

## **From Transcontextualization to Transcreation: A Study of the Cinematic Adaptations of the Short Stories of Premchand**

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Cinematic transcreations of short stories follow a trajectory that is different from adaptations of novels. While compression of events as well as sequences become almost mandatory in terms of a technique of adapting a novel into film, short stories owing to their brevity (not necessarily depth) lead themselves better to cinematic adaptations. Sometimes expansion of motifs and symbols become necessary in order to reproduce visually what has been rendered verbally on a page. It is also not uncommon to see how at times the narrative order of a short story is reproduced cinematically, though the hall-mark of a successful adaptation is not to see whether a one-to-one correspondence between the word and the image has been established. For a successful cinematic transcreation of a fictional piece, what is perhaps most important is the notion of *transcontextualization*, as unless the film text is able to 'politically' address the socio-cultural context in which it has been created, it cannot work within the target language situation. The film (whether an adaptation or a creative construction) must be able to speak to the context in which it is made, taking the spirit of the source text, albeit in a mode that may be altered but simultaneous at the same time as well. Again the adapted text must have a life of its own, taking within its sweep, as it were the 'after-word'<sup>1</sup> of the source text to aesthetic dimensions that are divergent as well as new.

Taking this as the matrix of reference, following the focus of contemporary trends in Translation and Adaptation Studies, it is perhaps pertinent to trace some of the cinematic

transcreations of Premchand, one of the major Hindi/Urdu writers of the past century in terms of a case study, in order to establish how important the idea of transcontextualization is, as it is a process simultaneous to transcreation, which in turn, influences the politics of adaptation. While some films and television serials were based on the novels of Premchand, like *Seva Sadan* (1938) (which in turn is based on the novel *Bazaar-e-Husn* in Urdu), *Godaan* (1963), *Gaban* (1966), *Godhuli* (1977), *Nirmala* (1980s), others were based on his short stories *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (1977), *Oka Oori Katha* (1977) - on the story 'Kafan' and *Sadgati* (1981). The mainstream Hindi as well as the regional cinema industries in India largely ignored Premchand's writings primarily because of its subversive content. Unlike Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyaya's novels, some of which like *Devdas* and *Parineeta* have been rendered more than once, in Hindi as well as regional language mainstream cinema, Premchand's works have been favoured by film-makers working primarily in the parallel cinema mode. This paper attempts to study primarily the cinematic transcreations of Premchand's short stories 'Sadgati' and 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi' in Hindi by Satyajit Ray and 'Kafan' in Telugu by Mrinal Sen in order to trace how the resonances of his legacy mark out a space of the 'alternative' in Indian cinema and thereby enable us to examine how valid is the notion of transcontextualization that I fore-ground above in terms of a hypothesis in relation to adaptation studies in particular.

## I

### Premchand's 'Kafan' as Mrinal Sen's *Oka Oorie Katha* ('The Marginal Ones' or 'The Outsiders')

Premchand's 'Kafan' is perhaps one of the most translated texts for reasons that are intrinsic to the matrix of the narrative. There is a certain degree of ambivalence regarding the presentation of issues in the story 'Kafan'. On the one hand, Ghisu and Madhav are portrayed as total good-for-nothing Chamars whose insensitivity to the plight of Budhia in the throes of child-birth make them quite inhuman. The cause of their insufferable indolence is not something that Premchand lays bare, except in terms of their individual natures, which made them outsiders to their own caste as well as the village society. Their experience of poverty and exploitation condition their very being and harden their philosophy of inaction and total insensitivity to others. Ghisu's wife had died long back and Madhav was wed only for a year. His wife Budhia was able to bring in some kind of order into this anarchic household through sheer hard work. This only furthered their resolve of not to work and now when she was almost

dying in the pangs of child birth, the two were busy eating roasted potatoes, waiting for her to die so that her screams of pain would stop and they would be able to rest in peace.

The second level of ambivalence with which Premchand works this narrative out was the kind of relation that the father and son shared. While Ghisu was Madhav's mentor in most things, he proved to be following totally the footsteps of his father. So when asked repeatedly to go and see what Budhia's state was, Madhav smelled some ulterior motive behind it all, as he felt Ghisu's real intention was to consume his share of the potatoes too. Hence he pretended to be afraid of going in as Budhia's condition of pain scared him. This suspicion that marks the character of Madhav makes him a more complex character than Ghisu making them thereby represent the most bankrupt aspect of humanity. What is interesting here is the manner in which Premchand sketches out the character of the two. While they were oblivious to what the world thought of them, the father and son had games of different kinds to tease each other with. One was of course the oft-repeated tale of a feast when some twenty years ago Ghisu had last tasted good food and had eaten his fill. Madhav had had no such opportunity but to listen to this tale and imaginatively re-construct things while keeping watch over the fact that he is not beguiled from parting with his present share of food (i.e., the roasted potatoes).

The third complexity revolves around the presentation of the village society in Premchand's narrative. Ghisu and Madhav are products of a social system that is seemingly humane. He complicates the representation by presenting Madhav and Ghisu as have-nots primarily because of their philosophy of indolence on the one hand, and on the other, portrays the living conditions of hard working villagers as hardly any better, despite the fact that the Zamindar was in fact kind hearted – "*Zamindarsahab dayalu the*"<sup>2</sup> and there was no dearth of work in the village which was primarily agrarian. Premchand's use of phrases often works at multiple levels. His later mooring within the social Left leading to his association with the Progressive Writers Movement is evident from the paradoxical nature of his creative constructions that aims at subverting that what is considered usually as a normative. The concluding thematic ensemble that is woven around the term 'kafan' from which the story gets its title, plays out not only the tragedy of women like Budhia, but also their immediate family members who hardly have a rupee to spare on the "ojha" (witch-doctor) or for a whole piece of cloth to cover living bodies, now receive the benevolence of the rich as well as the poor to

bid farewell to the dead with some amount of dignity and they spend it on food and drinks.

This act of Ghisu and Madhav may be read as the basest possible actions of human beings concerned with only the self. Now whether this is utter depravity that is being demonstrated or a critique of the social system that operates primarily on conditions that perpetuate inequality and then preach generosity would remain a matter of interpretation. Budhia's death in child birth and the kind of alienation that Madhav exhibits makes one naturally question the nature of relationship they shared. In Ghisu's story, he does share how he had seen his wife undergo nine child births, and probably Madhav is the only survivor among the nine, and how when his wife was on death-bed, he had not left her side for three whole days, makes one wonder how Madhav is so indifferent. Or is it that, like Madhav, Ghisu was not beyond dramatizing things *for without fabrications, displacements from reality is not possible; and without such displacements, survival in extreme conditions too is not possible*. Hence the irony that the money for the 'kafan' contributes towards celebrating as after-all it was twenty years ago that Ghisu had a proper meal when the Thakur's daughter got married. Now Budhia's death gave them another opportunity of feasting and drinking; so why lose it on a silly tradition like buying a 'kafan' for the dead.

Mrinal Sen's *Oka Oori Katha* ('The Marginal Ones' or 'The Outsiders') takes Premchand's story at the obtuse level fore-grounding Ghisu (Vengkaya), Madhav (Kistaya) and Budhia (Neelamma) as characters who are not without their own histories that shape the tenor of their lives. In the span of a short story, what may be left untraced would be hardly plausible as a full length feature film. Reading Premchand between the lines and adapting the storyline to comment indirectly on the political climate of the '70s, Sen transmutes the characters by adding on details that give us some sense of agency. Taking the location of the shooting to Andhra Pradesh, using Telugu as the medium both linguistically and culturally, Sen draws on the legacy of the region that served as a vortex of political struggle connecting Tebhaga-Telengana-Naxalbari in terms of a tradition that shaped an axis of resistance within a certain rhythm of the Left. It is precisely this that makes Vengkaya, Kistaya and to an extent Neelamma, different as characters that Premchand constructs. Rather than making them morally bankrupt with little or no sense of responsibility, he centres on the notion of their philosophy of inaction as an act of resistance. Taking his cue from one single paragraph in the story as the central core that has the key to the play of ambivalences

that Premchand toys with, Sen invests Vengkaya with a kind of existential anger against the social system that perpetually equivocates using the façade of ethics and morality. Note the following lines from the literary text representing the point of view of the omniscient narrator:

*“Jis samaj mein raat-din mehnat karne walon ki halat unki (meaning Ghisu and Madhav) halat se kuch bahut acchi nehi thi, aur kisano ke mukable mein weh log, jo kisano ki durbaltaon se labh uthana jante the, kahi jyada sampann the, waha is tarah ki monovrittika paida ho jana koi acharj ke baat na the. Hum to kahenge Ghisu kisano se kahi jyada vicharvan tha aur kisano ke vichar-shunya samuha mein shamil hone ke badle baithakbaji ki kutsit mandali mein ja mila tha. Ha, usme yeh shakti na thi, ki baithabajo ke niyam aur niti ka palan karna. Isliye jahan uski mandali ke aur log gaon ke sargana aur mukhiya bane hue the, us par sara gaon ungli uthata tha. Phir bhi use taskin to thi hi ki agar woh phatehal hai to kam-se-kam use kisano ki-si ji-tor mehnat to nehi karni padti, aur uski saralta aur nirihata se dusre log bewaja phaida to nehi uthate.”*<sup>3</sup>

Taking this as the central theme of the story, Sen invests Vengkaya with a Fanon-like notion of the oppressed. As the ‘wretched of the earth’<sup>4</sup>, Vengkaya rightly espouses the moral view in a drunken litany often repeated within the narrative oeuvre of the cinematic text:

“Idiots work!

The landlord will fatten on your work.

Every bastard who works is an idiot.

It’s the idiots who work, the masters who feed off them.

We eat to fill our stomachs. They eat for their glory.” (Hood, 43)<sup>5</sup>

Sen in order to contextualize the story changes several narrative units to suit the turbulence of the times. For instance, the absolute depravity that marks the characterization of Ghisu and Madhav is retained only marginally as Sen invests them in a new light suited to Vengkaya and Kistaya. Vengkaya is the ‘angry old man’ that Sen delineates as if in a playful opposition to what was happening in mainstream Hindi film-making with the megastardom of Amitabh Bacchan that revolved around the idea

of the 'angry young man', of course, not of the Osborne-variety. Again while there is a kind of mistrust between Madhav and Ghisu indicated particularly through the former's apprehension that the father might eat up his share of roasted potatoes if he obeys him and goes to see his wife's condition, Sen creates Vengkaya in terms of a hardened nut who refuses to crack as his life has given him a kind of perception about the conditions of their existence, while Kistaya is more like Vengkaya-in-the-making. Premchand's rendering of Madhav as a wily, treacherous creature, worse than his father Ghisu has led to different kinds of readings. For instance, Jesse Astbury's "Exploitation and Conscience in Premchand" in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, Volume XI, 1996, Centre for South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison, takes two stories of Premchand – "The Power of a Curse" and "The Shroud" as parallels to foreground how Ramsevak and Ghisu and Madhav, belonging to two different cross-segments of society, are equally de-sensitized as human beings for whom the social fabric, traditions and customs meant nothing if it could not be skillfully put to one's advantage. Though Ghisu and Madhav are not really sympathized with by Premchand, but neither are to be considered as mere "loafers" (p.268)<sup>6</sup> as Astbury delineates them since then one is ignoring the omniscient narrative point of view quoted earlier. One has problems with understanding Madhav as though he walks in his father's footsteps, he lacks his perception of life. Again to merely point out that poverty makes one bestial as Sara Rai's reading suggests in "Realism as a Creative Process: Features of Munshi Premchand's Ideology" in *Social Scientist*, Volume 7, 84, July 1979, would be a text-specific understanding that is hardly valid if one takes into consideration how the question of poverty has been dealt with by the author in relation to his other writings. It would be pertinent to quote Rai here:

"The desperate greed with which Ghisu and Madhav sit eating potatoes outside the dying woman's hut, neither agreeing to go in and attend to the woman, not trusting the other with the potatoes, is testimony enough that at that level of poverty emotional and familial ties become mere will-o'-the-wisp when the horror of hunger and misery looms large. And the irony of the ritual ridden social system at once leaps before our eyes when Ghisu says, "What a rotten custom it is that somebody who didn't even have rags to cover herself while she was alive, has to have a new shroud when she dies!" (p.40)<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the issue of trust here, it is Madhav who detracts, suspicious as he is of his father, and Ghisu is critical of his son's attitude towards his wife. "*Tu bara bedard hai be! Sal-bhar jiske sath sukh-chain se raha, usi ke saath itna bewafai!*"<sup>8</sup> Later he recalls how he never left his wife's bed-side for three days till she breathed her last. He also recalls how he helplessly witnessed the birth-pangs she suffered and then of course the ordeal of burying dead fetuses, scuttling between the hut and the graveyard, tells a story of a life of sixty years that has hardened due to suffering and now has no hope. It is Madhav again who distracts him from this narrative as he would rather escape from this immediate situation of responsibility as he has neither any will nor means to fulfill them and leads Ghisu to mull over what they would do when the child is born as they do not have "sonth, gur, tel" – i.e., dried ginger, jaggery and oil, needed primarily for the mother to regain strength after delivery, when he recalls that neighbours would help as they have always done in the past, which hardly suggest that poverty and inhumanity are inter-related. Being old, Ghisu then is led on to recount the oft-repeated tale of the Thakur's daughter's feast, much in terms of an escape that helps them digest not only those half-roasted, burning potatoes but also their condition from which there is no reprieve.

It is this understanding of the structure of poverty that makes Premchand's narratives complex and powerful and in Sen's cinematic transcreation, what becomes very interesting to see is the transcontextualization of the narrative making it political. Kistaya, unlike Madhav, is rather innocent of the ways of the world and is still foolish enough to both hope and dream that a better life is possible. It is this sense of belief in possibility for change that makes him desire marriage. Unlike Astbury's reading of them in terms of "loafers", Sen makes them rooted and it is this understanding that makes him invest the story differently. Vengkaya's initial outrage at Kistaya's desire to marry Neelamma stems from a kind of concern as marriage meant responsibility, being rooted to life, being bonded, and it is this condition of bondage that becomes the point of extraction when men are forced to labour more and earn less, buying only 'death' in several forms in the bargain. Rather the freedom that Vengkaya and his son now enjoyed would be totally lost but when he realized that there is no stopping Kistaya from traversing the beaten path, he agrees to go to the next village and seek Neelamma's hand in marriage. This whole sequence of love and marriage is a construction of Sen to transmute the apparent inhumanity of the father-son duo and the conflict in the narrative stems from the clash of two world-views – one held by the embittered

Vengkaya, whose life has taught him to be oblivious to stupid social customs and values as then only one is free, and on the other, by Kistaya and later Neelamma, whose experiences would force him to be like Vengkaya one day.

Sen's rendering of *Oka Oorie Katha* ("The Marginal Ones" or "The Outsiders") is an adequate transcreation of the progressive aspect of Premchand's politics. The 'kafan' is of little importance to him as it is not only that women like Budhia are denied in life as well as death but also the Ghisus and Madhavs. It is the marginal existence of people like Vengkaya, Kistaya and Neelamma, the cruel conditions of poverty that makes them bereft of the right to even dream that life could be otherwise. Keeping to the spirit of Mao Tse Tung's<sup>9</sup> understanding of the position of women in society vis-à-vis men, he does show Budhia, even in her condition of advanced pregnancy, doing all the house-work and trying to earn something too by selling cowdung cakes, working in the chain gang and making wicker baskets. In a specially moving sequence when she is seen to make rice for herself alone and gobbling it up without offering any to the men folk as they keep whiling away their time while she slogs, Vengkaya is outraged and he has an altercation with her for having cooked no dinner. She chooses not to answer any of his queries and when Kistaya returns, Vengkaya assumes patriarchal authority, humiliated as he was by the beating of the landlord's men outside a liquor shop, shouts at her and when she retaliates by shouting back, he threatens to hit her. Kistaya restrains him and with a look of sympathy on his face, he tries to stop the fight, pitying her condition and his impotence in helping her in any way. When rebuked for eating alone, she cries out, an equal to Vengkaya in her anger for spoiling Kistaya, saying that she needed to eat not for herself but the life growing inside her, for her baby. There are sequences where one sees her making things for the baby to be born, particularly a hand-stitched *katha*<sup>10</sup>, made with old cotton cloth, singing to herself while working, smiling at the prospect of becoming a mother. Kistaya is now slightly distant from her as her continuous chidings pushed him away and Vengkaya capitalizes on this since he has seen foolish women like his wife in the past, who prepared themselves and made the families slog for lumps of flesh they gave birth to but they had no life in them. In the concluding sequence while flies gather on her face and Vengkaya listens whether her heart is still beating by putting his head on her chest throwing propriety to the winds at the behest of his son, there is a close up shot of the *katha* symbolizing the effort of the poor, a travesty to chase dreams and keeping to the spirit of the story the sequence of collecting money for the 'kafan' and feasting

with it is omitted as symbols work differently in cinema and literature.

It is little wonder then why this film is regarded as the best Sen film in the post *Bhuvan Shome* phase (1969). Sen recounts what happened at a special screening of the film before its official release, for some of his friends including Premchand's son and biographer Amrit Rai in the following manner:

He (referring to Amrit Rai) saw the film, came out of the theatre and said: 'It is a shattering film and a shattering experience to watch. But I am sorry I do not agree with your interpretation.'

'Do you have any regrets that you allowed me to make the film?' I asked.

'Not at all' he said. 'Not at all', he asserted.

I felt relieved. (Mukhopadhyay, p. 246)<sup>11</sup>

Although the film was not received well in India writes Deepankar Mukhopadhyay in *The Maverick Maestro*, "[b]ecause of its grim and almost suffocating nature... barring a regulation Silver Lotus; but it was appreciated in a big way in foreign festivals like Cannes, Karlovy Vary, London and Carthage." (p.124) Two other responses to the film comprising Sen's happy memories of it is worth noting. In the Madras Filmotsav in 1978, the first Indian Panorama, Sen invited Satyajit Ray to see it and he was reluctant as sub-titling was not done as it was then not mandatory. He was reluctant at first as he thought it would be a waste of time watching a film in Telugu, a language and culture he was quite alien to. Owing to his persistence Ray agreed to be there for some time and after the screening was over, while he was busy with some delegates, he heard his familiar voice shouting his name. "Ray rushed to him, shook him by the hand, and said, "Thank you for persuading me to come. I would really have missed something." (Ibid.) The second incident was at the Cannes Film Festival, when Fernando Solanas sought him out among the milling crowds to congratulate him saying that it reminded him of his country. Solanas is one of Sen's mentors in cinema and what could be greater in terms of appreciation than the words of one's mentor.

## II

### Premchand's 'Sadgati' and 'Shatranj ke Khiladi' through the frames of Satyajit Ray

Unlike Sen, who dabbled in cinema using tongues that were not his own, Satyajit Ray often kept a safe distance from alien trends barring his venture into *Sadgati* and

*Shatranj ke Khiladi*, both made in Hindi, with a cast with which he had not worked before. Again, in terms of impediments, Ray had little experience of rural India, its complex politics, as well as the problems of caste and class that Sen was involved with. Rightly proclaimed as the last man of the Bengal renaissance by Chidananda Dasgupta<sup>12</sup>, the justice he did with Tagore and Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay's stories and novels in cinema as well as the writings of his contemporaries, he shows a complete non-understanding of Premchand. *Even one's intense Ray-philialia cannot help one come to terms with the failings of a master.*

First, with reference to *Sadgati*, though he keeps to the story-line, it is quite a mechanical rendering, as often the passages from the worded narrative are literally taken up to create cinematic sequences. What is striking in the story of 'Sadgati' is the conviction of Dukhi Chamar in the powers of the Brahman. It is this conviction that makes him not question, but adhere strictly to the codes of social behavior laid down by the upper caste Hindus. Hence, he is very particular in his instructions to his wife that she should not touch anything with her hand, but rather make the merchant place the ingredients in the right proportions on the leaf utensil that she makes in order to offer Punditji when he comes visiting their house to ordain the auspicious date for their daughter's marriage. Otherwise Dukhi feels "*gajab ho jayega*"<sup>13</sup>. It is again this internalization of the caste order that pushes him to his death when he goes to Ghasiram's house with a bundle of hay as offering and then made to do free chores like cleaning the courtyard, store-house, splitting a particularly difficult log of wood which lay outside his house, that many previous to him had been unable to do, when he was neither equipped nor trained for it. Without food from morning and a whole day of hard labour, intense sweating in the sun, makes him collapse finally when listening to the brahmin's dictum, he seems to have superhuman strength ("*gupt shakti*"<sup>14</sup>) that makes him split the Gordian knot leading to the end of his life. It is then, when the Brahmin is prepared to go to his house and after repeatedly calling him, he realizes that the fellow has died. *A Chamar dead on his door-step!* When none from the Chamar community come to pick up the body despite word being sent except the ritual mourning of the womenfolk (referred to as "*chudails*" and "*dayins*" in the story) primarily out of fear of the police, Ghasiram is forced to drag the corpse away from the Brahmin locality and cleanse the place with holy water. Dukhi's corpse lies unattended with not even the final rites taken care of, a prey to vultures and other scavengers feasting on his rotting flesh leading to his deliverance in ironic terms. Ray deviating from Premchand's narration

takes things at the obvious level, shows Dukhi to be somewhat recovering from a fever, weak and out of breath, creating thereby a sense of causation that leads to his death diluting, the irony of the title 'sadgati'. Dukhi is a victim of his own beliefs in the supremacy of the Brahmin and there are several words and phrases in the literary narrative to suggest that his fate follows his total submission to the idea of purity of the Brahmin unlike the fellow Gond Chikhuri from whom he borrows a smoke and who later tries to help him split the wood but fails. Although Ray's film has been praised by critics like Indrani Mazumder, it must be said that it is the worst in his entire oeuvre. The internal critique that ought to have been played out through the visual sequences hardly takes off as Ray keeps close to the literary text knowing full well that in the medium of cinema how trite the effect really would be. When almost all his works barring a few like *Kanchenjuga* and *Agantuk* have been based on literary narratives, considering how brilliantly each of them were rendered one wonders why did he choose to film the life of Dukhi Chamar particularly when he felt that untouchability was no longer a problem in India as he mentions in a BBC interview (See BBC Interview of Ray qtd. In Deepti Zutshi's article "Satyajit Ray's Deliverance of Premchand's 'Sadgati'")<sup>15</sup>. It is this belief again that makes him humanize the Brahmin couple to a certain extent who seem to feel apologetic about what they had unwittingly committed unlike the Premchand story. Had he considered the caste question in post-independent India seriously, he would have rendered Premchand as faithfully as Mrinal Sen did. The use of a close up of a statue of Ravana in the film inter-cut with close-ups of the Brahmin is yet another indicator of how raw the imagery is.

Again in *Shatranj ke Khiladi*, involving megastars from the Bombay industry, the manner in which the period of Wajid Ali Shah is re-created shows only one kind of historiography that he was privileging. If Premchand's critique is against the declining feudal nobility, Ray's is leveled against Muslim nobility quite in line with post-1857 legacy of writings that aimed at vilification of Islamic rule in India. On the contrary, when he does a film like *Jalsaghar* (1958), one rather finds him sympathetic to the condition of the old zamindar who squandered everything for drinks and courtesans of stature. The dignified way in which he rides for the last time on his favourite horse, makes his death visually poetic. If he is critical of anything here it is the nouveau-rich gentry who accumulate money in nefarious ways and then show off, unlike the tradition bound landed aristocracy. The effeminacy of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah is an addition to the film narrative, a departure from the Premchand story, and an uncritical assimilation

of prejudiced academic discourses on his reign. The King was a patron of arts but whether a debauch or not is perhaps not quite established. Premchand's lines are significant as when he abdicates his kingdom to the British, there is neither bloodshed, nor any hue and cry:

*“Nawab Wajid Ali Shah pakad liye gaye the aur sena unhe kisi azad sthan ko liye ja rahi thi. Shehar mein na koi halchal thi, na maar-kat. Ek bund bhi khoon nahi gira tha. Aaj tak kisi swadhin desh ke raja ki parajay itni shanti se is tarah khun bahe bina na hui hogi. Yeh ahimsa na thi, jis par devgan prasanna hote hai. Yeh kayarpan tha jis par bade se bade kayar asu bahate hai. Awadh ke vishal desh ka nawab bandi bana chala jata tha aur lucknow aish ki nind mein mast tha. Yeh rajnaitik adhapatan ki charam seema thi.”*<sup>16</sup>

This political decadence of society that Premchand is critical of, is represented through the obsession of the two chess players Mir and Mirza who represent the general condition of the pleasure-seeking aristocracy. The crucial lines that ought to have caught Ray's attention was *“rajya mein hahakar macha hua tha. Praja din-dahare luti jati thi. Koi phariyad sunnewala na tha...”* (Ibid.) The abysmal condition of rural Awadh fails to get any space in Ray's narrative. What pre-occupies him is the story of Mir and Mirza, the two chess players, and their obsession, the tale of an effeminate Nawab and treacherous wives who two-time their husbands, as well as wives who can go to any length of upturning propriety to get the sexual attention of their husbands. Though sexual treachery comprises the theme of several Ray films<sup>17</sup> never has it taken the proportion of incestuous depravity as it does in *Shatranj ke Khiladi*. Thus in conclusion, it could be perhaps pointed out that Ray's rendering of Premchand is largely a failure owing to his inability to transcontextualize his transcreation in adequate terms as he does so in all other films based on fiction.

Cinematic transcreations have been successful only if the spirit of the source text has been able to address issues within the target text culture in some ways. Ray's *Charulata*, widely acclaimed a master-piece is so since it is not “Noshto Nirh” that he is interested in re-creating but rather the story of the young Charu in it. The modalities of inter-lingual translations are very different from inter-semiotic ones as the codes governing the two are very different. Hence, while Sen is capable of incorporating the

‘alternative’ strand within Premchand’s narratives keeping to the rhythm of parallel cinema, Ray’s rendering of Premchand goes wide off the mark primarily because it is not the milieu in which he is either politically or socially at home.

**Notes:**

1. In an ‘Introduction: of colonies, cannibals and vernaculars’ to Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi Ed. *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practise*, [Routledge, London & New York: 1999] there is an interesting reference made to the Indian tradition of translation. The most common Indian word for translation in Hindi and allied regional languages is ‘anuvad’ which etymologically means ‘saying after or again, repeating by way of explanation, ... explanatory reference to anything already said’ (qtd. Monier-Williams). The Indian term ‘anuvad’ is temporal in sense, rather than spatial, unlike the European notion of translation that implies primarily the sense of ‘carrying across’(p.9). Another parallel may be traced with the Jewish Cabbalistic tradition to which Walter Benjamin belonged and for whom the idea of ‘afterlife’ or ‘survival’ (Überleben) was more important in a translation rather than anything else [See ‘The Translator’s Task, Walter Benjamin (Translation)’, <http://www.erudit.org/revue/TTR/1997/v10/n2/037302ar.pdf>, p. 153]. The notions of after-word, so as to say and afterlife are temporal constructions and none can happen unless the target text is transcontextualized which is the argument that I intend to offer through my present reading of the cinematic transcreations of the short stories MunshiPremchand.
2. See <http://premchand.kahaani.org/2010/12/kafan.html>
3. <http://premchand.kahaani.org/2010/12/kafan.html>
4. See Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, <http://books.google.co.in/books?id=XGKFJq4eccC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>.
5. See John W. Hood’s *Chasing the Truth: The Films of MrinalSen*, Seagull, Calcutta: 1993.
6. See <http://www.urdustudies.com/pdf/11/36exploitation.pdf>
7. See [http://dsal.uchicago.edu/books/socialscientist/pager.html?issue=84&objectid=HN681.S597\\_84\\_034.gif](http://dsal.uchicago.edu/books/socialscientist/pager.html?issue=84&objectid=HN681.S597_84_034.gif)
8. <http://premchand.kahaani.org/2010/12/kafan.html>

9. In a chapter titled 'Fourteen Great Achievements' (*Selected Writings*, Vol.I), sub-section 7 deals with the question of women in the following words: "A man in China is usually subjected to the domination of three systems of authority: (1) the state system (political authority)...; (2) the clan system (clan authority)...; (3) the supernatural system (religious authority)... As for women, in addition to being dominated by these three systems of authority, they are also dominated by the men (the authority of the husband). (p.44)
10. Wrapper for babies s.titched by putting together bits of old cloth.
11. See Deepankar Mukhopadhyay's *The Maverick Maestro*, Indus, New Delhi:1995.
12. See Chidananda Das Gupta, *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray*, National Book Trust, New Delhi: 1994, 2nd Rpt. 2005. In the very first chapter 'The Bengal Renaissance and the Tagorean Synthesis', Das Gupta writes, "Satyajit Ray was the last great representative of this movement for the regeneration of India – a movement triggered by the coming of the British through whom modernist Indians found a point of contact with the western civilization." (p. 6-7) The 'movement' refers to the kind of synthesis that happened due to the 'clash' (or perhaps 'dialogue') of civilizations in the Indian sub-continent post British colonization. This synthesis did usher in what has been termed (paradoxically for some) as the Bengal renaissance and according to Das Gupta, Ray was the last great representative of that legacy.
13. See <http://www.hindisamay.com/premchand%20samagra/mansarovar4/Sadgati.htm>.
14. See <http://www.hindisamay.com/premchand%20samagra/mansarovar4/Sadgati.htm>
15. See M. Asaduddin&Anuradha Ghosh Ed. *Filming Fiction: Tagore, Premchand, and Ray*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi: 2012, pp. 239-260.
16. See <http://premchand.kahaani.org/2010/12/shatranj-ke-khiladi.html>
17. For instance, *Pikoo* (1980) which has adultery as its explicit theme, and in terms of sub-themes like repercussions of pre-marital and extra-marital affairs bordering either on flirtatious sojourns in a kind of Bovarisme which may be ascribed as adultery or forced sexual labour owing to pressure of circumstances as in *Kanchenjunga* (1962), *Charulata* (1964), *Kapurush-O-Mahapurush* (1965), *AsaniSanket* (1973), *Jana Aranya* (1975), *GhareBaire* (1984) and *ShakhaProshakha* (1990).

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