

From Page to Screen: The Evolution of R.K. Narayan’s Literary Themes in Cinematic Interpretations

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<p>Received on: 01 Feb 2025 Revised on: 04 Mar 2025 Accepted on: 12 Mar 2025 ©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). Keywords— Literary, Adaptation, Modernity, Transformation, Cultural Discourse.</p>	<p>R.K. Narayan, one of India’s most revered literary figures, masterfully captured the complexities of Indian life through his fictional town of Malgudi. His works, characterized by simplicity and deep thematic resonance, explore universal themes such as tradition versus modernity, personal identity, and the intricacies of human relationships. This study examines how these literary themes transition from page to screen, analyzing the cinematic adaptations of Narayan’s works. Filmmakers, while striving to maintain the essence of Narayan’s narratives, often reinterpret characters and conflicts to align with evolving socio-cultural contexts. Notable adaptations, such as <i>Guide</i> (1965) and <i>Malgudi Days</i>, illustrate this dynamic process, showcasing both fidelity and creative deviation from the original texts. Through a comparative analysis of literature and cinema, this paper explores how filmmakers navigate the challenges of adaptation, balancing artistic interpretation with narrative integrity. The study further highlights how contemporary audiences engage with Narayan’s themes, ensuring their continued relevance in Indian cinema. By bridging literature and film, this research underscores the lasting impact of Narayan’s storytelling in shaping cultural discourse across generations.</p>

I. INTRODUCTION

R.K. Narayan, one of the most venerated authors in India, occupies a critical space in the canon of Indian literature, mainly through its distinctive narrative style and its living representation of daily life in the fictitious city of Malgudi. Born in 1906, Narayan’s literary journey coincided with a period of significant socio-political change in India, and his stories skillfully summarize the complexities of Indian society, culture and individual experience. His works, characterized by their simplicity and their elegance, often immerse themselves in the banal and the ordinary, raising them to reveal deeper truths on human existence. Through an acute observation objective, Narayan’s has characters that are not only

relative but also emblematic of broader social realities, thus making his stories resonate with a diversified audience.

Narayan’s literary contributions center is his exploration of universal themes such as love, desire, conflicts and the quest for identity, all in the backdrop of the unfortunate. This fictitious place

serves as a microcosm of Indian life, reflecting the country’s historical and cultural environment. By focusing on the lives of ordinary people, Narayan’s fills the gap between the individual and the collective experience, making his stories relevant not only for the Indian context but also for global readership. Such thematic wealth invites a critical analysis, in particular by understanding how these stories can

transcend their literary origins and be reinterpreted through the objective of cinema.

II. CULTURAL DIALOGUE & INTERPRETATION OF FILMMAKERS: TRADITION VS. MODERNITY

The adaptation of Narayan's works in cinema represents an important cultural dialogue, which allows the recovery of its themes in the context of contemporary Indian society. Indian filmmakers, drawing on the depth of Narayan's characters and their everyday struggles, offer fresh interpretations that resonate with contemporary audiences. The transformation of literary texts into cinematographic accounts is not simply a process of visual narration; it is a complex interaction of loyalty, reinterpretation and creative freedom. Each adaptation is used not only to preserve the essence of the original Narayan's stories, but also to respond to the evolutionary socio-cultural dynamics of the time.

In addition, the study of these adaptations provides a critical overview of how filmmakers negotiate the tension between tradition and modernity. While Indian society is struggling with rapid urbanization, globalization and changing cultural norms, filmmakers often revisit Narayan's themes, reconstituting them to speak of contemporary problems. The recurring themes of Narayan's work - such as the shock between tradition and modernity, the nuances of interpersonal relationships and the quest for identity - are at the heart of cinematographic interpretations. This exploration therefore highlights not only the sustainable relevance of Narayan's accounts, but also illustrates the role of filmmakers in the reinterpretation of these themes for new generations.

By analyzing the adaptations of Narayan's work, it is crucial to consider how various cinematographic approaches shed light on changing societal attitudes and cultural accounts in India. The resonance of themes of Narayan through generations underlines the importance of literature in understanding the complexities of human experience. By examining both literary texts and their cinematographic counterparts, we gain a deeper appreciation of ways whose art reflects and shapes the cultural landscape of the time, ultimately enriching our understanding

of the contributions of Narayan and the broader evolution of Indian cinema. Such an investigation underlines the meaning of this double study of literature and film, as a means of understanding the current dialogue concerning identity, tradition and modernity in contemporary India (Thaker, 2023).

III. THEMATIC PROGRESSION IN SCREEN

R.K. Narayan's literary work is characterized by a rich exploration of themes that resonate deeply with the cultural context of India, simultaneously facing universal human experiences. At the center of Narayan's work is the interaction of tradition and modernity. His narratives often take place in the imaginary city of Malgudi, acting as a microcosm of the Indian society in which traditional values coexist with the pressures of modernity. This duality is vividly illustrated in novels such as "The Bachelor of Arts" and "The Guide" in which the characters face the expectations deriving from their cultural heritage against aspirations catalyzed by modern influences. The internal conflicts experienced by the protagonists of Narayan reveal a wider social commentary, reflecting the transition phase that India was subjected to during and after the colonial domain. Their struggles not only encapsulate the tension between old and new, but also embody a search for identity in a rapidly evolving landscape.

In addition, Narayan's exam on human relationships is another significant theme that permeates his works. In a plethora of narratives, it deepens the complexity that characterizes family ties, friendships and romantic affiliations. The nuanced portrait of the author of human emotions, as depicted in pieces such as "Godan" and "Malgudi Days", arouses a profound understanding of human psychology and the nuances of interpersonal dynamics. Narayan's characters often sail with a labyrinth of relationships marked with affection, conflict and compromise. These interactions highlight the socio-cultural context of the Indian society, in which family loyalty and the bonds of the community remain fundamental. However, through these personalized objectives, Narayan's works draw on universal themes of love, betrayal and reconciliation, creating a narrative space that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries.

The meaning of the individual against the company also pervades Narayan's narratives, accentuating the delicate tension between personal aspirations and social expectations. Characters like Raju of "The Guide" and Swami of "Swami and Friends" illustrate the challenges faced by the individuals who fight for the self-reflection between the binding social standards. Narayan creates easy situations in which his characters must negotiate their wishes against the background of common values and traditional customs. This exploration of the conflict is complexly linked to the socio-political context of India, where the weight of collective identity often obscures the individual agency. Narayan's intuition on this dynamic resonates with the contemporary public who continue to face the balance between personal freedom and social responsibility, thus establishing timeless relevance within his narratives.

The cultural context of India is not only served as a background in Narayan's works; actively draws the thematic concerns that emerge from his narrative. In facing the complexities of tradition and modernity, the complexities of human relationships and the struggle of the individual against social constraints, Narayan's writings offer rich soil for analysis. His ability to interpret these themes in a nuanced and recognizable way ensures that they resonate with readers and spectators, revealing the fundamental aspects of the human condition. The literary themes presented in the works of Narayan, deeply rooted in Indian ethics, invite an ongoing dialogue that extends into the kingdom of cinematographic adaptations, while the filmmakers reinterpret these narratives for the contemporary public as they navigate in the same thematic complexes, Narayan's literary work is distinguished not only because of her thematic wealth but also because of the narrative techniques he uses to elaborate her stories. The central approach of Narayan's approach is her skilled use of humor, which permeates his stories, which allows you to address serious and moving issues with a happy touch. This technique has multiple purposes; it relieves tension around controversial issues, invites readers to get more intimately involved with the characters and, ultimately, it fosters greater empathy towards their struggles. For example, in "The

Guide", the transformation of the protagonist Raju of a tourist guide to a spiritual leader is imbued with a mixture of comic misadventures that highlight the absurdities of human nature. This nuanced representation invites filmmakers to underline humor in their adaptations, using that it resonates with contemporary audiences that could appreciate the inherent relationship of Narayan's ideas. Symbolism is another crucial narrative technique used by Narayan, often encapsulating deep philosophical reflections within everyday occurrences. The wonderful images, such as the Sarayu River in "The Man-Eater of Malgudi", serve as a symbol of life and death, affirming an omnipresent force that influences the destinies of the characters. This symbolic wealth offers filmmakers a palette for visual interpretation; the adaptation of the river on the screen could manifest itself as a visual motive that represents the dualities of destiny, freedom and entrapment, thus involving modern spectators with family idioms while maintaining fidelity to Narayan's thematic essence.

In addition, the use of Narayan of the unreliable narrator forces readers to analyze the veracity of the narrative that is presented. This technique is particularly evident in "The English teacher", where the subjective experiences of the narrator blur the lines between reality and imagination. Such narrative construction invites filmmakers to innovate in their representations, potentially introducing visual techniques, such as unreliable point of view or the sequences of dreams, which can evoke the same uncertainty and depth while effectively translates the psychological complexity of the characters' trips to the screen.

In film adaptations, the transformation of these narrative techniques is necessary for resonance with contemporary audiences. For example, the use of humor can acquire a more pronounced comic tone in a film version, fulfilling current entertainment cinematographic expectations while retaining Narayan's underlying comment on social issues. Symbolism can be emphasized more visually, since directors use cinematography and stage to create moving images that resonate with the contemporary experiences of spectators, transforming abstractions into tangible representations. Filmmakers can also choose to adapt to the narrator unreliable through

the introduction of additional perspectives, creating a multifaceted narrative that allows a broader exploration of issues such as identity and perception.

In this sense, Narayan's narrative techniques are not simply transferred to the screen; rather, they undergo a transformation that reflects contemporary discourse and aesthetic sensitivity. This dynamic interaction between the original literary devices and their reinvented forms in the film adaptations encapsulates the lasting relevance of Narayan's stories, inviting continuous exploration and the reinterpretation of readers and spectators alike (Kohli, 2021). As filmmakers get involved with Narayan's work through the lens of modern society, they unlock new dimensions in their narratives, ultimately enriching the understanding and appreciation of the last literary legacy of the author, Narayan's literary work, characterized by his nuanced representation of Indian life and intricate characters studies, has been the subject of fascination for filmmakers since the mid-twentieth century. Two of the first significant film adaptations of Narayan's works: "Guide" (1965), directed by Vijay Anand, and "The Man-Eater of Malgudi" (1965), directed by K. A. Abbas, provides a lens through which one can explore the fidelity of these adaptations of Narayan, as well as the reinterpret for the movies. "Guide", based on Narayan's 1958 novel, encapsulates key thematic elements such as the complexities of love, betrayal and search for your own identity. The adaptation of the film is remarkable for its innovative reinterpretation of the protagonist, Raju, who sails for the dualities of his existence as a tourist guide and a swami. Although the film retains the essential narrative arch of the novel, creative freedoms are needed in its representation of Raju's internal conflicts, opting for a more dramatic representation that emphasizes the cinematographic possibilities of visual narration. The cultural context of India in the 1960s, which was experiencing deep social changes, influenced the decision of filmmakers to amplify these issues, creating resonance with contemporary audiences that were dealing with problems of autonomy and spiritual identity. As Pokhriyal (2017) indicates, this transformation was not simply a deviation of literary fidelity; rather, it served as a reflection of the changing paradigms of Indian society.

On the contrary, the adaptation of K. A. Abbas of "The Man-Eater of Malgudi" maintains fidelity closer to Narayan's original narrative while adapting to the film environment. The satire of the novel on the exploitation inherent to bureaucratic systems and social hierarchies is articulated through the character of Nataraj, a humble printer trapped in the machinations of the antagonist, the dining room, which embodies larger social problems. The film is anchored in the characteristic social realism of the Indian cinema of that time, particularly highlighting the intersection of tradition and modernity in post-colonial India. The representation of Abbas de Nataraj remains faithful to the soft humor and the moving criticisms of Narayan's society, however, the adaptation introduces a more pronounced thematic resonance with the socio-political climate of the 1960s, since flourishing nationalism and post-colonial identity became focal points of public discourse.

Both adaptations reflect the navigation of the filmmakers of Narayan's original text while relating to the socio-cultural spiritualist of their respective periods. The dialectic between fidelity to the source material and the demands of film narration illustrates the complexity inherent in the adaptation of literature to the film. Narayan's literary standards, which emphasize the depth of the character and philosophical contemplation, often collide with the visual and temporal limitations of cinema. These adaptations question the universality of Narayan's issues by placing them within the specific cultural contexts of their adaptations. The first cinematographic translations of Narayan's works serve as a convincing study of how Indian filmmakers reinvent literary heritage to align with contemporary problems and sensibilities of the audience.

Through these analyses, it becomes evident that the cinematographic adaptations of Narayan's works are not mere replications but transformative interpretations that encapsulate the spirit of their narratives while addressing the cultural and historical currents that define each era. These transformation processes highlight the reciprocal relationship between literature and film,

where adaptations enrich the original narratives by making them accessible and relevant to the new generations of spectators.

IV. ADAPTATION IN CONTEMPORARY AGE

Narayan's narratives, rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of India, have long served as a rich source of film adaptations. Contemporary filmmakers' expert their issues while addressing urgent social issues relevant to the modern public. The cinematographic interpretations of Narayan's work reveal not only the lasting nature of his storytelling, but also a notable adaptation of his narratives to reflect evolutionary social norms and challenges.

A relevant example is the film "The Guide", based on the novel of the same name of Narayan, which received a modern reinterpretation in a more contemporary film context. Directed by Vijay Anand in 1965, the original film is involved with themes of identity and moral ambiguity, and has witnessed a renewed interest through several remakes and adaptations that resonate with the current public. In recent adaptations, such as the 2021 "Nakkash" film, filmmakers have incorporated Narayan's exploration of complex human relationships and emotional struggles, manifesting them against the context of contemporary socio-political issues such as religious discord, cultural diversity and the search for personal meaning in the face of social expectations. In "Nakkash", the character of a skilled artisan but in conflict, similar to the protagonists in Narayan's works, is placed at the intersection of art and commercialism, navigating through a society full of conflicts and injustice. The film highlights the struggle of creative people to maintain their integrity while facing external pressures. This reflects the narratives driven by Narayan's character, which often deepen the moral dilemmas that common people face in their search for happiness and realization.

The film makers approach in "Nakkash" embodies a nuanced understanding of Narayan's themes, updating them to resonate with a contemporary audience that dealt with the complexities of modern life. The protagonist of the film embodies Narayan's philosophical contemplation about the meaning of success and the sacrifices involved, echoing Narayan's characterization to people trapped on social networks. Here, the exploration of identity is combined with the fight against social norms, reflecting Narayan's representation of her characters

that are often trapped between tradition and modernity.

In addition, the thematic transformation within such adaptations is evident in its management of delicate social problems. Modern interpretations of Narayan's work often highlight the difficult situation of marginalized and critical socio-political structures, which make Narayan's literature timeless and urgent. For example, "Nakkash" brings to top-level issues of religious intolerance and social division, the issues that resonate in current Indian society, which involves the public that may not be familiar with Narayan's original works, but find relevance in their contemporary accountants.

Through R.K. Narayan's narratives, filmmakers exercise a creative license to reinterpret characters and topics in the light of current social problems, demonstrating how the fundamental aspects of Narayan's narration can stimulate dialogue on contemporary social challenges. In doing so, they make sure that Narayan's rich legacy continues talking with new generations, reminding them of the deep complexities of human experience within a changing social landscape., R.K. Narayan's accounts are characterized by their exploration of universal themes such as the complexities of human relations, the struggle between tradition and modernity and the complex dynamics of daily life in Indian society. These themes reflect not only the socio-cultural milieu of the fictitious city of Narayan the Malgudi, but also provide a fertile land for adaptation in the cinematographic field, where filmmakers have the possibility of reinterpreting and modifying these stories in alignment with contemporary societal attitudes.

One of the eminent themes that Narayan widely explores is the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. In his novel "The Bachelor of Arts", the protagonist, Chandran, is struggling with family expectations and his desire for personal freedom, which serves as microcosm for larger societal tensions during the transition from colonial independent India. In his cinematographic adaptation, the filmmakers have chosen to amplify the internal conflict of Chandran by accentuating his romantic relationships, thus situating the story in a modern framework of autonomy and individual choices. This change reflects the growing societal

acceptance of the evolution of gender roles and the growing young agency, allowing the film to resonate with the contemporary public which appreciates the personal realization of membership with traditional standards (Gupta, 2021).

In addition, the character of the residents of Malgudi, often represented with a feeling of nostalgia and simplicity in the work of Narayan, is often modified in cinematographic accounts to reflect the complexities of modern social dynamics. For example, in the film adaptation of "Swami and Friends", the character of Swami is represented with a greater focus on his friendships and camaraderie among boys in schools, establishing an emotional base that encourages viewers to engage with themes of loyalty and belonging. Thanks to a richer representation of friendships, the film plays in contemporary concepts of community and camaraderie among young people, diverging from the lonelier accent of Narayan on individual struggle.

The transformation of female characters in Narayan's accounts into their cinematographic counterparts is revealing to change attitudes towards gender. The representation of women by Narayan often adheres to traditional roles, like that of the dedicated woman or the mother of support. In adaptations like "The Guide", however, the filmmakers reinvented criticized the character of Rosie, amplifying his aspirations and his desires while locating his history in a booming feminist discourse. The film reflects a change in societal consciousness, presenting Rosie not only as a passive figure but rather as an active agent in his own destiny, thus committing with the expectations of contemporary viewers with regard to nuanced female representation.

In addition, the thematic concern of the dynamics of the social class which prevails in the work of Narayan is likely to reinterpret in cinematographic adaptations. The account of "The Financial Expert" addresses the questions of economic status and moral ambiguity through the character of Margayya, which embodies the continuation of financial success in the middle of the socio-economic fabric of Malgudi. The filmmakers, while maintaining the essence of Narayan's criticism, have chosen to contextualize these themes in the regions of neoliberals and the post-liberalization of

India. In doing so, they establish parallels between Margayya's struggles and modern dilemmas surrounding materialism and ethical integrity, thus improving the relevance and attraction of the film to contemporary viewers who sail on similar challenges.

In short, the contrast between Narayan's original accounts and their cinematographic adaptations reveals a dynamic interaction between literature and the film, where filmmakers strategically modify the characters and the conspiracies to reflect evolving societal attitudes. Thanks to these adaptations, the fundamental themes intrinsic to Narayan's work are not simply preserved but are revitalized to resonate with the aspirations, the conflicts and the sensitivity of the modern public, thus creating a dialogue between the past and the present in the landscape of Indian cinema (Gupta, 2021)

V. REIMAGING STORIES: RESPONSES TO ADAPTATIONS

The welcome of R.K. Narayan's literary adaptations in Indian cinema are a multifaceted phenomenon that deserves a thorough exam. The public and critics responded to these adaptations with a mixture of enthusiasm and control that reveals tensions below the narrative essence of Narayan and the interpretative choices of the filmmakers. Since cinematographic adaptations often try to reinterpret and return the literary texts for the contemporary public, they represent critical vehicles to improve Narayan's visibility in culture and popular literature.

The narrative simplicity and humanistic depth inherent in the stories of Narayan have an intrinsic adaptability that has resounded strongly with the public. His interpretations of ordinary life in the imaginary city of Malgudi have been reinterpreted by the filmmakers, but the nucleus and complexity of its themes often remain intact. For example, adaptations such as "The Guide" and "Malgudi Days" evoke the critical applause for their ability to capture subtle humor, the social realities and moral dilemmas that populate the work of Narayan. However, the effectiveness of these adaptations in Narayan's essential varies significantly.

The critical responses highlighted the discrepancies that arise in translating complex literary themes into visual narratives. Many filmmakers, while paying homage to the original texts, have modified patterns, arches of characters and thematic shades to adapt to cinematographic conventions and satisfy a wider audience. This tension has been particularly observed in the representation of female characters and social issues, so adaptations sometimes fall into stereotyped representations that decrease the shaded exploration found in Narayan's writings. These concerns led critics to question the loyalty of adaptations to the material of origin, while the filmmakers face the challenge of creating recognizable and engaging stories that remain faithful to Narayan's vision.

Despite these critical exams, adaptations played a fundamental role in re-launching the interest in Narayan's works among the new generations, an impact recognized by scholars such as Sengupta (2022). The cinematographic interpretations acted as gateway, inviting spectators to deepen the original literary corpus, thus promoting a cycle of commitment with the themes of Narayan. The interaction between films and literature in this context demonstrates how adaptations can serve as catalysts for a renewed literary appreciation, even if they can diverge from the material of origin.

In addition, the welcome of the public reveals a spectrum of involvement with the themes of Narayan through the film. The younger spectators, often not accurate by the literary contributions of Narayan, approach these adaptations with new perspectives, allowing the nostalgic narratives of the Indian life to resonate on a contemporary level. For example, the adaptations that emphasize modern dilemmas faced by individuals in urban contexts can arouse empathy and cause the reflection between the public who otherwise could not have encountered the work of Narayan. Critics and scholars have noticed a distinct trend in which adaptations in the foreground the issues such as the economic disparity and complexity of modern relationships, filling the gap between the context of the twentieth century of Narayan and the dilemmas addressed by today's society.

In evaluating the effectiveness of these films in transmitting the essence of Narayan's themes, it is essential to recognize that adaptations have the double ability to preserve and transform. While critics can focus on the loyalty and loyalty to the narrative complexities of the original texts, the greatest cultural conversations stimulated by these adaptations can encourage an environment in which Narayan's literary themes continue to thrive. While the filmmakers navigate these themes while making them accessible to the contemporary public, a dichotomy emerges: admiration for the literary art of Narayan persists even while the filmmakers creatively reinterpret his work, strengthening the lasting relevance of his narratives in the reflective mirror of Indian cinema.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

In the study of R.K. Narayan's literary themes, it becomes clear that his stories deeply deepen the nuances of everyday life, showing a rich tapestry of human experiences that resonate through time and space. The issues of the social class, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the complexities of human relations represent central aspects of Narayan's work that have not only captivated readers, but have also found a vital place in cinematographic adaptations. Indian filmmakers, through several interpretive lenses, have adopted Narayan's stories, establishing a dialogue between her literary visions and contemporary socio-cultural landscapes.

The film adaptations of Narayan's works, such as the "The Guide", "Malgudi Days" and "Swami and Friends" films, reveal a lasting relevance of their narration to reflect the Indian environment. The filmmakers have sailed the specific cultural and historical contexts presented in their narratives, sometimes choosing to adhere closely to the source material and, on other occasions, opt for reinterpretations that reflect modern social problems. For example, the adaptation of "The Guide" not only transposes the central themes of spirituality and redemption of Narayan, but also infuses new dimensions in the narrative that resonate with the contemporary public fighting with the existential dilemmas. These adaptations serve to reinforce the

opinion that Narayan's exploration of universal truths, such as love, loss and search for identity, transcends cultural limits and temporary contexts.

The successful transformation of Narayan's themes in the cinema can be greatly attributed to the ability of filmmakers to contextualize their narratives within the fabric of modern Indian life. The ongoing dialogues surrounding class structures, gender roles and family expectations experienced within Narayan's stories have continued to have relevance that filmmakers have used expertly to foster contemporary connections. By taking advantage of artistic elements such as cinematography, music and performance, Indian filmmakers have been able to imbue Narayan's works with a new life, involving new audiences while preserving the essence of the original narrative.

As the global panorama continues to evolve, so does the interaction between literature and cinema, particularly in relation to Narayan's works. With the advent of globalization and the emergence of digital media, new frames are emerging for the storytelling. The filmmakers are now empowered by technology to reach a broader audience and incorporate innovative stories techniques that can further transform Narayan's narratives. For example, the adaptations of the web series and short films can experiment with different narrative arches and characters developments, allowing a more complete exploration of the topics within Narayan's literature.

Future research could investigate how these adaptations influence the perceptions of Indian culture, especially in the context of globalization. The way in which filmmakers adapt Narayan's themes to address modern sensitivity invites an examination of how cultural narratives are remodeled in the digital age. In addition, academics can explore the impact of the reception of the audience on several socio-political contexts, how interpretations vary in different regions and the role of socio-economic factors that shape these cinematographic experiences. As Narayan's narratives continue to resonate, research on their adaptations on digital platforms provides an exciting way for the scholarship, marking a significant intersection between literature, cinema and cultural studies. By adopting both the traditional and the newly emerging, researchers can discover a deeper understanding of how timeless

literary issues continue to encourage dialogue in contemporary contexts, configuring the perceptions of Indian culture both nationally and global.

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