

Fiction into Film

Anjali Gera Roy

Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, India

Abstract

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide*, considered a masterpiece, was made into an equally successful film. *Guide* was made in two versions — an English version in collaboration with Pearl S. Buck and directed by Ted Danielewski to introduce Dev Anand to Western audiences and the Hindi version directed by Dev Anand's younger brother, Vijay Anand. Despite being warned by all and sundry not to touch the project and his brother's strong reluctance to direct, Anand persisted with the film, which went on to fetch awards in almost all categories and remains a landmark in Indian Cinema. R. K. Narayan was most unhappy with the final film as he felt it deviated too much from his novel, particularly in Anand's change of setting from Malgudi to Udaipur and the film's ending, and disowned the film. The author's disappointment with the cinematic translation of his text is understandable. But it overlooks the difference between fiction and film, the main issue being that the novel is a verbal medium whereas film is primarily a visual genre. What is the process through which the filmmaker translates the verbal into the visual mode? How did Vijay Anand translate Narayan's complex fictional narrative that weaves in modernization, social reform, and development with spiritual quest in a cinematic code? How did he weave in the emboxed narrative of the unhappy dancer Rosie into the frame story about the Hindu concepts of the power of faith and renunciation? How did he handle descriptions of characters: "complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half visible, as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice" and mood: "'I'm prepared to spend the whole night here,' she said. 'He will, of course, be glad to be left alone. Here at least we have silence and darkness, welcome things, and something to wait for out of that darkness'"; interior monologue; the passage of time; the switch from the frame to the emboxed tale and so on? Through examining *The Guide*, this paper will engage with the handling of narrative in fiction and film.

While adaptation has been a standard practice in the Western performing arts since Shakespeare's time, literary critics have looked down disdainfully at adaptations of fiction into film. In *Beyond Fidelity*, Robert Stam criticizes adaptation criticism for its profoundly moralistic tone and its suggestion that cinema has "somehow done a *disservice* to literature" (3). The adaptation of fiction into film, he asserts, elicits "an elegiac discourse of loss, lamenting what has been 'lost' in the translation from novel to film" ("Introduction" 3). The most frequent discussion of adaptation concerns fidelity and transformation. The assumption underlying the fidelity discourse is that fiction is the originary text and film its copy. The expectation in this discourse that the film must faithfully reproduce fiction has been challenged by Stam, Andrew, and, most recently, by Linda Hutcheon in her new book *The Theory of Adaptation*. If Andrew questioned the notion that "the task of adaptation is the reproduction in cinema of something essential about an original text" (31), Hutcheon is amused by the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text. J. D. Connor, in "The Persistence of Fidelity," shows that notwithstanding the repeated onslaughts on the fidelity premise of adaptation, the "fidelity reflex" continues to persist in adaptation studies. Underlying the negative view of adaptation, which dismisses film as a visual copy, is a deep veneration of literature based on what Stam calls *logophilia* and a matching suspicion



of images or *iconophobia*. Literate viewers usually go to watch the film with their visual images of the fictional text and are disappointed when their mental images do not match with the visual images employed by the filmmaker to express the same meaning. The viewers' *iconophobia* and *logophilila*, married to a high cultural contempt for *kitsch*, are intensified when confronted with commercial adaptations of literary classics. Despite the reevaluation of commercial Hollywood cinema in film theory and criticism, Hollywood adaptations of literary classics continue to be evaluated by the overt judgmentalism of the fidelity discourse. Bombay commercial cinema, dismissed as a poor copy of Hollywood, failed to attract serious attention from film critics until recently. The adaptations of Bombay cinema went almost unnoticed except by the literati because the masses who comprised the primary viewers of commercial Hindi cinema came unburdened with the baggage of the "original." But the "fidelity reflex" is clearly visible in the "not as good as the original" response of literate, middle class viewers of Hindi cinema.

It is, therefore, not surprising that Dev Anand's film version of R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* in 1965 should have invited comparisons with Narayan's novel and that the story should have bitterly ended with the author disowning the film after having given his consent to its filming. But it was the "disloyal" Hindi adaptation of *The Guide*, directed by Anand's younger brother Vijay Anand, instead of the faithful American translation that became a milestone in Hindi cinema. It not only enjoyed an unprecedented commercial success, it also won the coveted *Filmfare* awards in the best film, best director, best male and female actor, and best music categories.¹ A fictional masterpiece translated into a cinematic classic should have left everyone happy but the film's departure from the novel remained a sour point with the writer until the end. In the ire of the writer and his English speaking admirers, the moralizing tone of adaptation theory is coupled with a high cultural moral indignation at the meeting of the haloed novel with Bombay *kitsch*. While an arthouse adaptation might have equally activated the fidelity reflex, the aesthetic experimentation of a "serious" filmmaker like Satyajit Ray would have complimented the refined literary sensibilities of Narayan's readers. While the generic difference between the "masala" Bombay film and Indian English novel produces a shock in *Guide's* literary viewer, the average Bombay moviegoer, though initially intrigued, decoded the cinematic text within the established conventions of commercial Hindi cinema.² The adaptation of Narayan's novel into a Hindi film is particularly challenging because it requires not only a transcoding from the medium of fiction to film but also from a high literary genre to a popular commercial one. New critiques of adaptation theory have demonstrated that the shift from the page to screen can actually be creative and that "language, sound, music, and visual images can be used to convey a once purely verbal narrative in a new way" (Hutcheon 42). Following the recent movement to critique the assumptions of adaptation theory, this essay views adaptation as a creative process involving both losses and gains as it transcodes the elite Indian English discourse of Narayan's *Guide* into the commercialized entertainment genre of Bombay Cinema and proposes, along with Kamilla Elliott, that we look at fiction and film as "reciprocal looking glasses" instead of rivals (209-12).

1 *Filmfare* is a popular film fortnightly that has been organizing its annual award function since its inception.

This commercial award is regarded as seriously by commercial Bombay filmdom as the state sponsored national award with its strong arthouse bias.

2 "When it was finally released in 1965, the first audience reaction was one of confusion." Anand remembers that "slowly, people began to find something thought-provoking in it. It grew on them, and snowballed into a major countrywide hit." (Anand in Hattangady)

In the West, film's emergence from the tradition that produced literature could be the reason why film theory has taken the intertextuality between fiction and film as axiomatic. In film history from 1930 onwards, cinema and fiction have been so closely intertwined that one could speak, along with John Izod, of "literary and cinematic fictions" as the shared property of the book and the screen (qtd. in Orr). Despite the oft-made argument about the blurring of the distinction between fiction and film in the Bengali language, in which the same noun *boi* denotes both genres, the book and film, Bengali intellectuals as well as the masses know that *boi pada* (to read a book) is not the same as *boi dekha* (to watch a film) because they belong to two different semiotic systems. Other Indian languages, which had no equivalents for cinema, did away with approximations such as *kehel* or play recalling other performance traditions by importing corruptions of the original English term, *fillum*, *sanima*, or *pikchur* in native languages.

While the refined sentiments of Narayan's readers are hurt by the Bombay cinema's commercialized idiom, most Indian cinemagoers in the 60s first viewed the "film" without having read *The Guide* or even heard of R. K. Narayan, the celebrated Indian English novelist and, thus, their cinematic experience of viewing *Guide* was free of memories of the novel. It must be granted that cinema is a more powerful mass medium than fiction that can affect both the literate elite and the non-literate lumpen. Anand's adaptation of the novel, which followed the Hollywood example of introducing Indian masses to the "great tradition" of the English novel, appears to have had the opposite result because *The Guide*, for the average moviegoer, became Vijay Anand's *Guide* and Dev Anand was Raju Guide. Dev Anand's memorable portrayal of Narayan's Raju became so strongly etched on the nation's imagination that not only Narayan's Raju Guide but any cinematic representation of the guide figure that followed has had to negotiate with Dev Anand's emblematic figure in *Guide*. For instance, India's current heartthrob Amir Khan's essaying of the feisty Rehan Guide character in the recent blockbuster *Fanaa* may be viewed as a parodic imitation of "Devsaab's" ebullient, loquacious, epicurean guide who also seduces a young tourist, a visually challenged Kashmiri damsel, which culminates in a consuming passion recalling Raju's doomed love for Rosie in *Guide*.³ With Aamir Khan playing the guide only as a cover for his terrorist designs, the film and Aamir's character also have strong intertextual echoes of the "im-personation" motif in the 1965 film with the terrorist substituting the charlatan. The power of *Guide* confirms Orr's view that "if the book was essential to the picture, the picture, in turn, has been vital to the creation of a wider audience for the book" (Orr 1). Regardless of the price the book might have had to pay for visibility, its "film" adaptation expanded Narayan's audience from the negligible Indian English elite to embrace the entire nation.⁴

The furore in March 2006 about Dev Anand's strongly worded objection to Prithvi Nandy on hearing about Nandy's intentions to remake the 1965 classic directed by the arthouse film director Rituparna Ghosh also raises the contentious issues of adaptation, authorship, representation, and originality that cannot be resolved by the primary or secondary relationship in which film and fiction have conventionally been placed. The octogenarian actor-filmmaker confessed that he felt "touchy" when he heard about the film being remade. In an interview with *The Hindustan Times*, he publicly staked his claims to *Guide* as one of its two original owners; "*Guide* is R. K. Narayan's *Guide*, *Guide* is Dev Anand's and Vijay Anand's *Guide*." When he confessed that he "didn't bother to get his [Narayan's] response to the Hindi *Guide* because it wasn't really his story anyway," Dev was

3 Dev Anand is addressed as Devsaab (Dev Sir) by the film fraternity in deference to his seniority.

4 The sales of the book are reported to have multiplied after the film's release.

also speaking for his late director brother Vijay who had maintained that he was never interested in merely copying any work of art from one medium to another unless there was scope for value addition. The stance taken by the Anands confirms Hutcheon's definition of the adapter as one who appropriates fiction for producing a new version, which is a form of reinterpretation and her view of adaptation as an essentially creative process. Anand's assertion about being "free to get inspired from any source" as "the creative mind's prerogative" voices one view in film theory that the filmmaker might go to literature only for the idea and build on it freely. This differs from the fidelity persistence that holds the fictional text as sacrosanct and not open to "violation" by a cinematic adaptation.

The conversation on originality that follows clearly shows that the fictional and film versions of *Guide* are two independent texts as far as the filmmaker is concerned and that he may rightfully claim his ownership of the film without contesting Narayan's ownership of the novel. Yet Anand's emphatic denial to permit anyone else to remake the film, "But you can't claim to remake *Guide*," subscribes to the myth of a cinematic originality and ownership that parallels the fictional and his anger at the proposed alteration of his classic equals Narayan's own. While Anand appears to approve of filmmakers' poaching of literary texts in search of new ideas, he believes that this turning to another film signifies a loss of originality and creativity, the reason why he himself did not contemplate remaking *Guide*. Anand reveals a firm grasp of adaptation as transcoding from one medium to another and views the transformations entailed by the transcoding as intrinsically creative but is unable to critique the originary myth. Another remark that the actor makes shows that the acrimonious Narayan-Anand collaboration raked up extra literary issues. The reportage of the mediated dispute overwritten with the judgmentalism of fidelity theorists has maintained a polite silence on the human flaws that revealed themselves in the inconsistent responses of the canonical figure. When asked by another interviewer about what the novelist thought about the film, the actor replied: "After a pre-release screening of the English *Guide*, Narayan wrote me an effusive letter from America saying it's simply beautiful. But after the movie was panned by the American critics and failed at the box-office, he began denouncing it publicly." The problem with the fidelity reflex here is that the value question is sidelined. Adaptation critics invest the author's disavowal to commerce with a higher value than the aesthetic qualities of the novel or the film.

Hutcheon points out that the process of adaptation involves both translation and distillation of the adapted work and introduces a new element of transcoding by which she means "a recoding of a communication act into a different set of conventions" (41). Revisiting the history of the film shows that the making of *The Guide* foregrounded the dissimilarity between fictional and cinematic conventions that emerge as much from the difference in medium as from genre. The deciding difference in the adaptation appears to have been generic rather than semiotic and was motivated by gross commercial considerations of the Bombay "masala" film. Vijay Anand reluctantly agreed to direct the film that brother Dev Anand was obsessed with making after having turned it down twice. Anand's industry well-wishers had also warned him against committing professional *bara-kiri* by filming the novel. Their reservations problematize cinematic translation as the dissonance between the novel's conventions and socio-political universe with those of Bombay cinema. Vijay was reportedly horrified when he read the script because it dealt with the forbidden theme of adultery. The young director's agreeing to do the film on the condition that he was given a free hand also recalls Alain Resnais's warning that "the written fiction brings a pre-existent weight to the

cinema which burdens the process of filmmaking” (qtd. in Orr 3). Afraid of how the adultery theme might be received by Bombay cinemagoers, Dev Anand gave brother Vijay Anand the complete freedom to write “a new screenplay retaining the basic theme, but deviating somewhat from R. K. Narayan’s novel” (Hattangadi “Dev Anand Unplugged”). The film’s major deviations from the novel may provide a good entry into the generic differences between the two that are embedded in the semiotic systems from which they emerge – the literary milieu of Narayan’s novel and the commercial field of Bombay cinema. These deviations in the film accentuate Hindi cinema’s generic and socio-cultural expectations from those of the Western derived Indian English novel and had to do with the film team’s perception of Narayan’s novel as not conforming to the conventions of a Bombay “hit” film. It was the film which ultimately proved them right because the artistic and commercial failure of the English version faithful to the novel proved that fiction and film are altogether different languages and that fidelity alone can be used to assess cinematic value.

While Hutcheon argues that “there are always going to be both gains and losses” in the process of transposition from one medium to another, Narayan lovers denounce Anand’s *Guide* as an act of desecration (40). In sharp contrast, the veteran actor was of the opinion that the film’s departure from the novel actually improved it: “I was a little touchy when I heard about it [...] because our film *Guide* touched the spiritual heights, which weren’t there even in the novel. The book doesn’t have that spiritual feel of our film.” Whether one agrees with the filmmaker’s contention that the film is an improvement on the novel or not, Dev Anand’s claim that the Hindi *Guide* was not Narayan’s story at all needs to be examined in detail. Hutcheon points out that the problems of transcoding certain kinds of writing into film bring out generic differences. The moral universe of the novel that permitted Narayan to depict an arranged marriage between an anthropologist and a dancing girl, and her adulterous liaison with a tourist guide, and her eventual desertion of her husband to live with her lover in defiance of the social norms of small town Malgudi were still alien to Bombay Cinema in the 60s. Anand’s spiritualization of Raju and the Raju-Rosie relationship was in deference to the Bollywood code of conduct that glorifies self-sacrifice as the acme of romantic love.

Narayan had every reason to disagree with Dev Anand’s view of the film as a spiritualized improvement. The Valmiki-like transformation of the guide facilitating his anointment as the saintly figure in Anand’s *Guide* is a simple closure that robs the film of the complex ambiguity that Narayan’s novel is able to sustain till the very end.⁵ The spiritualization of the theme and the characters in tune with prevailing Bombay cinema trends and the formulization of the novel’s conflict destroyed the comic irony that saves the novel from becoming melodramatic. Anand concedes that the Hindi version made the heroine more sympathetic but this is true of his own character in the film too. The complex shades in Raju’s character in the novel are sacrificed at the altar of Bollywood heroism. Not only was Raju transformed in the end as a self-abnegating hero but his portrayal bore the strong stamps of the Bollywood star, the debonair Dev. Narayan’s Rosie, similarly, is a complicated being torn between her desire to walk out of a loveless marriage to pursue her own interests and her loyalty to her husband. Like real human beings, she is generous, self-centered, loving, and insensitive in turns. But the film casts her in the familiar mould of the dancing girl with a heart of gold whose peccadilloes may be overlooked in the interest of a noble

5 Valmiki is a mythical figure who transformed from a notorious dacoit to a sage through divine intervention.

cause. The film's conclusion where she agrees to wait for Raju until he returns from prison projects her as the errant adulteress on the path to reform. In inverse proportion to the "improvement" in Raju and Rosie's moral character, Marco is villainized in the film by being made to take on other undesirable attributes such as drinking, whoring, and gambling in addition to his original fictional sin of callous coldness and emotional incompetence. In the process of its spiritualization, Narayan's sophisticated frame tale of Raju's forced renunciation that contains the emboxed tale of the unhappy dancer Rosie and the complicated conflict that deals with the ambivalence of human relationships is turned into two simple stories, the rescue tale and the renunciation saga. Raju's amoral but consuming passion for the "snake-girl," which leads to his final destruction, is reduced to a rescue narrative where the debonair Raju rescues the unhappy Rosie from the clutches of a dehumanized husband. This is married to the miracle tale of the criminal turning saint in the unambiguous romanticization of Raju's self-sacrifice.⁶ Thus, a complex narrative of human actors attempting to control their destinies through voluntary acts transforms into a romantic tale of love, betrayal, sacrifice, and salvation. Narayan had Raju's human failings – hunger – counterbalance his canonization till the very end. In *Guide*, Dev Anand makes himself a willing sacrifice for the sake of the community.

But *Guide's* equally audacious deviation, as far as the novelist was concerned, was the change of its setting from the mythical Malgudi to the touristy Udaipur. Considering Malgudi's centrality to Narayan's fiction and its connotations for Narayan's readers, this can be considered a grave violation. The shift to Udaipur, a familiar tourist spot, fixes Malgudi, denuding it of the polysemy that imagination can provide. While Narayan argued that Malgudi's mythical nature accorded it with a certain universality, Narayan's small town has a specifically South Indian ambiance that the "All India Film" nationalizes. Anand's poetic license might have been motivated by Udaipur's familiarity to the film's Hindi speaking national audience and its touristy appeal for its international audience. In the 60s, Anand could not afford to take the risks that a teleserial based on Narayan's *Malgudi Days* could in the 80s because the enormous production costs of commercial cinema compel the filmmaker to put practical considerations above all aesthetic honesty. In the 60s, Bombay Cinema and its audience still exhibited a North Indian slant that could not accommodate regional differences in the same way as contemporary Bollywood does. The conventions of commercial Bombay cinema that require a shift from the unknown charms of Malgudi to the exotic appeal of Rajasthan excise a central motif in Narayan's narrative that the author would find abominable.

But the difference between the fiction and the film is dictated not only by the conventions of Bollywood but also by the constraints and possibilities of the visual genre. It is in its distillation of the novel, necessitated by the time constraints imposed by the visual medium that the film splits the focus between the picaresque plot of the transformation of the loveable rogue into a saint and the rescue tale in order to conform to the generic requirements of Bombay romance. Vijay Anand skips a number of chapters that deal with Raju's childhood (Chapter 2 and 3) and compresses detailed descriptions of his evolution into Raju Guide (Chapter 5) into a couple of frames to jump straight into his dramatic meeting with Rosie. The filmmaker transforms the technical necessity for distillation to recode the action of the novel into the conventions of Bombay cinema in which the protagonist's childhood, even when thematically relevant, is reduced to a few opening shots

6 The rescue motif returned with a bang in *Fanaa* with the Amir Khan playing the shining knight or 'shehzada' whose release of Kajol from darkness humanizes the terrorist and his final self-immolation or *fanaa* for the sake of his beloved recalls Raju's destructive love for Rosie in *Guide*.

before the camera moves to the main romantic interest. In *Guide*, the effect of Vijay Anand's recoding is to reinscribe the picaresque tale into a tale of a doomed romance. The film's opening – Raju's dramatic meeting with Rosie – establishes its generic focus before the romance proceeds in conformity with Bombay Cinema's established conventions and culminates in Marco's desertion of Rosie. The director retains dramatic lines and scenes from the novel, skips the introspective ones and rearranges the rest into accepted Hindi cinema grammar. His signposting of familiar cinematic stereotypes of the cruel husband, the tortured wife, and the sacrificing lover sanctifies the manipulative relationship between Raju and Rosie as the idealized love of Bombay cinema. Unlike the novel in which the dancer's *kunstlerroman* is emboxed in the main plot of Raju's transformation, the film gives equal weightage to both the frame and the tale. Raju's gradual deterioration is also summarily condensed in a succession of shots in the second half of the film but the build up to his imprisonment is dramatized. Similarly, the patient wait for the rains in the last sequence is devoted considerable time. While transcoding always requires a degree of distillation, the adapter's choice of sequences reflecting the adapter's perceptive can change the story so completely that Dev Anand can claim *Guide* as his story.

For Orr, “the narrative language of feeling, attitude and judgment in the novel often becomes more ambiguous and problematic when rendered through the image” because “visual gesture and expression” that the film depends on cannot hope to replicate “the complex fiction language of feeling purely through the look” (Orr 2). In *The Guide*, however, the film removes the novel's ambivalence and Raju's moral ambiguity captured through Narayan's comic ironic vision. This happens due to the film being a medium which depends on “showing” rather than telling and loses the prerogative exercised by 19th century fiction through the omniscient narrator. Since the film has no equivalent for the narrative voice, the burden of communicating psychological complexity is placed on the actor. Even though Dev Anand surpassed himself through his flamboyant portrayal of Narayan's loveable rogue, his limitations as an actor became evident in his inability to express moral ambiguity. Added to that was Dev Anand's acting style, which capitalized on his personal mannerisms – speech, delivery, pauses, and made him the star he was. Anand admits that he was content to be himself in all his films “unless the character demanded something outside of my own [his] personality” as in the later parts of *Guide*. The actor Dev Anand's interpretation of the Raju character has mediated the relationship between the novelist and the cinemagoer since the film was made. Anand inscribed Narayan's loveable crook with shades of his own extroverted screen persona and overshadowed Narayan's Raju so completely that, to the Hindi film audience, Dev Anand is Raju and Raju is Dev Anand. Though Anand gets out of his personality in the later parts as he claims, he interprets Raju as a reformed criminal who wishes to repent for his sins rather than the bewildered trickster who finds sainthood thrust on him by accident. This steers the thematic interest of the novel from an inquiry into the nature of impersonation to a study of salvation.

The film's female lead, Waheeda Rehman, on the other hand, brought to life Narayan's Rosie with such sensitivity that satisfied even the fastidious writer. By accepting the negative role of Rosie, she had taken a great professional risk that could have tarnished the “goody goody” image Bombay cinema required of its heroines in the 60s. But Waheeda brought into her portrayal of Rosie that beguiling mix of vulnerability and self-centredness that defined Narayan's Rosie. She summoned her commendable acting talent to communicate both the high-strung tension of the frustrated wife and the dancer's joy. With her “complexion not white, but dusky, which made her only half



visible, as if you saw her through a film of tender coconut juice,” Waheeda fitted Rosie’s physical description perfectly and her being a trained dancer also brought greater authenticity to her portrayal of the character. Though Anand did try to sublimate Rosie into the Hindi film dancing girl with a heart of gold, Rehman transcended the stereotype through the controlled intensity she brought to the character of the dancing girl. Unlike Dev Anand who was happy playing himself in the first part of the film, Rehman metamorphosed into Rosie so completely that her impeccable public image was forgotten. The varied shades of innocence and guile that could be seen on her face communicated the essence of Narayan’s adulteress.

In his introduction to *Cinema and Fiction*, John Orr avers that film is more limited than the novel because it has no analogous conventions for rendering thought to narrative language that is used to describe consciousness in fiction. In *The Guide*, Raju’s first person narration collaborates with the omniscient narrator, in reproducing the “subterranean life of Raju’s thought in all its verbal intricacies” (Orr 2). The viewer in the 60s must depend only on what the film shows, Raju’s actions and visible behavior, to intuit the actor’s thought. The shift in point of view from that of the narrator to character in the novel must be communicated by the camera through rapid cutting and tracking which the film does but perhaps not as effectively as the novel. Though Anand deftly employs the title sequence to make the transition from the narrator to character, the Indian cinematic grammar had not sufficiently evolved to communicate these switches. Anand resorted to convey inner thought through the device of voiceover through which Raju’s dilemma is verbalized and the unsophisticated Hindi cinematic convention of the dramatization of the inner conflict through twin images of the self speaking to the character that might strike the contemporary viewer as particularly unimaginative as do literal symbols such as the crossroads in the opening sequence.

Though the cinesemioticism of Christian Metz has been found to be abstract and removed from the actual film, his insights into cinema that “tells us continuous stories; it ‘says’ things that could be conveyed also in the language of words; yet it says them differently. There is a reason for the possibility as well as for the necessity of adaptations” are still relevant. *Guide* deftly manipulates an aspect of Hindi cinema’s formulaic grammar that is beginning to be recognized only now, namely the song and dance sequence – to say things differently. The much maligned song and dance sequence of Hindi cinema has at last begun to be recognized as an indigenous grammar for articulating different kinds of meaning. Until this media-specificity of Bombay cinema – a stylized convention naturalized to express the unsaid, inner thought, mood, emotion – was made visible, the Westernized viewer found the sudden breaks in narrative disconcerting. But the elevation of song and dance into a new cinematic idiom can help one review Anand’s translation of Narayan’s novel into Bombay cinema’s formulaic grammar as a form of reinterpretation.

While each song in the film can stand alone as a masterpiece, it is also incorporated in the narrative for a number of functions including expressing feelings, thoughts, and emotions. The title song in Sachin Dev Barman’s voice, a *bhatiali* song about the individual as intrinsically alone, perfectly complements Raju’s mood when he is released from jail and literally articulates his thoughts as well as provides narrative commentary.

Waban kann hai tera musafir jayega kaban
 What pulls you back there, where would you go?
Dam le le ghadi bhar aisi chaiyyan payega kaban
 Rest for a while; where else would you find shade?

Not only thought but also mood is expressed through the language of song and dance. When picturizing songs, Vijay Anand revealed a remarkable mastery of the cinematic apparatus missing in the narrative sections. No verbal description, even that of the venerable author, can match the emotional power of *aaj phir jeene ki tamanna hai* (I wish to live again) in articulating Rosie's relief, joy, and vivacity when she is temporarily released from Marco's deathlike grip. The famous low angle tracking shot of Waheeda Rehman dancing along the ledge of the temple is one of the most memorable images of *Guide* capturing Rosie's dangerous step of leaving Marco. Similarly, the haunting mood of *tere mere sapne ab ek rang hain* (Your dreams and mine are of the same color now), which was canned in just three shots with complex character and camera movements, elevates Raju's passion for Rosie to the spiritual love Dev Anand boasted about. The deterioration in the Raju-Rosie relationship is also expressed through the medium of song. Raju's alienation from Rosie is conveyed through *dil dhal jaye sham na aaye tu to na aaye teri yaad sataye* (The day has set but the night has still not arrived, you aren't back but your memory tortures me) and their mutual betrayal through *kyaa se kyaa ban gaya tere pyar men bewafa* (what has your love turned me into, you infidel).

Guide also proves that dance, in isolation from song, can provide a more powerful metaphor than verbal language. A haunting image of Rosie from the film demonstrates the exciting possibilities offered by the visual medium in translating visual metaphors in fiction. Rosie is repeatedly described in the novel as the snake woman, a mythical enchantress who uses her physical beauty to ensnare and destroy hapless males, and requests Raju to take her into the settlement of snake charmers where she performs a snake dance. The film can actually show her performing the snake dance, which is one of the most powerful iconic images in the film through which Rosie's ensnaring and destruction of Raju is staged. Hiralal's superb choreography in the snake dance performed by Waheeda Rehman produces a spectacular visual impression of the snake woman. As the snake dance would evoke the mythical stereotype of the fatal enchantress in the mind of the Indian viewer, the film sums up with remarkable economy one of the central motifs in the novel while visually complementing Narayan's mythic characterization. While watching Anand's picturizing of Rosie's dance, one is reminded of Hutcheon's statement that "no medium is inherently good at doing one thing and not another; but each medium (like each genre) has different means of expression and so can aim at (and achieve) certain things better than others (43).

But the most important transformation that the generic transcoding brings to the film is that it reverses Narayan's sardonic critique of exotic India by its celebration of the miraculous and the common masses' belief system. By ending the film with the benedictory rains that fall in response to Raju's fasting and prayers, it adopts the perspective of its mass audience who would believe in such miracles. Narayan's satiric voice continues to mock at both the protagonist and his believing admirers until the last line but the film settles for a populist closure. However, the strange case of real life imitating reel life that the filmmakers exploited merely confirms the power of Bombay cinema over the psyche of the Indian masses. "That year the Bombay monsoon was delayed, and the city was thirsting for rain. And the day *Guide* — in which the hero fasts unto death for rain — was released, it poured over Bombay. Our posters said, 'Guide Brought The Rains!' Sometimes, even the elements favor you," Dev Anand reminisces fondly. While the film failed to meet the writer's or his admirers' approbation, it interpreted Narayan's great work in the language of the masses.

As the above analysis shows, adaptation entails both loss and gain but it also shows that "language is not the only means to express meaning or to tell stories" (Hutcheon 43). Therefore, the rhetoric

of loss underlying literary denigrations of adaptation must be displaced by a better appreciation of the sign specificity of different media that endows each with capacities that the other lacks. Unfortunately, dismissals of *Guide* are marred by a fidelity reflex and marginalize the question of aesthetic value to moralistic judgments on the commercial motives of its makers and consecration of the simple living author. The assessment of *Guide* should be based on aesthetic criteria derived from its generic requirements rather than its fidelity to its literary original. Whether *Guide* is a gross or improved version of *The Guide* should depend on how successfully it transcodes the novel within the conventions of the commercial “masala” film rather than a valorization of the author’s disavowal of commerce. In my view, *Guide* twists the conventions of the “masala” film to offer a reinterpretation that might be viewed as an independent text. After watching Anand’s *Guide*, like Hutcheon “I have become convinced of one thing: that adaptation is not necessarily secondary or parasitic” (50).

Note: *This essay was an invited paper at the IACLALS & Sabitya Akademi on R. K. Narayan Centenary Conference. CIIL Mysore. The conference was held on 11-13 October 2006.*

Works Cited

- Anand, Dev. “Dev Anand Unplugged.” Interview with Shekhar Hattangadi. Oct. 3, 2003. www.littleindia.com/India/oct03/evergreen.htm.
- Anand, Vijay, dir. *Guide*, 1965.
- Andrew, Dudley. “Adaptation.” *Film Adaptation*. Edited by James Naremore, Rutgers UP, 2000, pp. 28-37.
- Connor, J. D. “The Persistence of Fidelity: Adaptation Theory Today.” *M/C Journal*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2007). Nov. 2, 2007. journal.media-culture.org.au/0705/15-connor.php.
- Elliott, Kamilla. *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*. Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 209-12.
- Hutcheon, Linda. “From Page to Stage to Screen: The Age of Adaptation.” *A Theory of Adaptation*. Routledge, 2006.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Translated by Michael Taylor. Oxford UP, 1974.
- . *Language and Cinema*. Translated by Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok. Mouton & Co., 1974.
- Narayan, R. K. *The Guide*. Indian Thought Publications, 1958.
- Orr, John and Colin Nicholson. *Cinema and Fiction*. Edinburgh UP, 1992.
- Stam, Robert. *Reflexivity in Film and Literature*. Columbia UP, 1992.
- . “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation.” *Film Adaptation*. Edited by James Naremore, Rutgers UP, 2000, pp. 54-76.
- . “Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation.” *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Adaptation*. Edited by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo. Blackwell, 2005, pp. 1-52.