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A Comparative Analysis of Mishawr Rawhoshyo: Exploring the Dichotomy Between the Literary and Cinematic Representations

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Abstract

Sunil Gangopadhyay's Mishawr Rawhoshyo has long been a cornerstone of Bengali literature. Its translation into the cinematic medium by Srijit Mukherjee marked a significant event for connoisseurs of both literature and film. This paper adopts a critical theoretical approach to dissect the film's endeavour to preserve the novel's essence while grappling with the intricacies of translating a complex narrative onto the screen. It critically appraises the film's allegiance to the source material, the cinematic techniques employed, the nuances in character portrayals, alterations in narrative structure, and the overall success of this adaptation. Employing critical theories of adaptation and film, this study examines the film's fidelity to the source material, its ability to capture the novel's essence, and the artistic choices made by the filmmakers. Additionally, it explores the alterations made to characters, plotlines, and narrative structure, providing insight into the resulting impact on the viewer's cinematic experience. Incorporating feedback and insights from both literary enthusiasts and film scholars, this research endeavours to provide a comprehensive evaluation of this adaptation, ultimately illuminating its merits and shortcomings within the realm of adaptation theory.

Keywords: Adaptation, Comparative Analysis, Literary vs Cinematic Adaptation, Mishawr Rawhoshyo, Sunil Gangopadhyay.

Introduction

The acclaimed Bengali detective novel *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, written by Sunil Gangopadhyay in 1984, was critiqued as much for its film adaptation by director Srijit Mukherji as for its novel version (Mukherji, 2013). This essay aims to analyse the film's fidelity to the novel as well as the difficulties encountered in adapting a complex storyline into a film. In terms of capturing the

novel's spirit, the film succeeds in visual detailing through the cinematographic consideration of the novel's Egyptian settings, as well as its atmosphere-driven storytelling. Nonetheless, the film grapples with the persistent problem of pacing. Because of the film's rushed tempo, in synchronous pace with time constraints, character arcs and sophisticated plot developments as intricately woven in the novel are oftentimes diluted (Hutcheon, 2006; Cartmell et al, 1999). In

Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory (2006), she describes adaptations as either 'fidelity' adaptations, which contain a close adherence to the original and 'transformation' adaptations, which reinterpret the original work. *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* falls closer to fidelity adaptations but does introduce some changes in character portrayals and action scenes, making it a hybrid. The adaptations of Kakababu and Shontu, the novel's prominent characters, exemplify these changes. The characters in the film, although they are plot faithful, are devoid of the richness of the characters in Gangopadhyay's (2013) novel. Also, some subplots are omitted, which is preferable for the pacing of the film, but is devoid of the satisfaction of the carefully woven plot for readers of the book (Chandler & Munday, 2011; Gangopadhyay, 2012).

Research gap and Methodology

Although *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* has inspired a steady stream of reviews and popular commentary, there is relatively little sustained scholarship that studies this specific novel-to-film pathway within a clear adaptation framework. Prior writing tends to praise the film's visualisation of Egypt and its overall plot fidelity, yet it rarely documents, in a systematic way, how chapter-level narrative functions travel into scene-level filmic choices. Three areas are especially underexplored. First, the trade-off between runtime pacing and the loss of interiority in key characters like Kakababu and Shontu is often asserted but not carefully traced across comparable narrative beats. Second, the change in the medium of character communication, for example letters in the novel becoming phone calls in the film, receives little analysis even though it materially alters tone, reflection, and viewer inference. Third, Egypt is widely noted as a striking backdrop, yet the scholarship seldom treats cinematography, sound, and editing as adaptation labours that carry meaning otherwise

handled by prose. This paper responds to these gaps by pairing close textual reading with shot-level film analysis and by situating its findings alongside critical reception from both literary and film communities.

This study uses a qualitative comparative design grounded in adaptation theory. The primary corpus consists of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel and Srijit Mukherji's theatrical release. Paratexts such as trailers and posters, as well as published reviews and interviews from recognised outlets, are used to contextualise creative choices and audience reception.

The analysis proceeds in four linked steps. First, the novel is read closely to mark narrative kernels, character arcs, thematic motifs, and the specific uses of interiority and correspondence. Second, the film is broken down scene by scene, with attention to *mise en scène*, cinematography, editing rhythm, performance, and sound. A chapter-to-scene alignment table is created to keep the two tracks comparable across plot turns and character moments. Third, each aligned pair is interpreted along two lenses that are central in adaptation studies, fidelity and transformation. Fidelity is read in terms of retained events, settings, and thematic continuities. Transformation is read in terms of reordering, condensation, and the substitution of prose-only effects with filmic devices such as framing, blocking, score, and montage. Special focus is placed on three recurrent adaptation pressures identified in the paper, the acceleration of pacing, the thinning of interior monologue, and the shift from epistolary exchanges to phone conversations. Fourth, reviews by literary enthusiasts and film critics are thematically coded for their judgments on character depth, narrative clarity, and spectacle. These external judgments are then compared with the textual–filmic findings to see where public reception confirms or challenges the close analysis.

Credibility is supported through explicit criteria for each lens, a transparent alignment table, and memoing of interpretive choices. Where possible, a second reader checks a sample of alignments and rationales, and disagreements are discussed to refine category use. All sources are published materials, quotations are cited, and no human subjects are involved. Limitations include the single-case focus, possible differences across novel editions or film cuts, and the uneven availability of peer-reviewed work on this particular adaptation.

Comparative Analysis

Storytelling Technique

One of the most striking contrasts between the book and film versions of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* is the approach towards the narrative. In the case of the novel, Gangopadhyay (1984) brilliantly paints the story using the characters' emotions and dialogues, immersing readers into the characters' hearts and minds. This inward thinking grants profound understanding of the characters and exquisitely captures the core of human emotions and motivations. Readers, for instance, relish Kakababu's internal monologues that reflect his reasoning, while the youthful exuberance of Shontu is expressed in the way he interacts with the world around him as detailed. All these literary elements combine to form a vivid description of the characters, which enables readers to navigate through the world of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* by travelling into the minds of the characters.

In contrast, Srijit Mukherji's 2013 film adaptation depicts these emotions and internal states through visuals and dialogue. Cinematic storytelling, by its very nature, strips away a character's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, the film uses character interactions, such as through visage, kinesics, and voice modulation, to express what the novel conveys through reflection and prose. Interactions

amongst the characters portray many aspects of their bonds and lines of development, as well as the story's overarching emotional progression. Even though film is a visual medium, which limits access to characters' thoughts to external imagination, filmmakers artfully fill these gaps with external thought, decoration, angling, and acting, to hint at what a character is thinking or feeling. For example, unlike the novel, which could use pages to discuss the complexity of a character's emotional struggle, the film has to articulate the same idea visually in seconds, which may include the use of simple gestures or expressions far less elaborate than what is offered in writing.

This difference brings out the unique advantages and limitations of each medium. As Chandler and Munday (2011) noted, books possess the strength of being able to explore characters' inner worlds deeply. The advantages of the written form include the unrestricted contemplation of a character's psyche, emotion, and complex layers of reasoning. On the other hand, films and television shows must contend with the need to externalise inner worlds, as well as the limitations of time. While a novel can take its sweet time detailing a character's thoughts or reflections, a film must convey this information far more swiftly, often relying on the actor's portrayal or atmosphere created through cinematography. Therefore, the difference in storytelling techniques between the book and the film is not simply a question of preference, but rather the unique features and potential each medium presents.

Character Development

In *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, Gangopadhyay (1984) develops intricate, multidimensional characters and reveals them through their actions as well as their complex inner thoughts. Each character's thoughts and feelings are conveyed to the reader through vivid language and meticulous attention

to detail. Take, for example, the central protagonist Kakababu. He is described as an elderly man who is intellectual and wise yet is shrouded in mystery. His actions in the story stem from a multifaceted past. He is not merely defined by the mystery he helps to solve. In addition to the mystery, his history, psychology, and personal conflicts are important to consider in understanding his character. The same is true for his young, energetic sidekick, Shontu. He is also given a multi-dimensional inner life, and his emotional arc is explored in detail, which makes clear his personal and character development. Aggressive, Shontu is also emotionally mature, and his growth is a journey. Throughout the story, he transforms, resulting in a more fully realised character. These readers can connect more deeply because the characters are multi-dimensional and not just story devices.

Nonetheless, due to time constraints, films often must cut elements of the story. In rough alignment with this reasoning, *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, directed by Mukherji in 2013, lacks the detail and layers of each character's motives and backstory due to the compression of time. As a result of time constraints, internal character conflicts and subtleties are overlooked. A good example of this is Kakababu. While he is a key character in the plot, he lacks the deep self-examination he is known for in the book. In the movie, he is shown more as a man of action and dialogue, with no time for introspection or the psychological intricacies that compel him. In the same way, Shontu is presented as eager and adventurous, but the shrink-wrapped story reduces him to a less complex version of himself, stripping away the detailed depiction of his character development.

Additionally, the film fails to explore other supporting characters, like Kunal and Bapi, as thoroughly as the novel does. In the book, Kunal and Bapi play important roles in the social structure of the story as their bonds with the protagonists deepen the plot. For instance, Kunal

balances out Kakababu's rigid personality with his more impulsive and easygoing demeanour. Shontu's friendship with Bapi is another important thin strand that weaves together the social fabric of the story. In the adaptation, though, these characters are all too quickly pigeonholed into a narrow scope as their relationships and interactions are streamlined for the audience, leading to a shallow grasp of their importance. This reduction changes the social and relational structure of the narrative geometry, fractally shifting the interactions between the characters and diluting the significance of their relationships. In the words of Cartmell et al. (1999), the transition from a novel to a film often cuts the depth of characters and their relationships because of the limits imposed by the runtime of the movie. Though the novel's characters add layers of emotional depth to the film, the changes made to the film are required, and therefore, the emotional depth of the characters is inevitably lost. The loss of character development in the film, especially in the case of Kunal and Bapi, alters the focus of the narrative, which risks the tone and thematic resonance of the novel. The film version may capture the plot of the novel, but is unable to match the depth of character exploration that the book provides, creating a different experience of the narrative for the viewer.

Narrative Structure

In the film *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, one of the most exciting changes is the dynamic of the character pair Shontu and Rini. In the original novel, the reader is able to appreciate the gradual change in the relationship between the two characters since it is developed one step at a time in a very subtle manner. Unlike the novel, the film does not explore their bond and instead seems to portray Shontu and Rini's relationship as less emotionally profound and instead, as more shallow, visually based interactions. In the original novel, the most profound and important moments of their

relationship involve a great deal of thinking and silence, which is important to the development of the relationship. Unlike the novel, the film does not give the pair in the relationship these moments of deep introspection and thinking, which makes their relationship shallower. Because of these omissions, the film makes their relationship less complex, which in the novel does not appear to be as time-driven or focus-driven. In order to portray the film, the novel is heavy in subtle details which the film at the end strips away to focus on the plot's core (Hutcheon, 2006). Although there are changes in the character relationships, the film manages to adapt the mystery of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* quite well (Hutcheon, 2006). Elements of suspense, intrigue, and the novel's key plot twists are skillfully executed in the movie version. The film accurately adapts the fundamental pieces of the mystery and provides them in a captivating fashion. Although some subplots, supporting characters, and relationships are changed or scaled back, the main mystery of the story is intact, making the story still interesting and aligned with the spirit of Gangopadhyay's novel. This approach in careful balance between the original work and the necessary changes and omissions for film is typical of the adaptation processes where the order of the primary plot is more often than not preserved at the expense of the peripheral characters. There is a major difference between the novel and film adaptation in the way characters communicate. In the novel, letters exchanged between Shontu and Kakababu form a crucial narrative strand. These letters are important in exposing crucial plot points and, at the same time, reveal the character's thoughts. Kakababu's letters to Shontu are filled with reflections and provide glimpses into his mind, his investigations, and his complicated character. The film adaptation, however, changes this form of communication to phone calls (Stam, 2000). The latter loses a substantial amount of emotional weight that their communication had in the novel.

The replacement of reflective, slower pace of letter writing with the immediacy of phone calls diminishes the emotional weight of the exchanges. This adaptation decision is meant to help the film maintain a faster pace, which is important in film and keeps with the medium's demands, but it strips the work of a considerable amount of the reflective, meditative insight that the book's letters offered.

These specific changes regarding the character dynamics and how characters interact highlight the shift the adaptation underwent to meet the needs of movie production (Hutcheon, 2006). Movies, as a form of art, have unique challenges, such as a limited amount of time, the necessity of visual stimulation, and momentum. Consequently, some of the more subtle or intricate parts of a novel are edited to better fit the movie's framework. This balancing act tends to happen in the adaptation process, where the devotion to the novel and its fidelity is sometimes sacrificed for the movie's creative needs. Although some of the novel's text is omitted to suit the movie's framework, the essence of the story remains understandable and relatable.

Visual Representation

The film's strong point is Egypt's geography and weather; Egypt's scenery and cinematography make it visually appealing and play a major role in establishing the mood (Mukherji, 2013). Adaptations never seem to do justice to the books they are based on; however, in this case, the film adaptation by Mukherji portrays the elaborate and rich visuals included in the novel (2013). It is clear that the director, Srijit Mukherji, captures the mystique and grandeur of Egypt's landscapes in a way that allows the audience to feel as if they are a part of the film. Because of the locations and shots, as well as the lighting used, the film vividly portrays *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, which improves the experience of storytelling. As noted by Gangopadhyay (2013), Mukherji's attention to

detail towards the novel's visual world is deeply impactful on the audience's experience, especially considering that the world completely feels alien. Egypt and its pyramids are rich in culture and history, which makes the film even better, as the backdrop is not just a sham but something which magnificently complements the themes of the story. The emotions and tensions of the plot have a direct relation to the notions and the characters in the movie, and the evolving scenery emphasizes tension. As a result of relying primarily on visuals to convey action and scene details of the plot, parts of the film's story remain untold (Cartmell et al, 1999). The film's primary focus on cinematic "beauty" and filmy "thrill" captures the audience's interest, which means that certain plot details, like internal strife between characters and intricate pair dynamics, take a backseat to the visuals and action. Each of the elements in the film complements and enhances the viewer's experience and engagement. However, the in-depth character relationships and the psychological aspects analysed in the book are not as prominent when using this technique. The detailed description of the story's visuals captures the viewer's attention. However, some of the thought and introspection that are important in the narrative of Gangopadhyay's work are absent.

Adaptation Theory

When considering *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, it is possible to use both fidelity and auteur theories. It seems that *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, produced by Mokokonia Studios, is not an auteur film since it seems to remain faithful to the source material. Nevertheless, it also displays the artistic imprint of the director Srijit Mukherji as an auteur (Hutcheon, 2006). Mukherji does not abandon the core of the novel by Gangopadhyay, but rather, he includes transcendental adaptations and changes to the work as he decides to tell it through the lens of film. Mukherji's influence can be seen in graphics, rhythm, and other themes and motifs of the film (Stam, 2000). The filmmaker's distinct

creativity is manifested in the emotional tone, pacing, and visual style of the film. For example, the book is slower-paced than the film, which adds a brisk tempo that complements the requirements of the visual format, but also reflects the narrating style of Mukherji. In addition, the director's interpretation of some visual metaphors and motifs and the techniques of the camera provides a different interpretation of the tale that goes beyond the book's narrative framework. Such adaptations illustrate the impact of the director's creativity, which changes the form of the story into a different form of artistic expression, albeit still inspired by the original. *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*'s artistic style reflects the auteur theory, which claims that the director reveals his style and vision as an "author" through his film, differentiating from the original text (Cartmell et al., 1999). Mukherji's mark is clear through the visual storytelling, interplay of characters, and thematic motifs that he has selected. These creative choices, wrapped in the film's novel honour and maintain the legacy of the source material. The resultant experience is a unique cinematic experience rather than the novel's prose. Mukherji's vision makes the film distinct from the original material.

Conclusion

In the film *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, Mukherji succeeds in capturing the essence of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel, while simultaneously infusing the film with his creative vision through distinct narrative and character changes. The film's stunning visuals and atmospheric storytelling do make up for the loss of narrative subtleties that some intellectually minded audience might see as a loss of scope. Adaptations and changes in plot and character are bound to happen, especially in the case of novels with multi-layered characters and relationships. The reduced depth and complexity of the character, while add-ons deserve attention, can be attributed

to shrinking a detailed literary work into a feature film.

With a focus on adaptation theory, it is apparent that the film offers a fresh take on the source material while honouring it and giving room for new artistic interpretations. Although the adaptation does not hold onto some details of the novel, it provides a captivating and visually breathtaking remake that retains the essence of Gangopadhyay's narrative. The film manages to straddle the line between fidelity to the original work and the director's creative vision. *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* is both a tribute to the novel and a new work on its own. In the end, the film adaptation of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* blows one away with the artistic cinematic experience that it offers while still staying true to the original film in spirit.

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