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Pinjar: From Verbal to Audio-visual Transmutation

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ABSTRACT

Aesthetics has been an inseparable part of the fine arts - literature, painting, sculpture, music and architecture. Cinema is a modern counterpart of the fine arts or one can say the sixth form in the group. The object of the fine arts is “to be read, or looked at, or listened to, for their own sake, simply for the pleasure of doing so.” In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the standard way of experiencing their products as objects of pleasurable attention has become a matter of confrontation. In the mode of experiencing the arts, theorists and producers have “shifted from the maker’s perspective and a constructive model to an observer’s perspective and a contemplative model.” Currently, it is a challenging task to sustain the aesthetic pleasure by adopting, adapting and metamorphosing a work of art from one mode to another. For instance, filming of *Pinjar* (1950), a novel written by Amrita Pritam, is meant not only for an audio-visible transmutation but also manipulation of the “bliss” (pleasure) of listening to and watching it at film theatre. The paper seeks to analyze what induces aesthetic pleasure of *Pinjar* to the reader/audience during the perusal of the novel and the viewing of the film at theatre.

Key Words: *Pinjar*, aesthetic, verbal, audio-visual transmutation

Almost all studies - to say, anything we study from literature to science, history to religion, dogma to myth, and alike - in the universe are ‘logocentric’. We always look at studies as “words on the page” that is being proliferated in the form of a narrative. Novel, one of the most prominent forms of literature in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has been preferred to all the means of “cultural signification.” Cultural signification refers to a mode of value system developed by the Swiss linguist Count Ferdinand de Saussure who opines that all meanings are arbitrarily added to some verbal signifiers. For instance, the word “partition” denotes

division but the actual value of the word may differ from reader to reader in a connotative sense, meaning hereby, an Indian can think about the word to be related to the partition of India into Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan. So we see how a single word threatens the limit of its own meaning that is why poststructuralist critics believe that “all the Western philosophy is logocentric” which undermines phonocentrism.

Novel uses narrative style to tell a story that may or may not be true, but is always like the truth. Narration is the greatest part of a novel that became a site of attention in the twentieth century. It gives life to the

words which form a chain of verbal signifiers. It is an imaginary phenomenon of the narrative of a novel. In a novel, narration “foregrounds” events to “move” the reader. All events of a novel are taken from society but they create an imaginary world which neutralizes the points of view of the narrative. Owing to this neutrality of the narrative, the reader (a competent reader) finds loopholes in the web of the meaning produced by synchronizing the signifiers. In a novel, plot establishes a pattern on which the structure of the story is erected. The narrative is dull without narration: narration foregrounds or “defamiliarises” the way of articulating an event which arouses the sense of strange pleasure of reading the text. The purpose of a novel is not only the description of social events and the narration of a story but also, in the words of Joseph Conrad, “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written words, to make you [the reader] hear, to make you feel - it is, before all, to make to see.” (1)

Film, a more advanced form of theatre, started with the invention of camera in the late nineteenth century. The study of theatre shows that a film represents events with the help of action (and less with the help of narration). Although every story has some narration, a film creates a structure by the unfolding of the characters and their action. Many a time, we see, characters come on the screen and play their roles. What do they think? What do they behave like? Who are they friends with? And alike are some most important aspects of every character that are not told but rather represented to us through action and camera. Such kind of

representation gives us a very clear picture of every character’s characteristics. Here we are brought face to face with the speaker (not the real speaker who wrote the script) in person and this phenomenon shatters our illusion of putting heterogeneous meanings to the dialogue between the characters. When we watch a film, our imagination is confined because what we are led to observe by reading the script is already provided to us in a ready-made gallery of the scenes. Christine Metz rightly puts in *The Imaginary Signifier*, “what he [the director/producer] has before him [an audience] in the actual film is now somebody else’s phantasy.” (2)

Film is phonocentric. When we are watching a film, we are given possibly both the ‘sound image’ and the ‘concept image’ of the signs used in the dialogue. We are not led to multiple meanings; however, the meaning given to us by the film seems to be the final meaning of the whole dialogue. Through a film, the directors always try to draw our attention to some specific points of view. They have a humanistic approach to the meaning of the film and believe that the audience will fully decipher it because the audience is not only told but also shown the film.

When we talk about verbal to audio-visual transmutation of a novel, we see, the novel does not remain the same because, as we have talked earlier, it moves from logocentric to phonocentric approach to study. In another sense, the novel loses its dialectical imagination and becomes a monolithic text, saying in terms of Brian McFarlane:

Changes led to a stress on showing rather than on telling and which, as a result, reduced the element of authorial intervention in its more overt manifestations. (3)

Adaptation of a novel into a film does not require to be genuine because a full-length novel cannot be summarized within two and a half or three hours, that is why the novel is re-written into a film script which is not the real novel but only a paraphrase that is not (at most times) written by the author of the novel. Though the audiences do not like the same story as it is in the novel, yet they look for it in the film because, it seems to me, a film whose story is already known to them provides a new context. Braine McFarlane argues:

As to audience, whatever their complaints about this or that violation of the original, they have continued to see what the books look like. (4)

But Christine Metz says that the reader “will not always find *his* film because what he has before him in the actual film is now somebody else’s phantasy.” (5)

It is very difficult indeed to define the meaning of “aesthetics”. Grammatically, it is a plural noun but accepted in dictionaries both as singular and plural. No critic agrees to take any definition of the term as universal because everybody has his own view on the meaning and experience of the aesthetics. Some critics believe that it is a branch of philosophy which deals with the nature, function and experience of art, beauty and taste which create and appreciate beauty. Aesthetics evokes our sensuous and

emotional feelings to take a judgment about the intensity, perfection and universality of sentiment aroused by the beauty and the taste. But it cannot be taken as the most authentic explanation of the term.

Critics also differ on their opinions about the nature of aesthetics. Margaret Wolfe Hungerford rightly remarks, “Beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder” (6), so the pleasure of the beauty of a particular object is different both in degree and quality from person to person. “For Alexander Baumgarten, aesthetics is the science of the sense experiences, a younger sister of logic, and beauty is the most perfect kind of knowledge that sense experiences can have. For Immanuel Kant, the aesthetic experience of beauty is a judgment of a subjective but similar human truth, since all people should agree that “this rose is beautiful” if it in fact is. For Friedrich Schiller, aesthetic appreciation of beauty is the perfect reconciliation of sensuous and rational parts of human nature. Oscar Wild says:

Aestheticism is a search after the signs of the beautiful. It is the science of the beautiful through which men seek the correlation of the arts. It is, to speak more exactly, the search after the secret of life.” (7)

After analyzing such pithy arguments, one can easily find that “beauty” is common with all the definitions given above because it is the only thing in the universe that pleases most and lasts long. John Keats says:

A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
It’s loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness. (8)

But the contemporary study of both aesthetics and art is very controversial. New Critics have “approached texts as semi-sacred art objects (‘verbal icons’) and have asserted an aesthetics which resolves tension and celebrates organic unity, balance and harmony. Formalists have concentrated on “literariness” and poetics in so far as these defamiliarise routine language and sharpen dull perceptions. Functionalists and reader-response critics argue that every period or culture develops its own aesthetic principles, often defined against those which precede or surround it. Some modern views of aesthetics are politically charged, therefore, and reject the view that art is somehow above or to one side of social struggle. Marxists, feminists and postcolonial writers, insist in their various ways that a traditional aesthetics of harmony balance and unity is often maintained only by ignoring and playing down potentially disruptive issues of class, gender and race. They point to the existence of opposed and alternative aesthetics based upon different versions of beauty and versions of pleasure (e.g. representations of labourers, women, people of colour and family that resist or replace stereotypes based upon Western European aristocratic bourgeois and patriarchal values).” (9)

When the reader actively starts reading a text, a kind of “questionnaire cognitive processing” (Kees van Driel, “Aesthetics without Good and Bad: Reading Pleasure is Cognitive Activation”) seems to be specifying the ways in which s/he fills in the blanks in the text during reading. In this process the work is translated with the activation of cognitive process in such

domains as the rational, the affective, and the imaginative. In such a cognitive process, what the reader tries to raise for discussion are encoding, comparison, modification of literary text and reader performance with the help of the reader’s linguistic and literary competence. Various elements like characters, plot, dialogue, style, etc. activate above mentioned processes in the domains to lead the reader to respond the text.

On the other hand, while passively reading a film, the reader tries to establish a linguistic communication with it. This kind of linguistic communication has been clearly described by Roman Jakobson:

Context
Addresser > Message > Addressee
Contact
Code

“An addresser sends a message to an addressee; the message uses a code (usually a language familiar to both addresser and addressee); the message has a context (or ‘referent’) and is transmitted through a contact (a medium such as live speech, the telephone or writing).” (10)

Case Study

Adaptation has been one of the most important tools for cinematic craftsmanship because it makes the craftsmen utilize the already existing resource material in a new and trans-creative way either by changing its former mode of representation or recreating its theme in the same genre. The invention of cinema has encouraged the art of adaptation. Two third of the award winning films are adaptations of some literary works, for instance, *Guide* which won the best

feature film award of 1961, was an adaptation of the novel *The Guide* written by R K Narayan. *Pinjar*, starring Manoj Vajpeyi, Urmila Matonkar, and others is an adaptation of Amrita Pritam's most poetic novel, *Pinjar*, which deals with the sacrificial social contract of women – a woman is the property of the enemy and can be looted, plundered and exploited as a commodity. A woman has to sacrifice her personhood during such hot times as wars, partition, kidnapping, fighting, etc. and is reduced from the subject to an object. The film adopts the novel with the same intensity of theme but refines the role of women. In the novel almost all the woman characters have been represented as submissive to the patriarchal norms but Pooro evolves as a new woman. Although Pooro is treated as an object before being kidnapped in the beginning of the novel, she starts governing Rashida. She has been more possessive not only in her own family but also Rashida's after her abduction.

Many critics accuse the director and the producer for adulteration in film version of the novel. Actually, the film adaptation of the novel is never a word for word imitation because the film has to satisfy the expected taste of the audience. The novel is written (originally in Punjabi language and) only for the literate people while the film entertains both the literate and illiterate audiences. If the film is genuine copy of the novel, it is only a documentary film running for six to ten hours. The producer invests a huge sum of money on the production of the film therefore, he needs a market for viewing it. Keeping such issues into mind, the script writer recreates the narrative and dialogues

that cannot at least be called adulteration. It is a kind of visual and aural effect which intensifies our aesthetic demands. Music and songs in *Pinjar* draw us closer to the sentiments of the characters. They vividly describe their feelings and emotions. These are the most palpable elements to arouse sympathy, fear and pleasure in every human heart.

In the novel, in order to “grasp a scene, a physical setting, we have no choice but to follow linearly that arrangement of arbitrary symbols set out for the most part in horizontal rows which enjoin the linearity of the experience.” (11) The omniscient narrator of the novel narrates events one by one which makes the plot run sequentially in a horizontal pattern – Pooro's engagement with Ram Chand, her abduction, her younger sister's marriage to Ram Chand and Ram Chand's younger sister's marriage to Pooro's brother Trilokinath, Pooro's meeting with Ram Chand, partition of India, the communal violence, and so on. “However, though viewing time (and thus sequentially) is controlled much more rigorously than reading time, frame-following-frame is not analogous to word-following-word experience of the novel.” (12) For “the frame instantly, and at any given moment, provides information of at least visual complexity (sometimes increased by the input of aural and verbal signifiers) beyond that of any given word because of the *spatial* impact of the frame.” (13) For instance, Pooro's restless passion to see Ram Chand on a visit at Rattoval to cure eye ailments of Rahima's mother and the moment of their meeting episodes have been

spatially shown in the film with the help of visual and aural inputs.

Film is a highly developed form of theatre. It is well known that drama deals with action not narration, quite similarly, the film also deals with more action and less narration. For example, the song that Pooro's mother sings in the novel has only narration while in the film, to say more exactly, it has both action and narration. The characters are not only singing the melancholic song on the condition of daughters in traditional Indian families but also shed tears, have languid physical movement, grave gestures, share their feelings in the dark night, etc.. This difference between action and narration shows that the former tries to represent "low iconicity and high symbolic function, works *conceptually*, whereas the cinematic sign [the latter], with its high iconicity and uncertain symbolic function, works directly, sensuously, *perceptually*," (14) and "because of its high iconicity, the cinema has left no scope for the imaginative activity necessary to the reader's visualization of what he reads." (15)

In moving from novel to film, we are moving from a purely representational mode to 'an order of the operable' (16), to use Roland Barthes' distinction. The distinction relates to some important issues:

- (a) Differences between two different 'language' systems, one of which works wholly symbolically, the other

through an interaction of codes, including codes of execution.

- (b) Tense: the film cannot present action in the past as the novel chiefly does.
- (c) Film's spatial (as well as temporal) orientation which gives it a physical presence denied to the novel's linearity. (17)

On another level, the novel's metalanguage (the vehicle of its telling) is replaced by the film's mise-en-scene. For example, the violence unleashed upon the Hindus during the partition of India has been verbally told to us in the novel, whereas the film captures a scene that is non-verbal but aural and visible.

By comparing the two modes of reading, the pleasures found through such acts are quite different. As I have mentioned earlier that the cinematic signs do not allow the readers to develop their own imaginary generalizations about the narrative. They are not involved in the production of meaning of the film, however, it is a ready-made perception through the eyes of "somebody else's phantasy." In this process of reading, the readers remain passive and silent. Although their intellectual mechanisms are non-creatively reading the film, they are passively applying all the possible devices to penetrate the complex web of meaning. In such a process, their creativity is less active than their sense organs, especially eyes and ears. Whereas the linearity of the novel provides plenty of scope for the readers to develop their own conception of the text by giving a free flow to their imagination, in the process of reading the novel, their intellect is working more actively than their

sense organs. In such a process, their cognitive processing is fast and shifting from one sphere of meaning to another. They are actively producing rather than passively receiving the meaning. Thus the

pleasure of actively producing the meaning overshadows that of passively receiving it. Reading the novel gives “bliss” and the film an entertainment.

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