

AMALGAMATION OF CINEMATOGRAPHY WITH LITERATURE IN CONTEXT WITH NOVEL Q & A

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Abstract

The era of Epic to modernism the relationship between Literature and Cinema has always been closely intertwined. Literature and Cinema are related to each other but still they are a different medium to express. Analyzing Literature- to – Film Adaptations looks at film adaptations from a fresh perspective that of writer or creator of literary works. The debate on Cinematic Adaptations of literary works was for many years dominated by the questions of fidelity to the source and by the tendencies to prioritize the literary originals over their film versions. Adaptations were seen by most critics as inferior to the adapted texts as “Minor”, “Subsidiary”, “Derivative”, or “Secondary” products, lacking the symbolic richness of the books and missing their “Spirit”. Film and Literature are although two interrelated phenomena, but at the beginning, their relationship was quite antagonistic. Still there are many disputes over the readers’ liberty to interpret a particular text and the traditionalists’ emphasis on the substance of the originality of a text. Keeping this in mind this paper aims to reflect on the changes that have taken place in the courses of the film adaptations of the text ‘Q & A’ and the adaptation ‘Slum dog Millionaire’. This paper attempts to explore the fact how the films through the predicaments of the characters, have ironically portrayed the hardcore reality of our society. Through the paper the readers of the Reader Response, Phenomenology or Reception theory transforms into the ‘viewers’ while watching a film and the role they play in determining the elements presented in a film mirrors the ideological structure of a particular society. Literature and Cinema has always been one of the most fascinating forms of knowledge which has made great impact on human psyche. Incorporating Multitudinous philosophies and widely incompatible theologies is the rich and fertile soil in which Cinema has firmly planted its roots and has ever since flourished portrait of society in Indian Cinema.

Key Words: *Multitudinous, intertwined, incompatible, portrait, Cinematic, Incorporating, flourished.*

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Introduction

The history of world cinema seems to reveal that the plot and story of most movies have been grounded in literary works. Whether it is Europe, America, Asia or Africa, their movies appear to be fed by the novels, dramas, short stories and even poems of these places.

A literary person makes efforts to captivate the five senses by creating images through word power, simultaneously; a film director performs this task through his cinematic skills. At the same time, he points to the fundamental difference between the ways images are produced in the two media, and how they are received.

Literature and Cinema seems to me like twins- having many identical characteristics, still different and unique in their own sense. They are similar in that a literary person makes efforts to captivate the five senses by creating images through word power, simultaneously; a film director performs this task through his cinematic skills. However, they vary in the ways images are produced in the two media, and how they are received. Perhaps, the cinema has been able to flourish due to a silent and mutual agreement between literature and itself- cinema would entertain and work as a subordinate to literature.

The emergence of cinematic adaptation of literary texts has been extensively discussed in recent years from different perspectives. These discussions aim at understanding some of the procedures, limitations and effects of trans- creation from literature to film. During such discussions, the most important question is of fidelity to the original work, in other words, the divergence in the structure and function of the movie adaptation.

The study of literary adaptations on film is becoming more common and indeed more acceptable. For many people the comparison of a novel and its film version results in an almost unconscious prioritizing of the fictional origin over the resulting film, and so the main purpose of

comparison becomes the measurement of the success of the film in its capacity to realize what are held to be the core meanings and values of the original text.

These commentators have already charted the problems involved in such an exercise and the pitfalls created by the demands of authenticity and fidelity- not least the intensely subjective criteria which must be applied in order to determine the degree to which the film is successful in extracting the essence of the fictional text. What we aim to offer here is an extension of this debate, but one which further destabilizes the tendency to believe that the original text is of primary importance. To do this we move from a consideration of literary adaptations to a focus on adaptations more broadly.

In this paper, I would try to explore the troublesome issues in general with regard to movie slum dog Millionaire and its cinematic interpretation. In adapting a novel for the screen, the screenwriter is always faced with difficult choices: what to include, what to leave out, how to compensate for necessary excisions, how to conflate characters and incidents, how to show what the writer tells, in short, how to tease out the thread of storyline from the tangled weave of plot. In this paper, I would try to explore the troublesome issues and changes that have taken places in adaptation process and in general with regard to novel Q & A and its cinematic adaptation Slum -dog Millionaire.

Q & A is a novel by Vikas Swarup, an Indian diplomat. Published in 2005, it was the author's first novel. It follows the life of Ram Mohammad Thomas and his ups and downs. He's just eighteen, and yet he has experienced one hell of a roller – coaster ride of a life, its fast and abrupt falls and rises leaving the reader dizzy and whiplashed.

The story, in a nutshell is as follows- The changing fortunes of Ram Mohammed Thomas take us backwards and forwards across the western part of India between the capital Delhi and largest city Mumbai, as well as to Agra, the site of India's most famous tourist attraction, the Taj Mahal. We met some of the extremes of Indian life from the worst slums to the privileged lives of film stars and foreign diplomats. The story is told from the opening sentence of the novel ("I have been arrested") tells us that it is conveyed with a first – person perspective. Ram is clearly a born storyteller and allows the people he has met to express them through him, using long passages of direct speech.

The most unusual, indeed unique, aspect of the composition of novel *Q & A* is the way the plot is structured; it is dictated by the order of the questions in a quiz show. The challenge of the novel is to grasp the life and development of the hero as he jumps backwards and forwards between the various periods of his life. The novel has been adapted more or less in the same manner and content. The trend of transforming a novel into a film has led to sending the adaptations through a test on the basis of fidelity as the origin of literature has been much earlier and its tradition much respectable than Cinema.

Analysis of the Novel ‘Q & A’

In some novels we find what is called a frame story. This is a story that frames of surrounding the other stories that are told. It is a typical feature of much older storytelling, like *The Canterbury Tales* or *A Thousand and One Nights*, in which a fictional person or group of people tell stories.

Q & A belongs to this tradition, which is also found in older Indian literature. In this novel though, we can say that there is a frame- within -a- frame. In the prologue Ram is saved from police brutality by the intervention of the young lawyer, Smita. It is to her that he tells the story of his life. But catalyst for each story. i.e. what sets his memories in motion – is Ram’s performance in the quiz show, which Smita has on DVD. Through the novel we shift between these three levels – the conversation with Smita, the quiz show, and Ram’s life story. Vikas Swarup has made it clear that his first priority was to entertain. The themes of a novel are usually closely related to the conflicts it focuses on. This magnificent contemporary novel portrays the slum life that exists around the big modern cities in modern India. Here Swarup portrays the situation in that kind of area in India, with the entire social, economical, political and religious issues.

The narrator in the *Q & A* novel, also the main protagonist, is Ram Mohammad Thomas and since the day he was born in a hospital runs by Catholic nuns, he already has a life that is full of questions that needed answers. His course of life leads him to the legendary quiz, which in the novel is entitled *Who Will Win a Billion?* (or *W3B*), an adaptation of the real *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* And the plot is more or less the same, that the questions of the quiz reveals the

personal journey of Ram Mohammad Thomas and also explores the situation of Indian society, the cultures, the social and economical, the poverty, the conflicts, and many more.

It is an undeniable and essential fact of life that our society is controlled by money. Those who are affluent flourish in such systems while the poor are deprived. The novel *Q&A* serves as an in depth and riveting tale regarding the less fortunate people of India. It follows the protagonist Ram Mohammad Thomas as he explains how he knew all ten answers in the game show, *Who Will Win A Billion?*

“My departure from Asia’s biggest slum would make no difference to their lives. There would be the same queue for water in the morning, the same daily struggle to make it to the seven-thirty local in time. They wouldn’t even bother to find out the reason for my arrest. Come to think of it, when the two constables barged into my hut, even I didn’t. When your whole existence is ‘illegal,’ when you live on the brink of penury in an urban wasteland where you jostle for every inch of space and have to queue even for a shit, arrest has certain inevitability about it. You are conditioned to believe that one day there will be a warrant with your name on it, that eventually a jeep with a flashing red light will come for you” (1).

Within the first few pages of Swarup’s *Q&A*, we learn that impoverishment has put Indians like Ram Mohammad Thomas in a miserable situation — the poor are completely outcast from society. Like in the days of the Hindu Caste System, they have truly become pariahs who are assumed to participate in at least one felony in their lifetime. In this particular section of the book, the reader is first associated with the theme of the effects of poverty.

Ram portrays the monotony of day-to-day life and the uneven-fullness of being taken away by the police. The reader gets a sense of pity as they understand that these horrors have become a natural, necessary part of living in the slums.

“We especially like watching the films on Sunday. These films were about a fantasy world, a world in which kids have mothers and fathers, and birthdays. A world in which they live in huge houses, drive in huge cars and get huge presents. We saw this fantasy world, but we never got carried away by it. ... The most we could aspire to was to

become one of those who held power over us. So whenever the teacher asked us, ‘What do you want to become when you grow up?’ no one said pilot or prime minister or banker or actor, we said, “cook or cleaner or sports teacher, or, at the very best, warden” (2).

In this paragraph, Ram depicts that even as a child, he and the other orphans were certainly aware of the role they played in society. He forms simple statements to explain this situation. The tone remains relatively unattached, yet knowing, as though his future is laid out obviously before him and is full of turmoil. When Ram describes the movies he watches, he mentions the things average people take for granted as if they are gifts from above. It is clear that his lack of a family and a stable income creates a hopeless mindset. Ram and the other children can only look forward to adding on to the never-ending chain by getting into a position of power like those in charge of them. They are aware they will not receive any great sums of money, and must become what they hate instead. Power is revealed to be a major theme of *Q&A*.

Ram is over-confident and feeling secure as he boards the train to Mumbai with his earnings from the Taylor family. Constantly shunned because of his past social class, Ram cannot fight his hunger for all the attention and “power” that accompanies having a full wallet. He focuses on relating this feeling to the reader, who has no doubt experienced it on some scale. As he has for the majority of the novel, Ram continues to use imagery as a major conduit for telling this portion of his story. His familiar words remind us of our own desires to show off our belongings, using an invigorating, almost hypnotic tone to do so. This passage details his justification for flaunting his fortune and the changes occurring in his mind as he realizes he might not have to be bound to the slums forever. However, Ram’s desperation to break away from his former life coupled with his newfound self-righteousness ends up dooming him to losing his rupees to a train robber. This quote overall relates back to the author’s theme that money and poverty are two of the strongest forces in the world — barriers that require serious determination to break through.

“But seeing these rich college boys spending money like paper, I am gripped by a totally new sense of inadequacy. The contrast with my own imperfect life pinches me with the force of a physical hurt. Not surprisingly, my hunger just shrivels up and dies despite the mounds of tempting dishes lying on my table. I realize then that I have changed. And I

wonder what it feels like to have no desires left because you have satisfied them all, smothered them with money even before they are born. Is an existence without desire very desirable? And is the poverty of desire better than rank poverty itself? I think about these questions but do not arrive at any satisfactory answers” (3).

This passage brings on a different state of mind of Ram. His newfound ability to make money through his Taj Mahal tours gains him new friends as well, if only for the moment. His clients invite him for a night out that shows the true contrast between him and the four boys. At this point, Ram has a revelation that goes against his previous thinking throughout *Q&A*. He ponders the prosperous side of life and realizes it might not be everything he had dreamed of back on the trains to Mumbai. Ram poses questions to himself that serve as a challenge to the reader — this internal debate becomes an important change in the story. His character is developing when he realizes that perhaps, even though he eats out of the garbage, his life is fulfilled and satiated more than that of the wild college students.

Analysis of Movie Slumdog Millionaire

Slumdog Millionaire is a wonderful example of life imitating art; or, perhaps of life riding on the heels of art. The film, taken from the novel *Q and A*¹, is a rags to riches tale of a poor orphan from the slums who wins the grand prize on the Indian version of “Who Wants to be a Millionaire.” It has had its own rags to riches story. An independent film made with a view to DVD distribution wins worldwide awards, culminating in the Oscar for best film of 2008.

Perhaps as analysts we should not be surprised that this film about an underdog which is itself a successful underdog should have in its fabric a childhood Oedipal fantasy, the ultimate underdog drama. The film’s underdog hero is Jamal Malik, a 20 year old orphan from the Bombay/Mumbai slums who has successfully answered the first eight questions on the “Who Wants to be a Millionaire” TV show and is one question away from winning the show’s top prize, 20 million rupees.

As we enter, a skeptical police officer is trying to elicit a confession from Jamal that he has cheated. Torture having failed, he methodically takes Jamal through each question from the show to see how an uneducated “slumdog” could have the answers. Through this series of

flashbacks, we follow Jamal's life from early childhood up to his police interrogation. It is a picaresque adventure in which Jamal and his older brother, Salim, survive against all odds in a hostile world.

The film opens with cuttings of Jamal in an interrogation room and Jamal on the Who Wants to be a Millionaire? television show. Danny Boyle is starting his theme in these first few minutes of the film and setting the stage for the rest of the movie. He uses smash cuts to show the two different areas that Jamal is in and these represent the real life (interrogation), and the escapist life (Millionaire show). Boyle uses strong contrasts to accentuate the differences. In the interrogation room, there is a strong orange and red palate along with many close-up shots. This room is real life, therefore it is painful and hard.

“Slumdog Millionaire” and the Exploitation of the Indian People

“Slumdog Millionaire” paints a picture of the rise out of poverty that is not only unrealistic but in some ways disregards the real issues surrounding the people of India. The main character Jamal Malik, played by Dev Patel, grows up in one of the most poverty stricken areas of Mumbai, India but contrary to his upbringing in the Juhu Slum, he has a British accent. Danny Boyle, director of “Slumdog Millionaire” may have won an Oscar but it was merely for the Americanization of the film. Had “Slumdog” maintained accurate accents, or used one of the Dravidian languages, it would have been pushed into the foreign film category, which by American standards holds about as much weight as a Grammy in smooth jazz. The beginning of “Slumdog Millionaire” begins like “Oliver Twist” and ends in a way Danny Boyle has become famous for; an unrealistic happy and yet tragic ending.

Young Jamal, played by Ayush Mahesh Khedekar, and his older brother Salim, played by Azharuddin Mohammed Ismail, are orphaned early on as a result of religious violence between Muslim and Hindu extremists. The film clearly shows only the side that puts the Hindu on the offense of the conflict which is a continuance of what is now known as the Mumbai Riots; while Jamal, Salim and the other Muslims in his slum are apparently attacked without cause. The religious intolerance between Hindu and Muslims in India is a two sided issue but Boyle, in an attempt to make the viewer gain attachments to his characters, decided to add to the conflict by taking sides. Jamal, Salim and a young girl named Latika, played by Rubina Ali, are now alone

and in danger of being killed in the most poverty stricken slum of Mumbai, India and they need to get out. The older Jamal, Salim, played by Madhur Mittal and Latika, played by Freida Pinto have gone from slum to abused child laborers and ultimately are separated from each other. Danny Boyle maintains a flashback montage showing Jamal's quest to find Latika and Salim, through his journey to being a contestant on the Indian "Who Wants to be a Millionaire?" and the investigation that ensues to his success on the show.

"We see all this every day," says Shikha Goyal, a Mumbai-based public relations executive who left halfway through the film. "You can't live in Mumbai without seeing children begging at traffic lights and passing by slums on your way to work. But I don't want to be reminded of that on a Saturday evening. (time.com, 2009)" Goyal is describing why India's poverty will never change; nobody wants to admit it is there. "Slumdog Millionaire" shows the poverty that exists in India for half of the movie, which may be the strongest point the film has considering many Indian viewers refused to see the film at all. The India people do not want to be reminded that they are poor. Rags to riches stories are only effective motivators if the riches were achieved through hard work; if the reward is achievable for any person equally. While Jamal's life experiences helped lead him to his 20 million rupee prize, the outcome is not realistic. "Slumdog" is more of a reminder to the people of Mumbai that they have no way out of poverty, except through a miracle.

Why Danny Boyle decided to Americanize "Slumdog Millionaire" is an easy assumption: even with India's population over one billion people (Masci, 2002), making the movie attractive to America was much more profitable. From the use of music from artist M.I.A. to the British-Indian accented characters, even though they were never truly educated, the film aims at tugging at the heartstrings of an American audience; and it works. Boyle's work allows us to view one Indian boy as a hero while leaving the rest of India as what he must escape. The only thing real about the "Slumdog Millionaire" is the use of Indian people and Indian places as the plot of the film; otherwise the film does not display any of the issues India is faced with on a realistic level.

In suit with the rest of the movie, Jamal wins his 20 million rupees and gets his girl, typical of a Hollywood happy ending. Salim on the other hand stands as the true martyr of the film, giving his own life so his brother and Latika can reunite; even through the flashback all is forgotten about the slums and struggles and outcome of Salim's selfless act. End scene, cue pop

Indian dance scene and roll credits. “Slumdog Millionaire” may have won 8 academy awards but it didn’t win the hearts of the people that matter the most: the true “slumdogs” of India. You may know a good movie when you see one, and in terms of writing, directing and acting, “Slumdog Millionaire” truly is a good movie. But besides entertainment what had anyone gained? India is still poor, America is still ignorant to the real issue of poverty in India and a whole sect of people and their lives have been exploited. Danny Boyle is sitting comfortably in his mansion polishing that Oscar while the real Salim Malik’s of the world are polishing shoes. Hope it feels good Danny.

Comparison of Novel ‘Q & A’ and Film ‘Slumdog Millionaire’

Usually when books are remade into movies, there is found to be a whole lot of difference. We have seen this happen with many movies in the past and this is true of the latest adaptation of the book written by Vikas Swarup, into the movie, “Slumdog Millionaire” directed by Danny Boyle. In spite of the differences, the movie was praised to the skies as one of the best movies of recent times and attracted quite a few voluptuous black ladies – the Oscars!

The book, titled “Q&A” is also a rags-to-riches story, where it talks about how the protagonist, Ram Mohammed Thomas, who is a tea stall waiter, wins the big prize on a TV game show. He is depicted in the book as a man of all religions and thus the name. Coming to the movie; although, it is based on the theme of the book, it has its own unique story line and deviates quite a bit from what has been written.

Was the movie better than the book?

This is a difficult question to answer. But the differences between the book and movie start with the main theme itself. The slums of Mumbai in Slumdog Millionaire, are projected as places where extreme poverty and only poverty prevails – which is not what the book depicts. The defecation scene shown in the first part of the film is also nothing but Director Danny Boyle letting his imagination run wild. Nowhere in the book does anything like this exist.

In the book, the protagonist, Ram Mohammed Thomas, who is not a Muslim and who does not have a religion, lives in an orphanage in Delhi and not in Mumbai. There are many such

differences, including the fact that Jamal and his heroine meet as teenagers and live in an apartment, and not in the slums. The story about how Jamal's mother was killed in the film was not true to the book either. The book and movie are different enough to be considered as two different stories. But both of them are worthy of mention. Both tell us stories that will ache our hearts, make us cry and laugh at the same time.

But if we ask whether the movie did justice to the book by Vikas Swarup, it has to be a big "No." With so many changes in the characters and complete deviation from the content of the book, the movie was in no way an exact adaptation. Justice would have been done if the movie depicted the exact content of the book.

Conclusion

Geoffrey Wagner, in the *Novel and the Cinema*, suggests three possible categories which are open to the film – maker and to the critic assessing his adaptation:

Transposition, 'in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference; 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; and analogy, which must represent a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art'. (4)

To do justice with an adaptation, we must take into consideration the above categories and decide in which one of these, the particular adaptation falls.

The majority of scholarly treatments for film adaptation are put forth by experts on film and film analysis, thus with the focus being on film. The debate on cinematic adaptations of literary works was for many years dominated by the questions of fidelity to the source and by the tendencies to prioritize the literary originals over their film versions. Adaptations were seen by most critics as inferior to the adapted texts, as 'minor', 'subsidiary', 'derivative' or 'secondary' products, lacking the symbolic richness of the books and missing their 'spirit'.

In order to be seen as a good adaptation, a film had to come to terms with what was considered as the 'spirit' of the book and to take into account all layers of the book's complexity. But who could guarantee that the image of the work that a particular reader had created in his or her mind was better than somebody else?

Adaptations are now being analysed as products of artistic creativity 'caught up in the ongoing whirl of intertextual transformation, and transmutation, with no clear point of origin'. An adaptation as interpretation does not have to capture all the nuances of the book's complexity, but it has to remain a work of art, an independent, coherent and convincing creation with its own subtleties of meanings.

Texts are very open ended, it has lot to be answered by the reader on their own conscious mind, thus the filmmaker use their view in checking and manufacturing from their experience and modify themes according to them. Cinema helps to fill the gaps left by the writer.

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