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An analysis of the matrix of social practices, gender roles and narrative realism in Odia cinematic adaptation of the novels of Bibhuti Pattanaik

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Abstract

The present paper makes an in-depth analysis of the two novels titled *Badhu Nirupama* and *Maya Miriga* written by the well-known Odia novelist Bibhuti Pattanaik. It primarily focuses on the contents of the novels as they have been rendered by the author, and then it spotlights on the shifts to the cinematic adaptations of both the novels. The analysis is based on the relevance of plot deviations on the basis of temporal shift of the context of the novels to that of the contexts of the cinema. Then, there is a cross examination of the major factors like reflections on the social practices, role of both male and female characters, point of views and the realistic portrayal of the events of daily life of Odisha of a post-independent period when women education, feminist perspectives in society and revolution against social prejudices were slowly gaining momentum. It is noticed that both the novels bear two very important dimensions of society. *Badhu Nirupama* is mainly based on developing awareness against the so-called prejudices and conservative outlook related to the role of women in the family and society whereas *Maya Miriga* is about the uncontrollable family disintegration as a social malady. Finally, the novels along with their cinematic adaptations have been taken together for a critical discussion on the basis of audience feedback, presence of intertextual elements both at the levels of novels as literary narratives and reflections on typical social and cultural constructs which happen to be inseparable from each other.

Keywords: Cinematic adaptations, temporal shift, feminist perspective, social awareness, intertextual

1. Introduction

Bibhuti Pattanaik (Born 25 October 1937) is a well-known Odia novelist and columnist. It is noticed that he was very much affected by the post-independent Indian social realities like corruption, nasty politics, exploitation, poverty, post-world war disillusionment, landlordism and its evil effects, poor people leaving homeland, reality of farmers and agriculture, pros and cons of rapid urbanization, touch of modernity and its consequences, focus on family relationship, women empowerment, human relationship, duplicity of social characters, deteriorating youth mass of the society, interpretation as well as misinterpretation of Gandhian ideology and people taking advantage of the so called social and cultural prejudices. He has written almost hundred fictional and non-fictional narratives. Some of the narratives contain some ground-breaking historical events and movements. Additionally, his focus is at par with the authors of international repute in dealing with neo-realism, critical realism and close reflection on the cultural constructs.

2. Literature Review

In the history of Odia cinema, many such novels have been turned to silver screen. They are *Amada Bata* by Basant Kumari Patnaik, *Abhinetri* by Kahnu Charan Mohanty, *Matira Manisha* by Kalindi Charan Panigrahi, *Malaa Janha* by Upendra Kishore Das, *Dharitri* by Amulya Kumari Patnaik, *Kaa* by Kanhu Charan Mohanty, *Kanaka Lata* by Nanda Kishore Bal, *Adina Megha* by Kuntala Kumari Acharya, *Tunda Baida* by Kanhu Charan Mohanty, *Sasti* by Kanhu Charan Mohanty, *Kaberi* by Gayatri Basu Malick, *Chha Mana Atha Guntha* by Fakir Mohan Senapati, *Aparichita* by Pratibha Ray and *Moksha* by Pratibha Ray. It is quite evident that all these are Odia classics and full of stories of different perspectives of life replete with delicate realities of the socio-cultural, traditional ways, and what's more, all

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such writings and movies reflect on the deeper humanitarian and modest concern aiming at establishing a society or community with harmony and broader outlook.

3. *Badhu Nirupama* (1965) as a Novel

This is a novel reflecting on caste feeling and other family prejudices associated with Odia families. Son of late Nilambar Acharya, Nirmal happens to be the well-educated young man selected to join as a Dy. Collector at Baripada, a place in northern Odisha. In the village, he has a legacy of landlordism and Acharya family status since the beginning. The novel starts with a dramatic scene of arrival of Nirmal with his newlywed beloved Nirupama. She is a graduate from Cuttack and belongs to a lower middleclass family whose father was a petty job holder-cum homoeopathic practitioner. Owing to the age long conservative traditions, mother of Nirmal, Hemangi could not easily digest this matter of love marriage of her son to a girl from a lower level Panda family. She thought that this would be gross disgrace for the Acharya family. Anyway, she allowed her to her home but remained dissatisfied with this act of his only son.

After a few days of his marriage, Nirmal had to go to his place of posting in order to resume his duty. At his workplace, he finds bureaucratic complicity for which it was bit awkward for him initially, but later, he tried to work in that environment being a novice. There, he finds his lecturer friend Anirudh and feels it good to stay with this childhood friend.

The days of Nirupama at the home in the village and Nirmal at his office run parallel. The only medium of communication is writing occasional letters to each other. But, both of them were having unspoken constraints created by the so-called tradition, customs and social practices. Like numerous families in the similar setup, Nirupama started playing the role of the traditional daughter-in-law serving the mother-in-law and performing all the household works of daily chore. At first, Hemangini and many other women in the surrounding could not believe the way Nirupama served the Acharya family amidst the gloomy atmosphere of getting identified as a girl from Panda family. Deliberately, Hemangini plays an authoritative as well as conservative role of expressing hatred for Nirupama. From daily life complications, it goes up to some major issues like Nirupama stealing money from the box of Hemangini to send to her parents as many other daughter-in-laws do in such setups.

But, there are a couple of sub-plots associated with the main story of Nirupama, Hemangini and Nirmal trio which is the cause of spread of hatred and anguish in the so-called established Acharya family. Some of the women from the neighbourhood pass unnecessary comments at the incidental actions of reactions as conducive to the uneducated rural women. There are episodes relating to Chaturbhuj Mishra, the younger brother of Hemangini who is an opium addicted person and as a result of his addiction, all his wealth got exhausted. Finally, he takes resort to Hemangini for bringing up her eldest daughter. But, owing to an urgent requirement of money, he accepts the decision of his eldest daughter to steal an amount of Rs.500/- from the money box of Hemangini. This is later found by Hemangini and she suspects Nirupama for this. This leads to a great misunderstanding between Hemangi, Nirmal and Nirupama and then, Nirupama leaves for her parents' getting frustrated with the unexpected actions and reactions of both mother

and son. After a few days, Hemangini falls ill and hearing this news, Nirupama comes back to her in-laws immediately to provide service to her mother-in-law. After a few days, she recovers and all her praise goes to Nirupama. Nirmal too gets impressed to see the self-less service of Nirupama.

Apart from the main story, there are some featured stories about the novel. One such noticeable story is related to Anirudh, the college teacher and his wife Shyamali. Their life style is very natural and guided by the very masculine and feminine instincts. Shyamali is bit greedy and reactive to the literary taste of Anirudh. In spite of differences between the couple, Shyamali takes care of the household responsibilities properly.

3.1 Changes/Additions in the Cinematic Adaptation of *Badhu Nirupama* (1987) Directed by Jugal Devta

1. Panda family has been changed to Pattanaik family
2. Love between Nirupama and Nirmal has been dramatised for audience attraction
3. The role of a cousin brother Mania, who works as a faithful younger brother of Nirmal and takes the lead role in bridging gaps relating to the misunderstanding of characters.
4. The role of a friend named Ramaa who happens to be drunkard and frustrated owing to injustice and bad social practices turn good character is indebted to Nirupama for bringing transformation in him.
5. Stealing of the idols of Radha Madhab instead of money
6. The name of Ushi has been renamed as Shanti and role has been exaggerated
7. Nirupama helps educating village girls has been introduced
8. After being attacked by ruffians, Hemangini, the mother-in-law has donated blood to save the life of Nirupama
9. The character of a bride has been foregrounded that a bride ought to have tolerance, express shyness to the maximum, render services to the elders in the family, if possible to become an epitome of sacrifice.

4. *Maya Miriga* as a Novel

Maya Miriga is concerned with the gradual and irreversible process of disintegration in a middle-class joint family living in a small town in Odisha. Raj Kishore Choudhury head master in a school lives modestly in a joint family. He has five children: Tuku, the eldest son, who is quiet and dutiful, works as a lecturer. Prabha, Tuku's wife is expecting their first issue and is dedicated to the running of the household. Tutu, the second son, is the great hope of the family. Following his brilliant academic career in Delhi, he is assured of a prestigious Government job. The third son, Bulu, clings to the family for his emotional security and is quick to see himself as a failure despite Tutu's encouragement. The fourth son Tulu is the defiant one, ready to challenge the established family norms. Tikina, the youngest girl is still at school. The family's emotional centre is the gentle and wise grandmother. It is, however, Raj Kishore Babu who lays down the rules. His wife merely wields control over her daughter-in-law, Prabha.

When Prabha gives birth to a daughter, family expectations are let down. But soon enough, Tutu's final selection for the I.A.S. job more than makes up for everything. As his newly acquired status demands, he marries above his social milieu.

The house is transformed with modern gadgets and new furniture after Tutu's marriage. Irritations arise, which reflect the beginning of changes in the joint family household. Tutu's city-bred wife does not follow Prabha's footsteps as a traditional daughter-in-law, the role that is expected of her. On the flimsy pretext of her mother's sickness, she declines to stay with her in-laws while her husband is away on training. Prabha resents the preferential treatment given to the new couple. Soon after the couple leave, the grandmother suffers a stroke and dies the same night.

Prabha's sense of oppression, resulting from the joint family system, increases. She sees others who are better off because they do not need to share their income. Prabha can only express her resentment gradually to her husband, Tuku, as she realizes the deep sense of dedication her husband has towards the joint family.

Raj Kishore Babu retires from his work as headmaster. He is depressed and only finds solace in the company of another retired official. The latter pins all his hopes on the return of his only son who lives in America.

Tulu, the defiant one gets a first class graduate degree. He wishes to follow his brother's footsteps and study in Delhi. Bulu, the 'failure' of the family, realizes that he will be all alone and left completely on his own. The family persuades Tulu to await the return of the successful brother Tutu, who is due to visit the family on the way to his first posting. His wife accompanies him only to collect her dowry possessions. She insists on doing it despite her husband's embarrassment at her material preoccupation.

Tutu expresses reluctance to help finance his younger brother's education in Delhi. The father comes down heavily on his favourite son and reminds him of the sacrifices they made to educate him in Delhi. Finally, Tutu, in shame, gives in. The eldest son chooses this moment to slip in the news of his deputation to a post in the State capital.

The disintegration of the family is by now apparent. An uneasy silence follows. In the quietness of the night, and in the privacy of their rooms, the family members recollect the warmth of their togetherness, yet are painfully aware of the impossibility of staying together.

Next morning, Tutu and his wife leave with their dowry items. Prabha, for the first time, declines to light up the oven feigning sickness. The mother has to take on the responsibility of the family. Reflecting on the state of affairs, Raj Kishore Babu ironically asks his two-year-old grandchild: "Will you too leave us". The story ends with a note of inexpressible agony of the old parents.

4.1 Cinematic Adaptations of *Maya Miriga* (1984) Written & Directed by Nirad Mahapatra

In it, one can see a lot of warmth, fellow-feeling, sharing of experiences and a sense of responsibility. But also, you can see the tight-rope walking of the married sons, the bitterness of its locked-up daughters-in-law, and their need for freedom, economic or otherwise, and the maladjustment in marriages and above all, selfishness that can damage its very fibre.

At one level, it is the emotional attachment to the family as against freedom for oneself that provides the mainstay of its conflict. At another, the conflict arises from the social reality of the middle class: its economic status as related to higher education, better jobs and higher positions in the

social hierarchy. But ultimately the film is about certain emotional bonds which make up a way of life and the painful realization that they cannot last.

The cinema focuses more on the following facts:

1. The simplicity, patience and tolerance of Mr. Choudhury and Mrs. Choudhury being parents
2. Initial coordination among the family members and contrastingly separation at the end.
3. Changing life style and future plan after obtaining higher qualification and better opportunities as opposed to the expectations of parents

5. Critical Interpretation in the Light of Social Practices and Gender Roles in both the novels

Social practices and gender roles have been intertwined in shaping the contexts of both the novels. Both as the reader of the novels and a critical reviewer of the movies, the following things can be remarked as the foregrounded features.

1. The title of both the novels are symbolic and based on allusions. The title *Badhu Nirupama* as such says a lot about the unparalleled greatness of the bride Nirupama as the name suggests as a social allusion. The title *Maya Miriga*, the mirage is popularly related to *The Ramayan* where the deer to which Lord Sriram followed was an illusion only. Similarly, the parents in the novel have taken lots of pain to educate their children but finally left at home alone. So, their run-in life is proved to illusory.
2. The novels as well as the movies directly reflect the Odia tradition and culture without any exaggeration which makes the visual purely realistic.
3. Mostly, the settings are in the post-independent Odishan rural and urban culture reflecting on the changing mental and social set-ups.
4. Dispositional reality of women has been emphasized in relation to the household responsibilities.
5. There is no dialectal influence except the language of elderly rural people. The Odia language in discourse is neutral both in vocabulary and accent.

6. Narrative Realism in the Novels

"Generally narrative realism holds that narrative structures that exist in the human world and not simply in the stories that people tell about that world. Narrative is regarded as a temporal structure inherent in our way of living and acting." (Walters, 7). In this light, it is noticed that both the novels reflect on the realistic portrayal of the daily life of people of Odisha. In the light of Foucault's notion of heterotopias, writing is an act of communication, and the writer will generally have something in mind that they would like to communicate. The effectiveness of this communication is heavily dependent on how its discourse is structured. If one can create mental models in the forms of visuals with reference to effective focalisation and placement of the original text, then one has better control of the discourse in the cinema in a way that helps to guide the re-representation of those scenarios in the mind of the reader too. Same is the case in the cinematic adaptations of both the novels.

7. Conclusion

Any literary writing cannot stay alive outside cultures, and cultures change and advance with varied reasons. As a matter of fact, it seeks to establish what kinds of things are

happening at levels of mental processing surrounded by social happenings which very often brim at a conscious stage. To quote Mark Turner:

The mind is patterns of brain activity. The brain is part of the body, not something separate from the body. Culture, society and language do not lie outside of the brain. Culture, society and language are patterns in brains. Meaning is patterns in the human brain. Meaning is something the human brain attributes to its world. Things outside the brain do not have meaning in themselves. (Turner, 30).

The process of adaptation from writing to cinema must also, by definition, start with a reading and that reading must engender an interpretation. In the interplay between book and film, and between audio-visual influence and the composition of a book, the processes of creation and re-creation takes place first in the mind, as representational models are established to enable the act of production. So, a study that looks at the nature of influence at the level of production must pay heed to those processes in an attempt to try to establish the factors that are conditioned by that influence. In this way, it can be said that both the novels of Bibhuti Patnaik have been trans-created to the silver screen not only with a notion of entertainment but also documenting the society of that time and bring about a social reformation.

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