

## Film studies



*CAESURAE: POETICS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION*

Volume 6:1

(ISSN 2454-9495)

July 2024

### **Travel cinema through the lens of remake culture: Analysing remakes of Queen movie into different subcultures**

*\*Isha Mahato*

**Abstract:** The role of translation has been moulding Indian culture and the Indian knowledge system since time immemorial. *Ret Samadhi* (2018) written by Gitanjali Shree which was translated into English, entitled as *Tomb of Stone* and won the international Booker prize, has elevated the practice of translation to a new height in contemporary Indian literature and culture. However, the recontextualization of the original signs in audiovisual media and its remake happens because the cultural context of translation has been witnessed through trans-semiotic perspectives. In a nation like India with its cultural and linguistic diversity translators do not only translate a text or product but also a culture. Remakes in movies are essentially reimagining of the source. Since the first interpretation appears as a constant, to undertake this reinterpretation, we do not challenge our own specific circumstances of reception but also go back to the source and revive the inquiry into how it was interpreted. A remake is frequently examined in comparison to the original, which is frequently interpreted in light of its relational audience and significance (*Play It Again, Sam*, 1998). These days, Bollywood's travel films not only fuel viewers' virtual wanderlust but also incorporate feminist viewpoints alongside popular genres, so limiting their neutrality. The objective of the article seeks to find out films like *Queen* and its remakes as travel movies empowering all the women out there who receive hope and inspiration to live their lives on their own terms, proliferating the remake culture in India. Also, how Bollywood travel cinema and remakes has come of age and has become mature enough to project feminist issues will be something very pertinent to look at contemporary remake cinemas. This travel movie *Queen* (2013) had such an impact that it has been remade into four South Indian languages. The scope of this paper will look into the aspects of all those remakes offering a chance to explore the distinctive subcultures of the four South Indian states. South India

consists of four sub cultures shaped by four distinct languages and among these Kannada, Tamil and Telegu cultures have very strong film histories. Each remake has been carried out with enough depth and variation to interest the cine-goers to watch the original film.

**Keywords:** *Travel movie, Remakes. Culture of Translation*

The formulation of translation theory is an important aspect of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Although translated related discussions have been continuing for so many years though. The West holds a long tradition of translation. In India also, many sources of translation have emerged from the tradition of translation. Recalling the acts of translation, whether by Michael Madhusudan Dutta, H.N. Apte, Jayadeva, Hemcandra, or Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, their works, through the groundwork for modern Indian literature, serve as an effective way to establish the fact that Indian literary communities do in fact possess this translating mind. The epitome of Indian literary virtuosity incorporates metaphysics of form, structure, literary significance, elements of plot, character, and stories that have been shipped with the source texts (Devy, 2002). There are many principles of translation that have been etched out by many theorists but the main one being the Theory of integration in cultural context (Bassnett and Lefevere, 1990). This theory has been discussed by the famous sociologist Malinowski (Malinowski, 1944). Translation acts as a cultural bridge. Therefore, the cultural importance of translation is universally accepted. Each language possesses its own culture. However, difficulty also lies in the translation of expressions related to the cultural aspect. It becomes obvious to translate by understanding the cultural contexts of the source language and the target language. Malinowski considers that translation is an integration of cultural contexts. Being an early researcher in the field of cultural perspectives to translation Malinowski conveyed the "the native view" of the magic in Trobriand stories to an English-speaking audience. He realised as an anthropologist that a literal translation was insufficient (Katan, 2020). As a result, he "continually striven to link up grammar with the context of situation and with the context of culture" (Malinowski, 1935, p. 73). Assumptions about proper conduct, customs, and values as indicated by language are all included in the broad framework of culture (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 47).

For many years, the cinema businesses in numerous nations have used remakes as a means to communicate culture. Remakes have been a staple of the Indian film business, one of the biggest in the world, since the Talkie Era of 1931 in order to maximize earnings and box office receipts (Murthy). Remakes were found in the history of cinema with the movie *Unpartie de cartes (Playing Cards)* by George Melies in 1896 and a remake of *Partie de cartes (Card Games)* by Louis Lumeire in 1896 (Evans, 2018). Horton and McDougal define remake as a “special pattern which re-represents and explains at a different time and through varying perceptions, previous narratives and experiences”. (*Play It Again, Sam “D0e30”, 1998*). Remakes have existed for nearly as long as movies (Evans, 2018). In the process of evaluating, the source is regarded as something that cannot be changed. However, when examined from the broader standpoint of cultural assessment throughout time, the original may still be evolving in terms of the influence it has or might have had on its audience in the present, if not more so than it is on that of the past. Remaking anything is sometimes seen as rereading it or reading it again (Simmons, 2021). Following this reading or rereading prompts a questioning not only of the reader's subjective conditions for reception but also of the original and resumes the issue of its reception. Both Stephen Mandiberg and linguist Henrik Gottlieb contend that remakes are a type of translation because they change the signs of the original text, replacing meanings in one language with meaning units in another. Other academics have drawn comparisons between remakes and translations, and some have even read remakes through the lens of translation theory. Lucy Mazdon, in her 2000 book *Encore Hollywood*, makes use of Lawrence Venuti's idea of "foreignizing translation," explaining her approach to remakes in terms of a "site of difference” (Evans, 2018).

Critics often make an effort to conceptualize remakes as translations in translation theory. For instance, Thomas Leitch's four-part model categorizes remakes as "True remakes," which make an attempt to replace the earlier picture, "homages," which pay homage to the earlier film, "updates," which attempt to translate a narrative to the present, and "readaptations," which are based on the same literary work as the film they are remaking (Evans, 2018). Conversely, Hans Maes, the author of *Conversations on Art and Aesthetics*, offers a fifteen-part hierarchy. The diversity of methods used in remakes and the range of connections among source and target texts in recreated movies are both confirmed by these taxonomies (Evans, 2018). In Indian cinema, the

remake in all its manifestations is not new. In 2008, Stephen Mandiberg published *Remakes as Translation*, a study that addressed the cultural drift by means of remakes (Murthy, 2013).

Some stories are well suited for remakes. Creators have a core story telling format that works scene to scene across all regions. However, *Queen* does not fall under that category. The narration and content need to be localized for this particular movie. And this is evident from the production choosing to make four remakes rather than making one for the entire south. The movie *That is Mahalakshmi* is a Telegu remake. The Tamil remake is named as *Paris Paris*. *Butterfly* is made into a Kannada remake and the Malayalam recreation is named as *Zam Zam*. Kangna Ranaut starrer *Queen* has a universal subject line. Released in 2013 this Hindi-language film echoes across cultures. In *Queen*, the story presents a distinct form of liberalisation, in which the movie's lead actress, Rani, bravely chooses to go on her planned honeymoon vacation alone herself after being abandoned by her fiancé, and comes to terms with her identity. It is travel that changes her life. Traveling can be one of the most meaningful and transformative experiences in life. As the protagonist's journey starts from India to Paris and then Amsterdam, travel makes her more open minded, changes her perspectives on life and transforms her into a different person. It was found that exposing her inner faculty of the mind to new languages, smells, tastes and sights by living in unexplored regions of foreign lands fosters her inner confidence, courage and creativity. Alongside Rani's friendship with Vijaylaxmi, Oleksander, Taka and Tim help her to brush off her pain and embrace all the possibilities that unfurls when the dejected self learns to love oneself. The journey improves her overall wellbeing and helps her to find her own voice.

In Bollywood the plot of the travel film is centered upon only exotic locations from foreign lands with no valid objective in itself. Marvelous visuals from those commercial movies feeding audiences wanderlust may fall under the mainstream genre but these films do not take much concern to discuss about pressing issues apart from showcasing the superficiality of travel accounts. But with the release of *Queen* the travel films start projecting feminist voices to justify a valid purpose through the inner mind as well as physical journey of the main protagonists. *Piku* is evidence in this context which was released after *Queen*. In *Queen* it is the chronicle of events that unfolds during the travel experience eventually evokes emotion. This very emotion being a universal emotion still requires to be made again. A remake based on a blockbuster comes with

both good and bad aspects. The good being that there is a solid fan base who loved the movie would watch remakes to compare with its original. The bad is that whatever the producers make, it will be compared to the original. Most of the time remake fails to impress such an audience. However, this coming-of-age story has a universal subject. So, everybody can relate to it. The conversation the main protagonist has with her parents, grandmother, friends and strangers feels closer to reality. The makers of remakes wanted to stick to the nativity to validate the fact that four remakes wanted each region in the cinema to have their queen. Telegu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam versions of the remake are not just adding the language aspect but also cultural aspects. In the Hindi version of the film, the lead character Rani materializes every local instance in a worldwide setting.

Venuti claims that the domestication alludes to an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign work to cultural norms exclusive to the target language, bringing the author into the reader abroad by registering the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text, whereas the foreignization is the result of an ethnodeviant strain on those (cultural) values back home. (Venuti, 2012). While exclaiming “Dilli aao boss! Dilli aao!” in front of a puzzled cab driver to sell the popular street food of India pani puri in Amsterdam, the language and culture have sailed through the far-field alienated lands of Europe and Amsterdam. Similarly, in the Telegu remake *That is Mahalakshmi* the protagonist Mahalakshmi draws a comparison between the Rajahmundry Bridge and the Eiffel tower in front of a gathering in a Paris club. Mahalakshmi argues that if the Rajahmundry Bridge is made stand vertical, the Eiffel Tower looks itsy-bitsy in front of it.

The challenge was to make it the original in terms of emotion but local. For instance, in Telegu version of the remake, the leading lady wears red or black tiny dot on her forehead. In Tamil remake the protagonist wears white bibhuti on forehead. These are cultural nuances that make the difference with the original. North Indian view of South India gives a homogeneous mould which is not the reality. Cultural values, sensibilities, cultural differences starkly distinct in every region which states outside South India are not aware. *Queen* has been diversely liked by all. Taking that it into regional cinema and focussing into different nuances of every state is to be understood the fact that remakes made into regional languages are being watched beyond language. In the Kannada remake *Butterfly* when Parvati, the lead role teaches a lesson to a

robber who tries to steal her bag, she sanguinely asserts to her friend “one should never lay eyes on a Kannada girl again.” These remakes are focussing in each and every unique attribute of a particular culture.

Alongside, the personal attributes of each leading protagonist have been etched out in remakes. Rani, the leading lady in *Queen* is very timid in nature. In Telegu remake *Mahalakshmi* is a nerd. In addition, Parmeshwari from *Virudhunagar* seems to hail from affluent family in Tamil remake. In Kannada remake *Parvati* hails from Gokarna and have a modest background. The remake in Malayalam showcases the protagonist who belongs to different community that is Muslim. Altogether, remakes in different languages have been made to get the nuances and nativity of the particular region.

The comprehension of the receptive situation at that specific period is aided by a remake. Therefore, through remakes of *Queen*, the effort has been made to portray the vulnerability of the character and identity formation through travel at later stages no matter the character belongs to any region. Sometimes, remakes problematise the belief that target texts created through translations need to be identical to their original texts. Remakes, as we have observed, frequently deviate greatly from their original texts, adding or eliminating passages and overall adapting the text to suit the intended setting (Evans, 2018). In remakes of *Queen* the makers emphasize the cultural nativity in different regions of South, which varies from the source film *Queen* showcasing North Indian culture. Somehow, these remakes try to replicate the movie in a fresh way rather than preventing viewers from seeing the original. It is conceivable that no translation, no matter how excellent, can truly mean anything in relation to the source. However, because the original is easily translated, there is a close relationship between it and the translation—all the more so because the original loses significance. This link could be referred to as natural or, more precisely, essential (*Benjamin, [1923], in Illuminations (1968)*). Remakes, argue some theorists, might thus be constructively understood as a creative misappropriation of a foreign work. Koichi Iwabuchi, for example, discusses how texts are handled when they cross boundaries within cultures (Evans, 2018). However, in remakes of *Queen* the process of self-discovery is evoked through the travel experience, does not get altered. For the majority of viewers, the primary lure of remakes is the positive changes they make to the original movie (Evans, 2018). When approached through the lens of translation studies, the remakes of *Queen* have incorporated the

cultural differences, cultural nuances, costume and styling pattern, linguistic expression of the source film *Queen* in order to localize the universal ethos of feminist voice. As the emotion portrayed in the source film gets a vibrant acceptance across different culture of Telegu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam, shown in the respective remakes of *Queen*, the protagonist's journey of self-actualisation too attains cultural translation where Indian cinema provides the thrust that makes the remake business move forward alongside mainstream blockbuster film.

## References

- Bassnett, Susan. *Translation, History, and Culture*. Burns and Oates, 1990.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings: 1913-1926*. Harvard UP, 1996.
- Branigan, Edward. *Narrative Comprehension and Film*. Psychology Press, 1992.
- Devy, G. N. "Literary History and Translation: An Indian View." *Traduction Et Post-colonialisme En Inde — Translation and Postcolonialism: India*, vol. 42, no. 2, Consortium Erudit, Sept. 2002, pp. 395–406. *Crossref*, doi:10.7202/002560ar.
- Evans, Jonathan. "Film Remakes as a Form of Translation." *The Routledge Handbook of Audiovisual Translation*, Routledge, Oct. 2018, pp. 160–74. *Crossref*, doi:10.4324/9781315717166-11.
- Horton, Andrew, and Stuart Y. McDougal. *Play It Again, Sam*. University of California Press, 1998.
- Katan, David. "Cultural Approaches to Translation." *The Encyclopaedia of Applied Linguistics*, vol. 1–9, 22 Dec. 2020, doi:10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0293.pub2.
- Leitch, T.M. 'Twice-told tales: The rhetoric of the remake', *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 18(3), 1990, pp.138\_49; revised and rpt. as 'Twice- Told Tales: Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the Remake', in Forrest and Koos (eds) *Dead Ringers*pp.37\_62.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays*. 1944

Mandiberg, S. *Remakes as translation: Cultural flow*. New York: New York University, 2008.

Murthy, C. S. H. N. "Film Remakes as Cross-cultural Connections Between North and South: A Case Study of the Telugu Film Industry's Contribution to Indian Filmmaking." *Journal of International Communication*, vol. 19, no. 1, Informa UK Limited, Apr. 2013, pp. 19–42. *Crossref*, doi:10.1080/13216597.2012.7395.

"Play It Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes." *Choice Reviews Online*, vol. 36, no. 03, American Library Association, Nov. 1998, pp. 36–1491. *Crossref*, doi:10.5860/choice.36-1491.

Simmons, Laurence. "Coda: Does Hitchcock Remake Žižek?" *Žižek Through Hitchcock*, Springer International Publishing, 2021, pp. 331–51. *Crossref*, doi:10.1007/978-3-030-62436-1\_9.

Transcript. "Remakes and Remaking." *Transcript Verlag*, [www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-2894-4](http://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-2894-4).

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility*. Routledge, 2012.

## FILMOGRAPHY

Bahl, Vikash, Director. *Queen*. 2013. Viacom18 Motion Pictures.

Shinde, Gauri, Director. *English Vinglish*. Hope Productions, 2012.

Sirkir, Soojit, Director. *Piku*. 2015. MSM Motion Pictures.

---

### **\*About the Author**

**Isha Mahato** is a Research Scholar of HSS Department, NIT Silchar.