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***Amadeus* and *London Dreams*: Hollywood versus Bollywood adaptations**

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative study of the plot adaptation of the Hindi movie *London Dreams* with the play *Amadeus* by Peter Shaffer. Earlier, the plot of the play *Amadeus* was adapted for the movie *Amadeus*. The article explores the many facets of film adaptation, provides background information on Peter Shaffer's plays that centre on *Amadeus*, examines the history of Indian cinema and film production, and then compares *Amadeus* with *London Dreams* based on their respective plots before drawing a conclusion. The paper also provides a brief analysis of the plots of the two cinema adaptations, *London Dreams*, an Indian film, and *Amadeus*, an American film.

The connection between Mozart and Salieri as well as the occasions leading up to Mozart's passing are depicted in the play and movie *Amadeus*. Notwithstanding the film's numerous historical alterations, it was well-received by critics and went on to win the 1984 Best Picture Oscar. However, the Indian adaptation of the plot of *Amadeus* has not been convincing and pleasing in *London Dreams*. For the original narrative and concepts to be justified, Indian screenwriters must adapt their stories with greater faithfulness and dependability. Unquestionably, Indian film demands more originality, inventiveness, and believable story adaptations than haphazardly written screenplays with a lot of contradictions.

Keywords: Plot adaptation, bollywood, hollywood, film production, comparative study of films, Amadeus, London dreams

Introduction

The paper "*Amadeus* and *London Dreams* – Hollywood versus Bollywood adaptations" presents a study of the plot adaptation of *Amadeus* – a play by the British playwright Peter Shaffer. The plot has inspired the Bollywood movie titled *London Dreams* in 2009 scripted by Suresh Nair, produced and directed by Vipul Shah. Earlier, the plot of the play was used as the source by Shaffer himself as the script writer for the Hollywood movie *Amadeus* directed by Milos Forman in 1984.

The paper unfolds the various aspects of film adaptation, a background of the plays by Peter Shaffer focusing on *Amadeus*, the background of the Indian film industry and film making, and a comparative study of *Amadeus* and *London Dreams* with reference to the plot, followed by a conclusion. The paper also presents a brief comparative study of the plot of the two film versions – one American (*Amadeus*) and the other Indian (*London Dreams*).

Background

Owing to the demand of the audiences in the past and lack of writers capable of scripting original scenarios with sound, books came into their own as sources of cinematic material because of the advent of sound. Thus, for financial reasons too, to keep the suddenly huge filmmaking industry going, to keep fresh new product in the theaters, some producers turned all together to another source of material – literature.

Undoubtedly, the question of "authenticity" arises, and the higher profile the source literary work, the more persistent are the questions of reliability. Whether we consider Hollywood movies or Bollywood movies, majority of them draw inspiration from earlier fiction and are adapted to suit the demands of the motion picture and the audiences. There are not only film versions of all of Shakespeare's plays but also multiple versions of many of them, and there are films adapted from Shakespeare's plays very loosely (*Maqbool*, *Omkara*). Similarly, hit Broadway plays are frequently adapted, whether from musicals or dramas.

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The relationship between film and literature has never been more prominent than today, thanks to *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. Creative (or “artistic”) license is generally understood to mean the freedom artists may take when handling factual material (Bernard). From William Shakespeare to Peter Shaffer (*Amadeus*) and Vishal Bhardwaj (*Omkaara*) to Vipul Shah (*London Dreams*) and beyond, history has inspired, but not controlled, artists. This process, however, has been regularly weighed down by arguments over the vexed question of reliability. To what extent should (or can) a film be “faithful” to its original source? To what extent should filmmakers alter characterization, setting, or plot to suit their own interpretation of the original? Does it matter if the filmmaker changes the original almost completely and yet comes up with a cinematic masterpiece in its own right? Should a film adaptation, in other words, always have to justify itself in terms of its closeness to its literary original, or can the two be accepted and judged independently? Considering these questions, then, let us study the adaptation of the renowned play *Amadeus* written by Peter Shaffer.

Analysis

Several of Shaffer’s plays have been adapted for films, including, of course, the Academy Award-winning *Amadeus*, which, in Latin, means “love of God” or “lover of God”. The play *Amadeus* is based on the lives of Antonio Salieri, the eighteenth-century Italian Court Composer, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the famous-eighteenth century German composer. In the play, Mozart appears to be a careless, rude genius. Shaffer, on the surface, seems to be asserting that artistic creativity, as epitomized in Mozart, is completely divorced from ethical principles or the values of society. However, the real theme of the play is not this, but as with Shaffer’s other serious plays, the relationship between Man and God.

Amadeus, the play, is introduced by a narrator and the story line is presented in flashbacks. Here Salieri narrates in 1823 the episodes that took place from 1781 to 1791. The narrator is also the play’s protagonist, and the action is presented from his viewpoint. The play is divided into two acts depicting Court Composer Salieri’s dual battle over Mozart. This legendary Mozart-Salieri rivalry inspired the plot of a Bollywood movie - *London Dreams*. The movie revolves around the theme of friendship, trust, passion, jealousy and sacrifice against the backdrop of music. *London Dreams* starts with a brooding Ajay Devgan recollecting his life saying “Maine zindagi mein kuchh achcha, kuchh bura aur kuchh bahut bura kiya hai”. The story revolves around two childhood friends Arjun (played by Ajay Devgan) and Mannu (played by Salman Khan) who have some music lineage in their family history. Arjun dreams of being on stage as a performer in the music industry, to live up to his grandfather’s unfulfilled ambitions. Mannu however has little interest in his music tutor and is satisfied with remaining a child at heart.

Arjun diligently pursues his dream and finally makes it to London where he believes he can succeed. Arjun creates a band and also brings aboard Priya (played by Asin), a music enthusiast from India. Mannu makes his livelihood as a wedding band performer at the village back in India. Arjun eventually invites Mannu to London to complete his band. Gradually Mannu becomes popular with the audiences,

consequently making Arjun envious of his rising success. Mannu’s growing proximity with Priya adds fuel to the fire. Mannu thus becomes the target of Arjun’s frustrations who seeks to disrupt Mannu’s career.

During their musical tour, Arjun tricks Mannu, gets him addicted to drugs, and then gets him arrested. As the tour concludes, the band heads to London to perform before a huge audience at Wembley Stadium. Meanwhile, Arjun makes Priya break up with Mannu. The show is a flop and in this flimsy state, the band breaks up and a sad Mannu goes back to his village. Arjun’s uncle (Om Puri), advises him to apologize to Mannu. However, Mannu forgives him without any grudge. They get back together and London Dreams becomes a successful band again.

The play *Amadeus* was also adapted as a Hollywood movie with Shaffer himself as the script writer. It covers the last 10 years of Mozart’s life, time that was spent primarily in Vienna. From 1781 until 1791, the film records the composer’s triumphs and failures, as viewed by Salieri, the Court Composer to Emperor Joseph II (Jeffrey Jones). *Amadeus* actually begins in the 1820s, with an aging Salieri, now confined in an insane asylum after attempting suicide, offering his confession to a priest. His tale forms the bulk of the movie’s narrative.

In 1781, Salieri is in dread of Mozart - until he meets him. A mediocre composer with a limited reputation, Salieri recognizes greatness in Mozart’s music, but is horrified to find that the man he admires is a childish rogue, a brutish and indecent person. Salieri’s disgust for Mozart grows as time passes. Believing God to have placed his favour upon an undeserving individual, he retorts: “Why?... What is my fault?... You know how hard I’ve worked! – solely that in the end... I might hear Your Voice! And now I do hear it – and it says only one name: MOZART!... Spiteful, sniggering, conceited, infantine Mozart!... him you have chosen to be your sole conduct! And my only reward – my sublime privilege – is to be the sole man alive in this time who shall clearly recognize your Incarnation!” (*Amadeus* 55-56, Emphasis is Shaffer’s). Salieri views the situation as a rebuke from God, and becomes determined to strike back at the Almighty by silencing His instrument – Mozart.

Thus, Salieri plots Mozart’s downfall. But, at the same time, even as he seeks to destroy the man, he is held enraptured by the music. Words in Shaffer’s plays aspire to the condition of music, which for Shaffer seems to be the supreme art. Therefore, it is not surprising that music is featured prominently in most of Shaffer’s plays whether as background sound or as part of the plot. The importance of music is also presented in the urgency of Salieri’s early ambition is emphasized by his admission: “I wanted Fame...Yet only in one especial way. Music. Absolute Music!” (*Amadeus* 16). The climax of this progression occurs in *Amadeus*, as fragments of Mozart’s music fill the theatre. Salieri, who knows better than anyone what he is hearing, states quite simply that “music is God’s art.”

Observations

Generally, movies about artists tend to be dull and uninspired, rendering the subject of the film far less interesting than his or her work. The Hollywood movie *Amadeus* is an exception. In fact, it is arguably the best motion picture ever made about the process of creation and the creator. Unlike a traditional bio-pic, director Milos Forman and screenwriter Peter Shaffer have crafted an

amazing portrait of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. It is filled with rich details, powerful drama, and a commanding score. *Amadeus* is an achievement and was deserving of every one of the eight Oscars it captured in 1985. In light of history, the plot of *Amadeus* itself is a bit absurd, but exceedingly fascinating. It centres round Antonio Salieri's deep hatred for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – a hatred which, by most accounts, did not actually exist.

Discussion

The film *Amadeus* opens with the violent scene of Salieri's suicide attempt in 1823 Vienna. Salieri is taken to asylum where he spends the rest of his life. It takes the form of Salieri's recounting the past while a priest sits with him, offering to take Salieri's confession. Salieri attempts to win against God to "send him (Mozart) away" elsewhere by using his power as a court composer to make things difficult for Mozart's career, and later even plotting his death. Mozart, on the other hand, is struggling on his own as he tries to gain permanent employment in Vienna. The film ends again in the "present" (when Salieri is already old and in the asylum) with Salieri giving blessings to his insane fellow patients. In his last address to the audience he pretends to be as divinity and offers a sour benediction to the audience: "Mediocrities everywhere – now and to come – I absolve you all. Amen!" (*Amadeus* 104)

On the other hand Suresh Nair, the script writer of *London Dreams* seems to have missed perfection during the adaptation. Many of the comments regarding the adaptation of *London Dreams* seem to suggest that most people have disliked this movie because of its ending. They make claims such as, "Suresh Nair's script was great until the end," or, "Why did Nair talk about not wanting to "bollywoodize" his script, and then do it in the end anyway?" There are Hollywood script-writers like William Faulkner and Elmore Leonard, or even Indian script-writers like Satyajit Ray, who have adapted fictions to films successfully, focusing on three qualities: Dialogue, compelling characters, and great tales told in the fewest possible words. Talking about Bollywood, we have the likes of Vishal Bhardwaj (*Maqbool*, *Omkaara*, *Saat Khoon Maaf*, *Haider*) and Gurinder Chaddha (*Bride and Prejudice*) who have been very meticulous during the adaptation of the plots to films.

Though evidently based on a true story, the events of the film are highly fictionalized, and the story always treads a fine line with reality. Shaffer's approach to film-making is thus original and daring, never tentative of trying something unique for the sake of the film. If Milos Forman's *Amadeus* traced the stormy comradeship between Antonio Salieri (F Murray Abraham), the Viennese court composer, and legendary genius, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Tom Hulce), then *London Dreams* sees a lesser talented Ajay Devgan articulating a similar angst as his gifted friend, Salman Khan, steals the thunder, despite his disinterest in super stardom.

But the similarity ends there. For, the plot of *London Dreams* is completely simplistic and linear, often bordering on the implausible. Devgan's journey from Bhatinda to London, his formation of a rock band with a bunch of strugglers, his rise to popularity and his sudden climactic outburst all lack depth. Salman's fall from grace is dubious too. And then comes the climax, with Salman signing off with the moral of the film: "A brother is a brother, brother, so no sorries." Then again, it is right away to London, to

fulfill the still unfulfilled London Dream of making it big in Wembley with Devgan's desi band. Truly, this is a poor piece of script writing and plot adaptation by Suresh Nair.

The first half of the film, set mostly in the village, has a rustic charm and innocent relationship between the two friends. The second half – the rivalry track – intermittently bursts into life when a self-occupied Devgan tirades against the injustice of God. "Why did you give him the talent and me the passion", he complains, swearing to bring down his best buddy who has become more popular than him. The film draws the plot and characters from *Amadeus*, but the high-tension rivalry between Salieri and Mozart gets converted into an unenthusiastic rivalry between unsophisticated Devgan and Salman.

Conclusion

Shaffer is a playwright and a screenwriter who clearly understands his craft. He knows the power of drama to make us struggle with profoundly human issues, the tensions and contradictions that rip our lives. What Peter Shaffer is saying is, ultimately, *fiction* is better than *fact* in *Amadeus* (Robbins). He writes, "The film version of *Amadeus* really sharpens the core question of self-confrontation: 'Am I Mozart or am I Salieri? Am I both (Shaffer, 56-67)?'" How will we deal with the startling realization with what the film and the play confront us? Like Salieri? Like Arjun? How will we negotiate the success and failure that characterize human existence, the pride that gives way to envy, the hard effort considered mediocre?

Amadeus, the movie, is undoubtedly a masterful combination of acting and storytelling, of sight and sound, of cinema and soundtrack. It is a splendid moviemaking feat, an inspired production that has impressed viewers for two decades now, and will most certainly them for many more to come. Shaffer was absolutely determined to write an original script and a perfect plot, without stuffing in erotic or violent scenes or car chases or characters learning philosophy of life or loving each other or facing struggles to succeed in the life. Forman and Shaffer have truly "mythologized" the Mozart legend. The film teaser very aptly says it all - *The man, the music, the magic, the madness, the murder, the mystery, the motion picture, the masterpiece – Amadeus*.

On the other hand *London Dreams* seems to be one of Vipul Shah's best works. From the gigantic concerts to romance to the conspiracy, everything is well directed and executed. But, the script by Suresh Nair ideally should have been crisper, especially the climax. Can our screen writers be as meticulous and superb in adapting plots as William Faulkner, Elmore Leonard or Peter Shaffer? Certainly, Indian cinema-goers and fans expect more Satyajit Rays and Vishal Bhardwajs to reinforce brilliance in adaptations to appease the Indian audiences and thus promote the Indian film industry.

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