

Cinematizing the 'Bard' for Indian Classrooms

Dr Bhupinder Jit Kaur, Assistant Professor, Deptt of English
Gujranwala Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Ludhiana (Punjab)

Abstract

India of twenty first century has seen tremendous developments in the field of technology used in various sectors through different digital techniques, be it the industry, commerce, etc. Even the Education sector has also been digitalised. The new technologies used while teaching are projector, DVD, PPT, etc. The innovative methods are being explored by the teachers who possess cognitive thinking. These innovative methods include exhaustive use of the technological devices available to them and when it comes to teach English which is considered a foreign language, the digitalisation of teaching becomes handy for the teacher as well as for the students. English literature teaching is considered a challenging task and when a teacher is assigned to teach Drama and Fiction to the undergraduate classes, it becomes difficult for the teacher to make the students read the complete text of Drama and Novel. If the student does not read or have the exact idea of the whole text, the charm of the story will be lost and the message conveyed by the writer will also not be interpreted the way he desired. The famous writers like the Bard 'Shakespeare', G.B. Shaw, Earnest Hemmingway, and many other writers are deceptively simple. Moreover, the students nowadays have become tech-savvy and they have less interest in the conventional teaching methods. So, to make them interested in their studies and to educate them, it is requisite to use the devices they are well versed with, and one such medium can be the Bollywood movies based on famous English novels and plays. The main focus of the study is to explore how useful and successful this method has been with special reference to the Bollywood movies based on Shakespearean plays.

I INTRODUCTION

In India the students are taught English language and English literature as well by using conventional method of Grammar Translation Method. The basic knowledge of a foreign language is provided in the form of their mother tongue which becomes a barrier in learning the target language in its original spirits. Other methods like Direct Method, Audio-Visual Method and Communicative Language Teaching Method are used to teach the sounds, stress, intonation and pronunciation of the target language. The challenging task in the academic field is to get the competent teachers who can implement these methods while teaching. There is dearth of such teachers who put extra efforts to explore new techniques and equip the students for future challenges. The teachers as well as the students need to keep pace with the modern world of technology. As far as the students of modern India are concerned they are almost well-versed with the digital revolution. They have mobile phone with up-to-date internet connection, updated version of various software programs and also easy access to the world of videos, movies and still pictures.

The present scenario is of 'Edutainment' which means blend of 'education' + 'entertainment'. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines the word Edutainment as, "the process of entertaining people at the same time as you are teaching them something, and the products, such as television programmes or software, that do this." Etymologically the word Edutainment is a neologistic portmanteau word. It was first "invented" by Dr. Chris Daniels in 1975, to encapsulate the theme of his Millennium Project, which later became known as The Elysian World Project, which espoused the core philosophy, "Education through Entertainment". Later, this was adopted by others and in particular made popular by Bob Heyman while producing documentaries for the National Geographic Society. According to other sources, Peter Catalanotto first coined this phrase in the late 1990s, as he travelled around the country edutaining school children about writing and illustrating.

The learning process has nowadays been associated with the entertainment. If teacher, parents or guardian want to teach the child or want to educate him/her they have to make it interesting and attractive. Even a new-born baby learns those rhymes/poems quicker which he/she finds interesting, attractive and soothing to the ears. The new advertisement of Pepsodent in which a mother is trying to convince her child to brush his teeth so that his teeth and gums remain healthy, she has to run after him all the time until her daughter suggests her to switch to the new toothpaste

Pepsodent which is tastier than other toothpastes. The mother is astonished to see her son enjoying to brush his teeth with the new Pepsodent. There are a lot of examples which show that fast and easy learning take place if it is made interesting or if some interesting methods are used to teach. Thus teaching a 'play' or 'novel' in a classroom is no different. It can also be made interesting by either asking the students to enact the story or to make them watch the movies based on those 'plays' or 'novels'.

Language plays an important role in cultivating intellectual faculties, and in shaping society. English language in India is an ever-rejuvenating phenomenon. Shakespeare's oeuvre is now part of world literature because national literatures are now being rapidly replaced by World literature. In the contemporary scenario transmission of literature is a perpetual phenomenon. It is because of widespread globalization that literary production moves from local → regional → global = GLOCAL. The word 'Glocal' is derived from the portmanteau word 'glocalization'. This word is made up of two words, globalization and localization. The dictionary meaning of 'Glocal' is to, "think global, act local". This trend of 'Glocalization' focuses on the international standards on one hand, and the local requirements on the other. However, when we discuss globalization in the literary arena, we talk of Goethe who coined the term 'Weltliteratur'. His futuristic vision created the corpus of world literature to blur the geographical barriers between nations. David Damrosch asserts, regarding the impact of globalization on literature:

The ongoing acceleration of economic and cultural globalization has brought the scope of world literature to a new level today. In the older imperial networks, literature usually flowed outward from the metropolitan center to the colonial periphery ...but literature now circulates in multiple directions, and writers even in very small countries can aspire to reach a global readership. (106)

This makes it clear that global readership has enhanced the scope of reading and writing on a massive scale. The canon of world literature has opened new avenues for translation and cross-cultural studies.

In India, cinema is as important as a religious cult for the people. William Shakespeare's plays have been adapted by Indian moviemakers on a grand scale. Namrata Joshi, a film critic, noted regarding Shakespeare that, "Shakespeare's plays with their dramatic strength and superb portrayal of the universal truths of human nature, have always lent themselves well to adaptation to different times and places" (n.pag.). The indigenized version of Shakespeare's drama in form of movie adaptations requires thoughtful visualizations and aesthetic sensibility because a slight deviation can lead to a giant theatrical blunder. However, Indian filmmakers garnish European drama with Indian aesthetic nuances so as to make it palatable for the Indian audience. The motive of a teacher is to make the students understand the depth of Shakespearean plays in such a way that the student doesn't get bored or he doesn't consider it a heavy watch.

At this juncture the Indian adaptations of Shakespeare's plays need to be discussed at length. In the early twentieth century Sohrab Modi enacted the role of 'Hamlet' in his movie called, 'Khoon Ka Khoon' (1935). Naseem Bano played Ophelia, and Shamshad Bai played the role of Gertrude. The Indian adaptation was written by Mehdi Ahsan. In 1941, J. J. Madan followed Sohrab Modi and adapted 'The Merchant of Venice' for his Hindi film titled, 'Zalim Saudagar'. The Indian adaptation was written by Pandit Bhushan. Similarly in the latter half of the twentieth century the trend of adaptation flourished with the release of the film 'Angoor' (1982), which was directed by Sampooran Singh Kalra (Gulzar). Angoor was a remake of Bhrantibilas (1963), a Bengali comedy film that was based on a Bengali play of the same name written by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. Vidyasagar's play was an adaptation of Shakespeare's play, 'The Comedy of Errors'. A recent remake of Angoor directed by Sajid Khan is titled, 'Hamshakals'. 'Romeo and Juliet' was adapted of late by Sanjay Leela Bhansali as 'Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ramleela' (2013) in a Gujarati milieu. The Montague-Capulet family rivalry was reflected in the Rajadi-Sanera family conflict. Death of Ram (Romeo) and his beloved Leela (Juliet) finally ended the bloodshed between their families. The art of cinematic adaptation in Indian cinema has been redefined by the Shakespearean trilogy of Vishal Bhardwaj. He won big accolades in filmmaking specifically for his Shakespearean trilogy that consisted of three movies, 'Maqbool' (2003), 'Omkaara' (2006), and 'Haider' (2014). Bhardwaj does not indulge in rampant plagiarism, but on the contrary

in many of his interviews he acknowledged his admiration of Shakespearean drama. The first movie of his trilogy called 'Maqbool' was a genuine adaptation of 'Macbeth', and it is in this regard that film critic, Madhu Jain, observes that, "Shakespeare hasn't got lost in translation here and Macbeth, a study in ambition and guilt, is perhaps one of the most accessible of the Bards' plays" (n.pag.).

In an interview with Roshmila Bhattacharya, Bhardwaj admitted that he adapted Othello for the second movie of his trilogy, Omkara, because of the 'sexual conflict' in the play. In a later interview Bhardwaj remarked that he adapted Hamlet as Haider to round off his trilogy because this play too had the element of 'sexual conflict' like the two earlier plays in his trio. Haider (2014) was written in collaboration with author, Basharat Peer. In a conversation with Deepanjana Pal, Basharat Peer discussed how the soliloquies of the play Hamlet were translated to Hindi, and how some celebrated lines had to be omitted because of the paucity of time. Regarding cinema Peer asserted that, "...what helps in cinema is that music and visuals do replace a lot of words" (n.pag.). 'Adaptation' and 'Appropriation' are two fundamental aspects of adapting texts for filmmaking. The Latin root of the word 'adapt' is 'adaptare' which means 'to make fit'. Thus, the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays makes his writing fit for contemporary cultural and political situation.

These adaptations do not tamper with the original text, and try to maintain the essential mood of the written text. However, some changes are mandatory such as those of language translation, local setting, and certain other cinematic essentials. Margaret Jane Kidnie in her seminal work, 'Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation' (2009), contends that, "Cultural, geographical or ideological differences between work and adaptation are rooted in a perceived temporal gap between work and adaptation enabled by an idea of the work not as process, but as something readily identifiable instead as an object" (68-69). This makes it clear that certain differences are unavoidable and that adaptations do lead to certain problems. When a text is adapted for a film, it is trimmed to counter the issue of time and space. This shortening may lead to a quality compromise. The author's genuine intention is overlooked in such collaborative venture of moviemaking, and often the participation of the viewer is strictly limited, contrary to the process of reading where a reader has the liberty to participate in shaping the meaning of the text. 'Generic hybridity' or the 'instability of genres' is also an important aspect of adaptation process because the medium of communication is changed, and there is interplay between the genres to enhance the cinematic charm. As defined by Julie Sanders, adaptation is a, "...transpositional practice, casting a specific genre into another generic mood, an act of re-vision in itself" (18).

An article on the celebration of 400th death anniversary of the Bard in The Hindu dated 20th April 2016, entitled "Bard more popular in India than in UK" reads that "The YouGov poll for the British Council covered 18,000 people across 15 countries to mark the 400th death anniversary of the Bard this month." Rosemary Hilhorst, Director of Shakespeare lives for the British Council said, "Four hundred years after his death, Shakespeare's work continues to play a vital role in Educating and Entertaining people around the world." The adaptations of his plays in India are more popular. The language used by the playwright is of ancient period which makes it difficult for the students to interpret the dialogues in their original spirits. The adaptation of his plays into movies provides a language with which the students are familiar. Once the students get an idea of the plot, characters and summary of the play, it becomes easier for them to comprehend the text in its original spirits too.

In this fast moving world the young generation wants to learn everything very fast and they want to understand the things in a way which is convenient to them. Speed is a distinguishing feature of a modern life. People buy home faster. Children fly the nest faster. Youngsters decide on a career faster. Employees leave company faster. Students want to grasp and memorise the answers faster. So, in such a scenario, it is advisable to keep a pace with the changing speed and adapting the methods of teaching which create interest of reading and studying among the students. The movies based on the classics, whether novels or plays, should be made available to the students so that they can watch them and can also develop interest in literature. To observe the difference between reading a play and making the

students to watch movie based on the same play, a few experiments were conducted. The classes chosen for the experiments were, undergraduate and post graduate classes. The experiments along with the results are as follows:

Experiment in the undergraduate class:-

A group of ten students were assigned to read first three to four chapters daily and discuss the same in the class. Initially there was a blunt refusal unanimously. The reason for this kind of behaviour was that they have never been taught how to read a play. They were not aware of the playwrights and their creations. Since the students are of fast moving world they tried to find an easy way to read the text. The search of easy way to read and understand the literary work the students browsed internet and downloaded summary of each chapter. No doubt they were able to discuss the chapters in the class next day. But they missed the original form of dialogues and the way those dialogues would have been delivered had it been enacted on the stage.

Another option with the teacher was to make the children enact the literary work in the class which again received retaliation from the students most of them found the language difficult to understand and read. A few of them were of the opinion that they have difficulty in pronouncing the words. Though the teacher tried to help them a lot, even the teacher has constraints of time. He/she has to complete the syllabi within a stipulated time period. Thus it was difficult to ask the students to enact all the plays in their syllabi in classroom. One of the students asked whether there was a movie based on the literary works in their syllabi. From this very point the search began and the teacher came up with the movies available with her. The students were asked to watch the movie at home and come with their queries including writing in brief the major and minor plot, main characters and favourite scenes of the students. The experiment proved to be a great success as the students watched the full movie at home and understood the meaning of the text easily. Now they themselves got interested in the original text to grasp the real meaning of the literary work.

II Experiment in the Post Graduate classes:-

The students of M.A. English used to be the ones who were well versed with the literature and had a keen interest in literary works. But the scenario has changed. The students from Commerce/Medical/Non-Medical opt for Post Graduation in English despite knowing the fact that they do not have the aptitude to pursue M.A. in English literature. Most of the female students opt for this subject due to matrimonial purposes and the male students just want to kill time or wish to go abroad. So the classroom is left with just a handful of the students desirous to study English Literature religiously. The biggest challenge in front of the teacher is to make these students aware of the benefit of reading texts, enriching their vocabulary and making them interested in English Literature. They study to pass the exams and not to learn anything from their text-books. Most of the times students take the guides as books, even during this experiment it was found that the students showed their teacher help-books like, Students' Notes, Professor's Notes, etc when they were asked to open the text books.

The same procedure was being followed by the teacher to make them fall in love with English Literature as was used for the Undergraduate classes. The result was a mixed one. Most of the students started bunking the classes initially, but gradually they understood the concept and found the class interesting. Shakespeare did not remain an alien and foreign name for them, it became of their own. The characters in his plays were seen talking to each other in the language of the original text. They tried to memorise the famous dialogues by heart. Students can do wonders if they are guided and their energy is channelized in a right direction. As said by David Daiches, "Literature is a mirror to the society" the students can use this mirror to develop and nurture their personality. To make the students fall in love with the English Literature the Bard is best choice one can explore. Shakespearean plays are lifelike. They teach, they make you laugh, they make you cry, they drive you crazy, they captivate you and release you at the same time, and they purify the soul by giving a moral preaching through its various characters. His plays are still relevant. If the movies are shown to the students based on his plays, then the students automatically will try to read the original text.

The experiments proved to be reasonably good success as the students tried to follow the path shown by their teacher i.e. to watch the movie and gradually to start reading the plays of the Bard. This is the need of the hour to

change the perspective to explore the vast ocean of technology. When the students are well equipped with the modern advanced devices which they usually carry in their pockets it is advisable that the teachers should update themselves accordingly. The Bard is unquestionably a widely read English playwright in India. Thus it would be beneficial for the Indian students to make them learn English language and English Literature through cinematizing the Bard's great creations.

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