

Reading Dickens' *Great Expectations* through the Lens of Cultural Intermediality

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Abstract: The proposed paper aims to explore the intermediality and transculturality through the two transcultural Intermedial-transposition (cinematic adaptation) of Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1861). One of the two films bears the eponymous name of the novel i.e. *Great Expectations* (1998), and the other one is *Fitoor* (2016). The paper endeavors to explore the elements of (cultural) intermediality of the contemporary America in the former Hollywood film, and the same elements of the contemporary India in the latter Bollywood film. The paper attempts to analyze both these films with respect to the source text of Dickens, i.e. with the 19th century contemporary England. Thus, the proposed paper argues for the role of intermediality in literature and film-studies (hence, the visual-culture) by analyzing the cross geo-cultural elements of the novel and the films.

Keywords: Intermediality, Cultural Intermediality, Visual Medium (and Culture), Transcultural-Film (adaptation), Hollywood, Bollywood

Introduction:

This intermedial reading traverses the vast domain of intermediality research which has been dilating since the early decades of the twentieth century across the globe. The present study prospects the connection of 'literature' with film (and thus their mutual connection with culture as well) by delving into the distinct concepts such as intermediality, intermedial transposition, cultural intermediality, transculturality, transcultural-intermedial transposition etc. As intermediality is a hypernym which encompasses various other terms and concepts, so "it becomes necessary to define one's own particular understanding of intermediality more precisely, and to situate one's individual approach within a broader spectrum" (Rajewsky 45). The term, intermediality can be bifurcated as 'inter' means between, and 'medial(ity)', means pertaining to media (singular – medium). According to

Werner Wolf, “Medium, as used in literary and intermedial studies, is conventionally and culturally distinct means of communication . . . in the public transmission of contents that include, but are not restricted to, referential ‘messages.’ Generally, media make a difference as to what kind of content can be evoked, how these contents are presented, how they are experienced” (206). Thus, broadly, the term intermediality implies any relation between distinct media, which here are ‘literature’ (to be specific, novel) and film, which makes the study interdisciplinary *per se*. If Plato was alive today, he would have declared that as the novel (art) is twice removed from the reality, so any of its film adaptation is thrice removed from the reality. The other way round, Aristotle would have defended the art (film adaptation) by sharing the similar thoughts of Chiel Kattenblat, one of the prominent names in the domain of intermediality research, expresses, “Media changes and co-relations between media have resulted in new forms of representations; new dramaturgical strategies; new principles of structuring and staging words, images and sounds; new ways of positioning performing bodies in time and space; of creating time-space relationship; of developing new modes of perception; and of generating new cultural, social and psychological meanings” (21). When the origin of the ‘text’ is known, then according to Irina O. Rajewsky, this kind of phenomenon is called “intermedial transposition” (51). It includes the transformation of text from the source medium into the target medium e.g. literary adaptations, novelization etc. The intermedial transposition takes place “with respect to both formal and content phenomena” (Wolf 655). Besides the form and content, when a narrative is ‘translated’ across media borders, the culture of the text also gets transformed with the transformation of the medium. This transference of culture occurs under the phenomenon of “cultural intermediality” (Stein 182). This term includes the concept of transculturality which includes the anthropological approach to ‘read’ the culture(s). The term transcultural-intermedial transposition that is used in the study, refers to the intermedial transposition (from novel to film) which have the setting of the target-text in different nation state and era, and thus different culture than that of the source-text. This section delineated the core theory of the study. Apart from establishing the theory of intermediality, now the study would embody the theory in praxis as well. For that, Dickens’ *Great Expectations* (1861) has been taken, and amongst the two target texts, Alfonso Cuarón’s eponymous Hollywood film released in 1998 and Abhishek Kapoor’s Bollywood (Hindi) film *Fitoor* (2016) have been taken. The present study endeavors to explore the target texts with respect to the source text, and establish the mutual cultural differences and similarities.

Theory in Praxis:

The 1998 (post)modern American film *Great Expectations* is a contemporary transcultural-intermedial transposition of the 1861 eponymous novel by Charles Dickens. Many classic lovers don’t like this film for its transformation in a way that it loses the classic status of the novel. But objectively, it can be considered as a fair example of the (trans)cultural intermediality i.e. the target text represents (transforms) the source text in a different medium (which here is film) with a different culture (which here is the contemporary American culture) than that of the source text’s culture of the Victorian

England. The film changes the name of many characters of the source text (except Estella's and Joe's) like Pip as Finn, Magwitch as Arthur Lustig, Miss Havisham as Nora Dinsmoor, Mr. Jaggers as Ragno, Bentley Drummle as Walter Plane etc. as per the contemporary American names and surnames. It would be right to say that the film emphasizes mostly (if not only) on the plot-line of Pip-Estella relationship. Nevertheless, when we watch the film, we find no Pip and Estella, but 'like-Pip' and 'like-Estella' characters, and even it'd be an exaggeration to label them such. In-fact, it'd also be an exaggeration if the whole film could even be labeled as 'like-Great Expectations', the similar words are expressed sarcastically by the film critic Lisa Thatcher in an article that "the problem with Cuarón's *Great Expectations* lies in the title" (Thatcher). Well! What alternative title could have been used instead of the current one? 'Fifty Shades of Green' would have been an appropriate title, as in every scene (except the ending scene where Estella wears white dress) of the film, the attire of Estella and Ms Dinsmoor is of green color, and many a times Finn also wear green. For representing the rural and urban setting (including culture) of the novel's Kent and London, the setting in the film is changed with Florida and New York respectively, both of which resembles the novel's locations geographically and culturally (the former representing rural/suburb culture of the contemporary America and the latter being urban/metropolis culture). The elements of transculturality can be seen at various instances, some of which are; (i) when Finn brings tool to Arthur, along with that he also brings some liquor and some medicine which the boy doesn't know what is used for, but it's known to audience when Arthur speaks while reading the medicine strip as birth control pills; (ii) showing the modern mode of transportations such as motor boats, cars, trains, airplanes; (iii) actors wearing the modern clothes etc. The film, while making it 'modern', loses the novel's classic elements. Once the director of the film Alfonso Cuarón himself regretted for making this film by stating (in the roundtable of directors of The Hollywood Reporter) that "... I did a film that was a horrible experience, *Great Expectations* (1998). That is a film that I should have not done. I passed many times, and then I ended up saying yes for the wrong reasons" (Cuarón). According to Cuarón, *Great Expectations* was "a complete failed film", while Lubezki, the cinematographer of the film defined it as "the least satisfying of our movies" (Lang). This film is certified as 'R' i.e. 'Restricted' by MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) for having some adult scenes and nudity in the film. There are various instances where the contemporary American (vulgar) slangs are used. Because of these slangs also, the film loses the originality of the source text i.e. the classicality of the classic. Two of such instances are: (i) when Finn encounters with Arthur, and latter consistently uses the word "fucking" as an intensive for 'damned'; (ii) when Finn first time visits Nora Dinsmoor, and asked to him by touching his hands over her bosom that, "what is it?" and he responds by saying "your boob", for which she replied "my heart, it's my heart".

The 2016 (post)modern Indian (Hindi) film *Fitoor* is a contemporary transcultural-intermedial transposition of the 1861 eponymous novel by Charles Dickens. "Based, sometimes loosely, sometimes carelessly, sometimes pointlessly, on "Great Expectations," the Hindi movie "Fitoor" is at all times more Bollywood than Dickens" (Saltz). *Fitoor*, unlike

Cuarón's *Great Expectations* (1998), the American adaptation, keeps the transformation in a way that it retains the classicality of the source text. Objectively it can be considered as quite a good example of the (trans)cultural intermediality i.e. the target text represents (transforms) the source text in a different medium (which here is film) with a different culture (which here is the contemporary Indian culture) than that of the source text's Victorian culture. The film changed the name of many characters of the source text such as Estella as Firdaus, Pip as Noor, Magwitch as Muazzam, Miss Havisham as Begum Hazrat Jaan, Joe as Junaid, Mrs. Gargery as Rukhsar, Herbert as Aarif, Bentley Drummle as Bilaal etc. as per the contemporary Indian names and surnames. All the names belong to the Muslim community as the shown setting is Kashmir. It would be right to say that the film emphasizes mostly on the plot-line of Noor-Firdaus relationship and Begum's past traumatic jilt in love (through analepses i.e. flashbacks). For representing the rural and urban setting (including culture) of the novel's Kent and London, the setting in the film is changed with Kashmir and Delhi respectively, both of which resembles the novel's locations geographically and culturally (the former representing rural/suburb culture of the contemporary India and the latter being urban/metropolis culture). The Satis House where Miss Havisham (here in the film, Begum Hazrat Jaan) lives, is 'replaced' with the 'Anjuman'. The film being contemporary Indian can be seen at various instances, some of which are; (i) The border tension between India and Pakistan is shown; (ii) it's presumed that Muazzam who in the source text is named Magwitch was an absconded convict, here is a Pakistani militant commander; (iii) how aesthetically and craftily the director and the script-writer showed the death of Noor's sister Rukhsar in a terrorist bomb attack, unlike the novel, where Pip's sister had been attacked by Orlick. The very next day of the bomb attack, when Noor visits the Anjuman, Begum told him that Firdaus had gone to London, as she couldn't be grown-up and educated here, where there are everyday explosions occur; (iv) it's displayed that how the attire of Firdaus changes while living in the metropolis whether Delhi or London, and while going back to her native town in Kashmir. She changes her attire according to the cultural changes in the setting.

Conclusion:

The paper explores the key theory of intermediality and its various constituents such as intermedial transposition, cultural intermediality, transculturality, transcultural-intermedial transposition etc. The study attempts to explain all these mentioned phenomena succinctly. A theory is not worthy unless it's applied into praxis. Thus, the paper endeavors to embody the theory and the phenomena regarding it into the praxis as well. In this way, it's tried to observe the transnationality and Intermediality in the two intermedial transpositions of Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

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