

Tagore's Works: A Treasure Trove for Filmmakers

Abstract

Literature and Films have a close connection, and several works of literature have appeared on the cinema screen, as rich and entertaining works of Art. Rabindranath Tagore popularly known as Gurudev has authored several novels and short stories and Filmmakers continue to dip into the treasure trove created by him, to draw plots and themes for their films.

Keywords: Films, Novels, Short Stories, Tagore, Filmmaker, Filmmaking, Treasure, Literature, the Cinematic Appeal.

Introduction

Short-Stories, Novels and Films are great source of entertainment and provide a rich feast to readers and viewers alike. Indian literature can boast of a vast number of writers, who are virtually giants of Indian literature. These literary giants are towering figures in literature and their works have already established themselves in the reader's mind. Tagore, the grandsire of Bengali literature and the doyen of Indian literature, becomes the obvious choice of Indian Filmmakers, who continue to draw on his works for storylines, emotional themes and social consciousness. Tagore's stories are a rich feast to the intellectuals and the commoners alike, which provide a rich platform for Filmmakers.

Aim of the Study

The Aim of this paper is to research the idea that since there is very little truth in the idea of a new story; filmmakers look for the plots and themes in the works of literature penned by literary giants.

Review of Literature

Retelling and reworking on Stories from the ancient Indian epics into other forms of literature and presenting them through live performances, is an age old tradition in India. The starting of Indian cinemas was rather rudimentary, through the form developed rapidly in the hands of innovative masters. Cinema in its earliest form began with choreographic movements of painted glass slides in a lantern in order to create an optical illusion of movement. In India the Cinema Movement was aided by the powerful influence of the traditional arts of India, both folk and the popular arts, with the result that song and dance sequences became characteristic features in Indian cinema.

Dhundiraj Govind Phalke, (1870-1944) better known as Dada Saheb Phalke is widely recognized as the Father of Indian Cinema. He created India's first full length story movie in 1913 and received wide acclaim and was a major breakthrough in the field of Indian cinema. Following the works of Dada Saheb Phalke, R. Nataraja Mudaliar from South India made a movie based on Indian mythology. Dadasaheb Phalke's first full length movie *Raja Harishchandra* and Mudaliar's first movie *Keechaka Vadham* were both based on themes from Indian mythology, and other films based on similar themes continued to follow in rapid sequence.

The cinema in Bengal has had powerful connection with the literature of Bengal. In fact, the link between Bengali literature and the cinema has been so powerful, that the audiences were able to see a quality product on the screen. Several Bengali films have been based on Tagore's works and the filmmakers found readymade plots in Tagore's literary works. Most all the filmmakers of Bengal who have made a name for themselves and carved a niche for themselves as sensitive filmmakers have at some time or the other been moved and inspired to base their films on Tagore's literary works. Natir Puja (1932), Naukabubi (1947), Kabuliwala (1957), Kshudhita Pashaan (1960), Teen Kanya (1961), Charulata (1964), Ghare-Baire (1985), Chokher Bali (2003), Shasti (2004), Shuva (2006), Chaturanga (2008), Elar Char Adhyay (2012) are the Bengali Films which are based on Tagore's Works.

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Hypothesis

The literary works of Tagore are a rich treasure trove of literary abundance, seemingly infinite in nature, and filmmakers pull out one literary treasure or the other to transfer to the silver screen.

Films have already held a rich audio visual appeal. Tagore has authored several short stories and novels, which have had such stupendous appeal, that they continue to exert emotional and literary interest among readers and filmgoers alike. Tagore's stories are stories of ideas, many of which are in the nature of seeds which will only continue to grow and develop more and more with time. Man, nature and society are perennial themes and Tagore's works best illustrate these themes:

Even before television emerged, cinema was exploring the construction of images within twentieth century society. Yet upon its arrival, in the early stages, although modernist, artifact, cinema was paradoxically more wedded to realism than modernism, as it held out the potential for reproducing reality with an incomparable exactitude.

[Timwoods, 240]

Chokher Bali, a novel in Bengali by Tagore, appeared as a film in Bengali and was later dubbed into Hindi, appearing in 2003. The dubbed version of released on October 2, 2003 and it was released on the international level in Hindi. The central character in the novel is the sultry and seductive widow Binodini and the role is played with great aplomb by Aishwarya Rai. The other major female character is Ashalata, whose role is played in the film by Raima Sen. Ashalata is the wife of Mahendra (Prosenjit Chatterjee) and Binodini and Mahendra have a torrid love affair, much to the despair and chagrin of Ashalata.

Because of the way the femme fatale uses her sexuality and breaks with the Hollywood convention of depicting women as passive; (mother, whore, wife or mistress) she has been subjected to considerable theoretical attention.

[Buchanan, 171]

Chokhar Bali literally means a grain of sand and metaphorically, it refers to someone or something in the nature of the perpetual source of irritation. The situation is not foreign to viewers, who are able to witness the entire gamut of human emotions that are involved in such situations:

Bollywood have also struggled to achieve serious scrutiny because of its dependence upon melodrama, a mode that in the west has connotations of vulgar often feminine taste.

[Dix, 280]

The fact that Bollywood films are released internationally, also argues for the fact that they are unique signifiers of authentic Indianness.

While Bollywood has an increasingly global reach, it is also an instance of

sub-national film. There is a regrettable tendency by spectators outside India to collapse the nation's filmmaking into this single tradition of Hindi popular cinema. Yet Bollywood's productivity is matched by the fertility of many other Indian filmmaking cultures, which utilise various regional languages and sometimes very different formal idioms.

[Dix, 279]

Another gripping novel by Tagore is *Naukadubi*, translated as *The Wreck*. The novel was filmed in Bengali as *Naukadubi* and was later dubbed into Hindi, with the name *Kashmakash*, which in itself is a symbolic representation of a great inner struggle, such as the one experienced by Hamlet in Shakespeare's play of the same name. The story is a complex web of human emotions and revolves round four human figures, who are caught in an unusual situation. It is a story of two couples caught in a strange situation of mistaken identities, the plot becoming thicker and thicker, and the chances of a resolution growing weaker and weaker, as the plot unfolds. Yet the dexterity, with which Tagore resolves the strange situation, is an art in itself.

Genette says that a story can be told without saying where it happens and whether this place is more or less distant from the venue of narration. But it is almost impossible not to connect the story and its narrating act to time. And a story is indispensably related to a three-dimensional time i.e. the past, present and future.

[Rajendran, 105]

The situations may seem incredible in modern times, yet the plot has a powerful sway on the public mind.

If Hollywood's cinema of attractions has been located by scholars in an early, soon superseded moment; it's Bollywood equivalent, according to Dwyer and Patel and other writers, has proved more durable without by any means abandoning narrative, Bollywood abstracts or even fetishises certain visual and auditory elements. Emphasis falls upon the spectacular properties of setting and costume. Star charisma is foregrounded, recalling the idea that Bollywood's stars system has a wattage out doing American version. Music and dance too may float free from the strictest exigencies of plotting. This disarticulation of formal elements makes Bollywood a frequent object of critique, not least among Indian intellectuals.

[Dix, 280]

Tagore's novels no doubt provide rich plots and themes filmgoers, but no less important are his short stories as sources of a variety of themes. Tagore's short stories *Kabuliwala* was made into a

film by the same name, and the role of Rahmat Khan, the Kabuliwala was played by Balraj Sahni, along with his becoming voice made a huge impact on the filmgoers, making the story an immortal piece.

What I mean to say is that when a Bhasa writer portrays a character, he uses the language actually used by the character in real life situation and hence his character appears to be life like.

[Das, 146]

This short story of Tagore had a unique elasticity, and could be expanded into a film with a screen time of a little over two hours. The basic plot has been maintained, but the film includes scenes relating in the Kabuliwala's life in his home (Kabul) with his old mother and a young daughter, which add to the beauty and Charm of the film.

The Bengali Cinema has had strong bonding with the literature of Bengal. Actually, there has been the connection between the Bengali Literature and Cinema so advantageous that the viewers were able to see a quality product on the Cinematic screen. Several films in Bengal and other regions have been based on Tagore's literary works which proved the super-hits and touched the heart of the viewers as they dealt with the sensitive matters of society.

Tagore pioneered the new age novel in the world of Indian literature. He realized that Indian social life should be presented in its fullest form instead of hiding things under the carpet. Rather, he felt that it was the need of the time to bring out into the flash, through the works of literature, the new and rather disturbing elements which were beginning to be witnessed in the Indian society.

Conclusion

It would be no exaggeration thus to assert that Tagore's works of literature are a treasure chest for filmmakers who recognize the utility of his themes and his farsightedness when it comes to ideas and ideologies. His works continue to inspire and stories live on the minds of the filmgoers and reading public.

In the experience of art, we are not merely given a moment of 'Vision', but are able to 'dwell' along with the work that takes us out of ordinary time into what Gadamer calls fulfilled time or autonomous time.

[Chandra & Samy, 83-84]

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