

Cinema as a Matrix of Intermediality: A Comparative Literary Methodology

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Abstract

For a long time scholars in the field of media took up individual mediums for investigation, but now a lot of them agree that various characteristics of media can only be understood through a comparative analysis of media which takes into account history and collaborations of all media and their network of connection. To understand Intermediality as a research field and its applicability as a methodology for comparative studies this paper uses 'Rang Rasiya' to illustrate the same. The paper explores the intricate use of various Intermedial categories suggested by Rajewsky and Schroter, in the narrative of the film to understand the interplay of literature, art, photography, theatre and so on in the matrix of the medium of Cinema. This provides a link between literature and Media studies which further enhances the scope of establishing an intersection between technology and humanities.

Keywords: Intermediality, Cinema, Comparative studies, Literature, Media

For a long time scholars in the field of media took up individual mediums for investigation, but now a lot of them agree that various characteristics of media can only be understood through a comparative analysis of media which takes into account "history and collaborations of all media"¹ and their network of connection. Herzogenrath opines that "since 'medium', etymologically means 'middle', 'intermediate', and 'between', and since 'inter' means 'between', 'intermediality' can very literally be described as between the between"² "The term intermediality was coined in 1983 by the German scholar Aage A. Hansen-Love in analogy with 'intertextuality' in order to capture relations between literature and visual arts (and to some extent also music) in Russian Symbolism."³ Rippl defines it to be the relationship that exists between media and so can be extended in the study of various cultural phenomena that deal with more than one medium.⁴ This term has a lot of ambiguity surrounding it. Initially the term was expounded around the milieu of literature and has been later extended to the realm of nonliterary studies. According to Rippl "it has become a central theoretical concept in many disciplines such as literary, cultural and theatre studies, as well as art, history, musicology, philosophy, sociology, film, media and comic studies-and these disciplines all deal with different intermedial constellations which ask for specific approaches and definitions"⁵

¹Ripple, Gabriele (Ed.). Handbook of Intermediality: Literature-Image-Sound-Music, 2015, p.1

²Ibid, p.10

³Wolf, Werner "Intermediality", Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, Ed Herman, David, Manfred Jahn and Marie-Laure Ryan, 2005, p.252

⁴Ripple, Gabriele (Ed.). Handbook of Intermediality: Literature-Image-Sound-Music, 2015, p.1

⁵Ibid. p.1

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Agnes Petho suggest that, Intermediality gained wide attention, since it emerged on an interdisciplinary basis, it allowed scholars from a large number of fields to come together and question its scope and subject matter. This makes Intermediality a major methodology in the context of comparative studies. Further Petho says that, most people who embrace the “research concept” of Intermediality have some basic training either in literature or communication or media theory and we can see that no theoretical study of Intermediality can be written without the reference to cinema.⁶

To understand this basic research field and its applicability as a methodology for comparative studies, cinema as a matrix of Intermediality helps illustrate the same. All cinema is generally an interplay of multiple intermedial relations bringing together music, dance, drama, photography, cinematography and so on. But to understand the various intermedial relations that can exist as part of the methodology of comparative studies, the film that has been chosen is ‘Rang Rasiya’ by Ketan Mehta”, owing to its wide range of Intermediality and their importance as a research methodology in the realm of literary studies.

Intermedialities in “Rang Rasiya”

As discussed above intermediality means different things to different researchers. It is impossible to take into consideration the vast number of definitions before one tries to analyze any text or media. Therefore in this paper I take the definitions given by two theorists: Rajewsky and Schroter to analyze the *Intermedialities* in the movie “Rang Rasiya”. I use the term intermedialities in a plural, because this text is a corpus of interactions of various media in forms of various definitions of intermediality that co-exist on multiple levels.

Among the various definitions of intermediality given by so many researchers, Irina O. Rajewsky is one researcher for whom intermediality is an “umbrella term and hypernym for all kinds of phenomena that take place between media”⁷, and who defines intermediality by placing it into three categories. i.e Medial Transposition, Media Combination and Intermedial References.⁸ Medial Transposition refers to the intermedial quality that has to do with the way in which a media product comes into being, i.e. transformation of a given media product or its sub stratum into another medium (eg. film adaptation, novelization). Media Combination on the other hand is a combination or a mix of different media like dance, music, theatre, photography into a single medium like films or opera. To use another terminology

this can also be called multimedia, mixed media or inter media. Finally, Intermedial References are for example references in literary text to a film through the evocation or imitation of various filmic techniques like dissolves, zoom in, zoom out shots, flash backs etc. These may also include musicalization of literature or references of a painting in a film and so on.

Jens Schroter on the other hand describes four major categories of intermediality, i.e. Synthetic Intermediality, Formal/Transmedial Intermediality, Transformational Intermediality and Ontological Intermediality⁹. Here the Synthetic Intermediality is synonymous to Rajewsky’s Media Combination which is basically a fusion of different media to a super media. Formal/ Transmedial Intermediality is a concept that is based on formal structures that are not specific to one medium but found in different medium, for example zoom shots are common to both photography and film, or flash back techniques are structures found both in literature and films. Transformational Intermediality refers to a model that is centered on the representation of one medium through another medium and finally Ontological Intermediality refers to a model that suggests that media always already exists in relation to other media, simply meaning that the concept of media is empty without the concept of intermedia.

The film Rang Rasiya is a nexus of interactions between Rajewsky’s Media Combination, Intermedial Reference and Media Transposition along with Schroter’s Synthetic Intermediality and Transformational Intermediality which I have illustrated in my paper.

It is imperative to note that “Rang Rasiya” is a film- based on a novel -based on the life of artist Raja Ravi Varma, who is recognized through his paintings which are- based on oral and written literatures of India.

Medial Transposition

Starting from the very periphery of the nexus, the film “Rang Rasiya” is an adaptation of a novel “Raja Ravi Varma” written by Ranjit Desai, which on the very surface of the text makes it an example of Medial Transposition. How the medium of literature is adapted into the medium of a film is what comprises this intermediality. This kind of intermediality leads one to various questions like: how the story has been adapted? How many extrapolations have been made into the text while this transposition is being done? One of the major points of comparative analysis that can be drawn from here is how the novel begins and

⁶Petho, Agnes “Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies”, 2010, p.40

⁷Ripple, Gabriele (Ed.). Handbook of Intermediality: Literature-Image-Sound-Music, 2015, p.11

⁸Rajewsky, Irina O., “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality”, Intermediality, 2005, p.50

⁹Schroter, Jens. “Discourses and Models of Intermediality”, 2011, p.2

how the film begins. The novel written by Ranjit Desai is almost like a kinstleroman, where the story proceeds on how Ravi Varma grows from a child into an adult and his journey of becoming an artist, the ups and downs and the growth that he shows. On the other hand the movie begins with a protest against Ravi Varma's paintings- the movie moves from present day (the movie was released for the first time in 2008 in London Film Festival) Bombay that is dealing with the issues of vulgarity and obscenity in art and media, as being protested against by the mass. This has been linked to an auction that has been going on which includes paintings of many artists along with Ravi Varma. Where the novel seems to move in a more linear fashion, the movie moves back and forth in time using the techniques of flash backs within flashbacks to narrate the story of the making, breaking and re-making of an artist.

Media Combination/ Synthetic Intermediality

Moving on to the next level of intermediality in the film I arrive at Rajewsky's concept of Media Combination and Schroter's concept of Synthetic Intermediality.

Petho asks: "Is film one medium among several others in a culture or is it one that combines more than one? Is film an 'intermedium', a 'composite' medium, in other words perhaps the ultimate 'mixed' or 'hybrid' medium that combines all kinds of media in its texture of signification? Or should we more likely regard it as merely a 'plate', a 'field' where intermedial relationships and/ or media transformations can occur?... Media histories tend to view cinema as the first truly intermedial medium."¹⁰

The medium of film itself is the "super media" that Schroter talks about. Being a combination of media like music, dance, theatre, photography and cinematography, simply makes the movie a basic Media combination. "Historical assessments argue that cinema's adaptation, convergence and amalgamation of discrete features from literature, music, dance, theatre and painting account for its intermedial quality".¹¹

In the movie, songs like O Re Kaamini, Anhad Naad Jagadey etc, are used in the background to show the interplay of the medium of cinema, i.e. the medium of moving pictures, along with music that further helps in the narration of the story. In my opinion Bollywood films are anyway inherent of singing and dancing, making Hindi films, a major example of Media Combination. Other examples include the performative aspects of theatre (which is one of the basic necessities of cinema); the use of paintings in the

palace of the Maharaja of Baroda or the use of paintings in the auction and exhibition scenes; the use of photography (as the medium of cinema itself is a combination of a collection of moving photographs). But Petho suggests, that, that "does not imply that the medium of film per se should be considered intermedia. The example of cinema rather highlights the transformative quality of intermediality that can be found in varying interrelationships between two or more media forms. These may have developed separately but are transformed through convergence into a new mixed form. In the example of cinema, intermediality acts as a model for the varied interrelationships between diachronic and synchronic media"¹², hence almost making it synonymous to Ontological Intermediality rather than Media Combination.

Transformational Intermediality

The concept of Transformational intermediality is three-fold in this film, i.e. from literature to painting; from painting to film and from literature to painting to film. I will explain how these three are done using different techniques.

Literature in Paintings

Starting at the very basic level Transformational Intermediality begins when Ravi Varma uses Indian literary texts as inspiration for his paintings. Monica Srivastava states "Raja Ravi Varma was among the first artists in the nineteenth century to introduce a radical change by focusing on the themes of Indian mythology and literature. He did this by resurrecting classical Indian sources from the Mahabharata and from Kalidasa's play and by combining this with European techniques of realism in colour, composition and perspective...in its selection of specific canon from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Kalidasa's epics, it invoked and reinforced a well- certified notion of India's classical past. Within this 'classical' canon, the choice of themes- particularly the romantic themes of love, longing and bereavement was seen to uphold the loftiest and lyrical values embedded in Indian literature and Mythology."¹³

When these stories were depicted through Ravi Varma's paintings they had in their original form become an example for Transformational Intermediality.

Apart from the fact that this counts as a subject of intermediality, the use of European art techniques by an Indian Painter to produce a piece of art based on Indian literature and culture makes it as a subject of comparative

¹⁰Petho, Agnes "Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies", 2010 ,p.48

¹¹Ibid, p.49

¹²Petho, Agnes "Intermediality in Film: A Historiography of Methodologies", 2010 ,p.49

¹³Srivastava, Monica. Renaissance in Indian Literature,p107

studies in the realm of art and literary movements and influence studies (as Comparative studies is alternatively called).

Paintings in Film

By depicting these paintings through the medium of film, the director, makes it a doubly complex example of transformational intermediality.

According to Andre Bazin many critics claim that “Not only is the film a betrayal of the painter, it is also a betrayal of the painting, and for this reason the viewer believing that he is seeing the picture as painted is actually looking at it through the instrumentality of an art form that profoundly changes its nature...the sequence of a film gives it a unity in time that is horizontal and so to speak geographical, whereas time in a painting so far as the notion applies develops geologically and in depth...space, as it applies to a painting is radically destroyed by the screen...a painting is separated not only from reality as such but even more so, from the reality that is represented in it.”¹⁴

But the director of this movie goes through the pains of distinguishing the paintings in their true form, from the paintings used in the movie.

Initially the paintings are used in the credit roll of the movie. Even though these images are taken from the original paintings of Ravi Varma, they are only shown in cut up parts, where one cannot see the wholeness of these paintings. Here the medium of painting works as wallpaper or a background image in the credit roll in the medium of the film.

Next, the film uses some of the original paintings, like the painting of the “Nair Stri” in order to develop a link between the original paintings of Ravi Varma and the paintings that are later depicted in the film. These other paintings are copies of the original paintings super imposed with the faces of actors and actresses playing the roles of the particular characters like king Ailyum Thirunal, Madhav Rao, Kaamini- this distinction between the original paintings and the morphed paintings are made by using the photographic techniques of very wide shots and wide shots, zoom in, fade outs and so on; in order to direct or divert the focus of the viewer from the face of the muse in the paintings. This is in fact an example of intermedial reference where the techniques of photography are made reference to through the medium of painting and film.

Finally, the scenes depicted in the paintings, like that of a

girl sitting on the swing, are taken from the painting and re-created on screen to show how the painter must have arrived at a particular finished product. Hence the medium of painting is transformed in the medium of the film.

Literature to Painting to Film

This transformational intermediality occurs at various occasions, but I shall illustrate this with a simple example. The film shows Ravi Varma painting a picture of Goddess Saraswati. In Vedas Saraswati is described to have four hands, a fair complexion, seated on a lotus and accompanied by her swan, she holds a veena, a book, a rose and a water pot. She is always dressed in white garments.¹⁵ Adopting this description Ravi Varma made his painting of Saraswati which has now gained popularity as the iconography of the Goddess all over India. The film depicts the muse *Sugandha* imitating this popular description of the literary text. From this the painter takes liberty of adding a background of beautiful greenery, a swan/ peacock, four hands instead of the two of *Sugandha*, from his own imagination as the movie depicts that the entire painting is being made indoors. To add to this, the movie takes the liberty of morphing the face of the actress on the original painting of Ravi Varma while recreating an image of the painting, i.e. the painting is a copy of the original in which the film adds special effects to synchronize it with the script and the actors in the film. This is further taken to the realm of the painter’s imagination in the film when he actually imagines those literatures as paintings with faces of him (i.e. Randeep Hooda) and his muse (Nanadana Sen) in this film. This can be seen through the paintings of Arjuna and Subhadra, Madhav and Radha and so on.

Intermedial references

Ravi Varma is shown to have drawn inspiration from Indian literature and culture for his paintings. So, passing references to the folk Dance form of Kalbelia and folk singers of Rajasthan are shown in the film. Depiction of Kathakali becomes a form of intermedial reference, i.e. Theatre as a media that has been used by Ravi Varma in his paintings is shown as a source of reference in the medium of the film. Other examples of intermedial references used in the movie are the sculptures of Khajurao, Ajanta, Elora and Konark; the use of Ravi Varma’s paintings as posters and advertisements points at the medium of photography and printing; depiction of a cinematograph as a medium of mass production and image evolution is also depicted in the movie. An art exhibition is also shown which can be counted as an intermedial reference.

¹⁴Bazin, Andre. What Is Cinema? 1967, p.165

¹⁵Goel, Nitin Exotic India- News letter Archives Lakshmi and Saraswati-Tales in Mythology and Art (22/10/16 7:40 pm), p.3

Apart from the intermedialities that I have illustrated above, this film can be studied as a treasure for anyone who wishes to understand the methodologies of comparative literary studies. This intermedial research concept that brings together the various mediums of Art, Music, Drama, Literature, Cinema and Photography can be seen to be one of the pillars that erect comparative literary studies. It allows one to indulge in a study of literature and cultural expression across disciplinary boundaries. Comparison and contrast is just a very minor part of comparative studies, whereas this crossing of boundaries is what would help one understand the project of comparative literature. Other than intermediality this topic leaves the scope for further research. The use of oral and written literary forms of epic, theatre and the genre of novel can be used to do a genealogical study; the artist theme, the love theme can be used for a study of thematology; locating modern Indian art and establishing its roots in the colonial period can help in study of historiography and postcolonial studies.; studying a film that is a Hindi Adaptation of a Marathi novel which is translated both into English and Hindi and has a common story line to a Malayalam film "Makaramanju" dubbed into Tamil as "Apsara, can help one understand the issues of Translation. The use of various literary texts as pretexts to Ravi Varma's Paintings like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Abhijnayanshakuntalam, Vedas, Puranas can help in an intertextual analysis. Hence all major areas of comparative literary studies can be understood through this one topic, of which Intermediality is only a small part.

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