By comparing the film with the novel, the paper will further question whether such stylistic choices were made simply to produce a disturbing film for its own sake, or whether they also provide room for deeper emotional nuances.

Keywords: Requiem for a Dream, Aronofsky, Adaptation, Cinema of the Body, Addiction, Pain, Linda Hutcheon.

Introduction

Hollywood adaptations have always been stuck between fidelity to the source and the demands of the market. Choosing the latter has often afforded harsh criticism from critics, since this generally involves sanitizing and diluting the essence of the source material, especially when the latter is a morally complex work. For instance, the film adaptation of Richard Matheson's 1954 novel *I am Legend* completely disregards the moral ambiguity regarding its protagonist, turning him instead into a "Christ-like saviour-legend" (Moreman 3). There are, however, adaptations that do indeed go the

opposite direction, amplifying the bleaker and disturbing elements of its source. Among the most striking examples is Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), adapted from Hubert Selby Jr.'s 1978 novel. Rather than diluting Selby's unflinching portrait of addiction and human misery, Aronofsky delivers a cinematic experience that is, in many respects, even more harrowing, immersive, and psychologically devastating than the original text. This was evidenced by the reaction of the audience at the Toronto Film Festival, where some of them vomited owing to the film's disturbing scenes (Jourdrey).

Analysing the exceptional case of Aronofsky's adaptation using Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory from her text *A Theory of Adaptation (2003)*, this paper will treat the film as an example of Hutcheon's definition of adaptation as a creative process of re-interpretation and re-creation, instead of slavish imitation. The paper will argue that under the creative vision of Aronofsky, Selby's critique of the American dream in the novel is transformed into a visceral experience of the "cinema of the body," of which its climax is an "ultimate instance," as argued by the scholar Terja Laine (Laine 1).

Adaptation as Creative Transformation

Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* insists on approaching adaptations as acts of "appropriating or salvaging," involving a double process of "interpreting and then creating something new" (Hutcheon 20). The adaptation, then, is a "palimpsestuous" process, always shaped by its context, its creator's intent, and the affordances of its medium (Hutcheon 21). Adaptations can "echo" or "contest" their source material; however, they are not obligated to be faithful in the literal sense, but instead initiate a dialogue with their origins, reimagining and reframing narrative, character, and theme in new ways.

For Hutcheon, the distinction often drawn between *fidelity* and *betrayal* is inadequate. Fidelity criticism makes the argument that every analysis of an adaptation should be judged on the basis of its closeness to the source material. Yet adaptations always operate within different signifying systems: "telling" (prose fiction) and "showing" (film) have radically different affordances. Success or failure,

then, must be measured in part by the adaptation's capacity to make expressive use of its own medium, and to generate new significance in that process.

Selby's Nihilism in Prose

Like his previous novels, *Requiem for a Dream* takes its readers on a bleak descent into the depths of drug addiction, loneliness, and disconnection in urban America. Through the narratives of four characters from Coney Island, New York, Selby shows how their obsession with the unattainable ideal of the American Dream ultimately destroys them, both physically and spiritually. One narrative thread focuses on Sara Goldfarb and her addiction to reality TV fame, and then eventually to diet pills. The second thread is focused on her son, Harry, his girlfriend Marion, and best friend Tyrone C. Love, and their addiction to heroin.

Selby's prose brilliantly captures both immediacy and estrangement. Owing to his adamant rejection of quotation marks, the erratic dialogue of its restless characters spills over into the narration, while the interior monologues become indistinguishable from the description of external reality; all of which works to indicate the loss of self and its agency. The resulting rhythm of Selby's prose mirrors the compulsive, hyperactive, and ultimately self-destructive patterns of addiction. As Abigail Bowers observes, characters "mistake being full for being whole, spending most of the text searching for ways to fill the void inside, resulting in them getting lost in their own addictions, unwilling and unable to find a way out of the society of the spectacle" (Bowers 247).

What's central to the novel, however, is its critique of consumerism and the empty promises of American capitalism. Instead of portraying the central characters as just another lot of drug addicts, Selby puts special emphasis on their victimhood at the hands of American capitalist ethos, in which the state is just as guilty as the drug lords who supply the precious drug (Giles 94).

Yet, Selby's novel remains a narrative that is thoroughly mediated by its language. Even its poignant critique of the American Dream is cleverly encoded by Selby in its prose. As an interesting instance, when describing Harry and Marion's initial infatuation with each other, Selby writes that they made love "until the dawn's early light" (Selby 40). The line is a direct reference to the American

national anthem. This inclusion can be interpreted as Selby's subtle hint at the fact that even Harry and Marion's apparently innocent romantic involvement is contaminated with the greed of the American dream from the beginning.

Aronofsky's Film; Or, Sensory Assault?

Just like Selby subordinates the written word to his grim artistic vision, Aronofsky pushes the boundaries of his medium in order to induce an affective, nearly corporeal experience of addiction and despair. Far from making the story more palatable, Aronofsky weaponizes the expressive resources of film: aggressive cutting, relentless sound design, extreme close-ups, and transgressive visual effects that engulf the viewer in the characters' states of mind. These shall be analysed in detail in this section.

Camera Techniques and Editing

It is a generally held view that film is a poor medium when it comes to capturing the internal dynamics of the characters (Hutcheon 57). However, Hutcheon points out that film finds creative alternatives, that is, visual and aural correlatives, to achieve somewhat similar effects, successfully portraying states of dreaming and hallucination (Hutcheon 58). To capture the spiralling disorientation of a drug-addled mind, Aronofsky employs a distinctively centrifugal camera style. Aronofsky utilises a "Snorri Cam," a contraption that mounts the camera on the actor's chest, with the lens directed at their face. This camera position, Laine writes, creates "a hyper-subjective effect,

‘freezing’ the character at the centre of the frame, while the background is in constant motion” (Laine 5-6).

This camera technique is utilised when Sara spirals into amphetamine-induced psychosis, along with monstrous sounds from her fridge threatening her. In Sara’s case, the camera’s movement literalizes a mind spinning out of control. The same technique is used when Marion (the actor in figure 1) returns home after prostituting herself to her psychiatrist for drug money. Here, it helps convey the drowning and isolating feeling of shame that consumes her.

In addition to that, Aronofsky is fond of using “hip-hop montages,” which are rapid-fire sequences of micro-cuts featuring extreme close-ups of the rituals of drug use: dilated pupils, syringes sliding through flesh, powder being chopped and sniffed. On the one hand, the fleetingness of these sequences stylistically conveys the fleetingness of the pleasure of drug use in contrast to the eventual, almost eternal, inferno of pain they give birth to; on the other hand, their compulsive repetition as motifs mirrors the routine nature of drug addiction and how it fragments the temporal experience of its users.

Finally, from the film's opening scene, we see Aronofsky utilise the split-screen technique to portray the characters' isolation despite sharing the same space. The film opens with Harry stealing Sara’s television set for drug money, something he has done multiple times in the past, prompting her to chain it to the radiator. While Harry struggles to pry it free, Sara hides in her closet, escaping from this harsh reality into her utopian visions. Here, Aronofsky portrays the separation of fantasy and reality through a split-screen shot: one half shows a denial-ridden Sara in the closet, while the other shows her restless son committing petty theft. Furthermore, as Laine argues, the continuous use of split-screen makes the co-existence of euphoria and dysphoria–a twisted and troubling experience of drug users–palpable to the spectators. She writes that the split-screen gives the impression “of two things being stuck together in eternal separation” (Laine 55).

On the Now-Iconic Soundtrack

Sonically, the film is dominated by the use of Clint Mansell's composition "Lux Aeterna" performed by Kronos Quartet. The use of this piece at crucial points in the narrative becomes a leitmotif for the film. It features a combination of "a sparse, repetitive melody with an intense, rhythmic crescendo and a sharp pitch of string instruments with scratchy undertones" (Laine 57). This dissonant crescendo heightens the anxiety and claustrophobia the characters feel on screen, evoking in spectators a dreadful, visceral expectation of the inevitable doom of its troubled characters.

On Mise-en-scène

Aronofsky's mise-en-scène in the film works to externalise the psychological and social conditions of its characters. Sara's delusional fantasies of television fame, with its bright and saturated palette, are violently juxtaposed against her decaying body. The fragility and eventual doom of Harry and Marion's relationship are shown in the film through its now-famous pillow-talk scene, where the two have their heads side-by-side, ear-to-ear, staring at the camera as it spirals away from them. Though they share the same physical space, for the spectator, it is hard not to notice an impeccable separation between the two.

Amplifying Pain

What, then, accounts for Aronofsky's film being "more disturbing" than the novel? Much of the answer lies in the way the two media engage our senses. The novel develops the narrative gradually, painstakingly taking us, page by page, into the deepest corners of its characters' desires and yearnings.

For instance, unlike the film where Harry and Marion are already romantically involved, in the novel we witness the planting of the seeds of this relationship, its first tender blooms, nights and days of passion, hope and desire, and then its eventual disintegration into narcissism, fuelled by their addiction to heroin.

The film, on the other hand, bombards the senses of its viewer, making their suffering explicit and visible. Aronofsky's film takes the unrepresentable nature of pain, as theorised by Elaine Scarry in *The Body in Pain,* as its central challenge. As Scarry theorises, in pain, language breaks down, only the pain-experiencing body is left, becoming our absolute reality. Thus, language may cease to speak, yet our body "speaks," that is, through affect (Laine 15). And it is this "affective-aesthetic system" that, according to Laine, Aronosfsky has mastered in his films, making him the finest director of the cinema of the body. Aronofsky's camera turns the psychic agony of its characters into a spectacle, which in the *Requiem for a Dream* keeps on increasing in intensity, accompanied by the dissonant crescendo of *Lux Aeterna*. Because he deliberately denies catharsis or clarity, the viewer is forced to share the characters' on-screen agonies, eliciting strong visceral reactions in the viewer. Therefore, through their "sheer corporeal" style, Aronofsky's films engage the lived bodies of their spectators (Laine 2).

Déranger pour le plaisir de déranger?

Are all these stylistic flourishes on Aronofsky's part done simply for the sake of producing a disturbing cinematic experience? On a superficial reading, one may come to the conclusion that Aronofsky is in fact merely a provocateur, someone who indulges in cinematic excesses. However, a closer reading suggests that these excesses are indeed not gratuitous and are instead crucial to the emotional architecture of the film. By submerging the spectator in rituals of compulsion and suffering, the film resists the temptation to "contain" pain within a comforting narrative or to offer easy solutions. The film turns away from the typical Hollywood convention of sublimating pain and violence. By letting the experience of pain remain in the realm of the unsayable, it restores its dignity.

It undermines the violence done by reductive and shoddy attempts by Hollywood at representing pain.

Moreover, rather than simply shocking, the film also elicits complex emotions from the viewer, including repulsion, pity, and ultimately, a recognition of shared vulnerability. Several critics, like Paul Eisenstein and Christopher Moreno, suggest that the film's refusal to grant any character heroic agency and its dissolution of boundaries between inner and outer worlds force a confrontation with the inexorability of addiction and the impossibility of extrication within a culture built on hollow promises. The film's own repetitive use of motifs, like Snorri Cam, *Lux Aeterna,* hip-hop montages, etc., mirrors the inability of its characters to escape their own obsessions. In a certain subliminal way, it fosters a sense of empathy in the audience towards characters who belong to a fringe of society with which we generally don't empathise. After its excruciating anti-climax, the film closes by showing one by one all of its main characters in a foetal position: Harry in agony from an arm amputation, crying for Marion; Marion, with a sly grin, holding a packet of heroin she earned by performing an orgy; Tyrone going through heroin withdrawals, alone, in a racist work-camp, with the childhood image of him being in his mother's lap dissolving in the background; and, finally, Sara still delusionally fantasising about being on a television game-show, being celebrated by the audience on

Fig. 3. Screen capture, Harry in foetal position with an amputated arm, *Requiem.*

reuniting with her son, who is now a successful businessman. (All these images are, of course, accompanied by *Lux Aeterna.*) It is hard to watch this ending without having tears in one's eyes, as was the case for Hubert Selby Jr. himself, who had tears "streaming down his face" at the Cannes Film Festival screening (Joudrey).

Fig. 4. Screen capture, Marion in foetal position holding a packet of heroin, *Requiem*.

Fig. 5. Screen capture, Tyrone in foetal position going through heroin withdrawals with the childhood image of him in his

Fig. 6. Screen capture, Sara in foetal position, still in her delusions of T.V. fame, *Requiem.*

Conclusion

Requiem for a Dream, as adapted by Darren Aronofsky, thus demonstrates that adaptation need not always mean dilution, simplification, or mere illustration. Rather, it can be an act of translation and amplification, using cinema's resources to create a new and different kind of experience. Aronofsky's film does not merely represent drug addiction and the self-destruction that comes with its obsession, but it rather incarnates the embodied experience of this obsession on screen, eliciting visceral reaction in the lived body of its viewer. In so doing, it challenges the boundaries between observation and participation, empathy and endurance, entertainment and trauma. The stylistic choices, like, for instance, the rapid editing, the aggressive camera placement, the overwhelming soundscape of *Lux Aeterna*, the oppressive mise-en-scène, and so on, are not arbitrary but are motivated by the desire to probe the limits of what cinema can communicate about pain, loss, and the impossibility of wholeness. Thus, a relatively firm argument can be made that *Requiem for a Dream* is not disturbing "just for the sake of it." Its excesses serve as formal and affective analogues of the compulsions and sufferings it portrays. In this, it answers, with singular conviction, the call of Hutcheon's adaptation theory: not to merely transpose story from page to screen, but to create a new work—a requiem, perhaps—for the possibility of redemption or wholeness that neither the book nor the film can ultimately provide.

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Against Forgetting: *Haider*, *Hamlet* and the Politics of Remembrance

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Abstract: Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014) is a postcolonial intervention that weaponizes Shakespeare's Hamlet to stage a cinematic tribunal against state-sanctioned historical amnesia in 1990s Kashmir. This paper approaches the film not as adaptation-as-translation, but as a disruptive act of political remembering. The paper argues that the film derives its power from its deliberate refusal of catharsis, achieved through centring its critique on the figure of Roohdaar, whose function is inherently contradictory.

Drawing on Derridean concept of Hauntology and Victor Turner's concept of Liminality, Roohdaar initially emerges as an ethical spectre, a collective voice of the disappeared demanding justice; however, by introducing the psychoanalytic concept of the Phantom (Abraham and Torok), the paper reframes this spectre as the pathological carrier of an encrypted, unmourned trauma. This critical approach brings into focus the film's central dilemma: is Haider's quest for vengeance an ethical injunction for justice, or a compulsive repetition of inherited violence? Ultimately, Haider suspends the possibility of ethical resolution altogether, situating the viewer within the same hauntological impasse that ensnares its protagonist.

Keywords: Adaptation-as-Intervention, Hauntology, Liminality, Phantom, *Haider, Hamlet*

Introduction

The adaptation of Shakespearean drama in postcolonial contexts has become a significant field of scholarly inquiry, representing a site where the cultural authority of the Western canon is both engaged and contested. Such adaptations are rarely simple transpositions; they frequently function as strategic interventions, repurposing canonical narratives to interrogate local histories and

contemporary political realities. To properly analyse these works, it is necessary to move beyond the traditional paradigms of fidelity criticism. This older critical model, with its “profoundly moralistic” (Stam 54) vocabulary of failure and betrayal, is predicated on the flawed assumption that a source text possesses a singular, “transferable core” of meaning that the adaptation is obligated to reproduce (57). As adaptation theorists have argued, strict fidelity is not only a problematic critical standard but is often a practical impossibility, as a “change of medium” automatically generates difference and originality (55). A more productive theoretical model frames adaptation as a dialogical and palimpsestuous process. This approach, which understands adaptation as a form of “repetition, but repetition without replication” (Hutcheon 7), recognizes the adapted work as a “derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary” (9). It is a "creative and an interpretive act of appropriation” (8) that exists in a constant, resonant dialogue with its predecessor, possessing its own unique aura even as it is “haunted at all times by [its] adapted texts” (6). Vishal Bhardwaj’s *Haider* (2014), a transposition of *Hamlet* to the conflict in 1990s Kashmir, serves as a powerful exemplar of this interventionist mode of adaptation.

Haider operates not as a reverential translation but as a pointed political rereading, a deliberate “transculturation or indigenization” (XVIII) that forces a “re-accentuation and refocusing of themes, characters, and plot” in a new cultural context (40). The film functions as a hypertext, one that actively “transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends” its Shakespearean hypotext to engage directly with the political trauma of the Kashmiri insurgency and the brutal state counter-insurgency of the 1990s (Gennete qtd. in Stam 66). This process of transformation is not merely a change of setting; it is a fundamental re-routing of the source text’s thematic concerns. The existential, metaphysical angst of the Danish court is deliberately grounded in the material and visceral reality of enforced disappearances, mass graves, and the psychological toll of occupation. The film seizes the narrative framework of a domestic tragedy and re-deploys it on a public, political stage, making the family’s drama a microcosm for the region’s collective suffering.

To adequately dissect this complex cinematic intervention, this paper will employ an interdisciplinary theoretical framework. It is grounded primarily in postcolonial adaptation studies, which provide the tools to analyse how Bhardwaj's film "writes back" to the Shakespearean canon, not as an act of homage but of critical re-evaluation (Ashcroft et al 1989). Within this, the analysis will draw on theories of hauntology to explore the film's spectral dimension, examining how the past, both literary and political, persists as a disruptive force in the present. This will be supplemented by a focus on liminality, which offers a vocabulary for describing the threshold states of characters, landscapes, and political realities within the film. The central thesis of this paper is that Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* weaponizes its status as an adaptation to stage a cinematic tribunal against state-sanctioned historical amnesia. It argues that the film, through its engagement with the spectral logic of hauntology and the liminal states of its characters, ultimately exposes the profound psychological and ethical contradictions embedded in a politics of revenge. The film achieves this by centring its political intervention on the ambiguous figure of Roohdaar*,* who functions simultaneously as an ethical injunction for justice and a pathological carrier of transgenerational trauma, forcing a confrontation with the unmournable nature of the Kashmir conflict. This paper will demonstrate that *Haider* is not simply a retelling but a politically charged re-visitation. For as Hutcheon reminds us, adaptations do more than retell stories; at their most potent, "they can also destabilize both formal and cultural identity and thereby shift power relations" (174). Ultimately, this paper will contend that *Haider*'s great power lies in this very destabilization, using the ghost of Hamlet to give voice to the ghosts of Kashmir.

Adaptation as Intervention

Any rigorous analysis of Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* must begin by categorically rejecting the anachronistic and theoretically inadequate paradigms of fidelity criticism. For decades, the scholarly discourse surrounding adaptation was constrained by what Robert Stam describes as a "profoundly moralistic" vocabulary, one preoccupied with notions of "infidelity, betrayal, deformation, violation, vulgarization and desecration," (Stam 54). This critical model, predicated on the flawed assumption

that a source text possesses a singular, "extractable 'essence'" or "transferable core" of meaning that an adaptation is obligated to reproduce, represents a critical dead end (57). As Linda Hutcheon argues, the "morally loaded discourse of fidelity is based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text," a framework that completely ignores the complex political and aesthetic motives that drive creative reinterpretation (7). For a work like *Haider*, such a lens is not just inadequate; it is obstructive. The film is a prime example of a "potentially radical" (Loomba and Orkin 7) postcolonial strategy: one that involves "interrogating... Shakespearean texts not on Western terms but on those of indigenous cultures' resistance to... hegemony, using these texts as sites of 'cultural intercourse'... to 'write back' to the 'margins'" (95). The act of adapting a canonical text within this context is never a neutral act of translation; it is a strategic and often subversive political engagement. It is a process of transforming the canonical text into a "colonial battlefield," a site where inherited meanings are contested and where artists can "appropriate Shakespeare as their comrade in anti-colonial arms by offering new interpretations and adaptations of his work" (2). Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* is a definitive example of this interventionist strategy. The film's political intentionality is not a subtle undercurrent but its explicit, foundational principle. The very genesis of the project, as Bhardwaj recounts, was an affective and political awakening, a realization that the aesthetic frame of Shakespeare could contain the raw political trauma of Kashmir:

> One night, I woke up to find my wife, Rekha, crying while reading a book titled Curfewed Nights by Basharat Peer. She explained that it was a memoir of the writer's growing-up years in the nineties—the peak period of militancy in the Kashmir valley. A bulb switched on in my head. I strongly feel that Kashmir has been the biggest tragedy in modern Indian history, and no film has been made to capture the real tragedy. . .I began to read Basharat's book with Hamlet in mind. . . I held Basharat's hand and walked back in time with him to feel the pain, terror and tragedy of that time in Kashmir (Bhardwaj and Peer qtd. in Javed 2).

This mission to translate the pain, terror and tragedy of Kashmir to celluloid was a direct response to a history of cinematic misrepresentation. As Bhardwaj explains, "Our way of looking at Kashmir has

either been cosmic—only for shooting songs—or rhetoric, where we show a man in a *phiran*, holding a Kalashnikov. *Haider* is the first film where we see Kashmir from the inside" (Singh). This project of "writing back" is shared by screenwriter Basharat Peer, who, as a Kashmiri journalist, sought to dismantle decades of harmful stereotypes. His stated hope was that the film would "challenge the narrative constructed by previous mainstream cinema... 'Kashmiris have always been portrayed as crazy fanatics, or Kashmir simply seen as a picturesque tourist destination. This is a very different view.'" (Burke). For Peer, the creative process was a matter of taking "stories I had reported on and grafting them onto Shakespeare" (Chakravarti 129). This "grafting" of lived trauma onto a canonical framework is the core of the film's interventionist power. It is a complex negotiation with the colonizer's cultural capital, as Loomba and Orkin theorize: the appropriation of Shakespeare, then, does not always signal a desire to be 'nativist' or to return to some 'pure' indigenous cultural form. Rather, it is often a way of challenging the cultural authority of the coloniser in his own terms and on his own ground. The master's tools, in this view, can be used to dismantle the master's house. But such a process is never simple or unproblematic. The cultural capital of Shakespeare is such that any appropriation of his work is inevitably a double-edged sword, one that can both empower and constrain the post-colonial artist (1998).

Bhardwaj wields this double-edged sword with remarkable acuity, admitting, "I like to fire the shots from Shakespeare's shoulders [...] that gives me a lot of license" (Chakravarti 129). The choice of Hamlet was deeply structural, with Bhardwaj declaring, "Kashmir is the Hamlet of my film," signalling that the play's themes of betrayal, surveillance, and a state in moral decay provided the perfect architecture for exposing the injustices of the postcolonial state (129). The film relentlessly grounds Shakespeare's abstract anxieties in the material reality of the Kashmiri occupation. Bhardwaj observed that "in the local [Kashmiri] papers, it's all full of politics... When you go to Kashmir, the first thing you see [is that] the pain is in the air and there is a lurking kind of fear" (Young 9). This pervasive pain gives visceral weight to Hamlet's famous lament that "Denmark's a prison" (Shakespeare 2.2.242). In *Haider*, this is not a metaphor for existential angst but a blunt statement of

political fact, declared by Haider during his desperate search for his father across a landscape of military camps: “All of Kashmir is a prison” (Haider 00:37:43-00:37:47). This carceral reality is anchored in specific historical grievances. When Haider seeks to file a report for his missing father, the lawyer Parvez Lone cynically recounts a history of broken promises: “Pandit Nehru promised Kashmiris a plebiscite with the world as his witness. What happened? Let aside a plebiscite . . . Even the first condition of plebiscite: demilitarization. That did not happen” (ibid).

This fusion of Shakespearean structure with contemporary political critique is best understood through the theoretical tools of dialogism and the palimpsest. An adaptation, in Hutcheon’s terms, is an “inherently ‘palimpsestuous’ work, haunted at all times by [its] adapted texts” (6). In *Haider*, the audience sees both Kashmir and Elsinore simultaneously. The political urgencies of Kashmir interrogate and repurpose the source text, with the “to be or not to be” soliloquy serving as the most profound site of this transformation. It is no longer a private, philosophical meditation on suicide but a public, political indictment of state violence and the erasure of a people. Haider, seizing a microphone in a town square, performs his madness as a political tribunal, citing international law to frame his existential crisis:

> Hello, hello, mic testing, one, two, three, hello. . . can you hear me? Hello. . . UN council resolution number 47 of 1948, Article 2 of the Geneva Convention and Article 370 of the Indian Constitution raise one and only one question! Do we exist or do we not? If we do, then where are we? If we don’t, then where did we go? If we do, then to what purpose?... Did we ever exist or did we not? (*Haider* 01:26:37-01:27:16).

This initial salvo moves the question of ‘being’ from the metaphysical to the juridical, demanding recognition within the very legal frameworks that have been used to suppress Kashmiri identity. The speech then escalates, moving beyond a plea for existence into a radical deconstruction of the legitimacy of state power itself. He continues, mocking the very concept of jurisprudence in a lawless state: “Law and order, law and order... There’s no law, and there’s no order. The one with the power dictates the terms. It’s a ‘law and order’ built to suit them. India and Pakistan, they’ve been playing

games with us, and we're just the pawns caught on the borderline..." (*Haider* 01:28:24-01:28:57). This movement in the speech is the theoretical core of Bhardwaj's intervention. It demonstrates a profound philosophical shift: the initial question, "Do we exist?", seeks recognition from existing power structures. The subsequent deconstruction, "There's no law, and there's no order?" rejects those structures entirely. The soliloquy thus fully transfigures Hamlet's individual, existential crisis into a collective, political demand for self-determination, one that refuses the geopolitical binaries that have defined and erased the Kashmiri subject.

Ultimately, this framework of adaptation as a politically charged, hybrid, and dialogical process is essential for any meaningful analysis of *Haider*. It moves the conversation beyond simplistic questions of fidelity and allows for an appreciation of the film as a complex cultural act. It is a work that, in Hutcheon's words, is its "own palimpsestic thing," an autonomous and politically charged intervention that actively engages and rewrites its sources to speak to the present (9).

The Hauntological Condition

To comprehend the function of Roohdaar within Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* is to move beyond conventional character analysis and into the realm of the spectral. His very ontology is immediately problematized by his name, Roohdaar. Mookherjee states that: "The first syllable of his name (*Rooh*) translates roughly to spirit or soul, while the second syllable (*Daar*) translates roughly to one who owns or possesses. His name identifies him not as the 'soul of a doctor' but rather one who keeps, possesses or even protects the doctor's spirit, his essence' (5). He is not a self, but a vessel. This ambiguity is compounded by his own self-definition. When asked if he is a doctor, he denies the fixed status, offering instead a liminal identity that explicitly frames him as a conduit for a presence that is absent: "After diagnosing a man with the New Disease, Roohdaar denies being a doctor and instead identifies himself as 'the soul of a doctor'" (5). This de-ontologizing gesture aligns precisely with Derrida's philosophical project in *Specters of Marx* (1993), which seeks to displace the primacy of being with what he terms "hauntology." As Davis explains: "Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is

neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (373). Roohdaar is the cinematic embodiment of this condition. As Derrida writes of the specter:

> The specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some "thing" that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the revenant or the return of the specter (5).

Roohdaar, with his scarred face and limping gait, is a carnal form, yet his essence is purely spiritual, the lingering trace of the disappeared Hilaal Meer. His existence, which is simultaneously physical presence and incorporeal reminder, perfectly illustrates the spectre's status as a phenomenal body, one whose spiritual core manifests through the flesh only to dissolve back into absence. Derrida's hauntology is not merely a study of ghosts but a thinking of time itself, a recognition that the present is never self-sufficient. Roohdaar's very appearance confirms Hamlet's foundational cry that "The time is out of joint" (Shakespeare 1.5.188). As a revenant, he is a figure who returns from a space of absolute violence and erasure. His origin in the detention camp, a modern analogue to the grave, allows him to disrupt the corrupt present established by Khurram's usurpation. His spectral presence acts as an ethical injunction, a demand that the past isn't truly past and that a profound debt remains unsettled. Derrida posits that the specter's defining characteristic is its untimeliness, its radical disjuncture with the linear progression of history, a trait Roohdaar embodies as a living contradiction to the new regime's constructed reality.

Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as a question of the ghost. What is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time* makes it also a *last time as well*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology*.

This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or a thinking of Being… It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. (Derrida, 10)

Roohdaar*'s* arrival is this hauntological event. He is not merely a messenger; he is the message itself, the embodiment of a trauma that refuses to be buried. He is, in Derrida's terms, a "simulacrum that is virtually more actual than what is so blithely called a living presence" (13). His return is precisely the "repetition *and* first time" simultaneously, a historical recurrence that shatters the present as a singular, new event. His unstable existence, which is neither a firm reality nor a mere hallucination, certifies the ghost's power to interrupt the established political truth. His presence signifies that the political and familial order constructed by *Khurram* is built upon a phantom limb, an absence that aches with presence. In this way, Roohdaar manifests a permanent deferral of closure, a figure whose very being disrupts the historical continuity and projected endpoint of the narrative. "A specter is always a revenant," Derrida insists (11). "One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back" (11).

The power of Roohdaar's injunction for revenge is derived from an "absolutely unmasterable disproportion" that Derrida terms the "visor effect" (7). In his initial encounter, Roohdaar approaches Haider via an intermediary, Arshia, ensuring that the necessary truth is mediated by an external, detached agent. This immediately establishes an asymmetry of knowledge; Roohdaar possesses a truth that Haider desperately seeks but cannot access on his own terms. This essential detachment and superior access to knowledge establish the spectral authority of the command.

This spectral someone other looks at us, we feel ourselves being looked at by it, outside of any synchrony, even before and beyond any look on our part, according to an absolute anteriority (which may be on the order of generation, of more than one generation) and asymmetry, according to an absolutely unmasterable disproportion. Here, anachrony makes the law. To feel ourselves seen by a look which it will always be impossible to cross, that is the visor effect on the basis of which we inherit from the law (6-7).

Haider cannot cross the look of Roohdaar*;* he cannot verify the source of the injunction. He must accept the narrative of betrayal and the demand for vengeance on faith, a faith born of desperation and grief. This constitutes, as Derrida describes, the encounter with the ghost, an "essentially blind submission to his secret, to the secret of his origin: this is a first obedience to the injunction. It will condition all the others" (7). Haider is thus interpellated not by a subject, but by a specter, binding him to a course of action whose origins remain shrouded in the traumatic opacity of the detention camp. This spectral subjection ensures that his quest for vengeance remains entangled in the undecidable political and historical trauma of the region, preventing any clean resolution or establishment of verifiable truth.

Roohdaar's hauntological status achieves its most expansive political scope in this profound utterance, where he transcends the role of Hilaal's soul and becomes the very soul of Kashmir:

> Darya bhi main, darakht bhi main / Jhelum bhi main, chinar bhi main / dair hoon, haram bhi hoon / Shia bhi hoon, Sunni bhi hoon / main hoon pandit / Main tha, main hoon aur main hi rahoonga (I am the river, I am the tree / I am the Jhelum, I am the Chinar. . . I am the Shia, I am the Sunni / I am the Pandit / I was, I am, and I will always remain) (Haider, 01:14:13-01:14:40).

His spectral utterance marks a profound ontological mutation in which the individual subject dissolves into the eternal suffering spirit of Kashmir itself. Roohdaar is no longer just a character but the spectral essence of a region saturated with memory, violence, and political schism. He is the river that carries the bodies, the tree that witnesses the atrocities, the warring identities, and the enduring spirit that persists through it all. His temporal declaration, "I was, I am, and I will always remain," perfectly captures the untimely nature of the spectre, which collapses past, present and future into a single, haunting continuum. He is that which "is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, is never present as such," but whose non-presence structures the entire narrative reality (Derrida xvii). He is the ethical injunction made spectre, compelling the living to reckon with an inheritance of violence and a debt to the dead.

If I am getting ready to speak at length about ghosts, inheritance, and generations, generations of ghosts, which is to say about certain others who are not present, nor presently living, either to us, in us, or outside us, it is in the name of justice. Of justice where it is not yet, not yet there, where it is no longer, let us understand where it is no longer present, and where it will never be, no more than the law, reducible to laws or rights. It is necessary to speak of the ghost, indeed to the ghost and with it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and just that does not recognize in its principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet there, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born (xviii).

Derrida's invocation of the specter as the necessary condition of ethics and politics situates Roohdaar's return within a horizon where justice itself is unmoored from law. Justice, for Derrida, is that which exceeds codification; it belongs neither to the past nor to the present, but to an unfulfilled and perhaps unfulfillable future. It must be spoken "in the name of those who are no longer and those who are not yet." His message demands an ethics grounded in the recognition of absence, an ethics that speaks to and with the ghost rather than about it. Roohdaar speaks in the name of this justice, a justice for the disappeared, for the silenced, for the land itself. He becomes the ultimate hauntological figure, the ghost of Kashmir. The justice he articulates cannot be legislated, because it concerns those whom the law cannot see. Roohdaar'*s* spectrality is thus not merely metaphysical but deeply political; he embodies a justice that must forever exceed institutional form. To speak through him is to speak from the wound of history, where the ethical demand to remember cannot be separated from the impossibility of restitution. Yet, the impossibility is not merely a failure; it is constitutive. Derrida's formulation reminds us that the ghost's address is necessary precisely because justice will "never be reducible to laws or rights." Roohdaar's haunting is therefore not a lament but a summons, a call to rethink the very grounds on which political being is recognized. His voice insists that responsibility is not exhausted by the present citizenry but extends to those who cannot participate in the social contract: the dead who were denied mourning and the unborn who will inherit the ruins of the denial.

The Liminal Space and the Powers of the Weak

The Kashmir of *Haider* exemplifies what Victor Turner conceptualizes as a liminal zone, a threshold space where the normative order of society collapses, and the distinction between life and death, self and other, sovereignty and subjugation becomes unstable. The film's 1995 setting situates Kashmir in a state of suspended crisis, perpetually oscillating between war and peace, visibility and disappearance. It is a territory haunted by uncertainty, where political violence and surveillance have rendered both the body and the psyche sites of profound ambiguity. Turner describes this state of liminality as one inhabited by those who exist outside conventional structures of meaning:

> The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ('threshold people') are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions. Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon (95).

Within this framework, *Haider*'s Kashmir becomes the geographical and psychic manifestation of Turner's "betwixt and between," a landscape of spectral indeterminacy where the living and the disappeared cohabit. It is precisely within this threshold that Roohdaar emerges as the archetypal liminal persona: a figure of return and revelation, whose spectral existence blurs the ontological boundaries between the dead and the living, justice and vengeance, memory and erasure. Having survived the execution that claimed Hilaal, Roohdaar occupies a profoundly liminal position within *Haider's* necropolitical landscape. Neither fully dead nor completely restored to the domain of the living, he becomes what Turner calls a "threshold" person, suspended between ontological states and social recognitions. His spectral return to the world− limping, white-clad, scarred, and stripped of all worldly possessions − visually encodes this condition of radical in-betweenness. Roohdaar embodies

the erasure of status and identity that marks the liminal subject, existing outside the symbolic economy of both state and kinship. As Turner observes:

Liminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands (95).

Roohdaar's physical and spectral austerity thus converge to signify a total evacuation of social being. His liminality is not merely symbolic but existential, a living testimony to the collapse of order and identity under conditions of political disappearance. In him, the abject body becomes a site of revelation, mediating between the worlds of the disappeared and the living, and transforming trauma into spectral presence. From this position of profound structural inferiority, Roohdaar wields what Turner, drawing on Lewis, identifies as the "powers of the weak" (99). His authority emerges not from institutional legitimacy or political capital but from his radical marginality and the moral authority conferred by suffering. In his spectral return, Roohdaar resembles the liminal figures of ritual specialists, prophets, or "holy beggars," who, though positioned outside the structures of power, derive an alternative potency from their exclusion. Their very dispossession becomes the source of a subversive form of agency, a sacred counter-discourse that unsettles hierarchies and gestures toward what Turner elsewhere describes as "communitas," the spontaneous solidarity that arises from the dissolution of social structure (96). Turner writes:

> In many societies, a terminological distinction is made between relatives on the father's and mother's side... The fact that continuous physical contact between the lineages involved is hardly possible is not ideologically important here, for the *bakologo* shrines are symbols and expressions of the Tale community... Such linkages are patently in their aggregate and transection more than merely personal or spiritual ties; they represent the ties of communitas

> countering the cleavages of structure. They are, moreover, bonds created from the 'submerged' side of kinship, the jurally weaker or inferior side (113, 118).

Turner's distinction between the structural and "submerged" sides of kinship, those bonds that arise from "jurally weaker or inferior side," provides a compelling analogue for Roohdaar's position within *Haider*. Like the *bakologo* shrines that express communitas through linkages beyond formal lineage or law, Roohdaar operates from the submerged side of social order. His moral authority emerges not from institutional sanction but from abjection itself, from the liminal space of disappearance, torture, and near-death that places him outside the visible structure of the polity. Yet it's precisely this exclusion that grants his speech its affective and ethical force. Roohdaar articulates the community's repressed truths because he no longer participates in its hierarchies; he embodies the paradoxical sanctity that arises when structural power collapses and only the solidarities of the suffering remain:

> In most societies, there are other areas of manifestation to be readily recognized by the symbols that cluster around them and the beliefs that attach to them, such as 'the powers of the weak,' or, in other words, the permanently or transiently sacred attributes of low status or position. In closed or structured societies, it is the marginal or 'inferior' person or the 'outsider' who often comes to symbolize what David Hume has called 'the sentiment for humanity,' which in its turn relates to the model we have termed 'communitas' (109, 111).

Turner's reflections on "the powers of the weak," those sacred attributes that accrue to those occupying positions of marginality or low status, clarify the paradox of Roohdaar's authority. In structured or closed societies, it is often the outsider who comes to embody what Turner, after Hume, calls "the sentiment of humanity," the affective ground of communitas that counters the divisions of structure. Roohdaar becomes precisely such an outsider-prophet: his liminal status grants him a sanctified moral voice within a landscape of silencing and fear. His diagnosis of the "New Disease" exemplifies the praxis of this sacred marginality: when he encounters the man paralyzed at his own doorstep, unable to cross the threshold of his home without being frisked, *Roohdaar's* response is not analytical, but ritualistic:

Arshia: “What’s with him?”

Old Mother: “I don’t know . . . These days, he just stands outside the door for hours. He doesn’t come in . . .”

Roohdaar: “Search him. Where are you coming from? . . . What’s in your pockets? ID?”

The boy immediately takes out his ID from his pocket. Roohdaar frisks the boy from head to toe.

Roohdaar: “Go, now.”

The boy quietly goes inside.

Roohdaar: “People have become so used to check-posts and body searches at every entrance that unless they are frisked . . . they fear crossing a door even to enter their own homes. It’s a psychological disorder called ‘New Disease’ . . .” (*Haider* 01:04:23-01:05:05).

This moment operates on multiple registers: political, ritualistic, and metaphysical. Roohdaar’s act of frisking is not merely a parody of militarized control but a profound dramatization of psychological colonization: the internalization of surveillance as ontology. By reenacting the violence of the checkpoint within the domestic sphere, he transforms domination into revelation. His action corresponds to what Turner identifies in Ndembu ritual as *ku-solola*, “to make appear, or reveal” (25). Through this embodied gesture, Roohdaar exposes the invisible pathology of a people who have absorbed occupation into the rhythms of everyday life, where fear itself governs movement and intimacy. The paralysis of the man at the threshold thus becomes a condensed image of Kashmir’s collective condition, caught between home and exile, belonging and suspicion. Roohdaar, as a liminal figure, inhabits this in-between space, transforming a scene of abjection into one of disclosure:

> What is made sensorily perceptible, in the form of a symbol (*chijikilu*), is thereby made accessible to the purposive action of society, operating through its religious specialists. It is the ‘hidden’ (*chamusweka*) that is ‘dangerous’ or ‘noxious’ (*chafwana*). Thus, to name an inauspicious condition is halfway to removing that condition; to embody the invisible action of witches or shades in a visible or tangible symbol is a big step toward remedying it (25–26).

Roohdaar's gesture thus performs a ritual of revelation: he renders visible the populace's invisible wound, transforming buried trauma into collective recognition. In doing so, he embodies the moral principle of "communitas" within a violently fractured polity. His words and actions consecrate the space of suffering as a threshold between silence and speech, law and disorder, death and return. From his position beyond legality and legitimacy, Roohdaar turns dispossession into revelation, marginality into moral resistance, and spectrality into an ethics of remembrance.

Roohdaar as Phantom

When Roohdaar is read solely through a Derridean hauntology in which the spectre functions as an ethical summons that exposes historical injustice and obliges the living to responsibility, his reappearance appears teleological: the past returns in order that the present may be accountable. Yet relocating Roohdaar within the psychoanalytic apparatus of Abraham and Torok radically displaces this teleology and reframes the spectre's political function. Roohdaar becomes not the moral ghost of justice but the pathological carrier of an encrypted trauma. His "message" is not revelation but repetition; his vengeance is not ethical duty but the symptom of a secret that refuses symbolic resolution. Derrida's formulation of inheritance makes clear that any ethical encounter with the past requires interpretive rather than blind obedience:

> An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the injunction to reaffirm by choosing. 'One must' means one must filter, sift, criticise, and one must sort out several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction. And inhabit it in a contradictory fashion around a secret" (18).

If inheritance demands sifting and judgment, the phantom forecloses that labor by converting the secret into a single compulsive imperative. Where Derrida demands an agonistic ethics of interpretation, the Abrahamian phantom substitutes compulsion for choice, enacting what Abraham and Torok outline as "transgenerational haunting" (3). This haunting is a "family secret, handed down to an unwitting descendant" through gaps, silences, and unspeakable words in a parent's discourse (16). They call this gap in knowledge "nescience," a not-knowing that nevertheless structures the

descendant's psyche (140). In this framework, the descendant's symptoms may "not spring from the individual's own life experiences but from someone else's psychic conflicts, traumas, or secrets" (166). The phantom works through a pathological process of "incorporation," an instantaneous swallowing of the lost object or trauma that bypasses mourning's gradual work of "introjection" (125). The incorporated trauma is then entombed within a 'crypt,' a sealed-off vault within the subject's ego where the unspeakable loss is "swallowed and preserved" (126) whole, containing "words buried alive" (159-160) that continue to exert a powerful, directive influence from beyond the grave. These unassimilated fragments of "painfully lived Reality—untellable and therefore inaccessible to the gradual assimilative work of mourning," (141) generate a "ventriloquist" effect, whereby "a stranger within the subject's own mental topography" speaks in place of the self (173).

Haider's encounter with Roohdaar exemplifies such psychic inheritance. The phantom does not emerge to deliver truth but to implant a foreign trauma into the subject's interiority. The moment Roohdaar utters Hilaal Meer's 'final message," the scene ceases to signify revelation and becomes one of psychic contamination. Roohdaar's speech transmits a trauma that Haider neither lived nor chose, transforming him into a ventriloquized subject, a host for someone else's pain. The exchange between Haider and Roohdaar encapsulates this dynamic:

Haider: "You said you had a message from him... what it is?"

Roohdaar: "Revenge. Vengeance."

Haider: "Vengeance. Vengeance from whom? And why?"

Roohdaar: "To take revenge for a foul and unnatural murder... by a serpent of a murderer."

Haider: "You seem to have confused matters... my father was arrested by the army and one of these days... we will find out where they hold him."

Roohdaar: "It was Khurram who betrayed your father. The army crackdown in your village was not a matter of chance. And Ghazala had informed Khurram... Ghazala deceived your father and Khurram betrayed him. They live like a married couple is a proof of that."

Roohdaar further announces that it was Meer's last wish that Haider should take his revenge.

Hilaal: “Tell him to avenge my betrayal by my serpent of a brother. Tell him to aim his bullets at those cunning, deceiving eyes... that entrapped his mother... that made him an orphan.”

Roohdaar: “And his mother?”

Hilaal: “God will be her judge” (Bhardwaj and Peer qtd. in Javed 5).

In this register, Roohdaar’s “message” becomes the phantom’s implant: a fragment of another man’s unassimilated pain, his encrypted death wish, transmitted into Haider’s psyche as an imperative. Its affective influence is reinforced by its false legitimacy: the voice carries the authority of kin and the verdict of the dead, yet its provenance is pathological. Roohdaar becomes, in this sense, not a messenger of justice but an emissary of unmourned grief. His speech does not complete Hilaal’s death; it extends it into Haider’s life. This reading reveals a crucial contradiction between Roohdaar’s claim and Hilaal’s earlier characterization:

> A few minutes into the film, Ghazala (Gertrude) interrogates her husband, Hilaal Meer, who has just smuggled a known militant into their house for an emergency appendectomy. She asks him: *Kis taraf pe ho aap*? (Which side are you on?) His laconic response—*zindagi ki* (life’s)—sums up the approach that the film seems to adopt when faced with the uncomfortable questions of political intent and allegiance (Mookherjee 1-2).

This statement establishes Hilaal’s core ethos as a doctor and a humanist, an ethical position that transcends political binaries in favor of a universal imperative to preserve life. This ethical orientation renders implausible the later image of the father commanding his son to “aim his bullets” at his uncle’s eyes. Chakraborti identifies this dissonance as central to the film’s enigma:

However, the hypotextual enigma re-echoes here in the disparity between Roohdar's version of portraying Hilaal as a tormented figure seeking revenge for his prescribed destiny and Hilaal's portraiture in the initial scenes of being an excessively concerned doctor for whom saving a patient's life matters more than his own. Can a person, who even in the moment of crisis remembers to instruct medicinal doses to a militant-patient, think of avenging his own brother by making his son shoot at his eyes? (177).

Chakraborti's question reframes the issue: the problem is not whether Hilaal actually demanded vengeance, but how trauma can be misrecognized as fidelity. The phantom's deception lies precisely in this disguise. Where Derrida's specter calls for an interpretive sifting of the past as a demand to responsibility and deliberation, the phantom demands uncritical enactment. Haider's acceptance of the message thus marks the foreclosure of ethical deliberation: the triumph of incorporation over introjection. Haider's famous soliloquy articulates this collapse precisely:

> Shaq pe hai yaqeen toh, yaqeen pe hai shaq mujhe. . . / Roohdaar ka afsana sachcha ya jhoothi kahaani chacha ki. . . / kiska jhooth jhooth hai, kiske sach mai sach nahin. . . / Hai ki hai nahin bas yahi sawaal hai, / aur sawaal ka jawaab bhi sawaal hai. . . / Dil ki agar sunun toh hai, / dimaag ki toh hai nahin. . . / jaan loon ke jaan doon, / mai rahun ke mai nahin.
>
> (My conviction is born from my skepticism, My skepticism, from my conviction. Is Roohdaar's narrative the reality, or is my uncle's testimony the deception? Whose falsehood is truly false? Whose 'truth' is devoid of truth? Does it exist, or does it not? That is the fundamental query. And the answer to this query is itself a query. By intuition, it is. By reason, it is not. Should I take a life, or give my own? Should I be, or should I not be?) (*Haider* 01:37:44-01:38:55).

This oscillation between doubt and conviction dramatizes possession rather than moral reflection. Haider is "possessed not by his own unconscious but by someone else's" (Abraham and Torok 173). His agency is displaced into the service of an encrypted imperative, and his ethical reasoning becomes a casualty of psychological colonization. The mission of revenge, therefore, is not born of Haider's autonomous political will but is the translation of an inherited psychic fragment into behavioural demand. This is precisely the work of the "psychic 'crypt,' a kind of tomb or vault harboring the not fully confronted 'phantoms' (*fantomes*) or secrets from the analysand's earlier history" (Bellamy 21). The crypt preserves the trauma's opacity rather than transforming it. The political tragedy of *Haider* lies here: oppression reproduces itself through the unprocessed transmission of its own violence. The son becomes the medium of the father's unexorcised secret, and the colonial death-world perpetuates itself as psychic inheritance.

Roohdaar's ambiguity intensifies this pathology. His function is amplified by his inherent unreliability as a "double agent whose repeated switches in allegiance have made it impossible to discover his true identity," and whose name, as Khurram describes, is part of a "'ghost' identity, an endlessly deferred sign that hints at but never fully represents his character" (Mookherjee 5). This indeterminacy makes him the perfect carrier of the phantom's lie. His testimony cannot be verified because its origin is sealed in the crypt; its function is affective transmission rather than evidentiary clarification. The film thereby stages uncertainty not merely as epistemic limitation but as the structural form of transgenerational haunting: the secret Roohdaar imparts is not the factual content of suffering but the felt texture of humiliation: the degradation of torture that resists symbolization, ensuring that the pain remains unspoken yet active. This corresponds to what Lacan calls the *Real*: that kernel of experience that cannot be represented or domesticated by language. In this sense, Roohdaar becomes both the keeper and the symptom of the crypt: his words are the words buried alive that reopen in Haider the wound sealed in Hilaal. Haider's pursuit of vengeance is thus the repetition of the very logic of violence that destroyed his family. The crypt repeats what it cannot mourn.

Victor Turner's notion of liminality helps situate this dynamic within a social frame. Turner describes the liminal phase as a potential space of communitas: "The second [model for human interrelatedness], which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders" (96). Ideally, liminality enables shared mourning and reconstitution of social bonds. Roohdaar's injunction, however, collapses this potential by privatizing grief. The phantom transforms collective suffering into an individual mandate, turning the social wound of Kashmir's violence into Haider's personal vendetta. Instead of communitas, there is isolation; instead of collective testimony, compulsion. Turner's insight that "the passage from lower to higher status is through a limbo of

statuslessness" registers here as a tragic inversion: Haider is suspended in liminality without passage to communal reintegration (97).

The film's ethical counter-injunction to this pathology arrives in Ghazala's renunciation: "*Inteqaam se sirf inteqaam paida hota hai. Jab tak hum apne inteqaam se azaad nahin honge na, koi azaadi humey azaad nahin kar sakti*" ("Revenge only begets revenge. Until we are free from our own revenge, no other freedom can free us") (*Haider* 02:27:58-02:28:17). In her self-annihilation, she becomes a new spectral voice, offering Haider an alternative inheritance. Her words invert the phantom's logic. She refuses the translation of pain into action, insisting instead on the necessity of internal liberation. The paradox of her suicide, violence used to negate the compulsive logic of violence, underscores the impossibility of simple purification.

Critics who read Haider's refusal to kill Khurram as a narrative weakness overlook this psychoanalytic and ethical structure. As Mookherjee records, "Haider, ultimately, does not kill his maimed uncle who, in turn, pleads for the mercy of death. . . One reviewer points to this as the film's fundamental flaw, that it 'is a revenge melodrama featuring a suicidal, reckless hero who neither kills the villain nor dies in the end'" (2). This critique, however, misreads the film's deeper philosophical project. Haider's refusal to kill is not a narrative failure but an ethical act of exorcism. Haider's refusal reorients the narrative away from retributive closure toward the slow labor of mourning. It marks the shift from incorporation to introjection, from repetition to narration. The act of not killing is the first articulation of the ethical 'filtering,' the living subject reclaims agency by refusing to be ventriloquized. Davis clarifies the practical divergence between phantom and specter:

> What they call a phantom is the presence of a dead ancestor in the living Ego, still intent on preventing its traumatic and usually shameful secrets from coming to light. One crucial consequence of this is that the phantom does not, as it does in some versions of the ghost story, return from the dead in order to reveal something hidden or forgotten, to right a wrong or to deliver a message that might otherwise have gone unheeded. On the contrary, the

> phantom is a liar; its effects are designed to mislead the haunted subject and to ensure that its secret remains shrouded in mystery (374).

Davis cites Abraham and Torok's formulation: "*les lacunes laissées en nous par les secrets des autres*" (the gaps left in us by the secrets of others) to describe how the unconscious is perforated by the unspoken secrets of others, noting that "*Le fantôme des croyances populaires ne fait donc qu'objectiver une métaphore qui travaille dans l'inconscient: l'enterrement dans l'objet d'un fait inavouable*" (The phantom of popular beliefs therefore only objectifies a metaphor that works in the unconscious: the burial in the object of an unspeakable fact) (374). The phantom's lie, in other words, is not narrative deceit but a psychic defence designed to preserve unconfessed pain. Haider's refusal to kill, therefore, becomes a gesture of ethical filtration, an inheritance sifted rather than obeyed. As Davis later observes: "Phantoms lie about the past whilst spectres gesture towards a still unformulated future. The difference between them poses in a new form the tension between the desire to understand and the openness to what exceeds knowledge" (379). Haider's decision to walk away affirms this openness: he turns from the repetition of trauma toward the uncertain possibility of life. His final choice represents not narrative weakness but the first articulation of a post-phantom ethics, the courage to choose life.

In this view, Haider breaks the cycle. He walks away from the climactic act of vengeance, choosing the difficult path of liberation from retribution made possible by his mother's sacrifice. However, this reading is directly challenged by an opposing critical perspective that sees Haider's final choice not as an abjuration but as a refinement of cruelty. Chakravarti argues forcefully for this interpretation: "Haider's decision at the end to walk away from a grievously injured Claudius begging for release is not an abjuration of revenge but a reinforcement of it, since he wishes only to prolong his antagonist's suffering" (130-131). This darker reading suggests that the cycle of violence is not broken but merely transformed. Haider does not kill Khurram but leaves him to a fate worse than death, a prolonged agony that constitutes a more profound form of vengeance. This interpretation implies that Ghazala's sacrifice was in vain and that Roohdaar's phantom has ultimately triumphed.

As Chakravarti concludes, “The film rejects tragedy but not vengeance: Haider lives only to be able to cross the border to Pakistan to keep the cycle of revenge alive” (131). This film leaves this ambiguity unresolved. As Chakraborti observes, “the implied issue of Haider getting trapped and manipulated... echoes and re-echoes even after the film ends (177). The haunting persists.

Conclusion

Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* stands as a masterful act of postcolonial intervention, transforming the existential despair of *Hamlet* into a searing indictment of the political trauma of 1990s Kashmir. In Bhardwaj’s hands, adaptation becomes an act of insurgency: a way of reterritorializing Shakespeare’s text within the geopolitics of occupation, exposing how universal humanist tropes fracture under the pressure of postcolonial violence. The film’s transformative power crystallizes in the figure of Roohdaar, whose unstable ontology makes him a site where politics, spectrality and psychoanalysis converge. Reading Roohdaar demands a confluence of critical frameworks, each illuminating, yet also disrupting, the other. Within a Derridean Hauntology, Roohdaar emerges as a paradigmatic ethical specter, the revenant whose temporal disjunction interrupts the corrupted present and demands an impossible justice for the disappeared. His liminality, in Turner’s terms, grants him “the powers of the weak,” enabling him to articulate a collective suffering of “communitas” from a position of radical marginality. Yet the psychoanalytic framework of Abraham and Torok complicates this redemptive interpretation. Seen as a “phantom,” Roohdaar ceases to be an ethical summons and becomes the return of an encrypted trauma, a ventriloquized symptom of the ungrieved dead. His message ceases to be an injunction for justice and becomes the transgenerational transmission of a psychic "crypt," a compulsive repetition of violence rather than an ethical choice.

The film’s denouement intensifies this theoretical impasse. Haider’s refusal to execute Khurram is not a closure but a provocation, an act that hovers between ethical transcendence and melancholic paralysis. Is it the exorcism of the phantom, the fulfilment of Ghazala’s plea to end the cycle of *inteqaam*, or merely another iteration of the same repetition compulsion that binds the living to the dead? The answer remains elusive. *Haider*’s enduring brilliance lies precisely in this refusal of

resolution. By suspending its audience within the same aporetic space that ensnares its protagonist, the film converts Hamlet's metaphysical dilemma into a political hauntology, an act of translation that reconfigures tragedy itself into critique.

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Divine Spectacle: The Cinematic Rebirth of Indian Epics

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Abstract: This paper explores the cinematic adaptation of Indian mythology in the films *Brahmāstra* (2022), *Adipurush* (2023), and *Kalki 2898 AD* (2024), focusing on how classical narratives are reimagined in contemporary visual culture. The study examines the narrative and thematic transformations that occur when mythological content is adapted for the screen. It analyses the selective appropriation of elements from traditional sources, where morally and culturally affirming motifs are emphasized, while aspects deemed outdated, problematic or considered unsuitable for contemporary audiences are modified or omitted. The language and characterisation are reworked to resonate with younger audiences, often through the use of modern idioms and dialogues and familiar archetypes. The paper investigates how the protagonists and supporting figures are reshaped to reflect present-day sensibilities, making them more accessible to a digitally native generation. Special emphasis is placed on the use of visual effects, music, and promotional strategies designed to enhance the films' appeal to contemporary viewers. Additionally, the paper considers the audience's response to these adaptations, noting the varying expectations and receptions shaped by cultural, religious, and generational factors. By comparing these three films, the paper highlights the ongoing negotiation between innovation and reverence in mythological adaptation and situates these practices within the broader framework of adaptation theory.

Keywords: Adaptation, Narrative Study, Mythology, Popular Cinema, Audience Reception, Visual Culture, Generational Shift, Narrative Transformation, Cultural Negotiation

Indian mythology has always been a fertile ground for storytelling. For centuries, epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have not only shaped religious and cultural consciousness but also inspired diverse performance traditions, including oral recitations, classical theatre, folk plays, devotional songs, and, eventually, cinema. In the twentieth century, mythological films became

foundational to Indian cinema and today, mythology continues to serve as a cultural reservoir, but its adaptation is no longer straightforward. In the twenty-first century, myth is increasingly reframed for digital-native audiences, shaped by global visual idioms of superhero franchises, dystopian sci-fi, and video games. This creates a tension: how to retain reverence for sacred stories while making them appealing to audiences accustomed to Marvel, *Game of Thrones*, or anime, etc.

This paper examines three recent cinematic adaptations that illustrate different approaches to negotiating this tension: *Brahmāstra* (2022), *Adipurush* (2023), and *Kalki 2898 AD* (2024). All three films engage with mythology, but their methods, successes, and failures vary. Where *Brahmāstra* hybridizes myth with the superhero genre, *Adipurush* attempts devotional fidelity but falters in execution and ideological positioning, and *Kalki 2898 AD* imagines mythology as a pluralist sci-fi futurism. By situating these films within adaptation theory, the paper argues that contemporary Indian mythological cinema exemplifies adaptation as cultural negotiation, an iterative process shaped by reverence, innovation, audience identity, and socio-political context.

Adaptation Studies has long debated the problem of fidelity: whether adaptations succeed or fail by how closely they adhere to their sources. Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, rejects fidelity as the primary criterion, emphasising the adaptive process as a form of palimpsestuous rewriting instead. Similarly, Julie Sanders in *Adaptation and Appropriation* frames adaptation as both intertextual dialogue and cultural negotiation**,** where texts are reshaped to resonate with new audiences. Robert Stam extends this view by emphasizing the intertextual dialogism of cinema, where adaptations are always in conversation not only with the source text but with other media, genres, and cultural contexts. This is particularly relevant for Indian mythological films, which borrow as much from Hollywood blockbusters as from Sanskrit epics.

In the Indian context, adaptation cannot be understood solely in terms of fidelity, because mythology itself is fluid and plural**.** The *Ramayana* has more than 300 versions across South and Southeast Asia. The *Mahabharata* too exists in multiple versions, folk performances, and reinterpretations. Myth is not a fixed text but a living tradition, continually retold to address

contemporary concerns. This flexibility enables innovation, but it also poses challenges. Adaptors must decide which elements to retain as sacred and which to modify**.** They must balance reverence for tradition with relevance for modern audiences**.** The three films examined here dramatize this negotiation in distinct ways.

***Brahmāstra*: Myth in the Superhero Mode**

Ayan Mukerji's *Brahmāstra: Part One – Shiva* positions itself as India's first attempt to build a film "*astraverse*," a cinematic world where mythic energies become franchise elements. The "Astraverse" is Mukerji's term for a cinematic universe modelled on Western superhero franchises, in which each *āstra* serves as a narrative and visual anchor for future stories. *Āstras* (or astras) are celestial weapons in Hindu mythology, frequently described in the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Unlike ordinary weapons, they are invoked through *mantras* (sacred chants) and are associated with particular deities, embodying divine power. Each *āstra* has a specific destructive capacity; for example, the *Brahmāstra*, linked to the creator god Brahmā, is said to be capable of devastating entire regions. In *Brahmāstra*, these mythological motifs are reimagined as franchise elements: portable and repeatable features that can structure sequels, spin-offs, and merchandising. Like superheroes in Western franchises, each *āstra* can generate its own plotline while remaining part of a larger shared world. The film is rooted in Indian motifs (*āstras*, divine lineages), but it speaks in the language of global superhero cinema. This choice shows one way to make myth accessible to younger, digitally native audiences. The most visible move in *Brahmāstra* is what it does with *āstras*. In classical texts, *āstras* are invoked and described through ritualized language and moral contexts. The film transforms them into glowing superpowers visualized through computer-generated imagery (CGI), using digital effects to stage battles and spectacular fight sequences. That visual translation is important: cinema must show what a text can only describe. By rendering *āstras* as spectacular visual effects, the film gives modern audiences a felt experience of the numinous. This is a bold move: it makes a traditional motif visible in a way that immediately maps onto viewers' familiarity with Marvel and similar franchises.

The protagonist Shiva is an example of selective appropriation and recharacterization. Shiva in this film is not an emperor or an ascetic; he is a Mumbai DJ, an urban young man who falls in love, makes mistakes, and gradually discovers his powers. This "reluctant hero" arc is familiar from global franchise cinema: the chosen one who must accept responsibility. By making the hero young and urban, the film aims to build empathy and to place the epic inside everyday life. Shiva's modern life, with its music, romance, and city friendships, creates a bridge between the everyday and the mythic.

Language in *Brahmāstra* follows the same logic. The dialogues are colloquial, often peppered with slang and playful banter. Shiva's romantic exchanges with Isha (his love interest, played by Alia Bhatt), his one-liners, and his pop-culture references are designed to make him feel like someone today's audiences would recognize. This strategy makes the film more approachable for younger viewers. The downside, as critics noted, is that this register can sometimes feel too casual when the film attempts to handle cosmic stakes; the voice tones can undercut the sense of religious grandeur the film otherwise gestures toward.

Spectacle is central to the film's identity. The marketing emphasized its CGI sets, *āstral* battles, and the idea of a larger universe. Music mixes Indian motifs with contemporary orchestration. These production elements function together: VFX show the *āstras*, music anchors emotional beats, and marketing sells the film as both a mythic spectacle and a youth-oriented blockbuster.

Reception shows the benefits and costs of this approach. Young, urban audiences generally welcomed *Brahmāstra* as a fresh attempt to bring myth to the superhero idiom; they enjoyed the visual spectacle and the accessible characterizations. Some traditional viewers, however, felt unease when ritual language and devotional nuance were shortened for time and replaced by modern slang. The film's result was a mixed reception that leaned toward acceptance among the younger demographic and cautious reserve among more devotional viewers. In short, *Brahmāstra* stands as a model of innovation anchored to selective reverence: keep the symbolic power of *āstras*, translate them into spectacle, and reframe the hero so that modern audiences can emotionally enter a mythic world.

Adipurush: The Contested Adaptation

Adipurush presents a very different case. Announced and marketed as a grand retelling of the *Ramayana*, it became notorious for failing to meet many audiences' expectations on several counts: narrative compression, awkward language such as "*Kapda teri Lanka ka,, Tel teri Lanka ka, Aag bhi teri Lanka ki to Jalegi bhi teri Lanka hi*," visual design choices like demon armies resembling *Harry Potter*'s Dementors, and production quality, especially the much-hyped CGI, was judged substandard, with reviewers describing the Lanka sequences and battle scenes as clunky and unconvincing. The film's box-office controversies, public debate, and heavy online mockery show how adaptation can go wrong when execution and cultural reading do not align. After strong advance bookings, collections collapsed within days, with *The Hindu* noting that negative word-of-mouth and widespread criticism "crippled" its commercial run (The Hindu, June 20, 2023). Public debate split into politics and religion, as petitions accused the makers of disrespecting the *Rāmāyaṇa* and forced revisions of lines such as "*Lanka laga denge*" (Indian Express, 19 June 2023). Online, the film became a meme template, with audiences ridiculing Hanuman's "maths problem" dialogue or Ravana's bat-like aircraft, examples of how intended spectacle turned into parody (Hindustan Times, June 17, 2023).

The film makes a stark choice in narrative compression, condensing a large, complex story into a shorter version that sacrifices depth for speed. In practice, it reduces the slow-building social and moral world of Ayodhya to mere glimpses, rushing through the backstories of Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana and moving quickly to exile, abduction, and battles. This compression strips away what makes the *Rāmāyaṇa* resonant: not only its heroic outline but the thick moral life of its characters. Here, thick moral life refers to the dense web of family rhythms, doubts, domestic politics, and ethical dilemmas that allow audiences to feel the gravity of choices and sympathize with conflicting duties. When a film removes the time characters spend as people, negotiating loyalty, love, or hesitation, what remains is a bare sequence of actions rather than the rich moral texture that has made the epic endure for centuries.

Visually and in characterisation, the film often replaces nuance with caricature. Ravana is stylized with tattoos, dark clothing, and an exaggerated multi-headed projection that looks more like a fantasy villain than the learned, complex king of the texts. Demons are designed in "Hollywood" modes, some describing them as resembling figures from Marvel or fantasy franchises, and Hanuman's depiction, very muscular and marked by exaggerated facial expressions, struck many as cartoonish or even insulting. Lanka serves as an example, presented as a black-and-gold, modern, dystopian palace. The design is spectacular, but viewers complained it lacked symbolic depth: where the epic evokes sacred architecture and poetic description, the film offers shiny but shallow modern set pieces.

Language proves decisive in *Adipurush*'s reception. The film attempted a modern, punchy register, but many lines read as out of place in a devotional retelling. Examples that became widely remarked include lines that came across as colloquial or awkward, phrases that the public quickly turned into memes. Lines like "*Lanka laga denge*" or casual slang such as "*fisaddi"* (a modern, rough dismissal) were widely mocked on social media. Instead of enhancing accessibility, these lines felt disrespectful to many viewers who expected a more elevated register for a story treated as sacred by many.

Two linked responses are important to note. First, critics of *Adipurush* emphasized that sloppy craft (uneven CGI, odd visual compositing) made the film look cheap, undermining its claims to be a majestic retelling. Second, scholars like Santosh Kumar Mamgain have argued that some of the problematic choices may not be mere incompetence but deliberate ideological decisions. Mamgain reads visual and rhetorical choices, such as the demonised design of Ravana, the heavy use of saffron imagery in battle, and lines that emphasise protection and masculine honour, as coded to fit contemporary communal narratives. In this reading, the film's adaptation choices become political: mythology is not only reworked for audiences, it is used to speak to a political present.

Marketing responded to the backlash in striking ways. After early criticism for CGI and certain scenes, the producers shifted promotional tactics toward devotional framing: campaigns

included reserving a seat in every theater in the name of Hanuman and conducting charitable ticket donations to schools and orphanages.

The marketing pivot aimed to reposition the film as a devotional event, promoted as "*Sabhi Bhartiyon ki Adipurush*," and to rally those who see these stories as part of national and religious memory. Karthikeyan Balakumar's marketing analysis shows that this pivot was reactive; it did not fix the fundamental craft problems and arguably reinforced the sense among critics that the film was being defended as a cultural object regardless of quality.

The film's reception was sharply polarized. Religious audiences who felt the film respected the epic were fewer than those who felt insulted; younger, digitally native viewers mocked the dialogue, the CGI, and the tonal inconsistencies. The result was that *Adipurush* alienated both sets of viewers, those who wanted devotional seriousness and those who wanted slick modern spectacle. Whether the film's key missteps were artistic or intentionally ideological, the outcome was the same: a contested adaptation that exposed the risks of superficial modernization and politically coded selection.

***Kalki 2898 AD*: Pluralist Futurism and Techno-myth**

Kalki 2898 AD takes a different track. Rather than present itself as a devotional retelling, Nag Ashwin's film relocates epic themes into a speculative, post-apocalyptic future. It opens with Ashwatthama's curse after the Kurukshetra war and jumps six thousand years into a world of environmental collapse, authoritarian rule, and radical social stratification. The prophecy of Kalki becomes a thread of hope within this broken world. The film thereby shows how myth can be used to reflect modern crises, whether ecological, technological, or political, while also imagining renewal.

The production design is central to this adaptation's success. The film constructs three major spaces that function as symbolic anchors: Kashi, the last habitable city, is a rotting metropolis: dilapidated buildings, narrow alleys, and scattered remnants of sacred carvings. This visual world makes the moral and ecological stakes felt: spiritual memory remains but is fragile. "The Complex" is a floating, high-tech sanctuary for the elite. Its sleek architecture, secret labs, and impermeable

spaces symbolize authoritarian excess and class separation. The Complex literalizes the film's critique that technological advancement can deepen injustice. Shambhala acts as a rebel refuge. It incorporates traditional elements and communal spaces referred to in the film as sites of hope and cultural continuity. The architecture here references natural motifs, such as an ancient tree and communal hearths, to show cultural resilience.

Ashwatthama's outfits feature textures that recall tree bark and aged fabrics, evoking his immortality and long suffering. Rebel costumes use reclaimed materials that visually underscore ecological collapse and social scavenging. Even the film's use of Buddhist iconography and more plural spiritual images signals a deliberate turn away from sectarian devotion toward a broad, inclusive spiritual language. Language and characterization in *Kalki* balance prophetic solemnity with modern clarity. The film uses slogans like "For Tomorrow" rather than exclusively devotional proclamations, which makes the Kalki figure accessible as a symbol of hope across communities. Characters such as Bhairava (a rogue bounty-hunter figure linked to Karna) and Ashwatthama are given psychological depth; the film centres their doubts and histories, making mythic archetypes feel lived-in and human.

Critics praised *Kalki* for its ambition, production values, and the way it reimagines myth as a tool to discuss contemporary challenges such as climate collapse, authoritarian rule, and moral decay. Some reviewers note borrowings from Western sci-fi visual language (moments that echo *Mad Max* or *Star Wars*), but the film generally integrates these references into an Indian techno-myth that aims for pluralism rather than narrow nationalism. Importantly, *Kalki* appears intentionally aimed at a younger, globalized audience. Its paratextual campaign emphasized world-building, VFX breakdowns, and concept art; the film invited viewers into a design-led experience. This strategy paid off, and the film attracted enthusiasm from sci-fi fans and young viewers interested in speculative narratives that combine mythic depth with global genres.

Comparative Synthesis: When Reverence Meets Innovation Selective Choices, Spectacle, Markets, and Publics

When we look across *Brahmāstra*, *Adipurush*, and *Kalki 2898 AD* together, a clearer picture emerges. Contemporary mythic cinema negotiates five related pressures at once: which parts of an old story to keep, how to recast language and personality for new viewers, how to show the sacred visually and sonically, how to sell the film to different publics, and how audiences actually receive and reinterpret the result. Below, I bring those five pressures into a single, comparative discussion using concrete examples from the three films. I avoid repeating the fuller film-by-film descriptions already given. The aim is to show patterns, to mark where filmmakers succeed, where they stumble, and what those outcomes mean culturally and politically.

First, selective appropriation and narrative reconfiguration. All three films retain the bones of epic meaning, including prophecy, chosen figures, and acts of cosmic violence and repair, but they differ in what they highlight and in the story logic they build around those elements. The common strategy is to keep motifs that easily translate into cinematic symbols (a weapon, a curse, an avatar) and to drop or rework material that requires long textual exposition or ritual context. Examples: the *āstras* become visual set pieces in *Brahmāstra*; the *Pushpak Vimaan* is reshaped as a menacing flying craft in *Adipurush*; Kalki's prophecy is recast as an ecological promise/technology dilemma in *Kalki 2898 AD*. These choices show a pragmatic logic: filmmakers keep what is legible in image and action and adapt or remove what is primarily discursive or devotional. But selective appropriation is not neutral. It signals what a filmmaker expects audiences to value: spectacle, moral clarity, or thematic resonance. *Brahmāstra* and *Kalki* choose legibility-plus-depth (visual spectacle tied to a thematic center); *Adipurush* often chose legibility without the supporting depth, which is part of why its compressions felt hollow.

Second, language and characterization as acts of translation. Re-speaking an epic for a digital generation requires a tonal decision: make the voice colloquial and contemporary or retain elevated diction and devotional cadence. Each film tested a different balance. The result shows that register is

an instrument of trust: when colloquial language sits comfortably inside a coherent tonal design, it can humanize mythic figures and broaden appeal; when the register clashes with visual or marketing promises, it produces ridicule or rejection. For example, short, modern catchphrases can energize a trailer and yield viral clips, as *Brahmāstra*'s pop-inflected beats did. The same technique turned toxic in *Adipurush* when pithy, modern lines ran up against devotional imagery and ritual cues. By contrast, *Kalki* adopts measured, slogan-like lines that read as prophetic rather than irreverent, lending it a sense of both contemporaneity and seriousness. The comparative lesson is simple: reworking language can welcome younger viewers, but only if register, visual style, and narrative logic remain coherent.

Third, spectacle, production design and music — translating the numinous into the sensory world of cinema. Here, cinema's medium-specific power is obvious: sight and sound can carry spiritual weight when craft is convincing. All three films attempt to render the sacred via VFX, architecture, costume, and score. The difference is one of integration and craftsmanship. Where *Kalki 2898 AD* uses architecture (Kashi, the Complex, Shambhala), texture, and integrated VFX to make myth feel materially persuasive, and where *Brahmāstra* uses *āstras* and music to create moments of awe, the spectacle enhances thematic meaning. Where *Adipurush*'s spectacle appears disjointed from tone and technical polish, the visual attempts undermine rather than realize the intended numinous effect. The comparative point: spectacle is not merely ornament; it is the medium's primary tool for making myth believable on screen. If craftsmanship fails, spectacle collapses into parody; if craftsmanship succeeds, even radical reworkings can feel reverent.

Fourth, marketing, paratexts and cultural positioning. These films demonstrate that adaptation is as much a paratextual project as it is a textual one. A trailer, a promotional stunt, or a social media campaign frames the lens through which audiences decode a mythic film. *Brahmāstra* framed itself as a franchise-in-progress; *Kalki* framed itself as a globalized science-fiction experiment built on Indian myth; *Adipurush* shifted from spectacle to devotional paratext after technical criticism. Those paratextual choices are not merely tactical; they shape the ethical expectations audiences bring: if

your ads promise sacred reverence, critics and devotees will expect ceremony, careful ritual context, and tonal dignity; if your ads promise franchise spectacle, viewers expect high-standard VFX, coherent world-building, and serialized hooks. A misalignment between marketing and the finished film prompts the public to engage in an oppositional reading. Viewers feel misled and react accordingly. Thus, paratexts are a form of meta-adaptation that can either cushion innovation or expose its limits.

Fifth, reception: negotiation across generational and ideological lines. Audiences are not passive recipients of adaptation; they decode according to memory, media habits, and politics. Younger, urban viewers are often eager for inventive reworkings if execution respects craft; older and more devotional viewers prioritize symbolic fidelity and ritual coherence. But these divisions are not neat: a well-crafted innovation may win both groups; a poorly executed "faithful" retelling may succeed with neither. *Adipurush* is a stark example: because its craft and tonal framing faltered, it produced both meme-fueled derision from younger viewers and anger from religious audiences. *Kalki*'s pluralist design reduced political friction by avoiding straightforward sectarian appeals; *Brahmāstra*'s hybrid positioning invited negotiated readings that accepted some liberties in exchange for spectacle and emotional accessibility. The takeaway is that reception is a bargaining table. Audiences reward work that clearly signals what it intends to do and delivers on that promise.

Taken together, these five pressures show how adaptation works as a bundled practice: choices about what to keep, how to speak, what to show, how to sell, and how to expect audiences to react are all made together. When choices align, and narrative logic, tonal register, technical craft, and paratextual framing are coherent, innovation can be read as respectful reinvention. When they misalign, innovation is read as disrespect or incompetence. These films reveal three broader truths about the place of myth in contemporary India. First, myth remains alive and valuable as cultural capital. Filmmakers consistently turn to epic motifs because these stories still carry emotional authority, mnemonic power, and collective identity. Second, media form shapes meaning. Cinema cannot carry myth the same way a recitation or ritual does; it translates myth into image, sound, rhythm, and

duration. That translation invites both creativity and risk. Third, adaptation in modern India is entangled with political and economic stakes. Myths may be invoked in the service of national identity, commercial franchises, or speculative critique. The public reaction to a given adaptation, therefore, reflects not just aesthetic judgment but judgments about cultural stewardship and political alignment.

In a plural society, film adaptations must navigate demands for inclusive representation, commercial success, and artistic integrity. The three films show distinct strategies: franchise-building that aims to globalize myth (*Brahmāstra*), devotional spectacle that claims cultural ownership but risks politicization (*Adipurush*), and speculative reimagining that seeks a pluralist, globally legible mythic language (*Kalki*). None of these paths is inherently superior; each carries trade-offs that the public will evaluate.

When reverence meets innovation on the film set, the result depends less on which of the old stories you start with and more on how honestly and skillfully the new telling is constructed. The three recent films demonstrate that selective appropriation, reworked language, compelling spectacle, honest marketing, and sensitivity to audience decoding are the five pillars on which successful adaptation rests. Where those pillars stand together, myth may be reborn for a new generation; where any pillar collapses, the film becomes contested territory.

Adaptation, then, is not primarily a question of fidelity to texts but a public act of cultural translation. It asks filmmakers to take responsibility for how they reshape shared narratives, not only artistically but also socially and politically. It asks audiences to negotiate how much change a living tradition can accept. The conversations around *Brahmāstra*, *Adipurush*, and *Kalki 2898 AD* show that such negotiations are happening loudly in India today. That is difficult, sometimes ugly, often instructive, and ultimately a sign that myth continues to matter.

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Exploring the Nuances of Neo-Noir: A Study of Graham Moore's *The Outfit*

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Abstract: The paper explores *The Outfit* (2022) within the neo-noir cinematic genre, examining its unique position within it. Through an analysis of its stylistic and thematic elements, the paper shall examine the film to understand the defining characteristics of film noir production. It will further examine how the film takes a distinct approach to depicting violence, thereby placing itself in a niche category of contemporary, constantly evolving film noir. *The Outfit* takes place in 1950s Chicago and centres on Leonard Burling, a British cutter who uses precision to disguise moral ambiguity, to demonstrate how Moore uses the compressed, claustrophobic environment of the tailor shop to create psychological tension rather than relying solely on overt spectacle. The analysis focuses on the presence of genre markers, such as the unreliable narrator, the reimagined femme fatale embodied by La Fontaine, and the use of sophisticated cinematography, including Dutch angles and low-key lighting to indicate existential dread. This paper investigates the representation of violence in *The Outfit*, in contrast to the explicitly graphic productions of traditional neo-noir films. *The Outfit* employs violence as a thematic tool to explore trauma and power dynamics.

Ultimately, the paper argues that while the film draws heavily on the 'black film' tradition, its focus on moral ambiguity and character depth encourages viewers to reflect on complex ethical *dil*emmas, fostering a sense of intellectual engagement.

Keywords: Neo-noir; Moral Ambiguity,]; Cinematography; Femme Fatale; Urban Crime; Psychological Thriller; Narrative Twists; Contemporary Cinema

Graham Moore made his directorial debut with *The Outfit* in 2022. The film is set in Chicago and centres on Leonard Burling, a British tailor, who finds himself drawn into the world of crime. *The*

Outfit offers viewers an engaging cinematic experience that explores the complexities of the underworld. This paper explores the film through the genre of "neo-noir." Neo-noir originates from the French "film noir" in the late 20th century, meaning "black film" or "dark film," a genre that encompasses crime dramas renowned for their dark, moody imagery. As noir evolved, filmmaking adopted techniques for a contemporary audience, and the neo-noir genre was born through stylistic innovation. It often features elements such as moral ambiguity, urban decay, complex characters, and stylised visuals. Neo-noir, according to Mark Conard, is "any film having noir themes and noir sensibility that comes after the classic noir period (1960s)". Neo-noir films often revisit and reinterpret classic film noir genres in contemporary contexts. *The Outfit* takes familiar elements such as morally ambiguous protagonists, femme fatales, and shadowy urban landscapes and infuses them with modern sensibilities. By doing so, it updates and recontextualises these tropes for the contemporary audience.

The film is set in the emerging time from the shadows of World War II and the Great Depression, and it reflects the mistrust and despair of the time. A large number of initial noir films centred on American crime novels, which in turn drew inspiration from hard-boiled detective fiction. Noir films frequently use complex storylines, flashbacks, and unreliable narrators. Neo-noir, as opposed to traditional noir, usually makes use of colour film, and frequently uses dramatic colour contrasts or a washed-out palette to produce an atmosphere similar to the black-and-white originals. It addresses modern societal challenges, modified gender roles, and new ethical issues reflective of contemporary culture. By exploring the causes underlying criminal activity and frequently presenting its protagonists as severely flawed or ethically ambiguous, neo-noir films offer a psychological analysis of their characters. Also, technology that is used for spying in crime films is much more visible in neo-noir films; for instance, in the film, bugs or recording devices were used in the tailor shop for the FBI to spy on.

The Outfit features moody lighting, complex plot twists, and morally ambiguous characters. These are all hallmarks of the neo-noir genre. The characters in neo-noir negotiate with questions of

identity and morality. They are stuck in situations where they must make choices that blur the lines between right and wrong as they navigate the criminal underworld. The twists in the plot keep viewers guessing about the characters' intentions and the outcome of their actions. Leonard, a very observant character and the protagonist of the movie, played by Mark Rylance, exhibits anxiety throughout, particularly when he is entangled in a web of deception and violence. Leonard's character is portrayed as someone who wants to give up his criminal activity, but to do so, he needs to indulge in it. He is at a crossroads over the consequences of his actions, a trait often seen in neo-noir narratives. He exists as a grey character. This moral ambiguity is a sign of neo-noir protagonists, who often find themselves navigating complex situations. As the film progresses, his motivations, desires, and inner conflicts are gradually revealed, enriching his character.

La Fontaine, played by Nikki Amuka-Bird, is introduced as a femme fatale, a woman with beauty and intelligence who puts men into dangerous situations. La Fontaine's character is depicted in a visually captivating scene, adding to the film's overall neo-noir atmosphere through lighting and shadow. La Fontaine's wardrobe is carefully curated to evoke a sense of sophistication. Rather than confining herself to the identity the society has imposed on her, she leaps out of it by playing the role of an ambitious woman, who had all the power in her hands despite being a black woman in the times when Americans never wanted any kind of power with blacks.

In *The Outfit*, cinematography is also instrumental in creating a neo-noir atmosphere that is both visually captivating and thematically resonant. Scenes are bathed in shadows with pockets of light illuminating characters' faces in a way that enhances their mysterious and enigmatic qualities. Framing and camera angles are carefully chosen to evoke a sense of tension, unease, and existential dread. A Dutch angle is a camera angle used in film studies to convey uneasiness, psychological conflict, or turmoil in the psyche of characters, such as Richie and Francis, as they engage in criminal activities. A Dutch angle is also used to portray Mable wherever her safety and loyalty are jeopardised. Low angles are the camera angles positioned anywhere below the eye line, pointing upward, and off-kilter framing, where characters are not usually confined to the bottom third of the

screen, crammed in the corner, or placed right at the edge of the screen, looking offscreen, are employed to heighten the sense of disorientation that highlights the genre. *The Outfit's* colour palette reflects the neo-noir tradition of using rich, saturated hues to evoke mood and atmosphere. Deep blues, velvety blacks, and crimson reds dominate the visual landscape.

In neo-noir films, the exploration of violence goes beyond mere action. It serves as a thematic device to delve into deeper aspects of human nature, societal decay, and existential themes. The use of violence underscores the bleakness of the world portrayed in these films and the character's desperate search for meaning in a chaotic and indifferent universe. Violence serves as a tool for exploring power dynamics in neo-noir narratives. Neo-noir films often delve into the psychological impact of violence on both the doers and victims. Characters are haunted by their violent pasts, grappling with guilt, trauma, and the consequences of their actions. The exploration of psychological depth adds layers of complexity to the characters, making them more nuanced and multidimensional. *The Outfit* offers a critique of contemporary society through its portrayal of violence. For example, in the case of Leonard, the violence faced by him is his mental trauma of the past, for which he had to indulge himself again to get away from such a situation.

An atmosphere of intrigue and tension is created throughout the film through dialogue and the cramped environment of the tailor shop, rather than through explicit, direct displays of violence, a defining factor that puts the film in a distinct position among other commercial neo-noir productions. Conversations drive the intricate plot twists, and each character's motivations are disclosed slowly. For example, Mable intended to have her share of the money, leave Chicago at any cost, live peacefully in France, and chase her dreams, away from the underworld. These foreshadowing elements add depth and complexity to the narrative, building mysterious plots to a dark side as the story unfolds. The exposition would likely lay the groundwork for the complex web of relationships, motivations, and conflicts that drive the plot forward. The climax of the film marks the turning point at which the central conflict reaches its peak. In the film, this involves a decisive confrontation, a major revelation or a critical decision made by the protagonist that determines the outcome of the

story. Here, the climax is when Francis and Leonard are left alone in the shop, and Leonard reveals his tattoos, which tell that he was once a part of a gangster group like Richie and Francis and then stabs Francis with his pair of shears. In the end, loose ends are tied up, and the consequences of the climax are played out.

The film's exploration of these moral dilemmas in the underworld contributes to the ongoing conversation in neo-noir cinema about the nature of morality and ethics. While neo-noir films often draw inspiration from the visual style of classic film noir, they also incorporate stylistic innovations and modern visual techniques. *The Outfit* utilises elements such as moody lighting, atmospheric cinematography, and stylised production design to create a contemporary interpretation of the noir aesthetic. It stands well with audience expectations, introducing unexpected plot twists or unconventional character arcs that defy genre conventions.

A question that arises in the analysis of *The Outfit* as a neo-noir is whether it is possible to limit the film to a pure neo-noir. A significant characteristic that defines neo-noir and makes it distinct from noir is the explicit display of violence to represent chaos. In film noir, this chaos is represented through a display of violence that is more streamlined and central to the plot (e.g., *The Godfather*), whereas in neo-noir, violence takes the central stage (e.g., Quentin Tarantino's directorial work). As with both noir and neo-noir, the portrayal of chaos reflects the chaos of the times, whether the backdrop of World War II for the former or the rise of the underworld for the latter. Where, then, can one place *The Outfit*, as it is subdued in the display of violence, but violence is innate in the plot? Moore's film could be argued as an attempt to be placed in the 'contemporary neo-noir,' as it reflects a contemporary understanding of the times, a portrayal of chaos masquerading in a civilised society. With its distinct portrayal of chaos and careful treatment of violence, Moore also ensures that explicit violence does not overtake the plot as a dictating factor for commercial success, to attract the regular voyeur of violence, blood, and death.

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Epic Voices, Feminist Fires: Reimagining Sita and Draupadi Across Genres

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Abstract: Far from being silent sufferers, Sita and Draupadi—central figures of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*—have always embodied strength, intellect, and an unwavering sense of self. This paper explores how contemporary genre-crossing retellings of their stories, through literature, theatre, and digital narratives, reaffirm their innate agency and moral clarity. By tracing their transformation from epic heroines into feminist icons, the paper emphasizes that these women were not passive recipients of fate, but vocal, and courageous individuals who challenged the injustices of their time.

Drawing upon Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, and Volga's *The Liberation of Sita*, the study demonstrates how genre-shifts—from oral epic to feminist prose, from mythic verse to digital re-imaginings—enable the recovery and amplification of their resistance. These texts do not reinvent Sita and Draupadi; rather, they restore the fire and foresight that tradition often muted. Whether in Draupadi's unwavering confrontation of the Kuru court or Sita's quiet refusal to return to a kingdom that questioned her integrity, their actions remain radical blueprints of resistance.

In a world still governed by patriarchal expectations of womanhood, these mythological figures urge the modern woman not to succumb but to stand tall, speak out, and reclaim dignity. The paper argues that such re-articulations of mythology act as feminist interventions—where Sita and Draupadi are not just remembered, but reborn as archetypes of courage, defiance, and agency.

Keywords: Draupadi; Sita; Feminism; Mythology; Agency; Genre; Resistance; Womanhood; Indian Epics

Introduction

"Na me priyam priyataram atmanah sita;

Maya saha dharmam avasthayati Sadhvi." (Valmiki Ramayana, "Ayodhya Kanda")

("Nothing is dearer to me than Sita, who shall walk with me in *dharma* as my equal." – *Valmiki Ramayana,* "Ayodhya Kanda")

"Whenever *dharma* declines, and *adharma* rises, I manifest myself." (*Bhagvat Gita* 4.7)

The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* have long been the twin pillars of Indian cultural consciousness. Through Rama's affirmation of Sita as his equal in *dharma* and Krishna's eternal pledge to restore the cosmic balance, these epics establish themselves not only as mythic narratives but also as moral and philosophical touchstones. To speak of *Sita* and *Draupadi* is to enter the heart of this tradition, where myth and memory converge, and where women are exalted as ideals yet often denied agency over their own destinies. Yet, it is within these very paradoxes that the potential for resistance and reinterpretation emerges.

The figures of Sita and Draupadi have occupied a paradoxical position across centuries. At once revered as heroines of endurance and devotion, they have often been silenced within the dominant epic frameworks. Their stories exemplify the cultural double-bind of Indian womanhood: glorified as ideals of purity and sacrifice. Herein lies the feminist urgency of retelling, a process that retrieves silenced voices and re-inscribes them as active agents in the epic imagination.

Equally crucial are the male *dharma*-bearers, Rama and Krishna. Rama embodies a *dharma* caught between personal ties and royal duty; Krishna reframes duty itself in cosmic terms, reminding humanity that *dharma* must constantly be redefined in shifting contexts. Rather than treating them as patriarchal oppressors, modern scholarship has begun to explore their role as ethical paradigms whose actions must be read within the context of cultural, political, and temporal pressures.

Modern feminist retellings reclaim these silenced voices. Writers such as Volga (*The Liberation of Sita*), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (*The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Palace of Illusions*), and Pratibha Ray (*Yajnaseni*) reconfigure Sita and Draupadi as narrators of their own lives.

These works unsettle epic fixities, presenting women not as passive sufferers but as agents of defiance and dignity.

Yet, a visible research gap remains. Comparative studies of Sita and Draupadi are scarce, and even fewer are attempts to place them in dialogue while simultaneously highlighting Rama and Krishna in a balanced, affirmative light. This paper, thus, situates itself at the intersection of feminist literary criticism, myth criticism, postcolonial feminism, and intertextuality. It argues that modern retellings reclaim women's voices while humanising male figures such as Rama and Krishna, thereby creating a nuanced discourse in which myth, gender, and ethics intersect.

Theoretical Framework

The study of Sita and Draupadi across classical epics and contemporary retellings necessitates an interdisciplinary theoretical approach, as their representations intersect questions of gender, myth, narrative form, and cultural authority. Accordingly, this paper draws upon feminist literary theory, myth criticism, postcolonial feminism, narratology, and intertextuality to revisit the epics as both culturally sacred and politically contested texts.

At the core of this study lies feminist literary criticism, particularly Elaine Showalter's concept of gynocriticism, which foregrounds women's writing and women-centred narratives as autonomous sites of meaning. In texts such as Ray's *Yajnaseni* and Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi emerges not as a figure spoken about but as a self-narrating subject. Similarly, Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* enables Sita to articulate a voice long muted within patriarchal epic discourse.

Simone de Beauvoir's proposition that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (*The Second Sex*) illuminates how both figures are shaped by patriarchal expectations of chastity, sacrifice, and devotion, even as feminist retellings attempt to disrupt these constructions. Further, Carol Hanisch's formulation that "the personal is political" frames episodes such as Draupadi's humiliation in the Kuru Sabha and Sita's exile as systemic manifestations of patriarchal power rather than isolated personal tragedies.

Myth criticism situates these feminist voices within the archetypal structures of epic literature. Drawing on Northrop Frye's theory of archetypes, Sita may be read as an earth-bound figure of endurance and regeneration, while Draupadi embodies the fiery archetype of protest and disruption. While these archetypes have traditionally reinforced idealized models of Indian womanhood, contemporary retellings resist their fixity, recasting them as sites of agency rather than passive symbolism.

Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist framework further reveals the binary oppositions governing epic narratives—*dharma/adharma*, purity/impurity, speech/silence. Episodes such as Sita's *agni-pariksha* and Draupadi's disrobing dramatize these binaries, exposing the instability of *dharma* when patriarchal authority silences women. Feminist retellings do not merely invert these binaries but interrogate them, revealing myth as a contested moral space rather than a stable ethical code.

Postcolonial feminist theory offers a crucial lens for examining the double marginalization of epic women—silenced by patriarchal structures and mediated by dominant historiographies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" resonates powerfully with Sita and Draupadi, whose voices in the original epics remain framed and constrained by male narrators. Contemporary women writers reimagine these figures as speaking subjects rather than spoken objects. Volga forges a collective female consciousness through Sita's encounters with marginalized mythic women; Divakaruni reclaims the Ramayana as a *Sitayan*; Ray structures *Yajnaseni* as Draupadi's epistolary address to Krishna. In these retellings, the subaltern not only speaks but reshapes cultural memory, transforming myth into a site of resistance and reclamation.

Narratology and intertextuality together illuminate how feminist retellings restructure epic authority. Gérard Genette's concepts of focalization and analepsis are central to understanding texts like *Yajnaseni*, in which Draupadi recounts her life retrospectively, shifting the narrative focus from dynastic conflict to female interiority. Similarly, Divakaruni's use of first-person narration dismantles the omniscient male voice of epic tradition.

Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality further clarifies how these narratives engage dialogically with their epic sources. Rather than rejecting Valmiki or Vyasa, modern retellings converse with them—layering memory, revision, and feminist consciousness. Myth thus emerges not as a static inheritance but as a living, polyphonic tradition continually reshaped by women's voices.

Together, these theoretical frameworks enable a nuanced reading of Sita and Draupadi as complex, speaking subjects embedded within yet resisting patriarchal epic traditions. By integrating feminist criticism, myth theory, postcolonial thought, narratology, and intertextuality, this study foregrounds how contemporary retellings reclaim women's voices while retaining Rama and Krishna as ethically significant bearers of *dharma*.

Archetypes in the Original Epics

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, beyond being tales of kings and wars, construct archetypes that continue to shape Indian cultural imagination. At their centre stand Sita and Draupadi—women whose suffering and resilience remain tied to the dharmic dilemmas of Rama and Krishna. To return to the original texts before exploring feminist retellings is to acknowledge the foundations upon which reinterpretations are usually built.

Sita in Valmiki's *Ramayana*

Valmiki presents Sita as the epitome of devotion and endurance, "not born of the womb, but sprung from the earth," symbolising purity and divine origin. Rama himself declares: "Nothing is dearer to me than Sita, who shall walk with me in *dharma* as my equal" ("Ayodhya Kanda"). Yet her life is marked by trials, her trial by fire and later exile during pregnancy dramatize the paradox of *dharma,* where public duty overrides personal love. Rama's choices, though often read as harsh, reflect the king's burden of raj *dharma*. Sita's quiet dignity, culminating in her return to Mother Earth, makes her an archetype of womanhood: wronged yet unbroken.

Draupadi in Vyasa's *Mahabharata*

If Sita embodies endurance, Draupadi embodies defiance. Born of fire during Drupada's *yajna*, she is the flame of destiny itself. Her marriage to five husbands makes her both an anomaly and a unifier,

yet her humiliation in the Kuru Sabha defines her destiny. Dragged and nearly disrobed, she demands: "Whom did you lose first, O King—yourself or me?" (Vyasa). This question challenges the very foundations of *dharma*. Krishna's intervention, ensuring her garments remain endless, marks her as both a victim of *adharma* and a catalyst of divine justice. Draupadi thus becomes the fiery archetype of protest against patriarchal silence.

Positive Framing of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna

Both Rama and Krishna, though often critiqued and misrepresented/misinterpreted in the modern discourse, retain their stature as *dharma*-bearers. Rama's choices, while seemingly cruel, reflect the weight of a king's duty over a husband's love. His life dramatizes the tension between individual emotion and collective responsibility, offering a nuanced model of moral complexity rather than patriarchal tyranny. Krishna, by contrast, embodies relational *dharma*. His friendship with Draupadi is a counterpoint to the silence of elders like Bhishma and Drona. Unlike the distant gods of mythology, Krishna's intervention in Draupadi's crisis affirms his role as an intimate protector and saviour, ensuring that *adharma* does not triumph.

Together, these figures create archetypal constellations: Sita as soil, Draupadi as flame; Rama as the burden of duty, Krishna as the freedom of divine play. Their narratives embody binaries—silence and speech, endurance and resistance—that continue to structure Indian gendered imagination. The epics, therefore, serve not only as sacred texts but also as contested spaces, where reverence and rupture coexist.

Re-visioning Sita in Contemporary Texts

If Valmiki's *Ramayana* situates Sita primarily in silence, sacrifice, and chastity, modern retellings by Volga and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni seek to restore her agency, giving her a voice that challenges patriarchal expectations while still preserving Rama's dignity. Both *The Liberation of Sita* and *The Forest of Enchantments* are not mere retellings but narrative revolutions, as they shift the axis of interpretation from the idealized image of the submissive wife to the resilient, self-aware woman who negotiates her suffering with dignity and wisdom. In these narratives, Sita ceases to be the woman

defined by her trials of fire and exile; instead, she becomes a seeker of truth, a repository of feminine strength, and a teacher of liberation.

Sisterhood, Silence, and the Making of a Liberated Sita (*The Liberation of Sita*)

Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* reimagines Sita's exile not as a tale of victimhood but as a spiritual odyssey towards self-realization. Each encounter Sita has—with Ahalya, Renuka, Urmila, and Surpanakha—becomes a lesson in womanhood, solidarity, and resistance against patriarchal structures. Ahalya teaches her resilience in the face of ostracization; Renuka reveals the cost of unquestioned obedience; Urmila embodies invisible sacrifice, having given up her conjugal life for Lakshman's *dharma,* while Surpanakha reframes desire as power rather than sin.

Together, these women represent what Elaine Showalter calls a "gynocritical tradition," where women's experiences generate their own system of values and knowledge. Through them, Sita evolves from a passive wife in the patriarchal epic into an agent of liberation.

Her refusal to return to Ayodhya is the culmination of this journey: "No kingdom can tempt me; no throne can hold me; I return to the womb that bore me" (Volga 132). Yet she paradoxically becomes Rama's eternal talisman: "You will carry me always, not as your wife but as your protective charm" (134). Here, Sita asserts her dignity while refusing patriarchal reins, becoming both absent and eternal. This redefinition repositions her as both absent and eternal, a presence that guards Rama beyond conjugal duty.

Simone de Beauvoir's words resonate here: *"*One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman*"* (*The Second Sex*). Sita "becomes" not the ideal wife shaped by male *dharma,* but a woman shaped by her own choices and solidarities.

***Sitayan*: The Self-Narrating Voice of Resistance (*The Forest of Enchantments*)**

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* radicalizes the tradition further by allowing Sita to narrate her own life in what she terms the *Sitayan*. In doing so, the text performs what Julia Kristeva describes as an act of intertextuality: the layering of myths to create new meanings that resist canonical silencing. Divakaruni gives Sita words of rebellion against patriarchal memory:

*"*Do not call it the *Ramayana*. Call it the *Sitayan*, for it is my story too*"* (Divakaruni 5). This assertion is revolutionary, for it re-centres a female voice in an epic long dominated by male narrators.

Sita rejects Ayodhya at the end, choosing to return to her mother Earth: *"*I cannot return to a kingdom that doubted me; my body belongs to the Earth, my spirit to truth*"* (341). Her act is both dignified and defiant, demonstrating what Carol Hanisch meant when she said, *"The personal is political."* By asserting that her suffering is not merely private but emblematic of women's subjugation under patriarchal scrutiny, Sita becomes a political figure of resistance.

Divakaruni also complicates Rama's role. Though he enforces patriarchal duty, he is portrayed as a lonely and grieving figure: *"*The throne was his, but his heart was empty; it beat only for the wife he had lost*"* (299). This sympathetic rendering resists a simplistic feminist critique by showing patriarchy as a system that wounds men as much as women. Rama is caught between *Raj Dharma* and personal love, his solitude symbolising the cost of inflexible duty.

Even in her maternal role, Sita asserts equality: Luv and Kush embody the love of both parents, not privileging one over the other. In this sense, Divakaruni dismantles the binary of dutiful wife versus wronged woman, portraying Sita as lover, mother, rebel, and sage, simultaneously.

From Fire to Earth: Sita's Journey from Subjugation to Sovereignty

Both Volga and Divakaruni craft Sita's "second birth," where she is no longer confined to patriarchal scripts of fidelity and chastity. Instead, she emerges as a philosopher of dignity, solidarity, and spiritual freedom. Her refusals—whether to return to Ayodhya or to submit to male judgment—are not mere acts of rebellion but affirmations of selfhood.

Gayatri Spivak's concern with the silenced subaltern becomes particularly relevant here: "The subaltern cannot speak*"* unless given a narrative agency. These retellings allow Sita to finally speak, and in doing so, they transform her from a silenced epic heroine into a torchbearer of feminist consciousness.

By becoming both Rama's protective charm and the self-narrator of the *Sitayan*, Sita transcends her epic confines. She redefines womanhood not as passive endurance but as active sovereignty—choosing solidarity over silence, Earth over throne, and selfhood over submission.

Re-visioning Draupadi in Contemporary Texts

If Sita is the archetype of endurance, Draupadi is fire incarnate—born of flames, bound by polygamy, humiliated in the Kuru Sabha, yet unbroken in spirit. Contemporary writers such as Pratibha Ray and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reclaim her voice, making her not only the queen of Indraprastha but also the epic's most complex heroine.

Fire and Epistles: Draupadi in *Yajnaseni*

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* gives Draupadi her own voice through an epistolary form addressed to Krishna from her final moments, turning the "fire-born" heroine into a reflective narrator of her own destiny. In this intimate mode, Draupadi confesses her anguish over polygamy, her inner conflicts about *dharma,* and her suppressed desires. She admits: *"*All events of my life were similarly dramatic. From that day till the last instant of my life, I would have to appear in five roles*"* (Ray 63). Through this candid admission, Draupadi emerges not as a silent archetype but as a woman caught between multiple roles that fracture her sense of self.

One of the most searing episodes in *Yajnaseni* is her humiliation in the Kuru *Sabha*. When Yudhishthir stakes and loses her in the game of dice, Draupadi becomes an object of male barter. As she is dragged into the assembly and disrobed, she cries out in anguish: *"*Whom should I call my lord? The one who gambled me away, or the ones who stood mute?*"* Here, Krishna's intervention transforms the scene into a cosmic statement of *dharma.* Her sari becomes endless, and her dignity remains intact, proving that divine justice will not allow a woman's honour to be fully consumed by *adharma*. Northrop Frye's myth criticism helps us read this as a moment where archetypes reassert themselves—Draupadi as the eternal feminine whose violation threatens cosmic order, and Krishna as the saviour who restores it.

Ray also touches Draupadi's hidden link with Karna—her regret at mocking him during her *svayamvara,* her confession of forbidden longing. This shadow desire renders her all the more human, revealing a woman of contradictions: loyal yet desirous, humiliated yet dignified. This acknowledgement situates Draupadi in the realm of forbidden desire, echoing Julia Kristeva's theory of the *abject*, where desire becomes both alluring and taboo, silently shaping identity.At the heart of her trials is her *sakha*, Krishna—the only man who never abandons or judges her. He consoles her, protects her dignity, and validates her voice when others suppress it. In him, Draupadi finds companionship that transcends patriarchy.

Palaces and Passions: Draupadi in *The Palace of Illusions*

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* also reimagines Draupadi through a first-person perspective, narrating her life from her fiery birth to her final journey. The novel gives Draupadi a deeply emotional and subjective voice, making her not only the queen of Indraprastha but also a woman of desire, doubt, and defiance.

The humiliation in the Kuru Sabha remains one of the most powerful episodes. Draupadi describes the terror of being dragged by her hair, her husbands rendered voiceless, and her body reduced to a wager. Yet it is Krishna's intervention that defines the moment. As her garments become infinite, she realizes that while men may fail her, her *sakha* will not. Divakaruni describes Draupadi's gratitude with tenderness: Krishna becomes her eternal protector, reminding readers that *dharma* is upheld not through silence but through action that defends the vulnerable.

Divakaruni also foregrounds Draupadi's forbidden attraction to Karna, making it more explicit than Ray. She confesses: *"*More than once I thought, if only he had been allowed to string the bow that day, how different my life might have been.*"* This portrayal reframes Draupadi not merely as a catalyst of war but as a woman of unfulfilled desire, reminding readers that her emotional landscape is as complex as her political one. Here, Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine* becomes relevant: Draupadi's voice inscribes silenced female desire back into the cultural narrative.

Krishna again emerges as her saviour and confidant. He guides her perception of honour and destiny, reminding her that her humiliation is not her shame but society's. He, thus, stands as a rare male archetype who upholds *dharma* without suppressing women's agency, aligning friendship with cosmic justice.

Desire, *Dharma*, and the Feminine Voice

Together, *Yajnaseni* and *The Palace of Illusions* reposition Draupadi as a woman of contradictions—vulnerable yet indomitable, silenced yet eloquent, desiring yet dutiful. Both retellings emphasize the disrobing scene as the crucible of her life, a moment where *dharma* and *adharma* clash most violently, and Krishna becomes her saviour.

In Frye's terms, Draupadi evolves into an archetype that cannot be contained by a single narrative; in Cixous's vision, her voice breaks through the silences of patriarchal myth; and in Kristeva's framework, her desire for Karna unsettles the binaries of purity and impurity. Ultimately, she is not just a heroine of the past but a torchbearer of timeless feminine resilience, with Krishna by her side as an eternal friend and guide.

Comparative Analysis of Sita and Draupadi

Though situated in different epics, Sita and Draupadi are bound by shared experiences of public humiliation and moral trial, yet they respond through sharply contrasting modes of agency. While Sita embodies a dignified ethics of withdrawal and restraint, Draupadi articulates justice through speech, confrontation, and demand. Their comparison thus reveals not a hierarchy of resistance but a spectrum of feminist possibility within epic tradition.

Shared Experiences of Humiliation and Endurance

Public humiliation becomes the crucible of both women's lives. Sita's *agni-pariksha* subjects her chastity to public scrutiny, transforming her body into a site where patriarchal honour is tested. Though she emerges unscathed, the ordeal exposes the violence embedded within *Raj Dharma*, where

a woman's virtue is subordinated to public opinion. Her subsequent exile during pregnancy intensifies this injustice, revealing how female suffering is normalized under the guise of moral order.

Draupadi's humiliation in the Kuru *Sabha* is more overtly violent. Staked and lost by Yudhishthir, she is dragged before an assembly of elders sworn to uphold *dharma*. Her unanswered question — "Whom did you lose first, yourself or me?"—becomes a devastating ethical indictment. Unlike Sita's trial, which demands silent endurance, Draupadi's ordeal forces *dharma* to answer publicly for its own collapse.

Contrasts: Silence and Defiance

The crucial distinction between Sita and Draupadi lies not in the degree of their suffering but in their chosen responses. Sita's resistance is articulated through silence and withdrawal. In *The Forest of Enchantments*, her refusal to return to Ayodhya is not submission but a deliberate ethical choice—a rejection of a social order that demands perpetual proof of female purity. Her return to the Earth becomes a final assertion of autonomy, transforming silence into sovereignty.

Draupadi, by contrast, resists through speech and confrontation. She refuses to internalize humiliation and instead demands accountability from those who wrong her. In both *Yajnaseni* and *The Palace of Illusions*, her voice exposes the hypocrisy of patriarchal *dharma*, making protest itself a moral act. Where Sita withdraws from a corrupt system, Draupadi forces that system to confront its own failure.

The Role of Relationships

Their resilience is shaped by relational frameworks that enable, rather than confine, their agency. Sita's liberation in Volga's retelling emerges through sisterhood—her encounters with Ahalya, Renuka, Urmila, and Surpanakha create a feminist lineage of shared wisdom. These women teach her that dignity lies not in obedience but in choice, allowing Sita to reconceptualize freedom beyond marital duty.

Draupadi's sustaining relationship, by contrast, is her friendship with Krishna. As *sakha*, he listens, intervenes, and validates her pain when even her husband's remains silent. His defence of her

dignity affirms that justice requires action, not passive reverence. Through Krishna, Draupadi's voice gains ethical legitimacy, transforming personal violation into cosmic rupture.

Modern Implications

Contemporary feminist retellings do not position Sita and Draupadi as oppositional figures but as complementary articulations of womanhood. Sita reclaims silence as ethical refusal, while Draupadi reclaims speech as moral demand. Together, they dismantle the notion of a singular feminine ideal within Indian mythology, offering instead a plural model of agency that accommodates endurance and rebellion, spirituality and desire.

Their revisions demonstrate that epic womanhood is not static but dialogic, continually reshaped by cultural memory and feminist imagination. Through them, myth becomes not a site of confinement but a space of negotiation, where tradition and resistance coexist.

Reclaiming Rama and Krishna in a Feminist Lens

While feminist retellings foreground women's silenced voices, a nuanced reading also requires re-examining the representations of Rama and Krishna. Rather than positioning them solely as patriarchal enforcers, contemporary reinterpretations reveal their complex negotiation with *dharma*—sometimes complicit, sometimes corrective—within deeply gendered social orders.

Lord Rama: The Cost of *Rajdharma*

Rama's portrayal in the *Ramayana* has long provoked ethical debate, particularly in relation to the *agni-pariksha* and Sita's later exile. A feminist reading does not absolve these acts but situates them within the tension between *raj dharma* (royal duty) and *sva-dharma* (personal obligation). Rama's declaration — "Nothing is dearer to me than Sita, who shall walk with me in *dharma* as my equal" ("Ayodhya Kanda") establishes her as a moral partner rather than a subordinate, even as his subsequent actions expose the limits of ethical agency within patriarchal kingship.

Contemporary retellings emphasize the cost of this ethical rigidity. In *The Liberation of Sita* and *The Forest of Enchantments*, Rama emerges as a solitary figure whose adherence to public duty results in profound personal loss. Sita's refusal to return to Ayodhya reframes this loss not as

abandonment but as the inevitable consequence of a social order that privileges reputation over justice. Rama thus appears less as a tyrant than as a tragic bearer of a flawed moral system.

Lord Krishna: *Sakha*, Guide, Protector

If Rama embodies the burden of duty, Krishna represents relational *dharma* grounded in intervention and empathy. His role in the *Mahabharata* consistently aligns moral authority with action, most notably in his intervention during Draupadi's disrobing. By preserving her dignity when institutional *dharma* collapses, Krishna exemplifies the *Bhagavad Gita's* assertion that divine presence manifests when justice fails.

In *Yajnaseni* and *The Palace of Illusions*, Krishna's significance extends beyond miraculous rescue. As Draupadi's *sakha*, he listens, counsels, and legitimizes her anger and desire—forms of female expression otherwise suppressed within patriarchal frameworks. His companionship affirms that ethical authority need not be hierarchical, and that friendship itself can function as a mode of feminist support.

Feminist Reclamation

Feminist reinterpretations of Rama and Krishna do not seek exoneration but re-contextualization. Rama's solitude exposes the emotional toll of rigid moral codes, while Krishna's intimacy models an alternative masculinity rooted in empathy and ethical responsiveness. Together, they illustrate divergent modes of engaging with patriarchal structures—one constrained by institutional duty, the other capable of disrupting injustice through relational intervention.

Rama's Solitude and Krishna's Companionship: Complementary Archetypes

Read together, Rama and Krishna articulate complementary masculine archetypes within the epic tradition. Rama embodies the tragic solitude of moral absolutism, where adherence to law demands personal sacrifice. Krishna, by contrast, represents ethical flexibility, where justice is preserved through presence, dialogue, and action. Feminist retellings do not dismantle their legacies but recalibrate them, allowing male figures to coexist with women's agency rather than eclipse it.

For Sita and Draupadi, these masculine figures neither define nor diminish their identities. Sita asserts dignity through withdrawal; Draupadi claims justice through speech. In both cases, *dharma* is reimagined not as domination but as relational balance.

Genre and Narrative Transformation

The transformation of Sita and Draupadi from epic heroines to feminist subjects is not merely thematic but fundamentally shaped by shifts in genre and narrative form. As the epics move from oral, collective traditions to contemporary written retellings, authority over storytelling is redistributed—allowing women to reclaim narrative control over lives previously mediated by male voices.

Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* employs the epistolary mode to collapse distance between narrator and reader, granting Draupadi interpretive authority over her own life. Writing to Krishna from her final moments, Draupadi reframes epic events retrospectively, shifting attention from dynastic conflict to female interiority. The letter becomes both confession and critique, transforming personal memory into ethical testimony.

Volga's *The Liberation of Sita* adopts a fragmentary encounter structure, replacing linear epic progression with episodic feminist pedagogy. Each meeting with a marginalized woman interrupts the epic's teleology, allowing Sita's consciousness to evolve through collective female experience rather than marital destiny.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* and *The Palace of Illusions* function as counter-epic narratives by displacing the omniscient male voice with first-person female focalization. By allowing Sita and Draupadi to narrate their own lives, these texts challenge the epistemic authority of the original epics and foreground women's emotional, ethical, and political subjectivity. This narrative shift does not reject the epic tradition but reorients it. The epics are no longer sites where women are judged, remembered, or idealized by others; they become spaces where women interpret themselves.

Narratological and intertextual strategies together reveal genre as a feminist intervention rather than a neutral vessel. Techniques such as retrospective narration, internal focalization, and textual dialogue with epic sources reconfigure authority, allowing women to inhabit myth without being confined by it. In this sense, feminist retellings do not merely retell stories—they restructure the conditions under which meaning is produced.

Myth thus emerges not as static inheritance but as a living discourse, continually reshaped by narrative form and cultural need. Through shifts in genre—from oral epic to epistolary confession, fragmentary encounter, and counter-epic autobiography—Sita and Draupadi are reconstituted as narrative subjects rather than symbolic functions. Genre becomes the mechanism through which feminist consciousness enters myth, ensuring that these figures continue to speak across historical, cultural, and ideological boundaries.

Conclusion

Feminist retellings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* function as acts of cultural reclamation that reconfigure epic memory itself. By restoring narrative authority to Sita and Draupadi, contemporary writers do not merely recover silenced voices but also transform the ethical centre of the epics, repositioning women as agents of meaning rather than mere bearers of moral endurance.

Notably, these retellings do not displace male figures to elevate female agency. Rama and Krishna remain integral to the moral architecture of the epics, though reimagined with greater ethical complexity. Rama emerges as a figure shaped—and constrained—by the burdens of raj *dharma*, while Krishna embodies an ethics of relational justice grounded in intervention, friendship, and moral responsiveness. Together, they underscore that *dharma* is neither inflexible law nor abstract ideal, but a lived, relational practice.

Sita and Draupadi ultimately emerge as complementary articulations of feminine agency within epic tradition. Sita transforms withdrawal into ethical refusal, asserting dignity through choice rather than compliance. Draupadi, by contrast, claims justice through speech, confrontation, and

moral insistence. Together, they dismantle the notion of a singular ideal of womanhood, offering instead a plural, dynamic model that accommodates endurance and rebellion, silence and protest.

The enduring power of these retellings lies equally in their formal innovation. Through epistolary narration, counter-epic focalization, and fragmentary feminist encounters, genre becomes a site of resistance where authority is redistributed and meaning renegotiated. Myth thus remains a living discourse—capable of responding to changing ethical, cultural, and gendered realities.

Future scholarship may extend these feminist re-visions into regional literatures, performance traditions, cinema, and digital storytelling, where Sita and Draupadi continue to acquire new cultural afterlives. Such engagements will further demonstrate that epic traditions endure not through preservation alone, but through reinterpretation, dialogue, and ethical renewal.

In reclaiming Sita and Draupadi, feminist retellings do not dismantle the epic tradition; they reveal its unfinished ethical possibilities, ensuring that the voices at its margins remain central to its future.

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Tracing the Transition of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* from Text to OTT

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Abstract: Adaptations, whether in the form of film or on OTT platforms, visually reflect the world of a literary masterpiece and provide a distinctive form of infotainment. By employing distinctive set design, costumes, cinematography, and other visual elements, they introduce new interpretations of classic narratives. OTT platforms are more effective in exploring and presenting long and complex narratives than mainstream cinema, which is obligated to present the story within a specific time frame. In 2020, Mira Nair adapted such a giant and groundbreaking novel, *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth, into a Netflix drama series of the same name. Published in 1993, this nearly 1400-page novel, densely populated with characters, has garnered numerous accolades. Several transformations have occurred during the process of transferring it from the pages to the screen. This paper is an endeavour to deeply examine those transformations and address questions such as: To what extent is fidelity essential? In the series, what are the inclusions and exclusions? Do these additions and deletions have any socio-cultural, psychological, gender-centric, historical, economic, or technical implications? Does the series negatively impact the novel it adapts, or does it infuse it with fresh energy? Furthermore, by using the "compare and contrast" method, it will evaluate the use of literary tools in the novel and cinematic devices in the series in accordance with the theories propounded by George Bluestone, Michael Klein, and Gillian Parker.

Keywords: A Suitable Boy; Adaptation; George Bluestone; Mira Nair; Vikram Seth

The contemporary world is a world of OTT platforms. Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hotstar and many more such platforms are widely popular. The adaptation of a novel into a screenplay for a film or series has become a distinct genre in the twentieth century. Long, complex narratives are often

adapted into series because mainstream cinema is obligated to present the story within a specific time frame of a few hours. Adaptations, whether in film or series form, visually reflect the world of a literary masterpiece and provide a distinctive form of infotainment. By employing distinctive set design, costumes, cinematography, and other visual elements, they introduce new interpretations of classic narratives. In 2020, Mira Nair adapted Vikram Seth's groundbreaking novel *A Suitable Boy* into a Netflix drama series of the same name. It was the first BBC period drama series to feature a non-white cast. It first aired on BBC One in the United Kingdom from July 26 to August 24, 2020 and was subsequently released worldwide on Netflix. Published in 1993, Vikram Seth's nearly 1400-page novel, densely populated with characters, has garnered numerous accolades. Several transformations have occurred during the process of transferring it from the pages to the screen. The process of converting linguistic signals into visual signs always entails some form of compression. Some characters may be removed while others may be modified. This paper attempts to examine those transformations and, using the "compare and contrast" method, evaluates the use of literary tools in the novel and cinematic devices in the series in accordance with the theories of various theorists.

Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is a grand narrative that weaves together the lives of four notable families—The Mehras, The Kapoors, The Khans, and The Chatterjis—set in post-independence India during the 1950s, amidst a landscape of political and social turmoil, marked by religious strife and land reform. Besides portraying Rupa Mehra's search for a suitable boy for her daughter Lata, this masterpiece serves as a political fable that portrays the emerging democracy, vote-bank politics, and communalism that were beginning to undermine the nation's essence. The OTT adaptation of the novel *A Suitable Boy* captures the essence of the narrative and the ethos of post-independence India quite faithfully. The star-studded cast of the series presents the finest actors. Tanya Maniktala portrays Lata Mehra. Ishaan Khattar plays Mann Kapoor, Danesh Razvi plays Kabir Durrani, and Tabu plays Saeeda Bai. Shahana Goswami plays Meenakshi Mehra. Rasika Dugal plays

Savita Kapoor, and Mahira Kakkar plays Rupa Mehra. Ram Kapoor plays Mahesh Kapoor, and Namit Das plays Haresh Khanna.

Bringing a novel to celluloid is not an easy task. The main challenge lies in maintaining its fidelity and the connection between novel and film encompasses the fundamental conundrum of words and images that are irreducible and untranslatable to one another. Cinema operates within its own distinct realm, characterised by unique aspects of economics, authorship, production, distribution, and reception; certain issues present in the novel are muted while others take centre stage. This paper explores the intricacies of adapting Seth's novel from this perspective.

This cynicism regarding the untranslatability of words and images originates from the Saussurean concept of the arbitrary link between the signifier and the signified. There are, however, strong formal, generic, stylistic, narrative, cultural, and historical ties between the two ways of representing things. Several poststructuralist critics have written on this peculiar connection between words and pictures. Discussing the connection between text and visuals in his book *Illustration,* the Yale critic J. Hillis Miller shares his insights:

> A picture and a text juxtaposed will always have different meanings or logoi. They will conflict irreconcilably with one another, since they are different signs... Neither the meaning of a picture nor the meaning of a sentence is by any means translatable. The picture speaks for itself. The sentence means itself. The two can never meet, not even at some vanishing-point where the sun has set. (Miller 95)

There are four main schools of thought on book-to-film adaptation, namely: (1) constructivism, (2) adaptation scepticism, (3) structuralism, and (4) cognitive equivalency. Constructivists believe that adapting a novel into a series or a film is not merely a transfer of the work, but an act of recreation, because many changes are made to suit the visual medium. Like an "architect," the filmmaker or director blends elements from the novel, but the products that emerge are a different creation with a unique cinematic setting. Adaptation Scepticism theory views films as autonomous, evolving productions that offer unique experiences, rather than mere imitations of the original material.

Sceptics doubt that a film that closely mimics its source is better. They disagree that literature is superior to films. Change is encouraged, as each new medium requires adjustments. They acknowledge the filmmaker's role in adapting the story for the medium. They believe films and OTT series are different from the original. It's an innovative story with its own strengths and implications, not merely a different take on the same subject. According to a structuralist view of film adaptation, adaptations convey meaning through universal structures and standards, like language, rather than simply copying original material. Using semiotics, structuralism examines how signals create meaning in codes. The cognitive equivalence method, based on translation studies, suggests that film adaptations should try to provide audiences with a similar experience to the original source material. This method emphasises overall meaning and emotional depth over word-for-word translation. Cognitive equivalence in adaptation states that a movie should make viewers feel and think the same way, regardless of alterations to the story or visuals to fit the new medium and environment.

Mira Nair's primary approach in Series *A Suitable Boy* is Adaptation Scepticism. As this approach acknowledges that a literary work cannot be fully or faithfully translated into another medium, like film or television, Mira has skillfully engaged in reinterpretation, reduction, and reconfiguration to suit the visual medium. Vikram Seth's narrative unfolds across 1,349 pages — a grand tale brimming with a multitude of characters and complex storylines, but Mira Nair's series takes a different approach by condensing the narrative into 6 episodes, reordering the events, removing various subplots, and either condensing or omitting certain characters. This viewpoint highlights the limits of adaptation. Nair delves into themes such as post-Partition identity, love, religion, and politics, yet she navigates them through a cinematic rather than a literary lens. George Bluestone, the pioneer of adaptation studies, is a major supporter of this idea. He believed that film and literature are very different because one is linguistic and the other is visual. As Bluestone claimed, "changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium (05)." For instance, the internal substance of the mind, like memory, dreams, and imagination, which are such

a big part of literature, can't be fully transmitted into film. Also, literature is about internal thought, character, and the psychological, whereas film is about exterior action, narrative, and the social.

The transfer of characters from book to movie is also not as effective because visuals can't match the force of words. Bluestone says that the narrative form is the only thing that can be transmitted between these two media. In sum, Bluestone concludes:

> What happens, therefore, when the filmmaker undertakes the adaptation of a novel, given the inevitable mutation, is that he does not convert the novel at all. What he adapts is a kind of paraphrase of the novel—the novel viewed as raw material. He looks not to the organic novel, whose language is inseparable from its theme, but to characters and incidents which have somehow detached themselves from language and, like heroes of folk legends, have achieved a mythic life of their own. (62)

Nair's work also contains constructivist elements. Constructivists emphasise that both creators and audience play a part in constructing meaning. The OTT version highlights this with its distinct visual and cultural elements, such as costumes, language, music, and architecture, which help viewers in "constructing" meaning within an Indian socio-historical context. Mira Nair's casting highlights innovative viewpoints as she chose a primarily Indian cast speaking Indian English, which has encountered some criticism for its unconventional accents. This decision encourages the audience to delve into their personal understandings of identity, contemporary culture, and heritage.

Narratives change drastically when they are exported from books to films. Roland Barthes' narrative theory, notably his ideas about functions and codes, explains this distinctly. In his book *S/Z*, he has categorized the narrative structure into two parts: cardinal functions (hinge points) and catalysers (less important acts). Cardinal Functions are the most important parts of a story that change its course. When it comes to adaptation, changing or taking away cardinal functions can make the plot very different from the book it is based on. McFarlane recounts

Overall, then, there is a close parallel between the cardinal functions which carry the action in the novel and those in the film. Sometimes, as indicated, these appear in different orders in the

two…. The social and affective discrepancies between the two texts will generally be located at other levels of the text, sometimes at the level of the catalyzers which surround the cardinal functions…but more significantly at the level of enunciation, through the exercise of those strategies peculiar to the medium in question. (178)

Barthes found five narrative codes—hermeneutic, proairetic, symbolic, semantic, and cultural—that affect the meaning and structure of a story. Vikram Seth employs all five of Roland Barthes's narrative codes in *A Suitable Boy*. The novel's broad sweep and length permit a detailed examination of various codes, with some more pronounced or quietly integrated than others, depending on the particular narrative context. Seth uses Semantic code to add deeper meanings to things. For instance, the title of the book, *A Suitable Boy*, has meaning in and of itself, prompting readers to consider the social norms and pressures surrounding marriage in post-independence India. The symbolic code appears in repeated images, objects, or characters that stand for bigger concepts or themes. For example, the monsoon season might symbolise both destruction and fresh beginnings, just as the changes in society and politics at the time did. The story of the novel is built around a succession of events and acts, as searching for a suitable boy, political rallies, and personal fights, thus carrying proairetic codes. The quest for a suitable boy, the novel's main mystery, is a classic example of the hermeneutic code. This code pulls the reader in and makes them want to find out more about the characters and their interactions.

Mira Nair's BBC and Netflix drama preserves all these codes. Hermeneutic code is created by the question: Who will Lata Mehra marry? This mystery appears in all six episodes. The Maan Kapoor-Saeda Bai subplot tackles hermeneutic concerns of desire, loyalty, and social acceptance. The series' proairetic code is Lata's increasing love for Kabir, Maan's obsessive passion for Saeeda Bai, and Firoz's stabbing. These elements add excitement and clarify socio-political concerns by providing momentum and motivation. Classical music, religious symbols, and traditional attire chosen by Mira Nair have symbolic meanings and thus represent semantic codes. Saeeda Bai's constant use of the "*ghungroo*" (anklet bells) demonstrates her prostitution, women's limitations, and

desire's commercialisation. The garden where Lata and Kabir first meet symbolises perilous beauty, forbidden love, and rebellious idealism. The series uses opposites like tradition and modernity, Hindu and Muslim, duty and desire, and urban and rural to create a symbolic code. Lata's battle with arranged marriage and romantic autonomy shows the cultural divide between tradition and modernity. Kabir and Firoz represent the Hindu-Muslim conflict and post-partition nationalism. Maan struggles between duty and desire. The socio-economic and cultural transformation of India in the 1950s is evident in both feudal villages and cosmopolitan cities. The cultural code of common knowledge, historical context, and intertextuality underpins Nair's adaptation.

Cardinal functions are effectively preserved and presented in Mira Nair's Netflix series. While the changes can be seen in Catalysers. The Netflix version of A *Suitable Boy* simplifies and, at times, modifies characters because it is hard to turn a long book into a short series. The book portrays Lata as knowledgeable, thoughtful, and eager to learn. Despite her young age, she questions norms, notably arranged marriage. She manages familial and personal demands. Her inner thoughts reveal her hardships and growth. The Series showed Lata as more confident on the outside. Though entertaining, the performance lacks emotional depth. The text mentioned that the main character, Lata, looked dark. The opening few pages' sarcastic comments about her skin colour, including the claim that pink doesn't suit her, grab readers' interest. Her mother fears "black grandchildren." However, Mira Nair's Lata is lighter-skinned than rest of the rest of the cast. She wears a blouse without sleeves. However, Seth's traditional Mrs. Mehra would have certainly disapproved of a revealing top, considered a bit 'too modern" for the 1950s. In the book, there was a contrast between Pran and Savita that was like "Beauty and the Beast." People say that Savita has light complexion and is pretty, while Pran has dark skin and isn't particularly appealing. But the actors who portray the parts don't look like they fit together at all.

Maan is careless and has many emotions that surface in the novel. He is close to Firoz, but homoerotic undertones are subtle and take time to surface. In the series, Ishaan Khatter plays expressive, passionate, and magnetic Maan. His homoerotic tension with Firoz is obvious at a

distance, resulting in a stronger but less nuanced portrayal of their connection. In the book, Maan celebrates Holi with his friend at Pran's house and he drowns a senior professor during Holi. In the series, they celebrate Holi at their father's house, and the state revenue minister and Maan submerge the Home Minister in a fountain to bring him down. It increases rivalry amongst the ministers. The Home Minister is portrayed with greater malice and cunning in the series to amplify the tension. In the book, Maan is present for his mother's last rites, whereas in the series, he is confined to jail. The Home Minister takes on a more nefarious role. In the book, the Home Minister takes the initiative to call the police and instructs them to accompany Maan for his mother's last rites. In the series, the Home Minister stops Maan from getting out of the prison, denying him the chance to bid farewell to his cherished mother.

It is comprehensible that a significant number of characters are not included in the series, as there would have been insufficient time to adequately develop their arc. However, Imtiaz Khan was one character who was unjustly eliminated. In the book, Maan's closest friend Firoz has a twin brother named Imtiaz; however, in the series, Firoz does not have a twin. Another character that stood out for her absence was Maan's older sister, Veena. Veena's son, the extraordinary maths genius Bhaskar, is featured in the series, yet his parents remain unseen. At one point, it seemed Bhaskar was meant to be the son of Praan and Savita in the adaptation, but that turned out not to be the case. Bhaskar looked like a lost child, crammed into the sets.

The Chatterjee lineage is also notably diminished to three siblings. The third brother, Dipankar, and the youngest brother, Tapan, have been severed from the narrative. It was important to highlight because Tapan drew some inspiration from Vikram Seth's life and was truly an endearing character.

Saaeda Bai Bibbo is portrayed as youthful and voluptuous in the book. At a certain point, she successfully entices Maan into sharing a kiss with her, a moment missing from the series. The on-screen Bibbo presents a more mature, robust figure, in contrast to the mischievous portrayal in the

book. Saeeda writes to Maan, imploring him to curtail his rural tour and return to Brahmpur, missing him. None of that happens in the book. She doesn't write him a letter or invite him back in the book.

Varun's short romance with Kalpana and his interview for the Indian Administrative Service occur much earlier than depicted in the novel. The series does not include the sub-plot concerning Meenakshi's second pregnancy and her miscarriage. In the novel, the three potential suitors of Lata— Kabir, Amit, and Haresh — collide while enjoying a cricket match. In the series, they encounter each other outside her brother's residence. In a somewhat dramatic scene, Lata proposes to Haresh that they marry while he is travelling to Calcutta by train. Although it was a refreshing change, it was also overly cliché, as these airport/train station sequences are a common feature in the climax of numerous Hollywood and Bollywood romances. The final minor deviation from Seth's narrative is that the Durrani family is invited to Lata's wedding in the novel; however, Kabir is unable to attend for sentimental reasons. In the series, there is a rather sombre scene in which a wistful Kabir is seen on his bicycle, observing a joyful Lata as she is married off to Haresh.

The tone, style, complexity, and cultural nuance of the language in Vikram Seth's novel *A Suitable Boy* and the language in Mira Nair's Netflix adaptation (2020) are very different. This is mostly because of the distinct requirements and limitations of their mediums: literary fiction vs. visual storytelling. Vikram Seth writes in a very advanced, literary English that includes complex sentence structures, deep inner monologues, and many references to other cultures. The work imitates the style of 19th-century English literature, such as Dickens or Tolstoy, but also incorporates Indian cultural and linguistic elements, including words from Hindi, Urdu, and Sanskrit. The chapter names are written as rhyming couplets, which gives the impression of a musical structure behind the story. Seth's original work is rich in literary elements, including ghazals, classical poetry, and an internal rhythm; "The rose laughs at the activities of the nightingale-/ What they call love is a defect of the mind" (127).

Mira Nair turned the couplets into musical interludes. She deems the ghazals "the soul of the film" since they made a "musical cinematic language" that was important to the tone of the

translation. For instance, one Urdu poem, “Mehfil Barkhast Hui,” was written and commissioned for Saeeda Bai to sing, bringing writing to life through performance. Therefore, despite the fact that Seth’s novel and Mira Nair’s BBC series share a common plot, they differ significantly in numerous respects, a phenomenon that is entirely natural when adapting a narrative for the screen. Both works of art were effective in leaving a lasting impression on readers and the audience.

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Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning and Alteration of Narratives: An Analysis of *The Hate U Give*

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Abstract: Literary adaptations either represent, reimagine, reinterpret, retell or rewrite the original narratives while remaining loyal to the main thematic strand. However, this 're' is often used in conjunction with a myriad of political propaganda to convincingly manipulate the audience's minds. This paper examines how the American cinematic adaptation (2018) of Angie Thomas' novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) politically clones / replicates as well as alters the novel's narratives where scenes are added or subtracted not necessarily with the theory of medium specificity but to manoeuvre the source story with a twist to meet the self-serving interests and thereby leading to the questioning of fidelity principle of the adaptation. Drawing upon the idea of adaptation as "repetition without "replication" (Hutcheon) alongside that of most "rewritings" working with "certain ideologies" (Lefevere) and politics, this paper aims to demonstrate that cinematic adaptation does not merely eulogize the source text; it rather seeks to unravel a deeper political purpose thereby attempting to understand the subject position and politics of the adapter. This, further throws light on how the degrees of variation introduced in the cinematic adaptation end up underrepresenting the theme of racial inequality and police brutality, which is critiqued vigorously in the novel.

Keywords: Alteration, Cloning, Fidelity, Ideology, Politics

The etymology of the term "adaptation" traces back to the Latin word *adaptare*, meaning "to fit." Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines adaptation as "the action or process of changing something, or being changed, to suit a new purpose or situation," which evidently suggests the omission of elements from the original. In the realm of arts, adaptation is defined as a process of transforming a piece of creative work from one form, genre, or medium into another while preserving a recognizable connection with the original. The form here signifies the structure into which a work

is organized (novel, poetry, drama, short film, etc.), genre serves as a type of creative work (tragedy, comedy, romance, thriller, folk, etc.), while the medium acts as the channel of expression (literature, cinema, music, dance, visual arts, etc.). Adaptation is not merely a process of transformation but a creative, learned process in which an adapter must be cognizant of both the source and target formats, understanding the conventions and limitations of each artistic channel.

The terms translation and adaptation appear similar but are distinct in their operational paradigms and aims. Translation is a linguistic process in which the original language, the source language, is converted into another language, the target language. The translator aims to achieve linguistic equivalence by remaining faithful to the original text, thus preserving its meaning; as translation is "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style" (Nida 12). In contrast, the aim of the adapter is not to achieve linguistic equivalence but to reimagine a work so that it fits a different form, genre, or medium. Whereas translation restricts the translator to the vocabulary of the source text, adaptation provides ample room for the adapter to make alterations in language, characters, plot, or setting.

Adaptations can be classified on the basis of form, genre, and medium. Firstly, based on form, adaptations can be divided into intra-form, where the adapted work retains the same form as the original but is created for a different purpose or audience (e.g., the remake of the film *The Little Mermaid* [2023] from the 1989 animated film), and cross-form, where a work is adapted from one form to another (e.g., the *Panchatantra* literary fables adapted into a TV series). Secondly, genre-based adaptations are categorized into same-genre, where the genre remains the same (e.g., a horror storybook adapted into a horror film), and trans-genre, where a genre is adapted into a different one (e.g., a tragedy adapted into a comedy). Thirdly, medium-based adaptations are the most common type and can be further classified as intramedial, where the medium remains the same (e.g., *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, a literary retelling of the *Ramayana*), and

intermedial, where the medium is switched (e.g., the adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* into the Bollywood film *Haider* [2014]).

Moreover, other types of adaptation include cross-cultural, purpose-based, and fidelity-based adaptations. In cross-cultural adaptations, a work of art is transplanted into a different cultural context to make it relatable to an audience other than its original one, for example, adapting the American film *Memento* (2000) into the Bollywood film *Ghajini* (2007). Purpose-based adaptations are created with a specific intention, which may be political, educational, or commercial. Finally, in terms of fidelity-based classification, Geoffrey Wagner, in his book *The Novel and the Cinema* (1975), identified three types: transposition, a close adaptation in which "a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference" (222); commentary, an intermediate adaptation;

> [w]here [the] original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect when there has been a different intention on the part of [the] filmmaker, rather than infidelity or outright violation" (224); and analogy, a loose adaptation that "must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (226).

We all grew up surrounded by adaptations, from our grandparents' bedtime stories to learning and performing poetry in childhood. Before technological developments, narratives remained fluid and were reshaped as they passed from generation to generation. In the pre-literate era, stories were reshaped not to fulfil commercial greed but for communal purposes, with the enterprise aimed at preserving cultural memory. Hence, some scholars consider adaptation an ancient phenomenon, while others argue that it is a product of modern times. In the ancient world, before people knew writing and reading, myths, epics, and folktales were transmitted orally. The Greek epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and the Indian epics, such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, grew from oral tradition to written form. Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides adapted myth into tragedy, while Roman playwrights such as Plautus and Seneca adapted Greek plays for Latin audiences. There were also visual adaptations, in which myths and folktales were represented in sculptures, murals, and pottery. During the medieval period, religious adaptations flourished as

biblical stories were transformed into mystery and morality plays, as well as church art, while secular adaptations included Arthurian and Charlemagne legends. Similarly, Buddhist *Jataka* tales were reworked into religious poetry and performances.

With the Renaissance, Shakespeare adapted myths and tales into plays, while artists such as Michelangelo and Raphael reimagined biblical and mythological narratives in visual art. In the During the Enlightenment period, satirical adaptations appeared, such as Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. In the nineteenth century, Romantic writers such as Byron, Shelley, and Goethe adapted myths and folklore into poetry and drama. With the rise of mass media, cinema became the most important medium for adapting religious epics, which were retold on screen. In the twenty-first-century digital age, adaptations have become more purpose-driven to reach broader audiences, and the addition of artificial intelligence has expanded possibilities, enabling stories to be easily adapted from written text to on-screen art.

The title of the research paper, Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning and Alteration of Narratives: An Analysis of *The Hate U Give*, encapsulates the central argument that adaptation is not merely an innocent act of transformation but a deliberate and political process. At times, the changes made are not simply dictated by the demands of the target medium but serve the wider self-interested purposes of the adapter. The phrase 'Adaptation as an Act of Political Cloning' signifies the replication of the original text into another medium with the infusion of political motives. On the surface, Angie Thomas's novel *The Hate U Give* appears to have been faithfully adapted and cloned, with central themes such as systemic violence and racial prejudice seemingly reproduced accurately. However, a critical analysis reveals that cloning is often shallow and agenda-driven. The second part of the title, 'Alteration of Narratives,' highlights the ideological negotiations undertaken by the adapter. The alterations in characters and plot work against the source narrative, where the original message of the novel is softened or de-radicalized.

The novel *The Hate U Give* (2017) by Angie Thomas is a young adult novel that portrays the traumatic experiences of a sixteen-year-old African American girl, Starr Carter. The novel is told

from a first-person perspective where the teenage protagonist is torn between her two worlds: one in the struggling Garden Heights neighbourhood, home to the Black community, and the other at the predominantly white Williamson Prep, her school. Her struggle is truly reflected when she says, "Being two different people is so exhausting. I've taught myself to speak with two different voices and only say certain things around certain people" (Thomas 266). The novel opens with a party in a neighbourhood where she feels lonely, but finally encounters Khalil, her childhood best friend. Her life takes a dark turn when Khalil is shot dead by an American police officer (whom she refers to as One-Fifteen from his badge number), who views him with suspicion because of his Black identity. Starr's pain is conveyed when she states, "An earsplitting scream emerges from my gut, explodes in my throat, and uses every inch of me to be heard" (Thomas 25). The police justify the action of shooting, labelling Khalil a gang member involved in drug dealing: "On the Monday night news, they finally gave Khalil's name in the story about the shooting, but with a title added to it—Khalil Harris, a Suspected Drug Dealer." (Thomas 96).

The incident shatters Starr to the core, and she is made to remain silent. But she could no longer tolerate the racial jokes of her Williamson friend, Hailey, and her biases, for which she had never been confronted before. Starr finally decides to speak for Khalil as she can no longer endure the justification of the shooting. Starr, in a TV interview, shares her childhood memories with Khalil and humanises him. She also testifies to Khalil's innocence before the grand jury to seek justice, but the jury decides not to indict One-Fifteen. The decision triggers riots, in which Starr also participates. The novel ends with the Carter family relocating to ensure a safe future.

The 2018 cinematic adaptation of the novel *The Hate U Give* is directed by George Tillman Jr. and written by American screenwriter Audrey Wells. The evaluation of the film's fidelity to the source text also involves examining the adapter's political and ideological agendas. Although at first glance the novel's core message appears to be retained in the film, a critical analysis reveals that the adaptation is not a naive act; rather, the alterations are made merely to attract a wider audience with highly engaged interests.

Opening Scene of the Novel Versus Film

The novel opens with a scene where Starr Carter is at a party in Garden Heights. An internal monologue depicts Starr's frustration at being caught between two different identities. The severe impact of racial conflicts and biases on teenagers' mental health is highlighted. Starr has to switch her slang, dress code, and mannerisms to fit in with her white Williamson Prep school identity. The beginning of the novel emphasizes the psychological toll and emotional labour that Starr is experiencing. On the other hand, the cinematic adaptation opens with "the talk," where Maverick, Starr's father, teaches his children how to behave if they are ever confronted by the police, a constant threat, as they are surrounded by a system where police brutality against Black people is common. He instructs, "Put your hands on the dashboard. Don't make any sudden moves." (*The Hate U Give*, 2018). He adds further, "Don't make any sudden moves. And don't reach for anything in the glove compartment or under your seat. Just do what they tell you to do" (*The Hate U Give*, 2018). The alteration in the opening scene exemplifies Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as "repetition with variation" (Hutcheon 7), where the primary themes of the novel– police brutality and systemic injustice are repeated to engage the mainstream audience immediately. However, the variation in plot sequencing and the neglect of psychological depth turn the story into a simplified, heroic journey in which Starr fights the system and ultimately wins, rather than a real, complex journey full of emotional battles.

Depoliticisation through Emotions

Khalil and Starr are childhood best friends. In the novel, it is depicted that Starr had an innocent childhood crush on Khalil, but she is currently dating Chris, her Williamson Prep boyfriend. When Khalil and Starr run away from the party because of the shooting, they kiss in the car, suggesting they are interested in each other. The addition of a romantic angle reflects Hollywood's patronage system, which aims to ensure box-office success. According to Lefevere, patronage refers to "the ideology

and poetics of people who hold some kind of power, or wish to use rewriting to gain power, in the target culture" (ix).

This addition also attempts to depoliticize the narrative, shifting Starr's fight against systemic racism from a collective struggle to a more personal issue, rather than a fight for the larger Black community, thereby working as a form of ideological manipulation.

Alteration of the Shooting Scene

In the novel, the police officer tries to intimidate Khalil for a broken taillight on his car. He is viewed with suspicion by the officer because of his black identity and is subsequently searched and humiliated. When the officer turns away, Khalil tries to check on Starr to see whether she is okay, reaching for his hairbrush to appear calm. He opens the driver's side door and says, "You okay, Starr—" (Thomas24). His movement turns out to be fatal, as the officer misinterprets it and shoots him three times due to the prejudices he holds against Black people.

In contrast, the cinematic adaptation depicts Khalil actually holding a hairbrush in his hands outside the car, presenting the shooting as a mistake rather than a deliberate act, thereby allowing the audience to sympathise with the officer as well. Here, the adapter's American subject position subtly maintains neutrality to avoid unsettling the comfort of the white American mainstream audience with existing power structures, while simultaneously engaging them with Black racial struggles.

Allies at Williamson Prep

Starr's mother decides to send her children to a white school because of the neighbourhood crimes. She wanted them to have a good education and a better future, but this eventually led Starr into an emotional conflict where she always had to try to fit in. As a result, she became more conscious of her Black identity and hence more sensitive to the racism of her friend Hailey. In the novel, her internal monologues depict her internal turmoil, and she finally stands up for herself and Khalil once she is drained of energy to suffer Hailey's racism.

In contrast, the film adaptation presents her confrontation with Hailey directly, thereby diminishing the emotional weight and complexity of Starr's internal turmoil; instead, Hailey is

portrayed in binary terms as the villain. Lefevere argues that “all rewritings, whatever their intention, reflect a certain ideology and a poetics and manipulate literature to function in a given society in a given way” (vii). The adapter here, to appeal to a broader audience, prefers clear-cut categories rather than portraying complex social relationships.

White Love Interest

Starr, both in the novel and the film, is depicted as having a white American love interest, Chris, from Williamson Prep. The novel portrays serious relationship tensions between them due to racial and class differences, whereas in the film, Chris is presented as a more understanding partner. According to Hutcheon, the adaptations assume “knowing audiences” (122). Hence, the alterations are made. Here, the adapter portrays Chris as a morally good, liberal character to satisfy the audience's expectations. a white, good character to be in demand by the viewers. This representation conveys the message that racial harmony is achievable through individual goodwill.

However, in reality, achieving a society free from discrimination requires collective action through multiple protests and rebellions, then it be the Black Lives Matter movement or the Black Panthers.

The Omitted Dialogue

In the middle plot of the novel, Starr engages in a dialogue with her father, expressing disapproval of Khalil's drug dealing. Maverick explains the Black Trap to her, illustrating that their community lacks access to quality educational facilities, which, in turn, limits opportunities for good jobs. As he says, “Corporate America don’t bring jobs to our communities, and they are damn sure ain’t quick to hire us. Then, shit, even if you do have a high school diploma, so many of the schools in our neighbourhoods don’t prepare us well enough” (Thomas 151). Their poverty either drives them to consume drugs or forces them into selling drugs, as in Khalil’s case: his mother was addicted to drugs, and to support his cancer-stricken grandmother's survival, he had no choice other than to become a gang member. The deliberate omission of the dialogue between Starr and her father, and the

ideological constraints of the adapter, prevent the audience from seeing a clearer picture of the hardships faced by that community.

Omission of Sub-plots

The novel features a subplot in which Maverick Carter, Starr's father, attempts to assist a young boy named Devante, a low-level gang member. Devante steals money from the King Lords because he wants to send his mother and sister to another place to have a better life, and for this reason, the King Lords are after his life. Devante seeks help from Maverick, a former gang member. Maverick saves him by taking him in, giving him a new, safer life and protecting him from the dangers of the neighbourhood. The omission of Devante's character from the cinematic adaptation erases the portrayal of intra-community conflict and removes a message of hope for those trapped in cycles of violence and drug-dealing. The omission eliminates another dimension of the oppression that Black communities endure– not only external oppression but also conflicts within their own community. Devante's character symbolizes the possibility that Black youth, if given proper support and guidance, can break free from the cycle of crime and violence.

The Re-framed End

The adapter has completely reworked the end of the narrative and appropriated it. In the novel, the Carter family decides to move to a new place to secure a safer future for themselves because of the ongoing riots, as Officer 115 was not charged for the shooting of Khalil. Their relocation serves as an act of survival rather than a sign of defeat. On the other hand, the cinematic adaptation ends with a fight between the King Lords and Maverick, after King sets fire to Maverick's store while Starr and her siblings are still inside. The police arrive at the scene and hold Maverick, about to point a gun at him, at which point Sekani, Starr's little brother, takes the gun in his hands and points it at the police. He becomes a symbol of THUG LIFE—The Hate You Give Little Infants Fucks Everybody, which Khalil explained as "Meaning what society gives us as youth, it bites them in the ass when we wild out" (Thomas 19). Starr then takes a stand and calms him down, and as a consequence, the police also release Maverick.

The altered ending tries to centre on the idea that communal conflicts can be easily resolved, giving the story a happy ending. According to Julie Sanders, appropriation involves adaptations that "carry out the same sustained engagement as adaptation but frequently adopt a posture of critique, even assault" (4). The appropriation in the cinematic adaptation is done to convert the novel's raw critique of racial injustice into a more marketable form of racial discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis concludes that the adaptation of the novel *The Hate U Give* is a complex political act, where deliberate changes serve the adapter's ideological and commercial interests. The alterations, oversimplification of scenes, and omission of characters demonstrate a calculated strategy by the adapter. The adapter navigates dual allegiances: advocating for the Black community while simultaneously appeasing white audiences. According to the theory of medium specificity, the cinematic medium is time-bound, and the adaptation therefore struggles between fidelity and reinvention; beyond these variables, the adaptation embeds political messages and works with the adapter's ideologies.

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Palimpsests of Green Gables: Intertextuality, Identity, and Ideology in *Anne with an E*

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Abstract: L. M. Montgomery's novel, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), since its publication has been frequently adapted into diverse media forms – silent film, miniseries, musicals and Japanese Anime – each version shaped by the cultural and historical moment of its production, bringing into play the concerns about fidelity, dilution, and transformation. For the purpose of this paper, I intend to critically examine the cultural osmosis and also the specific impulses and ideologies that have shaped the 2017 Netflix series *Anne with an E,* an adaptation of *Anne of Green Gables.* I argue that the series is not merely an imitation but a radical reimagining that weaves contemporary concerns—especially feminism, trauma, racial and personal identities, inclusivity, and indigenous concerns—into a classic narrative. By framing adaptation as both a dialogic and intertextual process, this study interrogates how *Anne with an E* reconfigures the bucolic, white-settler past of the original novel. The paper will contextualise the tone, ideological underpinnings, and the cultural context of the Netflix adaptation, and examine the extrapolations and amplifications of the thematic content, such as LGBTQIA+ themes and the erasure of indigenous identities, which were either missing or understated in the original novel. Using Linda Hutcheon's concept of Palimpsestic Doubleness and her arguments on adaptation as a product as well as process, Julie Sanders's insights from her book *Adaptation and Acculturation*, and Deborah Cartmell's three broad categories of adaptation: (i) transposition (ii) commentary (iii) analogue, the paper will critically examine the revisitation of *Anne of Green Gables* by situating it within the wider discourse of Adaptation Studies.

Keywords: Radical Reimagining; Fidelity; Dilution, Transformation; Feminism; Trauma; Racial Identities; Indigenous Concerns

L. M. Montgomery's novel, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), since its publication has been frequently adapted into diverse media forms – silent film, miniseries, musicals and Japanese Anime – with spatial, temporal, and cultural context bearing an imprint on each version of its production. The cultural and historical ethos embedded in adaptation raises concerns about fidelity, dilution, and transformation. Under the rubric of Adaptation Studies, this paper will focus on CBC and Netflix original series, *Anne with an E* (2017-19), produced by Northwood Entertainment and created by Moira Walley-Beckett. The paper will take the novel as the starting point to examine the tone, characterization, and ideological underpinnings of the Netflix adaptation, and look into the extrapolations and amplification of the thematic content and its representation, either missing or understated in the novel.

According to Linda Hutcheon, "Adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication" (7), and "with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise" (5). Instead of a parasitical feeding upon the source material, an adaptation is "an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works" (Hutcheon 8). This "transcoding" (Hutcheon 8) implies a shift of medium (for example, a song to a musical) or a change of genre (for example, a play to a film) or a retelling in terms of changing the context or point of view.

As adaptation is both a "product and a process of creation and reception," Hutcheon tries to theorise adaptation as a formal entity and its "experiential" nature (Preface xvi). The early works in the field of Adaptation Studies focused on measuring fidelity to the source text, and the creative potential of adaptations was under scrutiny. By viewing adaptations as potentially "vulgar" or "inferior" versions of literature, films were seen as a less serious art form compared to the written word (Leitch 2003). George Bluestone, in his seminal work *Novels into Film* (1957), argued that film is inherently limited in its ability to capture the complexity of literature because it relies more on action and spectacle, whereas the written word is steeped in reflection, subtlety, and depth. For some, as Robert Stam points out, the "axiomatic superiority" of literature is undeniable considering the fact that it preceded adaptation but he argued against this hierarchy as it stemmed from prejudices like

‘seniority’ (older arts are better), ‘iconophobia (a suspicion and devaluation of the visual) and ‘logophilia’ (valorization of the word as sacred) (Stam 58).

Robert Stam, Kamilla Elliott, Deborah Cartmell, Imelde Whelehan, Julie Sanders, and Thomas Leitch have added newer dimensions to the critical terrain of Adaptation Studies, though vestiges of fidelity criticism still remain in reviewing practices, especially of films adapted from classic texts (Hutcheon xxvi). The contemporary concerns oscillate between previous texts and their adaptations, but also shift among older and newer media, cultures, technologies, theories, and corporate models.

Hutcheon’s approach extends beyond fidelity criticism, as she considers adaptation to be “creative and an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging” (9). She calls it “its own palimpsestic thing (Hutcheon 9) because of its intertextual engagement with the adapted work. From the lens of audience or consumers’ reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation (Hutcheon 8). The term palimpsest usually refers to a manuscript (often written on papyrus or parchment in ancient times) on which more than one text has been written, with the earlier writing partially erased but its traces still discernible. Hutcheon uses the term palimpsestuous to explain the difference in the critical reception of adaptation in relation to the “unknowing” (unfamiliar to the original work) audience, for whom an adaptation is not an adapted work, but an independent creation and “knowing” audiences familiar with the source text (Hutcheon 120–122). She considers that “for unknowing audiences, adaptations have a way of upending sacrosanct elements like priority and originality” (Hutcheon 122).

Robert Stam emphasises the unavoidable, embedded intertextuality when readers or audiences are familiar with the adapted text. Using Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, Stam considers the source text and the adaptation to be in an ongoing dialogue with each other in terms of experience and comparison (Stam 64). Hence, instead of simple reproduction, it is a challenge to interpret, recreate, and retell the adapted text in the visual, aural, and gestural complexity of cinematic form. The creative

transposition relies not only on genre and medium demands, but also on "the temperament and talent of the adapter—and his or her individual intertexts through which are filtered the materials being adapted" (Hutcheon 84), for example the introduction of non-diegetic elements, such as background music or a narrator's voice-over exist outside the story's internal world, and are not perceived by the characters.

The translation from novel to television series exemplifies *intersemiotic transposition* – a shift from one sign system into another – a written narrative to audiovisual storytelling. Such adaptation foregrounds the medium-specific qualities of television, which have the potential to delve into broader explorations of character psychology, social/cultural critique, and historical trauma. Stam's "grammar of transformation" further clarifies that adaptations operate through selection, amplification, and extrapolation (Stam 68), shaped by style, ideology, and production constraints. Hence, the source text moves beyond the realm of a "single, fixed, recognizable story" and assumes the characteristics of an "ongoing, unstable, open-ended "multitext (Hutcheon 24). Additionally, the material, public, and economic drives in the contexts of creation and reception of an adaptation work in tandem with cultural, personal, and aesthetic factors prompting an adaptation, which explains that the transposed story can be radically interpreted, ideologically and literally, depending on shifts in a story's spatial or temporal context (Hutcheon 28).

The latter approaches in the field of adaptation engage with, and frequently foreground, the perceived medium-specificities of the source and target media. As one of the major figures of the *trans-textual turn* in film studies, Stam deals with the issue of medium specificity in the process of film adaptation and focuses on "the source novel hypotext's being transformed by a complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation" (Stam 68). Applying the medium specificity thesis to a Netflix drama series running into different seasons calls for a specific set of amplification tools, tweaking / expansion of the existing storylines, new corporate models of auteurship etc.

Ideological Transformations: Indigenous Identity, Feminism, Racism, Sexuality, and Trauma

Anne with an E was created by Moira Walley-Beckett, who also served as an executive producer and the show's head writer. The other executive producers included Miranda de Pencier. As opposed to truncation or condensation of plot lines, narration or narrow characterization owing to the time constraint of a film adaptation with a running time that varies between 120-180 minutes, the multi-season series furnishes a broader scope for imagination, and is well-equipped to develop well-rounded characters and to introduce new ones, to add to the existing message of the source text, and to introduce social themes, either missing or slightly hinted in the original work. Despite the tranquil, pastoral, and idyllic setting of the island village of Avonlea, the series uses it to address socially and politically contentious issues of the times. Such revision enhances the contemporary relevance of its plot by foregrounding concerns around social justice, human rights, gender parity and even sexuality. Stam argues, "Adaptations, then, can take an activist stance toward their source novels, inserting them into a much broader intertextual dialogism" (64).

Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation underscores how new media (Netflix in the context of this paper) position themselves as correctives to prior formats—seeking to fulfil promises left unaddressed by earlier media (Bolter and Grusin 60). Through episodic storytelling in the Netflix adaptation, Montgomery's bildungsroman is transformed into a series encompassing a wide array of societal concerns, including racism, homophobia, bullying, and female sexuality.

Montgomery's Anne Shirley is a young, idiosyncratic, compassionate, empathetic, and deeply imaginative orphan girl who is adopted by the Cuthbert siblings – Mathew and Marilla. The book traces her journey as she navigates through different challenges while settling into the Avonlea community. In the book, she is depicted as a child of about eleven, garbed in a very short, very tight, very ugly dress of yellowish-grey wincey, with two braids of very thick, decidedly red hair. Her face was small, white and thin, also much freckled; her mouth was large, and so were her eyes, which looked green in some lights and moods and grey in others (Montgomery 13).

Walley-Beckett's zeroing in on Amybeth McNulty as Anne Shirley in the lead role almost cemented her image as the real Anne, Montgomery's creation, for global audiences. Her physical

attributes are largely represented accurately through the persona of Amybeth McNulty in the Netflix adaptation. Due to imposed child care activities and later mistreatment at the orphanage, Anne becomes a victim of systemic neglect that manifests itself through her overtly reactive responses in the form of temper tantrums, insecurities, fears, social withdrawal etc. In contradistinction to the late nineteenth-century Canadian society, when mental health issues were swept under the carpet or were not dealt with exigency, as is evident from the understated response to Anne's mental condition in the novel, the onscreen disturbing and graphic representation of Anne's psychological wounds fosters a deeper audience engagement surrounding medical discourses around mental and emotional well-being. It is likely that the social stigmatisation concerning the discourse of mental health prevented Montgomery's active engagement with such issues, as the novel did not encapsulate the magnitude of the underlying traumatic condition of Anne. However, the Netflix series moves back and forth with Anne recalling the bullying she underwent at the hands of older girls in the orphanage. These themes turn the adapted text into a 'multilaminate' work, as Walley-Beckett opines, "They just never talked about it. Anne was abused, and she was traumatised. For me, that material has always been timeless, but timeless and topical. And sadly, we are still discussing so many of these topics today — prejudice against people who come from away and bullying and gender rights. These topics are alive and well" (Mullinger "Why the World Needs *Anne with an E*").

Pierre Janet was an early psychologist who developed a therapeutic and systematic approach to traumatized patients. He viewed trauma as a psychopathological issue – a memory disorder whereby traumatized individuals struggled with "unassimilated fixed ideas" that manifested as unbidden memories, nightmares, and behavioral reenactments, a core concept of modern PTSD. In the series, the multimodality through the interplay of moving images, still shots, text, sounds and other diegetic and non-diegetic elements adds to the emotional depth and deeper insights into the inner consciousness of the characters. The dimly-lit cinematography shots (especially the close-ups that bring out the emotional turmoil of Anne), sombre landscape, menacing soundtrack, and portentous background noises of the children that Anne had to tend to – all led to Anne's emotional

meltdowns and frequent burnouts. The memories of the harrowing time at Mrs Hammond, where Anne was kept as a child caretaker, keep flashing past Anne over and over again. Later, her experience at the orphanage is even more traumatic as the older girls constantly taunt her, scare her with a dead mouse and eventually throw it at her, leaving her crying, sending devastating shockwaves through her body and mind. However, Montgomery depicts childhood abuse in a subtle and restrained manner, which did not draw much attention from the readers, and such representation was probably in sync with the cultural sensibilities of the era.

Anne's escaping into her imaginative world is her defence mechanism against the harsh reality of the real world. During her time in the orphanage, she gives herself an imagined, more romantic and elegant name, Cordelia, instead of a plain name, Anne, so she could survive the bullying, taunts, and hostile treatment meted out to her. Anne renames the local "Avenue" as the "White Way of Delight" and Barry's Pond to the "Lake of Shining Waters" to give them the romantic significance she feels they deserve. Later, Anne and her friend Diana built a small make-shift playhouse in the woods and named it "Idlewild". Anne reflects: "When I don't like the name of a place or a person, I always imagine a new one and always think of them so (Montgomery 17). These imaginative strategies serve as protective measures against systemic neglect and abuse. Though the core elements remain the same, the series darkens these episodes, emphasising their psychological repercussions through graphic representations of emotional scars.

The novel describes Anne's misadventures and silly mistakes as part of her identity, but the series often gives these episodes a darker, more grim twist. When Marilla's most prized possession – an amethyst brooch which was an old-fashioned oval, containing a braid of her mother's hair is misplaced, Marilla makes a statement showing her displeasure with Anne's irresponsible behaviour: "Slyness and untruthfulness— that's what she has displayed. I declare I feel worse about that than about the brooch" (Montgomery 36). However, the series portrays this incident as a serious question mark on Anne's integrity and identity. The allegation leaves her heartbroken, and she runs away from Green Gables before Marilla realises her fault, brings her back, but reconciliation is a long-drawn-

out process. Hence, the series reinforces and reshapes her identity as a strong-willed yet vulnerable young girl.

The Netflix adaptation highlights the feminist concerns and discovers the feminist subtext in an explicit manner, for example, Marilla is invited to join a "Progressive Mother's Sewing Circle," in which the local Avonlea women discuss the importance of opportunities, autonomy, and education for their daughters. However, these deliberations seem more superficial and apparent than real and concrete, as these women are swayed by recent shifts in gender roles, with greater emphasis on independence and education, yet they lack a nuanced understanding of freedom, autonomy, and, broadly, the core ideas behind feminism. Their skewed conception of a progressive outlook is indirectly challenged by the newly appointed school teacher, Miss Stacey.

The character of Miss Stacey is introduced as a foil to the docile, submissive gender roles expected of women in the Avonlea community. Marilla's neighbour, Rachel Lynde, a nitpicking lady, uses low remarks and pejorative terms like 'old maid,' 'spinster' to refer to the unmarried status or 'inexperienced' status (i.e., not having children) of single women. The school teacher, Miss Stacey, is pivotal in understanding the broader resistance of the Avonlea community to embracing progressive ideas. Her non-conformist style—wearing trousers and no corset, taking a lift from a man, and riding a bicycle—is perceived as a threat to the community's established norms and values, yet her engagement with the pupils and practical pedagogical methods eventually wins people's favour. Rachel Lynde raises many an eyebrow at the non-ladylike behaviour of Miss Stacey, before coming to terms with her unconventional approach.

In the series, Anne is quite vocal about her agency and subjectivity, and wears it on her sleeve many times when she makes statements about empowering herself through writing and education, and about not being subservient to her future life partner. Such a feminist interpretation of Anne's character lies, more or less, dormant in the novel.

Erasure of Indigenous Ways of Living

As Julie Sanders opines that Adaptation often provides a commentary on a source text and offers "a revised point of view from the 'original,' adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized" (Sanders 18-19), the series introduces the residential School system – a dark chapter of Canadian history. Such layering adds emotional resonance and historical accuracy to the representation of indigenous tribes.

The Residential School System was started in order to integrate the indigenous children into mainstream society and remained operational from the 17th century until the late 1990s. As a key aspect of colonialism, the residential schools were an ideological mechanism to acculturate the native tribes to the values, beliefs, and language of the colonizers, and in the process erase their rich cultures, religious traditions, unique identities, shared legacy, connection with the land, and to homogenize them by developing a policy of "aggressive civilization" (Jones "The Intergenerational Legacy of Indian Residential Schools") in the church-run, federally-funded industrial schools, later called residential schools. The coercive and manipulative ways of the Indian agents were used to send hundreds of native children to the Boarding schools, which resulted in long-term detrimental effects and intergenerational trauma among the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities. On September 1, 2020, the Government of Canada announced the designation of the Residential School System as a national historic event under the National Program of Historical Commemoration. In 2022, Pope Francis came to Canada to apologise for the "evil" that had been committed at the institutions.

The Government of Canada has acknowledged this as a tragic and traumatic event in the shared history of Canada and is now working with Indigenous peoples and communities who attended these schools to raise awareness about the buried stories (literally and metaphorically). "The efforts of residential school survivors to tell their stories and to seek justice have been a crucial catalyst in the growing public recognition of the harm and effects of residential schools" ("Residential schools in Canada"). The historic, intergenerational, and collective oppression of Indigenous People continues to this day in the form of land disputes, over-incarceration, lack of housing, child apprehension, systemic poverty, marginalization and violence against Indigenous women, girls, and

LGBTQIA+ peoples, and other critical issues which neither began nor ended with residential schools (Hanson “The Residential School System”).

The Netflix series introduces the character of Ka'kwet, who belongs to the Mi’kmaq tribe living on the outskirts of Avonlea. Anne finds a kindred spirit in her, but it is ironic that Ka'kwet, which translates into English as a ‘starfish,’ is tested in the most brutal manner for her resilience, a hallmark of a starfish. When the news of a residential school in Halifax reaches Avonlea, Ka'kwet, much against her parents' genuine concerns, is thrilled by the idea of attending school, as Anne paints a rosy picture of the possibilities for growth and learning. Much against the wishes of her parents, who fear the loss of heritage from a white education, Ka'kwet is allowed to go. However, the results are disastrous and traumatic for Ka'kwet as she encounters physical abuse and ethnocide in a residential school. She is forbidden from speaking her native language, forbidden to leave, and is required to learn English and practice Christianity in an effort to “kill the Indian, but save the child.”

She briefly manages to escape the institution but is captured and brought back. When she returns, her mother feels unsettled due to the psychological trauma experienced by Ka'kwet, especially when she has an outburst at her younger sibling, calling him a "stupid Indian" and telling him to speak English. Ka'kwet's escape from school is temporary, as government officials soon raid the Mi'kmaq camp and forcibly bring her back to the residential school. Though her parents and Anne and Matthew try to get her out, the series stops short of providing any resolution to Ka'kwet's story, leaving the audience in a state of limbo.

This thematic expansion aligns with Julie Sanders’s assertion that adaptations can offer commentary by amplifying marginalised voices. The depiction of Ka’kwet’s sorrowful story of physical abuse, as well as her emotional alienation from her family, lends contemporary relevance, depth, and historical accuracy absent from the novel.

Marilla’s subtle racist intent is discernible in the early pages of the novel as she is sceptical of keeping “stupid, half-grown little French boys” as househelp and is averse to accepting anyone different from her, as she wants to keep a native Canadian, and not a boy from England or the States.

However, the Netflix series, goes further in its attempt to foreground the prevalent racism and classism in the late nineteenth century Prince Edward Island in Canada, as it provides a social critique and commentary on the same by introducing the character of *Sebastian* (Bash), a black, hailing from the Caribbean Islands whom Gilbert Blythe, (a classmate and friend of Anne) befriends when he is working on a ship and is eventually brought to Avonlea as Blythe's extended family and partner on the farm. Blythe considers Bash and Mary as his family, regardless of their skin colour. Mary is a resident of the Bog, a slum area in Charlottetown. She works in the laundry service with her friends, Constance and Jocelyn, and many other black women. Bash's friendship with Gilbert and his role in the community expose both solidarity and prejudice, while Mary's exclusion highlights structural barriers faced by working-class Black women. However, the community's initial resistance against accepting Mary, despite her baking talent and good-heartedness, reaches a culmination when Mary is on her deathbed and the community organises a warm get-together to bid adieu. This episode adds an element of corrective redress for the racism prevalent in the novel.

The conflicted ideological positioning in race relations manifests itself through Bash and his relationship with his mother, whose servile attitude towards the white family she works for, and her hostile treatment of her son hints at the deep-seated internalisation of the inferior status by the Blacks. Her husband was lynched as he was an ambitious man who tried to assert his agency and autonomy by desiring to start his own business and buy his own land. The series offers a powerful social commentary on the internalized racism, social ostracization, and resilience needed to overcome the barriers of race and class.

The series also challenges heteronormative frameworks by exploring queer identities. Series creator Moira Walley-Beckett, in an interview with *IndieWire, discussed* adding depth and density to the character of Aunt Josephine. Walley-Beckett takes up the cue to develop the character of Aunt Jo from the book and adds a layer of her lesbian relationship with Aunt Gertrude – her best friend and kindred spirit. In the book, as Walley-Beckett points out, "she's a spinster and she's just a bit of a curmudgeon ... coming to the Barrys for a month and she's grieving,' that's why I decided to justify

why she's there: Who is she grieving?" (Mullinger "Why the World Needs *Anne with an E*"). Beyond her exterior hard-to-get, unapologetic, and fastidious persona, Aunt Josephine is imbued with more humane qualities especially in the depiction of warmth and affection for Anne and Cole—a homosexual classmate of Anne who is ruthlessly plagued by his peer group for being 'different' from other boys. However, Aunt Josephine Barry's sheltering of Anne and Cole also raises pertinent questions about the issues of class. Whereas Aunt Barry's affluent position allows her the privilege to hide her homosexual orientation under the cloak of wealth and even renders it immaterial, Cole does not come from a privileged section of society. Without Aunt Josephine's intervention and decision to take him under her wing, his story could have had a tragic ending. Hence, the series's bolder and more sensitive take on the issues of different sexual orientations brings to the forefront issues of class privilege, familial support, and societal prejudice, raising critical concerns about belongingness, displacement, alienation, and safety.

Conclusion

The above analysis highlights the adaptation of the classic novel *Anne of Green Gables* into the Netflix series *Anne with an E* and examines it as a palimpsestic text, meaning that the traces of the source text coexist with the contemporaneity of the multimodal adaptation through its ideological underpinnings and new thematic layers. The series shapeshifts Montgomery's classic into an intertextual dialogic text which foregrounds modern concerns around mental health, feminist interpretation, racist themes, indigenous trauma, and homosexual identities—while retaining the coming-of-age story of Anne, whose strength, resilience, and imagination are the hallmarks of the source text.

By using the insights of various scholars like Hutcheon, Stam, Sanders, and others, this paper contextualises *Anne with an E* within the wider discourse of Adaptation Studies. By transcending the limited scope of fidelity criticism, the study delves deeper into examining adaptation as creative interpretation and retelling of the classic text, thereby emphasising the reimagination as a site of critical discourse and as a fertile ground for negotiation and contestation between the source text and

its revisionist cinematic representation. By doing so, the paper examines the Netflix multi-season series as a space for cultural critique, historical excavation, and reflection, as well as a palimpsestic narrative in which repetition moves beyond slavish imitation to foster new possibilities of meaning-making.

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Othello to *Omkara*: Caste, Social and Political Hierarchy in Vishal Bhardwaj's Adaptation of Shakespeare

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Abstract: Shakespeare's *Othello* has inspired numerous adaptations across films, television, and theatre in various languages. This paper focuses on Vishal Bhardwaj's cinematic adaptation, *Omkara* (2006), which transposes the narrative from sixteenth-century Venice to contemporary rural Uttar Pradesh, India. Bhardwaj localizes the story through the use of the Khari Boli dialect, rustic landscapes, and culturally specific political and social structures, effectively replacing the racial dynamics of the original play with caste hierarchies and regional power politics. The film explores the interplay of caste, gender, and political influence, highlighting the social and political hierarchies that shape the characters' actions and fates. This study examines how Bhardwaj reinterprets Shakespeare's characters, motifs, and conflicts to reflect the Indian socio-political context while retaining the tragic essence of the original play.

Keywords: Othello, Omkara, Shakespeare, Bhardwaj, Caste, Adaptation

Adaptation involves reimagining and reshaping a source text within a new context or medium, whereas transformation implies a more profound change, often producing a work that can stand almost independently of its source (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 5). When novels are adapted for the screen, filmmakers must translate descriptive prose, internal monologues, and narrative exposition into visual storytelling. Scenes are condensed, inner thoughts rendered through dialogue, and narrative description conveyed through cinematic techniques such as mise-en-scène, editing, and camera movement. This distinction underscores why adaptation theory differentiates between "adaptation" and "transformation."

In contrast, plays—particularly those of Shakespeare—are written for performance. Their scripts are crafted for actors to bring to life through spoken word and action, making it tempting to

assume that adapting a play to film is more straightforward than adapting a novel. However, as Anderegg observes, simply transposing a play's dialogue into a cinematic medium does not constitute a true adaptation (30). Film privileges visual and sensory experience—what Aristotle calls "opsis"—over language, whereas theatre relies primarily on the spoken word. Consequently, adapting a play for film requires reimagining how the story is communicated visually, not just verbally.

This distinction helps explain why Shakespeare's works occupy a unique position in adaptation studies. His plays are highly versatile and have been reinterpreted in diverse forms and settings. Some filmmakers, aiming to avoid overly literal fidelity, obscure their Shakespearean sources entirely. A prominent example is Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* (1957), a celebrated adaptation of *Macbeth* that employs Japanese Noh theatre conventions and samurai imagery, yet retains the play's tragic essence. As Hutcheon argues, adaptation is an intertextual act: the new work is enriched by the original while simultaneously asserting its own creative identity (Hutcheon and O'Flynn 22).

Vishal Bhardwaj, influenced by Kurosawa, views Shakespeare's plays as deeply human and universal, allowing them to be transposed into any cultural or temporal context. In his adaptation of *Othello*, titled *Omkara* (2006), Bhardwaj preserves the story's core while embedding it in contemporary rural Uttar Pradesh. He modernizes communication through devices such as mobile phones and television, exemplified in the scene where Omkara eavesdrops on Kesu and Dolly's conversation. The film also incorporates regional idioms and the Khari Boli dialect, anchoring the narrative in its local milieu. Bhardwaj emphasizes that this linguistic specificity lends the dialogue authenticity and "earthiness," making words as potent as physical action or weaponry (Bhardwaj, Interview).

A striking example of cultural adaptation in Bhardwaj's *Omkara* is his decision to replace Othello's handkerchief with a cummerbund, which Omkara gives to Dolly. In a scene rich with foreshadowing, Omkara places the cummerbund around Dolly's neck and instructs her to keep it safe, signaling its later significance as a symbol of betrayal and doom. This substitution demonstrates how

adaptation can transform symbols and motifs, imbuing them with culturally specific meanings that resonate within the Indian context. The cummerbund, an item familiar in North Indian attire, carries connotations of honor, status, and personal trust, which align with the film's exploration of social and political hierarchies.

Examining this example alongside adaptation theory clarifies the distinction between transferring a novel and adapting a play. Adapting a novel typically requires condensing extensive narrative and conveying internal states visually, while Shakespeare's plays, already designed for performance, invite reinterpretation through visual spectacle, dialogue, and embodied acting. Filmmakers such as Kurosawa and Bhardwaj do not simply translate the original text; they create new works that engage in a dynamic conversation with their sources, combining intertextual references with local invention. In *Omkara*, Bhardwaj subverts conventional Bollywood tropes, such as celebratory wedding sequences, replacing them with ominous signs and a sombre atmosphere that foreshadow the tragic trajectory of the characters. Through such choices, adaptation becomes a creative negotiation between fidelity and cultural resonance, where the narrative is reshaped to reflect contemporary social realities while retaining the core emotional and thematic stakes of the original work.

Understanding the adaptation further requires mapping Shakespeare's characters onto their Indian counterparts in *Omkara*. Set in the politically charged landscape of Uttar Pradesh, Bhardwaj's characters are meticulously reimagined to reflect regional dynamics and social structures. Omkara Shukla, also called Omi Bhaiya, embodies Othello as a half-caste political enforcer, or 'Bahubali,' whose strength and authority are both respected and feared. Dolly Mishra parallels Desdemona, as the privileged daughter of a prominent lawyer, whose innocence and loyalty are tested by the machinations surrounding her. Langda Tyagi, marked by a distinctive limp, mirrors Iago, serving as Omkara's trusted yet envious lieutenant whose manipulations drive the plot. Indu Tyagi, Omkara's sister, functions as Emilia, acting as both confidante to Dolly and witness to Langda's schemes. Kesu Firangi, the educated and charismatic newcomer whom Omkara favors, represents Cassio, while

Rajan Tiwari, a politically ambitious fixer and Langda's pawn, corresponds to Roderigo. Billo Chamanbahar, a bar singer and Kesu's romantic interest, aligns with Bianca, and Raghunath Mishra, Dolly's father and a respected legal figure, assumes the role of Brabantio, disapproving of Dolly's unconventional relationship with Omkara. By carefully mapping these characters, Bhardwaj preserves the narrative structure of *Othello* while embedding it in a culturally and politically specific setting, highlighting the ways adaptation can negotiate between textual fidelity and local resonance.

Language and Setting: Localizing the Narrative

Omkara unfolds in the heart of rural Uttar Pradesh, with its characters speaking in Khari Boli, a regional Hindi dialect. This linguistic choice not only anchors the film in its specific locale but also enhances the authenticity of its depiction of small-town power dynamics. The use of local dialects allows characters to convey social hierarchy, intimacy, and tension in ways that standard Hindi could not capture, making language itself a marker of identity and authority. Bhardwaj further embeds cultural specificity through the inclusion of regional terms and rituals that carry political and social significance. For instance, the term *Bahubali* refers to a powerful local figure, often associated with muscle, influence, and occasionally criminality; Omkara's rise to this status marks a key shift in political alliances. Similarly, being chosen as a candidate for the *Vidhan Sabha*, the legislative assembly of an Indian state, signals political legitimacy and public recognition. Rituals such as the *Tilak* ceremony, where a vermillion mark is applied to the forehead, formalize Omkara's new position and symbolize honor, blessing, and political succession, while the *Rudrabhishek*, a Hindu ritual worshipping Lord Shiva, underscores the religio-cultural backdrop against which power and authority are negotiated. Bhardwaj's attention to visual storytelling complements these linguistic and ritual markers: Dolly's evolution from structured, constrained silhouettes to more flowing and vulnerable attire mirrors her journey from protected privilege to exposed victimhood, highlighting how setting, language, and costume collectively reinforce the narrative's social and political hierarchies.

Social Themes: Caste, Gender, and Marginalization

Omkara retains and transforms the core concerns of Shakespeare's *Othello*, replacing race with caste as the central locus of prejudice. Omkara Shukla, the titular 'half-caste' enforcer, is constantly reminded of his mixed heritage, and his insecurities are deftly exploited by Langda Tyagi, echoing Iago's manipulations in the original play. Just as Othello's status as an outsider shapes his fate, Omkara's half-caste background engenders suspicion and self-doubt that make him vulnerable to manipulation. Dolly, an upper-caste Brahmin and daughter of the influential lawyer Raghunath Mishra, initially enjoys societal privilege and protection. However, her decision to elope with Omkara strips her of these safeguards, exposing her to patriarchal authority and caste-based marginalization. The patriarchal context is further underscored by her father's warning, in which he likens her to a *tariya charitra*—a woman of dual nature—fueling Omkara's suspicions and foreshadowing her tragic fate. Dolly's complete trust in Omkara and his associates, shaped by her sheltered upbringing, ultimately renders her vulnerable to jealousy and betrayal, mirroring Desdemona's fate in the original play. Her transformation from cherished daughter to a doubly marginalized woman—both as the partner of a 'half-caste' man and as an outcast from her own caste—illuminates the intersectional forces at work in Bhardwaj's adaptation.

The film also invests its supporting characters with cultural and narrative depth. Langda Tyagi's physical disability, mocked by Rajju, symbolizes both his resentment and his marginal status within the local power structure. Indu, like Emilia in *Othello*, steals Dolly's *kamarband*, reinforcing themes of betrayal from within a trusted circle. These nuanced details illustrate how Bhardwaj reinterprets Shakespeare's characters and motivations within the specific social milieu of Uttar Pradesh. Omkara's narrative arc closely follows the tragic trajectory of *Othello*, yet the adaptation is enriched by the integration of local ritual, politics, and social commentary. A pivotal moment occurs when Omkara appoints Kesu as the new *Bahubali* instead of Langda Tyagi, triggering jealousy, intrigue, and ultimately violence. By situating these universal themes in a culturally specific context, Bhardwaj transforms Shakespeare's story into one that resonates deeply with contemporary Indian audiences.

The film is firmly anchored in Uttar Pradesh, where regional dialects and the pervasive climate of corrupt local politics shape every facet of the characters' lives. Omkara serves as an enforcer for a local politician known as Bhaisaab, participating in a ruthless campaign for a parliamentary seat that often involves eliminating rivals. Much of the narrative unfolds in Omkara's native village, where he brings his fiancée, Dolly, as they await an auspicious wedding date. The seeds of jealousy are sown early, paralleling Shakespeare's *Othello*: Dolly's father warns Omkara of women's supposed duplicity, saying, "Strongman, may you never forget the two-faced monster a woman can be!" (0:20:41). Throughout the film, Dolly maintains an aura of innocence and purity, while Langda, Omkara's long-time friend and brother-in-law—mirroring Iago—initiates the betrayals that drive the plot toward its tragic conclusion. By embedding caste, gender, and power struggles within the fabric of the story, Bhardwaj's adaptation demonstrates how Shakespeare's timeless themes can be revitalized and rendered relevant to a contemporary Indian context.

Kesu, another central character, becomes his own adversary, as his susceptibility to temptation and personal weaknesses play directly into Langda's schemes. This internal conflict not only propels the narrative but also mirrors the tragic self-sabotage at the heart of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Bhardwaj integrates modern technology seamlessly into the film's narrative, further updating the story for a contemporary audience. For instance, Omkara eavesdrops on a conversation between Kesu and Dolly using a mobile phone, while political events, such as Bhaisaab's election party, are broadcast on television. These elements ground the story in present-day India while echoing the inventive strategies employed in other modern Shakespeare adaptations. Baz Luhrmann's *William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet* (1996), for example, uses a news anchorwoman as the chorus, and Michael Almereyda's *Hamlet – The Denmark Corporation* (2000) reframes Hamlet's soliloquies for a world dominated by media. Unlike these stylized or meta-commentary-driven adaptations, *Omkara* situates its narrative firmly within local political realities, using regional language, social customs, and contemporary weapons—guns replacing swords—to create a uniquely Indian interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy.

As the plot unfolds, Langda's treachery intensifies, betraying both familial and professional loyalty, which heightens the sense of impending tragedy. Omkara is portrayed as a sombre, brooding protagonist, a criminal enforcer unhesitant in his use of violence. This depiction allows Bhardwaj to reimagine the persistent political turbulence of modern Uttar Pradesh as a constant threat, effectively replacing the transient danger posed by the Turks in Cyprus in the original play (Rosenthal 188). The adaptation also cleverly integrates Bollywood conventions while localizing Shakespearean motifs. The symbolic handkerchief, for instance, becomes a cummerbund that Omkara presents to Dolly, draping it around her neck with an ominous warning to keep it safe. This seemingly mundane act foreshadows its later significance as a symbol of betrayal and doom.

Bhardwaj subverts typical Bollywood wedding tropes to underscore the story's tragic trajectory. While Hindi cinema often portrays nuptials as vibrant, communal celebrations, *Omkara* presents two failed marriages. By the time the primary wedding occurs, Omkara and Dolly's relationship is already poisoned by mistrust. The ceremony itself is suffused with ominous signs: a falcon drops a snake onto the *haldi*, and Omkara departs after the *tilak*, both considered inauspicious. Dolly's henna-stained fingerprints on her new home's door evoke blood, symbolically foreshadowing her death. The subdued soundtrack and muted visuals heighten the sombre atmosphere, marking a stark departure from the exuberance typically associated with Bollywood weddings.

Omkara's jealousy, stoked by Langda's manipulations and reinforced by the so-called "ocular proof," culminates in tragedy. In a devastating scene, Omkara smothers Dolly with a pillow, denying her any chance of defense. Only after Indu confesses to taking the cummerbund is the truth revealed, but by then, it is too late to prevent catastrophe. Indu, paralleling Emilia in *Othello*, emerges as a pivotal figure whose agency is central to the film's conclusion. As Omkara's sister, she transcends traditional female roles in Bollywood, embodying themes of resistance and justice. Upon discovering her husband's betrayal, she exacts vengeance by killing him with a single blow from a machete. This act critiques both patriarchal norms in Shakespeare's text and misogynistic traditions in Indian society, positioning Indu as a figure reminiscent of the avenging goddess Maa Kali.

Bhardwaj's commitment to realism extends to the film's bar scenes, which eschew the typical anti-realism of Bollywood set-pieces. These sequences are muted in color, somberly lit, and integrated into the narrative's political and emotional stakes. In one scene, Langda orchestrates Kesu's drunken downfall; in another, Billo distracts a political rival, foreshadowing further violence. Through this careful weaving of regional authenticity, contemporary technology, and richly layered character motivations, *Omkara* delivers a distinctively Indian interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedy. The film simultaneously pays homage to global adaptations while asserting its own voice, transforming universal themes of jealousy, betrayal, and the consequences of power into a story that is vividly grounded in the social, political, and cultural realities of Uttar Pradesh.

Racial and Caste Identity

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, the protagonist is defined as an outsider: Othello is a Moor whose valor and military accomplishments cannot shield him from the racial prejudice of Venetian society. When Brabantio accuses Othello of using witchcraft to win Desdemona's love, it reveals the deep-seated suspicion and racial bias toward Othello's otherness. Brabantio warns Othello:

> Look at her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
>
> She has deceived her father, and may thee (Shakespeare 1.3.293–294).

This line not only expresses Brabantio's distrust of Desdemona but also exposes the societal view of Othello as a perpetual outsider, vulnerable to suspicion and slander. Similarly, in Vishal Bhardwaj's *Omkara*, identity and otherness are reimagined through the lens of caste. Omkara Shukla is depicted as a "half-caste" within his community, a status that fuels his insecurities and shapes how others perceive him. In one pivotal moment, Dolly attempts to reassure him, saying:

> Chaand jab aadha ho jawe na, tab bhi chaand hi kahlawe hai bas" ("Even when the moon is half, it is still called the moon) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:35:21).

This metaphor directly addresses Omkara's anxieties about his social standing, suggesting that his worth is not diminished by his caste. The parallel between Othello's racial otherness and Omkara's

caste status demonstrates how societal prejudice can be effectively translated into a culturally specific adaptation (Sharda 603).

Familial Conflict and Loyalty

Another central theme is the tension between familial duty and personal loyalty. In *Othello*, Desdemona must navigate the conflict between obedience to her father, Brabantio, and devotion to her husband, Othello. Though she acknowledges her father's influence, she asserts her independence by choosing Othello, thereby inviting familial conflict and societal scrutiny (Shakespeare 1.3.182–188). Bhardwaj mirrors this dynamic in *Omkara* through the relationship between Dolly and her father, Raghunath Mishra. Like Brabantio, Raghunath cannot accept his daughter's choice of partner, warning Omkara:

> Bahubaali, aurat ka tariya charitra bhulna mat. Jo apne baap ko thag sakti hai, wo kisi aur ki saagi kya hogi" ("Strongman, don't ever forget the dual nature of a woman. She who can deceive her father can never truly belong to anyone else) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:20:41).

Langda Tyagi, Omkara's confidant, seizes on these words, manipulating Omkara's vulnerability in the same way Iago exploits Othello's trust (Sharda 610). Raghunath's warning not only questions Dolly's loyalty but also triggers Omkara's growing suspicion, propelling the narrative toward its tragic conclusion.

Thematic Continuity and Character Responses

Both Desdemona and Dolly are shaped by protective, privileged upbringings. Desdemona's defiance exposes her to new dangers, while Dolly's sheltered life leaves her tragically unprepared for the consequences of her choices. Dolly's transition from structured, boxed silhouettes to more flowing, vulnerable attire symbolizes her journey into victimhood within a patriarchal world (Gruss 227). Bhardwaj's adaptation localizes Shakespeare's themes while intensifying their relevance for contemporary Indian audiences, using the interplay of caste, gender, and social hierarchy to amplify the narrative impact.

Omkara's social critique extends beyond the central couple. Raghunath's repeated insults toward Omkara's mother—denied even the dignity of a name—underscore caste-based exclusion. Omkara is consistently devalued for "carrying the blood of a lower-caste woman" (Sharda 612). Such commentary situates personal grievances within broader societal prejudice, showing how caste informs perception and self-worth. These attitudes are reinforced through vivid metaphors and imagery. Indu, Omkara's sister, comments on the couple's disparity:

> Kya jodi hai…bilkul jaise koile ke lote mein dudh" ("What a match made in heaven, like milk in a pot of coal") and "Kauwe ke chauch mein barfi…jaise amavas ke goud me chandrama" ("A candy in a crow's mouth…like a moon in the lap of the darkest night) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:42:18; 0:42:35).

These metaphors visualize the perceived incompatibility between Omkara and Dolly, emphasizing the deep-rooted biases that shape their relationship. Dolly, described as "as fair as the moon," is positioned above Omkara in both complexion and caste. Omkara, likened to a crow, is depicted as overreaching by "snatching" Dolly, suggesting that acquisition alone does not confer legitimacy (Sharda 615).

Through these metaphors and dialogue, *Omkara* foregrounds the effects of caste and colorism on identity formation and social inclusion. Bhardwaj's adaptation demonstrates that Shakespeare's themes of otherness, prejudice, and marginalization are not only translatable across cultures but can be deepened through culturally specific storytelling. By situating these dynamics in Uttar Pradesh, Bhardwaj illustrates how caste functions as both a personal and societal constraint, shaping interactions, power relations, and tragic outcomes (Trivedi 150).

Language, Caste, and Social Marginalization in *Omkara*

In *Omkara*, the lexeme *kajri* functions as a pejorative marker, laden with both literal and figurative significance. Etymologically, *kajri* denotes "darkness" or "blackness," and within Bhardwaj's adaptation, it becomes a synecdoche for lower-caste status and social abjection. Raghunath Mishra's utterance—

> Par galti to meri hai… bhul gya ki tu brahmin to hain par aadha… adha khun to tere badan mein us kajri ka bhi hai" ("Actually, it is my fault… I had forgotten that you are half-caste after all. Your blood is that of a kajri) (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:12:34)—

operates as a speech act that simultaneously dehumanizes and otherizes Omkara, framing his maternal lineage as a site of ontological contamination. The absence of a proper name for Omkara's mother in the film serves as a metonym for the erasure of subaltern subjectivity. This nominal omission is not simply a narrative device; it functions as an ideological gesture that reinforces the invisibility of marginalized bodies within dominant social discourse (Sharda 613). Bhardwaj's deployment of such language exemplifies a Foucauldian interplay of power and knowledge, wherein casteist and colorist terminology perpetuates systemic structures of domination (Foucault 27).

The association of dark skin with lower-caste identity is further reinforced through both visual and verbal iconography. *Kajri* operates as a chromatic and social signifier, invoking the constructed binaries of purity and pollution underpinning caste hierarchies. The posthumous denigration of Omkara's mother illustrates what Spivak terms "epistemic violence," highlighting the persistent stigmatization of subaltern figures (Spivak 271). In this way, language itself functions as a mechanism of oppression, reinforcing caste distinctions and perpetuating cycles of exclusion and social marginalization.

Bhardwaj's adaptation is intertextually rich, drawing on Shakespearean tragedy while localizing its concerns through Indian caste dynamics. The film's diegesis, punctuated by moments of implied interiority, explores how language mediates identity and agency. The recurrent use of casteist slurs both characterizes social hierarchies and critiques them, illuminating the psychological consequences of verbal marginalization. Combined with strategic use of Khari Boli dialect and regionally specific mise-en-scène, these elements authenticate the socio-political landscape of Uttar Pradesh and situate Omkara's personal struggle within a broader matrix of systemic oppression (Gruss 230).

This approach finds theoretical resonance in B. R. Ambedkar's seminal essay *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916), which rejected the notion that caste originated from racial distinctions. Ambedkar argued that the Brahmin class's self-imposed isolation, maintained through strict endogamy and rituals such as child marriage and sati, was imitated by other groups, transforming social classes into rigid castes through "imitation and excommunication." As Ambedkar asserts, "Some closed the door: Others found it closed against them" (Ambedkar 14). This framework illuminates the mechanisms through which caste boundaries are policed in both Shakespeare's *Othello* and Bhardwaj's *Omkara*. In each text, social hierarchies are reinforced not merely by lineage or skin color but by the structured enforcement of group identity and exclusion (Béteille 62).

In *Othello*, the tension between group identity and personal merit is dramatized through the character of Othello, the Moor of Venice, whose military accomplishments cannot fully shield him from racial prejudice. Iago exploits these vulnerabilities, warning Brabantio:

> Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe" (Shakespeare I.i.88–89). This vivid imagery casts Othello's marriage to Desdemona as a violation of social and racial boundaries, seeking to preserve endogamy and the perceived purity of Venetian society (Anderegg 35).

Similarly, *Omkara* translates these dynamics into caste terms. The film opens with Omkara instructing Tyagi to disrupt Rajju's wedding procession, a ritual symbolizing the continuity of caste. Resistance to this procession signals opposition to social hierarchy, yet Tyagi allows Rajju to escape—a narrative echo of Iago's "motiveless malignity" (Coleridge 112). The union between Dolly and Rajju, designed to preserve upper-caste endogamy, is disrupted by Omkara, who abducts Dolly, radically altering the social order. Authority figures, represented by the Duke in Venice or by regional political leaders in Uttar Pradesh, wield power to enforce or overlook these boundaries. In *Omkara*, the Duke's pragmatic corruption and reliance on Omkara mirror the Venetian Duke's prioritization

of state security over social propriety, demonstrating how political expediency often overrides entrenched social hierarchies (Rothwell 201).

Individual actors, however, resist such disruption. Tyagi, whose surname marks him as belonging to the highest Brahmin sub-caste in North India, functions as both enforcer and gatekeeper of caste privilege, directly challenging Omkara's authority. This dynamic illustrates Ambedkar's insight that endogamy and exclusion are actively maintained by dominant groups who "close the doors" to outsiders (Ambedkar 15). Bhardwaj's adaptation, therefore, reframes the racial anxieties of Shakespeare's Venice into caste-inflected struggles over identity, status, and power, demonstrating how literary adaptation can serve as both narrative and social critique.

To illustrate the persistence of caste boundaries, *Omkara* visually emphasizes Tyagi's resentment and Omkara's outsider status in scenes where Tyagi undermines Omkara's authority, not merely out of personal animosity but as an assertion of social hierarchy (Bhardwaj, *Omkara* 0:45:12). Similarly, in *Othello*, Othello reflects on the precariousness of his social position, stating, "For she had eyes and chose me" (Shakespeare III.iii.192), highlighting his struggle for acceptance in a society that defines itself through exclusion. By drawing these parallels, both texts interrogate the mechanisms through which racial and caste boundaries are maintained and challenged, showing how authority figures, social rituals, and collective expectations shape individual identity. Through this lens, *Othello* and *Omkara* demonstrate that the enforcement of social hierarchies is not merely abstract but intimately enacted in the lived experiences of their protagonists (Ambedkar 14; Sharda 613).

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The Sacred and Its Adaptation: Negotiating Folklore and Scriptural Authority

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Abstract: Change and adaptation, often believed to be necessary for continuity and survival, also serve as tools of erasure. For smaller cultures and communities, change rarely comes on its own terms. Instead, it is a guise under which dominant systems impose themselves, rebranding assimilation as evolution and loss as "necessary progress." In the name of adaptation, languages disappear, rituals are abandoned, and identities are subsumed. In the realm of the sacred, these adaptive processes often manifest in how belief systems are reinterpreted, retold, and restructured to align with dominant narratives or contemporary sensibilities. In the Indian Western Himalayas, adaptations, cultural and ritualistic, have been evident in the prominent Institution of Divinity, the localised, sacred tradition of *devi-devta* worship. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, the systems of oral worship are being subject to adaptation under the weight of script-oriented Hinduism, tourism and state-sanctioned religious homogenization.

Rooted in animistic, ecological and performative worldviews, these traditions have long operated outside the bounds of canonical Hindu scriptures. However, in contemporary times, an increasing trend can be observed in which local deities are reimagined as *avatars* of pan-Indian gods, oral myths are scripted to conform to *Puranic* narratives, and indigenous rituals are either "sanitised" or supplanted by institutionalised temple practices. This paper approaches these shifts through the lens of Adaptation Studies, particularly focusing on how these sacred traditions are selectively transformed and recontextualized. Through case studies, the research focuses on analysing how adaptation plays out in narrative, ritual, spatial and performative dimensions. The study is an attempt to highlight the contested negotiations between scriptural authority and local ritual agency, between preservation and transformation. The analysis intends to reveal how adaptation involves complex acts of cultural translation, resistance and hybridity.

Keywords: Adaptation Studies; Sacred Traditions; Devi-Devta Worship; Cultural Erasure; Religious Homogenization; Scriptural Authority; Himachal Pradesh

In the study of any culture, a primary concern is understanding how cultural identity is negotiated within the framework of hegemonic pressures exerted upon it. Since each society is marked by numerous small divisions, this is reflected in its multifarious cultural expressions. As Robert Redfield explains in *Peasant Society and Culture*, culture is shaped by two interrelated forces: the "Little Traditions" and the "Great Tradition." The interaction between cultural identity and hegemonic structures is visible in the encounters between these traditions, the "little" traditions, which are localized, community-specific practices and the one "Great" Tradition, which is a mainstream, codified, pan-regional, religious or elite framework. The interplay of these traditions has been further theorized under the concept of acculturation, which captures the dynamics of cultural contact, transformation, adaptation and resistance (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits 149).

Acculturation has often been misrepresented as a linear process moving in a single direction, in which the 'subordinate' tradition is gradually absorbed into the dominant tradition. However, recent scholarship, as emphasised by Bhabha, argues the same, instead positing that encounters between two cultures are not merely about assimilation but become sites of negotiation, hybridity and identity reconstruction. The adaptation of little traditions to a Great Tradition does not then, necessarily comprise a complete erasure of the former's cultural identity; rather, it involves a dialectical process where elements of the 'Great' tradition are also selectively appropriated, resisted, and thus reinterpreted to sustain and to a certain extent reshape existing identities of both.

This process delves into the complex intricacies of power relations and deals with questions of hegemony. Drawing from Gramsci's notion of cultural hegemony, the incorporation of local practices into mainstream frameworks can be understood as a mechanism for 'manufacturing consent' and redistributing cultural capital (Bourdieu 243). Yet, the 'subordinate' position of little traditions also allows for forms of agency, which also in exchange, allow them to subtly transform the Great

Tradition, further creating hybrid cultural forms that challenge the notion of fixed dichotomies between the "local" and the "universal" (Guha 6; Ortner 175).

These complex dynamics of cultural assimilation and identity transformation are evident in the customs and ceremonies of the sacred *nag devtas* in select regions of the Sangla Valley in the Western Himalayas. The cultural paraphernalia there is a living testimony to how little traditions negotiate their relationship with the Great Tradition, and how such negotiations contribute to wider questions of cultural continuity, change and hybridization.

In the Indian Western Himalayas, sacred traditions are deep-rooted in ecological spaces, oral transmission and performative practices. These constitute a vital cultural foundation and define the lived experiences and belief systems of various little traditions found within the region. Here, the sacred institution of *devi-devta* worship emerges as a dynamic embodiment of localized cosmologies and community life, but these are little traditions which are not isolated from broader mainstream religious forces. Increasingly, processes of state-led religious homogenization, the expansion of tourism economies and the influence of scriptural Hindu frameworks are reshaping the meanings and practices surrounding local deities. Such transformations highlight the tension between scriptural beliefs and lived experiences, and continuity and change, as indigenous religious systems are being forced to adapt to shifting cultural and political contexts.

The valleys of Himachal Pradesh are filled with numerous such little traditions, one of which can be found in the Sangla Valley in Kinnaur district. The valley is home to a *devta* known as *Bering Nag*, whose sanctity exemplifies both resilience and contestation in the face of mainstream religious pressures. Venerated as the patron deity of the valley, he is associated with ecological balance, protection and even martial authority. *Bering Nag*, therefore, occupies a central position in local identity and ritual practice.

Based on interviews, it has been noted that *Bering Nag*, a *nag* deity, is not always in the local narratives, a serpent, but is believed to have the body of a deer and the head of a bird (Himalayan Monal) whose powers are tied to water, fertility and the rhythms of agriculture. His worship echoes

a broader ecological Himalayan pattern in which indigenous *devis* and *devtas* are understood as guardians of fields, rivers and weather, and as protectors of communities from ecological imbalance. The stories about his origins are multifarious and have been preserved through folklore for centuries. As is the nature of orality, these narratives and his place in the wider sacred order do not follow an esoteric singular linearity; rather is a multifaceted domain wherein the narratives shift depending upon the "gaze" that is delineating it, the local folk narratives, or narratives that have recently merged him into the Puranic pantheon of scriptural Hinduism.

Among the locals, folk memory not only describes the arrival of *Bering Nag* but also the creation of the valley settlement. This has been preserved through *chirani*, the oral "history of the deity," which is performed before any major event or ritual takes place, with divine power believed to have entered the body of a medium ("*groakh"* in Kinnauri). One such account recalls his migration from Uttarakhand into the upper valleys of Himachal. Travelling downward from a lake in Kashmir, *Bering Nag* is first said to have established his home along with his seven brothers, five sisters, and their mother at Baural, (Uttarakhand) a high-altitude point marked by a large pond. Baural, till date, remains a site of pilgrimage for his followers, who recount how the deity "took his seat" there and regained his powers, turning the place into a centre of his authority. The narration of this history continues in ritual practice, when divine power manifests, the *groakh* throws off his cap and speaks in the first person as the deity, recounting his origins and announcing his presence. This is how both myth and history are interwoven, and the deity's ties to the landscape are renewed through lived experience such as this.

At the same time, additions to this tale also embed *Bering Nag* within the broader scriptural order of Hinduism. In these more recent versions, his genealogy begins with *Brahma* and his son *Marichi*, and extends to the myth of *Kadru* and *Vinata*, the co-wives whose rivalry gave birth to the *nags* and the *garudas,* according to scriptural Hinduism. Through this lineage, *Bering Nag* is linked primarily to *Sheshnag*, as the Great Serpent of the Sanskritic tradition. His role in such narratives is one that has been followed since times immemorial: as *Sheshnag*, he supports *Vishnu*, as *Lakshman*,

he accompanies *Ram* in the Ramayan, as *Balram*, he appears as *Krishna's* elder brother in the *Mahabharat,* and here in Sangla, according to some individuals, he has come in support of *Buddha*, who they believe is an incarnation of *Vishnu*. This story is further followed by *Krishna's* allocation of territories to the gods at the close of the *Dwapar Yuga*, situating *Bering Nag* and his family within Kashmir before their eventual migration southward into the Western Himalayas. This adaptation of indigenous narratives and rituals to the scriptural, Sanskritic texts is a form of Sanskritization, as M. N. Srinivas elaborates in his work, *Social Change in Modern India* ". . . Sanskritization is not confined to Hindu castes but also occurs among tribal and semitribal groups such as the . . . *Pahadis* of the Himalayas" (7).

The coexistence of these narrative strands, the place-bound records of the *Chirani* centred on Baural, and the Puranic genealogy connecting him to *Vishnu's avatars*, highlights the layered and dynamic nature of mythmaking. Local accounts emphasize the creation of the valley and its people, ecological guardianship and kinship with the land, thus it is evident that such local lores are representative of a limited space, while scriptural versions mould the deity into the wider scriptural Hindu order, intending to establish the deity as part of a 'greater' Sanskritic tradition, thus seeking assimilation with the Great tradition. The first degree of Sanskritization, then, can be found in the new narratives of the deity's origin that root his identity within the scriptural Hindu framework. But this is not unidirectional acculturation with the local being forgotten; rather, one notes that the local, space-bound lore doesn't try to resolve cosmic interrogations, unlike the mainstream, which is 'determined' to resolve the cosmic mystery through a single narrative. This, in turn, presents a very significant characteristic of the indigenous: their acceptance of variety and acknowledgement of it as legitimate entities worthy of respect, just like their own. The two belief systems, the local, place-bound narratives and the homogenising, mainstream narratives, also circulate within the same communities, often overlapping in narratives; together, they reveal how Himalayan traditions negotiate narratives between localised cosmologies and dominant religious frameworks, reshaping both in the process.

The local belief system has uniquely preserved the *devtas'* individuality through ritual practices, and it is here that the second degree of Sanskritization can be observed. Traditionally, *Bering Nag* has been venerated through oral hymns, preserved in an ancient language, distinct from the modern Kinnauri dialect, that only a handful of people can now understand, and through local dances and elaborate festivals, the most prominent being the organization of numerous fairs and festivals in the temple premises throughout the year. These rituals are community affairs which bind the people of the valley through participation in processions, masked performances and offerings that correspond to the cycles of agriculture and the rhythms of the seasons. An example of a uniquely local festival exclusive to the region and the valley is the celebration of *Phulaich* (the Festival of Flowers), where people collect flowers from nearby regions to honour their ancestors as well as their *devta*. In some cases it has been noted that the celebration of mainstream festivals has also gained prominence in the region, for instance the Holi of Sangla has recently been in the headlines across the country, but this celebration varies from its mainstream versions of Mathura and Vrindavan as the festival in Sangla always begins in the temple complex and the highlight of the event is the local theatrical production which includes neither the genealogy of *Krishna* nor renditions of his *Raasleela*. Such festivities and celebrations carry strong associations linking the ritual life of the valley to both natural cycles and broader North Indian festival calendars. In the valley, then, even mainstream festivals are never simple repetitions of pan-Indian patterns; they retain the local beliefs, emphasising reciprocity with the *devta* and the land.

A significant tradition connected to *Bering Nag* is the story of his victory over a demonic serpent and its sister, both of whom threatened the valley's prosperity. Oral accounts recall how, after a fierce battle, *Bering Nag* subdued the demon and restored balance, ensuring agricultural fertility and security for his people. The event is commemorated annually through *Budi Diwali*, a regional festival that takes place a month after the mainstream Diwali.

While its name has undergone reinterpretation across generations, *Budi Diwali* in Sangla bears little resemblance to the pan-Indian Diwali associated with the return of Ram from his exile and the

lighting of *diyas* as a means of illuminating households, symbolically establishing the victory of light over darkness. Instead, it is a distinctly local event characterized by ritual performances, collective dance and offerings dedicated to the memory of *Bering Nag*'s victory over the demonic serpents. These practices affirm the deity's dual role as both protector and warrior within the community's cultural imagination. The later renaming of the festival, however, has reinforced a parallel misconception that the delay in receiving news of Ram's return to Ayodhya accounts for the festival's observance at a later date in this remote region.

The sacred order of Sangla Valley is not limited to *Bering Nag* alone. Local belief also emphasises that the valley is home to numerous *devis* and *devtas*, some demonic in nature, each with their own domains, tied down and controlled by *Bering Nag* for their own good and the people's welfare. According to the people, these deities live in mutual respect and peaceful coexistence, only demanding some offerings from time to time. *Bering Nag* himself is thought to have several brothers who preside over different regions of the Western Himalayas, creating a divine kinship network that extends beyond Sangla. What sets him apart from the scriptural narrative that identifies him simply with *Sheshnag* is precisely this web of localized connections, to place, to other deities such as *Kamru devta*, *Badri Vishal devta* and to the people of the valley.

The rituals dedicated to him are also characterized by secrecy. A large number of rituals, especially those performed during major festivals inside the temple's inner precincts, are considered too sacred to be publicly displayed or explained to outsiders. This secrecy serves to preserve the autonomy of local traditions in the face of external pressures.

This cultural uniqueness, despite its resilience, has, over the past few decades in particular, become a victim of a trend toward ritual adaptation dictated by scriptural authority. Processes of "Scripturalization" have begun to alter the religious landscape. Local hymns and invocations are supplemented or even replaced by recitations from Sanskrit texts. The movement toward sanitisation is consistently discouraging older offerings such as animal sacrifices and liquor, integral to festivals and rituals, instead forcing the replacement of them with vegetarian foods and "orthodox" practices

designed to align with state policies, tourism sensibilities and mainstream Hindu ideals. In his temple at Sangla, *Bering Nag* himself is now declared as a 'pure' vegetarian, even though the diet of people in the region is largely non-vegetarian, and even the old ritual cycles reflect this dietary reality. In the process, the specific little culture becomes alien to the very people it once belonged to, further altering the identity of the group. The culture, which was supposed to be the representation of the lives of the people, then moves away from their experiences and becomes distant and abstract.

Institutional reforms have significantly reshaped the sacred order of the hillfolk. Temple committees, often guided by mainstream, scriptural Hindu organisations, now oversee many rituals, gradually displacing hereditary custodians who once preserved oral traditions, performative practices and specialised ritual knowledge. The decline of caste-based restrictions, particularly following their legal prohibition, has also restructured ritual hierarchies. Rules that once determined access to temple spaces or ritual roles are steadily eroding. This shift has, on the one hand, enabled wider participation across social groups, but on the other hand, it has weakened older forms of ritual authority and unsettled customary channels through which knowledge was passed down.

Altogether, these shifts reveal a complex process of change, adaptation and negotiation. On one hand, *Bering Nag* remains rooted in Sangla's local cosmology, remembered through secret rituals, kinship with other deities and festivals like *Budi Diwali* that commemorate his unique mythological victories. On the other hand, the pressure of Sanskritization, where indigenous *devis* and *devtas* along with rituals are being 'purified' and homogenized with the mainstream scriptural beliefs, and state-driven "modernization" continue to reshape his worship in line with pan-Indian religious forms. The contemporary moment is shaped by a tension between local traditions and external forces of homogenization. Adaptation in this context is never neutral; it becomes a contested space where continuity, erasure, and transformation unfold simultaneously.

The temple and its complex, wherein Sangla *Bering Nag* resides, are also examples of the third degree of Sanskritization, and their study shows how spatial and architectural transformations embody cultural adaptation. Traditionally, temples in the region have been constructed in the *Kath-*

Kuni style, an indigenous Himalayan method which uses wood and stone interlinked together without mortar or cement. This architecture was not just practical, as it suited the seismic zones and harsh mountain climates, but was also symbolic. On the carved wooden panels, one could see motifs carved from local cosmologies, featuring hybrid figures; in the case of the *Bering Nag* temple, such as a deer with the head of a Monal, alongside floral patterns and carvings of protective spirits linked to the valley's ecology, which came to shape in oral descriptions that had been passed down generations. Modest in scale yet closely attuned to its surroundings, the temple's form expressed the community's bond with both the *devi-devtas* and the landscape.

In recent decades, however, successive renovations have altered the visual language of the temple. Increasingly, concrete is used in construction, while ornate carvings and decorative facades have been introduced to bring the structure in line with North Indian temple styles. The new carvings, no longer focus exclusively on local imagery or agrarian motifs but prominently feature figures from the mainstream Hindu pantheon, such as *Vishnu*, *Lakshmi*, *Durga* and other gods familiar to pilgrims from the plains. Iconography that once reflected the localized traditions and cosmologies is gradually disappearing or being reinterpreted through the idiom of scriptural Hinduism.

This architectural shift parallels the broader processes of religious homogenization. As the temple becomes a destination for outsiders, tourists, pilgrims and state officials, its visual presentation is adapted to be legible within a national religious framework. To those unfamiliar with Himalayan traditions, carvings of *Vishnu* or *Durga* signify orthodoxy and legitimacy, aligning the temple with the wider networks of Hindu worship across India. Yet in achieving this recognizability, the temple simultaneously loses aspects of its distinct identity as a seat of a local *nag devta*. The architectural language of *Kath-Kuni*, with its embedded ecological knowledge and indigenous symbolism, is overshadowed by an aesthetic associated with urban temples of the plains, which have been accepted by the script-oriented generations, furthering the establishment of the 'true' religious narrative, which has no space for the sacred entities of the little traditions and communities.

The transformation of temple space is not merely on a modern, aesthetic basis, but also carries implications for ritual practice. Where once the temple itself was a repository of local myths and ecological memory, its wooden carvings narrating the *devtas'* guardianship of the valley, new iconographies recast the site within the theological framework of the 'Great Tradition.' An example of this can be understood through the act of placing *Vishnu's* image or idol alongside or even above representations of *Bering Nag*. This would precisely reorder the hierarchy of the divine powers, situating the local *devta* within the shadow of a pan-Indian one. This has been observed across the land and temples of Nepal, where *nags*, once believed to be the original owners of land and the guardians of their people, have now been removed from the centre and made to stand outside, guarding the gates of scriptural Hindu gods. The physical form of the temple thus stands as a material record of the pressures of Sanskritization, the quest for visibility, acceptance and the ongoing struggle to maintain local cosmologies within an increasingly homogenized, national, religious landscape.

Much like in Nepal, the oral narratives of *Bering Nag* that had once been transmitted in local dialects and kept secret, performed within community gatherings, are increasingly being re-scripted into mainstream versions that align with scriptural Hindu narratives. This would, with the passage of time, force the erasure of all folklore that portrays him as the creator and guardian *devta* of the Sangla valley. With this erasure comes a shift in authority, as certain mainstream versions of the narrative will be preserved while others are silenced and pushed to the margins. The agency of storytellers, mediums and performers is thus weakened when narratives move from lived experiences, dynamic, oral contexts into concrete textual forms, especially when that textualisation is flawed and corrupted by the pressures of Sanskritization. Textualization, rather than ensuring preservation, then, reduces the inherent dynamic nature and plurality of oral traditions to a singular, authoritative script.

While the pressure of Sanskritization and homogenization is evident in the case of *Bering Nag*, it also shows that adaptation does not simply take the form of unidimensional assimilation. Local communities continue to exercise their ritual agency even when narratives are being recast in the mould of script-oriented Hinduism. The locals hold onto practices that bind the *devta* to the ecological

and agrarian rhythms of the valley. Hybrid modes of worship are emerging, in which traditional dances, processions, rituals, and oral hymns coexist with *Puranic* practices introduced by external actors. *Puranic* associations are employed strategically, where *Bering Nag*'s links to *Sheshnag* are emphasized when engaging with state institutions or wider religious organizations, while older, localized rituals remain embedded within community-based settings. Here, then, adaptation is neither pure submission nor outright rejection; it is a negotiated process in which survival depends on selective translation and hybridisation.

The unique identity of the valley and the *devta* can also be understood in terms of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, not only for other local *devi-devtas* but also for other religions. One of the major religious influences in Sangla Valley, apart from Hinduism, is that of Buddhism. Religious practice in Sangla is marked by its long history of interaction with Buddhism. The valley has absorbed Buddhist influences from nearby Kinnaur and Tibet, and there is a widespread acknowledgement of Buddhist sacred spaces and figures. Villagers often describe *Bering Nag* as a deity who not only tolerates but also respects Buddhism, and rituals in the valley frequently make symbolic room for Buddhist presences.

This co-existence extends beyond simple tolerance or acculturation, as it is not merely about one faith absorbing or overpowering the other, but about unaffected hybridization where both traditions merge together to shape sacred landscape. Unlike the tendency of script-oriented mainstream's beliefs toward acculturation, where 'other' traditions are absorbed into its fold and reinterpreted through a fixed lens, the Sangla valley reflects a dialogic coexistence. The acknowledgement of Buddhist sacred spaces, including a temple alongside the temple of *Bering Nag* in Sangla, and the integration of Buddhist rituals into the valley's religious life show that Buddhism is not subordinated but given an autonomous place within the collective sacred imagination. The symbolic gestures, in which the *devta* also often visits the *Bodhmandir*, and people's descriptions of *Bering Nag* as a deity who respects Buddhism point to a syncretic sacrality in which divine figures and traditions maintain their distinctiveness while inhabiting the same ritual and cultural space. This

hybridity thus underscores the Himalayan sacred ethos as one of layering and coexistence rather than strict homogenization.

Altogether, the narrative, ritual and architectural adaptations around *Bering Nag* illustrate how sacred traditions in the Western Himalayas are continually reimagined under broader hegemonic pressures where they bend and mould, but still have succeeded in maintaining their individuality. It is evident that for such little cultures, with adaptation, on one side lies the danger of erasure, as local histories, offerings and ritual secrecy risk being subsumed by standardized practices and scriptural authority, whereas, on the other side, there lies the persistence of agency, expressed in the ways communities reshape adaptation to safeguard traditions, even if these take hybrid or transformed forms.

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Mannequins on the Stage: Contemporary Theatrical Adaptations as a Socio-Cultural Discourse on Gender Fluidity

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Abstract: The proposed research paper analyses contemporary socio-cultural influences on adaptations, particularly regarding the gender of characters. For this purpose, Anton Chekhov's play *Uncle Vanya* and its theatrical adaptation, *Vanya,* directed by Sam Yates, are examined. *Vanya* is a 2024 theatrical adaptation featuring a single actor, Andrew Scott, who plays the entire cast of nine characters from Chekhov's original play. Usually, one actor is associated with a single character, thereby serving as an on-stage anchor of narratorial continuity for the audience, especially regarding the gender of the character. The paper explores the unique ability of adaptations to assign multiple characters – or, in this case, all characters – to a single actor, effectively dismissing the actor as a gendered anchor. Andrew Scott plays both male and female characters without any costume or prop changes. The paper argues that this removal of blatantly gendered stage tools as a consequence of the socio-cultural nature of adaptations, focusing solely on narrative presentation, may be caused by the contemporary liberal stance regarding gender fluidity in society. This tacit socio-cultural commentary on gender fluidity in theatrical adaptations is the research gap scrutinized by this paper by expanding Jeremy Hawthorn's concept of the Gaze, where the 'gazer' and the 'gazed' interact with each other. Hawthorn comments that this Gaze enables us to connect to socio-cultural scenarios simply by being a passive participant. The paper addresses *Vanya*, a single-actor gender-less adaptation, as a possible result of a liberal society conducting itself as the 'gazer' to which current theatrical adaptations respond as the 'gazed.'

Keywords: Gaze; Gender Fluidity; Theatrical Adaptation; Chekhov

Introduction

Adaptation as a concept has always been bogged down by the heavy shackles of catering to a source text. Since adaptations are, more often than not, visual renditions – a play, a movie, or an episodic series – of a novel or a text, the field of adaptation studies is construed as comprising the evaluation of these visual adaptations in two ways. One such way is a constant, in-depth comparison with the source text; the other is an isolated study of visual adaptation with no reference to the source text (Leitch 162). Since the term 'adaptation' inherently adheres to a possible source text, the second of the two ways is a rare possibility. The first way, then, brings into sharp relief the remediation of the text into a visual medium. A prime concern, now, is the fidelity with which the text may be transformed and adapted into the chosen visual medium. While reading a book, a reader may focus on every word and, therefore, on every situation described, but can the same be claimed when the text is adapted into a movie being displayed on a humongous screen in a cinema hall where the two eyes of a spectator can only focus on certain elements at one point in time? Can the richness of the text, felt while reading it in absolute silence, be relished again as it is adapted on a stage, knowing that theatre actors would play their characters differently from how the reader imagines them? These questions point to the concept of 'fidelity' in adapting a text to a visual medium.

Thomas Leitch adequately debunks fidelity as "a hopelessly fallacious measure of a given adaptation's value because it is unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in the trivial sense" (161). A removal of fidelity as a pre-requisite for a successful adaptation reveals the undeniable link between the source text and the adaptation. If not absolute fidelity, readers/viewers/critics seek constant comparison between the source text and the adaptation, leading to adaptations being viewed as mere "intertexts" (165). As an intertext, an adaptation is "assumed to be a window into a text on which it depends for its authority, and the business of viewers and analysis is to look through the window for signs of the original text" (Leitch 166). Since this analysis of the adaptation as an intertext is contingent upon the reception of the adaptation by the viewer – the richness of the translation (if any), whether all characters from the source text have been used in the

adaptation, whether any events mentioned in the source text have been omitted in the adaptation, and so on – the proposed research paper aims to study the influence of the viewer's gaze on contemporary adaptations. Further, the viewer's gaze is examined through a two-pronged approach: pre-informed reflections on the actors in the visual adaptation and the contemporary ideological and legal perspectives of viewers (regardless of the adaptation's or the source text's geographical or ideological context). In other words, these two prongs refer to the stage directions (particularly the number and gender portrayal of the actors) and the geo-temporal settings of the play.

For this purpose, this research paper investigates Anton Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*, originally published in 1897, and its 2024 theatrical adaptation *Vanya*. Chekhov's play comprises nine characters, has four acts, is set in rural Russia, and has at least two different scene settings. *Vanya* has eight characters, is a one-act play, is set in contemporary Ireland, and has a single actor playing all the eight characters in a single setting. In order to scrutinize how the viewer's gaze affects *Vanya* as an adaptation, the aforementioned two prongs are used like so: the pre-conceived notions pertaining to Andrew Scott, the single actor playing eight characters in *Vanya*, as a gay actor; the legal and ideological stance regarding queer sexualities in the United Kingdom (as the place where *Vanya* is shown and to where most of the viewership belongs). It must be noted that the sexuality of the actor and the United Kingdom's (hereafter referred to as the UK) laws about queer sexualities have no active part in the theatrical adaptation of the play. This paper claims that these two contemporary influences on the viewers form a 'passive gaze' leading to a certain sexuality-based interpretation of the adaptation rooted in the two prongs. In other words, this paper aims to develop the stance that any changes in the adaptation (in *Vanya*, the change of the number of characters, the outward portrayal of the characters, the geographical and temporal settings) mixes with the pre-informed notions that the viewers have about these changes (the contemporary queer laws of the UK, and the previous works and acting skills of Andrew Scott) to create a passive gaze that influences how these adaptations are received and interpreted. Given the scope of this paper, the analysis focuses primarily on any changes in the adaptation based on the portrayal of the gender of the characters. The proposed

concept of the 'passive gaze' is developed in depth in this paper and is grounded in the perception that adaptations are inevitably compared with their source texts if they diverge from the stage directions or the geo-temporal setting of the source text.

Producing Passive Gaze

Andrew Scott is a forty-eight-year-old Irish actor with an expansive array of acting experience and projects in both cinema and theatre. Scott, due to the roles he has played and his open and progressive views on queer sexualities, is heralded as a 'gay icon' worldwide (Theil). In 2010, he played the character of Moriarty in BBC's production *Sherlock Holmes*, a show popular for its homoerotic undertones. Scott's on-screen chemistry with the eponymous character of the series, played by Benedict Cumberbatch, led to widespread speculations about the sexualities of both characters, even though neither of the characters is portrayed as queer (Geen). In 2013, Scott openly spoke about his being homosexual, subtly linking it to his character in *Sherlock Holmes*, thereby creating a foundation for such a link between the sexualities of the characters of his future projects with his homosexuality (Rampton; Theil). Over the years, Scott has appeared as Hot Priest in *Fleabag*, as Colonel John Parry in *His Dark Materials*, and as a queer character in *All of Us Strangers*. Though Hot Priest and Colonel John Parry were not queer characters, Scott was lauded for his portrayal of those heterosexual characters. In *All of Us Strangers*, Scott was widely celebrated for his on-screen chemistry with heterosexual actor Paul Mescal (Theil). Scott's characters as well as his acting projects have consistently been linked with his sexuality, and always in a complementary role – if the character is queer, viewers claim Scott to have drawn from his own experiences, as in the case in *All of Us Strangers*; if the character is non-queer, Scott's sexuality is heralded as a way of helping in his method acting.

Jeremy Hawthorn elaborates on his concept of the interactive gaze by explaining that the gaze of the viewers is a cumulative process (508). This cumulative nature of connecting Scott's homosexuality with the sexuality of his characters – that is, attributing the portrayal of his characters' sexualities to his own, in such a way that this connection intensifies over time – even if in opposition

(that is, the character being played possibly having a non-queer sexuality), forms a part of the pre-informed notions held by viewers. These pre-informed notions are present in the form of the label of 'gay icon' being given to Scott, as exemplified by the initial success of *Vanya* being screened in Bulgaria, not due to his acting skills, but because of his gay-icon-ness – "[In Bulgaria, *Vanya*] initially gained attention due to the actor's popularity" (Terziev). This perception of the viewers – this gaze – that is ubiquitously present, contributes towards the formation of the viewers' passive gaze. A corroboration of the application of this gaze in a real-world scenario is seen by studying Scott's role as the eponymous character in *Ripley*. In episode two of *Ripley*, Scott's character said "I like girls" (Allen) in a serious tone, but viewers received it sardonically. The episode and Scott's line delivery led to a series of online memes, emphasizing Scott as a queer actor and Ripley as a queer character, despite blatant evidence contrary to it (Allen). Scott has long realized this tendency of the viewers, often calling it out, declaring that his being gay is "just a fact" (Rampton) and not a bridge connecting him to the characters that he plays. Expanding on his position regarding his sexuality, Scott has quite often linked it with his being announced (at interviews and award shows) as an "openly gay" ("Openly-Gay Scott") actor. He insists that being 'openly gay' connotes that some people might be secretively gay, and therefore highlighting the social taboo related to homosexuality, which is in stark contrast to the liberal society and progressive sexuality laws in the UK. This connects the first prong of the research undertaken in this paper (the actor's sexuality) to the second prong (the geo-temporal setting of the viewers) regarding the UK's legal position on queer sexualities.

Currently, the UK is ranked twenty-ninth in the world equality rankings, is considered a widely progressive and tolerant country regarding queer sexualities, and legally allowed non-heterosexual marriages in 2014 ("LGBT Rights"; "UK Gov"; Persaud). Given the blatant bigotry of the UK media towards queer people as recently as twenty years ago, the policies of the UK have come to greatly reflect the liberal and inclusive nature of the UK citizens. Laws and legal sanctions of the land contribute to a large extent in helping form the perspectives of the citizens, influencing the way in which they look at society, and consequently affecting social institutions. The "looking activities

[of the citizens] are saturated with the residues of [their] social and cultural existence" (Hawthorn 508), which, in turn, highly affects and is also affected by the law. Thus, Scott, as a gay actor playing characters with alleged homoerotic undertones in a country where the laws are progressive and supportive of such social perceptions of queer sexualities, cumulatively forms the pre-informed notions of the viewers. A prime example is Scott recalling the sheer paucity of queer visual content during his childhood at a time when homosexuality was illegal (Ireland decriminalized homosexuality in 1993; legalized queer marriages in 2015), and drawing parallels with "the current era of identity politics" ("Openly-Gay Scott") where identity is used in partisan politics.

This exchange of gaze between society and law – the law reflects society, and the social norms reflect the law – is what Hawthorn terms as 'interpersonal looking' and defines it as an "interactive, two-way process . . . [where] we reveal things about ourselves, including things we may not wish to reveal or of which we are unaware" (Hawthorn 508). Similarly, between an actor and the place/country where he performs, there is an interpersonal looking – Scott's own beliefs about sexuality, through his acting, may affect the country and its citizens. Thus, in a country intolerant of queer sexualities, Scott's position as a gay icon may create a prejudice against him in the minds of that country's citizens, and this perception might lead to a skewed interpretation of Scott's acting. Importantly, this exchange of gaze, this interpersonal looking, is not influenced in any way by the context or the content of the movies or plays that Scott acts. Thus, Andrew Scott, as a gay actor in a country whose laws dictate queer inclusivity, acts in *Vanya* and is seen by viewers who already have a pre-informed notion about him. This notion is passive because it is not directly affected by the play – both source text and adaptation – and is therefore termed as the 'passive gaze' of the viewer. The process of taking an active facet of Scott's identity, which is his queer sexuality, and passively linking it to the lens used by viewers to spectate Scott's characters in various works, forms the passive gaze.

From Uncle Vanya to Vanya

Madison Rouleau, in her study of Gaze in *Paradise Lost*, speaks of gaze as a discursive practice, invoking gaze as a concept affected by social institutions, gender binary, as well as cultural and

historical entities such as gods and religions. In particular, she speaks about the gaze of the reader as "the final link in the spectatorial chain" (Rouleau 7). If parallels are drawn with passive gaze, then the viewer's gaze is conceived as the last link or the final spectator, where Althusser's ideological state apparatus, in the form of pre-informed notions, affects passive gaze. Since the passive gaze is founded in the laws of a particular country, it can be argued that the passive gaze is a tool for shifting influence and "a means of control" (Hawthorn 512) by the country on the adaptation via the viewer. Thus, while everyone attributes Andrew Scott to gay-ness, the reception of that gay-ness is contingent upon the passive gaze. This paper now investigates passive gaze as an active influence and final gaze on theatrical adaptations, with particular focus on *Vanya*.

Uncle Vanya describes a rural Russian setting: a large country estate owned by a retired professor who lives with his extremely young second wife, his daughter from his first wife, his brother-in-law, and his mother-in-law. The actors, then, have a pre-established age, gender, as well as clothing that Chekhov has already decided and presented with the stage directions – the second wife is twenty-seven years old, the character of Ilya is described as "impoverished" and thereby would present the actor playing Ilya in tattered clothes, and Marina is unequivocally presented as "elderly" (Chekhov 3). In *Vanya*, Andrew Scott wears a blue half-sleeve shirt and grey trousers, his face devoid of any blatant make-up, showing no enhancement or patterns to show a change in age. The only indication of a change in the character being played on-stage is via minimal accessories – black sunglasses to denote Ivan, a thin necklace for the second wife, Helena, a yellow ball for Michael, and a chequered handkerchief for the daughter, Sonya. Scott's ability to shift between characters, depicting them with extreme skill, is posited as:

> In resumé, Andrew Scott plays a total of eight characters and manages to give each a distinct appearance and tone. This is amazing on its own and a real feat of acting, which can happen only in the theatre. The virtuoso actor moves swiftly from character to character without ever changing costume, with only subtle shifts in attitude and tone of voice and with an astonishingly precise economy of gesture. Ironic black sunglasses plus agitated, waving hands, and the

> anxious Ivan springs into life; a slow and gentle fondling of a thin necklace, and the audience is drawn into the hypnotic orbit of the beautiful Helena. The human sketches are sharp and convincing, and the timing of delivery impeccable. […] Yet, when the actor cries, we spectators of his one-man show are never certain which exact character is crying—is it Sonya now, or is it Vanya, or someone else? The shift from person to person is so rapid, so gentle, so fluid that there are moments when the boundaries between the different characters seem to melt away. They flicker across the actor's face and body like passing ghosts, creating an electric chain of emotion in which an impulse starts in one character and swiftly moves to another. (Terziev)

Within the span of one minute, Scott plays three characters – Sonya, Michael, Liam; the daughter, the distinguished doctor, and the impoverished landowner respectively – without a change of clothes or use of any props to showcase a change in bodily features (*Vanya*, 00:18:20-00:19:20). He only uses the tokens associated with the characters to aid the viewer in realising the character he is playing, such as bouncing the yellow ball on the floor for Michael, wiping his hands with the handkerchief to present Sonya, and sitting on a stool to enact Liam. This swapping of one character for the other should be seen in this way: there is no chorus or another actor on-stage to aid the viewers in distinguishing between characters, there is no overtly stereotypical gendered props used to signal a change of characters such as clothing or facial hair, the quickness of the swapping of characters leaves almost no time to properly swap the character tokens. Many times, Scott is seen juggling multiple tokens on-stage, such as when he pushes Ivan's sunglasses atop his head and is fondling Helena's necklace with his left hand while simultaneously holding on to Michael's yellow ball with his right hand (*Vanya*, 00:24:20). This one-man theatrical adaptation becomes more complex when the passive gaze is taken into account. Scott is a gay actor, championed as a gay icon, often uses his own life experiences as a homosexual to fuel his acting, *and* is rapidly switching between eight gendered characters (four male and four female) without any change in clothing or stage setting and is constantly modulating his voice to suit the characters. At one point during the adaptation, as Scott shifts from the baritone voice of Michael to the seductive purr of Helena, the baritone bleeds into the

first few words uttered by Scott-enacting-Helena (*Vanya*, 00:25:54-00:25:56). The effect produced is that of a mixing of predominantly stereotypical male and female characteristics, that is the baritone of the male with the seductive cadence of the female. This mixing, then, presents the entire adaptation as if it were comprising a single gender-variant character played by Scott.

Ali Jamali, while incorporating Hawthorn, in his seminal work on female gaze and its manifestations in one-act plays and their theatrical adaptations, describes a characteristic of the female gaze as a "continuous, non-stop presence of sympathy and identification [which is] . . . nowhere to be found in the male gaze" (42). If Jamali's theory is put to use to identify the female characters via the presence of the female gaze, there are only three ways to differentiate between the characters – stereotypically female features pertaining to the body, overt props or stage settings, and dialogues and events of the adaptation as attributed to the characters. Firstly, Scott does not use any props to depict bodily features such as breasts (to show a female) or a moustache (for a male character), and he merely changes voice intonation, which, as posited above, bleeds into other characters' voices whenever Scott shifts between characters. Secondly, Scott retains the clothes (with which he starts the play) till the end, and none of the clothes that he wears is exclusively female (as a contrast to his own maleness). If anything, the blue shirt unbuttoned till the middle of his chest and casual grey trousers are ambiguous in nature, and may be worn by both men and women (since the adaptation is set in contemporary Ireland, where both men and women may wear such clothes). Lastly, while the events in the adaptation largely remain the same as those of the source text, the dialogues have been translated and some of the names from Chekhov's text have been anglicised – Chekhov's Sofya, Mikhail, Ilya, and Marina are now Scott's Sonya, Michael, Liam, and Maureen. Most importantly, Chekhov's play was situated in imperial Russia, where females were dependent on males for social security. The theatrical adaptation, played by Andrew Scott, is situated in democratic Ireland, where men and women are equals. So, even in dialogues and events, it would be a fallacious claim that a sycophantic or submissive character ought to be female. Thus, using passive gaze, Scott's enactment of the characters in *Vanya* can be seen as a gender-variant or a gender-fluid adaptation.

Even if this gender-fluidity in *Vanya* were attributed to Scott as an intentional "political act" (Halberstam, *Trans** 88), an attempt to subvert both the source text and the adaptation, a passive gaze would not allow such a reading. Scott's presence as a gay icon necessitates that viewer, via passive gaze, would read the gender fluidity as an inherent part of Scott's acting in *Vanya* and, therefore, as a pre-determined part of the theatrical adaptation (that is, the gender fluidity precedes *Vanya* being conceived as an adaptation). Moreover, the laws of the UK allow such a presentation of gender fluidity, keeping in line with the passive gaze. More importantly, these self-same assertions would be wrong, had Chekhov's play been simply enacted on stage by Irish actors. Possibly, then, the audience might have assumed that the contemporary Irish actors were acting out a Russian play that was set in an imperial Russian setting. Thus, an important distinction between a theatrical adaptation of a play and the source text being enacted on stage is that the adaptation always includes the passive gaze, whereas the enactment of the source text does not.

In an interview, while *Vanya* was playing at Lucille Lortel Theatre, in New York, USA, Andrew Scott described the adaptation's setting: "This is incredibly modern. There's no doubt that it's set in the present day. . . . This idea of one person doing the whole show" (*Off-Broadway*, 00:00:14-00:00:28). He seems to imply that the notion of a single actor acting out eight characters of a play, condensing the four-act play into a one-man adaptation, is a modern narrative technique. Using passive gaze, his statement may be interpreted in a way that describes a modern setting of an adaptation as an any-gender actor playing an infinite number of any-gender characters, disregarding all stereotypes pertaining to on-stage presentation of gender of those characters, in an adaptation. Consequently, the passive gaze may be theorised as a discursive concept that may change its contents, depending on the actor and the viewers' country. This flexibility enables passive gaze to suit itself to possibly all variants of all theatrical adaptations.

An Alternate Version of *Vanya*

A gender-variant or gender-fluid portrayal of *Vanya*, using passive gaze, has been thoroughly discussed. The gender-fluid approach is a very inclusive approach, taking into account all sexualities,

labels, and beyond-label portrayals of the sexualities and genders of the characters. This leaves ample space for experimental approaches to interpreting adaptations, using passive gaze, such as a trans*gender reading of the adaptation and its subsequent nuances.

Jack Halberstam's concept of 'trans*' or 'trans with an asterisk' is an approach to redefine contemporary perception of trans-ness and transgender. Similar to passive gaze as a discursive narrative perspective, trans* undermines the current understanding of trans-ness as a permanent shift from one gender to another. Trans-ness caters to the gender binary of male-female, often labelling a person 'transgender, after that person has decisively shifted from identifying with one gender to another. Thus, trans-ness would comprise either a male-to-female person or a female-to-male person. Trans*, on the other hand;

> Holds open the meaning of the term [trans] and refuses to deliver certainty through the act of naming. The asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender-variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations. (Halberstam, "Toward a Trans* Feminism")

In *Vanya*, Scott may be understood as a trans* site for all eight characters. Since adaptations employ passive gaze, the gaze affects *Vanya* such that the characters blend into one another, creating a gender-fluid perception of them. Thus, no character is exclusively male or female, which further reasons that none of those characters may be argued as transgender, since trans-ness requires identification with a particular side of the gender binary. In *Vanya*, portrayed by Scott, all the characters have a dynamic, fluctuating understanding of gender, so they can be placed anywhere on a gender spectrum, with the two ends being 'male' and 'female.' Thus, effectively, these characters may be investigated as trans* characters, where "the asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to . . . a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk

holds off certainty of diagnosis . . .” (Halberstam, *Trans** 4). This trans* reading of *Vanya* is not simply because it can be done using the gender-fluid characters of the adaptation, but due to contemporary citizens, due to “young people who cross-identify . . . [and] imagine themselves into other bodies, bodies that feel truer to who they are” (Halberstam, “Toward a Trans* Feminism” 2) being active participants of society and avid viewers of adaptations. Trans* readings of adaptations keep pace with the discursivity of the passive gaze, which incorporates political and social ideologies of contemporary times, often visible in the law, rather than treating such concepts as reified or static. Thus, a trans* version of an adaptation would not just be one of the many probable adaptations of a source text, but one of the *more* probable ones, thereby reflecting social undertones.

Moreover, these queer readings of adaptations are not due to any possible ambiguity related to the changes made to the source text while it is being adapted. On the contrary, passive gaze helps explain that these queer readings are made plausible due to certain cultural nuances as well as performative conditions present in the socio-political avenue that is hosting the adaptation. A queer-intolerant society might emphasise a queer actor (who is Andrew Scott) heavily invested in portraying a heterosexual character, where a queer-friendly one would view and project the queerness more expansively, as has been sufficiently exemplified by the increasing viewer feedback where *Vanya* has been hosted or screened.

Conclusion

Passive gaze, while distinguishing between adaptations and source texts, also demands a more comprehensive analysis of the ideological state apparatuses that underpin it. Scott delineates that succinctly, opining:

> It’s about the stories that we say to ourselves about ourselves. We think, oh, well, I’m too old, or she’s beautiful, or he’s ugly, or he’s whatever. And when you have one person playing all the characters, you look at other things, you look at their attributes, or how they might feel about the way they look or the way they are, or what their history is. So, you have to look at, in

a way, ignore what the surface stuff is and look at what's kind of underneath. (*Off-Broadway*, 00:00:34-00:00:57)

Passive gaze, then, facilitates relatability between the adaptations and the viewers, paving the way for a more interactive relationship with the adaptation. Passive gaze is a cumulative active-to-passive perspective by a viewer, leading to this perspective influencing future inferences. In the context of this paper, passive gaze is involved via the fact that Scott declared himself as a queer person, forming the active part of passive gaze. This facet is cemented in the minds of the viewers and spectators, thereby forming the passive part of passive gaze. In contrast with 'ideological interpellation,' propounded by critics like Louis Althusser, which talks about ideology leading to the creation of dominant social patterns, passive gaze deals with the minority social segments (such as queerness) which are brought to the forefront by the participation of a queer entity (such as Scott's heterosexual roles being analysed by viewers as possible criticisms of heterosexuality because of his queer identity). Reception Theory, worked on by theorists like Hans-Robert Jauss, engages with the active interaction of the spectator with the text to present a constantly in-flux perception of the text. This active engagement is also characteristic of the concept of 'cultural spectatorship.' Passive gaze, on the contrary, as explored in this paper, adopts an active-to-passive approach in which certain facets of a social entity are reified and continually used by spectators to view that entity's social interactions.

Apropos of using queer sexualities as a connecting bridge, passive gaze might contribute to the burgeoning avenue of feminism, as well. This helps introduce another facet to passive gaze – the sexuality and gendered gaze of the viewer themselves. A gender-fluid viewer watching a gender-fluid character on stage would perceive it differently than a cisgender female viewer watching the same adaptation. Does this own-gender analysis reveal any changes in the influence of the passive gaze on adaptation? Since own-gender spectrum might be more volatile and susceptible to change than the laws of the country the viewer is a resident of, should own-gender analysis be considered separate from passive gaze? Such questions help formulate passive gaze as an important concept in adaptation

studies, thereby expanding the scope of research and providing a fertile ground for comparative study of multiple adaptations of the same source text.

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Feminist and Political Erasure: *The House of the Spirits* Novel vs. Film

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Abstract: Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* is widely acclaimed for being one of the foundational novels of the Latin-American feminist literary canon. Unlike her precursors who often wrote from male perspectives, Allende's work foregrounded the unique voices and experiences of women. It was, however, precisely this essential characteristic that seems to be lacking in the film adaptation by Billie August. The film was accused of silencing the Third World feminist and political struggles in favour of a depoliticised narrative palatable to the Western audiences. In the film, two significant and well distinguished female characters have been merged into a single character. By comparing the novel and its adaptation, this paper seeks to explore how this major omission results in the reduction of two diverse and vibrant female characters into one. It will further speculate how the adaptation, from a feminist and political point of view, would've benefited had it not proceeded with this omission.

Keywords: Political Erasure, Feminism, Allende, August, Hutcheon, Chile, Adaptation, Magic Realism.

Introduction

Originally written in Spanish, Isabel Allende's 1982 novel *The House of the Spirits* has been translated into over 30 languages and adapted into a film. *The House of the Spirits* is often seen as a transition from the Latin American Boom, which was dominated by male authors and experimental narratives, to the post-Boom, where gender, intimacy, and historical trauma took center stage. The book is celebrated for its rich thematic tapestry, which explores family legacy, class struggle, the intersection of personal and political lives, and the empowerment of women who assert their rights in a world that often denies their agency. Through its multi-generational saga, the novel foregrounds

women's voices and experiences, bringing to life their dynamic but often marginalized perspectives amid Chile's turbulent political history. The rich and complex characters of its three main female protagonists, that is, Clara, Blanca, and Alba, become the vehicle through which Allende traces their feminist and political resistance.

In 1993, Billie August, a celebrated and award-winning director, adapted Allende's seminal novel into a film. Despite its impressive cast, including sterling actors like Meryl Streep, Jeremy Irons, Glenn Close, and Winona Ryder, the film was largely regarded as a critical and commercial failure in the United States, a fate that stood in stark contrast to the success and awards it garnered in Europe (Kennedy). One of the central criticisms of the movie was that there was a profound mismatch between its tone and that of the novel. According to the film critic Roger Ebert, the film transformed the novel's "lusty, passionate Latin melodrama" into a "brooding, intellectualised drama" (Ebert). The second major criticism came with respect to its casting decision. In a narrative where Latin-American identity and political struggles take center stage, casting actors from the same ethnic background seems like the obvious direction to take. Yet, in the film, all the major roles were given to Anglo-European actors.

Due to this "whitewashing," the film faced widespread backlash and controversy, sparking protests from Latino actors who accused it of lacking authenticity (Kennedy). And finally, some of the critics lamented its "lackluster pacing" and "diffusely episodic structure" that struggled to present a multi-generational epic into a cohesive cinematic experience (Wikipedia). In the novel, it is through the characters of Clara, Blanca, and Alba, who embody distinct yet interconnected feminist and political trajectories, that Allende foregrounds women's voices and their intergenerational struggles. These critical dimensions have been substantially diluted in the movie, as the characters of Blanca and Alba, two distinct and vibrant female protagonists, have been mingled into a single character. Therefore, this paper undertakes a comparative analysis of Allende's novel and August's film adaptation of the same, examining how the film's choices diminish the novel's political and feminist aspects. It shall focus particularly on the merging of Blanca and Alba into a single character and,

through that, on the broader depoliticisation of the narrative as a whole. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, feminist criticism, and Latin-American cultural studies, this research outlines how Billie August's adaptation tries to perform a form of cultural and ideological erasure, and speculates what the film could have been if it had retained the distinct trajectories of Blanca and Alba and had "faithfully" translated the novel's subversive core.

Feminist Perspective in Allende's Novel

Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* blends magical realism, the political upheaval of Chile at the time of the Coup, and a family saga into a narrative that showcases female agency in an otherwise male-dominated literary landscape. The novel allows the voices of its female characters, especially that of Clara, Blanca and Alba, to shape the history of their family, as well as the memory of an entire nation (Smith 79-81). In the novel, both Alba and her grandfather, Esteban Trueba, a representative of patriarchy and republicanism, take turns narrating their own versions of events. Esteban's retellings are in first person and showcase his patriarchal leanings whereas Alba's narrative is more inclusive and female-centric. On the other hand, Clara, wife of Esteban Trueba and one of the most important characters in the novel, defies patriarchal control throughout the novel with her silence and her magical gifts. When Esteban goes into a fit of rage after he discovers his daughter Blanca has taken a peasant for a lover, Clara reminds him that he, in his youth, raped multiple peasant women. Enraged, Esteban strikes her, and when she recovers from the blow, Clara never speaks to him again (Thomson 42). Through this act of defiance, Clara swore never to enter Trueba's masculine verbal space. On the one hand, her muteness, far from signifying powerlessness, becomes a chosen form of resistance against Esteban's violence and the broader constraints on women that predominate the Chilean society. On the other hand, her supernatural abilities are symbolically linked to female agency, suggesting alternative epistemologies and valorising women's intuition and resistance. Clara is also the one who chronicles the family history through her journaling. Towards the end of the novel, these journals are revealed to be the primary source of Alba's narrative.

Clara's daughter, Blanca, on the other hand, exhibits her feminist defiance through her resilient pursuit of forbidden love with the socialist and revolutionary Pedro Tercero. By having a scandalous affair with a peasant employed in her father's estate, Tres Marías, she refuses to conform to class and gender expectations. Her story runs parallel to, and yet sharply diverges from that of her daughter, Alba. In the development of this multi-generational struggle, the latter represents the third generation of strong women who actualise the family's feminist and political consciousness. Unlike the previous generation, Alba resists conformity in every sphere of life, especially in the political sphere, where she effectuates positive change in people's lives by playing an active and indispensable role in the revolution (Thomson 21-22).

Allende's novel is inseparable from the Chilean history of the infamous military coup. By weaving the personal stories of women within national struggles of class conflict, political repression, and the trauma of dictatorship, she displays the intersections of gendered and political violence. Alba's narrative highlights the erasure of marginalized voices under an oppressive regime and illustrates the necessity of collective resistance. The novel's structure resists linear, patriarchal histories. Allende constructs a circular, memory-based narrative that allows forgotten and traumatic events to be remembered and re-inscribed into collective consciousness (Smith 80). In doing so, the novel functions as both an act of resistance against historical amnesia and a feminist intervention in the politics of memory (Youssef 78).

The Political and Feminist Erasure in August's Adaptation

Billie August, in the process of adapting Allende's novel into a movie, drastically alters the narrative structure of the novel, most notably by merging two distinct characters, that is Blanca and Alba, into a single character. By merging their unique trajectories, the film renders invisible the generational transmission of resistance, care, and feminist agency that is central to the novel. In the novel, it is Alba who endures physical and mental torture by Esteban García, the illegitimate grandson of Esteban Trueba, her grandfather. Whereas, in August's adaptation, it is Blanca who is shown to be the political activist who experiences the torture. This results in the erasure of Alba's critical role as a narrator-

witness and as a political revolutionary. Conversely, the film conveniently omits Blanca's significant role in aiding and hiding Pedro Tercero, a revolutionary and a criminal under the regime of the Republican party, right under her father's nose, who is a Senator of the same party. It further eliminates the dynamic tension between a mother and a daughter and the intergenerational evolution of feminist consciousness, both of which are so central to the novel. Furthermore, August's film also leaves out Clara's defiance against Trueba's patriarchal control, which she achieves through her refusal to enter his verbal space.

This results in not merely a loss of narrative complexity, but also substantially diminishes feminist representation. Blanca's defiance in love and her hazardous navigation of patriarchal and class boundaries differ significantly from Alba's direct confrontation of political violence and the aftermath of dictatorship (González 22-23). The flattening of these figures into a single character stunts the diversity and richness of feminine experience that the novel so carefully records. By erasing these nuanced and resistant voices, it commits what Hutcheon might call a "transcultural adaptation," but one that represses, rather than reinterprets, the novel's subversive energies (Hutcheon 147-149). As Hutcheon notes, when it comes to Hollywood, transculturation often means "Americanizing" a work (Hutcheon 146). In a similar vein, August's transcultural adaptation of Allende's novel seems like an example of a broader Westernization of the latter. Hence, August's movie adaptation received criticism for its broader depoliticisation and cultural erasure. The film downplays Chilean history, bypassing the military coup and subsequent dictatorship, thereby diminishing the political stakes of the story. The activism and resistance of key revolutionary characters, like Pedro Tercero, Blanca, and Alba, are either glossed over or neutralised in favour of a more generic melodrama.

Additionally, the casting of white, English-speaking actors for quintessentially Chilean roles adds an additional layer of erasure. The film's aesthetics, that is, its settings, dialogue, and even costuming, appeal to a Western gaze, framing the story as a universal family tragedy at the expense of its rootedness in Latin American, and specifically Chilean culture and resistance (Rodriguez 49).

The film not only marginalizes Third World feminist and political struggles, but it also tries to make Allende's subversive core more palatable to the Western audience.

Another tragic effect of the adaptation is the loss of narrative polyphony. The novel's dynamic interplay between female and male voices, between first-person and third-person, is replaced by a simplified, often external perspective. Alba's unique position as both a survivor of political violence and the inheritor of women's history is replaced with a more detached, masculine-ordered ending that dilutes the transformative potential of testimony and memory.

What Could Have Been and Conclusion

August's adaptation could have retained the distinction between Blanca's private, domestic resistance and Alba's public, political activism. Alba's survival of the torture and her choice to break the chain of revenge by forgiving Esteban Garcia are not merely plot points, but statements on historical memory, agency, and hope in the post-dictatorship era. Including Alba as a distinct figure would also have allowed for an intersectional depiction of women's struggles: not only as mothers or lovers, but as radical historic actors in their own right. The character of Clara would have likewise benefited had the director chosen to retain her multi-dimensionality in the film: her ability to see and communicate with spirits, to foresee future events, and her complex relationship with her husband and her children. Such directorial choices would have entrusted the adaptation with a more polyphonic and complex structure, creating space for the recovery of lost or silenced stories, proclaiming the feminist and political inheritance that Allende's novel seeks to preserve.

Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* is an act of feminist and political recovery, mapping the ways women remember, resist, and survive amid violence and erasure. The film adaptation's merging of Blanca and Alba, alongside its broader depoliticization and cultural flattening, constitutes an act of narrative and ideological erasure that robs the story of its resistant core. This loss is not simply a problem of plot or character, but a silencing of the diverse, polyphonic, and transformative voices that make the novel a foundational text of Latin American feminist literature.

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Plurilingualism and the Problem of Translation/Adaptation: A Study of Select Sufi/Bhakti Poems in Bangla/Hindi Translation

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Abstract: While the academic subfields of translation and adaptation are well developed within Indian academia and abroad, the possibility of new theoretical frameworks cannot be ruled out, given the complex, inseparable, and overlapping linguistic, literary, and cultural traditions in South Asia. Among these literary traditions, there are a number of texts by a number of acclaimed Sufi and Bhakti poets from the medieval period, which often pose a challenge to determine their 'language' as such, which in turn problematises their so-called 'translation' and 'adaptation' as independent literary practices. Instead of this, these texts are subject to numerous translations/adaptations and inadvertently draw an ambiguous line between the two. The proposed paper selects some of Tagore's poems which are both creative and translations like *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1915) and *Song Offerings* (1912) and their Hindi translation to argue that original text written by Sufi/Bhakti poets were *plurilingual* in nature that not only characterise its complex syncretic nature and humanistic fervour but complicates the very process of translation and adaptation by some of the modern Indian poets/translators. Through a detailed analysis of the translation-cum-adaptation of Tagore, the paper argues that, in this context, it is a daunting task for a modern scholar to distinguish between translation and adaptation, given the plurilingual nature of the selected texts. This paper particularly argues that the essence of plurilingualism is not only deeply rooted in Indian humanistic traditions, but also that an inability to translate/adapt them is the central feature of this Sufi/Bhakti literature, nurtured by a diverse, dynamic, and syncretic society throughout the centuries in India/South Asia. The paper engages not only with existing theories of adaptation and translation, literary histories, and linguistic debates, but also proposes an alternative method for understanding modern translation/adaptation of medieval Sufi/Bhakti texts.

Keywords: Adaptation; Translation; South Asia; Plurilingual Literatures; Syncretic; Sufi and Bhakti Literatures

Introduction

The body of scholarship in India and abroad that engages with a section of medieval Indian literature, specifically those in northern India, has more to do with the Sufi and Bhakti literatures starting from the 12th Century AD to the 17th century AD, than declassifying languages, dialects, idioms and vocabulary of the texts. The scholars, from the (mid) twentieth century onwards, are mostly invested in categorising the Sufi and Bhakti literatures within the popular literary framework of the Hindi-Urdu duo, or a few might ascribe importance to the regional dialects or languages still spoken across the Gangetic plains (both upper and lower), Punjab and *Rajputana*. And a vast majority of them, most of the time, underestimate the fact that there were fewer literary dialects than spoken ones in which a number of Sufi, Bhakti and Vaishnavite texts were written. It must be mentioned here that, as much as the colonial scholarship contributed more to the language parochialism than to the linguistic/literary unity, the postcolonial scholars sought to decode the prejudice and malice in colonial historiography and the classification of Indian languages. Instead of this, imbalanced verdicts are still being delivered by a number of recent scholars like Charlotte Vaudeville when she states that, *Awadhi* was a language spoken by the "Muslims" in Awadh and Peter Friedlander when he in his recent book *Kabir in Transformation: A Foundation of Creativity* (2023) argues that there is a manuscript found of Kabir in "Rajasthani" language. One is certainly left to wonder, especially when decolonisation as a process is vigorously taking place in the era of post-truth and emerging trend of "Indian Knowledge Systems" what exactly a "Rajasthani" language is where in the state of Rajasthan (a colonial border-creation) has multiple languages and among others, Mewari and Marwari has distinct literary traditions that dates back long years before the colonization of India?

It is in the spirit of the above proposition of language debates and literary historiography that always keeps new avenues open to change and challenges, comes across an intersectional point when one engages with the texts of a number of *Bhakti,* Sufi and Vaishnavite literatures produced in the

medieval India and transferred, transited, reproduced, adapted, carried forward and translated through centuries and reaches down to the hands of a twenty-first century reader. This must not be seen as a separate incident, but rather as part of a longstanding tradition regarding vernacular languages and literary traditions in India and South Asia, in broader terms. Among others, Rabindranath Tagore's translation of Kabir titled *One Hundred Poems of Kabir* (1915), in association with his lifelong associate and literary-comrade, Evelyn Underhill, in the English language, is a landmark translation that ignited an interest in Kabir and other Sufi, Bhakti and *Vaishnavite l*iteratures during the time of colonial modernity in the early twentieth century. Tagore, as deeply rooted as he was in the Indian linguistic, cultural and literary traditions, apart from *One Hundred Verses*, continued adapting, translating, and reproducing them in his literary creations like novels, which this paper later terms as intertextuality and places it in line with the longstanding precolonial tradition of what this paper calls *interpolation through translation.* Whereas a number of scholars have already categorised them to have influenced by Sufi, Bhakti and Vaishnavite literatures and assessed their relevance in Tagore's works, there is a significant research gap in understanding them by using theories of adaptation and translation. Tagore, creative as he was, apart from the translations in *One Hundred Poems,* uses texts from the Sufi, *Bhakti* and *Vaishnavite* literatures in his works (such as *Gitanjali*) directly in a creative manner and in such a way that they resist any sort of conventional definition for predominant literary practices like translation and adaptation. By analysing some select excerpts that Tagore uses in his novels and a few translated verses from *One Hundred Poems of Kabir*, this paper not only questions the very attempt to categorise the language of the Sufi, *Bhakti* and *Vaishnavite* literatures but argues that most of these texts are plurilingual in nature and this plurilinguality is a part of literary continuity that carries forward through continuous process of translation, adaptation, interpolation, and transition through oral means.

Moreover, there is a certain sort of mobility with those texts, and this mobility is not limited to linguistic exchanges and literary adaptations/translations but philosophical messages too that carry the very essence of harmony, tolerance and promote peaceful cohabitation of the people divided by

multiple religions, religious sects, castes and (often) ideology. This paper further argues that, although a modern scholar like Friedlander dismisses a modern Hindi/Bangla translation of Kabir as *inauthentic*, the very idea of syncretism and the message of harmony characterise the translated text. A scholar of translation studies might certainly note a number of 'additions' and 'omissions', but acknowledges at the same time that this has been the literary tradition of India/South Asia for more than five centuries since the time Indian societies were plagued by growing intolerance before the rise of the social movement like the Sufi and Bhakti.

The first part of the paper introduces the diversity of opinions regarding the language of the select texts and argues that most of the scholars, including the colonial historiographers, poets and writers (including Tagore) of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century and the modern Hindi scholars, see them as only "Hindi" texts with some various variations in dialects. By questioning the process of ascribing a single linguistic category to select texts, this paper argues that most medieval Sufi and *Bhakti* texts, including those of Kabir and Tagore, are plurilingual and characterise the very essence of Indian languages before the colonial period. The second part of the paper, with select examples of multiple translations, shows the plurilingual nature of Kabir's poems and their trajectory as a continuous process of translation/adaptation within Indian vernacular literatures.

Language of Kabir: An Ongoing Debate

A number of scholars of the Hindi language claim that Kabir's songs were composed in "Hindi" or "medieval Hindi," which, by default, was carried forward by scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the introduction to the translation by Tagore, Evelyn Underhill writes that Kabir's songs are written in "the popular Hindi, not in the literary tongue, they were deliberately addressed---like the vernacular poetry of Jacopone da Todi and Richard Rolle---to the people rather than to the professionally religious class" (xx). She further underscores the fact the Kshiti Mohan Sen, on which Tagore's translation is based, "translated" from *various* "Hindi" sources including "wandering ascetics and minstrels" (xx). Barun Kumar Mishra summed up by saying that Kabir is

acknowledged as a "Hindi poet," mostly by the scholars of the Hindi language and literature ("Reading Kabir" 525). Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Namvar Singh and Purushottam Agrawal are among others who consider Kabir as a Hindi poet. Often, Kabir is portrayed as a mouthpiece of Hindu reformation movements and fits within the nationalistic discourses. Mishra, in his article, also talks about the *ultabhasi* language in some of Kabir's poems, or the language that is turned upside down i.e., a language with mixed vocabulary and syntax and so on. For Kshiti Mohan Sen, Kabir's language was "bhasha Hindi". For S. S. Das, Kabir's language is *panchmel khichdi* or "a hotch-potch" of multiple languages. Jha, in his article, often refers to Kabir's "localised idioms" (Jha 53). Moreover, a number of scholars named a host of other north Indian languages and dialects as the language of Kabir---from "Rajasthani" to Bangla, including Braj, Awadhi and Bhojpuri. Eminent Kabir scholar Charlotte Vaudeville, in her article "Kabir's Language and Language, Hindui as the Language of non-conformity" (1990), quotes Rev. Ahmed Shah to argue that Kabir wrote in the spoken dialect of his area (Mirzapur, Banares and Gorakhpur) and it is Bhojpuri (259). Grierson is of the opinion that the language of the *bijak* of Kabir is old Awadhi (259). The debate over Kabir's language is ongoing.

In the introduction to his *Shantiniketan Kabir Part 1,* which is in Bangla, Kshiti Mohan Sen admits that the collection is a translation; however, he does not mention the language from which it was translated. It seems from this particular proposition that the literary language of the early colonial and pre-colonial North India was fluid, and one hardly made any attempt to distinguish the language(s) of the literary texts produced during those times. It is hard to determine the language/dialect of Kabir as the collections that Tagore and Underhill used to translate are based on multiple sources, both contemporary and those available in archives. Therefore, the role of translation not just in Kabir in *English* but in *Kabir* in Hindi cannot be left out of the magnifying glass. The 'Hindi' texts of Kabir are *constructed*, rather *reconstructed* and then translated and adapted into multiple Modern Indian Languages. This construction and reconstruction that happens in the hands of Baleshwar Prasad Agarwal, Kshiti Mohan Sen, Tagore, Ali Sardar Jafri, and many others in the Hindi language is what this paper points toward and argues that they pose a specific challenge to the

modern readers to distinguish them as independent literary practices either as 'translation' or 'adaptation'.

By problematising the linguistic discourses surrounding the text of Kabir and questioning their originality, this paper further argues that there is a need to distinguish between dialects or language as such and literary dialects, which often may look detached from society, but this was the literary culture during the medieval period and that the language of the received texts of Kabir is essentially plurilingual. This plurilinguality makes Kabir more accessible, adaptable, and translatable. Both the linguistic and philosophical legacies of Kabir in contemporary India (notwithstanding the paradigm shift from the colonial to the postcolonial period) constitute a shared heritage. This shared heritage is the core essence of syncretism that the Sufi and *Bhakti* poets of medieval India visualised and the role of translation and translations of Tagore and others cannot be undermined in this particular context in carrying forward the same to the twentieth and twenty-first century readers. Whereas most of the scholars acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of Kabir's text, they often overlook the complex and composite nature of Indian societies, otherwise divided on strict religious and caste lines, and thus, this sort of heterogeneity or interpolation or mixing up with other languages, cultures and literary traditions was very common in precolonial north India. Moreover, a number of scholars often overlook the fact that colonialism has left a huge impact on shaping the Indian languages, which later on emerged as Modern Indian Languages, and the language parameters which we have today to assess a language cannot be applied to the languages that had existed during the precolonial or early colonial times. In fact, most of the precolonial literary traditions share similar characteristics. Therefore, by not acknowledging the heterogeneity of Kabir's language/text, one is denying the very legacy of the syncretic nature of medieval Bhakti and Sufi literatures, which only sought to restore harmony and a faith in humanity rather than sectarianism of any kind.

Which Kabir? Exploring Multiple Kabirs through Centuries

Language apart, there is a host of opinions about the manuscripts, which adds further to the ambiguity of Kabir's language. Peter Friedlander, in his book *Kabir Poems in Transformation: A Fountain of*

Creativity (2023), writes that the Bangla *transliterated* text of Kshiti Mohan Sen, on whose text Tagore based his translation, is actually based on another "Hindi translation" by Baleshwar Prasad Agarwal (105). Ninety-seven out of a hundred poems in Tagore's Kabir are based on "Agarwal's translation" (105). Needless to mention, the English translation of Tagore is based on another translation (most probably Hindi, which is why Tagore and Underhill preferred to call it *Hindi*) by Baleshwar Prasad Agarwal. Friedlander points out, through a detailed study, how techniques like "cuts, combination and alterations" are used both in Agarwal and Sen's texts. Thus, one can simply imagine the multiple layers of translation Kabir went through, starting from the fifteenth century to the twenty-first century. Although Sen, in the Bengali introduction in the first part of the book, mentions that he used multiple biblical sources as well as sources recited by a number of Sadhus in and around Banaras.

Theoretical Frameworks

Having stated and questioned the authenticity of the original, this paper now proposes to use theories of adaptation and translation to understand this particular case of Kabir in translation/adaptation**.** The so-called translation by Tagore is neither a translation nor an adaptation as such, but stands somewhere in between. This ambiguity has been a longstanding feature of the vernacular literature for centuries. Adaptation as a practice is not new to Tagore, nor is the tradition of *anuvad,* which has existed for a long time. It is widely acknowledged by modern scholars that the indigenous practice of *anuvad* and translation, introduced by Europeans, cannot be equated. Both of them have long, independent traditions in their respective linguistic, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. Tagore harmonised this throughout his literary career, as did many other early modern Indian writers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Linda Hutchinson, in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), provides a detailed definition of adaptation, tracing its etymological roots to contemporary practices. She keeps her canvas centred mostly on cinematic adaptations of literary texts and adaptations from one semiotic medium to another, which, in the theories of translation studies, is called *intersemiotic* translation. However,

there seems to be a gap in the research where translation and adaptation are treated as independent creative practices, whether literary or cinematic. In this particular context of Kabir in Hindi/Bangla translation, the translators, compilers, and interpreters of Kabir are exactly following the methods that Hutchinson lays out in her book regarding adaptation: it is an adjustment, an alteration, making something suitable, a reshaping, or the making of something being adapted. Adaptation, for the most part, in literary theories, and for Hutchinson, is '*adjusting*.' This *adjustment* (both linguistic and cultural) has characterised different versions of Kabir across Indian languages, thereby raising questions about its authenticity. Whereas transposition is another literary activity often used in relation to adaptation, but in this particular context of Kabir in translation, it is not a case of transposition.

Discourses related to adaptation most of the time are focused on cinematic adaptations of literary texts and vice versa. Although there are some cases of literary adaptations of another preexisting text, it does not find much place in contemporary theoretical discourses. This paper is more invested in contemplating a kind of literary practice that traverses through any given criteria of translation and adaptation as separate literary practices. In the long, continuous vernacular literary traditions, there are multiple overlaps and overflows that are often plurilingual and inseparable, and Rabindranath Tagore's translation of Kabir is one of them. A simplistic look at the translation may appear to reveal multiple issues, but an in-depth analysis might reveal the patterns of adaptation and translation that are transmuted in the text.

Translating or Adapting: Where does Kabir lie?

Peter Friedlander, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Rameshwar Mishra, and scores of others have worked on Kabir in Hindi in the 20th and 21st centuries and have pointed out multiple differences across versions of Kabir and their translations. Whereas a majority of the scholars are concerned with the authenticity of the original manuscript and accuracy of the translation, they overlook the very fact that the concept of 'translation' was very different during the precolonial times, which, to some extent, was carried on during the colonial period, and Tagore is one of those. Tagore's freedom to translate Kabir's verses

without paying much attention to their authenticity can also be seen as a longstanding tradition that has characterised precolonial *Bhasha* literary exchanges. He is like one of those vernacular poets in precolonial times who took the liberty to translate Kabir as he deemed fit. The process of translation or adaptation, which this study is concerned with, did not start and end with Tagore; rather, it must be seen as a continuous process of literary exchange in the context of Indian/South Asian *Bhasha* literature. A few examples from the 'claimed' different versions of Kabir and the translations of Tagore shall reveal the journey that lasted up to several centuries.

"*Tohi mori lagan lagaye re fakirwa*" is one of the celebrated *bijak* of Kabir found a place in Tagore's translation and subsequently several other translations in Bangla and Hindi. Interestingly, Tagore's translation and the popularity of the translation kicked off a new interest in Kabir. The text in Rameshwar Mishra's 'Hindi' books reads:

तोहिं मोरी लगन लगाए रे फकीरवा ।

सोवत ही मैं अपने मंदिर में,

सब्दन मरी जगाये रे फकीरवा।

बूड़त ही भाव के सागर में,

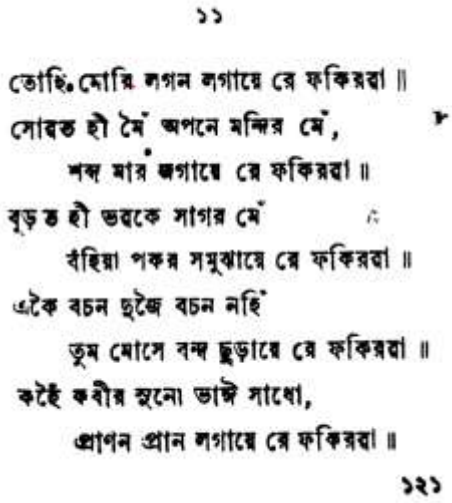
वहियाँ पकरि समुझाए रे फकीरवा।

एक वचन वचन नहिं दूजा

तुम मोसें बंद छुड़ाये रे फकीरवा।

कहै कबीर सुनो भाई साधो,

प्रानन प्राण लगाये रे फकीरवा।



১১

তোহি মোরি লগন লগায়ে রে ফকিরবা ॥
সোবত হী মৈঁ অপনে মন্দির মেঁ,
শব্দ মার জগায়ে রে ফকিরবা ॥
বুড়ত হী ভবকে সাগর মেঁ
বঁহিয়া পকর সমুঝায়ে রে ফকিরবা ॥
একৈ বচন দুজৈ বচন নহিঁ
তুম মোসে বন্দ ছুড়ায়ে রে ফকিরবা ॥
কহৈঁ কবীর সুনো ভাঈ সাধো,
প্রাণন প্রান লগায়ে রে ফকিরবা ॥

১২১

The text of Ali Sardar Jafri is the same; however, Mishra notes there is a missing line in Tagore's and adds the same in the footnote. The difference is clear between them. Now, let us look at the Bengali transliteration by Kshiti Mohan Sen that Tagore used for his translation in *One Hundred Poems*. Tagore's translations are done not from the *transliteration* of Sen's but from the explanatory paragraph or commentary, or a prose translation that follows. Interestingly, it is not known whether Tagore consulted the original version of Kabir in their original scripts. This is how the transliteration reads/looks:

(Sen 121)

The prose translation by Sen follows:

> হে ফকীর, তুমি আমাকে কি প্রেমে টানিয়া লইলে ? আপনার মন্দিরে ঘুমাইয়া ছিলাম, সংগীতের আঘাতে আমাকে জাগাইলে হে ফকীর। ভব সুমুদ্রের মধ্যে ডুবিতেছিলাম, বাহু ধরে আমাকে রক্ষা করিয়াছ হে ফকীর। একটি মাত্র কথা, আর দ্বিতীয় কথাটি নাই, তুমি আমাকে দিয়া সব বন্ধন ছাড়াইয়াছ হে ফকির ! কবীর কহেন, প্রাণে আমার প্রাণ লাগাইয়াছ হে ফকীর! (Sen 122)

Tagore translated the same in the *One Hundred Poems* as:

> To Thee Thou hast drawn my love, O
>
> Fakir!

I was sleeping in my own chamber,

And Thou didst awaken me;

Striking me with Thy voice, O

Fakir!

I was drowning in the deeps of the

Ocean of this world, and Thou

Didst save me: upholding me with

Thine arm, O Fakir!

Only one word and no second—and

Thou hast made me tear off all

My bonds, O Fakir!

Kabir says, "Thou hast united Thy

heart to my heart, O Fakir!"

One can simply note the differences in form, structure, and diction that Tagore used, and use them to make the translation more creative, which is close to an adaptation or what P. Lal would have called a transcreation. In the hands of Tagore, a different Kabir emerges.

Friedlander translated the same in such a way:

O Fakir! My devotion is fixed on you

O Fakir!

My devotion is fixed on you.

I was sleeping in my home

when your words pierced me, and I awoke.

I was drowning in the world ocean

when you grasped my hand and rescued me.

I am promised to you alone, to no other;

You freed me from bondage.

Kabir says, Listen, brother sadhs,

I sing of the virtue of the true name. (140)

Friedlander's translation is certainly one of the closest to Kabir's. But one must distinguish between the translational practices that existed in the Indian vernacular languages, those that continued among poets like Tagore, and the standard and professional practices of translation that emerged with the establishment of colonial institutions (such as the Fort William College, the Srirampur Mission, and other missionaries) in the nineteenth century. Friedlander's translation can certainly be defined as a "translation," but it poses a challenge to categorise Tagore's translation, given the liberty he took. In Tagore's translation, Kabir and the translator's persona become more important than the authenticity of the text.

Ranjit Saha, a scholar of Tagore of in Hindi and a prolific contemporary translator of Tagore into Hindi in his translation of the *One Hundred Verses of Kabir* titled as *Kabir ke Sau Pad* (1924) translated the same as:

अरे फ़क़ीर, तुमने मुझे अपने प्रेम पाश में बांध लिया।

मैं तो अपने कक्ष में सोई हुई थी,

और तुमने अपने स्वर के आघात से जगा दिया।

अरे फ़क़ीर, भाव सागर में डूब रही थी

लेकिन तुमने अपने हाथों मेरी बाँह पकड़ मेरी रक्षा की।

मात्रा एक ही शब्द द्वारा, बिना किसी और बात के,

अरे फ़क़ीर, तुमने मुझे समस्त बन्धनों से छुड़ा दिया।

कबीर कहते हैं, "अरे फ़क़ीर, तुमने अपने प्राणों से

मेरे प्राणों को जोड़ दिया। " (Saha 57)

This practice of translation is something close to what Mona Baker calls "back translation." Back translation occurs when a translated text is translated back into the language of its origin, which is no longer available. The condition is interesting here; the original text is available, but whereas it is claimed to be in Hindi, there is a need for an updated translation in "Hindi" to suit the temperament of a contemporary reader who might have difficulty in understanding Kabir in its original language. Saha adds the original text of "O Fakirva," the translation, and then supplements it with his own translation. This is something William Radice also did in his 2011 translation of *Gitanjali*. In all these cases, the translated texts read more like adaptations than translations.

Needless to mention, the second decade of the 20th century was one of the productive decades of Tagore's life. As much as he produced in creative writing, he also translated multiple works of Kabir and his own translation of *Gitanjali*. It is interesting to note that there are similarities between his self-translation in *Gitanjali,* which turned up as *Song Offerings* (1912), and there are striking similarities between the translation of Kabir and *Song Offerings*, which certainly is the case where Tagore's creativity and philosophy, especially the mystique one, are influenced by Kabir and his philosophy. Song no 16 of *Song Offerings* reads:

You came down from your throne and stood at my cottage door.
I was singing all alone in a corner, and the melody caught your ear. You came down
and stood at my cottage door.

Masters are many in your hall, and songs are sung there at all hours. But the simple carol of this novice struck at your love. One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of the world, and with a flower for a prize, you came down and stopped at my cottage door.

The original text is the song no 16 in Bangla *Gitanjali*: it reads:

তব সিংহাসনের আসন হতে এলে তুমি নেমে--

মোর বিজন ঘরের দ্বারের কাছে দাঁড়ালে নাথ, থমে॥

একলা বসে আপন-মনে গাইতেছিলেম গান;

তোমার কানে গেল সে সুর, এলে তুমি নেমে,

মোর বিজন ঘরের দ্বারের কাছে দাঁড়ালে নাথ, থমেকে॥

তোমার সভায় কত-না গান, কতই আছেন গুণী--

গুণহীনের গানখানি আজ বাজল তোমার প্রেমে!

লাগল সকল তানের মাঝে একটি করুণ সুর,

হাতে লয়ে বরণমালা এলে তুমি নেমে--

মোর বিজন ঘরের দ্বারের কাছে দাঁড়ালে নাথ, থমেকে॥

Conclusion

As this paper remains focused on the English translation of Rabindranath Tagore to argue about the inseparability of adaptation from translation as independent literary practices, it traces upon a number of issues like language, dialect, scripts, and manuscripts. It is generally observed that contemporary scholars who deal with texts produced during the medieval times often overlook the linguistic and cultural aspects of the text, which were and still are in a constant flux. As much as scholars of Hindi and other languages/dialects claim Kabir as their own, this paper merely emphasises the plurilinguality of Sufi and Bhakti texts as they travelled across geographical locations and thus incorporated linguistic, cultural, and literary traits. And, these are often inseparable. This paper argues for the syncretic nature of Kabir's text, which resists accurate translation or adaptation. The plurilingualism and multicultural cosmopolitanism, which are deeply indigenous to precolonial South Asia, are distinctly visible. In fact, a so-called modern successful translation is to do away with the very features of Sufi and Bhakti literatures.

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Visual Hermeneutics as Adaptation: Translating Sufi Mysticism Through The Aesthetics of Presence

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Abstract: This paper investigates the intersemiotic adaptation of Sufi mystical poetry into visual art through a phenomenological lens that privileges affective perception, embodied engagement, and contemplative receptivity. Moving beyond fidelity-based models of adaptation, the study proposes that visual forms can resonate with the metaphysical depth of Sufi verse without mimetically reproducing it. Here, the act of viewing becomes a spiritual event—an invitation to inhabit the artwork as a site of ontological encounter.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and its application in visual studies, the artwork is theorized as a perceptual field where meaning arises through the interplay of presence and sensory experience. In Islamic visual traditions, figuration has historically accompanied abstraction and symbolism especially within Persianate aesthetics, where representations of dervishes, saints, and cosmic motifs are integral to mystical expression. These images are not mere illustrations but contemplative devices that mediate access to the ineffable.

Engaging the ecstatic poetics of Rumi, Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, and Gani Kashmiri, the paper explores how visual elements such as the whirling dervish, the moon, turbans, and geometric patterns serve as vessels for spiritual signification. Theories of intersemiotic translation (Robert Stam) and adaptation as creation (Linda Hutcheon) position painting as an interpretive, embodied process. Reflecting on my own practice as both artist and researcher, I suggest that such adaptation is transformative, not descriptive. Generating a metaphysical dialogue between the viewer and the sacred, where visual becomes a mode of contemplative knowledge.

Keywords: Intersemiotic Adaptation; Phenomenology; Sufism; Visual Hermeneutics; Poetry

Introduction

The relationship between poetry and visual art has long been a matter of critical inquiry, but within the Sufi tradition, this intersemiotic translation assumes a distinctly metaphysical dimension. Mainstream adaptation theory, as articulated by critics such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam, has tended to focus on the transfer of narrative across media—most often from novel to film—where questions of fidelity, authorship, and audience reception dominate. While such debates have yielded valuable insights, they remain largely tethered to narrative-centered and representational models.

This paper proposes a different framework: visual hermeneutics as adaptation. Rather than treating adaptation as a secondary act of reproduction, this approach foregrounds the interpretive and experiential possibilities that arise when mystical poetry is reconfigured in visual form. In the case of Sufi verse, where language is already straining toward the ineffable, adaptation must be understood not as translation in the ordinary sense but as a metaphysical dialogue between word and image, text and presence.

Sufi poetry, steeped in ecstatic love, divine longing, and ontological inquiry, often transcends linguistic boundaries by gesturing toward the ineffable. When such verse is transposed into visual form, the task is not to reproduce meaning mimetically but to evoke a resonance of presence—a contemplative field in which the viewer participates in mystical signification. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty reminds us, perception is never a neutral reception of the visible; rather, "the world is what we see and yet we must learn to see it" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 4).

Adaptation studies provides a fertile framework to articulate this process. In its classical formulation, adaptation was measured against a fidelity discourse: the success of an adaptation was judged by its faithfulness to an original text. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon argues, "adaptation is repetition without replication" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 7). Rather than treating the visual rendering of a poem as derivative, adaptation theory insists on its generative potential, its capacity to produce meaning in

a new medium, cultural context, and sensory register. Robert Stam likewise critiques fidelity language, urging us instead to view adaptation as a dialogical process, an intertextual interplay across signifying systems" (*Literature through Film* 45).

This dialogical process becomes even more profound in the case of mystical verse, which already destabilizes the boundaries between word and silence, presence and absence. Rumi, Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, and Gani Kashmiri do not merely write about love—they perform a metaphysics of love, inviting the reader into a state of ontological transformation. To adapt such verse visually is not to transfer content but to translate an experience. The painting does not illustrate" the poem; it creates a parallel field where affect, symbol, and presence converge.

By foregrounding both adaptation theory and phenomenology, this paper situates the translation of Sufi mystical poetry into visual art as a transformative act rather than a representational one. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates on adaptation by extending them into non-narrative, spiritual, and intermedial terrains—domains often neglected in adaptation studies, which tend to focus on literature-to-film. Here, adaptation becomes a metaphysical dialogue: a process whereby the sacred word assumes visual form, and the artwork itself becomes a site of ontological encounter.

Adaptation Beyond Fidelity: Intersemiotic Translation

Adaptation studies, once tethered to translation studies, has in recent decades consolidated itself as a discipline in its own right. While its earliest concerns revolved around questions of textual transfer—particularly the movement from literature to film—its present scope is far broader and more interdisciplinary. It now addresses not simply a case of transferring content from one medium to another" but rather the dynamic processes of re-creation, transformation, and reception (Sharma 286). This shift was catalyzed by the cultural turn" in translation studies, which prompted scholars to reconceive adaptation as a form of intersemiotic translation. Theorizing adaptation in these terms foregrounds its semiotic complexities: not fidelity to a fixed original, but interpretive re-performance across sign systems.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines adaptation as the alteration of one thing to suit another" and, in a media context, as an altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., (now esp.) one adapted for filming, broadcasting, or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source" (OED). While serviceable, this definition falls short of the contemporary situation, where adaptation increasingly resembles the biological model of transformation. Like organisms, texts survive—or fail—in new environments by evolving their forms.

This evolutionary metaphor also applies to adaptation theory itself, which has undergone successive transformations in response to shifting cultural and media ecologies. Once dominated by fidelity discourse, the field is now shaped by post-literary and transmedia perspectives. As Thomas Leitch notes, adaptation no longer flows solely from literature to film but emerges from non-literary and sometimes non-narrative sources"—video games, board games, theme park rides or even fan-fictional rewritings. Such developments illustrate the inadequacy of fidelity as a critical framework. The persistence of fidelity discourse, however, has long marked adaptation criticism. Robert Stam calls it an unproductive hermeneutic model" since it presupposes the existence of some single, transcendent, correct meaning of the text" (*Literature through Film* 15). Virginia Woolf s condemnation of cinematic adaptation as a parasite" feeding upon literature, or Tolstoy s dismissal of film as a direct attack on the methods of literary art," exemplifies this long-standing suspicion. Fidelity-based rhetoric has produced a litany of pejorative tropes—"infidelity," "betrayal," "deformation," "bastardization," "vulgarisation," and desecration" (Sharma 289)—each reinforcing literature s supposed superiority to film and other media. Yet, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us, adaptation is not a pejorative sense of being a copy or a mere repetition" but a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging" (*A Theory of Adaptation* 9).

This insight becomes even more crucial when dealing with mystical texts such as Sufi poetry. The discourse of fidelity presumes a singular, stable meaning, whereas Sufi texts overflow with metaphor, symbol, and surplus significance. Rumi s famous lines—

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing,

there is a field. I ll meet you there."

(*The Essential Rumi*, trans. Coleman Barks, 36)

—do not describe a literal field but an ontological openness beyond binaries. A painting inspired by this verse cannot translate" the field in mimetic terms; rather, it might enact expansiveness through color-fields, dissolving contours, or liminal light. Similarly, Amir Khusrau s verse—

Gori soye sej par, mukh par daale kes,

chal Khusrau ghar aapne, rain bhayi pardes."

(The fair one lies on the bed, hair veiling her face;

Khusrau, go home now, for night has fallen in a foreign land).

—deploys pardes (foreign land) as a symbol of metaphysical estrangement from the Beloved. A visual translation here cannot merely depict exile but must stage estrangement through fractured horizons, chiaroscuro, or displaced form.

Paul Ricoeur s hermeneutics of symbol helps illuminate this dynamic. The symbol gives rise to thought," he writes (*The Symbolism of Evil* 15), because it harbors a surplus of meaning" that continually exceeds interpretation (Interpretation Theory 88). Sufi images—the moth consumed in flame, the wine of divine intoxication, the tavern as annihilation of ego—function precisely in this register of inexhaustibility. To adapt them visually is not to capture meaning but to re-open it, staging what Gadamer calls a fusion of horizons" (*Truth and Method* 306).

Hafiz captures this surplus in a luminous metaphor:

I am the hole in a flute / that the Christ s breath moves through—

listen to this music."

(*The Gift,* trans. Daniel Ladinsky 3)

This is not a figure to be illustrated" but an ontological dispossession, an emptied self-resonating with divine breath. A painter might evoke this not through the literal flute, but through negative space, luminous voids, or abstraction that renders presence audible through absence.

Thus, intersemiotic adaptation of Sufi verse demonstrates how adaptation, like biological metamorphosis, thrives not through fidelity but through transformation. Successful adaptations achieve repetition without replication" (Sharma 289), carrying the aura of the original while amplifying it in new registers of experience. In this sense, visual adaptations of Sufi poetry do not betray or vulgarize their sources; rather, they enact what Walter Benjamin would call an expanded aura, renewing the mystical text in the language of another medium.

Having freed adaptation from fidelity, we now turn to phenomenology, which provides a vocabulary for understanding how such visual transformations are not representational but experiential acts of presence.

Phenomenology and the Aesthetics of Presence

Maurice Merleau-Ponty s phenomenology reorients our understanding of art from a representational object to a lived perceptual field in which meaning emerges through embodied encounter. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not a detached act of cognition but an event of intertwinement between the seer and the seen: We must not say that our body is in space, nor for that matter in time. It inhabits space and time" (*Phenomenology of Perception* 139). Thus, the experience of viewing a painting cannot be reduced to optical reception but must be understood as a mode of dwelling—a participation in what the artwork discloses at the ontological level.

In *Eye and Mind,* Merleau-Ponty insists that the painter takes his body with him, and it is with his body that he sees" (162). Painting, therefore, is not reproduction but creation: the painter s

vision is a continued birth of his own seeing; the act of painting does not reproduce a perception, it makes it" (13). Art is thus revelatory, the visible raised to the second power" (166), a site where being is disclosed in and through the visible.

This orientation finds its roots in Edmund Husserl s call to return to the things themselves" (Ideas I 56–57). For Husserl, phenomenology seeks the essence of lived experience through reduction, both epoché (bracketing the natural attitude) and eidetic reduction (grasping essential meanings). Art, in Husserl s view, is a privileged site for such disclosure. As he observes in Phantasy, Image Consciousness, and Memory, Extraordinary profit can be drawn from art, which tower high above the products of our own fantasy…'Feigning [fiction] is the source from which the cognition of eternal truths is fed" (Ideas I 160, qtd. in Wertz 2010).

Martin Heidegger extended this project by making art central to his hermeneutic phenomenology. In The Origin of the Work of Art," he famously reads Van Gogh s painting of peasant shoes, discerning within them an entire world: From the dark opening of the worn insides of the shoes the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth" (14). The work of art here is not an illustration but an unconcealment (aletheia), a clearing in which being shines forth. Thus, a work of art allows its truth to come to stand in the light of its being" (16).

Hans-Georg Gadamer similarly affirms that art reveals truth not by being an object of detached analysis but by being an event of play, in which viewer and artwork participate together: The transformation is a transformation into the true … the world of art … is in fact a wholly transformed world. In and through it everyone recognizes that this is how things are" (*Truth and Method* 112). Paul Ricoeur, in turn, emphasizes the inexhaustibility of artistic meaning, noting that metaphor provokes meaning" precisely by surpassing literal reference, opening a new structure whereby a literal or static view of reality is surpassed" (qtd. in Freeman 310).

Jean-Luc Marion furthers this trajectory with his concept of the saturated phenomenon—phenomena that exceed the limits of intentional grasp and overwhelm perception. For Marion, the phenomenon gives itself in excess of what the concept can contain" (*Being Given*, 199). Mystical art, whether the ecstatic verses of Rūmī or the visual excess of Persian miniatures, can be read in this light: they are not objects to be decoded but overwhelming presences that appear more than we can see." This resonates with the Sufi notion of tajallī (divine self-disclosure), where the divine manifests in forms that exceed rational containment and flood the perceiver with meaning.

Emmanuel Levinas contributes another dimension by positing that perception is fundamentally ethical. The face of the Other, he writes, is a living presence; it is expression" (*Totality and Infinity* 66). In Sufi poetry, the Beloved s face functions in precisely this way: it is not merely an aesthetic object but a site of infinite responsibility and love. Gazing upon the Beloved is therefore not detached observation but a call to ethical transformation.

Such phenomenological insights converge with Islamic mystical epistemology. In Sufism, perception is not bifurcated into subject and object but understood as mushāhada (witnessing), an ontological unveiling in which the heart (qalb) perceives through both outer sight (baṣar) and inner vision (baṣīra). Ibn ʿArabī famously describes imagination (khayāl) as a barzakh (isthmus) that mediates between the visible and invisible realms: The cosmos is all imagination, and he who perceives it knows it to be imagination within imagination" (Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam, 125). The artwork, like imagination, is neither purely sensory nor purely intellectual but an in-between space where truth discloses itself.

Rūmī, too, emphasizes the primacy of the inner eye: Close both eyes to see with the other eye" (Mathnawī I: 3727). This resonates deeply with Merleau-Ponty s insistence that true philosophy consists of re-learning to look at the world" (*Phenomenology of Perception* xxiii). Both perspectives insist that vision is not passive reception but a cultivated way of seeing that opens being to presence. This convergence is not limited to textual philosophy but extends into artistic practice. Islamic calligraphy, for instance, demands a mode of perception that is slow, embodied, and rhythmic,

mirroring the act of dhikr. The viewer traces with the eye what the calligrapher enacted with the body, transforming vision into remembrance. Similarly, the samāʿ of the Mevlevi dervishes is not a symbolic dance but an enactment of ontological truth: the turning body becomes the flesh of the world" (Merleau-Ponty, *Visible and Invisible* 147), where motion, perception, and being converge. In Kashmiri Shaivism, this echoes the practice of pratyabhijñā (recognition), where art and ritual awaken the perceiver to their identity with the universal consciousness.

Arts-based phenomenology makes this explicit. Max van Manen insists that Art is not a tool to illustrate our understanding of experience. Rather, art enacts the meaning of experience itself" (*Arts-Based Phenomenological Research* 63). Aesthetic practice, therefore, makes visible the invisible dimensions of lived meaning" (65)—a claim that parallels Merleau-Ponty s insight that the painter gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible" (*Eye and Mind* 166). Both affirm art as a mode of ontological disclosure.

The relational nature of this disclosure is crucial. As van Manen notes, The meaning of art emerges in the lived relation between the work and the one who engages it" (74). Thus, a visual adaptation of Rūmʾīs metaphor of the moth and flame does not simply depict annihilation (fanāʾ); rather, in the trembling of brushwork and the vibrancy of color, it enacts the experiential intensity of mystical desire. Adaptation, here, is not illustrative but phenomenological: it opens a horizon of presence in which the beholder dwells.

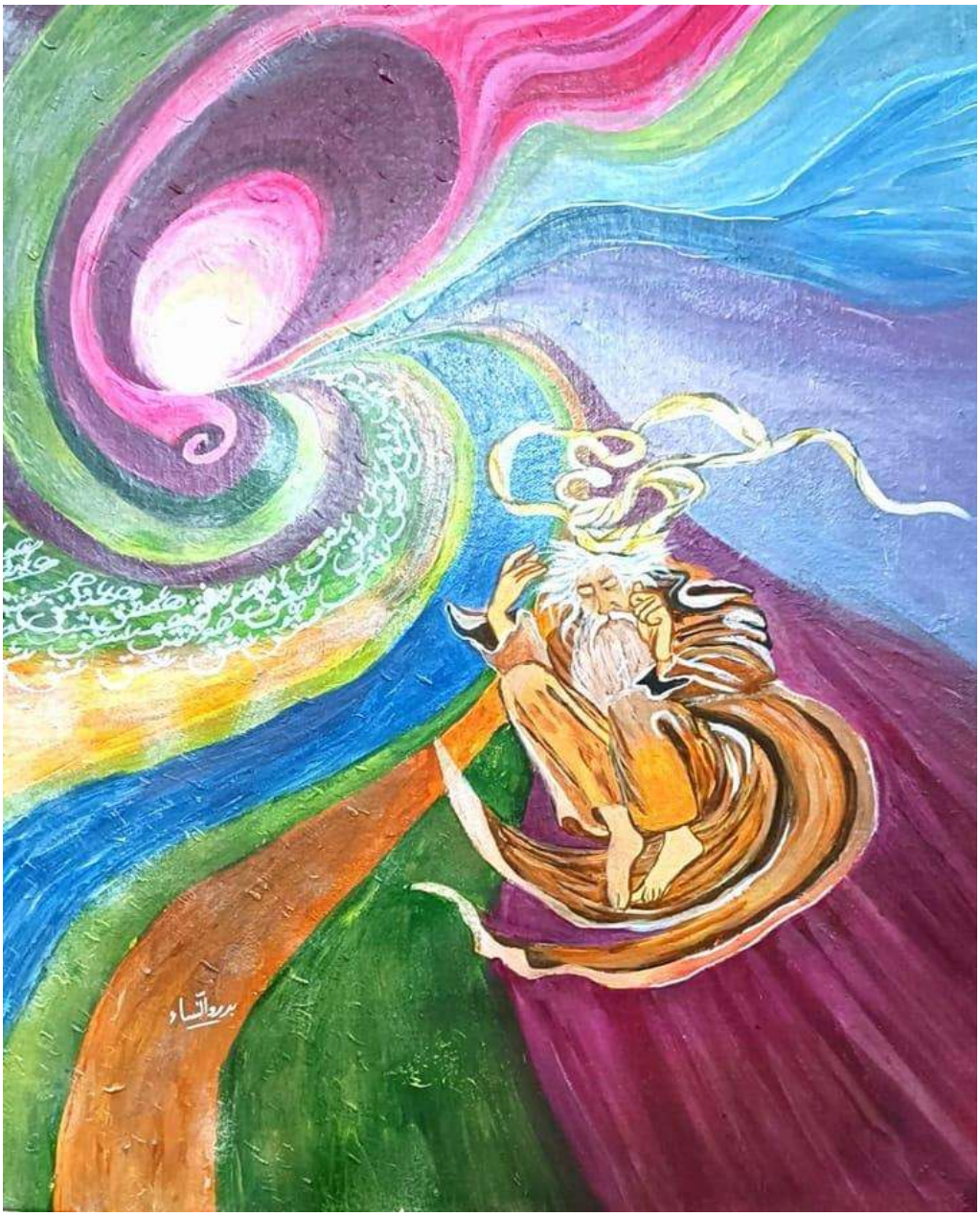
In both Merleau-Ponty s phenomenology and Sufi aesthetics, art is not a secondary ornament but a mode of presence. Vision is no longer passive seeing but participatory dwelling in being. As van Manen concludes, this world is not behind or beyond the work but is the work itself" (68). For the Sufi as for the phenomenologist, perception is a form of unveiling in which the depths of the Real (al-Ḥaqq) are disclosed.

The Artist s Practice: Translating Verse into Image

The translation of Sufi poetry into visual art involves more than an act of representation; it is an interpretive process where the metaphors of verse become living presences within color, form, and movement. Through this intersemiotic adaptation, the canvas becomes a hermeneutic space in which mystical symbols are not merely shown but enacted, inviting the viewer into a contemplative participation. Each Sufi poet—Rumi, Amir Khusrau, Bulleh Shah, and Gani Kashmiri—offers a symbolic grammar that lends itself to visual transposition. Their poetics, marked by metaphors of flight, radiance, nature, irony, and ego-death, open themselves to phenomenological adaptation, where painting does not reproduce but re-embodies their mystical vision.

As an artist, my engagement with Sufi poetry becomes an act of hermeneutic adaptation rather than mimetic illustration. The canvas is not a mirror of the text but a field of resonance in which the poetic word opens itself to visual embodiment. Each painting is titled after a verse or image drawn from the Sufi canon, yet the purpose is not to reproduce the literal but to generate what Paul Ricoeur terms a surplus of meaning" (*Interpretation Theory* 88). In this process, the visual work becomes what Hans-Georg Gadamer calls an event of understanding" (*Truth and Method* 306), where the horizon of the text and the horizon of the artist converge to create a new space of perception.

For instance, Ku-e-Yaar (*Abode of the Beloved*) translates the intimacy of longing into a visual metaphor. The poem—"Someone like you, a confidante of my heart, / I could not hope to find, no matter how hard I d search!"—is reimagined through luminous color fields and spiral forms, suggesting the inaccessibility of the Beloved and the eternal orbit of desire. The painting enacts what Maurice Merleau-Ponty calls the intertwining of vision and movement" (*Eye and Mind* 162), where perception itself becomes a gesture of reaching toward the ineffable.



Similarly, Kharqa-e-Faqr (*The Cloak of Transcendence)* draws upon Ghani Kashmiri s verse of the moth who finds repose in the lamp s flame. Rather than depicting moth and flame literally, the painting allows texture and chromatic layering to evoke the fragile ecstasy of self-annihilation. The cloak becomes both a garment and a shroud, an emblem of fana (annihilation of the self) and baqa (abiding in the divine). Here, the figural dissolves into the abstract, mirroring Islamic aesthetics where geometry and form intertwine as pathways to transcendence.

In *The Windowless Window,* inspired by Shah Niyaaz Ahmad Barelvi s verse—"In the fervor of love, the threads of being seared, / The fabric of body, form, self; all charred now, come what may"—the painting captures the paradox of mystical perception: to see beyond vision itself. The motif of a window without transparency becomes a metaphor for unveiling that occurs precisely through veiling. The work aligns with Jean-Luc Marion s notion of the saturated phenomenon" (*Being Given* 1998), where excess overwhelms the gaze, forcing the viewer into a posture of contemplative surrender.

In The Spinning Wheel of Love," inspired by Bulleh Shah s verse—"Beloved, to catch a glimpse of Thee, I place my charkha in the lane outside. People think I spin cotton, but I truly weave the thread of Thy memory"—the everyday act of spinning is elevated into mystical remembrance. Using mixed media, the charkha is transposed into circular movements and textured threads across the canvas, enacting both material craft and spiritual weaving. This aligns with Sufi poetics, where ordinary labor

becomes a vehicle for divine memory, echoing Merleau-Ponty s idea that the visible itself has an invisible inner framework" (*Eye and Mind* 150).

In Wajd! (Ecstasy), inspired by Wasif Ali Wasif s verse—"Main shamm-e-farozan hoon, main aatish-e-larza hoon, / Main sozish-e-hijraan hoon, main manzil-e-parwana!"—the act of adaptation becomes an attempt to transpose the ineffable tremor of mystical ecstasy into visual presence. The bowed head and interlaced hands, poised above a swirling field of blue encircling a radiant moon, do not merely illustrate the poetic lines but enact their experiential intensity. Here, adaptation functions as a

hermeneutics of state (hāl), where the turbulence of longing and the stillness of surrender converge in painterly form.

The painting embodies what adaptation theory often overlooks: the transference not of narrative but of affect and ontology. As Linda Hutcheon insists, adaptation is repetition without replication" (A *Theory of Adaptation* 7), and in this case, the painting repeats the ecstatic gesture of the poem without replicating its linguistic structure. The luminous vortex at the canvas s center stages what Ibn ʿArabi describes as the lifting of the veil, where ecstasy is the unveiling of the Real to the heart" (Futuhat al-Makkiyya). Thus, the visual form becomes a site where the metaphysics of love manifests beyond the discursive, a saturated phenomenon in Jean-Luc Marion s sense—an excess that overwhelms representation and opens the viewer to presence.

Finally, Ghada (Pot), inspired by Shah Bahu s ecstatic verse, visualizes the dissolution of self into divine remembrance: My constant remembrance of Your name merged me into You, / All trace of me was erased until there was nothing left but You!" The overflowing pot, spilling luminous colors, gestures toward the Sufi imagery of wine and intoxication, yet transfigures it into a cosmic event of union. The painting is not a static symbol but a performative outpouring, resonant with Ibn ʿArabi s

claim that divine love overflows from the Lover to the beloved, and from the beloved to the cosmos" (Futuhat al-Makkiyya).

Through these works, the practice of painting becomes a phenomenological encounter with mystical verse, not as object but as presence. The viewer is invited not to decode but to dwell, to inhabit the interstitial space where poetry and image meet. In this sense, the artwork does not belong to the artist alone but, as Gadamer insists, becomes a festival" of shared meaning (*Truth and Method* 123), in which the sacred is disclosed anew in each act of beholding. Such artistic enactments reveal adaptation not as aesthetic decoration but as a metaphysical dialogue—where poet, painter, and viewer meet within the horizon of presence.

Adaptation as Metaphysical Dialogue

The study of Sufism has often oscillated between interpretations that reduce it to a cognitive construct and those that view it as a distinct religious order. Yet, as many scholars note, its seeds of asceticism and spirituality are universal, found in every religion, both heavenly and non-heavenly" (Amin Yusuf 77). In Islam, this tendency manifests as the call to detach from worldly pleasures in pursuit of proximity to God. Sufism is therefore not an isolated sect but a spiritual doctrine in life and a path for spiritual elevation" (al-Tusi 249), intimately tied to jurisprudence, theology, and philosophy. Its central epistemology rests upon experiential knowledge (maʿrifa), which arises only through mutual love between the servant and the Lord—what Ibn ʿArabi would call the fusion with the divine self" (Futuhat II: 276). This relational knowledge defines the connection between the self and being, producing states of wonder that become both spiritual and aesthetic.

Such states have historically manifested through institutions like the zawiya (Sufi lodge), which in Algeria and elsewhere provided not only spiritual retreat but also education, social cohesion, and even resistance against occupation. The Sufi s life, thus, cannot be understood outside its social and artistic dimensions. Clothing, for instance, was never merely material but symbolic of humility, detachment, and inner purity. As al-Sarraj noted in al-Lumaʿ, They would wear wool, felt, or patched

garments if available, and if not, they wore whatever was available, maintaining dignity and majesty without being pretentious" (249). Yet, as the saint al-Daghoughi insisted, external appearance was never the essence: the color of the garment does not necessarily reflect the sincerity of the heart" (al-Tadili 222). Outward form functioned as a vehicle for inner meaning—a principle that resonates directly with visual art.

From its earliest expressions in calligraphy, symbolism, and abstraction, Islamic art was often understood as a Sufi gesture: a refusal of mere mimesis and a reaching toward the metaphysical. When one abandons imitating nature," Christoph observes, one achieves an ideal representation of nature in the artwork" (68). This principle reflects the Sufi s own desire to transcend the sensible in order to reach the Real (al-ḥaqq). Henri Bremond, writing of mystical poetics, captured this continuity between Sufi states and aesthetics: Poetry, in its essence, is a unifying magic, inviting us to serenity. Arts attract everyone, but each person, through his intermediary magic, joins in prayer" (qtd. in Edgar 93). Similarly, Bergson s notion of intuition as a kind of revelation or mystical witnessing" (Karima 78) echoes Ibn ʿArabi s claim that the heart must unite reason and imagination in order to perceive truth. Both the philosopher and the mystic insist that artistic vision is itself a metaphysical act.

This convergence also explains the deep intersections between Sufism and modern plastic art. Abstraction, in particular, shares with Sufism the desire to move beyond form into the domain of pure presence. As Afif Bahnassi argued, Abstraction is a search for pure, absolute beauty…a movement toward the absolute, toward beauty itself, abstracted from utility" (90). Artists like Kandinsky, Malevich, and Mondrian thus created what Marcel Brion called a new type of religious art with a much greater human meaning" (Bowness 204). Their quest parallels the Sufi s, who, as Hujwiri explained, sees robe and cloak as equal once a man understands the way" (al-Hasan 245). Just as the Sufi dissolves the distinction between appearance and essence, abstract art dissolves the boundary between representation and presence, opening a threshold into the ineffable.

Henry Corbin s remark that the image is a mediatrix between the sensible and the intelligible" (Creative Imagination 12) helps us understand adaptation as a metaphysical dialogue. The visual translation of Sufi poetry is not a commentary but a threshold experience. The canvas, like the poem, mediates between the visible (ʿālam al-shahāda) and the unseen (ʿālam al-ghayb). Its brushstrokes, spirals, and textures do not explain but rather perform what the poem gestures toward—an opening of vision. Merleau-Ponty s claim that the visible itself has an invisible inner framework, and it is this invisible which gives it depth and makes it a world" (*Eye and Mind* 150) resonates here, for the artwork functions as an opening upon Being." It enacts, phenomenologically, what Jean-Luc Marion terms the saturated phenomenon": a manifestation that overwhelms perception and exceeds conceptual grasp (*Being Given* 199).

Thus, the adaptation of Sufi poetry into visual art is not descriptive but transformative. It enacts the very logic of mystical knowing—maʿrifa—as presence. As Chittick explains of Ibn ʿArabi, To know God is not to define Him, but to be present with Him" (*Sufi Path of Knowledge* 79). In this sense, the painting born of Sufi verse is not an object to be consumed but a site of spiritual hospitality, a dwelling place for the beholder. Each act of viewing becomes a rehearsal of mystical vision, a re-enactment of longing, and, potentially, a glimpse of the Real. Fidelity to the poem lies not in reproducing its form but in sustaining its gesture toward the ineffable—a metaphysical dialogue that unites the poet, the painter, and the viewer in the horizon of presence.

Conclusion

The act of translating Sufi mystical poetry into visual form cannot be contained within the logic of representation or fidelity. Rather, it must be understood as a hermeneutic and phenomenological process, one that enacts presence instead of reproducing text. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty s claim that vision is a form of dwelling, Heidegger s understanding of art as the disclosure of being, and van Manen s insistence that art enacts the meaning of experience," this study has argued that visual

adaptations of Sufi poetry should be seen as sites where perception itself becomes a form of mystical witnessing (mushāhada). In this way, adaptation emerges less as a derivative act and more as a creative participation in the unfolding of truth.

The intersemiotic translation of Sufi poetry into visual art cannot, therefore, be reduced to illustration. Within the mystical tradition, where language itself strains under the weight of the ineffable, adaptation becomes an extension of the poem s ontological gesture rather than its content. To paint Rūm'īs flight, Khusrau s color, or Bulleh Shah s charkha is not to fix meaning in pigment but to open a parallel field of resonance, where form, texture, and presence enact what words themselves intimate but cannot contain. As Gadamer reminds us, the artwork becomes a site of a fusion of horizons" (*Truth and Method* 306), an imaginal threshold where the sacred is mediated through aesthetic presence.

Placed within the horizon of phenomenology and Sufi epistemology, the image is more than representation: it is mediation. Henry Corbin s insight that the image is a mediatrix between the sensible and the intelligible" (*Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabi* 12) and Ibn ʿArabi s insistence that the heart has two eyes, reason and imagination" (Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya II: 276) find concrete enactment here. The adapted artwork unites rational interpretation with imaginal vision, staging what Merleau-Ponty called the invisible inner framework" of the visible (*Eye and Mind* 150). Phenomenologically, the adapted artwork manifests as a saturated phenomenon" in Jean-Luc Marion s sense (*Being Given* 199): it overwhelms conceptual grasp through its givenness, disclosing more than the eye can contain.

Such adaptations thus function not as commentaries on mystical poetry but as continuations of their ontological unfolding. They are less mirrors than doorways, less illustrations than prayers. To adapt visually is to engage in dhikr through form, a remembrance enacted in line, color, and texture. What emerges is what William Chittick calls maʿrifa: a knowledge born of being-with rather than

knowing-about (*Sufi Path of Knowledge* 79). The visual artwork, like the poem, is therefore not ancillary to mystical experience but constitutive of it, disclosing its truth by prolonging its resonance. Ultimately, adaptation here is not an end but a passage — a perpetual unveiling in which poet and painter, reader and viewer, remain pilgrims of the Real. The work of art becomes a site of hospitality, a festival of meaning in which the Beloved discloses Himself anew. In this sense, the intersemiotic translation of Sufi poetry affirms the profound kinship between phenomenology and Sufi aesthetics: both insist that art is not about mystical experience but one of its privileged sites of manifestation.

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Tracing the Echoes of Partition through Brushstrokes, Panels and Cinematic Lenses

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Abstract: The Partition of India in 1947 is etched in history as one of the most harrowing and intricate events in modern South Asia. This monumental geopolitical rupture not only displaced over fifteen million people but also claimed nearly a million lives, leaving scars that still resonate today. This research paper delves into the lingering echoes of this cataclysm through three compelling cultural texts: Arpana Caur s painting *Memories of 1947*, created in 1997; Vishwajyoti Ghosh s graphic novel anthology *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (2013) and Anup Singh s film *Qissa: The Tale of a Lonely Ghost* (2013). The research paper engages with two critical theoretical concepts: Marianne Hirsch s notion of postmemory" and Cathy Caruth s theory of traumatic latency" to uncover how art, literature, and cinema act as powerful sites to reimagine Partition beyond the confines of historical documentation. Each of these works vividly illustrates Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory"—the intricate intergenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge—and Cathy Caruth s poignant idea of traumatic latency", where history reveals itself not through straightforward representation, but through delayed, haunting returns. The paper posits that the Partition, interpreted through the lenses of postmemory" and traumatic latency", transcends mere historical fact to become a continuous process of recollection and reimagining. Each medium—the panels of graphic novel, the haunting imagery of cinema, and symbols of visual art—offers a distinctive way to engage with the enduring legacy of Partition.

Keywords: Partition; Postmemory; Trauma; Graphic novel; Cinema; Painting

The Partition of India in 1947 is not just a historical event; it is one of the most profound and tumultuous ruptures in the subcontinent s legacy and, indeed, in human history. This cataclysmic

moment, marked by unprecedented violence, mass dislocation, and the tragic loss of millions of lives, transcends geopolitical boundaries, emerging as a deep civilizational wound whose echoes continue to resonate in our cultural memory and identity. Writers, artists, and filmmakers have revisited this trauma over the decades, striving to confront its lingering grief, silence, and haunting legacies. This research paper delves into three distinct yet interwoven cultural responses to Partition: Arpana Caur s evocative painting *Memories of 1947* (1997), Vishwajyoti Ghosh s graphic anthology *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (2013), and Anup Singh s cinematic narrative *Qissa: The Tale of a Lonely Ghost* (2013). Together, these works illuminate how art, literature, and film serve as vital mnemonic and interpretive realms through which the unspeakable dimensions of Partition are remembered, reimagined, and passed down through generations. To frame this analysis, the paper draws upon two influential theoretical paradigms in trauma and memory studies: Marianne Hirsch s concept of postmemory" and Cathy Caruth s theory of traumatic latency." Hirsch s notion of postmemory—defined as the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (22)—sheds light on how the violence of Partition continues to shape not just the lives of survivors but also those of their descendants, who inherit its emotional and psychological burdens. In contrast, Caruth posits trauma as an event that is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known" (4), emphasizing its delayed nature, resistance to narrative closure, and its tendency to resurface in fragments, symptoms, and cultural expressions. Through these theoretical lenses, the paper explores how these selected cultural texts navigate the silences surrounding Partition, and celebrate the resilience of memory against the tide of erasure.

To begin with, Vishwajyoti Ghosh s *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (2013) stands as a remarkable testament to the power of storytelling that brings together nearly forty contributors from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in twenty-eight compelling graphic narratives. One of the most

captivating aspects of *This Side, That Side* is that its contributors are not direct witnesses to the Partition; rather, they are inheritors of its fragmented memories, silences, and incomplete testimonies. The anthology beautifully illustrates Marianne Hirsch s concept of postmemory , where the generations that follow a collective trauma engage with the past not through first-hand experience, but through the rich tapestry of stories, images, and behaviours" passed down to them (Hirsch 106). This profound connection makes the echoes of the past profoundly resonate in their own lives.

Several contributions compellingly illuminate the theme of inheritance through the captivating visual language of the comic form. For instance, in Priya Kuriyan s evocative piece, the narrative voice emerges from the rich tapestry of the family archive. Kuriyan beautifully portrays a child exploring an old trunk brimming with photographs and letters. This visual interplay powerfully reinforces Marianne Hirsch s assertion that postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" (Hirsch 107).

Shohei Emura s evocative piece, *A Good Education*" delves into the unsettling ways in which prejudice is woven into the fabric of education. A Pakistani child, reflecting on memories decades after the turmoil of 1947, recounts classroom lessons that ingrained the notion of Indians as eternal enemies". By layering textbook diagrams of national borders with the child s own doodles: crosses, erasures, and tears, Emura powerfully illustrates that the trauma of Partition is not merely remembered; rather, it is filtered through inherited discourses, education, and the vivid realm of imagination. One striking caption reveals, I learned about Partition not at home but in the classroom, in the way maps were drawn and erased" (This Side, That Side 132).

Another touching example of this theme can be found in *The Tree*" by Anwar, which beautifully narrates the story of two boys—one Hindu and one Muslim—who, in a moment of unity, plant a sapling together before the Partition. Their friendship, however, is tragically severed by the tumultuous events that follow. Years later, a new generation stumbles upon the tree, still standing tall

and resilient despite the scars it bears from the past. The narrator reflects, This tree has seen more than I can ever imagine, yet it refuses to forget" (This Side, That Side 210). Here, the tree emerges as a powerful metaphor for postmemory - a silent witness that conveys memories not through mere retelling but through the endurance of its very being.

Sarnath Banerjee s striking piece, *Drawing the Line*," powerfully illustrates trauma through its interrupted narration. The story primarily recounts his grandfather s harrowing experiences during the Partition, but it artfully shifts between past and present, weaving in the narrator s voice as he wrestles with the unspeakable. One moment, the panels portray a train packed with desperate refugees; in the next, the page collapses into a stark white square, punctuated only by the haunting caption: He never spoke of what happened next" (This Side, That Side 78). This blank panel vividly embodies the concept of latency: the traumatic moment evades narration at the time, returning instead to the reader as silence, absence, and deferred meaning. The formal gap" between the panels mirrors what Cathy Caruth identifies as trauma s essential void—"the missing part of experience that can only return belatedly" (Caruth 8).

Similarly in *The Long Walk*" by Harshad Marathe, a profound exploration of latency unfolds through the narrative of a refugee family s migration. Rather than portraying the journey as a steady progression, the panels ingeniously loop back on themselves. The haunting image of bare feet walking resurfaces on three distinct pages, each time subtly transformed: sometimes marked by blood, fading into obscurity, or enveloped in stark white space. This recurring motif powerfully illustrates what Caruth refers to as the insistence of the event," returning in a delayed yet poignant manner. The caption deepens this resonance: The walk never ends. It comes back in dreams, in silences, in stories half-told" (164). The fragmented visual rhythm defies closure, capturing the enduring resurgence of trauma that echoes across time and generations, leaving an indelible mark on our collective consciousness.

The anthology *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* vividly demonstrates how the graphic form can capture and convey traumatic memories in ways that traditional historical narratives often fail to achieve. While conventional history tends to emphasize coherence, chronological order, and documentary evidence, the memory of Partition is marked by rupture, silence, and a haunting sense of belatedness. This anthology masterfully harnesses the unique strengths of the comics medium, its harmonious interplay of word and image, its poignant use of the gutter as a space of absence, and its capacity to weave together multiple temporalities to craft what can be described as a vibrant counter-historiography of Partition. In doing so, it invites readers to engage with the complexities of memory and history in a deeply impactful way. The impact of this word-visual interplay can be exemplified through an episode in the story *Making Faces*" where one narrator remarks I have never seen Partition, yet it stares at me through the faces of my grandparents" (95). This powerful statement captures the essence of what Hirsch refers to as the imaginative investment" of postmemory (Hirsch 109): memory is felt and claimed by subsequent generations, even in the absence of direct encounters with the past.

Caruth s concept of traumatic latency elegantly illuminates the anthology s tendency to disrupt chronology, evade closure, and embrace fragmentation. This structural delay resonates through the anthology s striking visual motifs—trains, borders, and empty frames—each intruding upon narratives that would otherwise flow seamlessly. Take, for instance, Sarnath Banerjee s *Drawing the Line*," where a train makes a sudden appearance across two panels, devoid of context, followed by the haunting words: He would not say more. He never did." (This Side, That Side 79). This jarring interruption captures the essence of latency: the event re-emerges not as a straightforward recollection but as a haunting, fragmented memory that lingers in the mind. Similarly, Priya Kuriyan s poignant story of uncovering family photographs, the act of gazing at sepia-toned images becomes a profound postmemorial practice: the narrator finds herself deeply influenced by an event she did not witness.

Yet, the narrative is punctuated by telling gaps—blank panels and silences in the elder s voice—that vividly illustrate Caruth s concept of latency.

This intricate interplay of inheritance and delayed return imbues the graphic form with remarkable power. A blank panel, a recurring image, or a fragmented page layout does more than merely depict trauma; it embodies it, creating a visceral experience. For instance, in *The Long Walk*" a caption occurs as: The silence between footsteps says more than the words we never heard" (167). The gutter—the white space between panels—serves as a striking visual metaphor for historical silence, representing what is unrecorded and unspeakable, yet undeniably present.

From a historiographic perspective, this graphic anthology compellingly challenges the singular national" narratives of Partition that often reduce this monumental event to mere political agreements or cold statistical losses. Instead, the anthology boldly asserts that Partition can only be truly remembered through its myriad fragments, contradictions, and disruptive moments. This celebration of multiplicity can be exemplified through one of the dialogues from the anthology which concludes as: Our history is not a line. It is a collage, torn at the edges, pasted again and again" (202). This striking quote encapsulates the heart of the collection, boldly rejecting the notion of linear narratives in favour of rich, fragmented stories. It reveals that history is not merely what is inscribed in books, but also what lives on in memory, what is inherited, and what emerges belatedly.

The moment of Partition in history has often been commemorated through state-sponsored memorials and polished narratives that tend to sanitize its complex reality. Yet, a courageous group of artists and writers has ventured to explore this trauma in more evocative ways, employing vibrant colours and powerful symbols to capture its fractured essence. In a similar vein, artist Arpana Caur masterfully employs this fragmented storytelling technique in her paintings, capturing the deep psychological scars left on those who witnessed this turbulent chapter in history.

Arpana Caur, born in 1954 in a newly independent India, emerged from a crucible of historical trauma marked indelibly by the partition. Growing up in an environment profoundly shaped by this

tumultuous period, she was influenced by her mother, Ajeet Cour—an esteemed writer who bore not only the scars of partition but also the haunting legacy of the violence that swept through India in 1984. This intricate and painful heritage deeply informs Arpana Caur s painting *Memories of 1947*," which resounds with the lingering echoes of her family s grief, suffering, and enduring wounds. In crafting *Memories of 1947*," Arpana Caur embraces the dual identity of daughter and artist. As a daughter, she channels her mother s untold stories through her brushstrokes, preserving the unspeakable in vivid color and form. Simultaneously, she embodies the role of an artist, skillfully weaving together silences and tales of sorrow through innovative and fragmented techniques. In this remarkable interplay, Arpana Caur finds herself in the liminal space of postmemory: neither a direct survivor nor a detached historian, but a profound bearer of a collective legacy that speaks to the resilience of the human spirit.

One of the most compelling aspects of Arpana Caur s *Memories of 1947* is its poignant portrayal of the Partition through a deeply feminine lens of suffering and resilience. The canvas is alive with female figures—displaced, fragmented, and ethereal—whose bodies vividly embody the trauma of history. Women are not simply depicted as passive victims; they emerge as vital repositories of collective memory, carrying both personal grief and the heavy scars of national disruption. In this way, the painting aligns powerfully with feminist historiography, emphasizing the crucial need to recover the silenced voices of women whose stories have often been overshadowed in the grand narratives of independence and Partition.

Arpana Caur s evocative canvas of *Memories of 1947* confronts us with the profound agony wrought by the Partition. Caur deliberately opts against the bright, celebratory hues typically associated with Independence Day. Instead, the canvas is enveloped in sepia browns, murky greys, and vivid streaks of rusted red that evoke the haunting imagery of blood. These tones conjure a scorched landscape, as if the very soil of Punjab—one of the region s most deeply scarred—has absorbed the blood of countless displaced souls and victims of massacre. The subdued palette rejects

any notion of festivity, compelling us to confront a profound atmosphere of grief and mourning. In Caruth s perspective, the painting serves as a powerful vessel for the return of trauma, illuminating the unresolved pains of the past and vividly bringing them into the present.

The painting creates a disconcerting sense of weightlessness, as figures float aimlessly, stripped of any grounding. Lacking a horizon line, architectural structures, or solid earth beneath them, they exist in a realm of perpetual uncertainty. This deliberate dislocation powerfully mirrors the plight of refugees, torn from their ancestral homes and rendered stateless. The canvas transforms into a fractured borderland—shattered, ambiguous, and impossible to inhabit.

The artwork powerfully highlights the fragmented postures of women s bodies. Adorned in tattered garments that seem to dissolve into the background, these women exist in a haunting interplay of visibility and erasure. Their spectral presence poignantly recalls the countless women who were abducted, raped, or silenced during the Partition—a violence frequently overlooked in the grand narratives of national independence. By placing women at the forefront of her work, Caur boldly disrupts the male-centric discourse surrounding Partition, which has often commemorated political leaders while sidelining the profound everyday suffering endured by women. The fragmented female bodies emerge as postmemorial witnesses, embodying the untold stories that echo through generations.

A striking feature of the painting is its deliberate lack of facial detail. The figures appear either headless or blank-faced, effectively shielding them from the viewer s instinct to identify or personalize them. This anonymity transforms them into haunting collective presences; they embody shared trauma rather than representing specific individuals. Their ghostly essence resonates with Hirsch s assertion that postmemory is less about direct recollection and more about engaging with the haunting presence of events that defy full representation. The disjointed portrayal of bodies in the painting also embodies Caruth s assertion that trauma defies assimilation. Survivors of Partition

frequently recount their memories as punctuated by profound silences and disconcerting gaps, as though their minds grappled with the overwhelming scale of the violence they endured.

Moreover, the figures appear to melt into their surroundings, struggling to maintain any stable boundaries. This fluidity poignantly reflects the disintegration of social and political borders in 1947, a pivotal moment when neighbours turned against one another and once tightly woven communities were abruptly torn apart. The indistinct lines between the figures and their background powerfully embody what Caruth describes as the unspeakability of trauma, a state in which memory is not confined within neat frames but instead spills over, blurring the distinctions between past and present, personal and collective experiences. The figures float ethereally, unmoored and weightless, mirroring the harrowing narratives of refugees as shared by survivors with their children and grandchildren: homes left in the dust, land irretrievably lost, and cherished belongings forsaken in the frantic rush of migration.

Anup Singh s film, *Qissa: The Tale of a Lonely Ghost* (2013), is also set against the emotional backdrop of post-Partition Punjab, where it delves deep into the haunting legacy of displacement. The narrative follows Umber Singh, a refugee resolute in his quest to reconstruct his shattered world. This powerful story reveals how the trauma of 1947 transcends its historical confines, weaving itself into the very fabric of family life and shaping identities across generations. Marianne Hirsch s concept of postmemory" beautifully captures this inherited trauma, as Kanwar—born a girl but raised as a boy to fulfill her father s patriarchal expectations—embodies a life scripted by wounds she has not personally endured. Equally compelling is Cathy Caruth s notion of traumatic latency", which illustrates how Umber s unprocessed grief resurfaces over time, distorting his daughter s reality and transforming the Partition into a ghostly, recurring spirit that looms over their existence.

The film *Qissa: The Tale of a Lonely Ghost* (2013) opens in a landscape deeply marked by fracture and displacement. The narrative centres on Umber Singh (portrayed by the Irrfan Khan), a Sikh farmer forced from his ancestral land during the tumultuous Partition of 1947. Alongside his

weary wife Mehar (the talented Tisca Chopra) and their daughters, Umber embodies both the resilience of a survivor and the haunting presence of an exile, weighed down by an unresolved grief that ignites an obsessive yearning for a son—one who could restore the shattered lineage of his family. Mehar, exhausted from the trials of continual childbearing, gently admonishes him: Umber, why must you carry this curse of a son on your shoulders? Daughters are blessings too" (Qissa 00:07:10). Yet, Umber s response is not one of solace but rather an assertion of his patriarchal conviction: A man without a son is a shadow. I will not live as a shadow" (Qissa, 00:09:22). This poignant dialogue encapsulates the film s central motif—the deep-rooted patriarchal belief that male heirs represent permanence, stability, and the possibility of symbolic redemption in the wake of Partition s chaos.

When Mehar gives birth to yet another girl, Umber cannot bring himself to accept this reality. He defiantly declares, This is my son. Kanwar is my son" (Qissa 00:11:03). In this poignant moment, the infant s body becomes a canvas for Umber s longing to reclaim a shattered dream of fatherhood. The swaddling of the child into a boy: a transformation that involves binding her body, cutting her hair, and forcing her into masculine attire serves as a powerful metaphor for the silencing of women s voices and identities during and after Partition. This symbolic act resonates with Judith Butler's insights in *Gender Trouble* (1990)," where she asserts that gender is not an inherent truth but an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 179). Simultaneously, the film echoes Marianne Hirsch s captivating notion of postmemory," where the subsequent generation inherits the trauma of their forebears not through direct experience, but through the nuanced mediums of storytelling and behavioral echoes (Hirsch 5). Kanwar, thrust into the role of the son that Umber insists upon, becomes the poignant symbol of this postmemorial inheritance. a living testament to the enduring legacy of historical wounds that span across generations.

The tension escalates as Kanwar comes of age. In a deeply moving exchange with her mother, Mehar, Kanwar gently whispers, Ma, who am I?" (Qissa 00:46:02). This poignant question cuts through the veneer of patriarchy, exposing the profound psychological toll of a coerced identity. Just as the nation imposed arbitrary borders across Punjab, tearing apart families and communities, Umber stitches a false identity onto Kanwar, forging divisions between daughter and son, woman and man. At one moment, when Kanwar strives to assert her individuality, confesses, I… I am what my father made me." (Qissa 00:46:21). This vulnerability encapsulates the violence of patriarchal naming and the broader pressures of Partition memory, where survivors were often compelled to reconstruct their very selves within the confines of newly drawn national boundaries.

The tension reaches its zenith when Umber arranges Kanwar s marriage to Neeli (Rasika Dugal), a calculated move meant to normalize" his daughter s imposed identity. For Umber, it serves as an effort to mend the dissonance between Kanwar s lived experience and the fabricated identity he has created. His chilling proclamation, Now you are a man. And a man must have a wife" (Qissa 00:42:05), starkly reveals that marriage is not an act of liberation but rather an instrument of patriarchal control.

On their wedding night, Neeli s heartfelt plea, Kanwar, why do you always turn away from me? Don t you love me?" (Qissa 00:47:32), is met with Kanwar s haunting silence. This silence echoes the concept of the latency of trauma, as articulated by Cathy Caruth; it signifies how unspeakable histories resurface not through words but through absence and repression. Neeli s anguished revelation—"Kanwar, who are you? What are you?" (Qissa 01:13:04)—unveils the fractures in Umber s constructed reality, turning the marriage into a border, a symbolic extension of Partition s divisive logic infiltrating the intimate realm of domestic life. Her desperate cry, You lied to me, Kanwar! You lied to me, all of you lied!" (Qissa 00:52:10), resonates with Marianne Hirsch s notion of postmemory: the heavy inheritance of traumas that are not one s own, yet must be relived.

Umber s death does not bring closure to the conflict; instead, his voice lingers, haunting and authoritative: You are my son. Do not betray me" (Qissa 01:28:42). In this insistence, Singh reveals a profound exploration of what Derrida terms hauntology," first articulated in *Spectres of Marx* (1993). For Derrida, the ghost embodies a paradox, existing in a state of being neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Derrida 5). Anup Singh s film breathes life into this philosophical concept: Umber Singh s ghost is not mere supernatural embellishment—it is a cinematic embodiment of the unresolved history of Partition. His spectral presence destabilizes the binaries of life and death, mirroring how Partition shattered the binaries of nation and belonging.

When Kanwar hears her father s voice, she urges him to depart with a desperate plea: Leave me, Baba. Let me live" (Qissa 01:29:10). This cry resonates deeply, serving both as a personal lament and an allegorical voice for a generation yearning to forge their own identities, free from the choking grip of inherited trauma. Furthermore, the hauntology in *Qissa* transcends the figure of Umber s ghost, permeating the film s entire atmosphere. In one particularly poignant moment, Kanwar confides to Neeli, I do not know if I am alive… or already a ghost" (Qissa 01:21:34). This heart-breaking admission encapsulates the hauntological condition: Kanwar is alive, yet she navigates life as an image of her father s unfulfilled aspirations, weighed down by the unprocessed grief of Partition.

The Partition of 1947 continues to resonate powerfully in our cultural memory, finding renewed expression in art, literature, and film. The works examined in this study vividly demonstrate that trauma is not simply recalled; it is imaginatively reinterpreted and transmitted across generations. By weaving together history and creative expression, these texts shatter silences, complicate established national narratives, and elevate individual grief to a collective memory. In doing so, they remind us that the Partition is not a distant relic of the past but a living legacy—one that continues to shape identities, challenge boundaries, and insist on the importance of remembrance.

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Adding Nuances of Postcolonial Arguments to Shakespeare – A Study of Selected Novels under Hogarth *Shakespeare Series*

Bhakti Vaishnav

Abstract: From plays to prose, to operas, to ballet, to movies, to video games, and to contemporary Manga series, William Shakespeare is probably the most adapted and adaptable of all the literary stalwarts. The seven titles published under the Hogarth Shakespeare series from 2015 to 2017 are rewriting, reimagining and reinterpreting of Shakespearean plays by celebrated contemporary writers. As Douglas Lanier points out this ambitious plan to commission prose retellings/ rewritings of Shakespearean drama was conceptualised on the conviction of the brand as "a home for new generation literary talent, an adventurous fiction imprint with an accent on the pleasures of storytelling and a broad awareness of the world." However, this microgenre or the adaptation of plays into prose by these writers embeds more than just contemporizing Shakespeare and the pleasure of storytelling. The proposed paper aims at analysing these adaptations with reference to Hutcheon's theory that views adaptation as a process and product and how these texts interweave the contemporary theories, specifically postcolonial discourses with a special focus on the issues of race, gender and agency as lived, contested and defined by contemporary thinkers and how by doing so these texts also follow and add to the existing theories on adaptation. The paper will also study the adaptations by women novelists, namely *Hag Seed* by Margaret Atwood, *The Gap of Time* by Jeanette Winterson, and *New Boy* by Tracy Chevalier as creative retellings, informed re interpretations, and celebration of universal elements and thereby adding modern nuances to the Bard's plays.

Keywords: Adaptation; Postcolonialism; Adaptation as a praxis of postcolonial arguments; New Boy; *Hag Seed* and *Gap of Time*

He was a great recycler of stories, and there s no reason why his stories shouldn t be recycled."

(Greenbalt, 242)

Shakespeare has been an inspiration to many a creative writer in every century that followed him. Interestingly, Shakespeare s works have been always experimented, innovated and reinterpreted from time to time. Earlier there was a prevalent hegemonic binary between the original work and the adapted work which has been deflated by the contemporary adaptation theorists like Linda Cahir, Thomas Leitch, Robert Stam and Linda Hutcheon. The broader definition of adaptation as given by Fischlin and Frontier is, Adaptation includes almost any act of cultural works of the past and dovetails with general process of cultural recreation." (qutd.from Hutcheon 22). However, adaptation is not just limited to medium it is also equally explored and celebrated in terms of adaptations of original work into other genres. Hutcheon defines adaptation as following:

An acknowledged transposition of recognised other work or works

A creative and an interpretive act of appropriation / salvaging

An extended intertextual engagement with adapted work. (Hutcheon 65)

Recent theories of adaptation have challenged and largely renounced the hierarchical distinction between the original" text and its adaptation. As Linda Hutcheon argues, adaptations should be understood not as secondary or derivative works but as creative reinterpretations that generate new meanings within different cultural and historical contexts (*A Theory of Adaptation*). This shift in perspective has redeemed many appropriations and retellings of canonical literary works that were previously relegated to the lower rungs of creative practice. Such a reconceptualization has, in turn, legitimized experimental and innovative reimaginings of literary texts. The works of William Shakespeare, in particular, have long demonstrated a remarkable openness to adaptation across temporal, cultural, and generic boundaries.

One notable contemporary example is the Hogarth Shakespeare project initiated by Hogarth Press under Vintage to commemorate the quadricentennial of Shakespeare s death in 2016. As part

of this initiative, several contemporary novelists retold Shakespearean dramas in modern prose fiction. These include *The Gap of Time* (2015) by Jeanette Winterson, a rewriting of *The Winter s Tale*; *Hag-Seed* (2016) by Margaret Atwood, based on *The Tempest*; *New Boy* (2017) by Tracy Chevalier, a retelling of *Othello*; *Dunbar* (2017) by Edward St. Aubyn, inspired by *King Lear*; *Shylock Is My Name* (2016) by Howard Jacobson, a reinterpretation of *The Merchant of Venice*; *Vinegar Girl* (2016) by Anne Tyler, based on *The Taming of the Shrew*; and *Macbeth* (2018) by Jo Nesbø, a contemporary retelling of *Macbeth*. Together, these works exemplify the ongoing vitality and democratic adaptability of Shakespearean drama in contemporary literature.

Close readings of William Shakespeare from a postcolonial perspective have become as significant as the continued study of his dramatic works themselves. Shakespeare s plays occupy an important place in postcolonial studies because they were written at the dawn of European colonial expansion and reflect many of the cultural, historical, and ideological assumptions of supremacy that characterized the period. Critics have examined his works to reveal how characters such as Othello, Caliban, Cleopatra, Prospero, and the non-Christian Shylock are constructed through discourses of racial, religious, and cultural otherness (Loomba).

In *Postcolonial Othering in Three Plays by Shakespeare: Othello, Antony and Cleopatra, The Tempest* (2015), Cado reads these plays through the lens of stereotypes associated with the Other," analyzing how speech, race, religion, and gender function within early modern structures of power. Similarly, scholars such as Singh and Shahani have explored the applicability of terms such as early colonial" and proto-colonial" to Shakespearean drama, interrogating their implications for contemporary critical practice.

Shakespeare has also elicited anticolonial literary responses from writers in formerly colonized societies. For instance, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o s *A Grain of Wheat* and Ayi Kwei Armah s *The Eloquence of the Scribes* engage, directly or indirectly, with colonial legacies shaped in part by

canonical European literature. Reflecting on such responses from the colonized world, Ania Loomba and Martin Orkin observe:

> Intellectuals and artists from the colonized world responded to Shakespeare in a variety of ways: sometimes they mimicked their colonial masters and echoed their praise of Shakespeare; at other times they challenged the cultural authority of both Shakespeare and colonial regimes by turning to their own bards as sources of alternative wisdom and beauty. In yet other instances, they appropriated Shakespeare as their comrade in anti-colonial arms by offering new interpretations and adaptations of his works (Loomba and Orkin).

However, it is remarkable to also study the rewriting of Shakespeare s plays in the form of novel engaging with postcolonial perspective and reimagined, reinterpreted and representation of contemporary theories in praxis by Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson and Tracy Cevalier in their novels *Hag-Seed, Gap of Time* and *New Boy*. These novels are not simple adaptations in terms of form but also adds layers of contemporary thinking, writing and debates stemming from the postcolonial theories and concepts of identity, cultural hybridity, race and the otherness. The writing back to empire" tradition included mixed genres, unexpected combinations of tradition and novelty, political experiences based on communities of effort and interpretation" (Said 335)

Through the very title *Hag-Seed,* Atwood invokes the whole discourse on othering and enslavement of Caliban by Prospero in The Tempest. Through her intertextuality and paly within play technique she creates opportunities for debate, discussions and questioning of Prospero s colonisation of the island and enslavement of Caliban in the source text. The class discussion on The Tempest summarises the discussions both the colonial and postcolonial insights on the text over the time. The following comments by the class is used by Atwood to showcase these insights; "Plus he s a slave-driver" says Red Coyote (Atwood, 126). Not just with Caliban. He s got his foot on Ariel too" says eight hands (Atwood, 126). Thus, Atwood shows the reception and analysis of Prospero in contemporary time through postcolonial lens wherein he is not a victimised hero and magician but a

slave driver, an encroacher turned into a coloniser and exploiter of the land that sheltered him. This also shows him as one of the White Male Coloniser who exploited everything and everyone available to him on the newly found land" and manipulating it for his personal growth that ultimately enriched the Commonwealth. Her rewriting of The Tempest also resonates with Franz Fanon s argument in Frantz Fanon s Black Skin, White Masks (1952) which discussed racial discourses underlying benevolent civilising missions. Again, Atwood debunks the myth of the Whiteman s Burden project so much propelled during the period of colonisation when all the White Men did was exploitation, appropriation and exhaustion of the human and natural resources of the colonies when she makes one character comment, "Plus he s a land stealer" adds Red Coyote. Sucking old white guy. He should be called Prospero Corp. Next thing he ll discover oil in it., develop it, machine -gun everyone to keep them off" (Atwood, 127).

This capitalist Western models of trade under the garb of upliftment and civilization of the colonies are now also being exposed by many contemporary writers like Amitav Ghosh who link the climate change with the colonial practices and exploitation through capitalism propelled by the Empire. Atwood shows how the colonial era have enriched the West and created empires of corporations that still dominate the erstwhile colonies while the colonies are left to the aftermath of climate change and environmental hazards. She also digs in at the blood-stained history of western industrialisation that prospered and thrived on oil excavation and history of colonisation.

Interestingly, Atwood while describing the postcolonial insights and interpretations of Shakespearean play, also brings out the fact that the play itself shows the flipside of the colonisation project. Through the interpretation of postcolonial inferences and nuances of various characters, Atwood also shows that the Bard has portrayed his characters and the theme in a way that is open to criticism for project colonisation. Thus, through her novel she not only recreates *The Tempest* in the Modern World but also reinterprets and reinstates the Bard against the storm of charges against him as being the key instrument of cultural appropriation during the project colonisation.

Postcolonial arguments of cultural hybridity, agency and otherness are quite present and played with by Jeanette Winterson in her adaptation of *Winter s Tale. Gap of Time* portrays a range of characters from England, France and US like the play by the Bard. The play had also shown three places and countries but Winterson sets these locales beyond Europe and Perdita is sent to New Bohemia where she is raised by Shep – a black man. Her biological mother is a French woman and her biological father is of British origin. The partners Holly, Polly and Molly of the band-Seperationists in which Perdita sings are Chinese triplets who were found in babyhatch of Guangzhou and adopted by English missioneries and their father was a minister of High Wycombe and had ended up in a Baptist church in New Bohemia via a mission to China.

The novel also uses food, music of various countries, artists, cars and the video game as part of her narrative that add to the aspect of the cultural hybridity of the contemporary world. The video game that is developed by Xeno transports the player into multiple cities of multiple nations; "Xeno dropped down a moving screen of cities, their icons recognisable at once- Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower, Brandenburg Gate, The Harbour Bridge, The Empire State…" (Winterson 37)

` These locales of the game also speak for the spatial temporal hybridity induced by the virtual reality in our contemporary world again pitched in together due to the history of colonisation. Winterson sets these characters in contemporary time where capitalism, power struggle and sexuality dominate the choices and decisions of life. Leo owns a kingdom in terms of power and money through which he dictates the world around him. The novel encompasses the complexity and hybridity of these international-intercontinental relationship and situations with a continuous discussion on Leo s progress, fall and rerising during and after the global crisis of 2008. Leo s position, power and engagement with profit-oriented market represent the Capitalism and its policies rooted in the history of colonisation that used business and capitalism as a tool to enlarge the Empire. This is well reflected in, "Leo hadn t invented capitalism-his job was to make money inside a system that was about making money" (Winterson 21).

In Jeanette Winterson s *The Gap of Time*, Leo s obsessive desire for control recalls the historical logic of the white European patriarch who seeks dominion over both domestic and imperial spaces. Yet alongside this critique of masculine authority, the novel offers a compelling reconfiguration of female agency. Like her Shakespearean counterpart in *The Winter s Tale* by William Shakespeare, Pauline remains morally steadfast, confronting Leo s megalomania, suspicion, and the cruel abandonment of his child. However, Winterson s reinterpretation extends agency even further, particularly in her portrayal of Mimi (Hermione) and Perdita.

Mimi, devastated by the loss of her daughter and the death of her son, initially appears emotionally paralyzed. Unlike Hermione in Shakespeare s play, however, she does not remain a silent emblem of suffering. Instead, she chooses to walk away from Leo and rebuild her life in Paris, exercising deliberate autonomy. Although she relinquishes her musical career, she composes a song for Perdita during their separation—an act that signals enduring maternal connection despite patriarchal rupture (Winterson). Moreover, Winterson presents Mimi as a successful and financially independent artist who has earned more than Leo, thereby unsettling traditional gender hierarchies. Her vulnerability emerges most sharply when Leo accuses her of infidelity, revealing the entrenched double standards of patriarchy: Leo assumes entitlement to multiple affairs—with both men and women—yet suspects his wife merely for being intellectually and socially at ease with Xeno. His chauvinistic paranoia ultimately compels him to steal Perdita and orchestrate her removal, an act that devastates the family structure and underscores the destructive consequences of patriarchal possessiveness.

Perdita, too, is rendered with greater independence than her Shakespearean predecessor. In Shakespeare s play, Perdita largely appears as a young woman in love whose fate unfolds through the decisions of others. In *The Gap of Time*, by contrast, she insists on learning the truth about her origins, compelling Clo to reveal her history (Winterson). Rather than being passively taken abroad by her lover, she actively chooses to seek out her biological father, embarking on the journey with Zel as an

equal partner. Ultimately, she rejects Leo and chooses Shep, affirming her capacity for autonomous decision-making. Through this portrayal, Winterson situates Perdita within a contemporary, postcolonial framework in which female subjectivity is self-fashioned rather than inherited.

Shep s hesitation in returning the child and his reluctance to become a witness in Tony s murder case further gesture toward systemic racial anxieties. Xeno s suspicion of Shep reflects the persistence of cultural biases against Black men. While such undercurrents of racial otherness surface in Winterson s narrative, the theme of racism is more centrally and explicitly explored in Tracy Chevalier s *New Boy*, a retelling of *Othello* produced as part of the Hogarth Shakespeare series, where racial prejudice becomes the primary axis of conflict.

In Tracy Chevalier s *New Boy*, Osei—referred to as O" by his classmates—is the only Black child in his middle school. Set in a 1970s American public school, the novel reimagines William Shakespeare s *Othello* within the microcosm of childhood social hierarchies. Dee is initially fascinated by Osei, drawn to the color of his skin as a marker of difference, while many other students and even teachers display varying degrees of discomfort, prejudice, or mild repulsion toward the eleven-year-old boy. Osei, however, is not unfamiliar with such reactions. Having previously encountered racial bias, he has learned to navigate white social norms through strategic self-containment and mimicry. As the narrator observes, He had learned to make himself smaller, to wait and see how much of himself was acceptable" (Chevalier).

Like Othello in Shakespeare s play, Osei is persistently judged and defined by his skin color rather than his character. The hostility and resentment directed at him by Ian—Chevalier s counterpart to Iago—symbolize the lingering structures of racial prejudice and colonial ideology that frame Blackness as otherness. Osei s father, a diplomat whose profession necessitates frequent relocation, underscores the boy s outsider status; he is perpetually new, perpetually foreign. The ordeal of being the only Black student in a predominantly white school environment becomes a powerful lens through

which the novel exposes the everyday normalization of racial bias. Chevalier captures this omnipresent scrutiny succinctly; He was used to the looks, the stares, the whispers" (Chevalier).

This exclusion becomes more excruciating when he becomes the target of suspicion from teachers and the subject of hatred from his peers. The teacher s reaction when he sees Dee going with O and O touching her becomes furious, and he scolds O for touching her inappropriately. This reaction shows the deep-rooted bias against Black people, where they have been wrongly blamed for immorality and inappropriate cultural practices. This continuous surveillance, exclusion, and accusation make O reminded of his otherness, inferiority, and lack, which leads to mistrust, rashness, and ultimate psychological breakdown that results in the tragic end (Chevalier). This continuous scrutiny and suspicion due to the colour of the skin echo Frantz Fanon s views on institutional racism. Ian s manipulation of other students and the situation also echoes the manipulation and exploitation of the African subcontinent. While the novel shows cultural hybridity due to postcolonial existence, it also echoes the historical encounters and destruction of the cultures of colonies. It also represents how people like Mimi, Casper, Bianca, and Dee would have played an instrumental role in the tragedy of colonies in the past, when colonial discourse was propelled, furthered, and executed by White European men like Ian (Chevalier).

While O has to suffer due to his colour and identity, Ian also represents the identity crisis of the white man and the bias against coloured people deeply rooted in their collective unconscious. Chevalier captures this feeling of never being able to belong because of an inferior identity." He was Ghanaian at home, American at school, and never enough of either" (Chevalier). Ian is jealous when O becomes popular and is not afraid of his bullying, but he becomes enraged when he sees Dee—a white girl—becoming close to a Ghanaian boy. This also highlights the evils of the modern world, where Black Lives Matter" has had to become a revolution for the rights and dignity of Black people. The novel is set during the era of Black is Beautiful," and this is repeated by various characters in the novel (Chevalier). Moreover, the novel also shows some teachers correcting the

biases against O, but ultimately the racist, oppressive, and manipulative Ian, along with other teachers, makes O fall into the trap and commit the mistake, making him behave in the exact way the whites wanted him to, living up to the toxic image often associated with Black men. After acting in this aggressive and unthoughtful way, O is described as having realized how he has been a fool and a puppet to the manipulation of his white enemies, thus ruining his own dignity and image. Osei felt the heat rise in him, not from shame, but from knowing it was expected of him to lose control" (Chevalier).

Thus, to conclude, it is evident that all three novels by these contemporary women writers reimagine, reconstruct, and resituate Shakespearean dramas into our times. While doing so, they not only add to the original plays but also enhance their nuances and relevance. Engaging with the Bard s works through a creative and critical employment of language, characters, settings, and plot, these novels not only retell but, in fact, transform the original texts with informed and conscious praxis of postcolonial debates and preoccupations. As Ania Loomba underscores, Shakespeare s plays stand the test of time because they address issues that span human history. In the introduction to *Shakespeare, Race, and Colonialism*, Loomba argues that Shakespeare s plays form a bridge between the past and us: even as we read in them stories of a bygone world, we also continually reinterpret these stories to make sense of our own worlds" (4–5).

Loomba and Martin Orkin view Shakespeare s plays more as contested loci of cultural hybridity than as carriers of hegemony. Loomba and Orkin further elucidate that Shakespeare s plays overlap with post-colonial concerns … [and] provid[e] the language for expressing racial difference and human sameness as well as colonial hybridities" (10).

From plays to prose, to operas, to ballet, to movies, to video games, and to contemporary manga series, William Shakespeare is probably the most adapted and adaptable of all literary stalwarts. The seven titles published under the Hogarth Shakespeare series from 2015 to 2017 are rewritings, reimaginings, and reinterpretations of Shakespearean plays by celebrated contemporary

writers. As Douglas Lanier points out, this ambitious plan to commission prose retellings/rewritings of Shakespearean drama was conceptualised on the conviction of the brand as a home for new generation literary talent, an adventurous fiction imprint with an accent on the pleasures of storytelling and a broad awareness of the world" (Lanier). However, this microgenre, or the adaptation of plays into prose by these writers, embeds more than just contemporizing Shakespeare and the pleasure of storytelling. By including aspects and themes of postcolonial concerns and innovative engagement with this theory, these three women writers transform the original play into a product of our time.

These novels demonstrate an acknowledged transposition of a recognised other work of Shakespeare, provide a creative and interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging of the original text, and also exemplify an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work. Thus, they level up to the three conditions mentioned by Linda Hutcheon in her adaptation theory. And therefore, as Hutcheon says, these retellings become both a process and a product while adapting Shakespeare (Hutcheon).

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Poetry as 'Passage': Symbolic Adaptation and Cultural Memory in the Poetry of Meena Alexander

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Abstract: The present paper looks at Meena Alexander's poetry as a powerful space where cultural memory, migration, and identity come together through adaptation. Rather than focusing on adaptation as just changing one text into another, it explores how Alexander's poems act as a passage; a way to navigate experiences of exile, trauma, and the search for belonging. In today's world of global movement and complex cultural stories, her poetry shows how tradition can be reshaped through innovation.

Focusing on poems from collections like *Atmospheric Embroidery*, and *Raw Silk*, the paper examines how Alexander blends multiple languages, memories, and political realities into her work. Her use of fragmentation, code-switching, and hybrid forms helps adapt deep-rooted histories and contemporary challenges into a rich, trans-cultural narrative. Here, adaptation isn't about sticking to an original source but about creatively reimagining identity and memory through poetry.

In the end, the present paper offers a fresh way to think about adaptation; as an ongoing process of negotiation between cultural inheritance and individual experience in a connected world.

Keywords: Diaspora, Symbolic Adaptation, Cultural Memory, Transcultural Poetics, Meena Alexander

Introduction

In the poetry of Meena Alexander, home is never a fixed geography but a crossing, a threshold, a passage. Born in India, raised in Sudan, educated in England, and long settled in the United States, Alexander lived and wrote at the intersections of displacement and belonging. Her poems are haunted by exile, shaped by cultural memory, and driven by the need to remake identity in unfamiliar terrains.

For her, poetry becomes not simply a site of expression but a passage; a way of carrying fragments of memory across time and space, a liminal threshold where inherited traditions encounter new landscapes, and a textual form through which the fractured self might be reassembled.

The present paper makes central claim that Alexander's poetry is best understood as an act of symbolic adaptation. Adaptation here is not the conventional reworking of one text into another but the reimagining of cultural memory, ancestral symbols, and emotional registers so that they may survive in new contexts. In her poetry collections such as *Raw Silk, Atmospheric Embroidery,* Alexander transforms loss into lyric, trauma into testimony, and scattered memories into hybrid forms. Her poems enact the struggle of a self in motion; shaped by departure and arrival, by rupture and reconstitution, and in doing so, they expand the very meaning of adaptation.

To frame this argument, it is useful to recall Arnold van Gennep's triangular structure of rites of passage; separation, transition and incorporation which, when read through the diasporic lens, aligns with the migrant's trajectory of dislocation, adaptation, and negotiation. Separation corresponds to the painful dislocation from homeland and cultural roots; transition resonates with the liminal stage of adaptation, a space of learning and unlearning; incorporation parallels negotiation, where identity is not simply assimilated but continually redefined through dialogue between past and present. Meena Alexander's poetry moves through these stages repeatedly, yet never resolves into a singular identity; instead, it makes visible the ongoing nature of passage itself.

The theoretical perspective draws on insights from adaptation studies, postcolonial theory, and memory studies. From Linda Hutcheon, I take the idea that adaptation is as much a process as a product, highlighting how Alexander reworks, images and affects across shifting contexts. Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity clarifies the in-between zones where languages, idioms, and identities converge to produce new articulations. Stuart Hall reminds us that cultural identity is always in process, a matter of "being" and "becoming," which resonates with Alexander's fragmented yet fluid lyrical voice. Equally relevant are the frameworks of memory: Pierre Nora's "sites of memory" illuminate how Alexander's recurrent symbols: threads, rivers, shrines, cloth serve as vessels of

collective remembrance, while Marianne Hirsch's idea of post memory explains how inherited scenes and ancestral echoes shape her poetic imagination.

Methodology and Objectives

The paper is guided by the conviction that poetry must be approached as lived experience as much as literary text. The main methodological thrust adopted here combines close textual reading with insights from adaptation studies, memory studies, and postcolonial theory, while also remaining attentive to the affective and aesthetic qualities of poetry that resist strict theoretical codification. Adaptation studies, as theorised by Linda Hutcheon and others, shifts our attention from fidelity to the source to the processes of transformation, re-creation, and negotiation. In this paper, adaptation is not about tracing intertextual borrowings but about seeing how cultural memory is carried into new contexts; how images, idioms, and affective registers are reworked in diaspora.

The first objective is to trace how Alexander's poems adapt cultural memory into lyric form. This involves examining the way ancestral images, ritual gestures, and fragments of language are transplanted into new poetic landscapes, thereby sustaining cultural inheritance while simultaneously transforming it. The second objective is to analyse how formal strategies; fragmentation, hybridity, multilingual diction, and symbolic imagery serve as techniques of passage. The methodology, therefore, is not a rigid set of procedures but an adaptive framework that mirrors the very processes under study. symbolic adaptation operates in her work.

Theoretical Perspective

The idea of adaptation in literary studies has often been associated with processes of transposition, where one text is reimagined into another form, medium, or genre. However, in the context of Meena Alexander's poetry, adaptation must be understood as more than a mechanical transformation. It becomes a symbolic act, a passage through which cultural memory, migration, and identity are negotiated. Adaptation is both a product and a process which provides a useful starting point (Linda Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8) In Alexander's poetry, adaptation operates less as a product and more as a living process; an ongoing negotiation between her diasporic histories and her poetic craft. Adaptation

allows "texts to reverberate within new cultural and temporal frames" (Sanders, 2006, p. 19). Sanders' insight is significant for understanding how Alexander's poems, written from the space of exile, function as adaptive negotiations that carry the weight of inherited traditions while simultaneously opening them to transnational resonances.

Adaptation is marked by the dynamics of repetition and difference, of remembering and re-creating (Linda Hutcheon 8). This resonates strongly with Alexander's fragmented poetic structures, where lines often oscillate between remembrance of homelands and the estrangement of diasporic life. Adaptation is never neutral but is "frequently a deliberate act of appropriation" (Sanders 26). In this light, Alexander's poetry may be read as appropriating cultural memories and recasting them in a hybrid idiom that suits her position as a migrant writer. Adaptation here is not a derivative act but an act of survival and reimagination, enabling her to articulate a trans-cultural identity that bridges India, Sudan, and America.

Postcolonial theory deepens this understanding by offering conceptual frameworks for diasporic identity and cultural hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha's notion of the "third space" is particularly relevant, for it emphasizes the creative potential of in-betweenness. It is in the emergence of the interstices; the overlap and displacement of domains of difference that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated (Bhabha 2).

Alexander's image of "everything… cut and coupled" imitates the very operation of the "third space" where cultural fragments intersect and adapt. Her embroidered cartography becomes a metaphor for the stitched, hybrid identities described by Bhabha.

Alexander's poetry often emerges from precise interstices, where memories of Kerala overlap with the violence of Sudan and the urban landscapes of New York. Her fragmented, multilingual lines enact this hybridity, revealing how adaptation is performed through language itself. Stuart Hall complements this view by insisting that cultural identity is not fixed but always in flux, "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being' (Hall 225). In Alexander's poems, identity is not an essence to be

recovered but a narrative continually reworked through memory and migration. Her poetry dramatises this ongoing process of becoming, where adaptation functions as the very mode of existence for the migrant subject.

Paul Gilroy's theorization of diasporic identity in *The Black Atlantic* adds another dimension to this discussion. Diasporic cultures are characterized by movement, hybridity, and the circulation of memory across boundaries. He writes of a "counterculture of modernity" that emerges from the ruptures of displacement and slavery (Gilroy 36). While Alexander's context differs from Gilroy's focus on the *Black Atlantic,* his idea of cultural memory as transnationally mobile helps us understand how her work engages with histories of violence and migration. In collections such as 'Raw Silk', she situates her personal memories of exile alongside broader political events such as the 9/11 attacks, thereby adapting private trauma into a larger cultural register. This aligns with Hall's assertion that cultural identities are framed through "the continuous play of history, culture, and power" (Hall 225).

Closely tied to these postcolonial frameworks are theories of memory. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" is illuminating here. She defines it as the relationship that the "generation after bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (Hirsch 22). Although Alexander herself is a first-generation migrant, her poetry often engages with the post memorial condition, where inherited fragments of family stories, cultural traditions, and collective traumas are imaginatively reassembled. To simplify it further cultural memory is not static; it is a process of continuous transformation and re-shaping. Alexander's adaptive strategies; fragmentation, code-switching, and hybrid forms mirror this process of re-shaping, turning poetry into a medium where the past is not reproduced but dynamically reimagined in the present.

The fragmented structures in Alexander's work can also be understood as formal enactments of memory's discontinuities. As Hirsch notes, postmemory relies on "imaginative investment and creation" (Hirsch 22), and Alexander's poetics of dislocation performs precisely this imaginative reconstruction. By adapting fragments of memory across languages and cultural contexts, her poetry functions as a symbolic passage through which both personal and collective histories travel.

Feminist and autobiographical perspectives further enrich this theoretical framework. Alexander's work is deeply autobiographical, yet it transforms personal experience into collective resonance. She often foregrounds the body; the female, migrant, and racialized body—as a site of inscription. This resonates with the argument that feminist writing from postcolonial locations must attend to the intersections of gender, race, and displacement.

The act of writing becomes an adaptation of trauma into speech, a feminist reclaiming of voice from the silence imposed by displacement and violence. Alexander creates a resistant narrative that challenges dominant cultural discourses. Her poetry exemplifies how the self-adapts memory and identity into art, creating what might be termed a trans-cultural autobiography. The blending of Malayalam phrases with English, the juxtaposition of childhood memories with global political events, and the invocation of female ancestral figures all signal a feminist practice of adaptation that reshapes cultural inheritance in dialogue with the migrant woman's lived experience.

In short adaptation, in the case of Meena Alexander, cannot be reduced to the formal reworking of one text into another. It is instead a dynamic process of negotiating hybridity, memory, and identity. Hutcheon and Sanders help us reconceptualize adaptation as an ongoing cultural process. Bhabha, Hall, and Gilroy provide frameworks for understanding the diasporic condition in which Alexander writes.

Review and the Context

A central concern in existing studies has been the relationship between displacement and cultural memory. The critics describe her poetry as a map of exile, where recollections that might otherwise seem broken become a resource for survival. Alexander writes "out of fractured geographies," where memory functions not only as a reminder of loss but also as a creative act of reconstruction (Susheila Nasta). Similarly, reads her work as "a poetics of dislocation," suggesting that Alexander transforms absence into aesthetic expression (Lopamudra Basu).

In these readings, memory itself is adapted into a kind of living archive, one that enables the migrant imagination to persist across shifting borders. Further Alexander "turns memory into a

migratory archive," a phrase that highlights the dynamic quality of her poetics (Debjani Ganguly). What emerges from this scholarship is the sense that Alexander does not merely preserve memory but reworks it, adapting fragments of cultural inheritance into imaginative spaces of belonging.

Another important strand of scholarship emphasizes Alexander's linguistic and formal strategies. Her use of code switching, fragmented syntax, and hybrid diction has been read as an act of resistance to the dominance of English. Alexander unsettles the literary authority of English through "interlingual memory," carrying traces of Malayalam and other cultural registers into her poetry (Vijay Mishra, 2008). Such formal strategies are often understood as acts of adaptation in themselves. These studies underline how Alexander's formal innovations exemplify adaptation as a mode of creativity and resistance.

Another critical strand situates Alexander within transnational feminist writing, emphasizing how her poetry connects displacement with questions of gender, body, and violence. Alexander's work articulates "a transnational feminist sensibility," foregrounding how exile and migration are not abstract conditions but lived realities inscribed on the female body (Shirley Geok-lin Lim, 2002). Her poetry transforms the body into "a palimpsest of memory and violence," especially in collections such as Raw Silk, which respond to traumatic events like 9/11 and the Gujarat riots (Anjali Nerlekar). These studies illustrate three major concerns: Alexander's negotiation of diasporic memory, her hybrid poetics of language and form, and her feminist articulation of trauma. What unites these critical strands is their recognition of adaptation as central to her work, even if the term is not always explicitly invoked.

Discussion and Analysis 'The Atmospheric Embroidery' :

Meena Alexander's title poem "Atmospheric Embroidery" emerges as a quintessential example of how her work stitches together fragments of memory, migration, and identity into a delicate yet resilient fabric. The very metaphor of "embroidery" implies a craft of piecing, layering, and embellishing; a fitting symbol for diasporic subjectivity where life is reassembled from scattered

histories. Here, Alexander portrays the turbulence of exile and the frailty of memory into an aesthetic that is intimate and also political.

The poem opens with an evocative image of air charged with trembling threads, hinting at how the atmosphere itself becomes inscribed with stories of displacement. This embroidery of the air illustrates how memory, culture, and belonging are not rooted in a fixed geography but exist in fragile, ephemeral tracings. Diaspora is not solid ground but shifting atmosphere. The use of "prayer" invokes the sacred, suggesting that cultural memory is preserved not merely in documents or artifacts but in whispered rituals, in fleeting gestures of devotion carried across borders.

This metaphor can be read through Homi Bhabha's lens of hybridity. The "weave" does not belong entirely to one cultural pattern but is a negotiation of multiple influences. Just as embroidery brings together disparate threads into a coherent form, Alexander adapts fragments of cultural memory into new, hybrid patterns of identity. The "atmospheric" quality underscores that such identity is not grounded but always in flux, much like what Stuart Hall describes as identity being "a matter of becoming as well as being."

Alexander invokes imagery of cities, landscapes, and bodies that bear witness to trauma and history. She writes, "in the wind a scar is lifted, / crimson against clouded blue." The scar here is not just individual but collective, evoking wounds of colonialism, migration, and violence that mark the diasporic psyche. Yet, placed against the "clouded blue," it is also a vision of survival: the wound becomes visible, remembered, and in that act of remembrance, it is inscribed into the sky, refusing erasure.

The craftsmanship of the poem lies in its oscillation between fragility and resilience. The embroidery is delicate, threatened by unravelling, yet it is precisely in the act of stitching; of creating patterns out of dispersal that the diasporic subject finds continuity. The poetic form, with its fragmented yet lyrical progression, mirrors this process. Lines drift and connect like threads; enjambments enact the movement across borders. This aesthetic of fragmentation aligns with

Alexander's broader poetics of adaptation, where cultural inheritance is not reproduced intact but transformed through creative reassembly.

What makes "Atmospheric Embroidery" particularly significant is that it encapsulates Alexander's vision of poetry as passage. The atmospheric threads become literal passages across air, across time, across languages. The act of embroidery gestures towards women's labour, domestic craft, and intimate care, refiguring these as powerful metaphors for diasporic survival. In this sense, the poem is both personal and political: it records Alexander's own negotiations with migration while speaking to larger histories of displacement.

In conclusion, it exemplifies how Alexander adapts fragments of memory and history into new cultural forms. Through imagery of stitched skies, rivers like the Nile, suffered trees, scars, and shifting winds, the poem dramatizes the tension between loss and resilience. The poem thus becomes not just a reflection of exile but an act of cultural survival, aligning with this study's theoretical framing of adaptation as negotiation between inheritance and lived experiences. The "Night Theatre" is a meditation on birth, trauma, and the inadequacy of language to represent unspeakable suffering. Night becomes a theatre where fragments of memory and history are enacted in shadow and silence. The poem begins with stark imagery; "Snails circle/A shed where a child was born." (AE p. 4)

The natural and the human intersect here, suggesting both fragility and persistence. Birth, often celebrated, is placed against poverty and vulnerability; a shed rather than a home, straw rather than safety. This inversion immediately unsettles expectations and hints at exile, precarity, and violence. The speaker confronts the limits of representation; "Who can write this?" The question acknowledges that poetry may falter when faced with raw suffering. Paul Celan's shadow looms in the poem, a Holocaust survivor-poet who wrestled with language's inability to hold atrocity. The line "Still language endures / Celan said" echoes his belief that poetry must persist even in the face of silence. Alexander thus positions her own diasporic voice in continuity with traditions of trauma writing. The night sky, far from being a place of transcendence, mirrors devastation. Stars themselves

are figured as rubble; light fractured like memory. This aligns with Alexander's larger poetics, where the personal is always entangled with the historical, and where exile leaves behind "rubble" that must still be carried into language.

The final image; "As he stood in a torn / Green coat, / Shivering a little, / In a night theater, in Bremen" draws the poem into a haunting tableau. The city of Bremen, bombed in World War II, becomes symbolic of fractured Europe, collective displacement, and fragile survival. The green coat embodies the worn, vulnerable body against vast historical violence. The expressions like 'we have no words for what is happening' are the best instances of memory and trauma.

Through fragmented images and broken syntax, the poem enacts the struggle of testimony: words both fail and endure. In this tension, "Night Theatre" becomes an elegy for the unspoken and a reminder of poetry's ethical demand to speak, however inadequately, of suffering.

In *Shook Silver*, Alexander transforms personal and collective memory into a lyrical meditation on displacement and fragility. It evokes the shimmer of "shook silver" as a metaphor for fragments of memory, glimmering, yet unstable. This silvery residue suggests both beauty and erosion, much like diasporic identity itself. The fragmented imagery recalls the way migration unsettles continuity; memory does not remain whole but surfaces in glittering shards. Such a poetics resonates with Homi Bhabha's notion of the "third space" where cultural identity is continually negotiated rather than fixed.

The silver metaphor also invokes historical residue: the colonial plunder of India, silver as currency, and the glitter of commodities that once mediated cross-cultural encounters. In this sense, the poem links the intimate texture of memory with the larger narratives of imperialism and diaspora. The form itself, restrained and elliptical, suggests a language stretched across borders, unable to stabilize into neat closure.

The poem embodies Edward Said's reflection on exile as "an unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place." The shimmering silver marks both beauty and loss, a sensuous trace of what cannot be fully retrieved. In the act of writing, however, Alexander transforms this loss

into aesthetic presence, showing how poetry itself becomes a vessel for adaptation which is an act of shaping fragments into meaning.

Thus, *Shook Silver* does not simply mourn loss but reconfigures it into a mode of survival. The titular image means something fragile, breakable, luminous becomes a metaphor for diasporic identity: fractured yet still shining. By adapting memory into poetry, Alexander grants new life to what might otherwise vanish, making literature itself a form of passage. In the expression "I must speak to the shadows" she relates her to the past. Thus *Shook Silver* exemplifies Alexander's capacity to adapt cultural memory into art, linking fragmented personal histories with broader diasporic and postcolonial realities, thereby embodying adaptation as passage. The next poem Udisthanam is anchored by the refrain like closing line; "Who will grant them passage?" This question crystallizes the central anxiety of the poem, the vulnerability of migrants and exiles who must depend on external powers for the right to move, settle, and survive. Positioned at the end, the question denies resolution; it leaves the reader suspended in the very uncertainty that defines displacement. Here, Alexander echoes Edward Said's insight that exile is marked by perpetual contingency, "an endless wait for permissions that may never come. "The titular significance further layers the meaning. Derived from Sanskrit (ud– "upward" and sthāna "place"), Udisthanam may be read as "a place of rising" or "an elevated place." Yet the aspirational quality of the word contrasts with the reality of the poem, where passage is not guaranteed but withheld.

By ending with a question, Alexander resists closure. The poem's structure enacts the very instability it describes: there is no answer, no authoritative voice to guarantee safety or belonging. Yet, paradoxically, the poem itself becomes a form of passage. In writing the unspeakable, Alexander transforms silence into presence, echoing the claim that memory and survival depend on retelling. Poetry becomes an alternative dwelling place when physical belonging is precarious or denied. Udisthanam embodies Alexander's poetics of exile by concluding with the unresolved question of passage. Its promise of elevation remains aspirational, yet through the act of writing, Alexander grants her displaced figures a symbolic home in language, affirming that poetry itself can rise where borders

constrain. In Tarawad, Alexander turns to her ancestral home in Kerala as both a material space and a metaphor for belonging, memory, and rupture. The term tarawad refers to the traditional matrilineal household of Kerala, central to kinship and inheritance. Alexander grounds her poem in cultural specificity, while also opening it to broader themes of diasporic memory and the fragility of home. The opening lines establish an intimate connection; “I am a creature of house and home/Bound by a cord of blood.” (AE p. 25)

The umbilical imagery conveys the idea that home is not merely a physical site but a living extension of the self. The natural details the “red tiled roof,” “mulberry bark,” “pond where koi crawled”evoke a lush domestic landscape infused with familial presence. This imagery aligns with Aleida Assmann’s concept of cultural memory, where lived environments embody collective identity and continuity.

Yet even as the poem celebrates rootedness, loss intrudes. The refrain “Going, going, gone!” echoes the voice of an auctioneer, reducing ancestral heritage to a transaction. This intrusion of market logic into intimate memory dramatizes the commodification of cultural spaces. The lines; “Someone banged the gavel/Hearing the house was sold” (p. 25) capture the violent rupture of modernity, where law and commerce sever ties that blood and memory sustain. The figure of the woman who “lay down in the mango grove / and stopped her eyes with stones” becomes a symbolic mourner perhaps an ancestor or guardian spirit who embodies the grief of cultural erasure. The poem intensifies the sense of dispossession. Alexander’s voice turns elegiac, lamenting the destruction of landscape; “Casurinas flashed green needles into flints/Jamun and jacaranda trees chopped.”(p. 26)

The violent verbs “flints” and “chopped” depict how environments of memory are stripped, their sacred value disregarded. The intrusion of the Christian priest “in white robes” into the burial scene hints at the overlay of colonial and religious histories that further complicate belonging. The closing stanzas move from external loss to interior fragmentation; “What becomes of houses torn down?/ In the room where she slept/Milk trickles/Syllables swarm, lacking a scrip (p. 26). Here the destruction of the house is mirrored in the collapse of language. The inability to find a script

underscores Homi Bhabha's idea of the "unhomely"a space where personal identity is disrupted by broader historical forces. Language falters just as memory falters, leaving only fragments. The final lines"Door jamb stuck to emptiness/Threshold split from walls" offer a powerful architectural metaphor for dislocation. What once signified passage and belonging is now broken, symbolizing the impossibility of return. Through Tarawad, Alexander adapts personal memory into a wider meditation on diaspora and cultural rupture. The ancestral home, once a site of continuity, is transformed into a ruin, its presence reconstituted only through poetry. Edward Said's notion of exile as "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place" resonates here: the house cannot be recovered, but it can be reimagined through lyric.

In *Human Geography,* Meena Alexander condenses the weight of exile and belonging into a few charged lines. The title itself signals her concern with how human histories and emotions inscribe themselves onto landscapes.The opening, "Out of the belly of stone / India pours," evokes both permanence and rupture. Stone suggests endurance, yet what pours out is fluid, unstable. Immediately after, "Wild grass is torn/from its roots" captures the migrant condition, the violence of being uprooted from home, echoing Edward Said's claim that exile is marked by "an unhealable rift" between self and place.

The imagery shifts from the collective to the intimate: "On broken rock/Your face is etched in shadow." Here memory becomes a fragile engraving, lasting yet spectral, more absence than presence. This resonates with Marianne Hirsch's idea of postmemory, where what is inherited from the past is both indelible and ghostly.

The closing question; "Is this what love does/Sempiternal marking?" links displacement to desire. Love here is not purely consoling; it leaves permanent scars, like exile itself. The choice of "sempiternal," meaning eternal yet shadowed, underscores Alexander's vision of identity: enduring but transformed by rupture. Therefore, the idea of sempiternal is more appealing and relatable.

Through its brevity, the poem enacts what Homi Bhabha calls the "unhomely" the meeting of the personal and political. Landscapes become maps of memory, while love itself becomes an act of

survival inscribed onto broken ground. Human Geography demonstrates Alexander's gift for compressing the vastness of cultural memory and exile into resonant images, showing how adaptation is both wound and endurance, scar and passage

Meena Alexander's *Hyderabad Notebook* is both diary and palimpsest, a layered text where memory, history, and cityscape intersect. As the title suggests, the poem adopts the form of a notebook: fragmentary, observational, provisional. This form mirrors the diasporic condition itself, where coherence is always partial and identity is shaped by scattered impressions stitched together across time and place. The poem begins in recollection: "I used to sit in the New Mysore Café, at a cracked marble table top/A cup of foaming coffee in front of me." (AE. 61)

The concrete detail of "cracked marble" situates memory in tactile space, while the everyday act of drinking coffee evokes intimacy. Yet almost immediately, erasure enters: "The café is gone, in its place a Reebok store." Here global consumer capitalism overwrites memory, replacing local community with homogenized corporate presence. The nostalgic image of the café becomes emblematic of cultural displacement within one's own city, resonating with Edward Said's description of exile as not only geographical but also existential: "to live in many places at once and in none completely". Alexander juxtaposes the secular, commercial city with gestures of devotion. The figure of the man "slowly going blind" who "runs his fingers over a page/Spelling out the names of God" embodies endurance through ritual. His physical blindness contrasts with spiritual vision; his act of tracing divine names inscribes permanence against urban flux.

The poem layers nationalist history into this personal geography. Reference to *The Golden Threshold* evokes Sarojini Naidu, the "Nightingale of India," situating Hyderabad in anti-colonial memory. The transformation of her residence into "a hospital, then a university" dramatizes how spaces are repurposed, re-coded, and adapted across generations. This aligns with Aleida Assmann's concept of cultural memory, where monuments, institutions, and stories serve as carriers of collective identity, even as their meanings shift.

The notebook structure permits sharp juxtapositions: “Another shop has plastic dolls with glued on hair/SIM cards, dark glasses, cellphones in tints of the rainbow.” Here Alexander catalogues commodities of globalization, contrasting them with older rhythms of the city: sugarcane carts, spiced tea, handwritten calligraphy. These fragments enact the dissonant temporality of modernity, where tradition and modern consumer culture coexist uneasily.

Later, imagery of students, booksellers, and traffic evokes Hyderabad as a city of thresholds between past and present, sacred and secular, memory and erasure. The speaker sees “tyres scuff the asphalt, cut free and leap,” an image that suggests restless, cyclical motion. Cut from “the bowels of courtly houses,” the modern city emerges from older histories of feudalism and colonialism, its traces barely visible in the marketplace of modern life. The poem closes on a reflective cadence; “Returning us to a dream of love, /And what we did not know we were.” (p. 64)

Despite fragmentation and loss, memory points to continuity. The “dream of love” here is not romantic but cultural and collective: the persistence of belonging carried in fragments of ritual, history, and imagination. The final line emphasizes discovery identity revealed retroactively, through memory’s adaptation of past into present.

Thematically, *Hyderabad Notebook* functions as Alexander’s meditation on adaptation itself. The city she records is transformed by time, erasure, and globalization, but in capturing these changes, she adapts its fragments into lyric survival. In this sense, the notebook becomes not merely a record but a creative reinscription. The poem dramatizes Bhabha’s notion of hybridity: an identity that emerges in between the fragments, where global and local, memory and forgetting, coexist. The last poem selected for analysis from this collection is ‘*The Journey. The Journey* compresses a childhood of displacement into a few stark, sensory images, turning personal memory into a miniature history of exile. The poem opens with that unforgettable pair “I was blindfolded and had only the mercy of the sea / (And sprigs of jasmine in my arms)” which immediately sets the tone: vulnerability (blindfold), movement (sea), and memory as fragrant cargo (jasmine). Alexander makes migration

bodily and sensory; the jasmine recurs later as a bruised, crushed scent that returns the speaker to what she "cannot bear to remember," so memory is at once intimate and traumatic.

Formally the poem enacts disruption: lines such as "The journey was awkward: lines blown inward, syllables askew. / Gulls nestled in torn pages" make language itself feel displaced. Linguistic fracture becomes a metaphor for identity in motion, languages "flowing in the fountain" but also producing confusion. The child's perspective (the speaker was five) intensifies the sense of bewilderment: "My soul ran away with me." War intrudes into the personal scene "When we got to that country, a war was going on" tying private loss to political violence.

The poem does two things at once: it documents the wound of exile (resonant with Said's and Hirsch's accounts of displacement/postmemory) and it models adaptation the speaker decides "not to stay thirsty" amid linguistic and cultural confusion, an act of survival and adjustment. In short; *The Journey* makes memory mobile, showing how trauma, language, and sensory detail are reworked into lyric passage.

The poems selected from *Atmospheric Embroidery* (including the title poem, N*ight Theatre, Shook Silver, Udisthanam, Tarawad, Human Geography, The Journey,* and *Hyderabad Notebook* together stage a consistent poetics of adaptation. Across these pieces Alexander does three interrelated moves: materializes memory as movable stuff. Whether it's jasmine, silver, the tarawad house, or a city café, memory is presented as something that can be carried, crushed, stitched, sold or re-inscribed. Fragmented syntax, enjambment, musical syncopation and elliptical lines enact dislocation on the page; the poem's shape becomes a model of the migrant's "passage." She turns private into political while creating symbolic passage. Poems like Tarawad or The Journey show individual grief alongside auctions, war, and urban erasure; yet by bearing witness in language the poems themselves create a kind of passage Bhabha's "third space" where hybrid identities can be imagined and sustained.

'The Raw Silk' like 'Atmospheric Embroidery' is another remarkable collection. The title poem "Raw Silk" stages silk as a carrier of generational memory and transmissible trauma. The

opening domestic call; “Open the door or I’ll faint hearing amma’s voice Where is the silk from your grandmother’s sari?” (Raw Silk p. 34) already sets up the wardrobe as a family archive and a site of contested value. Alexander ties everyday material culture (a wedding sari) to histories of political upheaval: brocade “saved from the bonfire Gandhi had ordained” becomes both reliquary and survivor-object; the thread of cloth is at once literal commodity and symbolic lineage.

The poem’s three part structure moves from embodied memory (the silkworms, mulberries, courtyard) to the disorienting geography of exile “It was Khartoum and it was not” and finally to a ritualized maternal cosmology where “silkworms dancing in the firmament” crown the speaker. The silkworm image is crucial: silk is made through a violent, transformatory process, and Alexander uses that biology as metaphor for adaptation the painful extrusion and re-forming of identity into something both precious and raw. This resonates with Hutcheon’s insistence that adaptation is repetition with difference; the sari is repeated across generations, but its meaning is altered by history.

Formally, the poem compresses languages (French Verlaine is quoted), geographies (Varanasi, Khartoum), and registers (domestic lyric / historical reportage). That multilingual collage enacts Bhabha’s “third space”: identity is produced in between these references, not recovered intact. The ash/smoke imagery in the central section raw silk “turned to smoke in the night’s throat” signals loss but also survivorship: memory is consumed and remade into language.

Rumors for an Immigrant turns public urban space into an arena where identity is fashioned by hearsay and translation. The poem’s vignettes (*Fifth Avenue Plaza, Central Park, a foreign notebook)* dramatize how rumour circulates in diasporic life: “Rumors clip the air, spread their wings / and swarm through the plaza.” The verbal image rumour as insectile, airborne thing recalls the precariousness of reputation and the ease with which meaning is remade in a new city.

Alexander repeatedly evokes multilingual disorientation. This linguistic straddling is not merely confusion; it is a survival tactic the immigrant making sense through a polyglot bricolage. The poem’s notebook sections suggest that writing itself is a refuge against rumour; the speaker attempts to live on language when homeland is denied. Stuart Hall’s notion of identity as ongoing “becoming”

is immediately useful here; rumour destabilizes fixed identity, while writing and small acts of naming attempt reconstitution.

Politically, the poem gestures to a world without refuge “She has heard the rumour no one will have a homeland” a dystopian image that refracts the anxieties of post national migration and the precariousness of asylum. Yet the voice resists pure victimhood by seizing myth, history, and even humour (Allen Ginsberg pops up in Central Park) to reweave belonging. Formally the stanza shifts, repeated refrains and vignette-logic mirror the swarm of rumour itself: fragment as method.

“Petroglyph” begins with ancient marks and ends by placing those marks inside contemporary catastrophe. The glyph (an elk pierced with a lifeline; a human figure sworn to four points) signals an archival memory that precedes writing: human inscription as the first device of cultural memory. Alexander’s speaker insists on the earth’s “thingness” while refusing teleologies that turn the past into a simple origin story. The poem moves from northern rock glyphs to the poet’s own childhood memory of “the sea burn(ing)” linking deep time inscription to immediate disaster.

The effect is palimpsestic; petroglyphs and Kantian geography, Muriel Rukeyser’s phrasing, and references to post9 /11 cities overlap. Alexander explicitly folds critical theory (Kant) and contemporary geopolitics (cities on fire) into the poem’s fabric, thus showing how cultural memory is always mediated by intellectual frames and historical ruptures.

The poem’s formal shifts sudden dream-flash, child’s vision, the adult’s reflective return enacts the recursive movement of memory: inscription, forgetting, retrieval. In the end Alexander positions herself by the river, watching a bright house afloat under moonlight; the child in the house, face covered with a wool hat, becomes an emblem of return and vulnerability. The final confession “Home is where when I go, they let me in” reframes petroglyph as a plea for recognition, not only for the ancient sign-maker but for contemporary refugees. Petroglyph therefore dramatizes both permanence and fragility: stone preserves, but only language can plead to be admitted into present belonging. The poem turns prehistoric inscription into a method for thinking about contemporary survivals of violence memory as rock and rhetoric.

The poem “Triptych in a Time of War” uses the art historical form of the triptych to structure a moral and aesthetic response to war and cultural loss. Each panel stanza summons different poetic ancestors (Forugh Farrokhzad, Enheduanna) and art objects (Frank Stella’s *Dove of Tanna*), creating a temporal layering that insists on the continuity between ancient witness and modern atrocity. The assertion “O the bomb is fear’s flower” turns destruction into a paradoxical aesthetic object, an image of how violence blooms and then becomes the subject of art and testimony.

The poem’s ethical backbone is its insistence on language that can hold love and atrocity simultaneously. Alexander invokes female poets across eras to insist that women’s lyric can be a site of resistance and bearing witness. The middle panel’s images like ziggurats, doves, children touching blood to their lips, juxtapose ritual, myth and modern terror to insist that atrocity becomes part of cultural memory unless actively mourned and narrated. This is precisely what Marianne Hirsch terms postmemory; secondary generations inherit trauma and give it form through creative acts.

Formally, the triptych’s three part structure lets Alexander compress myth, reportage and liturgical lament into a single gesture. She resists reductive reportage by making the poem a palimpsest of voices; that polyphony is itself a strategy of adaptation and the poet borrows other tongues and texts to hold what singular speech cannot. The closing insistence that “syllables of raw silk, this poem” ties Triptych back to the collection’s central metaphor: poetry as material that gathers, resists, and carries pain.

Blue Lotus mobilizes a rich set of Indian symbols (lotus, mulberry, tribal rites) to imagine cultural renewal in the face of devastation. The blue lotus appearing in the grandmother’s garden functions as emblem of survival and spiritual regeneration: petals that “whirl in moonlight” become the lyric threads pulling the speaker homeward. The lotus simultaneously evokes rebirth and rootedness; Alexander’s images (wrist stumps set with lotus stalks, mountain-clearing) conflate bodily loss and communal remaking.

A key moment is discovery of the “gammadion” a four cornered sign “which stands for migration, for the scattering of the people.” Alexander’s reading of the symbol turns a conventional

emblem into a diasporic emblem: migration is not merely loss but also the condition by which new cultural forms arise. The poem's turn to language "I am learning the language again, / a new speech for a new tribe" makes adaptation explicit: the speaker must remake idiom to belong to new communal rhythms. In Bhabha's terms, this is hybrid identity being performed; in Assmann's terms, it is cultural memory being actively transmitted in transformed form. Formally, the poem's incantatory voice (tribe, tribute, tribulation) reads like ritual. Alexander's lyric becomes a cleansing rehearsal. The closing lines, an invocation of modern and canonical poets ("William, Rabindranath, Czeslaw, Mirabai, Anna, Adrienne") stage a cosmopolitan genealogy that claims the lotus as transnational symbol. Blue Lotus thus refuses to let the symbol be merely nostalgic; instead, it refashions it as a vehicle of collective adaptation.

The Letters to Gandhi cluster are a sustained epistolary interrogation of moral memory. Alexander writes to Gandhi not to celebrate but to interrogate; "Dear Mr. Gandhi/please say something/about the carnage in your home state." (78) The opening plea(in Slow Dancing) places the poet in direct dialogue with an ethical icon, asking whether the principle of ahimsa (nonviolence) has resources adequate for modern communal carnage. This is not reverent address but a rhetorical provocation that turns national memory into an object of scrutiny.

Each short letter blends personal witness, historical reference, and moral urgency. "Slow Dancing" stages grief as choreography; "Bengali Market" localizes catastrophe in marketplaces and everyday life; "Gandhi's Bicycle" mixes anecdote and myth to show how Gandhi's image circulates in diasporic imagination. Alexander's strategy is to force the reader to confront the distance between Gandhi's ideals and the brutal realities of pogrom and mass violence (9/11 and Gujarat). The letters refuse a simplistic invocation; they demand conversation, accountability, and the reckoning of political memory.

Formally, the epistolary mode allows Alexander to mix voices, private lament, civic demand, mockery and tenderness producing a rhetorical hybrid that mirrors the collection's larger poetics. The letters become acts of adaptation: the national myth (Gandhi) is reworked, interrogated, and made to

respond to present atrocity. This is also a political poetics of testimony: by addressing Gandhi the poet both reclaims and re-situates national legacy within the transnational ethics of diaspora.

Across these six poems Alexander repeatedly performs the same artistic operation: she treats cultural materials (cloth, symbols, glyphs, urban rumour, canonical names) as malleable objects to be re-scripted into lyric survival. In Raw Silk and Blue Lotus household objects and religious symbols are not relics but working media: silk and lotus become carriers for transformed memory. Rumours for an Immigrant and Petroglyph dramatize how urban rumour and prehistoric inscription, respectively, function as alternative archives,ways communities remember, forget, and reconstitute themselves. Triptych and Letters to Gandhi demonstrate the poet's ethical vocation: to gather fragmented testimonies into forms that can witness but also teach, ask, and refuse simple closure. In short, Raw Silk the collection and the poem practice what the paper's title "poetry as passage": Alexander continually negotiates between inheritance and reinvention, turning what is broken into new. These poems show adaptation as a creative, often painful process that produces hybrid identities and alternative archives of survival.

Concluding Remarks

The paper attempted to trace Meena Alexander's poetry across two major collections Raw Silk, and Atmospheric Embroidery to argue that her work embodies a poetics of adaptation, where memory, identity, and history are continually restitched in the lyric mode. The metaphor of passage has structured this reading: passage as migration, as trauma, as translation, and ultimately as survival.

Across these collections, Alexander presents exile as both shattering and reconstituting. In Raw Silk, the sari, rumour, petroglyph, lotus, and letters to Gandhi all become cultural objects that carry memory across ruptures. The poems are not nostalgic returns but creative reinscriptions: silk survives the bonfire, rumours swarm into lyric, ancient glyphs speak to modern catastrophe, Gandhi is re-addressed to demand accountability. Here adaptation is not about recovering a lost origin but about reworking fragments into new imaginative wholes.

In *Atmospheric Embroidery,* the very sky is stitched into patterns of memory, scars inscribed into air, and the city of Hyderabad layered into a notebook of survival. Poems like Tarawad dramatize the commodification of heritage, while *Night Theatre* and *The Journey* testify to trauma and migration through fractured imagery. Together they show how poetry functions as a symbolic embroidery, fragile, ephemeral, yet enduring. Memory is preserved not by intact continuity but by adaptation: fragments rearranged into new passageways of belonging.

The theoretical frameworks employed, Linda Hutcheon's notion of adaptation as repetition with difference, Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the third space, Edward Said's reflections on exile, Aleida Assmann's theory of cultural memory, and Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory all converge to illuminate Alexander's poetic strategies. Her work shows that adaptation is not confined to intertextual rewriting; it is a lived process of cultural negotiation, where memory is re-imagined in lyric form. Ultimately, Meena Alexander's poetry offers a model for thinking about literature as both archive and passage. Archive, because it gathers fragments of cultural memory, inscribing them into forms that resist erasure. Passage, because it refuses stasis, insisting on movement, translation, and renewal. In her hands, poetry becomes a vessel that carries the silkworms of memory, the rumours of exile, the scars of violence, the notebooks of disappearing cities, and the torn maps of the heart across geographies and generations. In a world marked by displacement, migration, and fractured belonging, Alexander's work speaks with renewed urgency. It demonstrates that poetry is not merely an art of beauty but an ethical practice, a form of adaptation that transforms exile into resilience, silence into utterance, and trauma into shared cultural memory. To read her poems is to witness how fragments of the past, however scarred, can be woven into new patterns of belonging. In this sense, Meena Alexander's oeuvre exemplifies poetry as passage: a ceaseless act of restitching identity across borders, times, and languages, offering us fragile yet enduring threads of connection.

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Journey of *The Blue Umbrella* from Text to Screen: Signposts Missed, Milestones Achieved

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Abstract: *The Blue Umbrella* is a 1980 Indian novel written by Ruskin Bond. It was adapted in 2005 into a Hindi film by the same name by director Vishal Bhardwaj. The film went on to win the National Film Award in the Best Children's Film category. Bharadwaj has a reputation for making adaptations of Shakespearean plays earlier. The novel and the movie revolve around the perils of lusting for an object at the cost of human relationships. Both introduce the audience/ reader to the values embedded in the small hill town culture. The theme is relevant in the current materialistic world and the narrative appeals to the young audience due to its engagement with children. A blue umbrella triggers a conflict between a small village girl Binya and a tea stall owner Ram Bharose (Nand Kishore Khatri in the movie) that culminates into both being enlightened. The movie is a dramatic rendition of this quiet mountainous tale. With its song and dance sequence and heightened action, the film not only lends a visual form to the textual narrative, it reimagines the narrative by adding many cliffhanger moments. Bond's long signature descriptions of nature are replaced by dramatic encounters and conversations. Rather than evaluating the film through the lens of fidelity, this paper reads Bhardwaj's adaptation as a creative reinterpretation shaped by the demands and affordances of the cinematic medium. It aims to bring out the filmmaker's cinematic vision and his productive bending of the source text concluding that the film functions as an autonomous work of art while remaining in dialogue with its literary origin.

Keywords: Film; Adaptation; Drama; Interpretation; Cinematic Vision; Nature

Introduction

The paper explores the relation between the original text of *The Blue Umbrella* and its cinematic adaptation with the same title by Vishal Bharadwaj. It goes on to examine the accomplishments of the film through a comparative analysis of the both using the tools and terminology introduced by one of the leading adaptation theorists, Linda Hutcheon. According to Linda Hutcheon, an adaptation can be "an acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, a creative and an interpretive act of appropriation or salvaging or an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (Hutcheon 8).

Adaptation theory has evolved over the years. The current trends in adaptation theory exhibit a move away from rigid fidelity criticism towards more nuanced and interdisciplinary approaches. Preeti Oza explains, "Adaptation theories question the idea of faithfulness and the hierarchical relationship between literature and film... They illustrate that adaptations are not subordinate to the original material, but rather a means of promoting and revitalizing it within a different framework." In the field of film studies, scholars have increasingly recognised the value of intertextuality, medium specificity, cultural context, and audience reception in analyzing adaptations. This shift reflects a broader trend in film studies towards acknowledging the linkages of texts and contexts.

Still the makers of adapted works face a huge dilemma. Vineet Pal succinctly puts it, "If an adaptation maintains fidelity to the original, it is criticized for being unimaginative. Contrarily, if it seeks to interpret the literary text or add a new twist, it is criticized for fiddling with the original" (Pal 134). This tension forms the critical backdrop of the present study, which approaches Bhardwaj's *The Blue Umbrella* not as a derivative work but as a re-envisioning shaped by cinematic form.

Adapting a Novel into a Film

Literary adaptations have been integral to cinema since its inception, with numerous classics – from *Pride and Prejudice* to *Devdas*–finding renewed life on screen. The motivation for adaptation often lies in the popularity and cultural resonance of a text, but the shift in medium introduces significant

challenges. Differences in narrative structure, pacing, and character development require filmmakers to condense, modify, or extrapolate elements of the source text. Cinema operates through an independent idiom. As Virginia Woolf observes, "cinema has within its grasp innumerable symbols for emotions that have so far failed to find expression in words" (Woolf 309). This shift from verbal narration to visual storytelling enables filmmakers to externalize inner states through image, sound, performance, and rhythm. Thoughts must be translated into dialogue, gesture, music, and mise-en-scène, resulting in meanings that are not equivalent but analogous to those of the literary text. As Linda Hutcheon argues adaptation is not a process of direct translation but of reinterpretation, Jean Mitry similarly notes, "It would take on another meaning, open onto different perspectives, because the means of expression in being different would express different things -- not the same things in different ways" (Mitry 1). The adapted film thus emerges as a new text, shaped as much by the director's vision and audience reception as by the original narrative.

The Film vs The Novel

Ruskin Bond's novella *The Blue Umbrella* is set in small hill town of Garhwal. It is a short, simple tale that ends in profound wisdom. At the centre of the text is a blue-coloured umbrella that a young village girl of ten happens to possess. Ostensibly a children's story, the novella is a critique of the reigning obsession with materialistic possession of objects and advocates humanity over materialism. The film *The Blue Umbrella* is a product of Bharadwaj's cinematic vision. His film won the National Film Award for the Best Children's Film. He is quite an adaptation expert as his Shakespearean trilogy has won accolades. He has successfully transposed the texts written in the Western context into Eastern settings and many of them are set in small towns exuding regional flavour. Originally a music composer, his films are conspicuous because of their musical score.

Bharadwaj's *The Blue Umbrella* is many shades different from the novella despite retaining the author's message. While fidelity critics may object to the film's departures from the novella, the adaptation preserves the spirit of the original while articulating it through spectacle, characterization, and dramatic pacing. The adaptor can be "faithful to the spirit; he expresses similar ideas and

analogous sentiments, but arrives at them by slant routes" (Mitry 4). Though story is the common denominator across different media and genres, each medium deals with that story in formally different ways and through different modes of engagement including narration, performance, or interaction.

Characterisation

Bharadwaj is obsessed with dark characters as seen in his films but even his dark characters have a silver lining. He carves out the character of the tea stall owner in great detail even rechristening him as Nand Kishore Khatri. The film opens with Nand Kishore listening to a fortune telling machine. Played by Pankaj Kapur, the character endears himself to the audience immediately. His obsession with money and riches instantly becomes evident. He is an unscrupulous character who undergoes transformation eventually. "If we loathe him at one point, we sympathize with him at another" (Sasi). Nand Kishore overshadows Binya in the film as far as the depth of character and Kapur's prowess as an actor are concerned. "The film has been successful in developing the characters from seeds to plants." (Toppo 28). Khatri emerges as the most carved out and interesting character. As a miserly shopkeeper reluctant to shell out money, pickle lover and usurper of children's treasures, he stands out and leaves an impact on the audience. In addition, Kapur perfectly copies the body language of the hill people and adopts hill dialect and accent in the film. His use of the suffix "by chance" adds humour to the situations.

Binya's brother Bijju is quite grown up unlike the text that shows Bijju as two years older than Binya. His sinewy built and passion for wrestling is an addition. Many minor characters have been introduced to show the dynamics of a village. The introduction of the village chief and his son complete the picture. In fact, Bharadwaj creates a whole village with the help of an introductory song and lends rhythm and deeper meaning to external action.

Symbolism–Images and Music

The narrative literature belongs to the realm of imagination and the reader is delicately lead forward by words. A film adaptation deals with direct visual and aural perceptions. This section focuses on

Bhardwaj's cinematic strategies. Bharadwaj makes an excellent use of contrast between light and darkness and in seasonal landscapes. Pawan Toppo says the conspiracies and the darkest of desires surface during night and have been picturised thus. The jubilation of rare discoveries, celebration of festivals, rush of tourists are bathed in the daylight. This is not the case with the text which has its curves but they are different from the film. The film brilliantly shows Binya's state of mind when her umbrella is stolen. Binya's perception of Khatri as Ravana, visualized through the effigy's multiple heads, externalizes her fear and sense of betrayal. "The fond moments that both Binya and Nandu share with their respective umbrellas are captured through still Polaroid images, asserting it as a highly photographable object" (Sasi). Film sound can be used to connect inner and outer states in subtle and less explicit ways than do images. Rightly so, music is an integral narrative component of the movie which gives it an edge over the text. The characters invariably break into songs. The recurring music of the song "Neeli aasmani chchattri" lends a thematic unity to the film while evoking emotional responses from the audience.

Plot

The narrative structure/ plot is substantially changed in the film to suit the needs of the medium and to expand the short storyline. The introduction, conflict and conclusion got a little protracted in the film. There's a lot of detailing, extrapolation, suspense, dramatization and exaggeration of events in the film. Binya, the protagonist, is seen calling out to her cows when the novel opens. Bond immediately establishes the season, vegetation and the terrain with his effortless narration. The text foregrounds simple rustic way of life, humble desires of village folk, children's dreams and working of their minds. On the other hand, the film opens with Nand Kishore Khatri absorbed in the dream of making millions as he has tuned in to a future telling machine. The focus shifts from Binya's pastoral world to Khatri's dream of wealth, instantly foregrounding desire as a motivating force.

Immediately after introducing Binya and her elder brother Bijju, the author sets up the stage for Binya's encounter with a party of picknickers from the city. However, Binya of the movie is face to face with a group of foreign tourists supposedly from Japan. She is so mesmerised by the bright blue

umbrella belonging to them that she exchanges her sacred amulet for the umbrella. The umbrella is introduced as a surreal object looking like a patch of the blue sky mounted on a stick. “The movie introduces this umbrella very differently from the book, in fact more dramatic, as the umbrella’s descent is shown in a subverted form not through Binya’s eyes but the umbrella’s point of view as it descends. It sees the world it is landing into and the awestruck eyes of Binya, and then the camera shifts to Binya’s point of view and shows the blue umbrella” (Toppo 22). This technique foregrounds its agency within the narrative. The umbrella becomes a rage in the village. Binya carries it everywhere she goes. It is hailed as Binya’s superpower that saves her from snakes and other adversaries. Bharadwaj reworked the script a lot by deleting or altering many incidents. The sequence of the umbrella’s fall into a gorge and Binya’s struggle to retrieve it is missing. The film dramatizes a number of other incidents, offers a lot of cliffhanger moments and is more spectacular and happening than a sleepy mountainous tale.

Ram Bharosa aka Nand Kishore, like children and other villagers, covets the umbrella. But he oversteps and conspires to possess it. When he fails to buy it from Binya despite repeated attempts, he plans to steal it. He engages his helper Raja Ram to do the job. This part is full of suspense and audience are kept in the dark about the culprit. However, the short novella quickly jumps to the climax and the resolution. In the novel, Raja Ram runs away with Binya’s umbrella while she is collecting porcupine quills in the forest glade during the monsoon. But Bijju catches hold of him and snatches the umbrella after a long struggle. On discovering Ram Bharosa’s involvement in the theft, people boycott him in the text and its adaptation. The villagers neither visit his tea stall nor interact with him. Then follows a long autumn of repentance. The execution of this part is heart rending in the film as Bharadwaj uses the white winter landscape to depict Khatri’s plight and loneliness. It becomes an externalization of Khatri’s moral isolation, using visual space rather than narration to convey repentance.

Binya witnesses his downfall and is silently pained by it. In the climax, she leaves the umbrella at his doorstep and despite Ram Bharosa’s pleadings refuses to take it back. This climactic gesture

reverses their moral positions. In relinquishing possession, Binya demonstrates ethical maturity and enlightenment. “In that moment, it belonged to both of them” (Bond 75). Bond’s comment that “there was nothing between her and the bright blue sky” points towards the elevation of Binya to a goddess. Ram Bharosa makes the umbrella a permanent feature of his shop for everyone to use that signifies his transformation and redemption. As a token of gratitude, he gifts a necklace of bear claw to Binya. The film follows the rhythm of seasons – summer for introduction, monsoon for the discovery of guilt and autumn and winter for retribution. The film’s seasonal rhythm echoes Bond’s structure, rendering the adaptation “palimpsestuous” in Hutcheon’s sense.

Contextualising the narrative

Bharadwaj creates the appropriate mis-en-scene, in this case, a whole village humming with activity to make the storyline convincing and racy. He contextualises the incidents successfully and pays attention to small details. The sources of entertainment in small villages like devotional nights, singing of religious hymns, fairs and wrestling matches are the brainchild of the filmmaker. Bharadwaj creates a microcosm of village inhabited by characters like a teacher, a priest, a barber, a postman and so on. Occupations like pickling, dyeing are integral to the theme and dialogues in the local dialect steal the scene. When Raja Ram asks Ram Bharosa in the text what use an umbrella was to him, he replies; “Of what use is a poppy in a cornfield? Of what use is a rainbow?” (Bond 54) The audience are thrilled when the same thought is expressed in the movie by Nand Kishore in a hill dialect with a deliberate slip of tongue. He even wonders if he had a past life connection with the umbrella. Bharadwaj’s art lies in this imaginative extension of the conversation which hardly occupies any space in the text.

Conclusion

The Blue Umbrella is a case of intermediate adaptation as the text is sufficiently recognizable from the movie. The umbrella itself functions as a symbolic character in both media, binding text and film together. The cinematic medium enables the story, which was accessible to only a limited number of English knowing readers, to reach the masses and immortalises the text in the process. Bharadwaj

successfully transposes a story, a half-an-hour read, into a film that engages an audience for two and a half hours. Besides, it adds a third dimension to the narrative by contextualising the incidents and extensively using the local colour. Bharadwaj uses sound and visuals, play of light and shade and a carnivalesque presentation in the service of his cinematic storytelling. What the film sacrifices in terms of some incidents and linear plot, it gains in character depth, emotional resonance and contextual richness. Both Bond and Bhardwaj emerge as masters of their respective crafts. Film critic Sasi sums up the milestones achieved by the film. "So, today with almost all my memories around the literary work erased, I refer to *The Blue Umbrella* as a solid cinematic feat" (Sasi). One can see a certain blossoming of the literary text in the hands of the filmmaker. The film ends up becoming an autonomous cultural product, at once relatable and aesthetically appealing.

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