

Representing Marginal Voices: The Cinematic Lens on Subalternity in Renu and Thakur's Adapted Narratives

Dr. Suruchi Upadhyay

Assistant Professor, Department of English
DAV Post Graduate College Siwan
Jai Prakash University Chapra (Bihar)

Vijaya Laxmi Kumari

Researcher, Department of English
Jai Prakash University Chapra (Bihar)

Abstract

Cinematic adaptations of literary works play a pivotal role in translating written stories to the visual medium, often altering or preserving the literary and cultural essence of the original text. This research delves into the interplay between literature and cinema, examining how adaptations negotiate between fidelity to the source and the demands of film as an independent art form. It explores the role of cinematic adaptations in preserving or altering the literary and cultural essence of original works, through an analysis of The White Tiger by Aravind Adiga, Bidesiya by Bhikhari Thakur, and Mare Gaye Gulfam by Phanishwarnath Nath Renu(adapted into the film Teesri Kasam). This study explores how adaptations reflect or diverge from their literary origins, affecting their cultural resonance. The study investigates how these adaptations engage with the socio-cultural contexts and thematic elements of the source material, and how the process of translation from text to screen influences their cultural significance. The White Tiger is analyzed for its portrayal of class struggles and socio-political critique, while Bidesiya and Mare Gaye Gulfam offer insights into the challenges of adapting regionally specific, culturally rich narratives for a broader cinematic audience. Through a comparative lens, this paper highlights the ways in which cinematic adaptations either reinforce or transform the original literary and cultural essence, and discusses the implications of these transformations for cultural preservation and interpretation.

Keywords: Cinematic adaptations, literary essence, cultural preservation, The White Tiger, Bidesiya, Mare Gaye Gulfam, cultural adaptation, socio-political critique, regional narratives.

Introduction

Literature and cinema have shared a symbiotic relationship, with many celebrated literary works making their way to the silver screen. However, the transition from text to film is often fraught with challenges, especially when filmmakers must balance the need to respect the original literary work while adapting it to the visual and narrative demands of cinema. The transformation of a literary work into a film can either preserve its core themes and cultural nuances or alter them to suit different audiences and mediums.

Cinematic adaptations are a powerful medium of cultural transmission, transforming literary texts into visual spectacles that reach wider audiences. However, in this transformation, filmmakers often face the challenge of either adhering to the narrative and cultural essence of the source or altering it to fit cinematic conventions. The three works in question—The White Tiger (2021), Bidesiya (1963), and Teesri Kasam (1966)—illustrate distinct approaches to adaptation, each revealing different facets of how culture, context, and creative interpretation shape the adaptation process.

Adaptation and Cultural Translation

Adaptation is not merely a replication of the source material; it is a creative process where directors and screenwriters interpret a text, potentially altering its themes, character arcs, and cultural elements. In many cases, filmmakers aim to preserve the thematic essence while taking liberties with narrative structure or character representation to make the story more accessible to contemporary or global audiences. This act of adaptation can either preserve the cultural depth of the original or dilute it to cater to the cinematic market. This paper examines three distinct works and their cinematic adaptations: Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger, Bhikhari Thakur's Bidesiya, and Phanishwar Nath Renu's Mare Gaye Gulfam. These works, originating from different linguistic and cultural contexts in India, offer a fascinating insight into how adaptations can influence the interpretation and understanding of literary and cultural narratives.

Data Sources

The research draws upon primary and secondary sources:

Primary sources: The original literary texts—The White Tiger (2008), Bidesiya (1917), and Mare Gaye Gulfam (1958), and their film adaptations (The White Tiger [2021], Bidesiya [1963], and Teesri Kasam [1966]).

Secondary sources: Academic articles, book reviews, film reviews, interviews with filmmakers, and audience reception data (derived from popular review aggregators such as IMDb, Rotten Tomatoes, and Indian film archives).

Research Methodology

A qualitative content analysis method was employed for this study. The steps involved in the research process are as follows:

- **Textual and Cinematic Analysis:** A close reading of the literary texts and detailed analysis of the films' narrative structure, cinematography, character arcs, and cultural representation.
- **Comparative Framework:** Identifying key cultural and thematic elements in the original works and analyzing their treatment in the cinematic adaptations.
- **Critical Reception Analysis:** Examining how critics and audiences have responded to the fidelity or deviation of the film adaptations in relation to their source texts. Case Studies.

Case Study 1: The White Tiger – Modernity, Capitalism, and Subversion

Aravind Adiga's The White Tiger (2008) is a Booker Prize-winning novel that critiques India's class system through the journey of Balram Halwai, a man who rises from poverty to become a successful entrepreneur by navigating the moral ambiguities of a corrupt capitalist society. The 2021 Netflix adaptation directed by Ramin Bahrani translates this narrative into a visually gripping drama. The film was also nominated for Best Adapted Screenplay at the 93rd Academy Awards ceremony held in Los Angeles on 25th April, 2021. The White Tiger takes us to the globalized 21st century India replete with advancements in information technology.

Preserving the Essence

The film is a fine adaptation of the novel. Every effort has been made to stick to the 'spirit' of the novel. In both the novel and the film, the central themes of ambition, corruption, and the systemic oppression faced by the Indian underclass are vividly portrayed. The adaptation retains the dark humor and cynicism present in the book, maintaining its critique of India's socioeconomic disparities. The visual medium enhances the representation of India's urban chaos, a key feature of Adiga's literary portrayal of the country's rapid modernization.

Alterations and Impact

While the film remains largely faithful to the novel, there are notable simplifications in character depth and thematic nuances. The film is more alive to the self of the characters living in glassy structures than the novel itself. It goes deeper into the self of the characters living in glassy structures than the novel itself. While the novel keeps reverting back to the past village tethering of Balram, the film is directed towards a more city based destiny for its protagonist. The internal monologues in the book, which provide rich psychological insight into Balram's transformation, are condensed in the film. The adaptation focuses more on the visual spectacle of wealth disparity, reducing the philosophical reflections on morality and self-justification. This shift, though necessary for the medium, alters the intensity of the protagonist's moral dilemma, emphasizing action over introspection.

Case Study 2: Bidesiya – Cultural Preservation through Cinema

Bidesiya is a folk theatrical play written by Bhikhari Thakur, a renowned Bhojpuri playwright, which explores themes of migration, separation, and societal change through the lens of rural Bihar's working class. The play was adapted into a 1963 film directed by S.N. Tripathi, preserving many elements of Bhojpuri folk traditions, including music, dance, and dialect.

Preserving Cultural Heritage

The film adaptation of Bidesiya remained faithful to its cultural roots, maintaining the use of Bhojpuri language, traditional folk songs, and the representation of rural life. Bhikhari Thakur's original work was deeply intertwined with the cultural identity of the Bhojpuri-speaking people, and the film succeeded in capturing this essence, making it a significant cultural document of its time.

Cinematic Interpretations and Additions

However, the film also brought in elements of melodrama and spectacle common in Indian cinema of the 1960s. While the play emphasized the emotional and social struggles of the migrant laborer, the film added layers of romance and dramatized the interpersonal conflicts to make it more appealing to mainstream audiences. Although these changes did not entirely undermine the cultural message, they did shift the narrative focus, creating a hybrid between folk authenticity and popular cinema.

Case Study 3: Mare Gaye Gulfam and Teesri Kasam – Folklore, Morality, and Cinema

Phanishwar Nath Renu's novella *Mare Gaye Gulfam* is a poignant narrative set in rural Bihar that tells the story of Hiraman, a bullock-cart driver, and his innocent affection for a traveling dancer, Hira Bai. This novella was adapted into the 1966 film *Teesri Kasam*, directed by Basu Bhattacharya and produced by lyricist Shailendra. The film retains the rustic charm of the novella, while also interpreting the story for a wider cinematic audience.

The Preservation of Moral and Cultural Themes

Teesri Kasam is considered one of the most faithful adaptations in Indian cinema, preserving the cultural essence and moral dilemmas present in the novella. The film beautifully captures the pastoral simplicity and cultural context of rural India. The songs and folk music embedded in the film align with the novella's spirit, creating a harmonious adaptation that respects the original work's depth and emotional tone.

Visual Storytelling and Changes

Despite the faithful adaptation, the film inevitably added cinematic embellishments. The novella's subtle emotional tension is translated into more explicit romantic overtones, possibly to align with audience expectations. However, the core themes of innocence, moral integrity, and the tragic consequences of societal judgment remain intact. The film's visual richness and musical elements enhance the rural landscape, transforming the novella's quiet introspection into a more visually poetic experience.

Discussion: Fidelity vs. Creative Freedom

The adaptations of The White Tiger, Bidesiya, and Mare Gaye Gulfam illustrate different approaches to balancing fidelity to the source material with the creative demands of cinema. In each case, the cultural essence is both preserved and altered in varying degrees. The White Tiger focuses on translating India's modernity and socio-economic critique into a global cinematic language, often sacrificing narrative depth for visual impact. Bidesiya preserves its cultural core but adds melodramatic elements to appeal to a broader audience. Teesri Kasam stays closer to its literary origin, emphasizing moral themes while using cinema's visual and musical tools to enhance the story's emotional impact.

- **Cultural Preservation:** Bidesiya and Mare Gaye Gulfam (Teesri Kasam) largely preserve the cultural and moral essence of the original works, using cinema as a vehicle to bring folk traditions and rural settings to life.

- **Alteration through Visual Language:** The White Tiger demonstrates how adaptations may alter the narrative's philosophical depth to align with the visual and pacing demands of film. While the novel's introspection is pared down, the film amplifies the themes of capitalism and class through striking visual contrasts.
- **Audience and Market Influences:** The films also reflect the audience preferences and market forces of their time. Bidesiya and Teesri Kasam cater to the popular melodramatic styles of their eras, while The White Tiger adapts the novel's themes for a global audience, necessitating changes in pacing, tone, and complexity.

Conclusion

Cinematic adaptations are complex cultural and artistic endeavors that often walk a fine line between preserving the original work's literary and cultural integrity and creating a distinct cinematic experience. The case studies of The White Tiger, Bidesiya, and Teesri Kasam reveal that while some adaptations may simplify or alter elements to cater to different audiences, they also offer an opportunity to expand the cultural reach of the original works. In doing so, they play a crucial role in both preserving and reinterpreting cultural narratives for new generations.

References

1. Adiga, Aravind. *The White Tiger*. HarperCollins, 2008.
2. Thakur, Bhikhari. *Bidesiya*. Local Bhojpuri Playwright, 1917.
3. Renu, Phanishwar Nath. *Mare Gaye Gulfam*. Rajkamal Prakashan, 1958.
4. Bahrani, Ramin, director. *The White Tiger*. Netflix, 2021.
5. Tripathi, S.N., director. *Bidesiya*. Devta Films, 1963.
6. Bhattacharya, Basu, director. *Teesri Kasam*. Mahal Pictures, 1966.
7. Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.
8. Stam, Robert, and Alessandra Raengo. *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

9. Guha, Ranajit. Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India. Harvard University Press, 1997.
10. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.
11. Maila Anchal (TV Series 1990–1991). IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt6424788/>
12. Bidesiya (1963). IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0290463/>.