



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Two adapted Hindi Films, *Teesri Kasam* and *Omkaara*, : A Study of Transcreation of disparate Social Milieu

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ABSTRACT

Unification of culture through literature has been a common phenomenon, my paper will analyze two different adaptations, one of established Hindi Writer, Phanishwar Nath Renu's short story *Maare Gaye Ghulam*, one of the short stories published during the 1950s and 1960s, that got adapted into the film *Teesri Kasam* and Vishal Bharadwaj's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello* into *Omkaara*. The reason of selecting the two literature pieces, one of Hindi writer, and the other of English dramatist Shakespeare, is to examine their adaptations into Hindi language, where the emphasis will be shown in the use of very effective non-verbal language. The picturization of the film *Teesri Kasam* starring Raj Kapoor and Waheeda Rahman, conceives a rural life evincing story of common people in uncommon situation that is handled in a unique and very admirable fashion. Shakespeare's adaptations in Hindi language, of late has become associated with Vishal Bharadwaj who adapted three plays, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* into *Maqbool*, *Omkaara* and *Haider*, respectively. He has done a commendable job in representing a trans-cultural adaptation of Shakespeare's plays, but his greater triumph comes in providing Indianness to the plot and characters through very suggestive music too. The paper will critique both, Hindi films, each representing different social milieu, yet providing authenticity as they tend to create benchmarks in content, music, characters portrayal wielded through verbal verisimilitude.

KEYWORDS:

phenomenon, *Maare Gaye Gulfam*, Maithili, Magahi, Transcreating, *Teesri Kasam*, resurgence, trans-cultural.

Phanishwar Nath Renu hailed as an iconic Hindi writer was termed Regional Writer for having lived at Purnea, bordering North Bihar and Nepal. His language thus evinces regional dialects like Maithili, Magahi, Bhojpuri, Nepali and Bengali in pre-partitioned India. Transcreating such a cultural milieu owing to variety in idiolects, must have certainly been really challenging. This is disclosed by Indira Jhingara who faced several problems while translating *Maila Aanchal*, a seminal novel by Renu.

The connection of Literature and Cinema has been quite crucial and going by the first feature film by Dadasaheb Phalke, *Raja Harishchandra* in 1893, it is worth recalling that it was inspired by the mythological drama, *Life of Christ*.ⁱ

Asita Bali in her research *Female Body in Indian Cinema: A Reflection*ⁱⁱ informs,

Indian cinema ‘s roots lie in many art forms, (theatre, music, painting, photography, literature, dance, storytelling) as well as other aspects of culture that were stimulated by the colonial encounter and the new media that developed during the nineteenth century.(Dwyer)ⁱⁱⁱ

It is well known that several literary works like those of Munshi Premchand who found popularity chiefly as he made rural India the basis of his writings, similarly, one sees in Phanishwar Nath Renu, a great writer in Hindi language whose short stories and novels reflect India replete with deep-rooted caste, religion and gender issues.

The speciality about Renu’s stories is that his stories became a character of the nation or region showcasing societal milieu with natural flow of dialogues.

Rakshanda Jalil says in the Introduction to *Panchlight and other stories by Phanishwar Nath Renu*,^{iv}

What is more, there are large dollops of wit, humour, and satire along with oodles of folk songs and snatches of poetry thrown in for good measure.

Renu quite often associated with the novel *Maila Aanchal*, translated in English by Indira Jhingare was titled as *The Soiled Border*. She reveals several problems she faced owing, chiefly to the extensive use of dialects and idiolects used by Renu. She explained,

The linguistic complexity of the novel is compounded by the use of folk genres: proverbs, and folksongs, which are mostly in Bhojpuri and Maithili, often with many archaic forms, religious songs, and the songs of Kabir in Old Hindi, which often present problems of understanding.

It is not surprising that Jhingare took ten years to translate and get the novel printed in 1991.

A Short story by Renu entitled *Mare Gaye Gulfam* was selected for film adaptation under title *Teesri Kasam*, (1966) translated *The Third Vow*^{vi} starring Raj Kapoor and Waheeda Rahman, screenplay by Nabendu Ghosh and Renu himself.

viiThe film received National Award for best feature film, while both actors were awarded by Bengal Film Journalists Association, and so was director Basu Bhattacharya and Shailendra won National Film Award for best Lyricist. Moscow International Film festival awarded the film in Grand Prix category.

Shailendra gave many memorable songs like “**Sajjan Re Jhoot mat bolo**”, “**Sajanwa Bairi ho Gaye Hamar**”, especially “**Dunia banana wale Kya tere man main samayi**”: the importance of good, meaningful songs in films has been the mainstay since a long time.

The story of *Teesri Kasam* ^{viii} revolves around three solemn promises of the simple village man, who drives bullock cart, he has taken first vow of not carrying smuggled goods on his cart and takes second of not transporting bamboo in his cart as this too was smuggled and he faced beating. The third one he takes at the end of film when he regrets carrying a Nautanki dancer on his cart.

The story showcases the rural India in a region that borders on Nepal and Bengal. Hiramal who drives the cart, quite reluctantly agrees to carry a woman, Hirabai, who is visiting a village nearby. She does not divulge her profession. They both start talking on their way. Hiramal conjures picture of Hirabai in his limited, innocent imagination. Hirabai is amused by his talks so converses freely with him while Hiramal, a shy man of middle age responds shily.

Devoid of education, he is unable to express in words; hence his expressions become a gateway to his feelings. Expressions like 'dhat', 'isshhh' come out portraying his persona. Interestingly, the script writer, author himself, Renu does not speak for his character's feelings but it is left for the audience to decipher his feelings. Such usage of non-fluencies for him stands as excellent example of Non-Verbal Communication.

Hiramal is too ordinary a person to be considered a heroic figure; poor, middle-aged, and apparently with no exchange of heart with a woman, his interaction with Hirabai becomes very interesting, even as it makes the audience wanting and waiting for more from this couple.

He finds Hirabai very beautiful; to describe that he uses the word 'churaail', ie; witch, at times 'Pari'; i.e.; fairy. The choice of such words to describe a beautiful woman looks very weird; perhaps for him she is an unearthly beauty, or as a supernatural element, he can conceive of her either as a witch, or as a fairy while thinking of Hirabai. Renu gives unique and thought-provoking metaphors and symbols here.

Hiramal has a limited imagination of a beautiful woman that extends to that of an unmarried woman who is chaste, pure, and unspoil. On their way, he stops near a pond and suggests her to take a dip into it as he is certain she is unmarried. Hirabai is enjoying his company and is happy to receive his adulation and respect that she is not used to. She is a "company dancer" and in order to live the present she decides against revealing her identity.

His feelings for her are beautifully emoted in a sentence like;

Aaj rah-rah kar Hiramal ko gudgudi ho rahi thi

is used in the book and in the film too he expresses in an abashed manner,

Aaj Badi gudgudi ho rahi Hai.

Hiramal is poor in translating his feelings in a conventional manner but his unconventional expression makes him, an unforgettable performer, also for his unique coinage of words. Raj Kapoor essays the role brilliantly.

In his imagination, Hirabai is a woman of character and such impression is so deeply entrenched in his heart that when Hirabai, the courtesan, the dancer dances and she is referred as "Company ki Aurat". she is portrayed as a dancer in derogatory terms, this greatly upsets him. He gets unnerved when his friends pass comments on her dancing moves and sensuality, he gets upsets as he is unable to accept that she is a dancer. He even picks up a fight with them. When Hirabai asks him the reason behind his fight he becomes speechless.

Inadvertently he declares,

Hirabai will work in circus, she will make lion dance.

It is an undeniable truth that Hiramal's views about reflections of a village man, his simple, rustic mind makes him a laughable character also. He feels Hirabai's dignity would be in her working in circus rather than dancing in front of men. He finds such profession "bazaar", unrespectable and suggests instead she should sit at home like ordinary women. Undoubtedly, his patriarchal views get expressed evinced by the social culture he belongs to. It is quite apparent that male dominant views are bound to determine readers' response. Hiramal's love for Hirabai is motivated by respect for her that is rare to be seen in those days of severe caste distinctions and female subordination; she is doubly marginalized owing to both gender and caste bias of the society, and when Hiramal, ironically an uneducated and poor person, transgresses those distinctions, he becomes heroic. He wants her to improve her foiled image but she cannot explain the limited agency of poor women like her. Divided by the social prejudice, the two lovers' uniting looks impossible, and they get back to the same social situation they had come from. The story/film ends on a realistic note. The ending when Hiramal sees Hirabai leaving with her troupe is heart rending. Hiramal again, for loss of words is unable to say anything and looks helplessly, even angrily, it is expressed in a euphemism, he declares as **Teesri Kasam,**

Today I take the third vow, never to allow any woman to travel in my cart.

It sums up all; his pain, his loss, his heart-breaking moment. The ending puts an obvious question on the social structure that badly required change.

Critics have generally felt about the film that it only shows Hiramal's perspective, his pain, his excitement, his love, anger, and his final pain at separation as he was expecting Hirabai to leave her "bazaru" profession, her profession of a dancer and live life of a decent well settled woman, remaining at home, for that alone made a man honourable. It is evident Hirabai has no choice; she has lived as a performer and cannot think of forfeiting it. Hiramal obviously is too naïve to understand the biased perception of society towards marginalized women like Hirabai. Even after seeing how the village zamindar had tried to humiliate her, he is unable to comprehend that for such women seen as "fallen", "disgraced", there is no going back for them; it is impossible for society to see them as respectable, honourable women. The period evinced in the film is India in 60s, when even if the film director would have tried to show change, it would have looked impractical.

It is believed that Raj Kapoor wanted a different ending, of the two meeting, for the showman he was known for, but author, Phanishwar Nath Renu and Nabendu Ghosh who wrote dialogues wanted no changes.

IMDb review, from Headley Lamarr, entitled *The End of Innocence?*^{ix}

when Heeraman says isshhh—you can sense his embarrassment/disbelief/humor-Mr. Bhansali's Paro tried to copy it but that became a mockery....

Renu Sahab was advocating reforms and support for the Sharda laws about legal us that there is an inner core of strength in women, they may be tossed about on the storm of life, but in the end they will prevail and do the right thing....Basu Bhattacharya's first directorial venture and the film is simply awesome. He was assisted by none other than Basu Chatterjee. Phanishwar Nath Renu's story and dialogues evoked the times gone by in a simple rural setting. It is no surprise that that this film won the National award for best film.

Even though the coloured films had begun, the movie was made in black and white apparently to keep true to a completely rural setting in Bihar. However, it is tragic that such an artistic film was a commercial flop, so much so that the producer Shailendra was financially broke and before the film was selected for National Award, he met his end.

Rakshanda Jalil in **Introduction** to *Panchlight and Other Stories* written by Phanishwar Nath Renu in her translation from Hindi to English avers about *Mare Gaye Gulfam* picturized as *Teesri Kasam*, with Raj Kapoor and Waheeda Rahman in lead roles and Iftekhar Khan and Asit Sen in finely etched, memorable cameos, she speaks appreciatively of the film,^x

It showed how a love story set in rural Bihar—of Hiramal, a bullock- cart driver, and Hirabai, a dancer in a travelling dance company-could capture the national imagination. It also helped underscore the point that in branding Renu as the pioneer of the *aanchlik upanyas* (regional novel), the literary critics were not only doing Renu a grave disservice by virtually painting him into a box, but were also guilty of circulating an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms. While, admittedly, based in rural Bihar, Renu's stories were not parochial. Far from it, in fact!

Rakshanda Jalil fully endorses the film's selection as a National Award, and writer Renu not just a Regional but National writer.

The second adaptation is *Omkara*, adaptation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, as attempted by Vishal Bharadwaj who achieved considerable popular and critical success worldwide with 3 of Shakespeare's adaptations, by adhering closely to the illicit cravings, revenge, and betrayal, in suitable language, verbal, as well as non- verbal. He represents the strain of a trans-cultural adaptation of Shakespeare whose beginnings lie in the contemporary

times. Set in distant remote part of Uttar Pradesh instead of Venice, *Omkara* (2006) is the story of political ambitions and the patriarchal world that devalues love, and values lust for power in everything.

The treachery and villainy of Iago, essayed brilliantly by Saif Ali Khan in the role of Langda Tyagi, Othello's suspicion (*Omkara*, played by Ajay Devgan) and innocence of Desdemona (*Dolly* played by Kareena Kapoor) are very well evoked leading to a brutal ending. Bharadwaj makes major changes by substituting dialogues with emotions and scripts at critical moments.

In an interview with Roshmila Bhattacharya, Bharadwaj admitted he adapted *Othello* for the subject of sexual conflict.^{xi}

Shalini Pallavi avers^{xii}

Race and sexuality play a vital role in *Othello*. Instead of a racial other, the Moor of Venice, Bharadwaj makes *Omkara* a half-caste, a son of a Brahman father and a low caste prostitute mother. By doing so, he brings into the picture the Indian preoccupation with caste.

Though it appears that *Omkara* does not contain similar themes, *Omkara* showcases the subject of treachery of women, first, *Omkara*, son of a Brahmin father, carries the scar of his mother being a low caste prostitute, as he is often insulted for it by his political rivals. Secondly, he is unable to forget *Dolly's* father's warning who had said, 'the girl who can betray her father cannot be anybody's'. This sentence rings similarly like the original,

Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: She has deceived her father, and may thee. (*Othello*, Act I, Scene III).^{xiii}

It keeps haunting him all through. Thirdly, he nurses similar suspicion about *Dolly's* love; he constantly doubts it. Othello's suspicious nature, coupled with a misogynist outlook is clear. Bharadwaj clearly reveals blind love of *Dolly* for *Omkara* from the very beginning; she is unwilling to marry *Rajju* and dares *Omkara* to marry him or she will die. In the entire film she is shown constantly craving for *Omkara's* attention. *Dolly* in her innocence and hero-worship, is unable to comprehend his suspicious questions. In the last scene after their marriage and after being provided proof of her adultery, he abuses her and asks her to accept that she had a lover. Her reply comes befitting a chaste, gracious lover,

kill me, I do not want to survive.^{xiv} (subsequent dialogues from *Omkara* will be shown translated from Hindi to English)

The dark end of the play symbolizes the darkness that enters the lives of *Omkara*, who kills himself, *Langra Tyagi* who represents *Iago*, gets killed by his wife, who is unable to forgive herself and certainly not her husband, because of whom she unintentionally gets involved in malicious plot planted by him. The dirty conspiracy leads ultimately to the death of a pure soul. This is contrived in a very different and more effective ending that fitted perfectly into a contemporary Indian adaptation. *Iago's* wife's role is portrayed by brilliant actor *Konkona Sen* whose inclusion must have been well thought, considering her great acting skills. She wonderfully espouses women's lack of agency. In a scene when she finds *Dolly* sorrowful, she asks *Omkara* the reason behind his changed behaviour, he repeats *Dolly's* father's warning. She questions,

How long women will have to prove themselves, even a Fire- test was not enough for her.

The beginning of the film shows *Rajju's* marriage getting aborted by *Omkara's* men and *Dolly's* father unable to accept that his daughter was not forced to choose *Omkara*. True on the lines of original text, the father is no different in his strong, autocratic, and vindictive outlook who poisons his son-in-law's mind, that eventually dooms their life.

^{xv}Bharadwaj imparts a very apt setting that supports sociopaths like *Dolly's* father, *Omkara*, *Langda Tyagi*. The political rivalry abounding in typical patriarchal regions like UP, Bihar is made the location. The constant rift of musclemen, goons, murders dominate the film. While *Rajju* nurses hatred for *Omkara* for being rejected by *Dolly*, *Langda Tyagi* is burning with insult and anger as *Omkara* has chosen a less heroic figure, *Cassio*,

(pronounced as Keso). Unlike Iago's 'motiveless malignity' Tyagi's malevolence is motivated by circumstances.

The university of Iowa, in its review^{xvi} (indiancinema.sites.uiowa.edu) avers about the adaptation,

Although the film dispenses with the trope of “race” that is generally highlighted in stage productions of *Othello* (despite a lingering controversy over the actual “blackness” of Moors-a term somewhat carelessly applied, in Elizabethan times, to people of varied permutations of North African, Arab, and Spanish descent) , it substitutes other markers of difference that strongly resonate in everyday life in everyday life in north India, and are capable of eliciting the powerful sense of alterity that the tale requires.

In place of Desdemona's 'handkerchief,' 'kamardhani', the waistband is used as the tool of suspicion in *Omkara*. Bharadwaj uses stronger tool, it is not only an erotic symbol but corresponding to crude, masochistic society that Omkara hails from, it likewise looks a harder object. In softer moments with Dolly also, Omkara's sexual jealousy never leaves his mind. In one such scene, he tells her she must be either a 'lool', i.e.; dumb or a "churrail"; interestingly, here it implies enticing or seductive, that comes as a great contrast to simple Hiranman's evocation of supernatural being, like Pari", i.e.; fairy.

The most appealing and an additional feature used in *Omkara* is befitting music and meaningful songs that have a great lyrical beauty, like the earlier film

Bharadwaj himself composed the entire music of the film while Gulzar has written the lyrics.

Each song is suggestive; first song, "Naina thag lenge" suggests a marriage of deception, while "Dham-Dham- Dham- Dham Dharia re" shows masochism of the men. Sexual Lust, the driving force behind the film manifest in two erotic songs that are still popular, in Billo, the prostitute's dance, (Bianca in *Othello*) essayed by Bipasha Basu, like

"Bilo Rani, kahe to" and "bidi Jalaye le"

firmly establish the social milieu of men's world where women are in seen replica of a prostitute, hence, it can cost innocent people like Dolly their life. Keso fortunately gets saved, Billo is insecure so she too becomes their victim, as she cannot lose Keso, the only man who has promised to marry her.

Bharadwaj's adaptation in many ways not only makes departure from the original keeping in mind the contemporaneity, it highlights the major themes used in the original text like sexual jealousy and at the same time adds new dimensions by firstly making UP, Meerut the setting which is currently quite popularized in the OTT platforms nowadays for the realistic storylines. Secondly, not Cassio/Keso but Tyagi's wife kills him, and the film perfectly ends with woman taking revenge on man; however, she is shown standing near the well, her guilt drives her there.

Thus, the entry of two well-known female actors, Bipasha Basu and Konkona Sen gets justified as, the pathos of woman's subjection is well represented. Lastly, the music score too adds to the subjectivity of the emotions and suffering.

CONCLUSION

Both the films, *Teesri Kasam* and *Omkara* take place in patriarchal setting, while the earlier got filmed in 60s, the latter in 2006, and it quite appropriately showcases mobile phones, yet, woman objectification seems unaltered, in fact in the latter it is cruder and overtly disturbing. But while Nibendu Ghosh the director and Renu who wrote dialogues could not indicate change in society, Bharadwaj in 21st century, even amidst such subversiveness, indicates beginning of protesting women, when Langda Tyagi's wife takes revenge from her husband. Bharadwaj must have realized that the ending should be altered from *Othello's* to bring in contemporaneity.

No doubt, two disparate Hindi adapted films reveal contrasting social milieu as example of literature and language unification and one can see Hindi language being nuanced in both with the regions representing it. While in *Teesri Kasam* it is the usage of non-fluencies used by simple Hiramal, in *Omkara* other than the verbal, emotional expressions of characters and symbols are used immensely to drive home the subject of sexual jealousy and the destruction it causes to the men involved it. Bharadwaj however quite successfully shows progression in women's limited agency from Dolly to Indu, that not only Shakespeare but subsequent adaptations of *Othello* did not incorporate. There lies exclusive contribution of Vishal Bharadwaj.

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- ^{vii} *Ibid.*
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NOTES

Raja Harishchandra, film—India's first indigenous film made in 1913, it was the first of its kind of an attempt to give film making the status of industry not only in terms of craft but culture (information provided by Aasita Bali in the *IJLLC Journal*, 2014, mentioned above)