

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print); 2321-3108 (online)

PORTRAYAL OF MAN WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN THE SCREEN ADAPTATIONS OF O HENRY IN BOLLYWOOD

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ABSTRACT

O Henry has always been a popular choice for the filmmakers of India especially Bollywood. The movie makers of Hindi film industry have been influenced by the writings of O Henry ever since the birth of Indian Cinema and ventured to make films based on his writings. Most of these movies have done well in box office and some have been awarded in national and international platforms. The richness of the storylines has made them reach the ultimate level of success with diversified themes. Excellently they have portrayed the gray areas of life. Each film has a good scope of research works. This paper is an endeavour to study projection of man woman relationship in the movies based on the short stories of O Henry with special reference to the celluloid translations of The Last Leaf, The Double Dyed Deceiver and The Gift of Magi.

Key words: O Henry, Screen Adaptation, Indian Cinema, Bollywood, Man woman relationship

Introduction

Cinema and literature have always complemented each other. Literature has provided cinema with its base ever since the birth of the medium. The patterns of the narrative of cinema, its proceeding style and its way of catching and arresting the attention of the audience are thoroughly adapted from literature. Indian cinema has always drawn its inspiration from world literature ever since its early days. O Henry is one of them and perhaps the most popular choice of Indian film makers. Movie makers of almost all Indian languages have made films based on the short stories of O Henry and Bollywood has led the race. Hindi Cinema since its Golden Period has drawn inspiration from the stories of O Henry. The movies based on the writings of O Henry are so thematically rich that in each movie a detailed research work can

be carried. They not just project before the audience the various shades and gray areas of life but also touch the most sensitive zones of human hearts. This paper is an attempt to critically analyse the projection of man woman relationship in the screen adaptations of the short stories of O Henry with a core focus on the celluloid translations of The Last Leaf, The Double Dyed Deceiver and The Gift of Magi. Content analysis method has been applied to the movies selected for study. It is a thematic and close textual analysis of the selected movies.

O Henry in Hindi Cinema

The story that attracted Indian filmmakers the most is The Last Leaf. Ever since the early days of Indian cinema, the heart touching plot of the story has inspired the directors to base their films on it. One of the early adaptations of the last leaf is Musafir (1957) the directorial debut film of one of

the great pioneers of Hindi Cinema as well as the master celluloid editor of Golden Period, Hrishikesh Mukherjee. The script of the critically acclaimed movie was written by none other than the Indian movie maestro and a pillar of parallel cinema movement who served as the first academic dean of Film and Television Institute of India, Ritwik Ghatak. The film features artist from mainstream, parallel as well as regional cinema together. Dilip Kumar, Kishore Kumar and Suchitra Sen were featured in the lead roles of the movie. The experimental venture of Ghatak - Mukherjee duo of combining the leading faces of different genres of cinema brought the movie a new charm and made it more appealing (Throval,110). The movie was awarded the third best film in Hindi in National Film Award. Though it was loosely based on the last leaf and not a perfect adaptation of it, its shade is apparent clearly throughout the narrative, especially in the last act when the Pagla Babu is actually longing for his death and Uma, his past love in a new incarnation is praying for him in a hidden way, and the little special child of Uma is nurturing a line of hope in his heart that he will be able to walk on the day he will see flower blossoming in the tree in their garden. In the final sequence audience can see the girl of the last leaf in the little son of Uma who is able to walk after Pagla Babu's death. Though, the last leaf has been replaced by flowers.

Another adaptation of The Last Leaf was made in 2013 by Vikramaditya Motwane, Lootera, starring Sonakshi Sinha, Ranveer Singh and Adil Hussein, the most prominent faces of Bollywood of contemporary period. Set in 1958 Bengal, the film is an extra ordinary blend of period drama and thriller (Faulkner, 60). The plot is largely based on the last leaf but Indianised as per the taste of the audience. While the essence remains authentically true to the short story of O Henry, representation is done in Indian style. The only area where Vikramaditya Motwane differs from O Henry is here the last leaf bridges the gap between the beautiful, young and matured female protagonist and her love where as in the pages of O Henry the bond between the painter and the little girl is much like that of a father and his daughter.

The other largely appreciated story in Bollywood is The Double Dyed Deceiver. It has served as one of the major inspirations for the directors in Hindi Cinema during Classic and Angry Youngman Age. Many films of this period are loosely based on the story but the most prominent ones are Bombay ka Babu of 1960 and Zameer of 1975. While Raj Khosla's Dev Anand and Suchitra Sen Starrer Bombay ka Babu is a notable film of classic age (Rajadhyaksha & Willmen ,125), Zameer is a milestone of Angry Youngman era featuring the most popular icon of heroism and masculinity in Indian Cinema, Amitabh Bachchan and the evergreen beauty Saira Banu (Kumar, 32). The heart touching dramatic plots of the films still attract movie lovers across the country.

After twenty Years has also been adopted in Bollywood several times. Two most popular films based on it are, K Shankar's Sachchi in 1969, starring Shammi Kapoor and Sanjeev Kumar and Laksman Rekha of 1991 made by Sunil Sikand, son of the notable actor of the past era, Pran, starring Naseeruddin Shah, Jackie Shroff and Sangeeta Vijlani (sbcldr.in). None of these movies did well in box office nor did they succeed in projecting any good cinematic techniques. So with the passage of time, all these movies have been pushed into oblivion. Seldom does anybody remember these names.

Perhaps the most appealing and emotional celluloid adaptation of O Henry in India is Raincoat by Internationally acclaimed filmmaker from Bengal, Riruparno Ghosh in 2008. It is based on The Gift of Magi. The National Award winning Movie features one of the most challenging actors of Bollywood Ajay Devgan and the former Miss World as well as an extra ordinarily talented actress Aisharya Rai in a very different look (Kumar, 89). Every single scene of the movie looks typically north Indian; dialogues carry Maghi flavours, songs draw their influence from Hindustani classical music but Jame and Della reflect throughout the movie through Ajay Devgan and Aisharya Rai. Though the movie is hardcore parallel in nature, it has been adored by the moviegoers all over the country.

Discussion

Musafir has an excellent narrative structure with three stories woven together with three different titles, Marriage, Birth and Death. The unique feature of the movie which makes it a phenomenal one is the "House to Rent" is the actual protagonist, not any human character. In each part of the movie there is a new family with a new life style and different challenges, struggles and ambitions.

In the first act, Marriage, we see a newly married couple who eloped to stay with each other and married without their parents' approval with their hearts filled with new dreams and aspirations. At the beginning waves of sweet romanticism rules the screen but gradually when the ground reality starts to make its presence felt, they regret their decision of staying away from parents. In due course of time when Shakuntala's husband gets busy with work she starts feeling alone and lonely. Practical aspects of life open before her eyes and she finally makes a settlement with her in laws and they too accept her happily. A matured Shakuntala now moves to stay with her in laws who is very different from the young woman who left home for the man she loved. The simple yet unusual sequence clearly gives the message that a healthy marriage needs many other things than just the unconditional love between husband and wife. Life is complicated and romanticism is merely a part of it. This realisation is what makes Shakuntala move to her in laws' house along with her baby and husband but the seeds she sowed remain in the "House to Rent".

In the next sequence, Birth, a very different kind of relationship between a young man who is still single and his widowed sister in law is portrayed. A heart touching sweet bond between the two makes the audiences amazed and surprised. Despite staying close to each other no physical attraction develops between the two. One can see purity, truth, simplicity and above all respect in their relationship. Bhanu with his sense of humour and wit tries to maintain a light atmosphere at home to make his just widowed sister in law forget her sadness of losing her husband at an early age and during her pregnancy, the time when a woman needs the man in her life by her side the most. On

the other hand when Bhanu is depressed for not getting any job to support the family, we actually see a mother in the sister in law standing by Bhanu's side. After Bhanu gets a job, the family leaves the house, the widowed daughter in law gives birth to the child and it brings a new happiness to the family. The seeds sowed by Shakuntala now begin to grow.

In the last act, Death, there is a widowed woman with her physically challenged child who accidentally meets her old lover in the form of a Pagla Babu who keeps playing violin throughout the day and is suffering from cancer. Here many gray shades of life are explored. There is latent love between the man and the woman whom destiny never permitted to get along but the fear of society force them to pretend that they hate each other. Uma carries affection for Pagla Babu deep in her heart but because of a fear of family and its reputation she cannot show it. She is staying in her paternal home which itself is not very respectable in society and apart from that her child is special which alone is a big issue and capable to convert a woman into a burden in the family. She is forced to show that she is annoyed and gets angry at the sight of the mad violin player of the locality. She is forced to hide her relationship from each one in the family. Confrontation also arises when her brother comes to know about the relationship. On the other hand, the mad violin player shows fatherly affection to the son of Uma. He is committed to make the child walk just to bring back the lost smile of Uma. He makes the baby believe, when flowers will blossom in their tree he will be able to walk. Eventually, when he dies, flowers blossom and the child starts walking. It is a symbol to show life again has picked up its rhythm.

In Lootera we see how adverse situations and complications of life make a man sacrifice his love. He though does that to save the girl from the claws and teeth of the dark world to which he actually belongs but in doing it he actually spoils the life of the girl. Pakhi develops a feeling for Varun, who is actually a Lootera (robber) in disguise of an archaeologist. Varun too responds to the feeling but the circumstances makes him ran away from Manikpur, the hometown of Pakhi on the day of their marriage stealing all valuable belongings of the

family. The other man in Pakhi's life, her father is so affectionate to her that he cannot bear the shock of his daughter being betrayed and dies of heart attack after a short while. In the end part of the movie, we see Pakhi and Varun reuniting in Dalhousie, where Pakhi now lives with her maid. She is suffering from tuberculosis. We come to know that love has not died between them, it starts flourishing again. Pakhi hides Varun in her house to protect him from police realising why did he leave her and Varun makes every possible attempt to heal Pakhi from her prolonged illness. He discovers Pakhi has a belief that the day the last leaf of the tree in front of her house will fall; she will have her last breath. He therefore, paints a leaf ties it to one of the branches of the tree but during the course of the action, police catches him and shoots him to death. The next morning when Pakhi wakes up she finds that even in the autumn the tree is not fully barren there is still a leaf left in a branch and soon discovers it is not real, Varun has done this to keep her life going. She smiles with misty eyes. Camera moves throughout her house, rolls around her and we see everything is organised in her life, her world. No need to mention all these are done by Varun.

The adaptations of *The Double Dyed Deceiver* unveil before the audience, many thin layers of complexities of man woman relationship. Mother's love has been acknowledged as the super power which is capable to put back a criminal to the proper track of honesty. On the other hand they even tried to touch the chord of genetic sexual relationship slightly. The social taboo imposed on the issue of sexual attraction between brother and sister has been challenged a little but to the great relief of Indian audience, in none of the movies, the man and the woman have been portrayed as true siblings. Though at times from the point of view of the mother the brother and the sister have been shown to come close to each other in a very different way but the narrative has revealed before the audience in the very beginning that there is no blood relation between them. The success of these movies lies in taking the audience to a new height during the climax. An area which is completely unknown to them. In *Zameer*, Sunita is seen meeting Badal with a rakhi, she tries to tie it around his wrist

saying "Jo hakikat hai, use man lena hi sahi hain." But Badal knowing the truth refuses to accept it. He is torn between his mission and love. However, in *Zameer* we experience a happy ending, Badal reveals everything before the family which after some ups and downs forgive him and finally Badal and Sunita get tied in wedding lock but the narrative in *Bombay Ka Babu* takes a completely different turn at the end. Babu starts feeling guilty because of the unconditional love he receives from the mother in the family. He falls in love with his sister but cannot reveal the truth before the family out of fear of losing whatever he has got. He decides to remain as the true son in the family, the police officer handling his case closes the file on humanitarian ground. The sister gets married to another man; he accompanies her to her 'Doly' like a true responsible brother. While leaving she asks him, "kuch kahoge nahi?" he replies in the tone of confession, "Ahtak maine tumse woh sab kuch kaha jo mujhe nahi kahna chahiye tha. Ab jab sahi me kuch kahna chahiye, mere pas koi shabd nahi hain". She says "tum ne abhitaq sab ko bewakuf banaya, is ghar me sabhi ko, khud ko bhi. Par main pahle din se hi sachchayi janti thi. Par ab jise jo chahiye, mil gaya hain. Maa, Pitaji, Tum sabhi ko aur mujh ko bhi". She proceeds towards her new world with a hope of a new beginning and Babu returns to the house of the family. Exactly the way the protagonist of *The Double Dyed Deceiver* returned to the home answering to the mother's call, "yes, mother", he too returns to his mother's lap silently as if saying in heart, "yes, coming mother." Though the ending does not seem happy apparently to the audience as it does not match their expectation level, the hero does not get his love. But it leaves a very positive message before them, a man is not a slave to his instincts as popularly believed, he can control them.

In *raincoat*, conservative values of family make Neeru refuse to marry Mannu who is still struggling for job. The family wants to get the daughter married to a man of good economic condition who is well settled in life. In India this is the primary quality of any eligible groom. All other things are of hardly any importance. Neeru says Mannu very clearly before her marriage, "Samjhungi shaadi unse nahi, security se kar rahi

hoon” but, alas. That security she never gets in her married life. She is compelled to live in a rented house with a man who is drug addicted and has sold everything for alcohol, the rent also she cannot pay every month and the landlord comes to threaten her. She has rented the house to a dealer of antic furniture and runs her house on the money she receives from it. Mannu gets a job but soon loses it. The company shuts down. He is in Kolkata in search of a vocation and has taken shelter in one of his friend’s house. Here Neeru lives. Destiny again brings them together but both try to hide their misery from each other but finally each comes to know about the truth of the other and try to help each other. Mannu’s paying the rent with all the money he collected for his business and Neeru’s selling her bangles to help Mannu to start up his business reveal that though because of circumstances they could not stand by each other but love still remains in hearts. They can still sacrifice their everything for each other.

Apart from Neeru and Mannu there is Mauli, the wife of the friend who is not happy in her married life because her husband never paid any heed to her feelings. He is busy making money. The movie again and again makes an attempt to focus on the fact that good economic condition of a man alone is not capable of making a marriage happy and healthy but love is to a great extent.

Conclusion

In the Indian celluloid translations of O Henry, we find the fact clearly revealed that man woman relationship gets influenced in different circumstances by family values, economic condition of the family, social pressure and many other things. It is something very subtle and abstract which cannot be defined by the parameters and laws of the institution of marriage. Nor can it be restrained within the perimeter of wedlock. It can never be confined within the bracket of any kind of relationships. The definition of its charm and the complexities is beyond the capacity of common people. The concept of purity is very relative and may change with a change in time and space. It is an impulsive bond which may develop any moment between any two matured human beings of opposite sex and can be controlled only by rational

thinking and a human heart. But, at the end of the day, it is unpredictable, beyond logics and insane. Perhaps a song from Looteria composed by Amitabh Bhattacharya best describes it -

“ Kaagaz Ke Do Pankh Leke Uda Chala Jaaye Re
Jahan Nahi Jaana Tha Ye Wahin Chala Haye Re
Umar Ka Yeh Taana-Baana Samajh Na Paaye Re
Zubaan Pe Jo Moh-Maaya, Namak Lagaye Re
Ke Dekhe Na, Bhaale Na, Jaane Na Gaaye Re
Disha Haara Kemon Boka Monta Re!”

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