Paper

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Talking Heads, Listening Hearts

Abstract:

Knowing that meaning is created in the spectator's mind, we have acknowledged the role played by our life experiences and our acquired knowledge in making that meaning. I wish to explore whether the literature we have read and the stories we know also play a part. Of course, being well-read may increase the pleasure of watching a film because reading has honed our skills of nuanced understanding. Venturing beyond this general effect, I think we should consider whether we sometimes read a film and another text together and ask whether this enhances our pleasure of viewing. I recount my experience of watching Satyadev Dubey's 1968 film *Shantata! Court Chaalu Aahe* has read the original play written by Vijay Tendulkar and *The Witchcraft of Salem Village* by Shirley Jackson. Also, seeing that a short story is credited often as the source of Tendulkar's original screenplay, while as far as I can see, it is not, I thought of the processes of adaptation, basically, the interlinkages between texts, not in the writing of a screenplay but in viewing a film.

Virginia Woolf said that "the 'alliance' between cinema and literature was "unnatural" and "disastrous" to both forms, though her language and the context in which she made this statement made it amply clear that she believed it disastrous for literature and was more concerned about her first love- books than she was for cinema, audiences of which she called "the savages of the twentieth century"! However, it seems that this 'alliance', far from disastrous, has been beneficial considering the number of times it has been made.

Ever since its origin, cinema has adapted from literature. While Jules Verne inspired George Melies for his *A Trip to the Moon*, *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* was a proper adaptation. Some of us may be shocked to know that D.W Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* was sourced from that controversial racist best-seller by Thomas Dixon – The Clansman. However, we appreciate some of his other adaptations, acknowledging the original author for the story source and for imparting some cinematic techniques to Griffiths. Joy Gould

Boyum writes:

> "Griffith- who was more well-read than most of his followers and is said to have arrived on the set each day carrying one or another of Dickens' novels- also frequently used the classics. He adapted Tennyson in *Enoch Arden*, Browning in *Pippa Passes*, Thomas Hood in *The Song of the Shirt*, Jack London's *The Call of the Wild*, and, in *The Cricket on the Hearth*, his beloved Dickens, whose work is generally credited with inspiring the innovations- the use of the close-up, parallel editing, montage and even the dissolve- which helped earn Griffith the epithet "father of film technique".(Boyum,1989)

After that start, Cinema has benefitted from literature over the years, as is evident from the numerous screenplays based on novels and stories. However, apart from the stories, cinema has drawn from literature, as it has from painting and music. It is the beauty of the Cinema that it is open to and beautified by all arts. Susan Sontag said, "Cinema is a kind of pan-art." "it can make use of," adds Boyum, "...just about every other art, while there isn't a quality it has that isn't also found in one or another of these arts. The film shares its visual aspect with painting, its dependence on movement with dance, its ability to produce kinetic and emotional effects with music, its reliance on performance and spectacle with theatre, and its technological basis with architecture. But the art with which film (or at least, narrative film)clearly shares most- from the use of its plot, characters, setting, dialogue and imagery through its manner of expressing theme to its tendency to manipulate space and time- is literature." Thus, has literature benefitted Cinema.

However, some more realistic individuals may say half-jokingly is the other way around: adapted screenplays bring about profit and fame to novels! Many books become best-sellers when they are adapted. More copies sold in the edition with the movie poster for a cover, with that golden line- Now a major motion picture!'. The money the publishing house and the author received for adaptation rights is a bonus!

This win-win partnership, or what Virginia called an 'alliance' between literature and cinema, is fraught with a few minor problems. The rather condescending, never-satisfied reader who always thinks that "the book was better" and the disturbed author who feels that the film was not true to the book. Procedural flaws, such as the choice of adaptable text, explain away some of these differences. For example, some writers think that the novel loses more in adaptation because of its length, and I suppose what might be called its depth- its exploration of what goes within the minds of the characters, what goes on in the changing world of the story and so on. This one has heard a lot while discussing *The Hours* (2002) and engaging with the work and styles of Stephen Daldry, David Hare, Michael Cunningham and Virginia Woolf (through Mrs. Dalloway) herself.

Generally, screenwriters seem to like the longish short story or a novella for working into a screenplay. Students are more comfortable with the faithfulness of the script of Charulata (1964) despite some complex, beautifully executed changes that Satyajit Ray has made to Nostonir, the original novel by Rabindranath Tagore. Incidentally, this discussion, I adapt almost verbatim from my teacher's lecture at FTII! Although I have never attempted an adapted fiction, teaching and discussions are always adapted from various sources, aren't they?

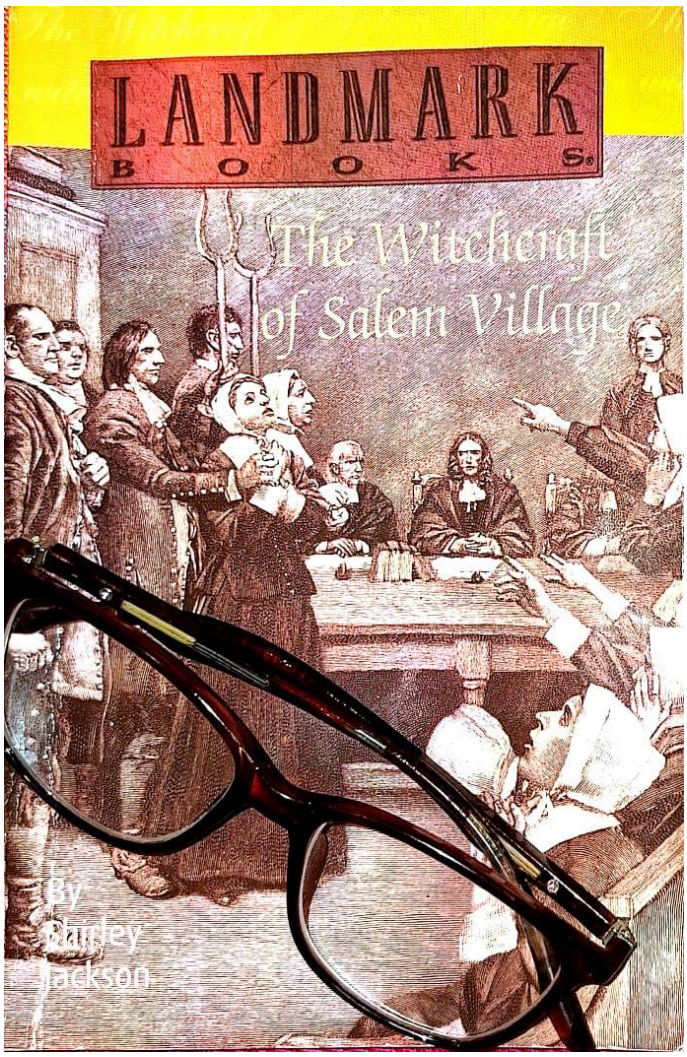
There are two very particular criticisms regarding the adaptation of plays into cinema. One is that a play is enclosed indoors and in a 'present' time. This underutilises the spatio-temporal possibilities offered by the medium of cinema. The second criticism reiterates every time there is a comparison between a playwright's and a screenwriter's dialogue. The former is derided as 'talking heads. This is quite unfair, I think, and this judgment indicates fewer inadequacies in playwriting and more of our inadequate readings. Screenwriters adapt plays by making them more cinematic, moving the action to different locations. For the present discussion, I look at Vijay Tendulkar's play *Shantata! Court Chaalu aahe*, and Sayadev Dubey's film adaptation of the same. An adaptation that does not make these attempts because of the story itself, because all the events take place in a fixed space. The space, in its claustrophobic, pressuring way, closing in on the protagonist is, in fact, what happens in the play. But nowhere does the film feel 'non-cinematic'; at no point do the dialogues seem like the speeches of 'talking heads. The script sticks to the interior location, opening up on crucial moments. I share my engagement with the film and how another text came to my mind and aided me. Also, we look at the adaptation processes that came into play in making this film.

First, the film credits listed in the Wikipedia entry are a story. A heartening flashback to a time of graceful and ethical behaviour among writers! At a time when plagiarism is rampant, when there is so much hesitation in acknowledging sources and giving credit to contributors, it is a surprise to see in the credits of Satyadev Dubey's film *Shantata! Court Chaalu aahe*, a 1956 short story by Friedrich Durrenmatt called "Die Panne" (English translation "Traps."). I say surprised because today if Durrenmatt were to claim that Tendulkar's play was adapted from his story, a committee would find his

application inadmissible because the similarity ended with the 'court trial' form and the content was different. For a change, the committee would be right. Die Panne is a story of Alfred Traps, a salesman who encounters four strange characters- a judge, a former prosecutor, a defence attorney and a public hangman when he takes shelter in a house after the breakdown of his car in a remote place. The four friends invite Alfred to participate in a mock trial game. Alfred is accused of causing the seemingly natural cardiac death of his boss. What follows is a series of arguments 'proving' that the heart attack has been caused by Alfred's affair with the boss's wife and, therefore, is premeditated murder, and he is 'sentenced' to death. In a shocking end, Alfred hangs himself(or, I felt somehow that Durrenmatt suggests that the retired hangman to escort

Alfred to his room has hanged Alfred). Anyway, that is the story.

Yes, there is a mock trial, but while Die Panne is a mystery about the boss's death, Tendulkar focuses on society's patriarchal rules and norms, and each 'charge' articulates these societal 'rules'. Rules are not in the sense of well-thought-out ideas for the betterment of society, but rather, impressions of the four prosecutors about how a woman should behave. Sartre quotes Hume to distinguish ideas and impressions: 'The perceptions which enter with the most force and violence, we may name impressions… By ideas, I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning.' (David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, second edition, edited by L.A Selby-Bigge and P.H Nidditch(Oxford: Clarendon 1978)p.1. The rules she has broken are merely the impressions harboured by her accusers; her crime is imaginary, and therefore, their questioning is forced and violent.



After seeing that the similarities were not enough to name Friedrich Durrenmatt's novella as the origin of an adaptive process, I reread Tendulkar's play and rewatched Dubey's film. This time, I saw why I had found no similarities. The persecution of Benare is accusatory violence inflicted upon a woman. The violation that it achieves is gendered. Every charge made against her is for her lack of adhering to the rules set by society specifically for women. A woman who is different from the other women around her. A woman who is suspected of an imaginary crime**.** An accusation of having perpetrated a made-up crime, especially in the form of a mock trial. A mock trial starts as an

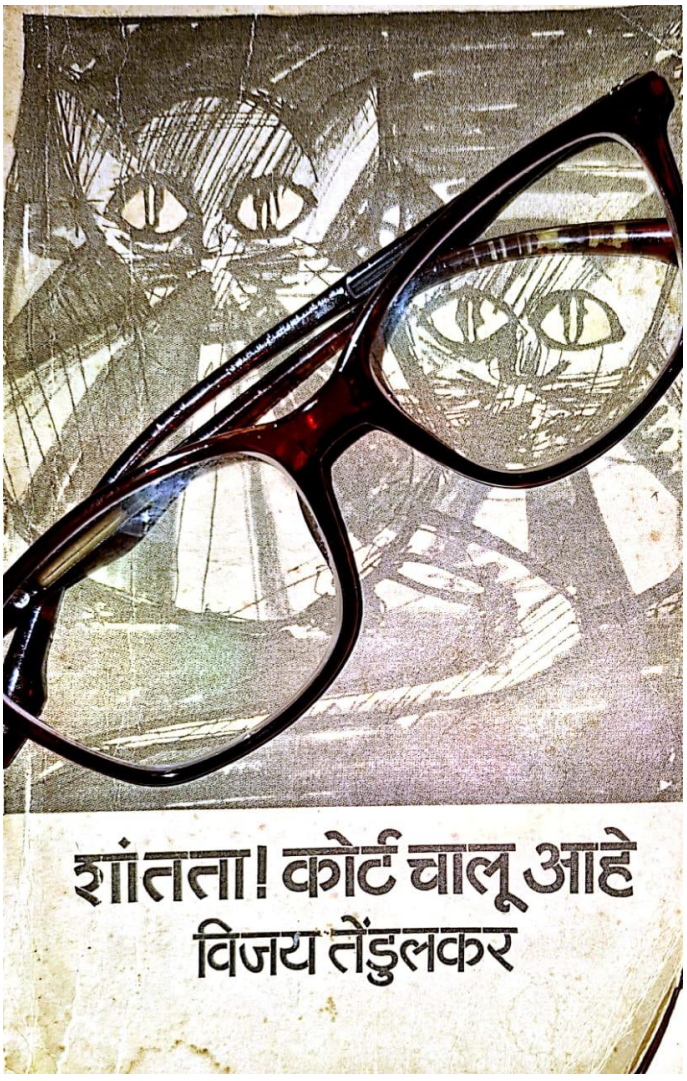
innocuous investigation, becoming more and more barbaric, almost escalating to the mental version of a gang rape.

Briefly, the plot- the film begins on a train. The first instance in the movie opens the play outdoors. We see Benare. We see her through the appreciative eyes of a passenger in the compartment. (A delightful guest appearance by the actor Amrish Puri). She is a striking woman. A theatre troupe is on its way to a village to put up a performance to raise awareness about courts. Two people have not managed to come. First is Professor Damle, who will be the defendant's attorney. However, the problem created by his absence is quickly solved by Sukhatme, who volunteers to play both the attorney for the defence and his designated role of public prosecutor. If this does not strike an ominous note, as we hear him say this, it most definitely does as the play goes ahead and most sadly at the end, in retrospect, when we recollect these words and realise that the 'accused' did not have a chance. The second missing actor is the one playing a witness. For this, a local contact person- Saamant- is roped in. It intends to make Samant understand both the court procedures and the staging of theatre, which the troupe decides to have a rehearsal. But why was there boredom among the usual accused – President Nixon? Why not have another accused? And the entire troupe seems to agree. Members who usually do not get along with each other suddenly find a common point of interest and zero in on Benare. She is accused of foeticide. And the evidence begins. The first witness stated that he had seen her in Professor Damle's room after dark.

The next witness, the local person- Samant, scripts evidence combining the charge that has been made and the novel he is reading. This is one moment when Dubey opens the film to another location. There are fascinating cinematic occurrences, like the appearance of a doorbell when Samant changes his "I knocked on the door." To "I rang the doorbell.", he (and us, the audience) hears Benare pleading to someone to get her out of this predicament, even threatening to commit suicide. All this we hear is in Benare's (played by Sulabha Deshpande) voice, but in a tone that is not like the Benare we have seen in the play till now. The tone of helplessness is melodramatic, borrowed from popular fiction of that time. The novel that Samant is reading!

The next witness is Ponkshe, who says she proposed to him. Again, this witness account takes us outdoors, where Benare has asked Ponkshe to meet him, first outside a restaurant. Ponkshe reveals that a pesticide bottle accidentally falls out of her purse. This makes her uncomfortable, and she asks to go out in the fresh air. On the beach, she initiates conversation by asking Ponkshe what kind of a partner he is looking for. "A mature person," Ponkshe replies, but the further conversation reveals that he has just said that for effect. A mature woman who has lived on her terms is not his cup of tea. Maturity comes with experience, does it not, asks Benare. Ponkshe is shocked when Benare reveals that she is pregnant and asks whether he will marry her., falling at his feet literally. When he refuses, she laughs and says the whole thing is a joke. "But there were tears in her eyes." Recounts Ponkshe now, in the witness box.

Finally, Baalu, a dependent of the Kashikars, also reveals how she has proposed marriage to him. We see how she must have fallen into desperation as he recounts how she held his hand and promised to support him financially. "I was so angry, I slapped her," Ponkshe says. This is rebutted by the next witness, the experimental theatre actor who swears that the slapping was the other way round. That Benare slapped Baalu. This gives the audience a slight relief in this 'witness account'.



The hurt we feel in Ponkshe's testimony is unrelieved and stark. Hearing Ponkshe speak gleefully about her most vulnerable moments is genuinely heartbreaking. So is listening to the speculations about her age. The speculations are started by Mrs Kashikar, who says Benare's face gives her age away, that she must be around 32, and the judge finally notes it at 34. Mrs. Kashikar's age remark is as if to suggest that 32 is too advanced an age to remain unmarried! Mr Kashikar, the judge, does not stop at just suggesting but makes a (nauseatingly) concerned statement that girls should be married off before puberty to prevent 'such' problems.

Speaking of the Kashikars, it is interesting how Mrs. Kashikar is excellently characterised as an agent of patriarchy. "...effective exploration of relationships between two women is a recurring feature in the screenplays of Vijay Tendulkar. (Palshikar, 2006) Mrs. Kashikar is the one who initially goads the others to make Benare the accused in the rehearsal. When the doors close and Benare finds herself trapped at one point at the beginning of the trial when she wants to walk away from this drama that already shows signs of turning terrible, it is Mrs Kashikar who forcibly leads her back to the accused's stand. When called as the third witness by the 'Public Prosecutor', she adjusts her saree on her head and looks smug as she establishes her married, 'good woman' status, in contrast to Benares. She speculates about the age discussed above. She is the one who makes the most directly vile remarks, such as "Why would anybody want the responsibility that comes with marriage when they get 'Everything' (suggesting physical pleasures) outside? Mrs Kashikar is relentless in her hatred for Benare.

Meanwhile, her husband never loses an opportunity to belittle her intelligence, ridicule or snub her every action. Tendulkar astutely observes the graded aspect of the

agency of patriarchy. Mrs Kashikar is herself a victim of patriarchy. Still, instead of feeling sisterhood when she comes across a younger, vulnerable woman (in this case, Benare), she chooses to exercise her relative power to oppress her. The 'Everything' might not mean only physical pleasure.

The unforgettable Benare and Mrs. Kashikar from 'Shantata Court chaalu aahe' are in a complicated, contradictory equation. Mrs. Kashikar volunteers to physically push Leela Benare into the accused's stand. When she speaks of "these unmarried women who get Everything without the responsibility of marriage.", we realise how this Mrs. Kashikar is not referring to sexual freedom, but to the fact that the unmarried Benare has something which Mrs Kashikar ho is constantly being insulted by her husband, will never have- a child. Mrs. Kashikar is a participant in that mock court case, which is nothing but a gang rape where words replace the phallus. (Palshikar, 2006)

Thus, all the prosecutors reveal their true colours as the trial proceeds deeper into Benare's life by digging up her past. Her innocent puppy love for her maternal uncle and the suicide attempt because of the shame. The suicide attempt by a 14-year-old child does not invoke compassion in this now almost bestial pack of prosecutors but instead is taken as some confirmation of her 'bad' character.

The last ten minutes of the film. The monologue. Again, this is another text that enhances my engagement with this film. A cyclostyled copy of the monologue from the original Marathi play. An acting workshop with Pandit Satyadev Dubey- an old hall at Garware College, Pune- in 2001. When this writer hammed through the iconic monologue. Revealing her lack of acting prowess (help us all!), but learning a crucial trait – being deeply involved with a text, knowing every aspect of it, making a text one's own. Hearing Dubey ji say the script, which is a degree of access away from him. First, Marathi is not his first language; secondly, here is a man reciting lines written for a female character. "*Hoy, mala Pushkar mhanaaycha aahe. Kitti varshaat kaahi mhatlach naahi."*

As Dubeyji performed the monologue, all of us were mesmerised. Forty years later, perhaps some of the words would have sounded too melodramatic to the younger participants of the workshop. But no. Everyone was transfixed with sheer respect. I respect the director's desire and capability to become this character.

"You are in love with Benare," I joked at our next smoking break. The grand man's "Of course" was accompanied by a most endearing smile! The sweetness of this memory has etched the monologue in my mind. As I discovered while writing this, I can still recite the lines a quarter of a century after that workshop. With age, not attempting to act, but again, with age, with experience, truly Knowing the words. It is most likely that this love gave him the strength to want for her something that she deserved. Unfortunately, what the play does not give her. But more on that later, after writing out the entire monologue here. I am taking the liberty because I think it bears a whole quotation.

From Priya Adarkar's official translation published by Oxford Publications. (I am not criticising Adarkar's translation in any way, but I do note that I have a different

version of the translation of the Marathi lines that I know by heart.)

BENARE: Yes, I have a lot to say. (Stretches to loosen her arms) For so many years, I haven't said a word. Chances came, and Chances went. Storms ranged one after another about my throat. And there was a wail like death in my heart. But each time, I shut my lips tight. I thought. No one will understand. No one *can. When great waves of words came and beat against my lips, how stupid everyone around me was, how childish and silly* they all seemed. Even the man I call my own, I thought I should laugh until I burst. At all of them! That's all. Just laugh and laugh! And I used to cry my guts out. I used to wish my heart would break! My life was a burden to me (heaving a great sigh.) But when you can't lose it, you realise the value of it. You acknowledge the value of living. You see what happiness means. You see how wonderful every moment is! Even if *you* seem new to yourself. The sky, birds, clouds, the branch of a dried-up tree that gently bends in, the curtain moving at the window, the pungent smell of medicines in a hospital, even that seems full to bursting with life. Life seems to sing for you! There's great joy in a suicide that's failed. It's more significant than the pain of living. (Heaves a big sigh)Throw your life away- and you realise the luck of having it. Guard it greater than life- and it only seems fit to throw away. Funny. Look after it. And you feel like throwing it away. Throw it away- and you're blissfully happy it's saved. Nothing satisfies. The same thing again and again. (In a classroom manner) Life is like this. Life is so and so. Life is such and such. Life is a book that goes ripping into pieces. Life is a poisonous snake that bites itself. Life is a betrayal. Life is a fraud. Life is a drug. Life is a drudgery. Life is something that's nothing – or a nothing that's something. (suddenly striking a courtroom attitude) Milord, life is a very dreadful thing. 'Life is not worthy of life. Hold an enquiry against life. Sack it from its job. But why? Why? Was I slack in my work? I just put my whole life into working with the children. I loved it! I taught them well! I knew that life is no straightforward thing. People can be so cruel. Even your flesh and blood don't want to understand you. Only one thing in life is all-important- the body! You may deny it, but it is true. Emotion is something that people talk about with sentiment. It was obvious to me. I was living through it. But do you know? I did not teach any of this to those tender young souls. I swallowed that poison but didn't even let a drop of it touch them! I taught them beauty. I taught them purity. I cried inside, and I made them laugh. I was cracking up with despair, and I taught them hope. For what sin are they robbing me of my job, my only comfort? My private life is my own business. I'll decide what to do with myself; everyone should be able to! That can't be anyone else's business, understand? Everyone has a bent, a manner, an aim in life. What's anyone else to do with these? (Light illuminates each face one by one. They all look fearsome, silent, ghostlike) These are the mortal remains of some of the cultured men of the twentieth century. See their faces- how ferocious they look! Their lips are full of lovely, worn-out phrases. And their bellies are full of unsatisfied desires. (Sound of the hourly bell at school) A distant noise of children chattering. For a moment, she is silent and concentrates on the sound. She

loses herself in it. The sound then recedes and is heard no more. Silence. Looking around her, as if she is waking up, she is suddenly terrified of the silence) No no! Please don't leave me alone. I'm scared of them. (Terrified, she hides her face and trembles) It's true. I did sin. I was in love with my mother's brother. But in our strict house, in the prime of my unfolding youth, he was the one who came close to me. He praised my blood every day. He gave me love. How was I to know that if you felt like breaking yourself into bits and melting into someone- if you thought that just being with him gave a whole meaning to life- and if he was your uncle, it was a sin? Why, I was hardly fourteen! I didn't even know what sin was. I swear by my mother, I didn't (She sobs loudly like a little girl). I insisted on marriage. So I could live my beautiful dream openly. Like everyone else! But all of them- my mother too- were against it. And my brave man turned tail and ran. It's such a rage. I felt such a rage against him. I felt like smashing his face in public and spitting on it! But I was ignorant. Instead, I threw myself off a parapet of our house to embrace death. But I didn't die. My body didn't die! I felt as if feelings were dead, but they hadn't died. Again, I fell in love as a grown woman. I threw my heart into it. I thought this would be different. This love is intelligent. It is love for an unusual intellect. It isn't love at all; it's worship! But it was the same mistake. I offered up my body on the altar of my worship. And my intellectual god took the offering and went away. He didn't want my mind or my devotion. He didn't care about them. (Feebly) He wasn't a god. He was a man. For whom everything was of the body, for the body. That's all.

Again, the body! (screaming) This body is a traitor! (she is writhing with pain). I despise this body, and I love it. I hate it. But it's all you have in the end. It will be there. It will be yours. Where will it go without you? And where will you go if you reject it? Don't be ungrateful. Your body once burnt and gave you a moment so beautiful, so blissful, so near to heaven. Have you forgotten? It took you high, high, high above yourself, into a place like paradise. Will you deny it? And now it carries within it the witness of that time. A tender little bud. Of what will be a lisping, laughing, dancing little life- my whole existence. I want my body now for him. For him alone. (shuts her eyes and mutters in mortal pain). He must have a mother, a father to call his own- a house to be looked after, and a good name. (Darkness. Then light. The loud ticking of a watch. Benare is motionless in the dock as before. The others are all in their places)

End of monologue. Her devotion to work and her failure in love are the two aspects that Tendulkar reveals in this monologue.

When Benare falls in love with the much-married professor, it is not a continuation of a dominance-submission pattern she seems to have got into. She is, in fact, trying to get out of her past in which the relationship with the uncle was, at least for him, based on physical attraction. "When I fell in love again- this time I was older- it was more a Worship- a devotion to a mind." Yes. She is still placed in a patriarchal culture, but Tendulkar foregrounds the dilemmas of an educated, intelligent woman; her search for a love based on a need for an intellectual partnership. When she says, "maybe the fault

lies with me. Maybe I failed to convey how much I cared for him." I hear- "maybe he was not as intelligent as I imagined him to be, maybe he's not worth it after all." (Palshikar, 2006)

After being faithful to the play's text, it is at the beginning of the iconic monologue that Dubey and Tendulkar write new scenes. First of all, the space is thrown open. Her stifled voice and self-expression translated into breaking out of the cage's confinement, like standing for the accused and running freely on a beach.

Most importantly, the film deviates from the last scene. In the play, a defeated Benare collapses on the floor. The toy parrot that Samant had brought for his nephew lies near her. A toy for a child. An indication that she will not abort the child she is carrying? Or has she already? The play's ending is entirely ambiguous about her future.

The film, however, changes in the last two minutes. The end titles have an extreme Benare's eyes looking at the audience, accusing us. She is not the accused; she shouldn't have been. We, the society, are the accused. However, before the titles roll, we are given a glimpse into Leela Benare's future. She is seen with a girl, holding her, walking with her, and showering affection on her. An image which, speaking of other texts that come to mind as we watch, will also be the last in the 1982 film *Arth* in which, again, in a last-minute turn, the protagonist makes a surprising choice and embarks on a solitary and vigorous life with an adopted girl child. Here, of course, the child is Benare's. Remember the foeticide that she has been accused of?

A daughter. In a dialogue, the foetus is referred to as a male one. But the film shows that the foetus has gone to term and has been born. Moreover, it is a girl child. It serves two purposes, one granting succour to Benare's life and the second creating a character whose life, unlike Benare's, will be full of self-respect, independence, and love. It was granted by her mother, who had none of all these in her life.

Or granted by the film by the scriptwriters Satyadev Dubey and Vijay Tendulkar. As I said earlier, granting her something she deserved but did not get in the play. Another well-adapted film, *Atonement* (2007), is based on the novel by Ian McEwan. The interview with a now-aged Briony (played by the great Vanessa Redgrave) where she says how, in truth, she was a coward to go and see her sister, quite contrary to the domestic scenes that were in her novel about her sister and brother-in-law Robbie, who had died of septicemia on the last day of evacuation and a bomb had killed Cecilia as she took shelter in a tube station. "So my sister and brother-in-law were never able to have that time together that they so desired and deserved," she says, "which ever since I felt I prevented. But what sense of hope, what satisfaction could a reader derive from an ending like that? So, in the book, I wanted to give Robbie and Cecilia what they lost in life. I want to think that this isn't weakness or evasion. But a final act of kindness. I gave them their happiness."

When a film is so loved, it reminds one of similar lovely texts that compound the created meaning. So, do audiences also adapt to other texts while viewing?

I was caught unaware as the viewing of *Shantata Court Chaalu Aahe* brought to mind, at first instance, the face of Renee Jeanne Falconetti! Portraying France's heroine and saint Joan of Arc, who led the French army to victory in the Battle of Orleans in The Hundred Years War, thwarting England's attempt to conquer France.

Yes, there have been various adaptations of the 15th-century trial of St. Joan of Arc, but the readers of this journal will understand why I thought of this face, haunted forever, as we all are, by those close-ups in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 classic *La Passion de Jeanne d'Arc.* A face full of defiance, resistance against the onslaughts, devotion to God, and obedience to the divine voices of St. Michael, St. Catherine of Alexandria, and St. Margaret of Antioch.

This narrative of hearing voices 'in the head' and acting on their instructions led me to another mock trial - the 17th Century Salem Witch Trial. In contrast to Joan's 'divine' voices, the 'voice' that Bridget Bishop, Sarah Goode, Sarah Wildes, Elizabeth How, Susanna Martin, Rebecca Nurse, Martha Carrier, Martha Corey, Mary Easty, Alice Parker, Ann Pudeator, Margaret Scott and Mary Parker were to hear and obey, was the voice of the devil himself. Incidentally, these women, declared by a 'fair' trial to be 'Witches', were hanged on Gallows Hill, Massachusetts, by September 22nd, 1692.

The similarity of the Salem Witch trial to *Shantata Court Chaalu Aahe* does not end with the 'fairness' of the (mock) court proceedings, but the 'crimes' that the accused were charged with also have a resemblance.

What can be the most terrible crimes a woman can commit? A crime that goes against the most crucial virtue ascribed to her. Nurturance of children. A meaningful ascription, yes, is the most mandatory prescription. Every woman is expected to unfailingly express only loving and caring feelings about children. In the eyes of society, there can be many degrees of volition against this rule. Choosing not to be a mother, or worse, exercising her right to abortion of a foetus. Then, there is the ultimate, almost unimaginable. In *Shantata Court Chaalu Aahe,* the crime that Benare is accused of is 'bhrunhatya' – Infanticide. It was so easy to condemn the 'Witches' of Salem to death because the crime that they were (falsely) accused of was inflicting strange 'other-worldly' violence on young girls. One has an idea of the mass hysteria episode in American history, where people convinced themselves and each other, even produced evidence against a group of people, primarily women, to sentence them to death. While writing this paper, to revise the account and to get the facts straight, I turned to a History book written for younger readers 'The Witchcraft of Salem Village' written in 1956 by Shirley Jackson, author of many excellent novels such as Hangsaman(1951) about a sensitive adolescent who escapes parental oppression by preferring to enter a nightmare world, The bird's Nest(1954) a thriller about a schizophrenic woman (which we know better as the adaptation source for the film *Lizzie*(1957), The Sundial(1958)- a dystopic novel about a group of people awaiting Armageddon in a secluded house, The Haunting of Hill House(1959)- a book that Stephen King called the best-written ghost

story of all time, and the complex novel- scary and poignant at the same time- We Have Always Lived in the Castle(1962), a story of two sisters ostracised by the village for killing the rest of their family. These are examples of Shirley Jackson's work. Therefore, the 'children's book' that I refer to is no bland, dry telling of a watered-down history text. Carefully appropriate for and accessible to younger readers, the book is critical of society in subtle ways, even using gentle subterfuge to criticise even the time when it was written, three centuries after the events described in the book had occurred. And because she is a great writer, much of the critique is relevant today.

Some examples-

-Right at the beginning, "Salem was a small community, self-centred and frequently almost isolated in winter.." Self-centred. Like the Kashikars, like Ponkshe.

-While mentioning Boston, "The most important settlement in the colony," Jackson writes, "By 1690, it was a busy city, the centre of government and education. Its people tended to be broader in their views than those in the smaller villages, although their religious discipline was almost as severe." It is these religious views that will prevent them from opposing the atrocious falsehood of the Salem Trial. For unquestioning religious belief overpowers rational thought and the ability to question. In Tendulkar's play, for Sukhatme and Kashikar, it is patriarchy.

- What prevents rational thought is the anxiety of being considered a sympathiser of the one ostracised. As we see in the case of Baalu and, even to a certain extent, Samant. Jackson writes of the spread of this 'Witches' paranoia outside Salem. " .. there had been rumours of witches in nearby towns. One neighbouring minister had dealt with a case of witchcraft simply by sending both accused and accuser back home, with instructions to behave themselves. But many people felt that this was too lenient. Had not Cotton Mather told them of the joy among the demons whenever a Puritan succumbed to temptation? Some people whispered that his secret feelings were much too sympathetic toward the forces of evil. Much of this gossip died away naturally, but people did not forget the incident. Moreover, this incident demonstrated an attitude towards witchcraft, which has contributed enormously to every witchcraft epidemic in history. Anyone who defended sympathised with, or said a good word for a witch was automatically suspected. It was felt that no one would help a witch without a reason, and the reason could only be that the suspect's defender was also in league with the devil. It is this attitude which makes it so tricky for intelligent and thoughtful people to stop a tremendous widespread hatred like the hatred towards the witches. Samant in the *Shantata* is unable to stop the trial.

-"In Salem Village in the early days of the year 1692, people were gossiping about the charter, about the Indians, and about the scarlet bodice that Bridget Bishop had made for herself." The guerilla tactics that Shirley Jackson employs draw our attention to society's importance of keeping a check on behaviour. 'Appropriate' dress has always been a marker of accepted behaviour. So, the significant current happening is the historical charter, which determined the exclusion and exploitation of native Americans. Along with

it, what features in the current discourse are an attractive outfit that a woman has stitched for herself? So disturbing is the bodice! Disturbing to the attentions of 'good' men, disturbing the entire social order! Again and again, accusations of 'free' flirtatious behaviour are made against Benare.

-"On February 29th, 1692, warrants were issued against Sarah Goode, Sarah Osburn and Tituba. It was felt that a dangerous crime must be accepted as a public responsibility, so four of the most important men in the village signed their names to the complaint against the witches."

It reminds me of the zeal with which Sukhatme takes on the task of being both a prosecutor and a defence lawyer!

This zeal not only shows how patriarchy rises to the occasion whenever a woman is prosecuted, but Tendulkar also makes a profound statement about the unfairness of the trial. The prosecution and defence are both on the same side. The defence lawyer is not defending her. Like the prosecution lawyer, the only thing he is defending is the patriarchal social order. It is fiction, and even within the fiction, it is a pretend trial that allows Tendulkar to 'cast', so to speak, the same man in both roles!

-"Even words could be evidence." States Jackson, sadly. Every word of every witness is twisted by Sukhatme, the lawyer and Kashikar, the judge.

- And how did they behave as a group? "Talking anxiously and quietly together.", "the trial was a novelty to both the audience and the accused, and no one was quite sure how to behave. Sarah Goode was furious and very frightened."

Like Goode, Benare also becomes first frightened and then angry. Unlike Goode, she has a stage of initial 'casualness' keeping in the spirit of playacting and, more poignantly, trusting that these people are colleagues and friends- no harm will come to her. We see that spelt out in The Witchcraft of Salem Village- "When she looked around from her place on the platform, the faces she saw were faces she had known all her life." Shirley Jackson wrote this in 1956. When I read it and watched Sulabha Deshpande enacting it in the film made in 1971, based on the play that Tendulkar wrote in 1963, why do I remember the statement made by the survivor of mass rape in 2002? "*sab log jaan-pehchaan ke the..*" Writing the dates bears repetition to see how good writing and good filming are mirrors of reality across time.

As for the accusing party, they get into their roles after the initial awkwardness and enjoy themselves. Saying what we hear in the film and what Jackson calls "things they never before dreamed of saying- cruel, unprovable things which would not have occurred to them a week earlier."

- Shirley Jackson, at one point, makes an ominous statement. "no further proof was necessary."

- "Is it a laughing matter?" she asked, but "Martha Corey continued to laugh."

- He begged people to forget any weakness or softness toward any other human being. He entreated them to give up any compassion, kindness, and brotherly love, and he announced at last that the Lord commanded that they should turn upon one another with distrust, to seek out and destroy any upon whom the slightest suspicion rested. This, too, is evident in how the older men

Sukhatme and Kashikar do not allow Samant to be compassionate in the slightest way.

The above list of examples is not one of the similarities in that the texts were not read together with watching the film for comparison but for recall. Remembering other texts with which one had engaged as profoundly as one was with the film. Maybe if we read deeply and widely, we would be pleasantly surprised when we encounter a film that catalyses recalls or brings back to us those texts we learnt from, which we enjoyed. It would enhance our pleasure in viewing and increase our learning of the language of cinema itself. It intends to encourage genuine and deep reading among younger critics, and I shared my meandering but fulfilling engagement with a feminist film made possible because of these other texts that I had previously read.

To anyone but us cinephiles, this may sound vague. But then, newer, unestablished ways of viewing and critiquing constantly sound vague and problematic.

There is a spate of 'women-centric' films being made. Some of these, under the veneer of appropriately ticked boxes of Bechdel tests, representations, and politically correct pronouns, are, at best, ordinary, at worst, dangerous. Criticism also bearing boxes and objective lists will no longer be enough. Feminist film criticism will have to find newer methodologies which allow subjectivities, maybe even a bit of meandering and crossing of borders between texts, and diffuse but profound thought.

And that 1956 short story by Friedrich Durrenmatt called "Die Panne" (English translation "Traps.")? Did it get adapted in Indian Cinema? Yes, it did! In Kannada, it is called Male Nilluvavarage (2015), Bengali is called Anusandhan (2021), and Hindi is called *Chehre* (2021). The Amitabh Bachchan starrer *Chehre* seems to be almost an exact adaptation. But then, that is another story. Or, more precisely, those are separate stories.

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