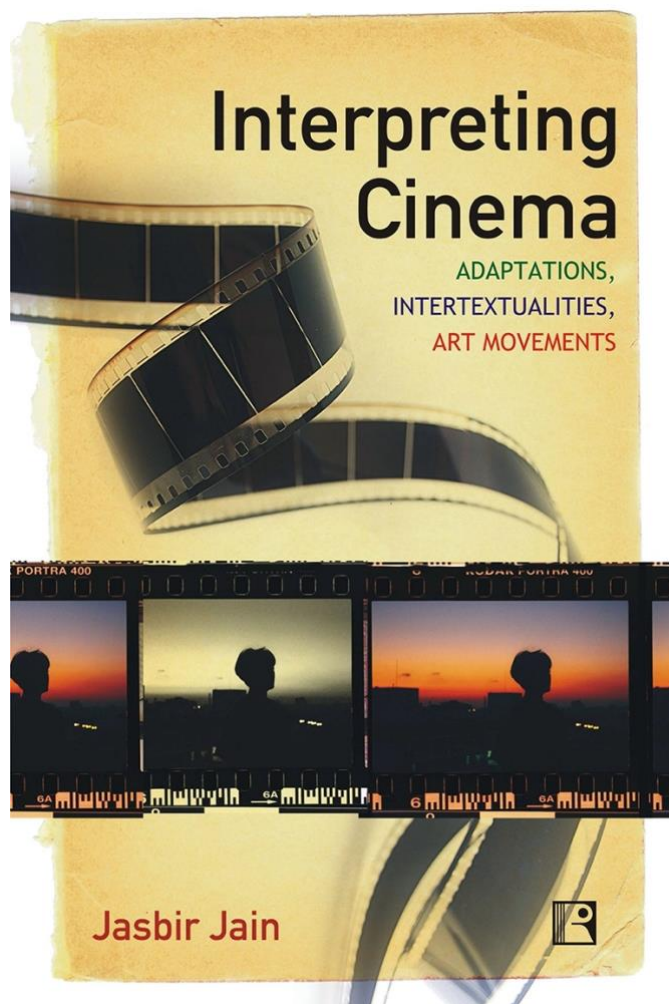


Jasbir Jain. *Interpreting Cinema: Adaptations, Intertextualities, Art Movements*. Jaipur & Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2020. 298 pp. ISBN 9788131611425



In a country like India with a few departments of film and media, literary and cultural critics from English Studies have contributed in a big way to film studies. Jasbir Jain (1937-) is a name associated with feminism, postcolonialism, literary theory, and diaspora studies in the country. After having produced volumes such as *Film and Feminism: Essays in Indian Cinema* (2002), *Films, Literature and Culture: Deepa Mehta's Elements Trilogy* (2007), and *Muslim Culture in Indian Cinema* (2011), Jasbir Jain has brought out a volume of essays on Hindi cinema. *Interpreting Cinema: Adaptations, Intertextualities, Art Movements* is the result of the author's reflections on and critical engagements with cinema over a period of time.

The book covers a collection of sixteen essays on different themes and issues in Hindi cinema. From the old classic *Jagte Raho* (Amit Maitra, Sombu Maitra 1956) to a twenty-first-century film *Dor* (Nagesh Kukunoor 2006), the book contributes to different topics of film studies such as adaptations, intertextuality, feminism, the body as a text, city spaces, identities, memory, and film autobiographies. The book braids essays on culture, poetry, art, literature, drama, and cinema into one work. The films discussed in the book echo the voice of dissent and questioning. As Jain is a feminist at heart, the book reflects her constant engagement with issues of women in its myriad form.

Understanding films not merely as a source of entertainment, but as cultural documents which are both “cultural representations” (Jain 3) and “cultural producers” (Jain 3), the author opens the book with a theoretical argument that films have a language and can be read as a text. The author opines that serious films deserve to be read seriously like novels. In the opening chapter, the author deliberates on varied shades of love, as shown in Hindi cinema over the period of time. Historicising the films, this chapter gives an overview of the changing idea of love in the films made in the 1940s, 1950s to those made in the 1990s and later such as *Baazigar* (Mustan Burmawalla, Abbas Burmawalla 1993) and *Jab We Met* (Imtiaz Ali 2007). By analysing the famous song – “Dil Jalta Hai To Jalne De” in *Pebli Nazar* (1945), poetry in *Mirza Ghalib* (Sohrab Modi 1954) to famous songs of *Shree 420* (Raj Kapoor 1955), Jain contributes to film studies in India by analysing film songs as cultural texts.

Engaging with issues of adaptation studies, Jain studies transference and cultural relocation of William Shakespeare (1564-1616) in Indian theatre and Hindi cinema. She studies adaptation across media – theatre and cinema. *Safed Khun* (1907), a theatrical adaptation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (1606), by Agha Hashar Kashmiri (1879-1935), a famous Kashmiri poet and playwright, relocates the English playwright in the Hindustani socio-political context. Jain then moves to discuss film adaptations of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601) in the Indian context. The chapter examines the aesthetics of Sohrab Modi’s *Khoon Ka Khoon* (1935) and Kishore Sahu’s *Hamlet* (1954). The former is so much under the influence of the Parsi theatre that it failed as a work of cinema and the latter is heavily under the influence of Urdu poetry. Jain extends her argument by discussing adaptations done by Orson Welles (1915-85) and Grigori Kozintsev (1905-73) across media. Through films like *Maya Memsaab* (Ketan Mehta 1993), *Bride and Prejudice* (Gurinder Chadha 2004) and remakes of *Devdas*, the author discusses cross-cultural adaptations.

The chapter titled “Birthing the ‘New’? Intertextuality, Grafting, Recycling” problematises the idea of novelty and newness. It locates films in the cultural memory of India by establishing connections between films and ancient cultural narratives. The relationship between new narratives and old narratives, surviving in the memory, is understood in terms of intertextuality. Jain discusses

intertextuality at multiple levels such as in literary-to-literary, literary-to-films, and films-to-films. She contributes to the discourse of intertextuality by including songs in Hindi cinema in its ambit. The analysis of the *antaksbri* scene in *Lambe* (Yash Chopra 1991) exemplifies film-to-film intertextuality, which also builds a narrative through songs sung in the *antaksbri* scene in the film. This chapter too contributes to studying film songs as an integral part of the narrative in Hindi cinema. The method of reading intertextual connections between two narratives through songs is carried out while analysing a song sequence in Aditya Chopra's *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* (1995) in which the famous song from *Waqt* (Yash Chopra 1965) is sung. Achla Sachdev, who plays the role of the mother in *DDLJ*, is there in the original song in *Waqt* as well.

Another major contribution of the book is a set of essays on women, gender, and sexuality in Hindi cinema, spanning a number of chapters. Through these essays, Jain critiques the ideology of patriarchy running in the undercurrents of the idea of the nation in India. Deepa Mehta's trilogy stands out as these films break the stereotypical representation of femininity in mainstream Hindi cinema. These women-centric films neither idealise women, nor do they represent women as subservient to their male counterparts. Jain analyses the screen space along with the cultural space of Indian society to decode women-centric narratives. In Lefebvre's term, she discusses the "representation of space" and also "spaces of representation" in a very simple yet incisive manner. The author studies the body as a text and studies narratives of reclaiming the body in a patriarchal setup. Films like *Panchvati* (1986), an adaptation of Kusum Ansal's novel titled *Uski Panchvati* (1978), Basu Bhattacharya's film *Aastha: In the Prison of Spring* (1997) and Mahesh Manjrekar's *Astitva* (2000) build a debate around female sexuality, morality, and transgression. Jain analyses politics played on the body of women by discussing films like *Mrityudand* (Prakash Jha 1997) and *Lajja* (Rajkumar Santoshi 2001). Jain deconstructs the ideology of the nation by studying the way identities, femininity, and masculinity are constructed in Hindi cinema.

The chapter titled "Reclaiming the Body: The Gender of Creativity" contributes to the feminist discourse around the female body. It focuses on women who express themselves through performance by acting in films, singing or dancing. While the body of a woman performing in public is central in giving her the agency, it also exposes her to the male gaze and makes an object of desire. It makes the situation of women performing in the public complex. Jain finds connections between Shyam Benegal's films titled *Bhumika* (1977) and *Sardari Begum* (1966), along with Guru Dutt's films *Pyaasa* (1957) and *Kagaz Ke Phool* (1959) on the basis of representation of women and self-reflexivity. Another dimension of femininity and a different facet of the relationship between father and daughter is explored in films such as *Daddy* (Mahesh Bhatt 1989), *Pitaah* (Mahesh Manjrekar 2002) and *Main Asia Hi Hoon* (Harry Baweja 2005). By showing "disadvantaged fathers" (Jain 180), these films "reveal the softer side of

patriarchy” (Jain 180). Fathers in these films are powerless and incapable of asserting patriarchal authority. The last chapter focuses on a unique category of autobiographies called “film autobiographies.” Autobiographies written by actors, directors, and lyricist, reveal certain aspects of their personal lives and are a source to reconstruct history of Hindi cinema.

The book is a collection of essays on varied themes written over a period of time. Jain’s methodology is that of a cultural critic, as she carries out an incisive criticism of films as cultural narratives. She engages with different kinds of films such as mainstream, parallel and also those which cannot be placed in either of these two categories. Dedicated to the memory of Girish Karnad (1938-2019), the book discusses issues of aesthetics, ideology and culture.

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