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A comparative study on the adaptation of the characters in the Sinhala film "Ekamath Eka Rateka" based on the French short story "Pour une nuit d'amour"

R. M. Sewmini Rathnayake Manike

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Author:

R. M. Sewmini Rathnayake Manike
Lecturer (Temporary),
Department of Languages,
Faculty of Social sciences and humanities,
Rajarata University of Sri Lanka,
Mihintale,
Email: sewmimrathnayake@gmail.com

මුද්‍රාපද:

ප්‍රංශ කෙටිකතා, සිනමාව, සංසන්දනය,
පරිවර්තනය, සිංහල චිත්‍රපටි

සංක්ෂිප්තය

එම්ල් සෝලා විසින් රචනා කරන ලද "pour une nuit d'amour"(1883) නම් ප්‍රංශ කෙටිකතාව, එහි සිංහල සිනමාත්මක අනුවර්තනය වන "එකමත් එක රටක" නම් සිංහල චිත්‍රපටය සමඟ සන්සන්දනය කිරීම මෙම පර්යේෂණයේදී සිදු කෙරේ. පර්යේෂණ ගැටලුව වන්නේ මුල් කෙටිකතාවට සාපේක්ෂව චිත්‍රපටයෙහි දක්නට ලැබෙන වෙනස්කම් මොනවාද යන්නයි. කෙටිකතාවෙහි එන චරිත සිනමා අධ්‍යක්ෂවරයා විසින් තිරයට අනුගත කරනු ලැබ ඇත්තේ කෙසේද යන්න හා එම චරිත තිරය මත ප්‍රතිනිර්මාණය කිරීමේදී මෙම වෙනස්කම් සිදු කිරීමට හේතු වූ කරුණු අනාවරණය කිරීම මෙම අධ්‍යයනයෙන් අරමුණ වේ. ඒ සඳහා අධ්‍යක්ෂවරයා සමඟ සිදු කළ සම්මුඛ සාකච්ඡාවක් හරහා දත්ත රැස් කරගනු ලැබේ. ඒ අනුව අධ්‍යක්ෂවරයා විසින් ශ්‍රී ලාංකික ප්‍රේක්ෂකයන්ට ගැළපෙන සහ තේරුම්ගත හැකි වන පරිදි චරිත සඳහා උපායමාර්ගික වෙනස්කම් කිහිපයක් සිදු කරනු ලැබ ඇති බව හඳුනා ගත හැකිය.

Introduction

The process of adaptation goes back to antiquity. The sculptures and the paintings on the porches of Roman and Gothic cathedrals are created based on the themes taken from the Bible. This phenomenon has spread over the centuries with the emergence of new artistic genres. The principle at the heart of this practice is: something that inspires something else. With the advent of cinema, adaptation takes on a new dimension. The filmmakers considered literature as an appropriate source to adapt on the screen.

Sri Lankan filmmakers also had inspiration from foreign literature. "Pour une nuit d'amour" (1883) is a short story written by the French writer Émile Zola. This short story has been adapted for the world cinema on several occasions by several filmmakers. Sri Lankan director and actor Sanath Gunathilake also made a movie titled "Ekamath Eka Rateka" (Once Upon a Time) in 2009 based on this short story. He offers a new interpretation on the short story from his point of view as a Sri Lankan.

This research gives me an opportunity to understand the movement from page to screen. It also allows me to take advantage of my passion for French literature and to improve my knowledge in French language. Besides, I have the opportunity to value the Sri Lankan culture, my native country and the Sinhala language which is my mother tongue. Several reasons persuaded me to do a study on the film "Ekamath Eka Rateka". At first, I find little discussion about this film although it is a fascinating film in the history of Sri Lankan cinema. Secondly, I saw that the majority of the Sri Lankan audience couldn't get the film and they called it boring and a failure. Sivakumaran said that:

Sanath Gunathilaka's Ekamath Eka Rateka - dubbed as 'Once Upon a Time' in English based on Emile Zola's 'For a night of love' - is not an intelligent movie. Nor is it a standard movie. It doesn't have a specific story line (so don't worry I have nothing to kill your appetite on the film). It has neither start nor end. It just flows out. (Daily News.lk, 2009)

Thirdly, this film offers a different interpretation of the original short story that paves the way for a research. These reasons led me to do a research about this film. The objective of this research is to address the changes depicted in the characters of the film and to find the reasons for which the filmmaker made these changes. The research is based on the problem: How the director has adapted the characters of the short story in the screen?

The methodology followed for this research is qualitative. The technique of the data analysis is descriptive and comparative. The primary sources are the short story and its film version. The research followed several stages. In the first place, the researcher read the short story and watched the film several times to understand their contents. In the second place, the characters of both versions were identified. As the third step, the researcher studied how the above characters are represented in the short story and the film. This made it easier to categorize the significant changes of the film in relation to the short story. Fourthly, an interview was carried out with the director of the film in order to have in-depth knowledge about the film and to find out the reasons behind the changes he made in the making of the film. Sri Lankan culture is also studied for a better interpretation of the movie. By investigating the data collected during the interview as well as the knowledge acquired through resources related to film adaptation, the researcher gives a deep discussion about changes of the characters that are observed in the Sinhalese film adaptation.

Results and discussions

In this section, the researcher analyses the significant changes undergone by the characters of the Sinhala film “Ekamath Eka Rateka” during their adaptation on the screen in relation to its original work “Pour une nuit d’amour”.

The adaptation of the characters on the screen

The main element in a fiction or a movie is the characters. During the adaptation process from fiction to cinema, the characters undergo changes. The changes of the characters in the movie “Ekamath Eka Rateka” with respect to the short story "Pour une nuit d’amour" are discussed below. The characters are divided into three categories: main characters, secondary characters and the characters invented by the filmmaker.

The adaptation of the main characters on the screen

By observing the characters in the film, we discovered that Gunathilake has included all the main characters of the short story "Pour une nuit d’amour". There are three main characters; Julien, Thérèse and Colombel. The filmmaker hasn’t named the characters in the film. Reminding us of the interview we had with Gunathilake, we learned the fact that this strategy allowed him to make these characters universal: they could have been born anywhere in the world at an indefinite time. To make our analysis more consistent, we decided to use the names of the characters used by Zola in the short story.

Julien

In the short story Julien's appearance is described as follows;

“Grand, fort, osseux, Julien avait de grosses mains qui le gênaient. Il se sentait laid, la tête carrée et comme laissée à l’état d’ébauche sous le coup de pouce d’un sculpteur trop rude ; et cela le rendait timide, surtout quand il y avait des demoiselles. [...] Dehors, les bras ballants, le dos voûté, la tête basse, il faisait de longues enjambées, pour rentrer plus vite dans son ombre. [...] Et cette vie ne pesait point à ses larges épaules”. (p.4)

“Elle sembla un instant l’étudier dans ses gros os, dans son corps énorme et mal ébauché, dans toute sa laideur de géant timide”. (p.13)

(Julien was big, strong with big bones. Julien had large hands which hampered him. He felt ugly. His head was square shaped as if left rough under the nudge of a too rude sculptor; and that made him shy, especially when there were young ladies. [...] His arms were dangling, his back was hunched, his head bowed, he took long strides, to retreat more quickly into his shadow. [...] And this life did not weigh on his broad shoulders.) (p.4)¹

(She seemed to study him for a moment. His big bones, his huge body which is badly outlined, in all its ugliness of a timid giant.) (p.13)

It seems that the character of Julien in the film does not correspond exactly to the description of the short story. Although Julien is described as a robust person using a lexical field of the largeness in the short story, he doesn’t have an extraordinary large figure in the film. He is of normal size. In fact, his face is mutilated by deformed dentures. He walks awkwardly. He limps while walking. There is the notion that Julien feels ugly and is shy in result. He walks quickly with his head down. According to the director of the film, it is impossible to create a very large man by makeup. As a result, he has decided to replace Julien's extraordinary size with dentures that deforms his face and by a lame walk.

In the short story, Julien appears to be a sentimentally lethargic person, unable to feel the slightest passion in life. “Il semblait s’être résigné à vieillir de la sorte, sans une camaraderie, sans une amourette, avec ses goûts de moine cloîtré.” (p.4) (He seemed to have accepted to grow old, without a companionship, without a lover, with his tastes of cloistered monk.) The reader cannot guess his sexual desires. Nevertheless in the film we

¹ Translated by the researcher

see his desire for women. Within the first 15 minutes of the film, there is a scene where he looks with a smile at a poster with the title 'Cave Girl Island' which features images of naked women. Spectators can therefore guess his sexual urge towards women.

In the short story, Julien is presented as a very strong person.

"Julien était d'une force de taureau. Tout jeune, dans la forêt voisine de son village, il s'amuse à aider les bûcherons, il chargeait des troncs d'arbre sur son échine d'enfant. Aussi portait-il le petit Colombel aussi légèrement qu'une plume. C'était un oiseau sur son cou, ce cadavre d'avorton". (p.34)

(Julien was as strong as a bull. In the forest near his village, he had fun helping the loggers; he loaded tree trunks on his back. So he loaded little Colombel so lightly than a feather. It was a bird on his neck, that dead runt.)

However in the film he is portrayed as a weak person suffering from back pain. When he walks with his friend, he often gasps and rests. He says to his friend "Le médecin m'a dit que c'est bon de marcher. Je guérirai vite. Quelquefois, je sens une douleur insupportable. J'ai mal à marcher." (French subtitles: Time: 00.26.58) (The doctor told me its okay to walk. I will heal quickly. Sometimes I feel an unbearable pain. I have trouble walking.) However, it can be argued how it is possible that a man who has back pain and who walks with difficulty carry the corpse of a man.

Thérèse

Thérèse is the young girl who lives in front of Julien's apartment. She is described as follows in the short story;

"Une jeune fille était venue s'accouder, et elle demeurait là, elle découpait sa mince silhouette, levait la tête comme pour prêter l'oreille [...] Il ne pouvait distinguer le visage de la jeune fille, il ne voyait que le flot de ses cheveux, déjà dénoués sur son cou. Et une voix légère lui arriva au milieu du silence." (p.9)

"Elle semblait réfléchir, très grande, très pâle, la face belle et régulière [...] Elle avait surtout une bouche un peu grande, d'un rouge vif, et des yeux profonds, noirs et sans éclat, qui lui donnaient un air de reine cruelle." (p.11)

(A young girl came and lean on her elbows. She stayed there, she had a slim figure, raised her head as if to listen [...] He could not distinguish the face of the young girl, he only saw her hair, already untied on her neck. And a light voice came to him in the middle of the silence.)

(She seemed to be thinking. Very tall, very pale, her face was beautiful and regular [...] She mostly had a rather large, a bright red mouth and deep, black eyes which lack luster, which gave her the air of a cruel queen.)

In the film too, she has a slim figure. She is a beautiful girl and fair in color. She seems thoughtful and also talks in a low voice. According to the short story, “elle était gourmande, elle mangeait du matin au soir des bonbons, qu’elle suçait les yeux demi clos, avec un petit frisson de ses lèvres rouges.” (p.21) (she was greedy, she ate candies from morning to night, she sucked the candies with her eyes half closed, with a little shiver of her lips red.) Yet it seems that this characteristic of the girl which is an important detail showing the sensual side of the girl is not seen in the film.

Zola emphasizes the ambiguous personality of Thérèse. She is very decent in appearance “À l’église, elle demeurerait abîmée, son front entre les mains. Dans la maison, elle mettait un parfum d’innocence et de paix.” (p.21) (In church, she was pious, her forehead between the hands. In the house, she smelled the innocence and peace) However in the film it is difficult to identify her ambiguous personality and the mask she wears to appear innocent. The filmmaker creates an indecent girl from the beginning of the film. For example, at a party in her house, she drinks a bottle of Coke and wipes her mouth on the scarf of a guest which seems as an impolite gesture. In addition, she crosses her leg while dancing which makes a young man to fall down.

In the film, Thérèse is presented as a girl who speaks openly. She gives direct answers. This characteristic is very evident through the conversations in the film. When a young man who wishes to marry her asks, “Si je t’épouse, je serai ton mari. Qu’est-ce que tu attends de moi?”. Thérèse answers “Ben. Que tu sois un bon coup ! Oui. Qu’on baise avant chaque repas.” (French subtitles: Temps: 01.06.24) (If I marry you, I will be your husband. What do you want from me? ". Thérèse answers: (Good. May be you give a good fuck! Yes. That we fuck before each meal). In another instance, when Colombel apologizes after raping her she says, "Idiot, I have no regrets. Except having been under you during all that time! Understood?" (Time: 01.00.50) Due to these conversations, the character of Thérèse on the screen can be interpreted as a girl more vulgar and more sexualized than the image presented in the short story.

Colombel

Colombel is Thérèse's lover. In the short story Colombel is described as follows;

“Car ce Colombel, un garçon de vingt ans, aux yeux vifs, à la bouche méchante, avait longtemps été son ennemi”. (p.8)

"[...] le jour où il s'aperçut que l'avorton n'était pas laid de visage, une tête ronde de chat, mais très fine, jolie et diabolique, avec des yeux verts et une légère barbe frisée à son menton douillet". (p.14)

"Colombel, habillé comme les jeunes gens riches de la ville, l'accompagnait en battant la terre d'une canne souple qu'il portait toujours". (p.21)

(Because this Colombel, a boy in his twenties, with lively eyes, with a wicked mouth, had long been his enemy.)

[...] the day where he realized that the boy was not ugly, having a round head like a cat, but very thin, pretty and devilish, with green eyes and a light curly beard on his cozy chin.)

(Colombel, dressed like the rich young people in the city, he accompanied a flexible cane that he always carried beating the ground.)

The character of Colombel does not have green eyes in the film and he does not have a cane. However the rest of the description of the short story corresponds to the character in the film. In the film also Julien and Colombel have a disgusting relationship. They don't like each other and Colombel makes fun of Julien.

In the short story, Colombel is a notary's clerk. However, in the film, he is a lawyer by profession. The parents of Thérèse have paid for his studies. He is invited to the house of Marsanne and he is allowed to enter the house at any time. He is entrusted to give piano lessons to Thérèse. According to the director he gets all these opportunities because of his status as a lawyer. A lawyer has more respect than a clerk in the Sri Lankan society. So we observe an adaptation that suits the hopes Sri Lankan audience.

The adaptation of the secondary characters on the screen

According to the observations made on the characters of the film "Ekamath Eka Rateka," we found that Gunathilake included all of the secondary characters from the short story. Yet he replaced and invented some secondary characters. Moreover, it seems that the secondary characters are allowed more space and time to develop in the film compared to the short story.

The dumb

The dumb man is Julien's only friend. His name is not given in the short story. He appears only once in the narration of the short story. The director has replaced the dumb with a stutterer in the film. According to the director, if he used the character of a dumb person,

there will be no verbal communication between him and Julien. Communication with a dumb must be done visually in sign language. We cannot expect the spectators to know the sign language. Therefore the sign language must be interpreted using subtitles. The director said he doubted that it will be difficult for the spectators to follow the sign language and he decided to replace the dumb with a stutterer. Although he stammers, spectators can understand what he is saying. However the writer does not face this problem because the description of the gestures of a deaf person allows the reader to understand what he says.

Although the dumb is only mentioned once in the short story, he receives much more credit in the movie as he appears in several scenes. The two friends go for a walk on weekends. They go to the church. They play carrom in the bar. In the film he is depicted as a drunkard. He asks Julien whenever possible to go to the bar and to drink alcohol. Moreover, he tries to get involved with a prostitute. His behavior highlights the decency of Julien who does not consume alcohol and refuse the prostitute.

The kid who sells match boxes

In the short story, Zola refers to a girl who sells matchboxes to whom Julian gives money without taking the match boxes. "À la poste, on le plaisantait sur une gamine de dix ans, une fille en haillons qui vendait, pieds nus, des boîtes d'allumettes." (p.5) (At the post office, they were joking about a teen girl, a girl in rags and barefoot who sold boxes of matches.) This is the only description where the girl is mentioned in the short story. Zola's description creates the image of a poor little girl in rags and bare feet who is ten years old.

However, she acquires a more significant dimension in the film compared to the short story. The viewer can observe that she is a young girl of about 18 years old. There is no clue that she is poor. She wears nicely. We find that the director replaced the girl who sells boxes of matches by a girl selling flowers. Zola wrote the short story at the beginning of the 18th century where there was no electricity. Gunathilake adapted the short story to the screen at the start of the 21st century after the invention of the electricity in Sri Lanka, so there is no need for matchboxes. In addition, according to the director, due to his goal of making the characters in the film universal, he used the character of a girl selling flowers. The fact that Julian gives money to this girl in the short story and the movie highlights the sympathetic quality of Julian.

The dog

In the short story, Zola has mentioned that Julien had a dog. It has died because of an accident. The dog is just a memory. The dog which does not appear in the short story but only mentioned is brought back to life by the director in the film. The dog acquires a more iconic dimension in the film compared to the short story.

Julien treats the dog like a friend. Sometimes it is with the dog that Julien communicates in the film. For example: "Viens et écoute! Je te raconte ce qui s'est passé. Aujourd'hui à cause de toi, au magasin ils se sont disputés avec moi." (French subtitles: Time: 00.21.04) Julien says to the dog after coming to his room from the office (Come and listen! I will tell you what happened. Today because of you, at the store they argued with me.

It is with the dog that he enjoys life. There is a scene in the movie where he listens to music and dances with the dog. Julien feeds the dog as if it's a child. He walks with the dog and that is a part of his monotonous life. He and the dog sleep in the same bed. However the dog dies after crashing into the garbage truck in the movie. (Time: 09/01/49) Julien is shocked by the dog's death. He asks for the corpse of the dog. According to the director, he used the dog to reveal Julien's good qualities. By society's standard, this man is considered a "good" and "innocent" person because he treats animals nicely. The director wanted to present that although Julien has an ugly face, he has a beautiful heart. The notion of the society is that a man who loves animals would also like humans. Has he not thrown away his veneer of innocence, kindness and politeness when trying to achieve his sexual desire? Or is there a demon inside him in disguise? The filmmaker used the dog to show this truth about the human nature.

The dog's name is Good girl. He belongs to the breed of Labrador. In Sri Lankan society, pets act as symbols of social class. Owning a Labrador symbolizes high social status. However Julien is an ordinary clerk who lives alone. This makes the situation unrealistic. The director mentioned during the interview that he chose this dog for two reasons. First, this dog corresponds to Julien's size and secondly it was easy for him to play with it because it was well trained.

The characters invented in the film

By observing the characters of the movie "Ekamath Eka Rateka", the researcher discovered that the filmmaker added the character of a prostitute who does not exist in the short story. She appears in several scenes throughout the film.

The prostitute

The intention of a prostitute is to have a sexual intercourse with men in exchange of a payment. What is important for the prostitute is money despite the physical appearance of the man with whom she is having the sexual intercourse. Julien could easily have a sexual relationship with her. Meanwhile the prostitute tries to seduce him, he gets scared and escapes. (Time: 00.23.22) Yet spectators have previously seen Julien's sexual desire in the film towards women. (Already discussed on page 6) According to the filmmaker, he

invented this character of the prostitute because he wanted to show Julien's fear of women despite his sexual desire towards them. Moreover he wanted to show the change of Julien: a man who was afraid of women, who refused prostitutes suddenly changes after seeing a beautiful girl and start to love her even without thinking about his looks, age or financial situation.

Conclusion

"Ekamath Eka Rateka" is the Sinhalese film adaptation of the French short story "Pour une nuit d'amour". As stated in the introduction, the objective of this research was to discover the changes in the film versus the original short story and find the reasons why the filmmaker made these changes while focusing on the Sri Lankan culture depicted in the film. The observations drawn from this study can be summarized as follows. The director included all the main characters present in the short story. However, he modified these characters as well as he invented some more characters. The director toned down their representation on the screen to suit the Sri Lankan audience.

All the above observations together, allow us to understand that the literature and film are two different ways of expression. The novel is controlled by the author while the meaning of a movie is the result of a collaborative effort. The film is the result from the point of view of a filmmaker or screenwriter. Therefore, converting a book into a film causes changes. In addition, the cinematographic representation of foreign literature causes cultural changes to match to the target audience. Although "Ekamath Eka Rateka" is an adaptation of a French short story, it doesn't reveal its original source thus preventing to establish a link between the two works. The short story "Pour une nuit d'amour" is reshaped and changed in different ways for different reasons by the director during the film adaptation. In conclusion, the new approaches to film adaptation studies can assess how the social, political and economic context affects the adaptation from the page to the screen. It allows a life extended and more enriched value to a literary work, especially when it is an adaptation from a distant land. It is the hope that this research will enable other researchers to explore in depth the areas offered here.

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