

An Analogical Study of the Narrative Techniques Used In the Film *Paradesi* (2013) an Adaptation of Tamil Translation (Yerium Panikkadu) of the Novel ‘Red Tea’

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ABSTRACT: *Narrations in films have always taken the primary place. Understanding the narrative culture of a medium becomes the prime motive of the narrator while working on adaptations. There is a strong connection between the verbal and visual representation is sequence, since literary and filmic signs are apprehended consecutively through time. The success and acceptability of a film is based on the narration style and techniques. This is very much true in Tamil cinema narrative patterns. While trying to adapt the story from a medium the director of the film Bala, has focused on trying to maintain the narrative syntax of the original, but has also closely followed the semantics of visual design. The Tamil film *Paradesi* is an adaptation of the Tamil translation *Yerium Panikkadu* of the novel ‘Red Tea’, which has been an inspiration for the director.*

Keywords: *Narration, film, adaptation, Tamil film, Bala, Yerium Panikkadu*

I. Introduction

James Monaco (2000: 44), film theorist and critic, finds that the film and novel stand close in that they share the same narrative capacities and tell stories from narrator’s perspective. Film critic David Bordwell (1986:82) suggests that we make sense of the world through narratives. He states that film, in general, tell us stories and these stories are made up of narratives. So is the case with novels, which also tell us stories via narrative. If a novel is to be adapted into a film, there are aspects and properties the two genres can share and there are those that cannot be treated and presented. A major difference between the novel and the film is that the narrative in one media is presented in words and in the other in frames.

One of the essential differences between the novel and film that Monaco (2000:45) proposes is that in the novel we can read only what the author wants us to read, but in film we see inevitably also those things that the author/director has maybe not planned to show. If a novelist has to describe things and aspects through his own perspective, then in film we can look and see details ourselves; thus there is a difference in the objectivity of the presentation.

The reader of a novel has to imagine, the spectator of the film has to read the signs and thus both have to undergo the process of interpretation of signs (Monaco 2000:159). The film medium makes use of visual images as compared to the novel which has a vast vocabulary at its disposal. Films are more restricted because it happens in real time and therefore we usually have only an average of two hours screen time, And in case of such limited narration it is clear that some details of incident are omitted, but as an advantage of the film, Monaco (2000:45) marks pictorial presentation that also allows aspects that cannot be transferred directly, “translated into image.”

Another distinction between the novel and the film is the tense form in which the story is told. It is usually held that the novel’s story is told in the past and the film’s story in the present. This fact makes the film more immediate than the novel, as it represents the action physically. The moving pictures support the film’s present tense, saying that through motion there is a kind of spatializing of time and it becomes difficult, if not impossible.

Another difference between the written form of narrative and the film is the sound effects that play an important role in creating the atmosphere in the film. The sound code is clearly an advantage of the film-maker, as in the novel the author is able only to describe the sounds in words. According to Monaco structures of cinema are defined by codes. It is through these codes that the film expresses meanings according to him. Monaco divides codes into culturally derived codes, which are outside the film .Adaptations can be looked upon and treated from the point of fidelity. Modes of adaptation are discussed from point of fidelity. Adaptations claiming fidelity bear originality as signified and inspired work stand as referring to the original.

McFarlane opines that it is arguable to what extent a film-writer should retain the novel's fundamentals and how to make changes to the original discourse. In this paper the adaptor, Bala has skilfully transferred the main parts of the narrative into the film. This paper tries to show how Bala, the director has chosen to introduce his point of view and has shown the original text from a new angle along with some of his view points. Bazin states (2000:20) that faithfulness to a form is illusory: what matters is the equivalence in meaning of the forms. He further explains that form is a sign of style which is inseparable from the narrative content.

The narratology inventory, when applied to cinema, is bound to incorporate and combine a large number of "co-creative" techniques "constructing the story world for specific effects" (Bordwell 1985: 12) and creating an overall meaning only in their totality. The absence of a narrative subject is to be compensated for by the construction of a "visual narrative instance" (Deleyto 1996: 219; Kuhn 2009) mediating the paradigms of overtly cinematographic devices (elements relating to camera, sound, editing), the *mise-en-scène* (arranging and composing the scene in front of the camera), and a distinctly filmic focalization.

On the other hand, the most solid narrative link between verbal and visual representation is sequence, since literary and filmic signs are apprehended consecutively through time, mostly (though not always) following a successive and causal order. It is this consecutiveness that "gives rise to an unfolding structure, the diegetic whole" (Cohen 1979: 92). The main features of narrative strategies in literature can also be found in film, although the characteristics of these strategies differ significantly. In many cases, it seems to be appropriate to speak of "equivalences" between literary and filmic storytelling and to analyze the pertinent differences between the two media in narrative representation. These equivalences are far more complex than is suggested by any mere "translation" or "adaptation" from one medium into another.

II. The film 'Paradesi' and the book 'Red Tea'

Adaptations need not be concerned with the faithful rendering of some original text, but can now take 'an activist stance toward their source[s] . . . inserting them into a much broader intertextual dialogism'. (verevis, 2006)

More particularly, it can be understood that the category of *hyper-textuality* to describe adaptation as a relationship between a given text (a 'hypertext') and an anterior text (a 'hypotext') that the former transforms, inviting a double reading. (verevis, 2006) Film adaptations – we could include remakes – are understood as hypertexts (new films) derived from preexisting hypotexts (literary or other textualised sources) that have been transformed through a particular series of operations, including 'selection, amplification, concretization, actualisation, critique, extrapolation, analogisation, popularisation, and reculturalisation'. (verevis, 2006) Furthermore, in the case of subsequent adaptations of properties – re-adaptations and/or remakes – new hypertexts do not necessarily refer back to original hypotexts, but rather encompass the entire chain of remakings that form a 'larger, cumulative hypotext'. (verevis, 2006)

The Tamil film *Paradesi* is a period film set during the colonial period and focuses on the pathetic life led by the tea-estate bonded labourers. The film is based on the book 'Red Tea' authored by Paul Harris Daniel. According to the sources the director of the film was inspired by the Tamil translation 'Yerium Panikkadu' by E.Ra. Murugavel. To put things in a nutshell, the film narrates the story of the pathetic and blood chilling conditions of the tea estate workers who were bonded labourer's, in South India during the colonial period. Bala, the director of the film had previously worked with the Tamil film maker, Balu Mahendra. Bala is known for his dark and disturbing film narratives. The connotation dark and disturbing is to be understood as a realistic tool of representation. His first film 'Sethu' made the Tamil film audience and the entire Tamil film fraternity to sit up and notice a new film making style. This was followed by his other films-'Nanda', 'Pithamagan', 'Naan Kadavul', 'Avan Ivan' and 'Paradesi'. It has been a pattern for the director, where his hero or main male protagonist is not shown as a mere muscle wielding macho man but as a degenerated version of the male identity in today's Tamil state. Sometimes the hero is shown as a person who cannot identify oneself to a particular gender or a social outcast or as an Aghori Sadhu, or a village urchin. None of the mentioned is any closer to celluloid representation of a 'Hero'.

The paper would be focusing on a few narrative techniques used in the film *Paradesi* by director Bala. Concentrating on narrative aspects of figurative language, humour, characterization in the book and the film, *mise-en-scene*, colour of the film, posters and music the researcher is trying to make a comparison of the narrative forms and how it impacts the same audience in different styles. The researcher also notices of how these narratives are used differently in the two mediums.

III. Figurative language and humour

The text uses figurative language which takes the reader into the past giving a feeling of a period text. The director in the film *Paradesi* has an introduction with a voice-over reading the parchment which is in the background. This is similar to the introductory content in the text *Yerium Panikkadu* (the translation of the original text 'Red Tea'). The voice here is serious, with a base tone applied which reminds the viewer of the film that the cinema here is a serious one in nature. It also gives an introduction to the topic of bonded labourers and the conditions of the characters in the text.

The humour in Bala's films is usually "dark" and "disturbing". In this film the same pattern is followed wherein every dialogue is outlined with some brutality and roughness. The language used both in cinema as well as the book is deep southern slang. Unlike the traditional Tamil cinema the language is not literary but crass in many instances. Humour is dealt with in a very insensitive manner- like insulting comments and remarks made by the villagers on the protagonist, calling him an idle beggar; he is called as 'Ottu-poriki' (collector of alms)¹. This is in contrast to the characterization of the protagonist in the book. In the text the village is introduced as Mylloodai in Thirunelveli district² but in the film it merely states Salur village (1929)

Category	Book	Film
Protagonist name	Karuppan	Rasa
Family	Married	Unmarried
Spouse	Valli	Lover: Angamma
Occupation	odd jobs	Village drummer/unemployed
Nature	responsible family man	rustic village youth
Close kin	Mother	maternal grandmother
Overseer	Muthukaruppan	Maistry (contractor)
Doctor	Dr.Abraham	Dr.Parisuththam
Offspring	one child (dies of malaria)	Son (out of wedlock)
Caste	Upper caste Nayakar's	Thevar's no particulars given

Comparison of characters and variables between the book and the film

Keeping in mind the narrative techniques and the nuances of story-telling changes are made in films. This helps in building the suspense and expectations in the audience. Elaborate fictitious characteristics are added in cinematic representations.

Mise-en-scène

Art director C S Balachander along with Costume designer Poornima Ramasamy have created a mise-en-scene of a pre-independent rural South India. The camera zooms into the narrow lanes of the Salur village. The costumes are typically rural and backward more precisely traditional. The properties used are traditional, not much description of this is given in the book. The director has taken special effort to bring out the nuances of village life through this. Properties like hand grinding stones, pounding stones, cloth cradles, ladles-wooden are some things which are prominent.

The complete village setting has low thatched roofs (straw and palm leaves). These are very descriptive narratives where in an elaborate language is not used unlike the book to describe the village and its culture. The scene of wedding is shot in open yards with not much of a setting except for bare necessities like flowers. This again brings the viewer to understand the visual from a very native point of view.

The first scene is set with a voice over of the narrator telling the viewers of the plight of the Tamil people who are captured with fake promises and are lured to the wolves den. The introduction of the protagonist, Rasa is done with simplicity and comes as a shock to the viewer to find the hero in such attire and simplicity. Throughout the film Rasa is abused, harassed and ill-treated by the villagers, the employers and even by the girl who eventually falls in love with him. This seems as a deliberate attempt by the director to break the stereotype created around the main protagonist who is constantly shown as macho in most cinemas. Considering Bala's previous films- 'Pithamagan'³ and 'Naan Kadavul'⁴ where the main protagonist is always different from the mainstream hero. In this film he lowers the status of the hero. There are scenes where the protagonist is humiliated- where he is not served food when he sits along with the others for lunch. The hero is also shown

¹ Beggar

² District in Tamil Nadu

³ National Film Award for best actor (Actor Vikram) in 2003. He played the role of Chittan, a social outcast.

⁴ National Film Award for Best Direction and Best make-up Artist 2010.

breaking down unable to bear the insults and the traumatic living conditions at the estate. The image of male chauvinism is completely broken by the director

Another aspect in the director's work is that he constantly bifurcates the main character into many smaller characters. For instance the main protagonist in the book is a married man who travels to the tea estate along with his wife, but in the film the director has chosen to break this entity of the protagonist as another character (his friend) who gets married and goes along with his wife to the tea estate.

The scene where the immigrants are checked by the self-learned medical practitioner Dr. Cruz brings out subtle humour which depicts a systematic brutalization of a section of innocent people. The narrative technique used here can be considered similar to that of the book where the author merely brings out the helplessness of the character. According to cinematic terms here is a point where the audience will start considering Rasa to be the hero who is their redeemer. But the film has no redeemer as such and we are left with suffering and no parallel story and subplots.

Considering changes while adapting the final scene in the film according to the medium and its narrative principles, in the film the ending is a wide angle shot where Rasa is grieving and lamenting that Valli has walked into hell along with their son. In the book Karuppan is in his hut at the estate and has a beautiful dream of chiding his mother and beside him is his wife and he teases his mother and tries to walk out of the house and his wife Valli (who is dead because of the epidemic at the estate) holds his hand.....this is a dream and in reality Karuppan is shaken up by the henchmen to get back to work. Both the scenes mentioned in the book as well as the film portray the same feeling of helplessness but with techniques unique to the respective mediums.

IV. Colour of the film

Since the film is a period film, the author does not give us the usual flash back scene but there is a direct start where the protagonist is instantly introduced to the viewer without any delay. The director has deliberately kept the film in sepia tone a grey colour depicting the soberness and seriousness of the story. The cinematography is ashen and gives the viewer a long stretch of the same shade. Nowhere in the film does one get to see the lush green tea estate in real colour except for a split second when the villagers arrive and look around in awe. But the camera immediately pans to the dry path symbolizing the dryness in their life to the labourers.

The sepia tone here does not fail the purpose of installing a feeling in the mind of the audience as to what to expect. On the whole the tone of colour used is very dry.

V. The make-up and costumes

The make-up and costumes of the characters are very aptly chosen and designed to maintain the simplicity and the culture to which the protagonist belongs to. Here a mention is to be made about the dealing of the main characters with simplicity and a very banal and simple introduction given to the main protagonist without any pomp and show.

In fact if the viewer is not familiar with the artists of the film they would miss out identifying the protagonist initially when they are introduced in a subtle manner. The make-up and costumes do not vary to an extent with of course a few exceptions of the overseer's wife who is dressed in pompous clothes and jewellery.

Another character with a different makeup are some women who befriend and bed the English manager of the estate. To set them apart from the rest, extra jewellery and a slightly bright make-up is applied. This is narrated very descriptively and elaborately in the book.

VI. Songs and background music

Music plays an important role in the film. Rasa the protagonist is a village drummer who announces the events to the villagers. This is done in the form of crude folk style songs and rhyming lines used in the announcements by him. Every important scene is dealt with a song which has the lyrics doing most of the description of the situation, occasion, emotion and culture. In a particular scene when the villagers migrate to the tea estate with the overseer who leads the troop in a cart, they are made to walk for 48 days before they reach the estate. This scene is a long shot giving you the impression of the large number that migrate and also how they are treated like cattle controlled by the henchmen.

The scene starts with a descriptive song telling the viewer how they are moving from homeland to hell without their knowledge. Lyrics compare the overseer to a wolf leading a pack of sheep to his den. A quick comparison can be made to the present migration to cities and to foreign lands which takes place in the villages and smaller towns in India.

VII. Language and behaviour

The language used throughout the film is region specific and gives meaning to the dialogues without compromising on the emotions and sentiments which are not experienced exactly in the book. Every dialogue in the film is seen as a description which keeps adding on to the character of the protagonist. Rasa is constantly proved to be a domestic animal like entity, even his style of speaking and behaviour depicts this clearly. In many scenes of the first half he is seen as errand boy of the village. Also the language used by the villagers towards the hero is very rustic. These factors help the audience connect to the characters and the situations.

Caste and class discrimination is made in the book with reference to the Thevar⁵ and Nayakar community being regarded as upper and ruling class people. But for obvious reasons this is not mentioned in the film except that the wealthy and powerful are mentioned as the ruling classes. Another incident is the Indian doctor, Dr. Parisuttham and his white wife. The white lady is wrongly regarded as the doctor. Also sarcasm and discrimination based on nationality and skin colour is shown in the expressions of the English man at the estate. A vivid comparison to the discrimination done to M K Gandhi on train in South Africa can be related to easily by the audience. Language has been a primary factor in cinema to help the audience connect to the characters and the sentiment the director is trying to evoke through his characters.

VIII. Music and lyrics

The music in this film is scored by G V Prakash and lyrics by Vairamuthu⁶. Bala uses music as a powerful narrative tool in his films. His previous films have won accolades for music scoring at the national level. In *Paradesi* the songs are composed on a poetic theme which suits the medium. Most of the song sequences are background scores which probe into the main theme of the movie. The scene where many of the villagers sign the bond (unknowingly) and move out to the tea estate, has a background song which affects the audience deeply with its lyrics which kind of warns the audience of what they can expect from the rest of the film. The director gives importance to the lyrics in his films. The songs are consistent as a narrative technique by itself where in the director fills in the scenes effectively. Be it his previous films like *Sethu*, *Pithamagan* or *Paradesi* music and lyrics are powerful narrative techniques of the director.

IX. Posters as an allegory in Paradesi

The posters of the film are also to be considered as a narrative technique the director uses to bring out the essence of the film. Most of the posters released for this film are connected to the film to a large extent. Unlike other commercial cinema where an unrelated item is depicted in the poster the film *Paradesi*'s posters carry the same mood the director is trying to maintain in his film. The colour of the poster too is sepia / grayish brown. Poster culture is a dominant aspect in Tamil film history and here it is used very effectively. Here the posters are used allegorically to bring out the deep hidden meaning of the film „*Paradesi*“ which means “vagabond”. As the title suggests the vagabond nature of the protagonist is shown in the poster as well. This is different when you compare it with the books both ‘*Red Tea*’ and ‘*Yerium Panikkadu*’ its translation in Tamil. Both the cover designs of the books are very neutral and non-allegorical.

X. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to find out that with adaptations from book to films the identity and authenticity of the story is not lost. In this film many characterizations used in the book are changed and modified according to the convenience and idea of the adaptor. The emphasis on situations and incidents in the film have been altered and re-oriented. As a result the film touches upon the issues of bonded labour in the estates of South India during the colonial period. Intra-diegesis codes have been used in the form of visual codes and scenes where the villagers are shown walking for 48 days to reach the estate whereas in the book they travel by train, are to give the audience an emotional feel of the pain and sufferings. The novel is more open-ended than the film that provides the spectators with a final scene of Karuppan dreaming of a free life in the novel and a wide angle shot of Rasa wailing at the sight of his lover and their young son who are the new set of bonded labours.

To conclude, the film adaptation can be classified as a commentary with visual intersections. The changes in the film are due to the differences in the media and also mainstream orientation and the Tamil film market which can be understood that adaptations are an individual's unique work of art.

⁵ Upper Caste Community in the Tamil society

⁶ Tamil lyricist and poet

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