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CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF JOHN GREEN'S *THE FAULT IN OUR STARS*: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND HINDI FILM VERSIONS

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Abstract

*A film adaptation is a creative process which transforms a narrative work into a visual mode. This adaptation acts as a catalyst to visually experience the imaginative pictures that reader acquires by reading an original text. During the adaptation process, it is important to compare the plot, characters, settings, motifs, messages and themes of the source text and the film as these elements may vary across culture, religion, customs and languages. In the recent times, a book is adapted into films which have different versions due to its variations in language, ideology and cultural context. As these movie adaptations of literary works are done commonly, analyzing the similarities and differences between the original text and its film versions helps in understanding the narratives across different cultural and artistic context. It also highlights the impacts of different storytelling mediums on viewer, especially when the same work is adapted into two different languages and culture. Thus, this paper compares the English (*The Fault in Our Stars* (2014)) and Hindi film versions (*DilBechara* (2020)) of the English novel *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012) written by John Green. The paper analyzes the adaptation techniques such as characterization, dialogues, themes along with cultural differences and variations. It also discusses the visual and textual differentiation between the novel and its adaptations.*

Keywords

Adaptation, Culture, Film, Language, Novel, etc.

Full Article

*“Books and Movies are like apples and oranges. They both are fruit but taste completely different”
-Stephen King*

An art is a form that expresses emotions, ideas, beliefs and life experiences of an individual. It is represented in various forms such as writing, oral expression, painting, film, photography, with books and films having the largest audience. Both books and films express long narrative experiences and feature complex plot, developed characters and a story of considerable length. A book is a narrative medium experienced through imaginative visualization whereas film is a visual art which pictures recorded images. Though they have similarities and variations, they still remain interrelated. Since the beginning of theatre culture, books are adapted into films and vice versa. The latter process is termed ‘novelization’, which is defined as “the practice involves the conversion of cinematic works... into novel, representing adaptation in reverse’. A film adaptation transforms a literary work into the cinematic form. According to Rabindranath Tagore, “Cinema is



still playing second fiddle to literature”. He considers it as a secondary form of art. Some early examples of books adapted into films are *Dracula*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Mistress of Spices and Custody*. Additionally, some of these have different cultural adaptations. While their plot, characterization and themes remain the same, they vary by language, culture, era and filming style. In the contemporary times, it is more common to adapt a book across different languages and cultures, from its original setting or customs. They store the central message of the source text and visually showcase the ideas in a totally different space.

The Cambridge dictionary defines the term ‘culture’ as the beliefs, arts and other customs of a particular social group, place or time. It varies across continent to continent, country to country, place to place and showcases various indifferences among people through their customs, rituals and languages. According to Raymond Williams in his essay *Culture is Ordinary* (1958), culture is a “Whole way of life”. He states that a culture is an individual identity that shapes and defines their way of living. This culture hails from the individual’s place of living, his brought up and his social bonds. In the recent times, an art is adapted into various cultural adaptations, especially when adapting a book into film. These adaptations challenge the film creator which is also stated by John Lee Hancock, the writer-director of films *The Blind Side* and *The Little Things*, in his interview to ‘Script Magazine’ as:

Adaptations are tough in that you'll essentially be deciding which 60% (of the book) to excise, if you're, for instance, writing a two-hour film. I try to read the book several times before I break out a pen and start making notes in the margins—underlining scenes and dialogue that I feel absolutely must be in the script. ... Finally, when I can't think of any other way to delay, I begin to write, and rewrite and rewrite (Rudder).

Besides, the performance of text into a movie is difficult as it never mentions about a character’s body languages, facial expressions or action in a particular situation and it merely elaborates the scene and the reactions of the characters. Linda Hutcheon, a literary and art critic also echoes this as, “When we work in the other direction- that is, from the telling to the showing mode, especially from print to performance – a definitional problem potentially arises... the text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as gestures, expressions, and tones of voice to use in converting words on a page into a convincing performance; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and interpret and then recreate it.” (Hutcheon,39)

Adapting literary works into films is more challenging when it is adapted across different cultures. Cultural Adaptation is defined as “transformation and reinterpretation of narratives when they travel across linguistic, geographical, or cultural boundaries” in a research paper titled “Cultural Adaptation in Cinema and Literature: A Study in the Context of Indian English Literature”. Some of the famous examples of cultural adaptations are *Wuthering Heights*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma* and *The Fault in Our Stars*.

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green is one of the best-selling books in the genre of Young Adult fiction. Green is an American based eminent writer whose works usually deal with lives of young adults aged between 16 and 18 years. This novel is written as a tribute to his friend, Esther Earl, who died at the age of 16 due to thyroid cancer. He has authored works such as *Looking for Alaska*, *Paper Towns*, *An Abundance of Katherines*, *Will Grayson Will Grayson*, *Turtles All the Way Down* and *Everything is Tuberculosis*, among which many are adapted into movies and series. Green’s writings highlight themes like coming of age, love, friendship, parental relationships, societal expectations and illness. The novel’s title, taken from the dialog of



Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars", symbolizes that a person's life is decided by the (unlucky) star, destiny or fate.

The novel *The Fault in Our Stars*, published in the year 2012, is the fourth solo novel of the author. It narrates the story of two young adult cancer patients, Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, who meet in a support group and develop stronger bond because of their similar interests and their deadly illnesses. They act as catalysts in each other's life, supporting during tough times. The storyline is written in a nested way, where Hazel reads a novel *An Imperial Affliction* and wants to know its ending. To find out, she travels with Augustus, which brings them closer and they fall in love. Although, Augustus dies at the end of the novel, he motivates Hazel to accept the life and take it easy.

The first adaptation of the novel was an American movie under the same title *The Fault in Our Stars*. It was directed by John Boone and released on 6th June 2014 with Shailene Woodley and Ansel Elgort playing the character of Hazel and Augustus respectively. The film was produced by Fox 200 pictures and collected \$307.2 million in box office. The movie followed the actual plot of the novel with minimal changes, maintaining the runtime of 126 minutes.

Another adaptation of the novel is a Hindi film which is titled *Dil Bechara*, which means "the helpless heart". It was directed by debut director Mukesh Chhabra and released on 24th July 2020 with Sushant Singh Rajput and Sanjana Sanghi playing the character of Augustus and Hazel respectively. The film was produced by Fox Star studios and was released in the OTT platform Disney + Hotstar due to covid pandemic and sudden death of the lead actor Sushant. A few changes were made to the actual plot with the runtime of 101 minutes.

Both versions similarly picture the struggles of two young adults who are diagnosed with different types of cancer. The visualizations of the movies clearly capture the plot, character's emotions and their turmoil reflecting the need to convey the mood of the each scene. The plot of both movies begin with the meeting of the protagonists in the cancer support group, their shared passions and thoughts, their deep emotional bonds and support, falling in love and their search for true meaning despite limited life time. This further progression of the movie remains as same as in the novel's plot. Additionally, the story highlights that death is a universal reality which no one can escape, showing how loss, grief and acceptance are deeply shaped by different cultural contexts.

Though both movies are similar in the plot structure, they vary in characterization, settings, ideas, motifs and presentation due to its differences in culture. *The Fault in Our Stars* is actually set in Indianapolis where people follow western culture and custom. Generally, western culture focuses on individualism, self-decision, innovation and self-expression. On the contrary, *Dil Bechara* is set in Jamshedpur, India where the people follow eastern culture, which emphasizes collectivism, interdependence, spirituality and tradition. These cultural differences bring out various dissimilarities in the movies, with each presenting its culture and practices in a unique style, while extending the plot to showcase the raw emotions of the character as they navigate coming-of-age struggle with added terminal illness.

The major difference starts with the name of the characters. In the movie *The Fault in Our Stars*, the characters are named after the novel's protagonists Hazel Grace Lancaster and Augustus Waters, whereas, in *Dil Bechara*, the protagonists are named as Kizie Basu and Immanuel 'Manny' Rajkumar Jr. Their characterization is also distinct, with Hazel and Augustus portrayed as individuals who are independent, makes their own decision, choose personal freedom and prioritize the personal happiness even during illness. On the other hand, Kizie and Manny are more bound by their families and strict cultural practices. Kizie keeps her family's choice over her own in every decision. For instance, when she wants to meet her favorite artist, Mr. Abhimanyu Veer, her family prevents her from going due to her poor health to which she obliges.



The narration in both movies varies significantly, in the Hollywood adaptation, the narration is more character-centered, narrated from the perspective of heroine's experience, inner battles and expressions are conveyed through dialogues and visuals rather than explicit explanations. Also, the narration follows a linear structure conveying individual emotions and feelings. In contrast, in the Bollywood adaptation, the narration is from the point of view of Kizie, with the background music, voiceovers and symbolic visuals adding up to the explicit emotions which highlight the societal bonds and the external involvements. This shows that the western adaptation values the internal emotions and personal meaning, whereas the eastern adaptation involves the collective emotions and conflicts.

The Hollywood version of the movie portrays Hazel's parents as concerned and protective whereas in the Hindi version, *DilBechara*, Kizie's parents are over controlling and restrictive. In contrast to Hazel's parents who express their pain through silence and gestures, Kizie's parents act as emotional anchors, reflecting the Indian values which makes her feel over protective and controlled. In both movies, the theme of the novel is perfectly highlighted, as both Hazel and Kizie feel lonely and worried that their illness places a burden on their parents, leaving them exhausted and financially strained. They also feel themselves as a 'grenade' and view their existence as a burden, since their death would cause heartbreak for their parents, while longing for a normal, healthy and independent life.

The movie *The Fault in Our Stars*' screen play is set according to the plot and mood of the story to carry out the emotions. The Hollywood version is much linear and progress well with the plot and advances the characters. On the other hand, *DilBechara* is added with song and other external factors to give it an Indian touch. Even the illness, is portrayed as emotional breakdown and the death is prepared through making memories in the Bollywood version. In the westernized movie, death and illness is seen as a medical realities and fate. In a simpler way, *DilBechara* is more cinematic and *The Fault in Our Stars* is more of a novel-like screen play.

The other major variation between both movies is with their level of detailing. In *The Fault in Our Stars*, the hobbies or the passion of the protagonists are shown as it is mentioned in the novel Hazel's love for the book *An Imperial Affliction* and her wish to meet the author Peter Van Houten to know the proper ending of the story and Augustus' interest in the book *The Price of Dawn* and in playing video games. They quickly bond over because of their hobbies. In the other version, the movie is added up with other detailing to make it more visually appealing and entertaining. In *DilBechara*, the character of Hazel, Kizie, is deeply in love with an incomplete song by a retired songwriter Abhimanyu Veer (replaced Peter Van Houten) and the character of Augustus, Manny, is a fan of Rajnikanth. They both quickly develop a friendship because of their common interests.

Furthermore, to make it more cinematic and entertaining, the Bollywood version has the protagonist, Manny, create a movie inspired by his favorite star and he asks Kizie to play the lead role alongside him. His friend Jagadish 'JP' Pandey (Issac in the novel) is the director of this movie despite losing his vision due to eye cancer. They use this movie as a tool to preserve their legacy after death. The movie is premiered in an open-theatre after Manny's death which receives positive responses. In contrast, the Hollywood version follows the original plot of the novel.

The use of special word by the protagonists brings out a significant difference between the movies. In the novel, both Hazel and Augustus use the word 'okay' as a special term and this is also retained in the English version, which is quoted in the text as, "“Okay,” he said after forever. “May be okay will be our always.” “Okay,” I said.” (Green, 73). The protagonist use 'okay' as a secret word, to remind themselves that everything will be fine in life and encourage each other to stay positive. Whereas, in the Hindi version, they use the word 'seri' (which means 'okay' in Tamil) as their special word, since Manny is a fan of Rajnikanth and chooses the Tamil word.



Notably, the Bollywood version was released posthumously after the death of the lead actor Sushant Singh Rajput during COVID pandemic in the OTT platform and the film begins and ends with a tribute message to him.

Moreover, there is another major change in the setting of both movies. In the novel and in the English version, Hazel and Augustus travel to Amsterdam to meet Peter Van Houten, author of the novel *An Imperial Affliction*, to which Hazel feels a strong connection with the protagonist, Anna, who is also a cancer patient. Hazel wants to learn the ending of the novel which is left incomplete. On the other hand, in *DilBechara*, Kizie and Manny travel to Paris to meet the retired songwriter Abhimanyu Veer to know about the incomplete song. These changes of setting show how the cultural variation and ideology play a crucial role. *The Fault in our Stars* presents the locations in a realistic and a natural way to convey the protagonist's love for each other whereas *DilBechara* uses the setting or the place symbolically, representing a dream and romanticized expression of love between the protagonists.

To sum up, both English and Hindi versions discussed above are adaptations based on the novel *The Fault in our Stars*, with each varying in cinematic and cultural context. The English version closely follows the narration of actual plot and clearly highlights the western ideology of individualism, self-decision and self-expression. On the contrary, the Hindi version is more on the idea of collectivism, emotional bonds and spirituality. In a simpler way *The Fault in our Stars* is more realistic, while *DilBechara* focuses more on the cinematic style of presentation to evoke audience emotions and make them feel more connected to the movie. The Hollywood version features a realistic screen play, whereas the Bollywood version, cinematically and culturally adapts the same narrative.

Literary adaptation of movies undergo major changes and transformations when they are filmed across cultures, as it is essential to reinterpret the narratives of original text to showcase the cultural value, social value and the traditions to the targeted audience. These adaptations are products which use the source text and retells different experience with different cultural framework. John Green's *The Fault in Our Stars*, is one such example which is filmed in different cultural context and highlights the idea of love, death, struggles and illness. In spite of variations in film making and cultural differences, both movies emphasize individual suffering, grief, death and acceptance as their major themes which are also presented in the novel. By varying elements such as the screenplay, cultural context, music, symbolism and characterizations, both the adaptations retell the story of John Green's novel *The Fault in our Stars* in a distinct way.

Thus, this paper compares the cross-cultural film adaptations of the novel *The Fault in our Stars* and highlights how cultural contexts shape storytelling and the creative process of film-making. Despite differences in language, culture, customs and narrative style, both films highlight the universal truth such as love, illness, societal relationships, parental affection, grief, and acceptance. Although the narratives are presented through different cultural context, the emotional connection among diverse audiences ultimately unites them through shared human experiences.

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