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Adaptation, Remake, Representation: *Five Point Someone - 3 Idiots - Nanban (Snehithudu)*

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Abstract:

The paper discusses matters related to adaptation, remake, and representation. It takes three associated literary and cultural outputs: Chetan Bhagat's best-seller novel *Five Point Someone* (2004), Rajkumar Hirani's super hit Hindi film *3 Idiots* (2009), and the Tamil remake of it by Shankar as *Nanban* (dubbed in Telugu as *Snehithudu*) (2012). Though the works are interlinked, the paper looks at two different media i.e. print and visual. The novel *Five Point Someone* (2004) and both the films: *3 Idiots* (2009) and *Nanban (Snehithudu)* (2012) have similar presentations of the same scenario but when compared they differ. There are copyright controversies and issues regarding this particular 'adaptation' which the paper does not discuss in detail. The paper mainly studies the relationship between print and visual narrations and presentation through adaptation and remake. In a limited way, the paper also looks at the representation of campus space.

Keywords: Adaptation, remake, Representation, copyright, media.

Adaptation has always been attempted throughout ages and genres and there are innumerable examples. It has been observed that many literary and creative outputs based on campus have always tried to depict campus as lively as possible and a place of delight. It shows love life, the rivalry between groups, student politics, and so on. But leaving all these, the novel and the films have some special points to look into. There are special messages which are very loud and obvious. The paper also predominantly attempts to see how the campus space has been used.

Five Point Someone:

Five Point Someone - What not to do at IIT, (2004) is a short novel by Chetan Bhagat who is an IIT Delhi and IIM Ahmedabad alumni. It is his first novel and was published by

Rupa Publication House, New Delhi, India. It is one of the best sellers of Indian English writings to date and became a must-read among young Indians. The novel is mostly considered to be an autobiographical account and a nostalgic reference to the IIT Delhi campus life. The story revolves around three mechanical engineering students of IITD; Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta, and their adventurous lives on the campus. These three classmates as well as hostel mates slowly turn into backbenchers and losers in the competitive setting. They try to cope with the system in their own ways but they fail and tragedy arises in their lives.

The novel is quite humorous and readable. At times it is sarcastic in representing the system especially the grading system of the so-called prestigious institutions. The system highlights a method of education where percentile is everything, for job, career, life, and so on. It hardly values passion for creativity where the major characters are five-pointers and their interests are different. It also represents the other sides of society, like poverty and the problem of providing education to children of economically weak families. In many ways, the novel is quite appealing. Probably that's why it caught the chord of the people and became so successful.

3 Idiots:

3 Idiots is a 2009 Hindi film, directed by Rajkumar Hirani and produced by the Vidhu Vinod Chopra Production House. The actors are Aamir Khan (as Ranchoddas Shyamaldas Chanchad and later as Phunsukh Wangdu), R. Madhvan (as Farhan Qureshi), Sharman Joshi (as Raju Rastogi) with the female lead, Kareena Kapoor (as Pia Sahasrabuddhe) and many others. It's a conventional mainstream film and when it was released, it broke all the previous Indian box office records and became the highest grosser. It was critically acclaimed and grabbed almost every Indian film award of that year. The storyline is nearly the same as *Five Point Someone*. The protagonists, three underachievers fight with the system. It indicates perfection rather than success and advocates passion for interests and professions.

Nanban (Snehithudu):

After the huge success of *3 Idiots*, the Gemini Film Circuit thought to remake it in Tamil and got the rights. Shankar, who was very much interested in the film, directed the remake version. It has Vijay (as Panchavan Pariventhan (Paari)/Kosaksi Pasapugazh), Jiiva (as Sevarkodi Senthil), and Srikant (as Venkat Ramakrishnan) with Ileana D'Cruz (as Ria



Santhanam) in lead roles. The film was released in January 2012 and also became hugely successful. After a few days of its release, it got dubbed into Telugu as *Snehithudu*. It's a comic drama and more on the same storyline as *Five Point Someone* and *3 Idiots*. It talks of three college friends; one going apart and the others two in search of him. Even before the release of the film, it created noise in the film circle. It is not just because of Shankar-Vijay, rather people wanted to see the Tamil version of the film and how it works with all local sensibilities. According to the director, the moment he saw the Hindi film, he decided to break his path of making only the original film and thought to remake it in Tamil (*One India*: January 11, 2012).

The film received many positive reviews as 'engaging', 'for everyone', 'wholesome package', 'entertainer', and so on. It bagged many awards and heavily grossed at the box office. *Nanban* can be simply described as an enjoyable film mixture of humor with some sentiment and sadness thrown in for that extra appeal as proposed by Malathi Rangarajan of *The Hindu*. Regarding the remake, few like Venkateswaran Narayanan of the *Times of India* argue as 'all is well and he sees *Nanban* as a successful retelling of *3 Idiots* which retains its soul and has its heart at the right place. But there are other views too. *Idlebrain.com* with regards to the Telugu version *Snehithudu* commented that "the magic of *3 Idiots* is missing" and the *Indiaglitz* stated that *Snehithudu* was a 'passable remake'. Anyway, *Nanban* is Shankar's presentation of *3 Idiots* in a different language, setting with its grandeur.

Fiction to Film: Adaptation

There are different ways of creating a story or plot in a film. Sometimes the idea can be original by the director or s/he borrows and adopts from some existing literature. John Harrington, in his book *Film And/As Literature* estimated that a third of all films ever made have been adapted from novels, and, if you included other literary forms, such as dramas or short stories, that estimate might well be 65 percent or more. Almost all of the works of classic literature studied in high school have been adapted into a film. So, adaptation has always been central to filmmaking. This is a relationship that we live with and it compliments each other and changes our way of reading, seeing, and storytelling. But while someone adapts from existing literature then a comparison surely happens. The film adaptation is generally subjected to intense scrutiny. Film adaptations from literary texts receive fatal criticism in a moralistic way as cinema has done a great disservice to literature. According to Welsh,

The most basic and banal focus in evaluating adaptations is the issue of “fidelity,” usually leading to the notion that “the book was better” (14).

Adaptations are like re-telling. So, the semiotic adaptation and the visual presentation of the same should be looked at from different perspectives. Sometimes adaptation is like replication and it stands on its own as an independent work close or far from the ‘source’. It creates a new story and thus, claims cultural validity. Moreover, adaptation can be seen as a hybrid construction mingling different media and discourses, and collaborations (Stam, 2005).

In 2004, the novel was published and created hype. It set up a new era and form of writing. Almost every student in the country read it like a compulsory text. Initially, the producer and the director bought the copyright from the writer and people were eagerly waiting for the film to release. Before the release of the film, the controversy came regarding the copyright issue as the film claimed its own storyline rather than a simple adaptation of the text. Though it mentions Chetan’s work as a source but refused to give the original credits that the writer was seeking. *Nanban* does not talk about anything in this regard. So, these can be regarded as independent bodies too. Sometimes adaptation and remake are translation that renews art through creative ‘mistranslation’. It sometimes enhances fictional elements. It is like multiple repetitions of the same story and every layer adding to another one. Discarding the notion of ‘original’ and ‘copy’, Derrida described that a film adaptation is not simply a faded imitation of a superior authentic original; it is a ‘citation’ grafted into a new context and therefore ‘re-functioned.’ Far from destroying the literary source’s meaning adaptations ‘disseminate it in a process that is democratizing (185).

Film to Film: Remake:

Thus, adaptation moves towards a new cultural norm. Contemporary theories have significantly meditated on the literature-film, print-visual, and original-copy tensions. A few are more focused on intertextuality or modes of production and allow differences between representational and signifying strategies. Another way of looking at it is through contexts, especially production, reception, and discourse analysis through film culture (Barlowe, 2011). Maybe the global scenario or the Indian context remakes have been phenomenal. Remakes have been playing a vital role to cherish good work, connecting new frontiers, and inter mingling with cultures. In the case of India and especially remakes of South Indian films into



Hindi and vice versa is quite helpful as they illustrate how cultures meld producing new knowledge. It intermixes various music traditions, stars exchanges, and so on. Sometimes the artistic and commercial success of earlier stage and film adaptations motivate the choices of production companies and filmmakers. In the same way, *Five Point Someone*, a successful Hindi film, has to be made in Tamil or other Southern languages for their own taste.

A remake is like re-adaptation. While some remakes are re-adaptation some are updates. As noted by Robert Stam some are trans-textual transformations (30,147). Remake plays cross-cultural significance in a pluralistic society like India. It may connect different regions. And with globalization today, nothing is 'local' or 'regional'. It also offers opportunities for the producers/directors as they make a known film in a different way and reach a larger audience. It might give significant financial gains. But not only from the media economic point of view but remake also provokes double pleasures with different developments, twists, interpretations, representations, etc. (Horton & McDougal 1998, 6). It also helps to bring out the film in a different form in the same language or other. So, the challenge to present in a more creative manner is always there. So, underrating remakes as mere copies and in dearth of ideas is not fine at all. In this regard, Horton and McDougal observed that,

Beyond simple remakes of one film to another with the same title and story, we are also interested in extending the definition of a remake to include a variety of other inter-textual types. What dynamics and dimensions are involved in cross-cultural remakes in which language, cultural traditions, psychology, and even narrative sense may differ greatly (1998, 4).

Multiple Outputs and Representations:

With the help of technology replicating things, the filmmaking process is a kind of representation. There are various other forms of representation too. Cinema tries to capture a literary piece through representation. What is predominantly common in the three works is campus life and its presentation. In the novel, the campus is more central and to some extent, it highlights students' life and activities. In the films, the campus is not so crucial factor, but friendship and other aspects are emphasized. Chetan Bhagat takes readers on a fun-filled trip to IIT and gives a glimpse into the eccentric, elitist world of India's most prestigious institution, whereas the film has used the campus just for its sake. The novel is much campus-oriented and close to the reality of the Indian campus environments.

According to Brian McFarlane, novel and film can share the same story, the same 'raw materials', but are distinguished by means of different plot strategies which alter sequence, highlight different emphases, which in a word defamiliarize the story (23).

Though the novel and the films come under a large category of campus life the kind of campuses shown is the IIT type which is somewhat different from other campus life. The pressure of work and ambiance makes students work like a machine. Anxiety prevails on them for good grades and for jobs or creating something distinct and so on. The IITs are infamous for stress, and individual failure and lead to many complex problems. It seems the pressure of work has made these institutions like pressure cookers rather a place of learning. On the contrary, the average college - university campus life is livelier and it follows a mixed pattern and system. There is a contrast in the common campus situations of the IITs and the presentations, which are interesting to look into in these works. Once in the novel the character Rayan says,

You know guys, this whole IIT system is sick. Because, tell me, how many great engineers or scientists have come out of IIT? I mean that is supposed to be the best college in India, the best technology institute for a country of a billion. But has IIT ever invented anything? Or made any technical contribution to India? Over thirty years of IITs, yet, all it does is train some bring kids to work in multinationals. I mean look at MIT in the USA... What is wrong in the system... This system of relative grading and overburdening the students. I mean it kills the best fun years of your life. But it kills something else. Where is the room for original thought? Where is the time for creativity? It is not fair ().

Representation depends on the medium. The issue of censorship and other things comes in. In this regard, books enjoy little more freedom than the visual public domain like cinema. For example, in all three works, there is a context where the male protagonist gets into the female characters' room. The book has a quite elaborate description whereas both the films are more restricted. Probably, they felt that it might offend public decency. So, as the film is a public medium, it is more vulnerable and socially responsible. In all the works there are economic disparities among the characters, but Bhagat was not restricted to putting a Muslim character while the Hindi film does. It's a more business-oriented platform and probably tries to appeal to the mass audience. While adapting a film from a literary text, the screenwriters of the filmmakers make major changes due to the demand for the new



medium. Films and texts have their own style of narrating a story. There are various different techniques. The other point is how to make the story 'new' and fit for a contemporary audience.

The language of books and films is radically different. The length of a novel and a film is a problematic factor too. But one might get a maximum of three hours to cover a huge novel. The films seem somewhat humorous but it touches people and conveys a few messages. Importantly the films just do not restrict to the campus, they move outside of it like family, hospitals, shopping malls, wedding ceremonies, etc. The final parts have almost shown outside situations and the locations and sequences have strengthened a lot, which is somewhat different from the novel. The film, along with friendship, also shows rivalry among students. The character Chatur represents a type of student class who are worried about good grades, a job in foreign countries, etc. At the same time, it advocates a learning process focusing on the competitive world.

Films are representations of events, ideas, and sentiments in an attractive manner of exhibition, which are attractive and entertaining. Both the fiction and the films have ragging scenes (s) which were important practices in campus life. Whereas Bhagat was closely presenting the ragging episode in the book but the films make it intensely dramatic and lively. It gives much space to the main character. Other than the major characters the helping boy or Millimeter grabs our attention. One can easily find this type of small kids on or around any campus. Sometimes they connect between the old and the new. The use of physical space varies in the novel and films. It is small and limited, just running within some blocks of campus, classroom, hostel, water tank, etc. There is hardly any in between the campus offices, quarters, hostels, or the classrooms and academic block. The bathrooms are quite representative, though in reality, hardly anyone dances or sings 'All is well. It is not important whether the films are 'faithful or not to the 'source', but rather how they convey the message or appropriate meaning.

The filmmakers are not just simple translators but rather independent artists and authors in their own rights. Thus, they work accordingly too. The director, other professors, and staff who represent the education system have been portrayed as trivial. The novel was not so critical of the director. Probably films made him a villain perhaps in the need of the story. The scene where the professor asks 'what is a machine in the class indicates the bookish way of teaching and treatment to students. There are many spaces where the films

comment on the system, which promotes excellence and extraordinary type for survival in this world. But on the other hand, the works cherish the creative spirit of students and hint not to be like machines. So, the novel and the films represent campus differently from the conventional way of representing campus. They have a strong message about our faulty education system which pressurizes the students and under that pressure, students give up their life. Students are forced to be like machines or else they have to stand in the last row in the photo session or as backbenchers, they lose their identity and suicide. In this race students like Lobo die in this mental pressure, writing 'I quit' or Raju attempts suicide. They beg for their souls to be listened but hardly 'sunshine' comes to them.

Representation is like social reality and works as social commentary. The films talk about and make a difference between knowledge and degree-based education. The young child sits in classrooms, gains knowledge, and gives less value to a degree. In fact, later giving certificates to someone else and reaches excellence through the achieved knowledge and realistic practices. The protagonist uses knowledge for the common masses and simplifies their life by helping them. On the other side, in fiction, the boys jump from the hostel to catch a movie and we realize the differences in their outlooks. Alok wants to conform to the system, Ryan wants to beat it and Hari, the narrator, is in between, while in the movie, Rancho demonstrates right at the beginning that he likes to bathe in public and learn things himself by opening up parts of machines. So, film representation deals with places, characters, and atmosphere.

A film adaptation is like a round and circular dance, and a film is like a circus where the audience is always under the power of the 'police'. Alok's typically poor filmy family, boys' daring night outs, the female characters' revelation of her brother's death due to a train accident - all these elements from the book have made an integral part of the screenplay. Music occupies a crucial position and plays an important role in film representation. It extends narratives. First, the set of exams pressure and the narrator Hari's budding romance with Neha, in the book, Bhagat speaks about the tension, the pressure on the eve of exams. Hirani uses a song to bring out this angst and unleashes a dramatic twist on student suicide. Representation is nothing but a set of images associated with reality. The study pattern, the semester, the course work, lab, assignments, quizzes, tests, and studying late at night which are more realistic pictures of campus have been presented. The films revolve around only a few important characters and highlight them. Hardly importance has been given to other



small characters. But in the novel even the senior who rags students become prominent. Hostel or wingmates are not ignored too. The novel is much more hostel oriented whereas the films are not. The hostel, hostel mess, hostel food, morning walk, and cheap canteen make the novel close to the campus reality. Contrarily, Welsh argues,

A good adaptation doesn't necessarily have to be exactly "by the book," but many will expect it to be at least *close* to the book and not an utter betrayal. And, as the essays that follow here suggest, the "book" could be a history book or a biography, as well as a novel or play (24).

Books and films are very often seen as competitive versions. But it is quite clear that adaptation is not merely a reproduction of the same, rather it is more like rendering, interpreting in a new way. In the representation part, the novel concentrates on campus life at its best, the films narrow it to friends and move beyond conventional 'campus' for so many reasons. Whereas in the novel, the campus gets a touch of reality, in the fiction, the films fail to give a real feel and a more didactic and melodramatic look to the campus. Anyway, this adaptation and remake are noteworthy and complex. As Barlowe argues, "cinematic adaptations more generally, are consciously intertextual, significantly compressed, and re-imagined translations of the source text, produced within the contexts and confines of prevailing cinematic practices and the filmmakers' own artistic visions" (39).

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