

FROM *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* TO *BRIDE AND PREJUDICE*: THE INDIANISATION OF JANE AUSTEN

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Abstract

Jane Austen, a novelist writing two centuries ago is popular even today and her popularity has been increasing with the passage of time. She is best known for her six novels of which *Pride and Prejudice* is considered as her magnum opus. Many Hollywood and Bollywood directors have featured film on Austen's classic but Gurvinder Chadha has presented Austen in an Indianised form. The focus of the present paper is to explicate the Indian threads in the movie through settings, characters and themes.

In 20th century the Film Studies has emerged as a new concept in the academic discipline that deals with the various theoretical, historical and critical approaches to film. It is sometimes subsumed within media studies and often compared to television studies. The purpose of the theory is to add critical debate to the film by making changes in the method of film and its analysis. The film theory is centered on the history, analysis, and theorizing of film, on many levels, ending from pure technical and formal analysis to consideration to audience, psychology, and the broader cultural, ideological and economical context of film production and consumption. For the first half of the twentieth century, film theory was largely the outgrowth of the actual filmmaking of directors; it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that film study became an academic discipline, subjected to the wave of structuralism, semiotic, and psychoanalytic thinking that overtook merely and common criticism in general. In the last decade of the twentieth century the so-called digital revolution has marked the beginning of the new era in filmmaking and film study.

Movies fed on the placenta of the popular, the common coin, and not on the support of the superior class. Movies were ushered into existence by common, human hunger for story. Although literature, history, and movies are distinct forms of communication and thousand of solutions and accommodations have been found so they can get along and have fruitful relationships. Tales evolve and one generation adjusts the stories of the past to the present time and to its modern needs and ways of storytelling. Aeschylus has written:

My dramas are but slices cut off from banquet of Homer's poems.

(*Four Books of Homer's Odyssey* pp.456-525)

But Aeschylus's dramas were leaner and meaner, in search of a higher truth which synthesized moral opposites, profoundly simpler than anything all-embracing Homer ever wrote. For it is the singer, not the song, that makes the splendor of communication successful. And a story retold, as Aeschylus retold Homer, continues. Both novel and literature are preindustrial arts, but movies are an industrial art. The novel also has a lengthy record as a classical-oriented medium. For centuries the novel relied on the upper and middle-class elitism of literacy. Cinema was born as mass and popular cultures bloomed in urban civilizations in modern times. Dudley Andrew, a film critic, in his *Major Film Theories* gave attention to several powerful individual thinkers who constructed complete views of cinema. According to him:

Film based on position taken in relation to those concepts specifically to perception, representation, signification, narrative structure, adaptation, evaluation and interpretation etc.

(James Dudley Andrew. pp1-2)

Cinema arose from visual pleasure, and it is able to make the audience more curious and fascinated by taking glamorous celebrities, placing them in ordinary roles, and allowing the spectators to feel like they are watching a private world. The debate on cinematic adaptations was for many years dominated by the questions of fidelity to the source and by the tendencies to prioritize the literary works over their film versions. Among the processes of creativity, adaptation has always held as an ambiguous position, caught between an original work and its reshaping in another, sometimes vividly in different form. This transformation might be considered as the essence of another's creation. When an adaptation is compared with the literary work it is based on, the stress is on the ways the film creator's move within the field of inter-textual connections and how they use the modes of expressions by the filmic art to convey meanings. As Dudley has rightly said:

“Adaptation seen “ both as a leap and a process...can put into play the intricate mechanism of its signifiers only in response to a general understanding of the signified it aspires to have constructed at the end of the process”

(Dudley. 97)

Adaptation acts as a medium which transforms the telling modus of the book into the showing modus of moving pictures. It acts as a bridge between two art forms: the text and the film. The major difference between these two is that the visual images stimulate our perceptions directly in comparison to the written words. George Bluestone in his *Novels into Films* writes:

“The reputable novel, generally speaking, has been supported by a small, literate audience.....film, on the other hand, has been supported by a mass audience....”

(Bluestone vi)

The artistic narration of filmmakers as an emphatic medium not only reaches a wider audience but also helps in exploring the literary essence of the text; unfurls the thematic matter, characters and conflicts and above all the humanity embedded in the text. As Linda Hutcheson remarks that “the appeal of adaptations lies in their mixture of repetition and difference, of familiarity and novelty”, which can of course be compared to “a child’s delight in hearing the same nursery rhymes or reading the same books over and over”. However it should be noted that the appeal of adaptation lies in reinvention, rebirth of familiar world thereby, shaping it into something new. As Hutcheson remarks that the real comfort lies in the experience of tensions between old and new, “in simple act of almost quite repeating, in the re-visiting of a theme with variations”(10). Moreover what draws the audience to an adaptation is the desire to see or hear the beloved world created by the book. The complexity of a literary work appears as a form of challenge to readers making it difficult for them to get important detail offered by it. Here the film fills the gap; the confusion created by the text in the mind of the readers and provides pleasure in exploring the text through visual senses.

Jane Austen’s classic *Pride and Prejudice* revamped, envisioned, and reconfigured into a loud, brassy Bollywood musical drama “Bride and Prejudice”. ‘Bride and Prejudice’ is part of hybrid genres which includes comedy, drama, romance and music. Taking Austen’s classic 19th century novel, Chadha has updated it to a modern day, India, London, and Los Angeles and supporting characters to fit the updated environment. It can be placed into newly founded British Asian genres. An attribute of such texts of this genre is that they are produced by Asians, about Asians and are evident of the fact that Asians in today’s society have more power and influence as a social group than in previous years. Most of the British Asian texts have a comical element, they are still able to express issues and situations which the target audience may feel they can relate to. In one of her interview with Jaime Russell on BBCGurvinderChadha said:

Bollywood, Bollywood. But I needed a good story that everyone was familiar with so they wouldn’t be freaked out by the Indian film language being foreign! So I went with the Jane Austen novel that we all did at school and that we all know and just started to Indianise it.

Bride and Prejudice promotes the idea of a collaboration of two cultures; Bollywood and British in one. The scenes in the film helps to portray this attribute as it is displayed as

continually colorful which links to Bollywood films and the way in which they are portrayed as usually you would expect them to be bright and cheerful in this way, this sense of color is also depicted through the clothing that the characters wear; which is usually traditional Indian clothing especially in scenes such as the wedding. The bright lighting within the film helps to portray the light hearted feeling and images expressed throughout. This is true for most scenes in the film, even if the mood of the particular scene, even if the mood of the particular scene is not really 'bright' and 'happy' nature the lighting still generally remains bright reinforcing the comedy and musical elements in the Film. There is a strong significance of the use of the particular scene and setting that have been utilized as they are important to symbolize the 'stereotypical' vision that the audience expects to have of a film which is in a sense a reproduction of a 'Bollywood' film. An example of this idea of a grand setting is the scene at the beginning of the film where there is a wedding taking place in an enormous and elaborate house. The conjunction of cultures is also evident via the use of two language predominantly English but also some Punjabi. The use of both languages works to reach the wider range of audiences both, British Asian and traditional Asian.

'Bride and Prejudice' presents many characters that appear to conform to the stereotypical representations of Indians, however, it also demonstrates various alternative representations of Indian characters that challenge these conventions. For example, the film features Aishwarya Rai as a leading protagonist, giving her a sense of power and independence which makes the audience identify with her as she is in a central and active role. Lalita's character is initially presented as having a good balance, however is faced with her own predicament between tradition and values against her choice for love given that Darcy is white. Lalita is featured as a headstrong young lady in the film. She along with her parents and three sisters, live in a small town in India, but when they meet Balraj, his sister, Krian, and their friend, Will Darcy, at the wedding of a mutual friend, everyone's lives are impacted. Lalita tries throughout most of the movie to fight off her feelings for Will Darcy while also getting drawn in by the intrigue of Johnny Wickam. Elizabeth Bennet, which was created by Jane Austen, is really one of the most well known in literature, but Aishwarya Rai successfully makes herself the most memorable character in the film.

The theme of 'patriarchy' can be expressed in 'Bride and Prejudice' as it features a very stereotypical Asian attitude at times, especially in terms of marriage, for example, 'I will end up living in that rotten house, full of spinsters with no grandchildren', is the opinion expressed by Lalita's (Rai's) mother in the film who feels as if she should marry off her daughters as soon as possible to relieve the shame of having the burden of unmarried daughters. This theme of marriage is a key aspect to the narrative of the film as it is a central

issue covered that helps to showcase the idea of patriarchy. The character of Lalita's (Rai's) father and most other male characters seem domineering as they feel what they expect should be done without argument. Chadha believed that the themes driving Jane Austen's *'Pride and Prejudice'* remain central to the lives of many Indian women, and her movie does translate these – particularly the need for advantageous marriages- quite effectively. On a few occasions lines of dialogue have been shifted directly, for example when Mr. and Mrs. Bakshi argue about whether Lalita should accept Kholi Saab's proposal. Kohli in the movie is Mr. Collins. He is an Indian-American expatriate who only sees the good in the country. The re-imagining of his character is one of the most interesting aspects of "Bride and Prejudice".

One of the major ways that this film sets itself apart is the singing numbers. There are several original songs done for the film, and they all incorporate aspects of Indian music and culture while also being extremely relevant to the story. Each time a song comes up; it fits directly in what is going on. And since the characters are often attending weddings and dancing functions, the role that the music plays is extremely important. One of the best songs in the film is the hilarious "No Life Without Wife", which Lalita and her sisters sing about the ridiculous Mr. Kohli (the Indian version of Mr. Collins) after he has come to India in search of a wife. They mimic him perfectly in many ways and mock the way that he has come to forget traditional Indian values. The film engages our cynicism and then demands we suspend it, when a more consistent tone would have perhaps made it an easier watch. Nevertheless, this is a recommended movie for Austen fans and anyone thinking of dipping their toes into Bollywood cinema.

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