



THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN UMRAO JAAN ADA, THE TEXT, AND UMRAO JAAN, THE FILM

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Abstract

This paper will look into the interrelationship between literature and the other arts, i.e. between the novel, Umrao Jaan Ada, by Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva (1857-1931), and the movie Umrao Jaan (1981) by Muzaffar Ali. In cinema, we see what the director wants us to see whereas in the novel we can interpret the way we want to. With the coming of the idea of 'the death of author' (Barthes) and 'intentional fallacy' (Wimsatt-Beardsley) the scope for interpretation of text has widened up. This paper will analyse both the film and the novel by using various film theories and criticisms.

Keywords: *Umrao Jaan Ada, Rusva, Muzaffar Ali, Film Theories, Novel, Literature, Cinema*



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Introduction:

According to Kettenbelt there are three concepts of mediality: multi-, trans- and intermediality. "Multimediality refers to the occurrence where there are many media in one and the same object." In the movie, *Umrao Jaan*, there is the use of more than one media, i.e. musical, pictorial and choreographed movements. "Transmediality refers to the transfer from one medium to another medium (media change)" (Kettenbelt 2008). Here, the novel, *Umrao Jaan Ada*, presented through the medium of written words has been transferred to the media of audio-visual representation in the movie *Umrao Jaan*. "Intermediality refers to the co-relation of media in the sense of mutual influences between media" (Kettenbelt 2008). Contemporary idea of intermediality could be related with the idea of "*Buhnen Kompositionen*(stage compositions) of Wassily Kandinsky". According to Kandinsky, "the interplay of arts as a dynamics of musical, pictorial and choreographed movements was only possible because each individual art has developed its own purity of expression in a relative independence from the other arts." In the movie the music and the lyrics of the ghazal and the choreography has been used to heighten the inner experiences or, in Kandinsky's terms, the vibrations of the soul. These three concepts show three distinct angles against which 'media phenomenon' can be analysed with reference to their mediality.

Ingmar Bergman, reflecting on the literature and film, says, “The written word is read and assimilated by a conscious act of the will in alliance with the intellect, little by little it affects the imagination and the emotions. The process is different with a motion picture. When we experience a film, we consciously prime ourselves for illusion. Putting aside will and intellect we make way for it in our imagination. The sequence of pictures plays directly in our feelings” (Steene 2005).

Umrao Jaan Ada, the Text, and, Umrao Jaan, the Film: An Analysis:-

The coming of speech and sound created a new association between literary text and film portrayal. Sound could present a connected ‘audio-visual narration’. “It could also detract, undercut, and produce effects such as irony, echo, allusion and parody” (Steene 2005). Thus, the coming of sound into film augmented the narrative language. Bahadur and Vanarese, in the essay “Film as Narrative”, say, sound “made possible further dimensions of film such as allegiance to linguistic text or criticism of that text. Music could enhance the underlying feeling-tones inherent in the visual image.”

But this novel has been written in ‘pre-new-criticism’ era and is an oriental text. Here the author, Rusva, constantly intervenes and interpret the text for us. In the movie, also, though indirectly, the director shows us what he wants to show through the camera’s eyes. We see what the director wants us to see. It becomes obvious in the ‘dream scene’ in the movie. There is difference between the dreams of Umrao, the character, in the text and the movie. Dream in the novel shows family members whereas in the movie Dilawar Khan comes with his evil face with the intention of killing Umrao. In the movie Umrao tries to flee or commit suicide (though it is not clear) but in the novel no such thing has been shown, as if she surrenders without opposition (though Umrao in her narrative justifies this behaviour). The movie in this scene tries to make Umrao appear more as a humane in this sense rather than a fictional character. In the dream sequence, in the movie, Umrao Jaan, where she sees herself being attacked by Dilawar Khan, is more real than the dream in the text where she remembers her family members in her dream. The fear in her unconscious mind comes out through this dream. The fear is more natural after what happened to her than her love for the family members at that time. The source of this fear comes from her kidnapping by Dilawar Khan. Umrao was always fearful during the journey that she might be killed. The fear of death is what further motivates her, though ironically enough, to commit suicide attempt. Though the dialogues convey that she wants to flee from the ‘kotha’ but her actions reflect that she wants to commit suicide in order to escape her fear of death, an ironical situation.

Sergei Eisenstein, in his 1945 essay "A Close-up View", gives three film theories: "long-shot" film theory, "medium-shot" film theory and "close-up" theory. Eisenstein describes "long-shot" film theory as that "which deals with film in context, which judges its political and social implications." Rusva, writing in the 19th century, takes into account the 1857 mutiny and the collapse of the kingdom of Avadh. There is nostalgia for a glorious past, which is no more. Rusva presents the natives as robbers, i.e. in negative light. But Muzaffar Ali's portrayal of British soldiers replacing native robbers aptly conveys his nationalist feelings. The fans, clothes, jewellery, architecture of the houses, paintings, horse-carriages, the training in classical music and dance, and the gun used by Nawab Sultan, etc. in the movie try to create the historical setting of the 19th century Lucknow.

Eisenstein's "Medium-shot" film criticism "focuses on the human scale of the film." Umrao, in the novel, is shown as an extrovert. On the other hand, Muzaffar Ali presents Umrao as an introvert. Umrao's inner feelings are reflected either through her eye movements or through her ghazals or songs. Umrao is shown as an emotional being, like Khurseed in the novel. Rekha, through her acting, aptly portrays the emotional Umrao Jaan.

"Close-up" theory, of Sergei Eisenstein, however, "'breaks down' the film into its parts" and "resolves the film into its elements." "Film semiotics and other theories that attempt to treat the 'language' of film, for example, are close-up approaches" (Eisenstein 1970). By analysing the movie through the 'close-up' theory, one can see that the line of the ghazal '*Is shehar mein tere jaise deewane hazaaron hain*' shows that there are many so called lovers of Umrao in this city of Nawabs. However, the implicit meaning connotes that there is not even a single true lover, who deserve her heart. That is one of the biggest tragedies of the courtesans. Their life is devoid of true love. Only physical pleasure cannot fulfil the desires of a human being. The emotional aspect of love is absent or very less or ephemeral in the context of the relationship with the courtesans. Even though Nawab Sultan's love is true but it is ephemeral or become so due to the social and cultural codes and constraints.

Vachel Lindsay, in *The Art of the Moving Picture* (2010), compares film with the older arts and sees a film as a "sculpture-in-motion," "painting-in-motion," and "architecture-in-motion." Lindsay asked his readers "to consider this sideshow entertainment as a real art. Working on the model of the established narrative and visual arts, he identified three basic types of "photoplays," as movies with pretensions to artistic station were then called: "The Photoplay of Action," "The Intimate Photoplay," and "The Motion Picture of Splendor". In each case, Lindsay had noticed and formulated elements of narrative in which film could not

only rival but often surpass the other arts: Action, Intimacy, and Splendour are all strong and direct values.

“Freudian dream psychology” served as an important device for prominent “theories of cinema” in the early twentieth century. “Freudian film psychology” highlights the “unconscious, dreamlike nature of the experience”. It focuses on the passive approach toward the medium. Munsterberg, in contradiction to this, sees the connection between film and audience as interactive. Munsterberg says, “Our perception of movement in moving pictures depends not so much on the static phenomenon of persistence of vision as on our active mental processes of interpretation of this series of still images.” Later on, it was called the Phi phenomenon.

In his book *The Major Film Theories* (1976), J. Dudley Andrew looks into the structure of film theory. Andrew analyses different theories through four ways: "Raw Material," "Methods and Techniques," "Forms and Shapes," and "Purpose and Value." "Methods and Techniques" and "Forms and Shapes"—are two sides of one aspect, “the first practical, and the second theoretical”. Andrew says that the Realist theories are the ones that eulogize the raw material. The Expressionist theories, on the other hand, are the ones that concentrate “on the power of the filmmaker to modify or manipulate reality.” That is, the director's expression of the raw materials is more important than the filmed reality itself. Expressionism advocates the manipulative capability of the director. Here, the novel *Umrao Jaan*, on the one hand, shows us the story in flashback. The movie, on the other hand, shows the narrative in a linear and chronological way, starting from the childhood of Umrao Jaan, the protagonist. Muzaffar Ali implicitly shapes the psychology of the viewers. He presents his own views through the camera's eyes.

Monaco says that the Realist and Expressionist have played major roles in the history of film theory and practice. Only recently the association between movie and audience (in Aristotle's terms "Purpose and Value"), has come to dominate film theory. Monaco says, “The semiotics of film and the politics of film both begin with the observer and work back through the art of the filmmaker to the reality of the raw materials on the other side” (Monaco 2008). In the movie, *Umrao Jaan*, the love factor between Umrao and Nawab Sultan has been shown through their eye contacts; the purity in this ‘profane’ relationship has been aptly portrayed. The eye movements convey the feelings and act as a substitute for speech. The ghazal and the background of the field of mustard seeds add to the glamour of love. The movements of the flowers of mustard seeds in the field adds further to the romantic relationship. In one of the songs, the camera's movement from the Sun to the two lovers tries to connote love in its

pristine form. Whereas when Umrao becomes sad the feelings are portrayed through the dim lamp illuminating the small sombre room, in which she is laying on her bed. The camera shows her face through the gaps in the top wooden architectural frame of the bed to show the broken or the fragmented heart of Umrao.

There has been a paradigm shift in the interest- that is, from generative to receptive theories. The making of film does not concern today's audience. They are interested in the impact and the effect that a film has on their lives. In the movie, at the climax scene, when Nawab Sultan meets Umrao in the presence of his wife, he has to act as a stranger. This shows his submission to the social norms. Muzaffar Ali focuses his camera on Nawab Sultan's wife, the Begum, while she looks at her husband, Nawab Sultan, and Umrao. Her facial expressions aptly show that she understands it all. After this she is shown as not getting either jealous or angry. Rather the happiness on her face and her involvement with the ghazal shows a kind of deep and mature understanding which means that she not only forgives her husband and Umrao for this extra-marital relationship. But she is even ready to accept their relationship. Audience is made to view these relationships in a new light. *Rusva* gave voice to a prostitute, who ultimately confesses to become corrupt after being in this profession for a long time. But in the movie a prostitute is not only given voice but also shown that she can also love and that too truly. She can be full of emotions.

"The shots taken by the cinematograph camera were recorded on a flexible roll, which could be cut and joined. Hence, shots could be edited in a chain to form a succession of visual images in a coherent narrative" (Monaco 2008). As in the movie, when the robber Faiz Ali, acted by Raj Babbar, helps Umrao to get down from the horse, the scene is cut and the audience/viewers can notice this. As her clothes are again well organised which were disorganised while getting down from the horse. She has also moved some steps away from the horse. There are similar other scene cuts in the movie. Though in today's digitalised and hi-tech age such discrepancies are not apparent to the viewer.

On reading of the Urdu novel in Devanagari script or its translation in Hindi, Umrao Jan appears to be rustic. She appears to be belonging to the class of courtesans as her speech is not that refined as that of Umrao Jaan in the movie. In the film, the teacher or the Maulvi Sahib says that Umrao is not made to be a prostitute but 'she is made for the world', i.e. by which he means that she belongs to the nobility or the class of 'asharaf' or 'sharif'. The slow and sweet, i.e. moderate and sophisticated speech delivery of Umrao show her as a high-class courtesan unlike the loud-mouth sex-workers who are lower in this hierarchy of courtesans.

The behaviours and refined manners aptly portray the behaviour of the people of Lucknow of 19th century for which the city and its people are renowned even till today.

We see the actors from the viewing position of the camera. Conceptually, and experientially in case of the medium of cinema, the camera makes you believe what it 'saw' at the time the shot was taken. At the end her wiping of the mirror symbolises that though the dust from the image on the mirror can be cleaned but the dust or stain on her character cannot be cleaned. The mirror has been used as a symbolic tool to convey this harsh truth.

Conclusion:

It can be concluded that a "Film is a medium and an art, but it is also, uniquely a very complex technological undertaking. It operates on us psychologically and it affects us politically" (Monaco 2008). Turning a novel into a movie is a metamorphosis of literal written words into audio-visual representation. We read novels individually, one person at a time. But we can watch the movie together with a large crowd. The individual space while reading a novel is different from the social space while watching a movie. It is more of a commercial practise and activity rather than the secluded private practise of reading a novel.

In Muzaffar Ali's movie, *Umrao Jaan*, even Bismillah can fall in love, Gauhar can be a little bit more serious towards love and Bua Hussaini could be tougher on Umrao. And a prostitute, Umrao, can also be a woman, a human being full of feelings and emotions who can crave for true love and can have the capacity to reciprocate true love. It is a humanistic portrayal and therefore a realistic portrayal of the life of a courtesan in the movie, which uses various techniques, technologies, methods to create an interactive platform between audience and the film. The movie shows the physical manifestation of the literal words through the organic beings on the screen, which is an inorganic medium in itself.

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