

## **Adaptation and Auteurism in South Asian Studies with Reference to Rabindranath Tagore's Works on Screen**

Shah Ahmed,<sup>1</sup> Md. Mahmudul Hasan,<sup>2</sup> Wan Nur Madiha Ramlan<sup>3</sup>  
International Islamic University Malaysia

### **Abstract**

Since its inception in the 1890s, cinema has been predominantly contingent upon literature for its source, growth and success. The curiosity to know what happens when a literary text is rendered into visual medium has led to a myriad of debates and discussions. Unlike in Europe and North America, in South Asia cinematic translation of literature has not received substantial scholarly attention and critical insights. As a result, the literary adaptations of Bengali authors are hardly discussed from the theoretical perspectives of adaptation studies. Contextualising adaptation studies in South Asia, especially in India and Bangladesh, this paper recommends the incorporation of auteurism in adaptation studies and argues that, like literary authors, artistic filmmakers (read adapters) are the authors of their films. It attempts to wean away adaptation discourse from the outmoded fidelity/infidelity debate and maintain that directorial transgression is an essential modality in the dynamics of literary adaptation for a successful intermedial rendition. In distinguishing auteurs from general adapters, we suggest that some of the adapting directors, especially those of Rabindranath Tagore's works, can be evaluated from the auteurist premise of creative independence, technical competence and artistic imagination.

### **Keywords**

Adaptation studies, auteur theory, Bengali cinema, adaptation of Bengali literature, artistic deviations, Tagore's works on screen

---

<sup>1</sup> **Shah Ahmed** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, East Delta University, Bangladesh. He is currently pursuing his doctorate degree in the Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia. His research area is adaptation studies, particularly South Asian literature on screen. Email: shah@eastdelta.edu.bd.

<sup>2</sup> **Md. Mahmudul Hasan** is Associate Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia. He holds a PhD in feminist comparative literature from the University of Portsmouth (2007). His areas of research interest include postcolonial feminist literature, twentieth-century and contemporary British literature, South Asian literature in English and Islamic literature. Email: mmhasan@iium.edu.my.

<sup>3</sup> **Wan Nur Madiha Ramlan** is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, International Islamic University Malaysia. She holds a PhD in English literature from the University of Adelaide. Her research interests include Asian Australian literature, spatiality in fiction and digitization in literary studies. Email: madyramlan@iium.edu.my.

Just as novelists use a pen to write, filmmakers, who should be considered their artistic counterparts and equals, use a camera. (Alexandre Astruc 17)

## Introduction

Literary works are often adapted in other genres and for various media, and every adaptation offers a new dimension to the source text. In fact, the dynamics of literary adaptation that involves a certain amount of interpretation, alteration, transgression or modification in keeping with the scope of the medium and the culture to which it is presented have appealed to diverse audiences and critics. Hence, adapted works have received abundant reflections from Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) theory of "dialogism" which claims that any text is itself an independent discourse which influences, and is influenced by, many other discourses. In other words, an adapted film, as Beyad and Javanian contend, is not only a filmic cognate of a literary text, it rather addresses the heteroglossia of its source and interacts with other sources "in a network of intertextual relations" (381-83). Progressively, this "dynamic encounter [between literature and adaptation] rather than a static rendering of a story" (Mayne 25) has become an interesting arena of critical discussion. That is why, adaptations of literary works continually generate engaging criticism and fierce debates among scholars. In course of time, these have given birth to discourses, research and, more importantly, theories in such a way that a new study, adaptation studies, has evolved in literary and cultural discourses, especially in the field of comparative literature.

In academic debate, adaptation studies has now received nearly as much critical and theoretical attention as literary studies (Leitch "Introduction" 5). Accordingly, film adaptation has now earned considerable pedagogical value and is studied as "texts" alongside the literary texts on which the films are based. Interestingly, moving away from the conventional approach of "reading" novels and "watching" (adapted) films, adaptation scholars have focused on the reverse premise of "viewing" novels and "reading" films since an adaptation is generally accepted as an "interpretation" of its source text (Bane 2). Thus, with these developments, adaptation studies has gradually achieved its scholastic respectability at par with many other academic fields, such as translation studies, comparative studies, transmedia studies and intertextual studies. Regrettably, despite such widespread popularity of adapted films, and theoretical innovation in adaptation studies and pedagogical curricula, South Asian film criticism almost routinely feeds on the "fidelity principle." As a result, the screen adaptations of such authors as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-94), Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay (1876-1938), Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay (1894-1950) and Tarasankar Bandopadhyay (1898-1971) are not sufficiently discussed in adaptation studies. Even though frequently compared with the auteurist directors of global cinema in terms of cinematic talents, except

for Satyajit Ray (1921-92), other Bengali auteurs such as Tapan Sinha (1924-2009), Ritwik Ghatak (1925-76) and Rituparno Ghosh (1963-2013) have hardly received sufficient critical focus.

Given the necessity of contextualising adaptation studies, along with its theoretical formulation and innovation in South Asian studies, this paper delves into the literary basis of Bengali cinema and the undercurrents of the auteur theory and seeks to recognise Bengali auteurs in academic discourse. Offering some of the current perspectives in Bengali adaptation discourse, we will discuss auteur theory, its developments and limitations as well as its relevance to South Asian realities and culture. Given the dominance of literary and director-written scripts of Bengali cinema, the paper attempts to entrench the Bengali adapted film in adaptation studies and auteurist discourse as a “text” in parallelism with its literary ancestor. It will also comment on some literary adaptations of Tagore’s works and put forward the rationale for recognising their auteur directors.

### **Adaptation Theory and Criticism**

Passing through a number of adaptation schools – the old school of fidelity criticism of the 1950s and 1960s, and the narratological schools of (Russian) formalism, New Criticism, structuralism and semiotics of the 1970s and 1980s – adaptation studies has now found a connection with the recent theoretical turn of dialogic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Gilles Deleuze (1925-95) and others. Therefore, theories such as intertextuality, post-structuralism, postcolonialism, post-modernism, cultural studies and gender studies have been the constant bases of critical interpretations of the adapted cinema. With this shift from the older formalist schools to new formal theories, adaptation studies has succeeded in drawing attention from scholars, researchers and students for its own theoretical scholarship, analytical insight and methodological innovation. Failing to form a definitive understanding of these theoretical paradigms practised in the adaptation discourse of the West, critics of Indian cinema still appear to hold on to fidelity/infidelity criticism and propose that an adaptation is a derivative product and hence inferior to its literary counterpart.

Some contemporary critics have, however, made fascinating insights into the adaptations of Bengali literature, and their works are published by well-known presses. For example, Chidananda Das Gupta in his foundational book *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray* (1980) extensively focuses on Ray’s adapted films such as *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road* [1955]) and *Charulata* (*The Lonely Wife* [1964]). Although Gupta explores “Tagorean synthesis” in Ray’s cinematic vision and recognises the influence of *Pather Panchali* and *Charulata* as a turning point in his career, he refrains from elucidating the adaptational aspects of the films. Somdatta Mandal discusses the shift from the traditional view of faithful adaptation to the director’s creative freedom of “reinterpreting the word text into film text” (11). Despite interpreting a good number of adapted films from this

stand, she is not primarily concerned with the question why the works of such filmmakers as Ray, Sinha and Ghosh are more successful and more critically acclaimed. Similarly, Abesh Kumar Das explores almost all the films Sinha has adapted from Bengali literature and examines the director's textual transgressions.

It is evident that these critical propositions are predicated upon the putative inferiority of the adapted text, that is, cinema's subservience to literature. In fact, lack of recognition of adaptation works as artistic and creative productions partly precludes adaptation studies from gaining critical attention from scholars of South Asian studies. Surprisingly, the apparent contradiction that remains among the above scholars is that some of them approvingly dwell upon a faithful adaptation, while others censure the same film for tenaciously conforming to the written text. Given this context of critical indeterminacy, we argue that the auteur theory can be coalesced into adaptation studies in order to assess an adapting director in the light of treating "literary text as raw material and ultimately creating their own unique structure" (Bluestone vii-viii). That is, since a director exerts certain creativity and technical competence in converting a literary text into a cinematic work, he/she deserves the authorial status in tandem with that of the literary author. Hence, the incorporation of auteurism in this arena will constitute a significant remedy for the neglect shown to literary adaptations.

### **Auteurism as a Film Theory**

In his 1948 article, "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera Pen," French film critic Alexandre Astruc claims – as the epigraph of this article suggests – that, apart from the expressional and material variation of the pen and the camera, there is no other essential difference between a literary author and a film author (17). He suggests that, though literary authors and cinematic auteurs produce medium-different artworks, they are equivalent in artistic stature. In subsequent years, this idea inspired largely a group of French critics, including André Bazin (1918-58), Jacques Doniol-Valcroze (1920-89), Joseph-Marie Lo Duca (1910-2004) and François Truffaut (1932-84). With a view to promulgating the auteurist notion, in 1951 they founded *Cahiers du cinema*, one of the most eminent magazines of European cinema. Accordingly, all the *Cahiers* critics and succeeding auteur exponents increasingly propagated auteurism, especially espousing Truffaut's claims that "there are no works, there are only auteurs" (qtd. in Bazin 250) and "there are no good and bad movies, only good and bad directors" (qtd. in Brown 48). Thus, the basics of the auteurist principle were contextualised in European cinema.

However, for its worldwide familiarisation, the auteur theory owes much to American film theorist Andrew Sarris (1928-2012) who translated the *Cahiers* articles into English and taxonomised the term "auteur theory" from Truffaut's phrase "la Politique des Auteurs" (the theory of authors). His breakthrough essay, "Notes on the Auteur Theory" (1962) and foundational book, *The American*

*Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968* (1968), served as reference works on the theory in the English-speaking world. From Truffaut's claim ("there are no works, there are only auteurs"), Sarris reshaped the history of American cinema as the history of great directors (Sarris "Notes" 67). His insistence on "the technical competence," "distinguishable personality" and "interior meaning" of the director as "criterion of value" of a film (Sarris "Notes" 63-65) further solidifies auteurism as the director-as-author theory. It is notable that diverging from his precursors' rigidity of determining auteur films, he included, in the prevailing auteurist assessment, modern commercial films along with classical ones. In fact, what makes the theory pertinent to the existing film discourse is his claim that "the auteur theory is the most efficient method of classifying the cinema: *past, present and future*" (Sarris, "The Auteur" 28; emphasis added). Twenty-first-century auteur critics like Harry Benshoff seem to acknowledge Sarris's influence when they redefine the auteur director as "the one creative mind or organizing principle behind a film" (Benshoff 63).

In defense of directors' individual creative vision and technical control, the auteur theory has made the director "a figure of cultish hero worship" (Brantley 9) and minimised the roles of other important constituents of a film production such as the script and actors. They put forward the argument that the same artistic exertion that underlies the process of literary art is required for its cinematic counterpart. An auteur of a film is, more precisely, equivalent to the author of a literary work. Auteur theorists, as Marie reinforces, "safeguard the creative freedom of the auteur director" (70). Almost without any divergence, they agree that if the artistic process of a film is solely steered by its director, the director is the auteur of the film. Moreover, the success or the failure – both artistic and commercial – of a film is determined largely by its director's ingenious or slapdash approach. In fact, an auteurist film is believed to emblemise its maker's artistic inscription and imaginative design which implies that not all filmmakers are auteurs; true auteurs are inherently endowed with imaginative spirit, stylistic predilection and creative design which they pursue in *a number of films*. In other words, a number of their films require to be analysed to see whether or not their idiosyncratic artistic signature is reflected in them.

Such minimisation apparently results from the auteurists' crucial distinction between *mise-en-scène*, the particular arrangements of a scene for the director's creative meaning and theme, and *metteurs-en-scène*, matters such as script, dialogue, music and actors. They call the former "form" or "the strength" while the latter "the content" or "subject matter" of a film (Jim Hillier 10). They argue that the strength of a film mostly lies in the *form*, which is prompted by the technical competence and the interior meaning of the director rather than in the *subject*, which the director merely engages as the "stage setters" for his purposes (Hess 3). In other words, it is the auteur who, as they stress, chooses the subject matter to hone their artistic and technical designs.

### **Limitations of the Auteur Theory**

Since the development of auteurism as a theory, there has been an argument regarding the parameter of director-function as the exclusive determinant of a successful film. Prior to such ideas, a film was traditionally viewed as a collective production by a group of specialised professionals separately contributing to the *dynamics of a film*, such as script, direction, music, casting, acting, costume, production and editing. On other hand, the auteurs are less concerned about these dynamics which in fact are crucial for a film's critical and spectatorial acceptance. It is an undeniable fact that many viewers go to cinema to watch a particular movie because of the reputation of its performance artists. In fact, the most frequent criticism of the theory concerns the theoreticians' undermining the film's composite structure while underlining the director's overarching authority.

Perhaps, the most crucial limitation of auteurism is that in its theoretical spectrum it does not encompass the undercurrents of how a literary work crosses over from print to celluloid. Due to this constraint, auteurism is not very popular in adaptation studies which is chiefly focused on the comparative study of the literary text and the script of its adaptation (Elliott 681). Owing to the auteurist emphasis on "the interior meaning" of the director, scriptwriting skills remain underrepresented in auteurist criticism. They do not even bring into consideration the custom that many directors work on their own script (Thelen 2), a fact which reinforces the claim of their "director-author" theory. Dale Andrews contends that in giving excessive focus upon the directorial role, "Truffaut minimized the significance of the author of the screenplay" (178). Most recently, Nicholas Godfrey, who identifies a film as "an industrial production" of a comprehensive teamwork and a script as "the major hallmark" of a film, maintains: "The script has become a victim of auteur principle" (17). In fact, Godfrey locates the auteurs' director obsession and disregard for other complementary engagements as the most crucial limits of the auteur theory.

In order to establish auteurism in the context of adaptation scholarship, we maintain that the auteur theory is germane to adaptation studies in consideration of director-written scripts to which, as we noted earlier, auteurist exponents were shockingly unconcerned. In another words, the auteurs' overarching emphasis on the director as "the one creative mind or the guiding principle behind a film" can be more credible if the director's script written from the literary work under adaptation is brought into consideration. In fact, it is the scriptwriting ability that is more crucial and arduous, as it involves a director's inherent literary and filmic insights. Therefore, the principle of auteurism – that the director is the ultimate author of the film – becomes more convincing when the director-written script is considered in the theory.

This article claims that by considering the writing as a significant constituent of a film production, the auteur theory can tone down some its unfavourable criticism due to its inflated focus on the director. Notably, as in world cinema,

the prominent adapters of Bengali cinema such as Ray, Ghatak, Sinha and Ghosh are themselves the (script) writers of their adaptation works. Hence, focusing on the dual creativity of Bengali writer-directors, Indian film critics can significantly make the theory much more inclusive and interdisciplinary. Moreover, in arguing for the relevance of auteurism in adaptation studies and for the integration of writing into auteurist tenets, we suggest a reformation of the theory that may ultimately be a significant feature of South Asian auteurism.

### **Auteurist Practices in Bengali Cinema**

This article affirms that a number of Bengali filmmakers deserve the auteurist status since they share among themselves a common literariness and auteurist tendency in their adaptation works. Though several Bengali directors whom we will discuss in the following pages can fortuitously leave some extent of creativity on one or two of their films, they cannot be considered as auteurs since the auteurist principle emphasises that an auteur-director continues making good films (Sarris “Notes” 64). Often preoccupied with box-office success, commercial adapters such as Naresh Mitra (1888-1968), Sekhar Das (1952-) and Agnidev Chatterjee (1965-) generally filmise a literary text as faithfully as possible, especially when it is a classic. That is to say, they do not take the risk of improvising the transposition of a recognised work mainly because of the lack of artistic vision and confidence. For example, Mitra adapted Tagore’s classic *Gora* (*Fare-Faced* [1909]) in 1938 without transgressing the textual narrative and interfusing aesthetic improvisation. The same is true for Ajoy Kar (1914-85) who adapted Bankim’s *Bishabriksha* (*The Poison Tree* [1873]) in the mode of Bengali mainstream cinema of the 1980s without any creative interference in the plot of the novel.

Apart from these, a good number of auteur adapters of Bengali cinema – such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, Tapan Sinha, Mrinal Sen and Rituparno Ghosh – continually made (mostly adapted) films which earned both commercial profits and rave reviews from the cine-critics of home and abroad. In other words, by building a long-standing interface with Bengali literature, these filmmakers demonstrated a certain uniqueness of aesthetic and thematic improvisation in spatiotemporal contexts which in due course placed them alongside the other outstanding auteurs of the world (Pauwels, “Introduction” 1). In fact, hardly any film by these directors have failed in terms of Bazin’s precepts of an auteur film as “popular,” “industrial,” “financial” and “intellectual” art (251). This implies that ensuring the spectatorial preference, they had to rework the literary text in order to win critical appreciation through a distinctive narrative technique, a unique screenplay, stylistic innovation, philosophical bearing, theoretical relevance, cinematographic signature, musical elegance and temporal adjustments. As a result, their films – unlike commercial

films which predominantly aim at revenues – make a balance between public taste and critical reading.

Perhaps, the two most astonishing features of this cinematic tradition can be understood from the fact that Bengali literature predominates Bengali cinema, and most of the adapters depend on their own script. It is perhaps worth mentioning that whatever international kudos Indian cinema has gained so far, it is, to a great extent, due to the merit of the Bengali adapted films such as Ray's *Pather Panchali* and Sinha's *Kabulivala* (1957) (Biswas 72). Critiquing the banal stereotype against Indian cinema that it is an inferior variant of Hollywood, Heidi Pauwels upholds the literariness of Bengali parallel cinema foregrounding "its extensive engagement of Indian literary traditions" ("Introduction" 1). Likewise, the majority of Bengali adaptations by an assortment of talented scripter-directors bask in literariness in varying degrees. Importantly, almost all the Bengali films, celebrated at home and abroad, are, apart from being based on literature, made on the directors' own scripts. It is probably worthwhile to mention a few of them which have been commercially successful and received accolades from both cine-goers and cine-connoisseurs at national and international levels: Ray's adaptations such as *Pather Panchali* (1955) and *Ghare-Baire* (1984); Ghatak's adaptations such as *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960) and *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* (1973); Sinha's adaptations such as *Kabulivala* (1961) and *Atitibi* (1965); and Ghosh's adaptations such as *Chokher Bali* (2003) and *Noukadubi* (2011).

It should be noted that along with making auteur films, some of these Bengali directors articulate their individual cinematic notions that obviously bear a close similarity with those of the auteur theory. For example, Ray enunciates that

the cinema language is, in fact, the camera language led by the director. Camera is the narrator of cinema, and the wit of the language depends upon the director-led camera. So, the language of cinema is in fact the language of camera. (*Bishoy* 11; translation ours)

Ray's emphasis here on "camera language" and "camera as the narrator of cinema" bears striking similarity with the basic auteurist principle that equates the significance of pen with that of camera. In fact, in his copious writings on cinema, he repeatedly underlines the role of camera, and the genius and style of the director. In *Speaking of Films* (2005), Ray comments, "The artist must come before his art. Where there is no artist, no art can be created even if all relevant material is available" (29). Similarly, in *Our Films and Their Films* (1976), he maintains that "a true artist is recognizable in his style and his attitude" (83). Again, giving prominence to cinema as "the subjective factor" which underpins the auteurist principle of the director's subjectivity in filmmaking, Ritwick Ghatak in his famous treatise *Cinema and I* (1987) points out that "all art is subjective. Any work



of art is the artist's subjective approximation of the reality around him" (61). What is more, apparently agreeing with the auteur director and theorist Jean-luc Godard on the individuality and impression of the director, Ghatak asserts:

I agree with Jean-luc Godard that anything which seems to an artist to be capable of conveying his message is entirely valid – be it song or dance or newspaper headlines or commentaries or just about anything! Artistic validity is the only criterion. (72)

Practically associated with almost all the production dynamics, these directors, if theoretically identified, will have more critical recognition in adaptation discourse. Likewise, if seen in the light of the auteurist proposition, the directors of these renditions will appear no less ingenious than those hallowed in world cinema as "master auteurs." Significantly, the critical foundation of the theory will distinguish their adaptations as directorial arts as opposed to authorial (read literary) arts and make the fidelity/infidelity debate irrelevant. Furthermore, despite the age-long stereotype against Bengali cinema that it has no theory of its own (Gupta, "Indian Cinema" 30), these auteurs, who simultaneously practised the auteurist tenets, can at least be brought under the canopy of this theory.

### **Tagore's Works on Screen: An Auteurist Approach**

Rabindranath Tagore was drawn to "the primordial attraction of cinema" since the beginning of cinema production in the 1900s (Mollick 3). Though adaptation of his works began in 1923 with Naresh Mitra's *Manbhanjan* based on his story of the same title, in 1932 he himself directed a film, *Natir Puja* (*Worship of the Dancing Girl*) which is an adaptation of his 1926 dance-drama of the same name. This is arguably the first instance of a great writer to have adapted his own work. In subsequent years, his literary works in various genres have been adapted and readapted in both the silent and sound eras of Bengali cinema. It goes without saying that virtually all prominent directors of the (Indian) Bengali film industry, irrespective of their purposes, have translated Tagore's works into the visual medium. What is more, hundreds of films have used his lyrics, commonly known as *Rabindra sangeet*, as background music.

A central aspect that is inexorably linked to the adaptation phenomenon is the precondition of compression, omission and expansion for medium specificity. This genuinely cinematic technique, which largely contributes to the organic structure and the success or failure of an adaptation, is very crucial from two adaptational perspectives. Firstly, they allow directors to make textual departures, and secondly, these departures create an avenue for them to exercise their own artistic insights. Significantly, some directors, in executing these techniques, have altered Tagore's works and interposed their own aesthetic insights into them. It can be debated whether such adapters have exercised

directorial independence, worked on their own scripts and inscribed their creative pursuit. Therefore, an analysis of Tagore adaptations primarily distinguishes a number of auteurs – such as Rabindranath Tagore himself, Madhu Bose (1900-79), Satyajit Ray, Tapan Sinha, Purnendu Pattrea (1931-97), Rituparno Ghosh, Suman Mukhopadhyay (1966-) and Qaushiq Mukherjee (1975-) – who have artistically and technically recreated the texts in the celluloid medium. Though some other directors have also exercised freedom, their adaptations have not been considered artistic or successful. This suggests that transgressing a text erratically cannot vindicate art or ensure success. On the contrary, artistic transgressions, when exploited from the director's aesthetic exhilaration, may make the films transcend the philological medium and become visual arts.

A closer examination makes it apparent that even though these adapters demonstrated auteurist tendencies, not all of them can be, to the strictest principle of the theory, categorised as auteurs. In the light of auteur direction in which directors remain a “creative mind or organizing principle” in a number of films, only three directors – Satyajit Ray, Tapan Sinha and Rituparno Ghosh – have made three Tagore films each. Stalwarts of Bengali parallel cinema, these master adapters are consistently inspired by the different genres of Tagore's corpus and have consistently translated them into visual medium (Gooptu 187). In their Tagore films – Ray's *Teen Kanya* (1961), *Charulata* (1964) and *Ghare-Baire* (1984); Sinha's *Kabulwala* (1957), *Kshudhita Pashan* (1960) and *Atithi* (1965); and Ghosh's *Chokher Bali: A Passion Play* (2003), *Noukadubi* (2011) and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012) – they have exploited the auteurist role as “creative mind” and “organizing principle” in overseeing the entire production.

It is to be noted that these three auteurs were not only writer-directors for their entire filmography, they also wrote scripts for other directors – a distinction which is indeed not very common in world cinema. As scriptwriters, they, apart from improvising thematic edges in, and eliminating some textual characters from, their Tagore films, have dominated the entire production and taken such liberties as to improvise cinematic narratives that artistically differ from Tagore's. For example, deviating from Tagore's novel *Ghare Baire* (*The Home and the World* [1915]), a narrative written in the form of diaries and monologues by the major characters with an ambiguous ending where Nikhil is severely wounded but not dead, Ray improvises a flashback, circular filmic narrative which commences from Nikhil's funeral cremation and retrogresses to his earlier death. Thus, seen in the perimeter of Nikhil's premature death and the preceding background in flashback in which he had to die, Ray's *Ghare-Baire* recreates the political circumstances the novel describes. Uncertain about how future will unfold, Tagore seems to offer some faint hope – as manifested in Nikhil's being alive – about India's future. Ray, to whom Tagore's future becomes present, has made the events more catastrophic and fatalistic in relation to the subsequent historical events of India.

With regard to textual transgressions, though Sinha is not as bold as Ray, the former has brought significant artistic nuances in his Tagore films. In *Kabulivala*, for instance, he prefaces an epic beginning coupled with an enlightening voice-over – a narrative improvisation that enthralled the audience and astounded the critics for the first time in Bengali cinema even before Ray undertook Tagore adaptation. Extended to a considerable length, this voice-over narration graphically represents entire Afghanistan – the geographical source of Rahamat – in its spatial, natural, historical, mythological, ethnic, cultural, economic and demographical backdrops. The euphonic voice-over information can be taken as Rahamat’s biographical piece which is instrumental to the thematic edge of the film. Maintaining Tagore’s theme of universality of fatherhood, Sinha focuses on Rahamat’s life, emotion, struggle and occupation so that the audience can have a balanced understanding of the father from Afghanistan at par with that from Hindustan whom the text has sufficiently developed. Moreover, the film may have currency in religious discourse as regards the Afghan Muslims’ lifestyle together with their Islamic appearances, clothes and way of prayers that abound in the film which can be paralleled with those of Mini’s Brahmin family. Similarly, the Afghan music that Sinha interweaves in the prefatory shot dovetails with Bengali music that is performed at Mini’s school (*Kabulivala* 47:18-50:16). In order to remove the text’s ethnocentric misgivings about Afghan culture and people, Sinha’s camera, a la an omniscient narrator, captures the Kabuliwalas in a long shoot against a barren, rugged landscape that provides the rationale why they travel to India.

Again, in *Chokher Bali*, the first Tagore adaptation in the twenty-first century, Ghosh not only particularises his film with the latest technology and medium-specificity improvements, he also interweaves his individual gender concerns – such as Binodini’s participation in political affairs like the anti-Bengal Partition movement of 1905 – which account for his textual deviations and thematic alterations. Consequently, while Tagore gives his major characters almost equal space in the novel, Ghosh strategically shifts his focus on Binodini, the female protagonist of the novel/film. Moreover, he changes the novel’s publication year from 1903 to around 1905 in order to set the film in the backdrop of the above movement with the slogan of *Vande Mataram* that was seething with the nationalist spirit against the efforts of separating Bengal into the Muslim eastern areas and the Hindu western areas. Significantly, this form of directorial novelty in narrative and other visual aspects links these adaptations to the most recent theoretical developments by Linda Hutcheon who maintains that “it [adaptation] involves both memory and change, persistence and variation” (173). In fact, such “change” and “variation” that directors have insightfully extemporised make their adaptations different from the source texts.

Apart from Tagore films, the three directors made many other extraordinary adaptation works in which they demonstrated almost the same creative talent.

Moreover, in most of their films, they themselves made musical directions which have gained considerable currency in Bengali musical studies (Gooptu 158). By extension, they wrote their own music for many of their films. For example, in *Ek Je Chhilo Desh* ("Once There Was a Country" [1977]), based on Mani Shankar Mukherjee's short story of the same name and *Raincoat* (2004), based on O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi," Sinha and Ghosh were the lyricists, respectively. Therefore, in terms of technical and aesthetic merits of their filmographies, these filmmakers can be regarded as the three most outstanding auteurist representatives of the cinematic adaptations of Bengali literature and of Tagore's works in particular. Strangely, though their works were significantly appreciated at home and abroad, the textual transgressions they made received severe opprobrium, as literary texts are considered superlative and cinematic versions, derivative.

### Conclusion

Bengali cinema is enriched by some capable auteurs who have treated literary works as source materials for their cinematic expressions just as classical writers treated mythological legends and Shakespeare, popular tales. For example, Syed Waliullah's *Lalsalu* (*Tree Without Roots* [1929]) and Tanvir Mokammel's *Lalsalu* (2001) are as different from each other as the legend of Lear from Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1606). The adaptations of these auteurs have been far from celluloid semblances of their literary predecessors but artistic equivalents in which the directors have enjoyed creative independence, exploited technical finesse and inscribed aesthetic élan. Some of them have transcended national borders and are ranked with the world-famous auteurs. It may be worth noting here that some of Ray's, Ghatak's and Sinha's adaptations have been enumerated in *Sight & Sound*, a British cinema magazine published by the British Film Institute (BFI).

It is important that adaptation scholars assess the cinematic counterparts of Bengali literature through an auteurist prism in order to identify the directors' artistic alterations with their idiosyncratic personalities. Although cinema has been accepted as an art for over nearly a century in South Asia, an adapted film is yet to be considered as artistic equivalent of its literary source owing to literature's putative superiority over cinema. This article has shown that auteurism can be one of the most effective ways to liberate adaptations from being stalled in platitudinous arguments and interpret them through intermedial variations.

If an adapting filmmaker is given auteur status, it is believed that adaptation studies will be popular in South Asia. As a result, more talented filmmakers will emerge to translate literature on screen with adequate knowledge of adaptation modalities and theories. We believe that if adaptation studies along with the auteur theory is adequately popularised in South Asian studies, scholars will be keen on the theoretical examination of literary adaptation, and adaptation discourse will be divorced from fidelity/infidelity criticism. Given this theoretic

background, this article has sought to ascertain the importance of contextualising adaptation studies in South Asia and establish the relevance of the auteur theory to adaptation discourse. It has maintained that a filmmaker is as important as a literary author, the only difference being that one uses the pen and the other, the camera. We have focused on some celebrated adaptations of Bengali literature, especially those of Tagore's works, as a corollary of this theorem for further research and to encourage enthusiastic, future scholars to embark upon the auteurist appreciation of adaptations.

## Works Cited

- Andrews, Dale. *Digital Overdrive: Communications and Multimedia Technology*. Burlington: Digital Override, 2010.
- Astruc, Alexandre. "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera Pen." *The New Wave*. Ed. Peter Graham. New York: Doubleday, 1968. 17-23.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Bane, Charles. *Viewing Novels, Reading Films: Stanley Kubrick and the Art of Adaptation as Interpretation*. Louisiana: Louisiana State University, 2006.
- Bazin, André. "On the *politique des auteurs*." *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*. Ed. Jim Hillier. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1985. 248-59.
- Benshoff, Harry. *Film and Television Analysis: An Introduction to Methods, Theories, and Approaches*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Beyad, Maryam Soltan and Mohammad Reza Hassanzadeh Javanian. "Bakhtinian Intertextuality and Contextuality in Adaptation Studies: Kenneth Branagh and Michael Almereyda's Dialogues with William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*." DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29162/ANAFORA.v5i2.6>.
- Biswas, Moinak. "In the Mirror of an Alternative Globalism: A Neorealist Encounter in India." *Italian Neorealism and Global Cinema*. Ed. Laura E. Ruberto and Kristi M. Wilson. Michigan: Wayne State UP, 2007. 72-90.
- Bluestone, George. *Novels into Film*. London: Cambridge UP, 1968.
- Brantley, Will, ed. *Conversations with Pauline Kael*. Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1999.
- Brown, Gene, ed. *The New York Times Encyclopedia of Film: 1977-1979*. Vol. 12. New York: Times Books, 1984.
- Das, Abesh Kumar. *Tapan Sinha: Sarbik Chalachchitra Abikkha*. Howrah: Srihtishukhprokashon, 2016.
- Eliott, Kamilla. "Adaptation Theory and Adaptation Scholarship." *Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. Ed. Thomas Leitch. New York: Oxford UP, 2017. 679-97.

- Ghatak, Ritwik. *Cinema and I*. Kolkata: Ritwik Memorial Trust, 1987.
- Godfrey, Nicholas. *The Limits of Auteurism: Case Studies in the Critically Constructed New Hollywood*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2018.
- Gooptu, Sharmistha. *Bengali Cinema: An Other Nation*. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- Gupta, Chidananda Das. "Indian Cinema Today." *Film Quarterly* 22. 4 (1969): 27-35. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/1210307](http://www.jstor.org/stable/1210307). 29 April 2020.
- . *The Cinema of Satyajit Ray*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1980.
- Hess, John P. "The Beginning of the Auteur Theory." <https://filmmakeriq.com/lessons/beginning-auteur-theory/>. 27 April 2020.
- Hillier, Jim. "Introduction." *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave*. Ed. Jim Hillier. Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1985. 1-17.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Kabulivala*. Dir. Tapan Sinha. Subodh Roy, 1957. Film.
- Leitch, Thomas. "Introduction." *Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*. Ed. Thomas Leitch. New York: Oxford UP, 2017.
- Mandal, Somdatta. "Adapting, Interpreting and Transcreating Rabindranath Tagore's Works on Screen." *Adaptations: Some Journeys from Words to Visuals*. Ed. Shri Krishna Ray and Anugamani Ray. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015. 6-20.
- Marie, Michel. *The French New Wave: An Artistic School*. Trans. Richard Neupert. Malden: Blackwell, 2003.
- Mayne, Judith. "Dracula in Twilight: Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922)." *German Film and Literature: Adaptations and Transformations*. Ed. Eric Rentschler. New York: Routledge, 1986. 25-39.
- Mollick, Subha Das. "Images and Imagery: A Poet's Engagement with Moving Images." *Silhouette Magazine: A Publication on Cinema & Allied Art Forms*. 29 December, 2011.
- <https://learningandcreativity.com/silhouette/images-imagery-rabindranath-tagore-moving-images/>. 16 January 2018.
- Pauwels, Heidi R.M. "Introduction." *Indian Literature and Popular Cinema: Recasting Classics*. Ed. Heidi R.M. Pauwels. London: Routledge, 2007. 1-16.
- Ray, Satyajit. *Our Films and Their Films*. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1976.
- . *Bisboy: Chalachchitra*. Kolkata: Ananda, 1982.
- . *Speaking of Films*. Trans. Gopa Majumdar. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005.
- Sarris, Andrew. "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962." *Theories of Authorship: A Reader*. Ed. John Caughie. London: Routledge, 1981. 62-68.
- . "The Auteur Theory and the Perils of Pauline." *Film Quarterly* 16.4 (1963): 26-33. JSTOR, [www.jstor.org/stable/3185951](http://www.jstor.org/stable/3185951). 29 April 2020.
- Thelen, Lawrence. *The Show Makers: Great Directors of American Musical Theatre*. London: Routledge, 2000.