

Cultural Politics of Adaptation A Study of Textual Intervention

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Abstract—This research is an attempt to uncover the theory of Textual Intervention, introduced by Rob Pope, the various methods that were made use of in applying this theory to different novels; in order to adapt the novel into a motion picture. A novel maybe too lengthy, with a lot of characters or many numbers of situations or plot. The novelist or author has the freedom to think, imagine and put into words, even if it has mounted too much. But the scriptwriter is, in a sense, bound in chains, so that he has to stick on to the time limit of a movie. For this purpose, he will have to engage in different procedures like cutting up of characters, whom he thinks is unnecessary for the story, or add up certain characters together, or insert a new character, all this according to the way the movie demands out of him. He is obliged to get into the deeper levels of meaning in a text, invade it from all sides, and thus produce something new to be presented before the spectators. In the process of adaptation, screenwriters often have the tendency to stick to the original story by making a few changes to the real novel. If the scriptwriter belongs to an entirely different cultural background, and his effort is to make a movie for ‘that’ audience, then the cultural acceptance of the novel also has to be taken into account. Here comes the ‘cultural politics of the scriptwriter into play. Even if the novel is set in a Western background, the scriptwriter is forced to think from the mindset of the audience, before whom he is going to present his work.

Index Terms—textual intervention, cultural politics, adaptation, target audience.

I. INTRODUCTION

This research explores the intricate relationship between culture, politics, and literature in the process of adapting English novels into scripts for Tamil films. Focusing on the cultural politics that surround the textual intervention in adaptation, this study investigates the creative choices, modifications, and negotiations made during the transformation of

literary works into cinematic narratives. By examining selected English novels and their corresponding Tamil film adaptations, this research sheds light on the multifaceted dynamics of intercultural exchange, translation, and representation.

The study investigates the motivations behind the selection of particular English novels for adaptation, the creative decisions made to bridge the cultural gaps between the source material and the target audience, and the negotiation of cultural identities within the transformed narratives. Additionally, it explores the reception and impact of these adaptations, considering how they contribute to the evolving cultural landscape of Tamil cinema and its engagement with global literary traditions.

This research is significant as it provides insights into the cultural politics of adaptation, showcasing how the transformation of English novels into Tamil film scripts becomes a platform for negotiating and contesting cultural values, norms, and ideologies. By examining the textual intervention in the adaptation process, this study illuminates the complexities of intercultural dynamics and the ways in which literature and cinema intersect to shape the cultural imagination

II. METHODOLOGY

The screenwriters often have this tendency to stick to the original story by making a few changes to the real novel. If the scriptwriter belongs to an entirely different cultural background, and his effort is to make a movie for ‘that’ audience, then the cultural acceptance of the novel also has to be taken into account. Here comes the ‘cultural politics of the scriptwriter into play. Even if the novel is set in a Western background, the scriptwriter is forced to think

from the mindset of the audience, before whom he is going to present his work.

In order to make this idea clear, three novels have been selected; each having two sets of adaptations – one in the Eastern and the other in the Western scenario. The novels chosen for this purpose are, *Madam Doubtfire* by the author Anne Fine, *Sense and Sensibility* by Jane Austen and *Misery* by Stephen King.

The novels are chosen in such a manner that the Tamil adaptations of these novels were released in between the time period ranging from 1996 till 2003, a span of seven years, with a difference of four and three years in between each movie. The first movie, *Avvai Shanmughi* was released in 1996, *Kandukondain Kandukondain* was released in 2000 and *Julie Ganapathi* was released in 2003. This will help to make the study more specific and to the point.

III. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Madam Doubtfire was adapted into the Robin Williams starrer movie *Mrs. Doubtfire* by Chris Columbus and also the Tamil movie starring Kamal Hassan 'in and as' *Avvai Shanmughi*. *Mrs. Doubtfire*, released in 1993, showcases Miranda as an established businesswoman; in the Western scenario, ladies going out for jobs and 'voice acting' were common. But in the Eastern culture, in 1996 to be precise, such a thing was unimaginable. Here Janaki (Miranda) goes along with her father to his leather factory. Pandyan (Daniel) is an assistant choreographer and so is always busy with his job. Janaki divorced Pandyan mainly because she could not stand the life of an ordinary 'family woman' anymore. She started to miss her pampered life as a wealthy heiress. Her father Viswanatha Iyer was dead against to their marriage because of the disparity in caste as well as financial status of the two. Unlike in the English version, where the children fight for a complete family, here Pandian disguised as 'Shanmughi maami' resorts to different means to win Janaki back. Miranda's suitor and the hilarious 'restaurant scene' is not there in the Tamil version; instead, certain fight sequences and the humorous romantic attraction that the old men have towards maami is shown.

The next novel, *Sense and Sensibility* has two movies – the Tamil movie titled *Kandukondein Kandukondein* directed by Rajiv Ravi and the English movie *Sense and Sensibility* released in 1995 done by the Taiwanese director Ang Lee for which the script was written by the actor Emma Thompson. The novel is being somewhat similar in character portrayal and situations in the English adaptation, but in the Tamil movie, taking the Tamil audience into account, many concepts had to be changed. In Emma Thompson's adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility*, released in 1995, is mostly true to the original novel; certain changes were made only for the purpose of 'cutting short' in order to stick on to the time frame. Certain characters that were crucial in the novel, like Anne Steele's younger sister, Lady Middleton and her children, etc. were removed. But when it comes to the Tamil movie *Kandukondein Kandukondein*, the whole scenario had to be changed. Ideas like "The Inheritance Law", Ball room parties, etc. were common to the Western culture. The daughter 'Padma' and her daughters were denied any inheritance of her father's assets just because Padma eloped and married against the wishes of her father, Chandrasekharan. Again, in the Eastern tradition, arranged marriages are common, and things like 'jidakadosham' caused the eldest of the three sisters, Soumya (Elinor in the novel) to remain unmarried; but she is highly qualified and works as a principal in her grandfather's college. 'Manohar' (Edward in the novel) is not her sister –in-law's brother; and also there is no Lucy Steele here, to come in between Manohar and Soumya. 'Meenakshi' (Marianne) keeps on iterating Bharatiar's or Bharatidasan's verses, and not Shakespeare's sonnets. 'Sreekanth' (Willoughby) is forced to marry the daughter of a minister in order to save his finance company, and thus breaks Meenakshi's heart; unlike Willoughby who secretly impregnates Colonel Brandon's niece. Here, the cultural differences are evident mainly in 'the inheritance' law and 'arranged marriages. Instead of including ballroom sequences, the 'pooja' scenes at the temple offers the young lovers to unite.

Similarly, in the making of the movie *Misery* by Rob Reiner, except for one or two scenes, the movie is in sync with the novel; but its Tamil adaptation, *Julie Ganapathi*, has some sentimental elements like family and other relationships coming in. in the English

version, Paul Sheldon is single, twice divorced and so there is no emotional entanglements. In the Tamil adaptation, Balu (Paul Sheldon) is married and misses his wife during his 'missing' days. The wet dream that Balu has is an explanation of him missing his family. His wife, daughter, and his best friend, keeps searching for him; Paul Sheldon's missing is not noticed for a long time.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research employs a multi-dimensional approach, analyzing the textual modifications, translational challenges, and cultural negotiations that occur during the adaptation process. By exploring the adaptations of select English novels into Tamil scripts, such as examining how themes, characters, and cultural contexts are translated or modified, this study sheds light on the negotiation of cultural identities and power dynamics within the realm of adaptation. So, to be precise, we have to keep in mind the idea that the background of a movie may change depending upon the cultural background of the scriptwriter, especially depending up on the target audience.

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