



The Silver Screen Adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri's 'The Namesake': "The Theatre And The Pocket Theatre".

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ABSTRACT

Writing is essential for both theatres and cinema. Stage and screens are vital part of creative writing. Although literature and film are two very different mediums and when a successful literary work is adapted successfully on celluloid, cinematic consideration of various kind has to be made. The book by Jhumpa Lahiri 'The Namesake' is dense in detail yet many incidents that are explained in the book naturally do not find place in the silver screen adaptation. Meera Nair's film is still a faithful representation of the novel. The movie, despite various variances, is craftily made. Mira Nair very successfully negotiates such a daunting proposition is proof of her talent.

KEYWORDS : The Namesake, Silver screen, faithful representation, acclaimed film

In the field of the creative expression, stage and screens should not be seen apart from the creating writing. Writing is an essential for both theatres and cinema- the term scriptwriter is suggestive. Although literature and film are two very different mediums and when a successful literary work is adapted successfully on celluloid, cinematic consideration of various kind have to be made. The novels have been very aptly described as "*the pocket theatre*" and at the same time they have the advantage of keeping readers involved for a considerable period of time. Movies have only a couple of hours or so to keep viewers engrossed while sustaining the willing suspension of disbelief in the minds of the movie-goers. On the other hand, a film has advantage of visuals and music that impact the mind and stay in the memory for a long time fulfilling the Aristotelian requirement of spectacle and song in style in modern days with the help of state-of-art modern equipments. Since the media are different, most of the time it is not an easy task to say – whether a book or its silver screen adaptation is better. As far as the question of '*The Namesake*' as a film is concerned, though not exactly like the work of fiction by Lahiri, Mira Nair's film is still a faithful representation of the novel. The difference between two medium of expression has good reasons to substantiate the causes of the reason. Fundamentally, the book and the movie both delve deeply and richly into the same topic of displacement and the crisis and creation of identity while having the lives of immigrants as the plot of the novel and the film both. The movie, for the most part, is true to the narrative of the novel. It is merely incidental that in the movie Ashoke and Ashima, the male and female lead respectively, come to New York instead of Boston, as the Queensberry Bridge over the East River in New York and Howrah Bridge over the river Hooghly in Calcutta cinematically connect the two cities and thereby bring in the comparison and contrast of two different cultures. While the film opens with Ashoke Ganguli's train accident and progresses linearly with his arranged marriage to Ashima and their migration to the US, the book opens with the impending birth of Gogol and then flashes back to narrate Ashoke's train's accident and his marriage with Ashima. The book informs the reader about how Ashoke was miraculously rescued from the accident site very early in the story even though Gogol comes to know about it much later. Interestingly, the film keeps the viewers in the dark about how Ashoke was rescued until the moment when Gogol learns of it also. Thus, when Ashoke, looking at his newly born child remarks that his rescue from the shattered train was the first miracle of his life and Gogol's birth is the second miracle, it does not cause as much impact as the written words of the book do.

The book by Jhumpa Lahiri is dense in detail yet many incidents that are explained in the book naturally do not find place in the silver screen adaptation. For instance, the movie does not relate anything about Montgomerys, who were the first neighbours of Ashoke and Ashima in the US and with whom they share a washing machine. This omission very intelligently occasions Ashima's visit to a seamy laundrette and her realization that woolens shrink in a washing machine. This seemingly good-for-nothing event leads to an endearing scene between the husband and the wife depicting how the newlyweds find each other's company comforting in an alien land. But this added scene comes at the cost of the interactions with the Montgomerys, as Americans must be Christian, when in fact they are Buddhist, and

where Judy Montgomery mistakenly assumes that Gangulis, being Indians, are vegetarians, though they are not.

The growth of Gogol occurs at an unhurried pace in novel, but due to obvious time constraints, the movie had to leave out a few vital incidents in Gogol's life. One such important incident is when Ashima lifts the baby Gogol high over her head and a stream of undigested milk regurgitates from the kid's mouth into Ashima's open mouth. This incident throws light on a new aspect of mother-son relationship, emphasizing unseen ties that bind a family. Instead, much of Gogol's life in the movie revolves around his romance with Maxine and his failed marriage with Moushumi. His other romantic tales with Kim and Ruth are not included in the film script. Similarly, Moushumi's relationship and break-up with Graham is only cursorily mentioned in the film whereas the novel offers details of the relationship, thereby garnering greater sympathy for her character. However, given the number of episodes in the characters' lives the movies does touch upon, it seems rather absurd to demand for more exposition or for greater depth.

The death of the male lead Ashoke is pivotal in both the medium of expression i.e in the novel and the film. In the book, son of Ashoke, Gogol becomes aware of the significance of his connection to the author, Nikolai Gogol; as an adolescent beginning to seek autonomy from his family, and from an early age begins to resent his namesake. In the film, Ashoke does not tell his son about his rescue from the train accident until shortly before his death, at that time revealing the impact in his life of the expatriate Russian author and the true reason behind his son's name. Perhaps this is why the film does not end with Gogol retrieving the short stories of Nikolai Gogol, gifted to him long ago by his father Ashoke, and finally reading its first story, '*The overcoat*'. The movie conjures another episode at the end, to show Ashima back in Calcutta, the homeland, practicing Indian classical vocal.

No doubt, '*The Namesake*' is an extremely well written novel by Jhumpa Lahiri. Very realistically the book makes one realize and understand both immigrant families and first generation American born people as well. The book is written very exquisitely with just enough detail to keep one's attention not go astray. The movie, despite various variances, is craftily made. Like the novel, it very faithfully renders what it set out to explore the universal themes in two worlds. A tribute to Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, as the credit title suggest, the silver screen adaption of the novel is not the run-of-the mill cliché –ridden diaspora stuff with lots of melodrama. There is no doubt that it has been influenced by the aforementioned masters' standard of film-making that Mira Nair very successfully negotiates such a daunting proposition is proof of her talent. The scene in the movie, where Ashima looks through pier glass window at the lonely figure of Ashoke walking through the snow to work very realistically, speaks volumes for the depiction of state of alienation in a foreign land that hundreds of words might fail to deliver. Similarly, when Ashima steps into Ashoke's shoes, the low-angle shots of Ashima in her would-be husband's shoes aptly display her clandestine pleasure associated with matrimony. Very often when the literary medium puts up a challenge, the aid comes in music from Bauls and Bhatiali and Bollywood and Blues; and visuals too do wonder in the scenes when the narrative pauses at the time when the Ganguli family visits the Taj Mahal.

The most realistic scene of the Howrah station, Ghosh's voice urging Ashoke to go abroad, and Ashoke's enigmatic presence even after his death generously compensate for any miniscule flaw. Over all it is Mira Nair's wonderful direction, accompanied by competent acting from Irrfan Khan as Ashoke, Tabu as Ashima, Kal Penn as Gogol, Jacinda Barrett as Maxine, Zuleikha Robinson as Moushumi and many other wonderful talents that make this critically acclaimed film memorable and grand success.

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