

BOOKS AND FILMS: A MARRIAGE MADE FOR CONTEMPORARY TIMES

Smita Chandela¹

Abstract

Literature has been a tool of expression and reformation of society from times immemorial. It has actively functioned to maintain the social norms and as a moral instructor. Over the years, literature has evolved as a subject and a mode of communication, thus expanding its role of changing the society. Books are the greatest source of reading literature, but with changing times, developing technology and lack of time have replaced books with films on the same subject/story. With the onset and spread of information and communication technology and its biggest boon, the worldwide web, it has become easier to seek and access books and literature of times bygone. This facility is contributing immensely in reviving the dying art of reading, especially through e-books.

In ancient times, plays and stories were one of the few ways of amusement, imparting knowledge and conveying morals at the same time. This was the practice for several centuries until the industrial revolution happened and man began experimenting with everything that was constructive. The twentieth century witnessed an almost superhuman way of entertainment called "cinema". It served the same purpose as that of plays and stories but in a more enhanced way of pleasing the senses.

The postmodern era stretched its limit and experimented further with cinema by adapting the stories of the novels and plays, in short, giving life, body and expression to the texts. These adaptations once again did the magic of revisiting the books, which were long buried, but never forgotten. The paper shall look at adaptations of literature texts into movies in contemporary times and their relevance by focusing on a few popular works and their re-adaptations. It shall also elaborate on the avenues of employability that these "script-to-screen" versions offer to people with creative inclinations.

The renowned Hollywood director of Australian origin, Baz Luhrmann said, "What I think is extraordinary, apart from the inherent values of the ideas, is that we were experiencing ourselves a historic moment in the life of the Internet, an example of how massive publishing power is in the hands of anyone with access to a PC." This comment coming from a film director of such acclaim suggests the significance of books even in the age of the Internet and technology, of which we are a part. In the current world of globalization and such advanced technology, there is hardly any room left for creating any piece of art independently. Internet contributes immensely in simplifying the method of creation for an artist, be it painting, sculpture, architecture or literature. Internet is now the way of life, and mass media a way of thinking. It helps in increasing our awareness quotient and keeping us abreast with the changes taking place around us. As Luhrmann said, internet has led to 'massive publishing power'. The point in focus here is that given the current scenario of information and communication technology being functioning as an imperialistic force, how many of us

1. Research Scholar, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur

read books? The present generation of young people is highly Internet oriented, and social media is their portal to the world and its aspects. It is a tool that they use in order to stay connected with the world, to stay updated and also to communicate. In this world of hi-tech communication, books have nothing much to offer and readers have been forced to shift their loyalty to Internet because of lack of time.

Literature has functioned as a medium of communication ever since human civilization. In the ancient times, plays were performed in order to entertain the royalty and various sports were played to amuse the masses. The Greeks propagated the theatre, whereas the Romans promoted sports. The ancient classics depicted life in its most realistic form in order to convey the set of societal norms that were expected to be followed. Literature has been the moral instructor of mankind for ages now. It has played a significant role in refining the perception of human race and helping it decipher the symbols of nature. It has also been one of the most artistic mediums of expression of the various emotions and thoughts of mankind. Before the industrial revolution, it was difficult to document it. It was only with the invention of printing press that the writers, poets and playwrights began to record it. And with the advent of the newspapers and journals, the written word yielded as much power as the performatory word. We notice that in the sixteenth and seventeenth century literature played a vital role to bring out revolutions that changed the face of the English and the European history. Every aspect of the society was depicted in the literature of those times and moving towards the eighteenth and the twentieth century, we see that it spread awareness about various social evils that were practiced in England then. Writers like Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, were a few of the many popular writers that conveyed the flaws and conventions prevalent in the English society. It contributed immensely to the bringing about of significant changes in the social and political scenario of England.

But with the advent of the twentieth century, writers began to experiment with literature. Since industrial revolution was spreading rapidly far and wide, the artists found their art to be getting created and preserved. It did prove to be a boon to the artisans, especially the ones who were associated with the performing arts. They could now experiment with several effects in their act and the advent of photography, camera and motion picture in 1890, revolutionized this art. It proved to be a greater blessing than preservation of the contemporary art as it revived the lost one by adapting it in various forms of entertainment, and not limiting only to theatre. So if the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries elevated and fostered theatre and plays, the later nineteenth and early twentieth century took literature to another level of cinema, thus preserving the classics for a prolonged period of time. Although the first movie adaptation of a novel happened only in 1924 by the Austrian director Erich von Stroheim who tried to adapt Frank Norris's *McTeague* into a motion film, which was not such a successful attempt. But he did pioneer the concept of adaptation of a book into a film, popularly known as "script-to-screen" in the postmodern era. The main objective behind such an experiment was to give a face, body, expressions and voice to the characters of the novel and a physical setting to the story, in order to please the senses and consequently entertain the audience. After 1924, it became a research activity to go back to the best works of English literature and reproduce them as films so as to acquaint the audience with the creative faculties of the writers of a particular time. It also led to the audience's inclination towards reading the book that was adapted in order to compare the film with the book and stress the similarities and differences. By doing so, the audience also adopted a creative bent of mind through discourse on the book that was made into a film. Not only this, it also led to reinterpretation of a particular text with relation to the times in which it was produced as a movie. It questioned the relevance of it in those times and also noticed the sustainability that the movie had, as compared to the book it was based on. The movies were also

a departure from reality for the audience. It was too harsh to survive the two World Wars and come out of it unaffected. Hence, in order to redeem their faith in life and existence, the classics were reproduced in films and released for the audience to reorient them towards the concepts of humanity and society.

The adaptations and re-adaptations of book into a film differ from era to era, but what remains the same is the core of the story and the purpose behind writing the book. Books are considered as critics of society, adaptations of them into films enhance that criticism to the level of virtuality. But one aspect to notice here is that the director of the movie may not have the same sense of aesthetics as that of the writer whose book is being made into a film. Such a disparity may or may not affect the adaptation, but the director does keep in mind the audience that he is catering to. The instance taken into consideration here is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* which was published in 1813 and was first adapted into a film in 1940 with Laurence Olivier as Mr. Darcy and Greer Garrison as Elizabeth Bennet, and directed by Richard Leonard. It was the closest adaptations that any director could have made with the impacting performance of Olivier. It proved to be a refreshing experience for the English audience who were struggling hard to survive the Second World War. It gave them a reason to believe in love, humanity, affection and life on the whole. Society is usually the common backdrop of every literary work. An Austenian society exemplary in its depiction of how a society should be and the conventions that it should follow. This production encouraged the audience to convert into readers too and they went back to the book in order to fill in the missing gaps, if any.

In the years 1967, 1980 and 1995 respectively, *Pride and Prejudice* was telecast as TV series by the British Broadcasting Corporation. This kind of an adaption took place in order to reach out to a more expansive group of audience, because by 1967, almost all European and American households had a television. The fact that this work of Austen was made into a TV series at different points of time in the twentieth century goes on to prove the agelessness and the significance of the work. That it still worked as a moral instructor and a guide to establishing a healthy and happy society, is an evidence of the artistic perception that Jane Austen had of life.

Books have the power to direct us and anchor our thoughts. The current generation is the byproduct of technology and progress, hence it does not have much time to seek concrete pleasure, the experience of which is everlasting, as compared to the instant gratification that the internet provides them, unlike reading. But with the knowledge boom that they are experiencing, it becomes important that they are well versed with the course that they pursue. Contemporary literature is an amalgamation of popular fiction, travel writing, non-fiction writings, gender studies, magic and supernaturalism in fiction, etc. The variety offered to the youth today is expansive, yet, we see that they are not inclined towards reading, as the competition that they face keeps them occupied to perform better in whichever field they are. That is where the internet features as a boon as it offers reading of classics online. Information and communication technology has simplified life so much that one can find time to watch a movie but reading is now luxury. Hence, we notice that almost all the American and British classics are being made into films, in order to promote art and culture in the cotemporary times, thus reviving the long-buried texts of morals and ideologies. These adaptations vary from audience to audience. The 2004 version by Gurinder Chaddha of *Pride and Prejudice* is a highly Indianised version of the English classic (titled *Bride and Prejudice*, echoing the same theme that the book carries), but in a very Indianised manner. The entertainment value of the film was such that it inspired the non-English speakers to read the novel in Hindi. Once again the visual effects, the actors, the dialogues and the comedy of expressions elevated the stature of the novel. Jane Austen relived in the twenty-first century

India! The movie was embellished with songs and colours and music, which are not the features of a Hollywood film, but what adds to the awe of the audience is the fact that the film was in English with just two or three American actors in it, the rest were all Indians.

Such script-to-screen adaptations help the current student fraternity to go back to the book after they have seen the film, thus reviving the art of reading and polishing their creative perception, which is being rusted by over use and abuse of the internet. The reading activity functions as moral and social guide for the contemporary generation which feels highly alienated in the current society due to the generation gaps that it faces. Difference in ideas and understanding isolates the young individual, who has no better company than a book, and it is in this companionship, that the young individual finds himself.

Film industry, both national and international, is so extensive that there is no dearth of employment in it. The education system today across the globe is such that it equips the individual according to the need of the industry that the individual wishes to join and grow in. The number of film and acting schools has augmented evidently, both on the national and the international platform. Even if one fails to be an actor, one can be trained enough to be an assistant director, a music composer, lyricist, art director, cinematographer, etc. The number of jobs that a film industry offers is endless. So the kind of education that we give to our students endows them with special skills to not only survive but also to excel in this creative field of film production and promotion. The concept of globalization and the onset of the internet has definitely shrunk the world to an extent where we are not strangers to a lot of people. The World Wide Web has empowered us to carry the entire world in our smart phones, laptops and PCs. Life is much easier with the various apps that the Internet has to offer, so much so that one can order food, clothing and shelter online. And if there is too much clutter, we upload it all on the Web and sell things that are discarded. So the Internet is a way of life now. With the expansion of the social media as one of the most popular ways of communication, it has become easier to reach out to a huge number of people at the same time and convey one's thoughts or opinion. Amidst all this advancement and virtuality of being, what is being left behind is the 'real', the original. We are departing from our true selves and morphing into somebody we are not, tailoring ourselves according to the requirements of the society that we live in. This is where education features. The current education system is holistic in nature, offering something significant and helpful to students from all strata of society. It preserves their creativity, which is otherwise marred, owing to the mild corruption that the Internet spreads. Students now specialize in courses which are practical in nature. The establishment of several universities and colleges has made it simpler for the students to choose an area of study of their choice and pursue it, keeping in cognizance the needs of the current employing sector. Human resource being the most valuable resource of present times, it is being tailored according to the need of the organization that is hiring it. The most significant additions to the education system of the twenty-first century are the incorporation of applied arts and study of culture. The awareness quotient of the present youth is so heightened that it is opting for courses that bring it closest to the reality of the world and its people. The social media being the recent imperialistic force, our students are studying various branches of mass communication and as facilitators of education and trainers of the present youth, it becomes our moral and social responsibility to equip them with knowledge that will help them fend for themselves.

Literature and movie adaptation help these students to apply their knowledge in their respective field of work, thus enriching them and bringing them back to their roots, their values and morality.