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THE JOURNEY OF THE GUIDE FROM PAGE TO SCREEN

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Abstract: Starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, Vijay Anand's *Guide* (1965) is such a movie that twisted the source material and yet remained one of the masterpieces of Indian Cinema. *Guide* is based on the famous novel *The Guide* by R.K.Narayan. Although the critics of the film disdain it for not being true to the novel, Vijay Anand deserves full credit for representing a great story in an intellectual and entertaining manner. *The Guide* makes a brave attempt to move out of the mundane formula ramp on the areas considered taboo for Indian society. However, Narayan was never happy at the manipulations made in the onscreen adaptation. There exist a number of significant modifications that the novel undergoes on its onscreen version.

Keywords: adaptation, masterpiece, novel, movie, modification.

I. Introduction

Film adaptation is a type of derivative work that transforms the body of a written work into a feature film. John Harrington, in his book *Film and/as Literature* projected that almost a third of all films ever made have been adapted from novels, and the estimate will go upto 65 percent or more if the other literary forms such as drama or short stories etc. will be included. Nodoubt, one cannot but deny the popularity of Novels for film adaptations. Certainly here the question of faithfulness arises and the more high profile and famous the source novel is the more insistent are the questions of fidelity. Starring Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, Vijay Anand's *Guide* (1965) is such a movie that twisted the source material and yet remained one of the masterpieces of Indian Cinema. *Guide* is based on the famous novel *The Guide* by R.K.Narayan. Although the critics of the film disdain it for not being true to the novel, Vijay Anand deserves full credit for representing a great story in an intellectual and entertaining manner to the audience with amazing cinematography, beautiful songs and dance thrown in. *The Guide* makes a brave attempt to move out of the mundane formula and ramp on the areas considered taboo for Indian society. The film dared to show a man and woman living together outside the sanctity of a marriage way back in the 1960s. Hence, the greatness of the movie also lies in the fact that the brilliant script and the honesty of the performances never distracted the audience from the concept and content of the film. Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman's whole-hearted performances handled a delicate subject with beautiful maturity and created the arc of the character through the film that actors always crave for.

II. The Idea of Adaptation

To understand the idea of adaptation from pages to screen, George Bluestone's facets in his famous book, *Novels Into Film*, becomes very relevant. The writer presents a detailed analysis of the limitations, techniques, and potentialities of both novel and film by highlighting on the significant modification when the former is transformed into the latter. Bluestone's argues that when a novel is transformed into a film it "looks not to the organic novel whose language is inseparable from its theme, but to characters and incidents which somehow have detached themselves from language, and like the heroes of folk legends, have assumed a mythical life of their own" (Bluestone, 65). According to him, a novel, especially the modern novel, essentially deals with time and the complexities of inner psyche; the film, on the other hand, falls short to bring out this minute relationship between time and space effectively and renders its specialty only in terms of motion and action. While a novel takes forty hours to be read indulging in the luxury of leisure, the film, on the other hand, is time bound celluloid that cannot turn back, dwell or diverge. In this sense the novel is more flexible in relation to time and space than a film: "A novel has three tenses, a film has only one" (Bluestone, 98). Bluestone analyses the nature of "psychological" and "chronological" time in the two media, and brings out the differences between them. In a film, Bluestone explains, the dialogue, the music and the picture dominates but the thought cannot be expressed directly and minutely. A dialogue can only convey the external expression of thought and once spoken it is no longer a thought. However, Bluestone focused on the advantage of film adaptation also. The shortcoming of a novel lies in the fact that language cannot convey non-verbal experience. A mere picture may worth ten thousand words at times. The camera, on the other hand, however, is highly objective, capturing the variations in the intensity and color of light but not contributing to the intricate subjective vision. Apart from these technical considerations, the novel is different from the film in many other ways such as while the film is a commercial group project, the novel is far more a personal creation. While a novelist writes for a small audience with whom he can assume a certain rapport, a film is aimed at reaching every section of people-young, old, men, women, educated, illiterate, natives, foreigners etc. Linda Costanzo Cahir writes in her seminal book *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches*:

In a traditional translation, the film makers stay as close as possible to the original literary text while making those alterations that deemed necessary and/or appropriate. These changes may be made in the service of the filmmakers' interpretive insight or stylistic interests, but just as often they are driven by a need to keep the film's length and its budget manageable, and to maintain the interests and tastes of a popular audience. In a traditional film translation of a literary text, scenes are added or deleted as needed; characters are often composites; and the settings are frequently modified in ways that make them more visually interesting... (2006, p. 21)

Celluloid adaptation from literature offers the filmmaker a challenge to pick the writer's work and through this transposition, make it as powerful and appealing on film as it is in its printed form. Cinema brings words to life through visuals, sound, music, dialogue, acting and splicing or mixing of shots generally known as editing. It offers infinite scope for argument, discussion, debate and questioning among spectators who have read the novel and it is a kind of challenge on the part of the director who tries to present to the audience something new out of the original. Vijay Anand was never interested in merely copying any work of art from one medium to another and hence, he has made *Guide* into a rich and unforgettable cinematic experience. But unfortunately, Narayan was never happy with the way the film was made and its deviation from the book. On-screen adaptation of the *The Guide* differs a lot from the text. Following are the deviations which can be readily noticed in the course of the journey of "The Guide" from page to screen.

III. Vijay Anand's 'Guide':

One of the major changes that Vijay Anand did was the change of the entire setting of the story. He shifted the story from Malgudi, a fictitious small town in Karnataka, to the royal Rajasthani city of Udaipur. *Guide* was the first colour film from Dev Anand's production house 'Nav Ketan'. The film was an exotic, grand visual with a riot of colours. Dev Anand's contention in this connection is justified on the ground that the small town Malgudi could never fill up the lavish frame of a big colour film and in this context Jaipur offered an ideal background. Rajasthan with its vibrant colours and historical monuments served the purpose perfectly and the movie has captured beauty of Rajasthan in a faithful manner. R.K. Narayan was never happy with these manipulations. He believes that his characters fit well only in Malgudi as Malgudi constitute their life and

character. Therefore, the story and its crux have lost its significance when placed outside Malgudi. But for a Hindi commercial film, *Guide* could never have had a small town in South India as the backdrop and can never convince the audience of having so many tourist attractions. To give 'Railway Raju' more exposure, Vijay Anand as director and Dev Anand as actor, not only turned Narayan's simple tale into a visual treat but also brought out the consciousness of a tourist guide by exposing the protagonist to the intersection of the economic and social cross-currents sweeping the then postcolonial India. The metaphor of tourism was also marking the entrance of rural India into the global economy. The beauty of Udaipur's palaces and lakes, hills and mountains is presented for visual consumption through fluidity of camera cinematography. Nodoubt, the purpose was also to highlight Udaipur as a tourist site in the national and international level.

Vijay Anand was definitely trying to give the film a global exposure which could not be attained at Malgudi. Malgudi is absolutely a non-secular, Hindu small town. *Guide* was represented as the story of India where the filmmakers wanted to show the social realities of India. India is a multi-religious country where a Sanyasi is visited both by Hindus and Muslims to seek divine blessing. Anand's *Guide* in this sense upholds a secular, non-communal picture of India where Hindus and Muslims gather around Raju's shrine, saying prayers together to bring rain for the wellbeing of the village. The song ---"Allah megh de pani de chhaya de re Allah, Ram megh de pani de chhaya de re Ram . . ." (Allah, fill the sky with clouds, and give us rain and shade; Rama, fill the sky with clouds, and give us rain and shade. . .)--is a indication of a multireligious diversified India.

IV. The Differences between Page and Screen:

Many a times the celluloid adaptation factualizes the hints given in the original story to make the story cinema-worthy, intellectual, enjoyable and polished. In the novel, Rosie just spoke of suicide. In the film, we actually see her making serious attempts that add to the suspense and the visual excitement. If we have the fresh impression of the book in our mind we readily get the impression that the film characters are somewhere, somehow deviating. In the novel, Rosie is projected as a 'devdasi' hailing from the illegitimate profession in the ancient royal courts. The novel's "fiery snake woman" transforms into a diffident young woman who loves dancing but also loves Raju. She has been divorced by Marco who philanders with a native girl in the mountain although the readers find no such clues in the novel. At one point of time she reacts as if she is fed up with Raju but ultimately goes back to him. Rosie, in the movie, overshadows Raju whereas Raju remains the pivotal character for the whole part of the novel. There are several shades in Rosie's character; she is moody, impulsive, passionate and ambitious. These variations of her character have overshadowed in the movie. Narayan created the character of Rosie ahead of its time. A woman leaving her uncaring and impotent husband and living with her lover in his house was something impossible to accept in the era of sixties. It becomes necessary on the part of Vijay Anand to demonize Marco in order to humanize Rosie and thereby attracting the sympathy of the audience. This is the reason why it is difficult to understand her in the novel but easy to comprehend in the movie. The audience finds Rosie taking dust from dead Raju's feet and putting it in the parting of her hair at the end of the movie. Here it must be mentioned that Narayan created his female protagonist unlike the traditional, spineless women who consider their husbands to be their Lords and worship them irrespective of their behavior towards their wives. Rosie is a highly educated powerful woman who is conscious of her individuality and rights. She strongly faces the dogmatic Hindu patriarchal society. In spite of being divorced and cheated by Raju, she did not cry in despair rather she prepares herself as a skilled dancer and becomes a star dancer acclaimed all over India. The character of Rosie is decked with an inner strength which "fortifies her mind with such an indomitable spirit that —she would never stop dancing" (Narayan, p. 223). Raju asserts "whether I was inside the bars or outside, whether her husband approved of it or not. Neither Marco nor [any man] had any place in her life" (Narayan, p. 223). The film has undermined this rebellious spirit in the character of Rosie to a great extent. The self-confident Rosie drastically deviates from her textualized variation and becomes a very common, traditional Indian woman.

Raju's character too has undergone multiple modifications. In the novel, the grey shades of his character are much more highlighted as opposed to white in the movie. He is a young man with the frailties of young age. The moment Rosie steps on the railway platform, Raju is impressed by her physical stature. It is clearly written in the novel that her physical beauty attracted him but in the film his sole attraction towards her physical beauty nowhere figures out. He even tries to seduce her away from her husband but in the movie he has been shown in heroic grandeur rescuing Rosie from her torturous husband. The saintly part of his character is

glorified in the film though realistically. His death brings tears to the eyes of the viewers. The novel does not evoke any such emotion.

The character of Marco has perhaps undergoes the most noticeable transformation in the hand of Vijay Anand. The intellectual and studious archeologist is given a villainous and grouchy shade. In the novel Marco is just an introvert person who is so much obsessed with his work that he does not care for the emotional needs of his wife. Marco was never infidel nor devious as he was shown in the film. At times even Rosie, in the novel, feels that he was justified in leaving her. She feels love and affection for her husband even after both have been separated. But the film projects Marco having immoral relationship with a native tribal girl while the original text provides no such clues. To justify the Rosie-Raju relationship and to give the film an acceptance in the 1960's conservative society of India, Marco is transformed into a drunkard womanizer. On these manipulations Narayan wrote in his essay —*Misguided Guide*: —

In my story the dancer's husband is a pre-occupied archeologist who has no time or inclination for marital life and is not interested in her artistic aspirations. Raju the guide exploits the situation and weans her away from her husband. That is all there to it in my story (1988, p. 214).

Not only Marco is an intellectual Archeologist, he has some very rare virtues such as not caring for the caste of his wife, entrusting his young wife to the care of a young and handsome tourist guide; but in the film he is made a villain for the sake of a villain in a common commercial Hindi feature film.

V. The Manipulations:

Narayan was very much dissatisfied at the manipulations made at the end of the novel. In the novel Raju dies alone; whereas, in the film the audience can see Raju's mother, Gaffur (his friend) and Rosie with him in his last moments. Finally, the thunder bursts with heavy downpour and the whole crowd of the village rejoices with clap and cry. With Raju's prayers being heard of and the rain actually pouring down, the tragic effect gets minimized in the film as Raju ultimately did not pay for his sins. There is nodoubt about the fact that the easy ending of the film destroyed the uniqueness of this classic creation and decreased its level to a common cheap production. It is the mystery involved in Raju's death that made *The Guide* a classic of Indian English literature but the film turns the novel into a cheap, commonplace film by showing Raju dead. While *The Guide* was a masterpiece, the film *Guide* was equally a mediocre.

VI. Conclusion:

In the final analysis it can be said that although changes have been incorporated in the script but the movie manages to touch the heart of the viewers. The original content has been diluted to an extent but perhaps it was necessary to do so out of commercial onscreen compulsions. Here it must be mentioned that *The Guide* became much popular after the movie was made. The movie made the novel much popular among the people of later generations. The veteran actors, Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, did full justice to the characters. The roles of a happy go lucky guide and a miserable saint were performed perfectly by Dev Anand. Waheeda Rehman, an accomplished dancer lent credibility to the role and performed it gracefully. The movie is neatly crafted with song and dance sequences, inevitable part of any Hindi commercial movie, developing the theme and helping the story moving forward. The movie is successful in delivering a positive message to its viewers. The film evokes faith in the heart of the viewers and stipulates the fact that self-belief and belief in humanity can lead a person to divine heights. Whereas the novel, brilliant in its own way, finds a little difficulty to cut ice with ordinary people or the common mass, the movie is more simple and comprehensible than the novel and ordinary people can understand and relate with it in a better way.

Inspite of the controversy and criticism, one cannot deny the interplay between cinema and literature which is as old as the medium of celluloid and it will continue as long as there will be good books to read and good filmmakers to translate them into good movies. However, one must understand that the adaptation, whether good or bad, cannot supplant the original; the celluloid version cannot annihilate or erase the existence of the original in anyway. To reach to a wider range of audience and interpretation, it's not blasphemous to transform a work of literature into a film with necessary modifications. Cinema has a larger exposure conveying different socio-political and religious strands. Hence, the critical attention should be on the work of art itself and not on its comparison with the literature it springs from.

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