

## “And Then There Were None” to “Gumnaam”: Critical Review of the Literary Adaptation

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**Abstract:** Agatha Christie’s novels are widely praised throughout the world. Be it “The Man in the Brown Suit”, “The Secret of Chimneys”, “The Mysterious Mr. Quin”, “The Hound of Death”, “The Murder at the Vicarage”, “Sleeping Murder”, and many other in line. Among other foreign writers, Christie too has managed to occupy a significant space in almost every part of the globe including the subcontinent of India. With the passage of time the literary adaptation of novels into different mediums of art is becoming more frequent. This trend has not left any part of the world untouched. As the time passes by the plant of this trend is grooming new flowers of great creations. In order to develop a better understanding of this subject-cum-trend this research studies various dimensions and perspectives related to it. It evaluates the literary adaptation of Agatha’s “And Then There Were None” in context of the Bollywood movie “Gumnaam”. The parametres or elements invoked for the research will be point of view, narrative, foreshadowing, conflict, setting, plot, character, motif, and theme.

**Keywords:** Literary adaptation, cinematic adaptation, adaptation, film, and transmutation.

### Introduction

Whenever a viewer watches a film and begins to like it suddenly the fact that it is adapted from a novel of so and so writer raises variety of questions in his mind. In general, the basic question which penetrates first in the minds of viewers is “Why”.

Is there any scarcity of good script writers in the field of cinema? If not, then why? This question “why” deals with the aspects of cultural status and economics. Literature in every part of the world is hailed high by the people. In most of the countries around the globe people regard

literature with reverence. The best example to serve this point could be seen when a movie (adapted from literature) suddenly finds itself surrounded with discussions of fidelity by its expectors.

“Discussion of adaptation has been bedeviled by the fidelity issue, no doubt ascribed in part to the novel’s coming first, in part to the ingrained sense of literature’s greater respectability in traditional critical circles” (McFarlane, 1996). These lines convey the prominence of literature in terms of status. So by playing gamble directors take the risky chance of literary adaptation of a classical work into a film, just on the presumption that popularity of a novel would bring popularity to its adaptation into film. And it’s no joke.

The list of Oscar winners of the year 2019 have listed five of the twenty-two winning films that are based on books/novels. Therefore, movies ensure huge amount of money through literary adaptation because the concept of cultural status and economics goes hand in hand.

Right from Dev Anand’s *Guide* (based on R K Narayan’s book by the same name) to Vishal Bharadwaj’s *Maqbool*, *Omkara*, *Haider* (adapted from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Hamlet* respectively), in Hindi film industry, a large number of films have been literary adaptations. Bharadwaj has now teamed up with Agatha Christie Limited to adapt some of her books into Hindi films. Published on November 6, 1939, *And Then There Were None* was first named *Ten Little Niggers* after the children’s counting rhyme and minstrel song which is an interesting element of the plot. The book was subsequently named *And Then There Were None* but continues to sell as *Ten Little Niggers* in Russian and Spanish. Called by Christie the most difficult book to write, *And Then There Were None* proved to be a blockbuster by selling more than 100 million copies (Chhibber, 2019). It tells the story of 10 strangers who die one by one as detailed in the counting rhyme.

Christie’s blockbuster has been adapted into a play, a serial, and several films in Hollywood and Bollywood. In 1943, four years after the publication of the novel, Christie herself adapted the story into a play. But to ward off the gloom perpetrated by the Second World War, she tweaked its ending into happier one. Two years later, Rene Clair adapted it into a black and white film which again had an upbeat ‘The End’. In 1965, there came two films based on the murder mystery/horror, Raja Nawathe’s *Gumnaam*, and George Pollock’s *Ten Little Indians*. Nawathe never credited his film to the novel and made wholesale changes in the plot to make it an entertainer with music, songs, comedy, and romance. Peter Collinson’s *And Then There Were*

None, set in a plus hotel in Iran, came after these. Alan Birkinshaw's *Ten Little Indians*, released in 1989, was set in a safari in Africa. The last English adaptation of the novel happened in England when British Broadcasting Corporations (BBC) converted it into a television series helmed by Craig Viveiros in 2015. The book has been adapted on silver screen in Tamil, Kannada, German, Russian, Japanese and Italian.

Released in 1965, *Gumnaam* proved to be a hit figuring in the top ten grossers of the year. Made with a budget of Rs.5 lakh, the film, the film grossed Rs.2.60 crore worldwide (box-office, 2021). Though it drew the main plot from *And Then There Were None*, it never acknowledged it and tweaked the story in a big way to give it a happy ending and include songs and dances. Music contributed majorly to the success of the film and also popularized it across the world. The film's first song 'Jaan Pehchan ho' (Let's get to know each other), picturised on Laxmi Chhaya, Herman Benjamin, Ted Lyons and His Cubs and sung by Mohammed Rafi, figured in the opening sequence of 2001 Scarlett Johansson movie *Ghost World*. Shankar Jaikishan's music fit into this rock and roll dance number like a tee. The title song of the movie *Gumnaam Hai Koi* was copied from Henry Mancini's theme song 'When we played our charade' in *Charade*, a 1963 American romantic comedy.

## Review of Literature

In the ecosystem of new creations there are many movies which were later transmuted into novels. The notable creations are "Conan the Barbarian", "The Deer Hunter", "The Empire Strikes Back", and many others in line. The same transmutation could be seen from novels to movies. Some of the exceptional works are "The Wizard of Oz", "Little Women", and "To Kill a Mocking Bird" etc. The cross influences and associations of these two mediums of creation are quite evident by the above mentioned inter-changes. Among many academicians the literary adaptation of novels to films and how far the adaptation stood up to the expectations of audience, are widely and thoroughly discussed. But there is no consensus of scholars on this subject. There were and are many renowned personalities who shared their negative and positive notions on the concerned issue.

Acclaimed writer Virginia Woolf described the use of novels as a source text for movies as disastrous. According to her article "The Cinema", originally published in the *New York Journal of Arts*, "The cinema fell upon its prey (novels) with immense rapacity, and to the moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both. The alliance is unnatural." (Woolf, 1926, p.1) Thereafter it leaves a negative impression of the practice

of literary adaptation to films. But on the other side of the spectrum there are scholars like Rudolph Arnheim who in his book *Film as Art* argues vigorously for the differentiation of film forms and styles from other literary and pictorial practices (Corrigan, 2007). Arnheim thus urges people to perceive cinema as an independent art form, though at times it uses literary works as source texts and sometimes as an inspiration by reshaping the theme of the literary work in order to create a new piece out of it. Discussions and deliberations around this subject also take into account the parameters of evaluating a literary adaptation, theories in this field, and reasons behind following this trend. Mohammad Tariq believes that translation of a literary work into a film is more than adaptation. “It is not only an adaptation but a recreation and re-description of the reality that is out there. It is purely original. By this act we reach from pages onto the screen. Some times the translation of any text from source language to target language is easier than making a film. In making a film we have to give a code to every word in an image form and thus the reader has to recreate the same meaning as it is with the word. In this process image language becomes the medium of communication” (Tariq, 2014). Tariq believes that conversion of a literary work into a film boosts its popularity. “Many people now watch the films first and then read the text or the story later. There always remains the importance of any recreator of the text, I mean the filmmaker and the actual writer of any text because till the time a story or novel is buried only in pages, paper or in books has only an identity of its writer, but whenever the same thing is transformed or translated in a form and comes from pages onto the screen then it acquires a new identity along with its Director, the film-maker and the actor as well” (Tariq, 2014). Tariq’s research helps one understand why, how, and what films add and subtract from the literature.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

**Theoretical Framework** - In order to develop a deep understanding of the term literary adaptation, firstly we need to understand its literal definition. According to the Chicago School of Media Theory adaptation in context of media is defined as “An altered or amended version of a text, musical composition, etc., one adapted for filming, broadcasting or production on the stage from a novel or similar literary source.”

The term cinematic adaptation is referred by Belén Vidal Villasur as a memory-object of its source; herein literature (Alquadi, 2015). Literary adaptation of a novel into film can be evaluated or examined through various elements of both the mediums such as theme, character, plot, narrative, and conflict etc. Along with the development of this term “literary adaptation”, there are many theories proposed by many theorists of the concerned field. Hence the focus of the research is on the evaluation of the literary adaptation of Agatha’s “And Then There Were None”

into the Hindi movie “Gumnaam” on the basis of the elements of both mediums. After evaluation of this adaptation the study will put the configuration of its findings under an appropriate category of the literary adaptation theory proposed by Geoffrey Wagner (Wagner, G.A. 1975).

**HYPOTHESIS** - The type of hypothesis used in this research is alternative hypothesis, more commonly known as the research hypothesis. It is because the dependent variable (Movie) used in the research shares a relationship with the independent variable (Novel). The research has also used directional hypothesis because it predicts the nature of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. Thus the hypothesis of this research predicts that the literary adaptation of Agatha’s novel “And Then There Were None” into the Bollywood movie “Gumnaam” is loosely motivated and the adaptation fits best in the third type of adaptation category proposed under the adaptation theory by Geoffrey Atheling Wagner.

**Methodology** - The research is an amalgamation of pure and descriptive research. It underlines the distinctions of the elements of both the mediums (Novel and Movie) in context of adaptation. An appropriate evaluation of this literary adaptation would be made on the literal definitions of the elements of both the means of expression of art. The elements used in this study are- point of view, narrative, foreshadowing, conflict, setting, plot, character, motif, and theme. In this research both dependent (movie “Gumnaam”) and independent (novel “And Then There Were None”) variables are used to meet the research objectives.

It would be hard to evaluate the literary adaptation of all novels of the aforementioned writer in the Bollywood cinema. Therefore, the main focus of the evaluation will be only on one Bollywood movie which is inspired by Agatha’s novel “And Then There Were None”. The name of the movie is “Gumnaam”, directed by Raja Nawathe. The approach of the research is subjective in nature. The research would be largely based on the literary and theoretical framework.

## **Analysis**

**Semblance between the Novel and the Film in the Context of Literary Adaptation** - *Gumnaam* was released in 1965, and was directed by Raja Nawathe. The film is an adaptation of Agatha Christie’s remarkable and sensational novel “And Then There Were None”, published in the year of 1939. Here it is important to note that one (Novel) is published in the first half of the

20<sup>th</sup> Century, and the other (Film) is released in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. So in reference to time period both shares corresponding characteristics.

In the second scene of exposition part of the Movie we could see that seven people win a trip to some foreign land, and thus are exported to that strange location. Where except them there is no one around. The same sort of thing could be observed in the novel where different people are exported to the Soldier Island, on an unexpected personal invitation, in which they all are exposed to the same situation and circumstances, though a bit different in sense, as it was in the movie “Gumnaam”.

Characters of both the novel and the film share some similarities in characterization as well. Asha is similar to V.Z Claythorne in terms of her reflections on the ongoing events, which takes place at the location. Anand is similar to W.H Blore in terms of profession, both are police inspectors. Kitty Kelly is similar to V.E Claythorne in terms of profession, both are private secretaries. Dharamdas is similar to E.C Brent in terms of devotion to god. Acharya is similar to Armstrong in terms of profession, both are doctors. He too is tricked in the same manner by the killer as Dr. Armstrong is. Madhusudhan Sharma/Madanlal is similar to Justice Wargrave in respect to his wit and planning for killing others. He also, like W.H Blore, lives under a disguised identity among other occupants’ in the mansion. Even means of death are quite similar in the movie and the novel with one exception which would be unfolded in the next part of the research paper. Common means of killing the occupants of the mansion, of the novel and the film, are gunshot, poison, axe and noose.

Motif of both the mediums of expression of art is similar and that is confusion. Even they share same minor theme and that is the murder of the occupants of the mansion. Third person point of view is used in both of them. The type of conflicts are same in both the mediums of representation and that is - who is the murderer (Internal Conflict), and who’s next to be killed (External Conflict). The element of foreshadow has also manifested its presence in both of them. In the novel the old man on the train warns Mr. Blore of the approach of justice, and in the movie the anchor of the Princess Club conveys the upcoming danger through his ambiguous tone of voice at the closing sentence of his announcement of the lucky winners.

**Distinctions between the two creations in the context of Literary Adaptation** - Like similarities the adaptation has distinctions too. But the distinctions which would be mentioned further in the ongoing research paper are of far more importance in terms of deciding the category of this literary adaptation under G.A Wagner’s theory of literary adaptation.

The most significant difference could be noticed in the major theme of these two creations. The major theme of Agatha's novel "And Then There None" is Justice, whereas the movie "Gumnaam" has revenge as its major theme.

In reference to character establishment, the movie did not live up to the expectations of its respecters. This is in contrast to the novel. In Agatha's novel, the setting of the whole story is mentioned in a very detailed manner. The best evidence of this is the details of the island and time. Through the words of Emily Brent-"This same week of August four years ago", the time-frame of the setting could be easily understood. Unlike novel the movie is not successful in respect to detailing. Neither the description of the place where the characters are exported to, nor the time-frame of the year of trip is mentioned.

Other major difference could be easily noticed in the characterization. The novel only has one type of characters which is protagonist. On the other hand the movie has both, protagonist and antagonist. The novel and the film are also apart at some length in respect to narrative. The narrative of the novel is both chronological (In terms of death of the occupants of the mansion according to the nursery rhyme "Ten Little Soldiers") and deductive (Because all occupants of the house are murderers and so is Justice Wargrave). Whereas in the movie you could notice only chronological type of narrative.

According to the plot, as one of the important elements of observation in the research, the movie has a lot of action and romance and the novel does not have so. Concerning the means of killing of the characters again the movie come up with a new one, and that is knife along with gunshot, poison, axe, and noose. Even in means of exporting the characters to the location where all this action takes place, the novel used boat and film used airplane as a means of transportation. The last, but most interesting difference is in the ending of both the creations of art. The novel ends on a negative note with no one alive at the end. Whereas the movie ends on a positive note with five characters alive at the end, including the murderer. "The source novel has a relentless sense of foreboding, characters with solid back stories, and a pessimistic ending. However, no grey cells appear to have been used by screenwriter Dhruva Chatterjee and dialogue writer Charandas Shokh for the Hindi version. Gumnaam has a filmsy plot, unclear motivations and weak characters, but is a lot of fun thanks to Mehmood and song sequences featuring Helen." (Ghosh, 2019). Unlike Christie's book where all characters are fleshed out and have multi-faceted personalities, Gumnaam does not even reveal much about characters other than Rakesh (Pran), a criminal lawyer, Acharya (Madan Puri), a doctor, and Dharamdas (Dhumal), a god-fearing man.

“The rest do not get any professions unlike in Christie’s novel, where each character is armed with a past, present, and personality.” (Ghosh, 2019).

**Inadequacies in the Movie in the Context of Literary Adaptation** - The movie “Gumnaam” has some inadequacies apart from literary adaptation. If the movie is viewed as an independent work of art, it could be noticed that there are things that does not fit well due to the lack of proper reasons and information.

The first in this queue is why it is written in the black diary (found out by Dharamdas) that people who are present in the mansion are associated with a crime, because Anand is not. Even butler and his sister are not associated with any crime. The other is the insufficiency of adequate information related to the place (some foreign land) which all seven people win trip of. The next in line is why murderer Madanlal spares butler and his sister, and how the murderer could actually commit such a grave mistake because later it proves fatal for him. Following the queue of inadequacies the next is the unavailability of full name of the characters like Dr. Acharya, his first name is not mentioned in the movie as if he does not deserve to have one. The same problem could be noticed with the name of other characters too. The climatic part of the movie “Gumnaam” is too fast to be conceived by a viewer in relation to its other parts. The last shortcoming of the movie, if watched as an independent form of art is, in the end how the police know that now it is their turn to enter the scene. In case Anand intimated them (police) then how he did it. Hence the movie does not furnish its viewers with adequate amount of information which is necessary to fill the gaps aforementioned.

## **Conclusion**

After taking into consideration all the evaluated points of the literary adaptation of Agatha’s “And Then There Were None” into movie “Gumnaam” along with other aspects, the research has reached to a conclusion. So for conclusion a recall of the problem statement of this research is needed and that is- “In the adaptation theory proposed by Geoffrey Atheling Wagner under which category this literary adaptation comes”

Moving forward, Wagner’s theory has three categories- transposition, commentary, and analogy. In transposition, a work of literature is directly transmuted on screen with minimum of apparent interference. In commentary, an original story is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some manner. In analogy, there is a considerable departure from the



source text for the sake of making another piece of art. After critical analysis and evaluation of the elements of both the mediums of art, based on parameters of evaluation for this research study, this literary adaptation comes under the analogy part of G.A Wagner's theory. It is because of results of the evaluation. There are five differences noted in the parameters of evaluation in both the expressions of art that are of significant importance. One major difference, which puts this literary adaptation under the third category of Wagner's theory, is the theme of the story. The major theme of the novel is justice, and the major theme of the film is revenge. Therefore it is evident that the novel is used merely as a source text for the movie in order to create a new piece of art out of it. Besides all this, the research has also shed some light on how the concept of literary adaptation is being used as a key strategic business for money making.

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