

Article

Subrat Jyoti Neog

Mukti and *Tare Zameen Par*: An Intertextual Study



Abstract: Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938) is the most outstanding personality in modern Assamese Literature. Bezbaroa's contributions to Assamese literature are manifold. He was a poet, storyteller, novelist, playwright, critic, and essayist, all rolled into one. One of his best short stories is "Mukti" (1923). The text of "Mukti" can be connected with the text of the film "Tare Zameen Par" (2007). "Mukti" is about a child whose imagination, interest, hidden talents are disregarded by parents and teachers. "Tare Zameen Par" is a story of Ishaan, an eight-year-old dyslexic child who dislikes school and fails every test. He is belittled and berated by his teachers, classmates, and parents. Both texts can be studied in the light of Intertextuality. This intertextual study will signify that a text of regional language can be world-class and universal.

Intertextuality is the shaping of a text's meaning by another text. Julia Kristeva introduced the notion of intertextuality in 1966. Intertextuality is a literary device that creates a relationship between texts and generates related understanding in separate works. Julia Kristeva challenges traditional notions of literary influence and says intertextuality denotes a transposition of one or several sign systems into another or others. M.H. Abrams noted that the term is used to signify the multiple ways in which any literary text is made up of other texts, utilising its open or covert citations and allusions, repetitions, transformations of the formal and substantive features of earlier texts or simply its unavoidable participation in the common stock of linguistics and

literary conventions and procedures that are "always already" in place and constitute the discourse into which we are born. Any text is, in fact, an "intertext," the site of an intersection of numberless other texts and existing only through its relations to other texts.

Intertextuality and intertextual relationships can be separated into three types: obligatory, optional, and accidental (Fitzsimmons, 2013). Obligatory intertextuality is when the writer deliberately invokes a comparison or association between two or more texts. Obligatory intertextuality relies on the reading or understanding of a prior hypo text before complete comprehension of the hypertext can be achieved (Jacobmeyer, 1998). Optional intertextuality means it

is possible to find a connection at all. The writer's intent when using optional intertextuality is to pay homage to the 'original' writers or to reward those who have read the hypotext (Ivanic, 1998). Accidental intertextuality is when readers often connect a text with another text, cultural practice, or a personal experience, without there being any tangible anchor point within the original text (Fitzsimmons, 2013). The writer has no intention of making an intertextual reference, and it is completely upon the reader's prior knowledge that these connections are made. The connections of "*Tare Zameen par's*" text with "Mukti" can be studied in the light of accidental intertextuality. "Mukti" is a short story, and "Tare Zameen Par" is a film. Both are different mediums. "Mukti" was published in 1923, and "Tare Zameen Par" was released in 2007. There is a massive gap of eighty-four years between these two creations. As the text of "Mukti" is written in the Assamese language, it's confined to the region of Assam only. Therefore, the writers of "*Tare Zameen Par*" were unfamiliar with the short story. But we can easily connect the texts of "Tare Zameen Par" with the text of "Mukti." This connection is purely accidental.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa (1864-1938) was one of the literary stalwarts of Assamese literature. One of his popular Assamese short stories is "*Mukti*" (1923). The text of "Mukti" can be connected with the text of Aamir Khan's directorial venture "*Tare Zameen Par*" (2007). The story *Mukti* explores the life of a child named Sukumar. His world is filled with wonders that no one else seems to appreciate. He likes birds, rivers, plants, fish, and nature fascinates him a lot. Sukumar's inner world is rich. But no one tries to identify his interest. Instead of it, due to poor academic performance, his parents send him to his elder brother's home, and he is admitted to a town's English medium school to be disciplined. Things are no different in his new place, and Sukumar must contend with the added trauma of separation from his family and his favourite nature. The story of *Tare Zameen Par* revolves around a child of eight years old who suffers a lot until a teacher identifies his problem as dyslexia. Although he excels in art, his poor academic performance leads his parents to send him to a boarding school. Alone there, he rapidly sinks

into fear, anxiety, and depression. At last, his new teacher Ram Sankar Nikumbh helps him overcome his inabilities.

The story of the "*Mukti*" revolves around the actions of the child Sukumar. The child's inner conflict is beautifully portrayed in the short story. On the other hand, eight-year-old child Ishaan is the protagonist of the film "*Tare Zameen Par*." In this film, child psychology is presented vividly through the child Ishaan. His inner and outer worlds are shown in the movie.

We have found three steps in the story of "*Mukti*." Sukumar's love for nature is engraved in the first stage of the story. He wished to live his childhood with freedom. He wanted to do whatever he liked. This aspect is also narrated in the first stage of the story. In the second stage of the story, we find that Sukumar's elder brother Debakumar tried to distract him from the outer world and emphasised his study. Debakumar was a well-educated and established lawyer. He imposed strict rules on Sukumar's life, which led him to death. These are included in the third stage of the story.

If we minutely observe the story of the film "*Tare Zameen Par*," we can quickly identify three stages of the story, which is also the same as the story of "*Mukti*." Ishaan's love for nature, who wishes to celebrate his childhood on his terms, is shown in the first stage. In the film's opening sequence, where Ishaan's character is introduced, we find that Ishaan came out of the classroom of his school, and after that, he tried to play with the fish in the pond. Ishaan did not like to confine himself in school or at home. He wanted to immerse in nature like Sukumar of "*Mukti*."

In the second stage of the film, his parents of Ishaan identified that he was not interested in his studies. So, they compelled him to go to boarding school. In "*Mukti*," the parents of Sukumar also tried to bring back Sukumar's mind from the outer world, but they failed. The parents then send him to his brother's home, and his brother admits him to an English medium school in the town. These parents' actions

made Ishaan and Sukumar feel isolated from their beloved family and nature.

The Boarding school's disciplined lifestyle made Ishaan miserable. His isolated life is engraved in the third stage of the film. This stage of the film reminds us of the secret life of Sukumar. We find one difference between the short story and the film in this stage. Imposed strict rules led Sukumar's life to death. On the other hand, Ishaan is emancipated from his tortured life by Mr Nikumbh, a teacher with a modern outlook. It is noteworthy that the leading tone of both texts is the same. The main tone of these creative arts is that strict or imposed rules cannot make man educated, but it creates a barrier to a child's mental and physical growth.

The film and the short story are eye-openers for every teacher and parent. Both parents and teachers should not compare one child with other children. In the movie, the Math teacher compares Ishaan with other classmates, and his parents compare him with his brother, which hurts his self-esteem. Sukumar's parents always appreciated his elder son Debakumar for his good habits. On the contrary, they scolded Sukumar for his poor academic performance. In "*Tare Zameen Par*," Ishaan's parents have great pride in his elder son Yohaana. They tortured slow learner Ishaan. Both creative arts try to convey a good message, i.e., patience is necessary for teachers and parents when students make mistakes. They should not scold, beat, or kick them out of the class as a punishment.

Sukumar's mother is a static character. It was heartening for her when her husband and elder son tortured Sukumar. Elder brother Debakumar and his father said that all mothers are alike and cannot be logical. They are emotional. In the film, Ishaan's mother, Maya, is a static character who cannot do anything to rescue Ishaan from her husband's torture, like Sukumar's mother.

In "*Tare Zameen Par*," one of the central characters, Ram Sankar Nikumbh, criticised the prevailing education system. In the short story, the narrator also criticises the academic burden on students. The film and the short story advocate that social isolation,

disrupted routines, and restricted access to recreational activities have turned the worlds of children upside down. One of the main messages of the film and the short story is that both teachers and parents should be aware of the strong points and weaknesses of the child. The first and most crucial step for parents and teachers is to fulfil the child'.

The film has shown that the student-teacher relationship should be friendly and spiritual. Moreover, the teacher should create a learning environment where a child can express all their abilities. In the film, Amir Khan organised a painting competition in school; therefore, the students can explore their potentialities and underlying meanings in their minds. The short story's narrator directly told that today's school is not a great place for students. It is like a factory where the student-teacher relationship is purely artificial and machinery.

Sukumar's father did not know how to handle his child's problems. He thought school could do everything for his child's improvement. So, he insisted Sukumar go to school and follow the teachers' instructions. He did not try to understand his mental state of Sukumar. Like Sukumar's father, Nanda Kishor, the father of Ishaan, played the same role in the life of Ishaan.

It is noteworthy that Mukti and *Tare Zameen Par* both stories are inspired by real life. In the autobiography '*Mor Jiban Sunwaran*', the writer Lakshminath Bezbaroa said that he did not like to go to school in his childhood. The school was like a jail for him. His father insisted he go to school, and he did not ask him why he was not excited to go to school. Ultimately, we can identify some autobiographical elements in "*Mukti*." On the other hand, the writer of the film, Amol Gupte, once told in an interview that the childhood story of well-known filmmaker Akira Kurosawa inspired him to write the story of Ishaan.

The short story's text, tone, and message are the same as the film's. Through this intertextual study, we may say that Lakshminath Bezbaroa's "*Mukti*" is a world-class short story. "*Tare Zameen Par*" is a film of the 21st century that received tremendous responses worldwide for its sensitive and relevant subject

matter. Initially, it was acclaimed as India's official entry to the foreign-language category for the Oscars. It is noteworthy that the same sensitive story with the universal appeal was written in the Assamese language in 1923 by Laksminath Bezbaroa. *Mukti* is a tragic saga of a child aptly related to the story of "Tare Zameen Par", with its concoction eighty-four

years before the latter's release. This is the achievement of a regional writer like Laksminath Bazbaroa. This intertextual study establishes that a regional text can be world-class and universal.

References:

- Abrams, M. H. (1999). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Fitzsimmons, J. (2013). *Romantic and contemporary poetry: readings*. Retrieved from CQ University e-courses, LITR19049-Romantic and Contemporary Poetry, <http://moodle.equ.au>
- Ivanic, R. (1998). *Writing and identity: The discursive construction of identity in academics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co.
- Jacobmeyer, H. (1998). *Ever After: A study in Intertextuality*. Carl Hanser Verlag.Munchen. Available at: http://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic98/jacobm/88_98.html
- Kristeva, J. (1980). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dr Subrat Jyoti Neog is an Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Assamese, Tezpur University.