Film Adaptations of Some Short Stories of Rabindranath Tagore: An Analytical Study

Salma Haque
Department of English Language and Literature
International Islamic University Chattagram, Bangladesh
salma@iiuc.ac.bd

Abstract
Film is a powerful medium for conveying impactful messages to the viewers. At the same time, it entertains also. In a sense, the invention of film has revolutionized the minds of global people. It has direct and indirect links with literature. Both are for education and entertainment. Thousands of classic books have been made into films around the world. Bengali famous books and short stories are no exception. Most of them drew the attention of Bengali and non-Bengali film directors. Western film directors did not opt for any Bengali books, as the language, culture, and religion differ from those of European people. However, the structures of films and texts are different from one another. In West Bengal and other parts of India and Bangladesh, renowned and lesser-known film directors attempt to adapt Tagore's books into films. Viewers saw films on his fiction as well as novella and short stories. The reader, who has read or has not read the book, has enjoyed the film versions with fascination. This paper aims to show the connection between film adaptations in the Indian Sub-Continent, directed by West Bengal film directors and four short stories by Tagore.

Keywords: Directors, Short Stories, Film Adaptions. Inclusion, Exclusion

1.Introduction

Literature and films are two strikingly different mediums of art that have attracted readers and viewers for a long time. The structures and elements of these mediums are different. The book can be enjoyable, but the film based on the book may not appeal to the same readers. Sometimes, the opposite happens. A reader may find the film more appealing than the book, which is based on the film. In the words of Costello, "When the story of a book has transferred an analysis into a film, we define it as film adaption" (1997). Film adaptation, a prevalent word to cine-goers "refers to the process of translating a story or literary work into a cinematic production. This could involve adapting a novel, play, comic book or even a video game into a film"(STUDIOBINDER, 2020). The taste of reading a book differs from tasting a film based on the same text. Generally, directors go for all types of genres: such as novels, dramas, epics, short stories, and novellas for their films. " In today's contemporary world, all themes can draw the attention of film directors. The person who reads a book is known as a reader, and the person who watches a film is called a viewer. The aim of them is not limited to entertainment. They need to focus on the depth of these two art forms. The writers also never want to write to please the reader. They always target to make readers think deeply about the themes of their texts. Among the writers of the Indian Sub-Continent, the household name Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) has drawn the attention of well-known film directors for many years. Even the New Millennium films are made on the great writer. This paper aims to analyze the film adaptations of Tagore's renowned short stories "Postmaster: "Samapti", "Manihara," and a novella | "Nastanirh", which are appealing to Bengali viewers.

2. Discussion

The versatile genius Tagore's literature covers all genres: poems, novels, short stories, novellas, dramas, musicals, and paintings enriching the reader generation after generation. Critic Bhadhury states: "Rabindranath has dealt with all the issues concerning human beings and society and attempted to reflect the hidden recesses of the human heart letting the individual fill the vacuum from within the help of music of all-encompassing love, cutting across the narrow boundaries of narrow domestic walls"(2013). His vast short stories drew the attention of many directors. Bengali, Tamil, Hindi, Telegu, Assamese, Urdu, English, and French have adapted his stories into films. His film adaptations list more than forty, of which are topics of my discussion in this paper.

If we search for film history, we will see film adaptations of Bengali Literature started in the 40s. The initial phase of the Bengali film adaptation started with the fiction of legendary Bengali writer Sharat Chanda Chhattaphadhay. Later on, the classic film director Satyajit Ray's film adaptation of *Pather Panchali*(1955) touched the hearts of global viewers by blending film with art. In one sense, Ray introduced the viewers to the film adaptation of Bengali literature. Film directors face some issues about adaptations of classics. Sometimes, directors change the ending or some parts of the texts as some events are not possible to portray in films.

Apart from Ray, the renowned directors, adapted films on Tagore or Bengali literature of Bimal Roy, Nimai Gosh, Ritwik Ghatak, Guljar, Rituparno Ghosh, Budhdeb Dash Gupta enriched

viewers with their attempts at film adaptations of Tagore. Bangladeshi directors also attempted to make films on Tagore's short stories, "Kabuliwala", and "Shasti." In this study, my analysis will be limited to four film adaptations of Tagore's short stories and a novella made by reputed Indian directors.

"Postmaster"(1891): Two film versions have been made based on Tagore's short story "Postmaster". One was included in the anthology film *Teen Kanya*(1961), through which he paid tribute to the legendary writer on his centenary birthday. Ray beautifully portrays the setting Ulapur, but he has brought changes to the original ending, where the low-caste helping hand Ratan begs the postmaster to take her with him to his city falling at his feet. In the film, Ray's ending shows Ratan wiping the tears from her eyes and refusing to take the tip of the postmaster. When journalists questioned Ray about the change of the ending, he said: "he had felt that the original would have looked rather Victorian' on screen".(Chottopadhay, 2017) In 2016, Bengali director Srijon Bardhan also made his debut film which "had its premiere on 7 December 2915 at the 4th Delhi International Film Festival and "Later being released commercially on 2024 June 2016" (Narayan, 2016). Although Bardhan based his film on Tagore's short story, it is noticeably different from the main story. The difference is shown in the society of Tagore and the contemporary one. Bardhan's postmaster Nanda Sen, a member of the upper class gets disturbed by the rural environment criticizes, and undermines the societal norms and professionals. To get rid of his monotony, he starts teaching a village girl named Ratan, a twelve-year-old orphan girl. In the film, Ratan is in her formative years and charms the postmaster through her beauty who serves him. In response, the postmaster falls in love with her. Ratan receives ill-treatment from the previous masters and finds the new one appealing. Afterward, the postmaster breaks the social barrier and marries her. Post-marriage, at the appeal of his father, he leaves Ratan and passes a remorseful life.

Regarding the changes in his film, Bardhan points out, "I have modified Tagore's story to make it more contemporary" (*The Hindustan Times*, 2017). Tagore's Ratan had care, respect, and compassion for the postmaster. Bardhan portrays her as a girl who has a love for him. She dreams of starting a new life with him. Ray also changed some parts of the short story and included comic scenes to provide humor to the viewers. Film adaptation is challenging, and sometimes, the directors change the ending or some parts of the text. A director makes a film in different ways: impartial and partial adaptation. Tagore's Ratan is around twelve or thirteen, but, Bardhan's Ratan is sixteen as he thought having physical intimacy with a girl of tender age might not have been accepted by contemporary viewers. Bardhan arranged a marriage between Ratan and the postmaster. The wife also gave birth to a male child, who was not found in the original short story, and the postmaster never had love for Ratan. Ray also did not show any romance between them. His postmaster leaves Ratan without emotional attachment. Thus, Ray originality of the short story in his film adaptation.

Film and literature are two different art forms. So, it is natural to see changes in structure, scenes, and elements in film adaptations. At the same time, the Ratan of Bardhan's film failed to show the inner world of the leading girl. Regarding the way to adapt a film of a literary book, a renowned film expert, Roberge states,

> There are three ways for film adaptation: total reflection, partial adaptation, entertainment purpose . . . . To

> go from one medium to another, one must change. It is troublesome to portray the original story in a film adaptation. To be true to the film adaptation, the director is required to show respect to the book. Based on the story, he has to organize everything. (Roberge, 2004)

Whenever a director makes a film based on a literary text, he makes some changes either by excluding or including events. Sometimes, these changes spoil the main story. The film adaptation partially differs from Tagore's original short story. But, we cannot deny the chief purpose of filmmaking: entertaining the viewers. To do so, directors attempt to bring some entertainment changes. Ray's trilogy *Teenkanya*(1961), is related to the short story and has originality.

In the village set-up, the city-bred postmaster often finds him lonely. He also finds the uneducated rural people unworthy of his association. So, to rid him of his monotony, he converses with the helping hand, Ratan. Tagore says: "At any rate, the postmaster had but little company; nor had he much work to do" (2005).

Ray truly reflected the silence, the activities of neglected pet dogs, the chirping of birds, and the busy lives of rural people through long shots and close-ups. The viewers can easily see the awkwardness of the postmaster in the rural setting, as he is a city-bred person. The viewers of Ray's film awaken the curiosity of the viewers about these adjustment problems in the new area. They become eager to know about his life here. The viewers adjust them with the character portrayal of the postmaster. They cannot be imaginative. If a reader watches the film version later, s/he can have some imagination about the film.

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A renowned film critic, Harris Ross, who points out:

> Literature can, at times, have a fascinating connection with film. Whether it is a film or a piece of literature, both are written by someone that wants to leave an impact on an audience. However, movies and books have different roles. They each have different strong points: books give better characterization, stronger revelations and inner conflict, but movies create better mood with music and visuals/effects. You should always read the book first because it is good to 'practice' your imagination more than being told what to think.(1987)

"Nastanirh"(1901): It is a well-known novella by Rabindranath Tagore, which has been adapted into films by two directors. Satyajit Ray made a film on it, named Charulata in 1964. Agnidev Chatterjee made another film in 2011 based on the same story. Their films were able to draw the attention of viewers in the Bengali community. The films made commercial success. Ray's film highlighted the psychology of women, men-women relationships, family life, love, etc, Rabindranath never emphasized the physical love between two lovers or husband and wife. Ray also did the same in his film. In the movie, Agnidev shows the physical urge of Charu and portrays the characters of Charu and Amal differently. He wanted to portray the difference

between the time of publication and the filmmaking. Surprisingly, the viewers accepted the new portrayal of the main characters as they realized the value of current times and trends in human relationships. Film adaptation theorists view adaptations as legitimate, and directors of Shakespearean films also had these changes. Adaptations are made for the suitability of the film jointly by the director, producer, and screenwriter.

Ray also made some changes in the story and characterization, creating scope for voicing his opinions on the characters. He portrayed the positive and the negative characteristics of the nineteenth-century Bangli characters. For film adaptations of books, critic Costello states,

> Adaptation of film making is an advanced and important milestone in the development of human being. Film is the only area, which depicts the people, though they are of any class (poor, middle & rich) along with the predicament and happiness. Such depiction makes literature look more realistic and touchy.(1997)

Generally, books are read by educated, middle and upper-middle-class readers. People of all classes view films. Hence, its appeal and power are vaster than those of books. When the Ray film was released, it did not receive acclaim. The newspapers criticized it, but Ray mentioned regarding the addition and subtraction of his film, “At the beginning of the twentieth century, the films which were made based into epics were true reflections of the real stories, which were found literary flattery according to Rabindranath” (Ray, n. d.).

Why it is not possible to follow the book word for word must be shown here. In the original story, some events take place daily; some occur ‘sometimes ‘and some happen ‘occasionally.’ Charulata used to be angry with Amal occasionally. If anybody has some film knowledge, he can understand that these occasional occurrences cannot be shown in film adaptations all the time.

The main attraction of the novella "Charulata" is the psychological analysis of the characters and the sympathetic observations of the relationship between characters. The couple Vupathi and Charulata had a happy marital life until the arrival of Vupathi’s younger cousin Amal, who was either contemporary or younger than Charu. Vupathi was busy with his printing business, and Charau used to feel his absence in her loneliness. Charu and Amal bonded deeply. Vupathi spends his time with the new arrival, his brother Umapada, and his wife Manda.

Meanwhile, Umapada misappropriates Vupathi's money and escapes from the house. Vupathi was devastated at the loss of his money and discovered the newly developed secret bond between Charu and Amal. Their news broke him. In the film adaptation, Ray highlighted the psychological conflicts of the main characters, which are in the story. Many events of the story are also absent in the film. For the first nine minutes of the film, there is no dialogue. Charu’s frustrating loneliness had been highlighted. If Ray wanted to be true to the main story, he had to portray the transition of Charu from her girlhood to womanhood. To show everything in the film would lengthen the movie. Hence, Ray left out many events of the story.

In the story, Amal is immature, poetic, jovial, restless, and weak. Charu develops a bond with her brother-in-law to remove her loneliness in her married life, where the well-to-do workaholic husband is always away from her. She also appears to be indecent when she requests to remove Manda. In this story, the “willing suspension of disbelief”, created by Tagore's use of language is not present in the film.

Ray contemporaries his film with different shots, film elements, and his thoughts. In the last scene of the film, Vupathi decides to leave Charu. He changed his mind by extending his hand to his wife. The hesitant Charu also held his hand, although both maintained a distance from each other. They stood still, and the sad music played behind the scenes. The viewers realize their unbridgeable gap.

> Vupathi said, "If you feel lonely, write to me. I will come.
>
> Charu said holding his hand, "Take me with you. Do not leave me here alone.
>
> The surprised Vupathi's stared at her face and his hand got released from her hand.
>
> He said to her, "Let's go with me".
>
> Charu said, "No" (Tagore, 2005, p. 247).

The dialogues give us hints about the future bond of the couple, who want to be free. With this scene, the film ends. Tagore wrote the story with an inconclusive ending. The readers have the freedom to think about the ending. In the movie, the viewers cannot be imaginary and accept the reality.

"Samapti"(1893): In India, two directors made films on Tagore's renowned short story "Samapti". The first one was made into Hindi by Sudendhu Ray. Satyajit Ray made the Bengali version of the film, which he included in his trilogy *Teenkanya*(1961). Sudendhu Ray changed the title and the story. His title was *Uposonghar*. In the story, Tagore described Apurbo's return to his home. He also described the beauty of the river. In the film, we do not view such a description. It starts with Mrinmoyee's playing with her playmates. In the story, she remained childish after her marriage,

> Next day, Apurbo woke her up slowly in the middle of the night and asks her, "Do you want to visit your father? The excited Mrinmoyee held his hand and sais,"yes."(Tagore, 2005,p.105)

In the Hindi film Sudendhu, we find a responsible Mrinmoyee after her marriage. She wants to love her husband, Apurbo. He cannot respond to her love due to his dislike of his mother towards Mrimoyee. Apurbo distances himself from the wife, as he marries her against his mother's permission. At night, he secretly asks her if she wants to go to her father's house. She tries to understand her husband. In the background, the musical instrument sanai is played. In the story, at Calcutta, she surprises Apurbo at her sister's home. Ray's film shows Aparbu's strength to ignore his mother's conspiracy by submitting to Mrinmayee. Sudhendhu portrayed her differently in his film.

Ray remains true to Tagore's story for making the film. He portrayed the literary events in his film. He includes some scenes also. In the movie, Mrinmayee writes a letter to Apurbo, but she crumbles and throws it on the floor. In the last scene, she leans on the bed, and the pages of the letters remain on the floor. Tears well up in her eyes. The letter-writing part was not in the story. Ray uses several symbols throughout the film. Thus, he shows his artistic mind.

"Manihara"(1898): Two directors made films on the Tagore short story: "Manihara". Ray's film is part of his trilogy *Teenkanya*, released in 1961, which is true to the Tagore story, except for the inclusion of a new scene at the end. The film starts with conversations between the two

characters on the bank of the river. The unnamed one is the silent listener, who reaches the bank by boat and is about to enter a dilapidated mansion. The other one is a dominant speaker, a school teacher, and an amateur writer. It is a "story within the story," and the schoolmaster deliberately narrates the story of the haunted mansion to the stranger. At the end of the story, the viewers can understand that the film is about the listener's life story, who becomes Phanibhushan. He also becomes the listener, and viewers are surprised to see his multiple sides.

According to the narrator, a couple named Phani and Manimalika used to live in the mansion. He sent her a letter from Calcuttaa about his financial loss. The jewelry–lover wife was terrified of losing her valuables and disappeared from the house with her jewels. The husband, upon his return, searched for the missing wife. One day, she returned to him as a bejeweled skeleton and signaled to follow her to the river bank. After going there, he followed the skeleton into the river and died in the river water. Tagore's story ends here. With the help of camera, light, and editing, Ray made the viewers frightened.

Ray modified the last scene and created magic realism, a literary device by combining the real scene and his imagination. Sometimes, the listener becomes the character Phanibhushan, and sometimes he becomes the dead person. Lastly, he disappears from the scene.

In Devatma Mandal's film "Manihara"(2015), "there are some differences between "Tagore's and Ray's telling; and as a consequence, it loses some of that ghost-story flavor to concentrate its focus on inner suffering. The shift is from horror to grief" (Purvis, 2019). His story ends with the drowning of the couple. It is less complicated than the original Tagore story and is more than a ghost story, which highlights the inner turmoil of the characters.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, I can say that the inclusion and exclusion of any event in the story depend on the directors and the scriptwriters. We have to keep in mind that "Film and Literature are two different things with a similar goal to create sublimity in human imagination and understanding"(Ross,1987). The directors of the chosen four short stories did the same as the truth of art differs from the truth of reality. After viewing the selected Tagore films, the viewer mixes imagination with reality, and the fictional characters become realistic to them.

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