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Word to Image 586-595

Novel is defined as a long narrative in prose and can be treated as a 'Word'. Film is also a narrative that combines both theatrical and dramatic elements and can be treated as an 'Image'. The novel and the film imitate human life. The novel and the film are complementary to each other because they are the works of fiction. However, both are independent art forms. Hence, the adaptation of the novel to the film is a multidisciplinary process.

Film Adaptation

Film adaptation is based on a story, novel or any other work of art. (Bandi 2009: 11) Most of the films are based on novels. Novels offer ready plots and stories for filmmakers. Adapting novels for films is a well-known phenomenon in film industry.

Both Hollywood and Bollywood have adopted many novels for their film scripts. To name a few: *Gone with the Wind* (1939: George Cukor), *Pather Panchali* (1955: Satyajit Ray), *Godan* (1963:

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Trilok Jetley), *Samskara* (1970: Pattabhi Rama Reddy), *The Godfather* (1972: Francis Coppola), *Train to Pakistan* (1997: Pamela Rooks), *The Namesake* (2007: Mira Nair) and so on.

Recently, Christian Colson has adopted the novel *Q & A* (2005) by Vikas Swarup for the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). This film adaptation has won eight Oscar Awards.

The film adaptation process is the study of ‘Word to Image’.

Focus of the Paper: Film Adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s Novel *The Namesake* into Mira Nair’s Film *The Namesake*

The present research paper is an attempt to explore the film adaptation of Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake* (2003) to Mira Nair’s film *The Namesake* (2007). The research question is: What is the relationship between the novel *The Namesake* and its film adaptation? The hypothesis is that the novel and its film adaptation have many similarities and differences.

As already mentioned, the objective of the research paper is to explore the film adaptation of the novel *The Namesake*. Jhumpa Lahiri is an Indian emigrant to the United Kingdom and the United States. Her permanent dislocation from her motherland and a sense of uprootedness which she must have witnessed in the foreign countries has become a major theme in most of her published literary materials including *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *The Namesake* (2003). In short, her individual life and her creative literature are two sides of the same coin. There are many biographical elements which force me to tell something about her life.

Jhumpa Lahiri: A Short Biography

Jhumpa Lahiri (born in 1967) is one of the young authors writing upon the theme of Diaspora. She is an American author belonging to the Bengali Indian community. Recently, the US President Barack Obama has appointed her as a member of American Arts and Humanities Committee. She is a prominent writer who deals with the major theme of the problem of Language in India www.languageinindia.com

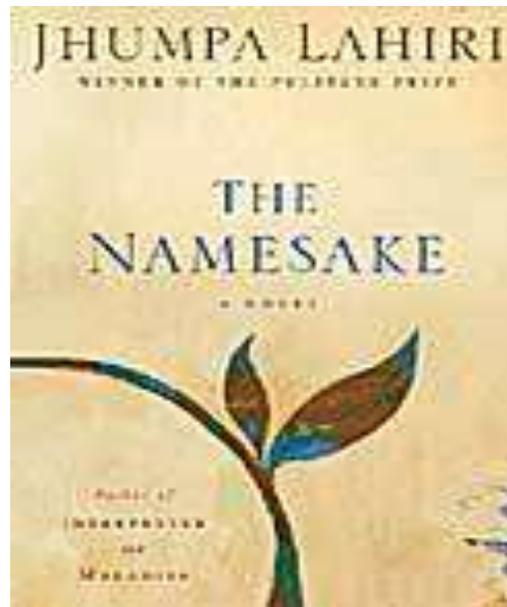
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emigrants, which is an outcome of her own life. She has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2000 for her debut collection of short stories entitled *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Her first novel *The Namesake* made her more popular. This diasporic novel was adapted for the popular film of the same name. It is released on 7th March, 2007.

***The Namesake* in ‘Words’**



Cover of the Novel

The novel is a realistic one. It takes place in different places in India and the United States and depicts the life of an ordinary Indian family that emigrated to America. The novel begins with Ashima Ganguli standing in her kitchen. She is at the verge of her first pregnancy. She gives birth to a baby boy. Ashoke, the father, decides baby's name would be Gogol. Then after some years Sonia is born.

Gogol has been uncomfortable with his name because it is neither Indian nor American. Ashoke gives Gogol a copy of *The Short Stories of Nikolai Gogol* on his fourteenth birthday. Gogol changes his name legally and chooses to call himself Nikhil. Gogol feels guilty when his father tells him about the train accident and his miraculous escape.

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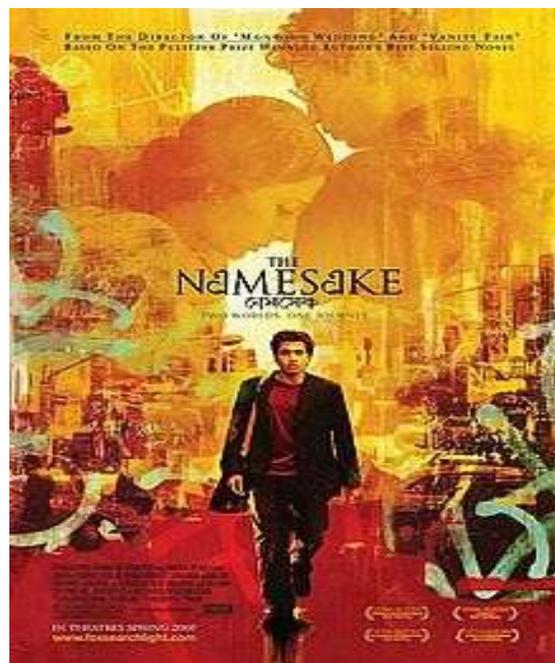
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In his early twenties, Gogol has had affairs with several American girls Ruth and Maxine before marriage. He takes seriously the warning of his parents that marriages of Bengali boy and American girls end up in divorce, and marries Moushumi which nonetheless meets the same fate. Meanwhile, he was informed that his father had had a massive heart attack and had died. At the end of the novel, Gogol opens the book and begins to read the story *The Overcoat* which had been read by his father at the time of the train crash.

The Namesake in 'Image'



Poster of the Film

The film also shifts between India and the United States. It begins with a train accident. Ashima (actress: Tabu) is singing a classical song. Her marriage is arranged to a Bengali man called Ashoke Ganguli (actor: Irrfan Khan). After their marriage, they tried to assimilate in New York society. Ashima gives birth to a baby boy. The boy is later on named Gogol. Then after some

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years Sonia is born. The film shows Gogol's (actor: Kal Penn) struggle over his name. It explores issues of cultural assimilation and identity.

Ashoke gives a book *The Collected Essays of Nikolai Gogol* to his son and tells him the importance of the book. Gogol neglects this book. He visits the Taj Mahal. He studies to become an architect. He falls in love with Maxine Ratliff (actress: Jacinda Barrett). He enjoyed his life with American blonde girls from the wealthy families.

Ashoke tells his son about the train accident which is shown at the very beginning of the film. His life is saved by sheer luck. He was having a copy of the book *The Overcoat* by Nikolai Gogol. The train meets with an accident and a number of people die. The rescue team finds Ashoke holding the pages of the book and they find him alive. This is a miraculous escape.

Ashoke dies of a heart attack in Ohio. Gogol feels sad. He meets Moushumi Mazumdar (actress: Zuleikha Robinson). They are married and then separated. Gogol remembers the days of his childhood when his father had taken him to the beach. His father was searching a camera-

“Ashoke: Aray Baba, the camera! It is in the car. All this with no picture, huh? You just have to remember it then. Will you remember this day Gogol?

Gogol : How long do you I to remember it?

Ashoke: (laughing) Remember it always. Remember that you and I made this journey and went together to a place where there was nowhere left to go.” (*The Namesake*, 2007))

Finally, Ashima returns to India and film ends.

Comparative Approach to the Novel and the Film

The novel as well as the film describes the struggles and hardships of the Indian people emigrated to the United States. (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) Ashima and Ashoke migrate to America and raise their two children Gogol and Sonia. Gogol has to struggle from his awkward name. He finally searches the true story behind the awkward name from his father, who later on faces a severe heart attack and dies. Thus, the novel as well as the film adaptation becomes a geographical as well as a psychological journey of two generations.

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The Namesake – novel and film are realistic and are capable enough to concentrate any person's attention especially those who have lived long away from their native places. In fact, it is not the very story of the difficulties of the Indian emigrants but it is the universal saga of the modern life.

Film Production

The film has fifty-six characters in all. The film revolves around its hero Gogol (Kal Penn). Other major characters are Ashima Ganguli (Tabu), Ashoke Ganguli (Irrfan Khan), Maxine Ratliff (Jacinda Barrett) and Moushumi Mazumdar (Zuleikha Robinson). The minor characters are Sonia (actress: Sahira Nair), Ashima's Mother (actress: Tanusree Shankar), Ashima's Father (actor: Sabyasachi Chakravarty), Ashoke's Father (actor: Tamal Sengupta), Mira Masi (actress: Gargi Mukherjee) and so on. Jhumpa Lahiri also acted in this film as Aunt Jhumpa. The film was produced under the UTV Motion Pictures and Mirabai Films. It is directed by its producer Mira Nair. The screenplay is written by Sooni Taraporevala. Excellent photography is done by Frederick Asc. The film is edited by Allyson Johnson.

The film requires traditional Indian as well as modern American costumes of two generations. This responsibility is carefully handled by Arjun Bhasin. Music of the film must have a pathetic note. There is need for the mixture of the Indian classical music along with the western tinge. The eminent musicians Nitin Sawhney and Linda Cohen carefully accomplish this delicate responsibility. The film also contains the famous old Hindi song 'Ye Mera Divanapan Hai' (this is my madness) composed by Shankar Jaikishan.

The film contains visual description of high quality. We find a proper use of camera. The visit of the Gangulis to the Taj Mahal and their conversation with each other at Agra is one of the unforgettable scenes of the film because they provide us with the emotions of nostalgia. Mira Nair has used the flashback technique wisely and skillfully. It is evident from the portrayal of the train accident.

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Appreciation for the Movie from Around the World

The people of India as well as of other nations have well accepted the novel. Its film adaptation further made it famous and its popularity reached its peak. The film is produced in English, Bengali, Hindi and French. Along with many awards and nominations, the film won the prestigious International Film Festival Award of Bulgaria. Many leading newspapers, periodicals and film magazines have taken cognizance of its success.

Nikhat Kazmi reviews the film in the entertainment supplement of *The Times of India* March 24, 2007:

India is an idea that lives in the heart and the mind, rather than a land-locked territory; and India is a style of upbringing and attitude that transcends territory. Great performances, an iridescent canvas and a topical theme: *The Namesake* is Mira Nair's tribute to her *janmabhumi*. (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>)

Creative Elements in the Film *The Namesake*

Cinematic considerations must be made when a novel is to be successfully adapted to the film. Novel is a lingual medium while film is a visual one. Film provides an abundance of details to the spectators through major changes of light, inflections of colour, music, camera, physical expressions and so on.

The reader has a far more control over the novel than the viewer does over the film.

The novel and the film are different in terms of the structures, perception and the narrative. Hence, no one can really judge the relevance of the novel or film. It may be necessary to deviate from the original story while transforming novels into films. Film adaptation of *The Namesake* is not an exception to this.

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Here are certain major deviations in the movie *The Namesake* which are in fact the creation of the film producer:

1. The novel begins with Ashima Ganguli standing in her kitchen. She is at the verge of her first pregnancy. The film begins with a train accident which Ashoke faces.
2. The novel carefully gives us the description of the Montgomerie family who were the first neighbours of the Gangulis in the United States. In the film, such important events are omitted.
3. In the novel, Ashima sends letters to her relatives and friends. In the film, she sends the letters along with photographs.
4. The novel describes the Rice Ceremony of Gogol. The film describes the Rice Ceremony of Sonia.
5. The novel describes Gogol's relationship with Kim and Ruth. The film has omitted the important characters Kim and Ruth.
6. The novel describes premarital relations of Moushumi with her boyfriend Dimitri. The film has omitted the important character of Dimitri and instead given us the character of Pierre.
7. The events in the novel are concentrated in Cambridge, Boston, Yale, New York, Ohio, New Hampshire and some scenes are related to India. The film is only centered around New York and some scenes are related to India.
8. The novel ends with an event when we find Gogol reading the short stories of Nikolai Gogol. The film ends with an important scene when we find Ashima practicing Indian classical vocal at Calcutta.

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The film adaptation aptly portrays the central theme of migration like the original novel.

Mira Nair's 'Tribute to her Motherland'

Mira Nair is an acclaimed Indian filmmaker. She has taken into account human lives and relationships in the world. *The Namesake* is the most remarkable film of Mira Nair to date. She has used the audio-visual facility effectively. All the characters in the film are effectively carved out as compared to the novel. Both Nair and Lahiri express the emotions which are well-known to the people of Indian Diaspora.

The film is warmly received by the viewers from all corners of the world. Indian people have now practically reached to all the countries of the world. They peacefully try to assimilate themselves in the respective foreign societies. They constantly remember their motherland and their culture. Lahiri has certainly depicted the culture conflict in her literary pieces. There is more to study the difficulties people of India origin face in France, China, Germany, Russia, England, South Africa and the Arab Countries.

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The Namesake. Dir. Mira Nair. Adapt. Sooni Taraporevala. Perf. Irrfan Khan, Tabu, Kal

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Penn, Zuleikha Robinson, Jacinda Barret, Sahira Nair and Ruma Guha Thakurta. Fox
Searchlight Pictures, 2007.

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