



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

FILM AS A MEDIUM AND A MESSAGE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN LITERATURE AND FILM WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO *THE ENGLISH PATIENT* AND *ARANYER DIN RATRI*

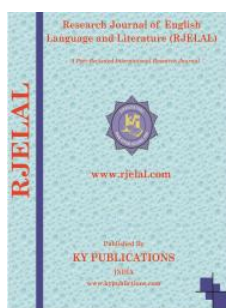
RAMPRASAD DUTTA

M.A. in English, Banaras Hindu University

Guest Lecturer, Department of English, Acharya Sukumar Sen Mahavidyalaya

Email: ramduttabh1@gmail.com

<https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.7119.277>



ABSTRACT

This paper will fundamentally focus on the 'nouvelle vague' (new wave) tradition of media as a 'medium' to convey a 'message'. As a distinctive part of 'narratology', film displays the facts kaleidoscopically, be it a novel or drama; movie, through its authentic devices can project the narrow alleyways of that particular genre of literature.

The discussion will be on the basic as well as core ideas of film regarding the narrative and style under the spectrum of that genre. The paper shall also demarcate the didactic details of the value of movie. For this matter this paper will show how the film *The English Patient* differs from the novel by Michael Ondaatje, and how the film *Aranyer Din Ratri* by Satyajit Ray differs from the original novel by Sunil Gangopadhyay. The heart-rending love of Almasy with Clifton and the relation between Hana and Almasy provide us a parochial outlook towards the primrose way to love. Apart from this portion, there will be another epoch-making film namely *Aranyer Din Ratri* directed by Satyajit Ray based upon the novel of the same name by Sunil Gangopadhyay which will be showing how four country-bred frustrated men (Asim, Sanjoy, Hari, Shekhar) celebrate a kind of carnival in the forest of Bihar. Both the film and the book demonstrate a simple, rustic aura of love and a nasty act of Hari as he goes to rape Duli; a tribal woman. This paper will show an interesting connection between *The English Patient* and *Aranyer Din Ratri* as both the films deliver a similar 'message' of camouflaged courtship. In a word, this article will depict the deconstructive ways of cinema, how it is structured and furnished and finally served as a palatable dish in front of the eyes of the spectators.

Keywords: medium, message, camouflaged courtship .

When a man with a bag full of colored images was passing through an empty street, a little kid peeped out of his window and cried out loud: "Oh cinema-wallah, I want to see that cinema where

the king forgets his beloved and ultimately recognizes her after seeing his souvenir."

This is one of the simple procedures demonstrating how cinema has become popular as a

narrative form, from its ramshackle, shabby room to an “avant-garde” process of “fabula”. And how it creates a tale out of a tale is an important thing. Though the study of narrative has a long specific background, but after judging it logically we get to know that this genre is principally a creature of 20th century. Apart from this, another crucial phenomenon that attracts us is the method of making a movie, as if it is a medium to convey a message; what Marshall McLuhan said “medium is the message.” Though Christian Metz (French film theorist) said that: “film is a form of Parole without a Langue”, but there are other critics who had developed a different notion about film. The fact is that every aspect of literature has its particular way of telling tale; film is one of them. This paper fundamentally focuses on the prime agenda of films, i.e, message. Two movies like *The English Patient* and *Aranyer Din Ratri* lend a significant message, that is, camouflaged courtship.

First of all, *The English Patient* is a simple love story. The movie begins with the picture of a pre-war isolated desert where a biplane is seen carrying two passengers in its open cockpit. And the novel starts with the description of an ancient monastery containing an unknown patient (depicted as a ‘despairing saint’) and a dedicated twenty years old nurse called Hana. Though there are certain changes in the movie version in comparison to the novel, but the required closeness between the patient and Hana remains intact. In fact, the so-called illicit relationship between Almasy and Katharine Clifton, the fascinating love between Hana and Kip, the caring attitude of Hana for her unknown patient, the tale of Candaules, images of Sahara are sufficient to prove the fact that it is a saga of camouflaged courtship. In the characterization of Hana, both Michael Ondaatje (writer) and Anthony Minghella (director) focused on the true dedication for her job (especially for the English patient) which is conspicuous from the following passage:

“It was sometime after this that she had come across the English patient- someone who looked like burned animal, taut and dark, a pool for her. And now, months later, he is her last patient in the Villa San Girolamo, their war was over, both of them

refusing to return with the others to the safety of the Pisa hospitals. All the coastal ports, such as Sorrento and Marina di Pisa, are now filled with North American and British troops waiting to be sent home. But she washed her uniform, folded it and returned it to the departing nurses. The war is not over everywhere, she was told. The war is over. This war is over. The war here. She was told it would be like desertion. I will stay here. She was warned of the uncleared mines, lack of water and food. She came upstairs to the burned man, the English patient, and told him she would stay as well.” (1993; 41)

Next important thing about the movie is that, this movie follows the well known flashback tradition. It sometimes goes back to the pre-war stage and suddenly comes the present scenario. Sometimes the past reveals through the dose of morphine, sometimes it is revealed through an epiphanic realization of Almasy; as if the past and the present are interwoven.

The pivotal conflict of the movie is the love of Almasy for Katherine, and the uxorious love of Geoffrey Clifton for Katharine as we must know the social status of Katherine as she is the wife of Geoffrey Clifton and with this view we can consider Almasy as an outsider, rather an intruder. The conflict becomes prominent when Katherine slaps violently in Almasy’s face and surrenders herself to the soothing embrace of Almasy. It proves her individuality and fearlessness. Again when she comes to know about the fact that she is cheating on her fiancé she discloses that issue to Almasy, fully aware of what is happening to her, yet unable and unwilling to resist it. The kaleidoscopic nature of Katherine should not be overlooked here. But that so-called illicit relationship raises a pertinent question. She is an adulterous woman or not? One possible answer can be given here and that is, love is nothing but an act of hunting as Gabriel Garcia Marquez said: “the pursuit of love is like falconry”.

The movie uses the Greek Herodotus as a leitmotif and relates the tale of Almasy with that story. In a dramatic situation Katherine tells the gathered people a story from Herodotus extremely

emblematic of her love affair with Almasy. As she goes on telling the story the camera focuses on her and the description of the night of her story comes out as a murky ocean. In that dark night the heroine of her story comes out and undresses herself (unwittingly) in front of a man who will be her future husband. The sensuous description of the act shows the subconscious (sexual) desire of Katherine for Almasy. Kristin Scott Thomas did a justice in the role of Katharine. The camera also becomes successful in showing the intrinsic instinct of Katherine.

Now the movie focuses on the psyche of Hana also as with the passage of time Hana's affection for the Indian sapper Kip grows and it is culminated in an outburst of intense proximity between the two. As an Indian, Kip undergoes the same condition of colonization as to some extent the English patient went through, and the former gets to know about the British rulers from his brother.

Anyway, the message of the movie is not only to show us how in *the Cave of Swimmers* the tragic death of Katherine takes place and how the intense love beckons tragedy with the aid of a tinge of psychic dilemma, but also to demonstrate a camouflaged courtship between Katherine and Almasy on one hand and between Kip and Hana on the other.

To speak the truth, this movie is regarded as one of the most touching love stories not just because of its mode of narrative but also for its editing. One example of this great work of art can be cited from the book *Ondaatje:2002*, which describes how the movie deviates slightly from the novel, where the conversation between Caravaggio and the English patient, (which was altered in the last cut), is eavesdropped by Hana which reveals the much awaited identity of the English patient. The footage from a scene between Hana and Kip, which had been removed, was inserted to have Hana overhear the conversation.

Apart from the editor's job, the director Anthony Minghella becomes puzzled about the task of adaptation. He says that one of the things that struck him most about the novel was its "deceptive appearance of being completely cinematic. Brilliant

images are scattered across its pages in a mosaic of fractured narratives, as if somebody had already seen a film and was in a hurry trying to remember all the best bits" (Minghella 1997a:xiii).

If we talk about the narrative of the novel we get to know that in the novel there are main three characters Almasy, Caravaggio and Hana taking the main course of dialogues. Rather, from their view point we see the novel; obviously apart from the omniscient narrator. But in the movie we see pivotal portion is assigned to Almasy alias the English patient. Very late in the novel, we get an indication that the third person flashbacks could indeed represent direct speech by the English patient. At least this is the case here: in a narrative passage told to Caravaggio in the first person, he suddenly speaks of Almasy, switching to the third person, making Caravaggio wonder: "who is he speaking as now?" (1993; 244)

Now the question is how the fiction becomes a 150-minute film. To speak the truth, this was one of the disturbing issues that Minghella faced while adapting the story. Of the novel's main characters, Kip is the one representing a colonial subject and ethnic "Other", torn between loyalty to the colonists and love for their culture, and an awareness of cultural difference, prejudice, and unequal treatment on the other. Here the question of marginalization can arise, the question of what Homi.K.Bhaba called "third space". Anyway, the thing is, in order to create a film one has to make changes, one has to do some inventions, and there lies the authenticity of the creator. The form of adapting a tale is definitely a different thing as Forshey observes:

"The act of adapting is as much one of the imagination as the act of imagining a new story.

Minghella took a central narrative and by adding, subtracting and rearranging, gave his audience a new experience." (Forshey; 97-98)

The next topic of discussion is a Bengali film called *Aranyer Din Ratri (Days and Nights in the Forest)* directed by Satyajit Ray, based on the novel

written by Sunil Gangopadhyay. Like *The English Patient*, this movie is not a mere love story, though the touches of love are there in order to establish and substantiate the pivotal focus of the story.

As an adaptation, this movie also deviates from the sordid tale told by the novelist. Being a magnificent director, Satyajit Ray adroitly handles the moving episodes of his film which undoubtedly surprised the author. He had not expected enormous changes as conspicuous from his own voice as he said after watching the finished film: "I felt that I didn't know these characters."

The movie starts with a conversation among four frustrated friends in a car; Asim, Shekhar, Hari, and Sanjoy. They start a journey from the cacophony of the city Calcutta to an idyllic world of Palamau, a forest area of Bihar. According to Andrew Robinson in his biography of Ray, "*Satyajit Ray: the Inner Eye*", the major literary reference in the film is to an account of Palamau written by Sanjiv Chatterjee in the late 19th century and described by Robinson as an important cultural document for Bengalis – representing a cultural experience akin to that of East Coast Americans in the 19th century and the romantic lure of the 'Wild West'. Anyway, these four men are used in this movie as the agents of so-called modern society. Interestingly, they become fascinated about the culture of the Santhali clan (according to these four friends the Santhali clan has a popular culture like the Western society, as the former clan gets inebriated with women like the latter society).

Another important aspect of the film is that, this movie follows the Bakhtinian *carnivalism* where the four characters are chosen from different parts of the society as follows:

Asim: a wealthy and quite intellectual bachelor with a safe job. Reasons for the journey are: 1. to try out his new car, 2. to get some fresh air

Shekhar: a funny character, to some extent a hedonist. Reason for the journey: his friends want him for his happy-go-lucky composure.

Sanjoy: a man with little ambition aspires an easy life. He is shy with girls but gets attracted easily by the beauty of a beautiful woman. Reasons for journey: 1. true lover of places, 2. he wants relaxation.

Hari: a sportsman. He has a serious kind of inferiority complex which he himself discovers after getting ditched by his girlfriend. Practically speaking, he hides that complex from the external world, especially from his friends. Reason for his journey: he wants to forget the girl.

So, from this framework one thing is certain, that is, they are rich more or less and they are taken from the various portions of the society. According to "carnivalism", these men share different tongues, rather voices, which eventually create what Bakhtin called "heteroglossia".

Again, the setting of the film serves as a kind of "panopticon", where these four friends are being watched by the people of Palamau. As if they belong to a different world. Now the fact is what happens in that idyllic jungle? What they did to the villagers? Why they didn't find any comfort in the forest?

It will be difficult to give any answer to these questions, but to say hypothetically, the four urban musketeers go and destroy the cool sequestered life-style of the villagers, which is unthinkable as well. They decide to stay in a forest bungalow unofficially by bribing the officer. They throw the newspaper in order to draw an end to their attachment with the urban pomp. They decide to drink like simple villagers, to stay and behave like an uncultured man (which is revealed by the nudity of one of them in the novel, though Satyajit Ray presents them with attires). All these doings unearth the primitive wildness of the characters.

The image of love is also there in the movie which rather tragically devastates the life of Hari which keeps on reminding him about the face of his former beloved, for whom he gets fascinated by the murky complexion of Duli, a country-bred daring woman. This phase of Hari is very unfortunate and

heart-rending. His love for Duli can be traced as an incarnation of camouflaged love.

The episode of the memory game is also very symbolic in nature as it reflects the personalities of the participants. After some time of playing the game, Asim and Aparna are the only ones playing; but after a little while she simply gives up and lets him win.

Last but not least, Ray's women characters are very active and to some extent superior to men, they are quick witted, nimble footed, loquacious and even psychologically strong. A critic in the *Village Voice* said that 'Ray's women in *Days and Nights* are creatures of superior moral sensibility and his men all helpless children'. And in the case of Aparna in *Days and Nights* that sense becomes all the more prominent.

Unanimously, these two films *The English Patient* and *Aranyer Din Ratri* are noted for their perfect screening and outstanding way of story-telling. From Anthony Minghella to Satyajit Ray the journey of a message continues to convey its core ideas. The filmmakers of *The English Patient* clearly tried to exploit the range of visual and auditory possibilities of film to a large extent in order to create not a 'literary' film with excessive use of dialogue and voice-over but a truly cinematic one. Every scene of the movie is charged with excessive sensuous emotion which leads the movie to a higher level. However, how the movie is made out of a tale of love and in what way it is successful differs from one person to another. But from a neutral view point, this movie has achieved success for its simple love story. On the other hand, *Days and Nights*, though seems a story of four men but the sensuous ambiguous love (rather lust) which tries to neperthes the bruise of love given by the former beloved of Hari, the bourgeois mentality of manipulating the so-called 'others' and other interesting issues have made the movie a magnum opus.

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