

SHARAT CHANDRA'S *DEVIDAS*: VIS-À-VIS ITS CINEMATIC ADAPTATION IN HINDI MOVIES

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Abstract: The present research article is an attempt to compare and contrast Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyaya's novella *Devdas* with three of its cinematic renderings in Hindi. The purpose is to find out the quintessence of original novella in the movies based on it. Works of creative literature have been used as the subject matter of movies since its inception. However, the business consideration, public tastes based on ethical norms and the filmmaker's own perception of the work of art make the directors omit/ include many new things and ideas in their cinematic adaptations. The rate of deviation is so high that many times it kills the basic spirit of the original work. The novella *Devdas* has been a great fascination for the film makers because of its vast emotional appeal. P. C. Barua's directed *Devdas* (1935) truthfully presents rural Bengali community life in the context of class-caste dynamics of pre- independence India. Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1955) is real and emblematic at the same time. The director has been able to raise the particular story of an alcoholic lover to the general saga all failed loves. Bhansali, on the other hand, tries to put his own philosophy of two separated lover, desperately yearning to have just a last glimpse of each other (2002).

Keywords: quintessence, adaptation, novella, dynamics, emblematic, life-vision, moralizations, stereotyping.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature and movie are two important forms of creative art. Literature is the presentation of the writer's life-vision about men and milieu in which he lives. Cinema, on the other hand is a popular version of creative imagination. The film makers are more concerned about the contemporary social and moral norms as movies are generally made for selling to the common masses. Thus these portray themes and subject matters dear to popular taste. It has been common to base the movies on the works of creative literature as they provide ready-made material for the same. However, retaining the quintessence of original work is the biggest challenge in cinematic rendering of works of creative literature. This applies to film adaptation of literary works in the Bollywood movies to a great extent, as the directors and film makers are too much concerned about popular taste and moral and ethical considerations of masses. The *Devdas*, the famous novella of Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay has been adapted into film at least thrice in Hindi itself. The present research paper aims at analyzing and evaluating the three Hindi *Devdas* films so as to find out original *Devdas* therein. The objective is to highlight the variations in the image and persona of Devdas, as well as in his physical milieu of three different ages in which the movies are made. These changes, to a great extent, can be attributed to change in socio-cultural norms with the passes of time. However, the director's personal perception and artistic vision have great say in the final end product.

The given research article is a work of qualitative research that employ in-depth analysis of primary sources, i.e. the original novella *Devdas* written in 1917 and its three cinematic adaptations by P.C. Barua, Bimal Roy and Sanjay Leela Bhansali, came up in 1935, 1955 and 2002 respectively. It is a thoroughly theoretical research based on extensive observation, analysis, interpretation and inference of primary and secondary resources.

2. DISCUSSION

***Devdas* in Hindi Movies:**

Cinematic rendering of works of creative literature is as old as cinema itself. This, on the one hand, provides the film maker with the ready-made content for the films. However, on the other hand, retaining the essence of the original literary work becomes a challenge for the film makers as business consideration makes them compromise the originality in film adaptations. This applies to cinematic adaptation of literary works in the Bollywood movies to a great extent, as the directors and film makers are too much concerned about popular taste and moral and ethical considerations of masses. The inadequate or limited understanding of literary work too comes in the way and the films are many times quite different from the original works on which they are based.

Devdas, the famous novella of Sharat Chandra Chattopadhyay, has all along caught imagination of Indian filmmakers. The tragic story of an introvert and proud protagonist who fails to express his love, but destroys himself for its sake, can be sold like a hot cake. *Devdas* has been adapted into film at least thrice in Hindi itself. The present research paper aims at analyzing and evaluating the three popular Hindi *Devdas* films so as to find out original *Devdas* therein.

It was easier for P.C. Barua directed *Devdas* (1935) to reflect the socio-cultural milieu presented in 1917 published novella. The fast changing society of 1950s posed a bigger challenge to Bimal Roy in revisiting the *Devdas* saga. However, the liberalized environment of 2002 made it still more demanding for Sanjay Leela Bhasnali to reproduce the pessimistic tale in proper context.

Barua's 'Devdas':

Pramathesh Barua's *Devdas* is a milestone in Indian talkies. The Hindi version of this film came in 1935. Famous singer/actor of those days K.L. Saigal was in the role the *Devdas*. Jamuna played the role of Paro and Rajkumari appeared as Chandramukhi. The unfulfilled love story of *Devdas* and Paro is the focus of attention and it very well caught the public attention. Barua has been able to present the community life of rural Bengal in the context of class-caste dynamics of pre independence India. The political- economic environment of 1930s was not much different from that of the first quarter of twentieth century in which the novel was published. The public morals and social norms were almost the same. The cultural ethos of 1930s was inclined towards the folklore tradition and popular culture of previous two decades. Thus in Barua's film the two ages mingle quite easily. The spectators of his film could connect themselves with both the men and milieu of the novel without much difficulty. Thus when emotionally traumatized Paro, in the film, addresses her lover *Devdas* as "Dev Bhaiya" (brother Dev), it does not hurt the public sentiments outside rural Bengal as it was quite common for the people of same age-group in a small geographical surrounding to address one other as brothers and sisters. Also Barua did not require citing justification for the emotional liaison between dancer Chandramukhi and almost deranged *Devdas*.

The director was very much true to the original storyline of the novella. Without getting into complications of relationships and taking considerations of lines beyond written lines the director reproduced the original story in its preliminary basic form. The rural Bengal of the first quarter of twentieth century was evoked vividly. The image of obstinate *Devdas* stands in sheer contrast with the simple smooth flow of rural life. At this point the film fully corresponds with the original novel and the same is the real charm of the film.

Barua can well be appreciated for representing the original storyline of the novella in his film. However, only this is not enough to induce the real essence of the original work. The film lacks in symbolism awfully and is utterly without any vision or philosophy of life. The filmmaker has either ignored or failed to understand the vision the novelist is conveying in his novella. Nor has he been able to instill any other vision to his film. Thus it remains a simple story of failed love of particular characters of a particular age. Devoid of the philosophy of the novelist or the film maker, the film is left lackluster and fails to have a universal or lasting appeal. The profound music of the film, however, has been able to compensate this lack of universality to a great extent. The well-known music director of those days Timir Baran has instilled both life and soul in the film. The soulful voice of legendary singer K.L. Saigal- both in playful and sad mood- evokes not only the situations of the film in various moods but also elicit a general overtone to general human emotions. The highly romantic song 'Balam aye baso more man me' (My dear! Be always inside my heart..), or heart rendering song of separation "Dukh ke aab din bitata nahi" (there is no ending of these traumatic days..) still catch people's imagination. Equally appealing is the wild-desolate looks of the actor K.L. Saigal, impersonating the arrogant pathetic *Devdas*.

Roy's 'Devdas':

Another super hit celluloid adaptation of *Devdas* came up in 1955. A dream project of acclaimed producer- director Bimal Roy, film *Devdas* is real and emblematic at the same time. The great thespian Dilip Kumar was in the lead cast. Suchitra Sen played the role of Paro, while Vaijantimala was in the role of Chandramukhi. The director sincerely followed the storyline of the original novel. The time gap in setting of the novel and of movie was easily managed. The pre-independence rural Bengal of Sharat Chandra's novel and newly-independence dreamy village of Roy's movie get mingle and coalesce with each other. The passage of time of more than one quarter century does not hamper the progression of actions in the movie as the director focuses more on portraying the protagonist rather than on the environment.

The characters of the movie too are very much in the line of characters of the original novella. The arrogance and trauma of protagonist Devdas is very well reflected in the eyes and body language of Dilip Kumar. Suchitra Sen has effectively blended the self respect and self-resignation of the helpless but proud Paro, whereas Vaijantimala has well justified the image of a subdued self-sacrificing dancer girl Chandramukhi. The events and situations of original novel have also been retained with slight modifications. The film progresses smoothly from one scene to another enfolding the tragic saga of Devdas, Paro and Chandramukhi. The situations quaver with intensity of feelings and emotions.

A few scenes from the film, in particular, need to be mentioned here for sheer excellence:

The first is when Paro visits Devdas's bedroom in the night. Snubbed by Devdas's parents, her Parents have fixed her marriage with Bhuwan Choudhary, an elderly but big landlord. Paro, since her very childhood, has not taken anyone, but Devdas as her love. Failing to get any response from him she secretly goes to his bedroom in the night to convey her feelings to him. This scene is quite intense and filled with feelings. It is also revolutionary in the sense that it presents a woman taking initiative in expressing her yearning for a man.

In another scene after being hesitant to defy his parents to marry Paro, at the first instance; Devdas finally makes up his mind to marry Paro leaving the false sense of superiority behind. Paro rejects this 'generosity' on part of Devdas, charging him of hurting her self-respect. She chides Devdas for being dishonest and infirm and says that he does not deserve to have her. The furious and indignant Devdas then take up a stick and strikes Paro Hard, leaving her bleeding profusely.

Such violent display of manly power of hurting a lady cannot be justified at any rate. Dilip Kumar, in one of the interviews, has himself termed this scene as quite illogical and nonsensical one. However, the scene as executed in the film transcends all these general concerns. In its utter naturalness and intensity it assumes a symbolic dimension reflecting the absurdity of human situations.

Then we have a resolute Paro visiting Devdas again at his home. Devdas is on the path of self-destruction. Losing Paro has fallen so heavily on him and he has been ruining himself with wine and prostitutes. Paro first tries to take him with her so that she can take care of him. Devdas chides her gently for having such childish idea. Then Paro asks him to make a promise that he will not have wine anymore. A calm Devdas says with fondness that he don't want to make a false promise. This scene once again is quite intense and quavers with strong emotions.

The real strength of the film are such emotionally rich scenes, those make the film transcend its physical- literal contour and assume symbolic overtones. The beautiful music of R.D. Burman also adds to the meaning and charm of the movie. The beautiful devotional song sung in the film by the Vaishnav beggars "Aan milo aan milo Shyam Saaware..." (Geeta Dutt, Manna Dey); the desperate love request "Jise tu Quoobul karle..." (Lata Mangeskar); and heartrending outcry of separation "Mitwa Lagi re yeh..." (Talat Mehmood)- make the emotions felt universally.

True final movement of the film is a bit disconnected. It is also not as engrossing. However, director cannot be faulted for this. The ending of the original novel itself makes the readers totally distracted. Even the novelist seems to be trying to distance from what has happened.

Bimal Roy must be appreciated for presenting such complicated human situation with ease. The tragic story of such intensity with plethora of complex relationships is presented without any villain. True, Roy many times becomes defensive in explaining complexity of relationships and takes recourse to simplifications. In particular, Roy seems to have difficulty in justifying relationship between Devdas and Chandramuthi. The lack of conviction, on part of the director lessens the charm of the film.

Despite this the film remains to be one of the classics of Hindi celluloid history. The director has been able to raise the particular story of an alcoholic lover to the general saga all failed loves. The helplessness and trauma of the lovers who are more victims of their own attitude and psyche rather than the environment is well reverberated. However, Roy too cannot escape a few unnecessary moralizations and stereotyping. Thus the film cannot go beyond the category of a love story and fails to acquire the symbolic overtones, instilling a work of art with multiplicity of suggestiveness and layers of meanings

Bhansali's "Devdas":

The third super hit cinematic representation of *Devdas* came up in 2002. The film was directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali. The main casts of the film are Shahrukh Khan (as Devdas), Aishwarya Roy (as Paro) and Madhuri Dixit (as Chandramukhi). The music was composed by Ismail Durbar and Saroj Khan was the Choreographer. The director has used immense audio- visual effects in setting of the scenes. Huge- marvelous sets, expensive heavy costumes, gorgeous decorated women, pompous dance and music- all these make the film noteworthy and these are the biggest strength of the film. The same pomp and grandeur, on the other hand can be taken as the bigger flaw of the film. The director is too much preoccupied with the outer beauty and show that he fails to focus on the substance. The result is that the film is reduced to all body and no soul.

There is no denying the fact that the liberalized environment of 2002 posed great challenges to Sanjay Leela Bhasnsali to reproduce the tragic love saga in proper context. The changed economic and cultural milieu of 2000s found little similarity to small confined dreamy setting of the original novella. Bhansali erred in grasping the essence of the original work. He bases his film on a philosophy or vision of his own perception. According to it two separated lovers just yearn to have a last glimpse of each other by holding their hands together at the final moment of their lives. This final union of holding hand together is seen as ultimate togetherness. This philosophy is all right as far as it goes but it is only one aspect of the novel. And the way in which it is presented makes it still more glaring. The filmmaker desperation of presenting the protagonists above board and undue moralizing to make their motifs pure has almost killed the spirit of the novel. The overblown villains become the ultimate players controlling the fate of the hapless heroes. The pompous sets and embellished characters only add to the artificiality and make the film devoid of substance.

The most important feature of the film is that all its aspects have been overdone. There is excessive show of emotions-surplus festivity, surplus tears, surplus scheming and surplus showing off. Without incentives and impulse on their parts, the main characters are just shadows of their original selves. They don't feel or act, but are made to feel and act by others. Sans of any drive or energy on their part, they become just the victims of circumstances.

The director's main motive seems to be stirring the emotions in the audience, and not to make them assess the situations on their own. It is like providing a hypnotized environment to condition people to a particular way of life. This very much corroborates to the ethos of globalised corporate environment where people are intoxicated by show and propaganda and fail see real issues inflicting them.

3. CONCLUSION

To conclude, these three 'Devdas' films have caught public imagination in three important phases of modern India as these very well collaborate to eco-cultural ethos of their time. The conservative society of 1930s was having strong progressive undercurrents. This is reflected in broad social vision, such as, idea of individual choice and liberty and gender sensitization, as presented in the 1935 film. The gradually developing society with progressive outlook at the aftermath of Independence filled the movie of 1955 with an inclination to challenge and protest. The progressive ideas like equality and freedom prevail in the film. Individualism in these two films is conditioned by a high- blown social considerations and the protagonists suppress their personal urge for the sake of social propriety. However, the selfish individualism of the globalized society of 2000s is contained by villains and adverse circumstances in Bhansali's film. A desperate design to maintain the status-quo is reflected as individuals are presented either as angels or demons. The value for progress and change is lacking awfully as the main protagonists are presented only as victims of their circumstances.

To sum up, despite limitations both Barua and Roy are true to the storyline. The setting and characters are real in these films and the environment of gloom and despair is well evoked. However, both the directors fail to give larger life and universality to their film. They fail to provide their film with a vision or everlasting philosophy that is required to instill

various suggestiveness and reverberation of meanings that in turn makes a work of art universal and timeless. Bhansali's philosophy on the other hand is based on his limited understanding of the novel and fails to provide any charm to otherwise a lackluster presentation. The film is filled with overblown villains and undue moralizing.

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