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Cinematic Adaptation as 'The Time Machine' of Culture: A Brief Analysis of Satyajit Ray's 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi' Adaptation of Munshi Premchand's 'Shatranj Ki Baazi'

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to throw the light on the emergence of cinematic adaptation of literature at present time. It also discusses the points related to the adaptation, its definition and codes of film adaptation. The paper gives the brief analysis of 'Shatranj Ke Khiladi' film and how it shows feudal Indian culture through visual presentation. It deals with the historical events and incidents of British Raj in India with strong evidences and documents.

Key Words:

Feudal, Luxury, Chess, Battle and Culture.

Introduction: Culture dwells in the behaviour of people, their way of living, their manner of communication, their art, their music and their stories. All these things along with others make a society, a cultural institute. Although animals too have a society but they don't have a culture. Hence, it is the culture that creates a boundary between the human society and animal society. As Mahatma Gandhi rightly said, "Nation's culture resides in the hearts and souls of its people" (qtd. in Sushmita 2411). If society can be considered a body then culture can be called its soul and literature its shadow. Literature presents society in its real form. There are numerous oral story tellers, writers, poets, authors and artists who are always in search of new and true canvas to portray some hidden realities of the society and present them with a literal shape. In the words of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, "literature is nothing but carpentry. With both you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood" (Simpson). In this way, instead of showing fake personality, literature reveals a true reflection of inner soul. But to some extent, literature also rests upon the fanciful imagination of writers. It manages a balance between reality as well as fancy.

Literature has the skill that tells something about life, something that life is not able to tell by itself. With the change of modern persona of literature, the way of literary presentation has also been changed. Now people consider cinema to be more useful, entertaining and powerful presenter of society. But it is also true that cinema is dependent upon art and literature for the authentic content and reliable source-provider of knowledge about social realism. It will be not wrong to say that literature is enough mature than cinema and has kept the real motive alive in cinema, otherwise, it had become just the commercial promotion of vulgarity and obscenity and the market of money. But it doesn't mean that cinema is not much useful. It is impressive and revolutionary in a way of changing the world. It is more entertaining and easy to persuade.

Adaptation in Bollywood: With the popularity of cinema, the culture of entertainment discovered a rare phenomenon of imitation that created space by introducing a unique theme of adaptation as; caricature, mockery, parody, satire, lampoon, burlesque, and various other genres. Result came as film-makers started adapting content from literature that preserved the culture of the past as well as the social issues of the present and the themes related to a futuristic vision of the coming

generations. In Indian cinema, *Raja Harishchandra* (1913), *Mohini Bhashmashur* (1913), *Satyavan Savitri* (1914), *Lanka Dahan* (1917), *Kaliya Mardan* (1919), are the adaptation pieces as a reflection of the Indian mythology. Also, there are other movies based on novels and short stories like *Guide* (1965), *Devdas* (1955), *Chokher Bali* (2003), *Kabuliwala* (1961), *Aparajito* (1956), *Anand Math* (1952), *Bandini* (1963), *Sahib Bibi Aur Gulam* (1962), *Chhoti Bahu* (1971) and *Charulata* (1964).

Devdas is one of the most celebrated movies in Bollywood that have been re-directed from time to time as per the new taste of audience. It has survived along with its original charm with new experiments with the change of the modes of presentation. There is a huge difference between Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Devdas* (2002) and Bimal Roy's *Devdas* (1964). But both are fresh, relevant and equally appreciated during their respective time periods.

Emergence of Adaptation: Adaptation is not a modern process. Before the beginning of cinematic culture; plays, dramas, epics, morality books, children books and even religious books have been adapted from folk tales, folk songs, dance forms, street shows, oral stories and people's beliefs related with the world. They are equally relevant because they have exact and reliable transformation from oral to written form. Maharishi Valmiki and Ved Vyasa created the grand epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which are well arranged collections of stories gathered from folk songs and tales of different regions of India. This mechanism of: (a) adopting themes from folk culture or other socio-cultural episodes, (b) adapting or recreating the adopted key leitmotif as per the taste of the contemporary society, and therefore, (c) transforming the raw ingredient into new ideas or themes is a special trait visible in Indian literature.

William Shakespeare, widely acclaimed as the 'Bard-of-Avon', too followed the same in British literature. He has immensely adapted material from numerous classical, literary and historical sources among whom *Holinshed's Chronicle of England* is considered his greatest single source. He transmitted cultural stories from page to stage, displayed scenes of real life in drama, converted the ordinary day-to-day events into precious ones by mummifying the culture, customs, and innumerable other issues through his literary works plus stage performances. This shifting of the content, point of view, and context, performance of lazy literary words into a new lively and wonderful mobile world of cinema that enthralls the attention of the public, especially, expressing a more or less similar story through a new medium is called 'adaptation'. It is the legal form of translation and it is more authentic and more vulnerable than any other way of representation of literature with flourishing culture. Before the discussion of the adapted movies of Indian cinema, it is important to discuss: what is adaptation and what are the different methods of the process of adapting a movie? Julie Sanders avers that adaptation is a "specific process involving the transition from one genre to another: novels into film; drama into musical; dramatization of prose narratives and prose fiction; or the inverse movement of making drama into prose narrative" (qtd. in "Adaptation and Appropriation"). Also Linda Hutcheon opines:

According to its dictionary meaning, "to adapt" is to adjust, to alter, to make suitable. . . . as a *formal entity or product*, an adaptation is an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This "transcoding" can involve a shift of medium (a poem to a film) or genre (an epic to a novel) or a change of frame and therefore context: telling the same story from a different point of view, for instance, can create a manifestly different interpretation. . . .

In short, adaptation can be described as the following:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works
- A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative - a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsest thing. (7-9)

There are numerous perspectives of examining the adapted film based on any literary piece. A film acts as a work of literary art when it attracts attention from the audience cum critics who judge its presentation with its literary counterpart. This is labeled as 'the judgment view of observer'. For example, if the speaker is talking about a table on which a cat of dark color is sitting, many possibilities of the picture as well as innumerable stories related with cat and table will suddenly appear in the mind of the listener. The listener may imagine a table of wood or of metal, the cat may be fat or thin, it may be sleeping or just watching something. Each and every person or listener will imagine it (the audible content) in different ways as per their own understanding of the provided raw material.

So, all these possible or probable judgments about the cat or the table are very relevant to examine any artifact. Such predicted details fabricated by the creative author engage the audience in the act of contemplation. Transformation of a novel or a story into a movie follows the same 'concept of judgment' where the reader or audience or critic gets into the role of a judge. It is almost impossible to transfer all the scenes, the dialogues and the information of a novel in the new medium like movie, film or documentary in the exact form. Single content transformation into new medium is not sufficient for cinematic adaptation but the meaning of original work, that is, 'fidelity or faithfulness' must be presented in the new product with freshness, greenery and a flowery pleasant charm of early piece.

Adaptation in new medium from old one is not harmful but a natural process; even reading a novel is adaptation because of the use of pause, speech and paralanguage change the meaning of the text. To be a good adaptation of a novel, the film must be *faithful* to the novel. Like a translator, the filmmaker who adapts the literary piece must demonstrate some similar key ingredients of the source text and at the same time creates a new work of art in a new language, with the help of cinematic language.

To study a cinematic adaptation, MacFarlane refers to extra cinematic codes like: (a) Language codes (accent or tones of voice), (b) Visual codes (reading between the visuals), (c) Non linguistics sound codes (musical and other aural codes), and (d) Cultural codes (regarding people and their life at particular times and places). Without understanding of these codes, appreciation of cinematic adaptation is not possible. The present paper has taken serious note of all these codes with respect to the short story by Premchand.

Filmmaker Satyajit Ray: Satyajit Ray (1921-1992) is known as the best filmmaker of the twentieth century who was awarded with the title of Bharat Ratna in 1992 for his contribution in Indian cinema as producer, director, fiction writer, music composer and as a film critic. His well-known movies are: *Pather Panchali* (1928), *Aparajito* (1957) and *Apur Sansar* (1959). These movies are remarkable stamps of the cinematic genre as well as literary genre that occupy a significant place as a piece of art. Ray adapted many movies from Hindi-Bengali literature like *Aparajito* (1956), *Pratidwandi* (1970), *Ashani Sanket* (1973), *Charulata* (1964) and *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (1977). *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (1977) is the adaptation of Munshi Premchand's (1880-1936) Hindi short story *Shatranj Ke Khiladi* (1924) entitled as *Shatranj Ki Bazi* (1924) in its Urdu version. In the short story, Premchand represents the real condition of the feudal India and sets the target on the luxurious lifestyle of the upper middle class. Ray did change nothing but only the medium to present it in his own way so that the film can reflect with its original charm of literary text. The three aspects of attitude, sensibility and aspiration are the

life generating ingredients of Premchand's writings and Ray has kept these ingredients alive in this film *Shatranj Ke Khilari* (1977).

Analysis: The story begins with these lines: “वाजिदअली शाह का समय था। लखनऊ विलासिता के रंग में डूबा हुआ था। छोटे-बड़े, अमीर-गरीब, सभी विलासिता में डूबे हुए थे।” (Premchand, *SKK*). Through this abrupt beginning, Premchand introduces the theme as well as time period: theme of a luxurious, lustful, materialistic and spendthrift life and time period is 1856, the eve of the first Indian struggle for independence (The Mutiny of 1857) in the reign of Mughal Emperor Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. He was the tenth and the last emperor of Awadh. Wajid Ali Shah was a poet, playwright, dancer and a great patron of arts, so it seems relevant why Premchand has referred to Wajid Ali Shah to clarify the influence of the emperor's lifestyle on the society: “कोई नृत्य और गान की मजलिस सजाता था, तो कोई अफीम की पीनक ही के मजे लेता था। जीवन के प्रत्येक विभाग में आमोद-प्रमोद को प्राधान्य था। शासन विभाग में, साहित्य क्षेत्र में, सामाजिक व्यवस्था में, कला कौशल में, उद्योग-धन्धों में, आहार-विहार में, सर्वत्र विलासिता व्याप्त हो रही थी।” (Premchand, *SKK*).

Pather Panchali another adapted piece by Ray also limelights the prevalent poverty, but *Shatranj Ke Khilari* is rich in content. The movie gathers “particular visual contents of the scene, contents that can be arranged under the subheadings of setting, props, costume and lighting . . . acting . . . the distinctive ways in which shots . . . are composed” (Dix 10-11).

Fig. 1: A still of Mir and Mirza playing chess. They seem to be lost in thought to find a right move. Their entrapment and costume speak volumes about their identity and status that



perhaps may take long narrative exercise on the part of a writer in literary description.

Visual arts in film depend primarily on two things, composition and mise-en-scene, that is, on how objects and people inside a frame are brought together into a mutual relation. The performance of actors is an important element for the mise-en-scene. The on-screen facial expression, gesture, positioning, movement and speech of the performers constitute acting. Ray's composition of these elements enlivens the spirit of the story so that the audience not only can imagine or visualize but can also enjoy and experience the representation of history thus enhancing their prevailing knowledge.

The film starts with the voice of Amitabh Bachchan who is the narrator of the film and the appearance of two fiefs Sanjiv Kumar as Mirza Sajjad Ali and Saed Jaffrey as Mir Roshan Ali. Both are sitting in the position of contemplation during the game of chess aptly suited to the title of the film or the short story. Ray has excellently presented the game of chess in the beginning of movie instead of portraying all such literary details of the pomp and show or other similar traits of ‘epicureanism’ prevalent in the contemporary times. Also the projection of the chess board in the very beginning gives the indication of leading a fashionable but opulent style of living because it is the symbol of doodling in itself as the narrator speaks: “Just look at the hands of these generals. They might never have actually lifted any real arms themselves but in what a grand manner they move forward their troops in this square battlefield”. (Ray)

However, the presentational technique of the movie which is based on the short story by Premchand is much influenced by Vsevolod Pudovkin’s 1925 film *Chess Fever*, the satirical tone used in the film, noted the Indian director, Satyajit Ray, is set to target colonial India in 1856 as Premchand did. The film is not only meant for Indians but the subtitles in English prove its worldwide efficacy.

“Films are generally divided into four major classes for practical and pedagogical purposes: (a) Narrative film equated with fictional story telling, (b) Documentary film (non-fictional or factual), (c) Experimental film (avant-garde), (d) Animation film” (“Adaptation and Appropriation”).

Shatranj Ke Khilari, the film employs the voice narration of Amitabh Bachchan that introduces the plot to the audience and informs them about the characters from time to time. “Like a novel, a narrative film is a narrative fiction, controlled by a narrative voice, a teller (the camera lens) that lets us see what it wishes. In addition, like a novel, a film is capable of leaping in time and space, a common feature of narrative fiction” (“Adaptation and Appropriation”).

In the film narrative techniques, voice-over is known as a storytelling device that is employed in the background dialogues anywhere from the beginning of a film till the end with beautiful sound effects. Voice-over offers the director an opportunity to introduce alternate perspectives, inner insight and potentially, even an unreliable narrator — when used well, it has real potential to heighten and enlighten a visual narrative. Amitabh Bachchan who is the narrator of the film “has done a record number of commentaries and voice-overs for cinema as varied as Shakti Samanta’s *Ballika Badhu*, Sujoy Ghosh’s *Kahaani*, Vinod Chopra’s *Parineeta*, Rakesh Roshan’s *Krish 3*, Luc Jacquet’s *March Of the Penguins*, Ashutosh Gowariker’s *Jodhaa Akbar*, and Srijit Mukherjee’s *Begum Jaan*”. He says, “The experience of doing voice-overs is wonderful. My first - ever film-connected credit title was for the voice -over in Mrinal Da’s film *Bhuvan Shome*, and then several followed” (qtd. in Jha). He feels blessed of performing a ‘voice-over’ in Satyajit Ray’s *Shatranj Ke Khilari* as he states “I regret not getting an opportunity to work with the legend as an actor. But just a mention as a voice-over in his film is a moment of great pride for me” (qtd. in Jha).

On the sky of Indian cinema, Satyajit Ray shone so clear and vibrant like the full moon. He dealt with social issues and subjects with rare touch and skills. For Ray, a filmmaker who commanded global audience and attention, it was story-telling art he had come to master. This movie is a proof that adaptation is not an easy task for a director. A writer just pens down what is in his imagination but a director works hard to bring that imagination on the screen. The characters, body language, background, costumes, jewelry, style of living, manners, architecture, setting, props, everything has a special role to play and carry an important place in a movie. Satyajit Ray has dealt with such issues without making the movie a disintegrated work of art. He sets the whole background of the movie to reveal every aspect and a single literary detail written by Premchand.

Fig. 2: Close up shot of Shabana Azami piping in the leisure time. Her make-up with its



entire spell nourishes the beautiful feature of the actress and her jewelry is the emblem of her being close to royal family. The gaudiness of her clothes is the perfect epitome of seductive portrayal of women by screen.

It seems that he has closely observed and analyzed the character of the king Wajid Ali Shah. Wajid Ali Shah was a great lover of dance of Kathak who is also credited for its revival with major classical forms. Ray shows Amjad Khan as Wajid Ali Shah dancing among Kathak dancers in one scene. Amitabh Bachchan or the narrator satirically utters about the careless behavior of the king: “The king of this fun-loving kingdom is Nawab Wajid Ali Shah who has a liking for everything except running his kingdom”. (Ray) English General Outrum asks Weston about the daily routine of the king and he describes him very patiently that the king prays five times a day, flies kite on the palace roof, sleeps during four to five p.m. in the evening, writes poems, and attends mushaira. And currently, he is listening to a new singer named Mustali Bai.



Fig. 3: A Still from Mushayara by Mustali Bai in the movie

The whole schedule of the king in a day shows his religious, luxurious, lustful nature, and his music loving tendency. The narrator comments on the king's languidness and indolence: "Every once in a while Wajid Ali Shah would also hold courts"; on this idyllic conduct of Wajid Ali Shah, Outrum calls him: "A bad king, a verminous, effeminate, irresponsible, worthless king" (Ray) due to which the kingdom proved to be an easy catch for the British Governance System that was eventually annexed bloodlessly on 11 February 1856, just before the ninth anniversary of Wajid Ali Shah's coronation. Premchand has discussed this incident as: "शहर में न कोई हलचल थी, न मार-काट। एक बूँद भी खून नहीं गिरा था। आज तक किसी स्वाधीन देश के राजा की पराजय इतनी शान्ति से इस तरह खून बहे बिना न हुई होगी" (Premchand, *SKK*).

According to Premchand, it were not the Britishers who had a strong ability to drive a great nation like India but it was the unfazed behavior of kings and fiefs that they let them snatch their native lands. In this regard, Gandhiji has rightly uttered in *Hind Swaraj* (1909) that "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them" (Heredia). Wajid Ali Shah was one of them as neither had he protested nor he moved his single lad for stopping them. "यह अहिंसा न थी, जिस पर देवगण प्रसन्न होते हैं। यह कायरपन था जिस पर बड़े से बड़े कायर आँसू बहाते हैं। अवध के विशाल देश का नवाब बन्दी बना चला जाता था और लखनऊ ऐश की नींद में मस्त था। यह राजनीतिक अधःपतन की चरम सीमा थी" (Premchand, *SKK*).

Premchand rightly asserts that luxury, lust and art are the main reasons for our nation's decline. That's why, again and again the leitmotif of the destruction of the social and moral code of people or society resulted from the growing craze for materialism, luxury, pleasure or revelry occurs in the literary text as:

शासन विभाग में, साहित्य क्षेत्र में, सामाजिक व्यवस्था में, कला कौशल में, उद्योग-धन्धों में, आहार-विहार में, सर्वत्र विलासिता व्याप्त हो रही थी। कर्मचारी विषय-वासना में, कविगण प्रेम और विरह के वर्णन में, कारीगर कलाबत्तू और चिकन बनाने में, व्यावसायी सुर में, इत्र मिस्सी और उबटन का रोजगार करने में लिप्त था। सभी की आँखों में विलासिता का मद छाया हुआ

था। संसार में क्या हो रहा है, इसकी किसी को खबर न थी। . . . राजा से लेकर रंक तक इसी धुन में मस्त थे। यहाँ तक कि फकीरों को पैसे मिलते तो वे रोटियाँ न लेकर अफीम खाते या मदक पीते। (Premchand, SKK)

Lucknow was the center of the emergence of all such degraded values that lead to the decline of ethicality, morality and gave birth to a corrupt set of values relying upon the principle of self-gratification which weakened the very foundation of the nation. Everyman and even the royal courtiers were involved in such amusements: “राज्य में हाहाकार मचा हुआ था। प्रजा दिन-दहाड़े लूटी जाती थी। कोई फरियाद सुनने वाला न था। देहातों की सारी दौलत लखनऊ में खिची चली आती थी, और वह वेश्याओ में, भाँड़ों में और विलासता के अन्य अंगों की पूर्ति में उड़ जाती थी। अँगरेजी कम्पनी का ऋण दिन-दिन बढ़ता जाता था”। (Premchand, SKK)

Satyajit Ray has directed the film in the manner of an anecdote through which all the incidents, information, letters and documents based on real events shown in the movie are original. The narrator tells about feudal Lucknow, “Since the time the Mughal Sultanate in Delhi became defunct, Lucknow became the emerald of etiquette”. (Ray) He explains the writer’s worries about wasting money in different words, “The fun-loving gentry of Lucknow believe that throwing money about is work”. (Ray) If ordinary people believe in the tradition of squandering money uselessly then what will be the fate of a king like Wajid Ali Shah. Outrum and Weston discuss about his love for creativity: “Outrum: Weston...have you ever seen a pigeon that has one black and one white wing?...Jalman Khan, the keeper of the royal pigeons received a kila, reward of two thousand rupees for producing a pigeon with one black wing and one white wing”. (Ray)

Music is another vital aspect of a movie. It comes in the non-linguistics sound codes of the film adaptation. If the adaptation is a Hindi movie and one of the three protagonists of that is a great lover of music as Wajid Ali Shah, then there make no sense to avoid music. Andrew Dix asserts:

Film music . . . is not simply reproductive - providing an equivalent of image contents in another artistic language - but also reductive, stereotyping what is on screen and inciting a spurious emotionalism in the audience. (86-89)

The music is the breath of this movie that helps to generate catharsis in audience and make them feel different flavors of their history and ‘Luckhanawi Culture’. Wajid Ali Shah has been famous for his *Bhairavi Thumri; Babul Mora Naihar Chotto Jaay*. His *Bhairavi Thumri; Babul Mora Naihar Chotto Jaay* has been sung by several prominent singers, but a particularly popular version was performed by Kundan Lal Saigal for the 1930 movie *Street Singer*. Ray used it to put a strange taste of sad tone that epitomizes the pain and agony of the poet, i.e., the king himself when he is exiled from his beloved kingdom Lucknow:

बाबुल मोरा, नैहर छूटो ही जाए;
चार कहार मिल, मोरी डोलिया सजावे
मोरा अपना बेगाना छूटो जाए,
बाबुल मोरा, नैहर छूटो ही जाए।
आंगन तो पर्वत भयो ओर देहरी भयी विदेश;
जाए बाबुल घर आपनो मैं चली पिया के देश। (Ray)

It is because of his ingenuity and proficiency to compose delightful verses as well as tempting sad music that the English Residence Officer, Weston was an eminent admirer of his compositions. Weston sings some lines composed by Wajid Ali Shah to General Outrum:

सदमा न पहुँचे कोई मेरे जिस्म-ए-जार पर
आहिस्ता फूल डालना मेरे मजार पर
हर चन्न खाक में था मगर ताक फलक गया
धोखा है आसमान का मेरे गुबार पर। (Ray)

Wajid Ali Shah used to write verses on his own and was a poet of a considerable merit. He used to write under the nom-de-plume of ‘Akhtar’. He had equal command over Persian and Urdu languages and wrote several books in both. According to his court chronicler, Masih-ud-Din, he received a liberal western education and was well versed in ancient and modern history and literature. Garcin de Tassy, during his travelling to the sub-continent in the mid-nineteenth century wrote about his experiences of Wajid Ali Shah and noted, “I do not have to appreciate here this very political resolution, neither do I have to appreciate the qualities or defects of Wajid Ali Shah, as a sovereign, but I am interested in him as a distinguished scholar and as eminent poet in Hindustani” (“Wajid Ali Shah”).

The script of the film witnesses minor alterations with respect to the dialogues, for instance, Wajid Ali Shah utters the famous lines of his poetry: “सिर्फ शायरी ओर मोजिकी ही मर्द की आंखों में आंसू ला सकते है” (Ray). In film subtitles, the dialogue is translated in English as, “Only love and poetry can bring tears to a man’s eyes” (Ray). If music has been used as the tool of preserving agony and pain in the film, there are also other kind of music that has received music critics’ attention who think it different. As Billy Joel avers, “Music in itself is healing. It’s an explosive expression of humanity. It’s something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we’re from, everyone loves music” (qtd. in Nandy).

Slow paced but gripping, the movie brings forth the delicacy of Urdu, brilliantly captured by Shama Zaidi and Javed Siddiqi in association with Ray, who penned the English dialogues perfectly. It was beautifully delivered by Tom Alter in the role of Captain Weston. The role of Captain Weston, so British in his ways, but in love with Urdu poetry worth noting.

Fig. 4: A conference between King Wajid Ali Shah and General Outrum. It is an example of



Deep focus which in contrast to Shallow focus keeps equal focus on every object/part (foreground, middle and background) in focus whereas Shallow focus highlights specific areas and blurs the rest part of screen image.

The story and movie both present the historical scenario of the 19th century India when the British rule was rising like the smoke of forest-fire. Premchand depicts the situation of the royal Indian emperors who were under the influence of the Western culture, leading a busy life in enjoying the disguised bounties of materialism and luxury. They remain engaged in petty things that did not suit their responsible and dignified position. For instance, instead of discussing various strategies or planning to protect their kingdom from British they were active in participating fancy battles like chess games; the fights of sheep, goats and cocks. Premchand ironically states, “बटेर लड़ रहे है। तीतरों की लड़ाई के लिए पाली बदी जा रही है। कहीं चौरस बिछी हुई है। पौ बारह का शोर मचा हुआ है। कहीं शतरंज का घोर संग्राम छिड़ा हुआ है।” (Premchand, *SKK*). Although living in fantasy looks romantic and pleasant when it is read in fairytale or in lyric poem, but Premchand does not write about fantasy. He is known for his mastery in depicting realism. His stories spit out the most horrifying and sordid aspects of humanity. The India of that time was not interested to see the real world. The citizens were euphoric and intoxicated by the long lasting slumber and were dreaming of India as the ‘Golden Bird’. Unfortunately, this Golden Bird was brutally demolished by the British in their long sleep. Ray gives an account of some historical incidents on their habit of indolence:

... friendship with the English goes back a hundred years to the time of Nawab Shujaudaulah, and it was Nawab Shujaudaulah’s foolishness that he challenged the strength of the English. The result was that he had to suffer a terrible defeat. But look at the generosity of the English government! They did not take over the kingdom but got him to sign a friendship treaty and fixed a small sum of 5 million rupees as penalty. From that day till today, the Nawab of Awadh have maintained

their friendship with the English and whenever the English had money for war, the treasure houses of Awadh are opened.

It would be wrong to say that the native rulers and fiefs of India were coward but they were sluggish about the government that was slipping under their feet. It is worldly acknowledged that our nation is a peace loving land. Ray ironically compares the peace loving nature of Indians with their amusement for the games of battle and bloodshed. The narrator speaks in an ironic tone, "Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Roshan Ali are not fighting they are playing. They prefer to ride, not real but horses of mind...This is why they have made the old and excellent game of chess, their playground". It is really sarcastic too that they do not have time to think about their surroundings. Even they call the servants for trifles like hand washing and to puff up their hookah pipes. The narrator mocks, "Poor Maqbool, who knows how many more pipes will have to be filled today. Because today there will be a lot many more battles fought in this battle field". (Ray) It does not mean that they are 'fiefs of nothing' as they feel proud on their historical bravery. Although they claim of having the blood of warrior through their actions, activities, dialogues, behavior, and habits but it appears very satirical. Moreover, it sends the reader in desperation that they do not utilize their so called historical bravery or power for saving the honor of the king, Wajid Ali Shah. Premchand's story ends with the death of both, Mirza and Mir who fight with each other to save their family's nobility for the game of chess:

मिर्जा - खुदा की कसम, आप बड़े बेदर्द है। इतना बड़ा हादसा देखकर भी आपको दुःख नहीं होता। हाय, गरीब वाजिदअली शाह!

मीर - पहले अपने बादशाह को तो बचाइए, फिर नवाब का मातम कीजिएगा। यह किशत और मात! लाना हाथ! (Premchand, SKK)

After the winning of the game Mir was ready to pray for Badshah's safety but Mirza changed the mind, "मीर ने कहा - आइए नवाब के मातम में मरसिया कह डाले। लेकिन मिर्जा की राजभक्ति अपनी हार के साथ लुप्त हो चुकी थी। वह हार का बदला चुकाने के लिए अधीर हो गए थे" (Premchand, SKK). Indirectly, Premchand has denied the importance of bloodshed, however, it was present both in the game as well as in reality. Ray added the dialogue to explain the idea of the story writer: "This issue of battles is continuing from the day when these two friends were taken with this game". (Ray) In the movie, Satyajit Ray explains these two characters' interest in bloodshed with the help of 'sword.' 'Sword' has been exhibited as the metaphor of the lust of blood and love for battle that leads the story of film till the end. They discuss on the 'sword' hanging on the wall of Mirza. When Nandalal comes there to inform them about British resident's plot to snatch Indian land Awadh, they took more interest in 'sword' than resist British intrigues:

Nandalal: Do you know to whom this sword belongs?

Mir Saheb: This sword belongs to Mirza Sahib's grandfather's great grandfather...He and my grandfather's great grandfathers were together in the army of Nawab Burhan-ul-Mulk. (Ray)

These three men set the conversation on the bravery of their ancestors. They relish themselves by talking about battles and participation of their forefathers in wars, "They were so brave, these two, that the enemies of Avadh trembled when they heard of them. The Nawab had awarded them fiefdoms for their bravery and valor. And we, their descendants, are enjoying the fruits of the fiefdoms till this day...After all, some blood from these illustrations persons must be running in our veins". (Ray) It shows that they love bloodshed but were slackers too, that's why, they did not want to move their single figure. But with the playing of the game of chess they were fulfilling their desires of bloodshed.

Chess is the central idea of the movie and the story both. It is the luxurious symbol of story and leading motif of the movie. The narrator and the story writer both throw light on the exclusiveness and evils of this game. Munshi Nandalal rightly called it, “the game of kings and the king of games”. (Ray)

Fig. 5: The chess board used by two fiefs in movie, but different in color. The pawns are red instead of black. Red represents the Red-Indian battalion of India and white as British



army.

Premchand includes other's opinions about what they think of this game, “शतरंज ताश, गंजीफा खेलने में बुद्धि तीव्र होती है, विचार शक्ति का विकास होता है, पेचीदा मसलों को सुलझाने की आदत पड़ती है, ये दलील जोर के साथ पेश की जाती थी” (Premchand, *SKK*). In order to sharpen their mental skills, they got addicted for this game. Both fiefs forgot their daily life or routine and always kept sitting on the game. The wives and other family members of both fiefs felt very much irritated due to their habit of playing chess. Premchand writes, “घरवाली का तो कहना ही क्या, मुहल्ले वाले, घर के नौकर-चाकर तक नित्य द्वेषपूर्ण टिप्पणियाँ किया करते थे 'बड़ा मनहूस खेल है। घर को तबाह कर देता है। खुदा न करे किसी को इसकी चाट पड़े। आदमी दीन दुनिया किसी के काम का नहीं रहता, न घर का न घाट का” (Premchand, *SKK*). The author also shows all these evils through these two characters' behavior towards their family especially wives, servants or officers. Mirza's wife complains about the extreme headache in the daytime but he did not pay any attention and ignores her totally to continue with his game. Mir advised him to go and see her but he replied, “क्या ऐसा दम लबो पर है? जरा सब्र नहीं होता?”. Mir again tried to make him agree but he said, “जी हाँ, चला क्यों न जाऊँ। दो किशतों में आपको मात होती है” (Premchand, *SKK*).

Satyajit Ray edited this scene very carefully and added some humour. He keeps all the important ingredients alive, intact and made it all the more sarcastic. Mirza complains Mir about his wife Khurshid, “If I sit all night at a dance show, she does not complain but if I sit in my own home and play an excellent game, she pesters you”. (Ray) Mir insists him to go and Mirza warns him not to exchange the pieces. But during the long duration of waiting, Mir while putting his eagle's-eye on the door and exchanged the pieces. Next morning when he comes to play chess at the home of Mirza, he listens Mirza shouting over his servants. The pieces of chess had been lost. Mirza abuses all and replies Mir after his questioning in furious voice, “Some idiot has stolen my chess pieces”. Mir advised him to keep them safe and he replies ridiculously, “I should have looked them up in a trunk”. It was their deadly craze for the game that they go to Imtiaz Hussain Saheb's home

to play. When they were informed that the advocate is ill, they did not pay much attention on that and continue to play chess there too.

Fig. 6: Mir and Mirza in the house of Imtiaz Hussain

This scene is a masterpiece in itself originally created by Ray and is very often repeated in different versions of movies and TV shows. Instead of asking about the health of Imtiaz Hussain they ask of borrowing the chess board during the meeting of Mir and Mirza. And Hussain dies. Immediately both the chess lovers run from there but take a pity look on the chess board. After coming from the house they were wandering in the streets of town. And Mir says some hilarious



words: “What a lovely day...and we are bereft of chess” while Mirza was drawing chess squares on the sand with the help of a wooden stick.

Chess has infatuated their mind completely that they return to Mirza’s house and start playing with the tomatoes, betels and chilies instead of pawns. Khurshid throws the pieces in their room after find them playing again.

Fig. 7: Low-angle shot of Vegetable Chess made by Mirza. In this type of shot camera is



positioned low to enhance the grandeur of the object on screen and is specifically used to project its predominating strength and power.

After this incident, Mir's house became their 'adda' (meeting place) to play the game. Premchand mocks at the situation of Mir's house. He describes the condition of the lazy servants:

आठो पहर की धौस हो गयी। कभी पान लाने का हुक्म होता, कभी मिठाई लाने का। ओर हुक्का तो किसी प्रेमी की भांति नित्य ही जलता ही रहता था।...कभी-कभी ऐसा भी होता कि बाजी उठा दीजाती, मिर्जा जी रुठ कर अपने घरजा बैठते। पर रातभर की निद्रा के साथ मनो-मालिन्य शांत हो जाता था।

प्रातःकाल दोनों मित्र दीवानखाने में आ पहुचते थे। (Premchand SKK)

They were deeply involved in the game that Mir did not have idea about his own home's condition. Premchand writes about his wife:

मीर साहब की बेगम किसी अज्ञात कारण से उनका घर सेदूर रहना ही उपयुक्त समझती थी। इसलिए वह उनके शतरंज प्रेम की कभी आलोचना न करती बल्कि कभी-कभी मीर साहबको देर हो जाती तो याद दिला देती थी। इन कारणों से मीर साहब को भ्रम हो गया था कि मेरी स्त्री अत्यंत विनयशील ओरगम्भीर है। लेकिन जब दीवानखाने में बिसात बिछने लगी ओर मीर साहब दिन भर घर में रहने लगे तो उन्हें बड़ा कष्ट होने लगा। उनकी स्वाधीनता में बाधा पड़ गयी। दिनभर दरवाजे पर झांकने को तरस जाती। (Premchand SKK)

Ray has added few scenes to show the careless attitude of Mir towards his family affairs. Nafisa, wife of Mir does not like their staying till the dinner. She shows her concern to her secret lover Akeel and he consoles her with the saying: "When there is an open mate before one you cannot see anyone but the pieces". (Ray) The movie presents the 'lover's excuse scene' in some more humorous way where the lover Akeel Miyan on being caught red handed by Mir in his bedroom with his wife. Akeel gives the excuse that men of British Army are in search of people to join the army forcefully. Mir feels scared after hearing this news and advises Mirza to escape from the town. In the short story, the lover of Nafisa who is unnamed himself comes in the house of Mir in the disguise of a British soldier forces him to join military. Nafisa asks Akhil doubtfully in movie about

getting their illegitimate love affair being revealed but he tries to console her by saying that “इनकी सारी अक्ल और हिम्मत तो शतरंज ने चर ली अब भूलकर भी घर न रहेंगे” (Ray). When Mir tells Mirza about the military recruitments and finding Akeel Miyan in his wife’s bedroom, Mirza laughs loudly at the foolishness of his friend. But he does not tell him because he does not want to disrupt the ongoing game.

The ending of the movie has also been re-written by Ray. But manners of dialogue delivery are almost same. Mirza starts feeling frustrated when losing the game. He chided over Mirza’s wife’s adultery. In the story Mirza comments:

मिर्जा: किसी ने खानदान में शतरंज खेली होती तब तो इसके कायदे जानते। वो तो हमेशा घास छीला किये, आप शतरंज क्याखेलियेगा? रियासत ओर ही चीज है। जागीर मिल जाने से ही कोई रईस नहीं हो जाता।

मीर: क्या! घास आपके अब्बाजान छीलते होंगे। यहाँ तो पीढ़ियों से शतरंज खेलते चले आते है। (Premchand, SKK)

And then they start fighting seriously:

मिर्जा - अरे चल चरकटे, बहुत बढ़कर बातें न कर!

मीर - जबान सँभालिए, वर्ना बुरा होगा। मै ऐसी बातें सुनने का आदी नहीं। यहाँ तो किसी ने आँखे दिखायी कि उसकी आँखें निकाली। है हौसला?

मिर्जा - आप मेरा हौसला देखना चाहते है, तो फिर आइए, आज दो-दो हाथ हो जायँ, इधर या उधर। (Premchand, SKK)

Premchand concludes the story with these words:

दोनो दोस्तों ने कमर से तलवारे निकाल ली। नवाबी जमाना था। सभी तलवार, पेशकब्ज कटार वगैरह बाँधते थे। दोनो विलासी थे, पर कायर न थे। उनमें राजनीतिक भावों का अधःपतन हो गया था। बादशाह के लिए क्यों मरे? पर व्यक्तिगत वीरता का अभाव न था। दोनो ने पैतरे बदले, तलवारे चमकी, छपाछप की आवाजे आयी। दोनो जख्मी होकर गिरे, दोनो न वहीं तड़प-तड़प कर जाने दी। अपने बादशाह के लिए उनकी आँखों से एक बूँद आँसू न निकला, उन्होने शतरंज के वजीर की रक्षा नें प्राण दे दिए। (Premchand, SKK)

Hence, both killed each other with the swords lying beside the chess board. In the movie, this scene has been presented differently. Mirza says to Mir: “What was your family?...only till the other day before they were blowing into the stones in the kitchens of the rich and clean vessels”. (Ray) Mir shoots him in hesitation but also regrets afterwards. He feels relieved that the bullet missed the target. Kallu, a small boy of the village informs them about the king that has surrendered without war and gun. Narrator comments: “There will be no firing and there won’t be a war. Wajid Ali Shah will fulfill his promise”. But neither Mirza pay attention on it nor Mir has interest in these affairs. He just speaks: “With whom will I play chess now?” And Mirza replies: “You have a player here before you”. (Ray)

Conclusion: Therefore, from the time, the movie opens with a brilliant commentary by Amitabh Bachchan, the voice-over artist and closes with the scene of the two Nawabs settling down to another round of chess, *Shatranj Ke Khiladi*, grows into an evergreen classic which only Satyajit Ray could have conceptualized and delivered with such a perfection retaining its original charm and aura.

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