Chapter Five

Conclusion

Studying the relationship between various art forms like literature and film of different languages or era has acquired much importance in present times. This approach to arts has opened up a specific area of study which commenced as comparative literature which was later extended to incorporate art forms like cinema, painting and music over various cultures and periods. A comparative study of arts embraces a broad range of methodologies and subjects and focuses on texts, genres, themes and cross-cultural treatment of specific issues. According to Susan Bassnett the comparative approach involves “the study of texts across cultures, that is interdisciplinary and that is concerned with patterns of connection” in various arts across both time and space (1).

Translation Studies is a major offshoot of comparative study of arts. A comparative study of the two referential systems (the particular linguistic and cultural systems of the source text and the target text) helps us to comprehend “the translated version of the text with reference to the translator’s reading strategies, degree of objectivation, the extent to which the general is modified or replaced by the specific and the type of bilingualism” (Choudhuri 150). According to Roman Jakobson, adaptation of literary text to film falls under the category of intersemiotic translation. Thus, the study of adaptation as translation apparently falls within the scope of comparative study of arts. Comparing and contrasting the literary text and filmic text is a major concern of the adaptation. Appropriation of literary texts to a foreign cultural context elaborates the scope of this approach. Therefore, comparing the adaptation styles employed by Akira Kurosawa and
Francis Ford Coppola, who hail from two different traditions of filmmaking would be worthy of study.

Comparative study has identified areas of critical inquiry with which it is deeply concerned: influences and analogies; movements and trends; genres and forms; and motifs, types and themes. The films of Kurosawa and Coppola open up the prospect of studying the influence, genre and thematic study between themselves and with the filmmakers of both western and eastern traditions. The fact that brings these influential filmmakers together is that both were frequent adaptors from literature to film. Some of his most discussed films like *Rashomon*, *Throne of Blood*, *Ran* and *The Lower Depths* were adaptations of Akutagawa, Shakespeare, and Maxim Gorky respectively. Similarly, Coppola adapted Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby* as a writer, and directed film adaptations of Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather*, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, S E Hinton’s *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*, and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.

Kurosawa was brought up on the traditions of western filmmakers like D W Griffith, Sergei Eisensten, Charles Chaplin, John Ford, Jean Renoir, Luis Bunuel, Fritz Lang and Josef von Sternberg. Influence or rather intertexts of these film makers are clearly visible in his films. He was an admirer of the silent film of early period and he believed it to be superior to the sound when he remarked, “they are often so much more beautiful than sound pictures are. Perhaps they have to be” (Richie, Kurosawa on Kurosowa 112)”. Eisensten’s theory and practice of montage was major influence on Kurosawa’s film-making, the reason why Stephen Prince calls Kurosawa as “the direct heir of Eisenstein in so far as he
returned the shot change to its true function as a visible, avowed parameter of filmic discourse” (21).

John Ford’s westerns was another major influence in Kurosawa’s stylistics, which he ingrained in the samurai films like *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Yojimbo* (1961) *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), *Kagemusha* (1980) and *Ran* (1985). *Ran* (1985) is particularly important in that he used the barren slopes of Mount Fuji to assimilate a Western like landscape similar to John Ford’s Monument Valley. What Kurosawa acquired from the western cinema was returned when Kurosowa’s film texts became an inspiration for a host of talented western film makers like Francis Ford Coppola, Sergio Leone, Martin Scorsese and George Lucas. Coppola’s *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*, Sergio Leone’s films in the Dollar trilogy are homage to Kurosawa’s films. The initial war sequence in *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* is clearly designed from Kurosawa’s war scenes in *Kagemusha* (1980).

A Graduate of UCLA Film School, Francis Ford Coppola’s primary influence, like Kurosawa was also Sergei Eisenstien. Another major influence in his career was Roger Corman with whom he assisted for several films. Coppola’s *Dracula* is inspired from his collaborations with Corman’s Edgar Allan Poe films. Coppola’s first film *Dementia 13* (1963) was a horror film heavily influenced by his mentor. Orson Welles and Stanley Kubrick were other influences during this period. *The Great Gatsby* (1974), in which he worked as a screenwriter was the launching pad for Coppola’s great career in film adaptation. Though *The Godfather* (1972) was an adaptation of Mario Puzo’s novel of same name, the signature of the director was evident in the film, owing to the style of filmmaking
he adopted in the film. Some of the most discussed films in his career were adaptations of literary works.

In the style of adaptation, Kurosawa and Coppola followed a style distinctive of their own. In selecting the texts for adaptation, Kurosowa selected the books he was very fond of reading in his youth. Some of the authors who influenced him during his youth were Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Ryunosuke Akutagawa, Shakespeare, Maxim Gorky, Edgar Allan Poe et al. Among the works of these writers Kurosowa filmed Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*, Akutagawa’s *Rashomon*, Shakespeare’s *Macbeth, King Lear and Hamlet*, and Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths*. Though Studios financed these productions, as an artist, Kurosawa had personal notions about these texts, which contributed much to the adaptations. Except for *The Idiot*, all other films are true to the medium of film. Kurosawa’s adaptations of Shakespeare and Maxim Gorky are regarded as classics not because of their commitment to the source text, but owing to their brilliance as cinema.

Kurosawa’s adaptation of the western texts can be categorized under appropriation, in which the source text is moved to a different linguistic and cultural setting. Kurosawa’s films are not often acknowledged as the adaptation of a particular source text. Instead, they are capable of staying independent as films based on original screenplays. *Throne of Blood* (1957), *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and *Ran* (1985) are examples. In these films, the intertextual link with the source text is embedded within the filmic text, the knowledge of which helps to enhance the signification of the film. Kurosawa’s skill lies in the careful substitution of the codes of the source text with similar codes in the target text. Moreover,
Kurosawa’s filmic text abounds in several other Japanese intertexts like Kabuki-Noh plays, music, painting, martial arts, Buddhism. *Ran* is not only based on *King Lear*, but also on the Japanese legend of Motonari Mori. Still, its intertextual link with *King Lear* adds to the dimension of the film. The presence of several intertexts in the film along with the literary intertext asserts the polyphony of the text.

*The Idiot* (1951) and *The Lower Depths* (1957), are appropriations but it acknowledges its source texts by its title. However, the method of appropriation remains the same. By transposing the story of Dostoyevsky’s *The Idiot* in post-war Japan, Kurosawa probes the Japanese social scenario in the war torn Japan. Hokkaido, the place where he set the story seems quite appropriate as it is near to Russia and shares many of its geographical features. Cultural appropriations can be seen in the scene where the characters exchange the charms. The exchange of crucifix between the protagonists in the source text is substituted by the exchange of Buddhist charms which is an example of Kurosawa’s style of appropriating culture. Similar method of appropriation is employed in *The Lower Depths* too. Even when he follows the source text closely, he presents the play in a different light. Thus Kurosawa’s personal vision is brought out powerfully with his mastery of the medium of cinema, rather than depending upon the literary text.

Contrary to the adaptation strategy employed by Kurosawa, Coppola’s films are adapted into the same linguistic and cultural context, except for *Apocalypse Now* (1979). Thus, Mario Puzo’s novel set in the mid-twentieth century America is transposed into film in the same cultural context. The critic who analyzes Coppola’s adaptation of Mario Puzo’s *The Godfather* based on the
transfer of the principal cardinal functions would find that it is a ‘faithful’ adaptation of the novel. However, a *mise-en-scene* analysis of the filmic text reveals that the film is unmistakably Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather*. Coppola grasps the story, characters and the motifs and re-imagines sequences quite different from the source text. The historic and cultural specificity is given more authenticity. Consequently, the novel, which is meant to be read as a thriller, is made into culturally, historically and aesthetically significant film. Thus, *The Godfather* redefined Hollywood’s approach towards popular cinema. Ever since, Coppola’s film has remained as an artistic and popular success.

*Godfather Part II* (1974), which was simultaneously a prequel and sequel to the previous film, was yet another unconventional adaptation. An episode in the novel is adapted into the prequel of the film, and an original story as the sequel. The original story is in fact logically re-imagined from the novel, hence it can be said that the whole film is adapted from the literary text. Another major intertext in the film is the history of the Italian immigrants in America. The film where the adaptation strategies of Kurosawa and Coppola converge is *Apocalypse Now* (1979), which is an appropriation. In this film, Coppola appropriates Conrad’s 1899 novella set in Congo to the war torn Vietnam. The condition in Congo in 1899 was similar to that of Vietnam during the American invasion, thereby rendering a contemporary relevance to the adaptation. It was same method of appropriation employed by Kurosowa in adapting *The Idiot*, *The Lower Depths* and *Ran*. *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992) is yet another creative adaptation by Coppola, where he alters the character function of the central characters and makes a gothic fiction into a tragic love story.
Kurosawa and Coppola employ methods of appropriation in adapting a foreign language text. Kurosowa’s Shakespearean adaptations and Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) are particular cases in point. In adapting texts from the native texts, their methods of adaptation are similar. In making *Rashomon* (1950), Kurosawa adapts two Japanese stories written by Ryunosuke Akutagawa named ‘In a Grove’ and ‘Rashomon’. He grasps the components of the story and re-imagines it cinematically. Even when following the events in the story accurately, Kurosawa and Coppola invent and interpret characters and events and render a film, which is true to the medium. Thus, Maxim Gorky’s gloomy play is interpreted as play of black humour and Bram Stoker’s horror fiction is interpreted as a tale of love and redemption.

Discourses on film adaptation generally attribute greater importance to the source text and treat the film as merely derivative, thus judging the film on the basis of fidelity to the literary text. As long as the film industry continue to rely on literature to supply the raw material, the various problems associated with adaptation will persist and critics will continue to judge a film on the basis of fidelity to the source. However, readers of literature themselves are interpreters who create their own personal ‘movies’ in their imagination. Similarly, when a filmmaker attempts to adapt a literary work into film, he incorporates his own personal vision and his insight into the source. This implies that the adaptation of any work of art from one medium to another is always a personal interpretation.

Following post-structural perspectives on adaptation, this thesis views adaptation as an intertextual activity and as critical interpretations of the source text. As traditional critical standards view written text as superior to the visual
text, ‘originality’ of the adaptation with respect to source text has always been questioned. Due to the claim of the originality of the source text, mainly because of its coming first, fidelity to the source text came to be regarded as a major yardstick to evaluate an adaptation. Therefore, in order to discard the insistence for fidelity to the source text, the myth about its originality should be destroyed. Post-structural notions of intertextuality do this by proving that “any text is an intertext” (Barthes 39). Intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva from Bakhtin’s dialogism, is the concept that every text depends on other texts to create their system of signification. Kristeva, in her essay, “The Bounded Text” (1980), emphasizes the notion by invoking examples from literature, arts and music. When we consider a film adaptation as an intertext, we acknowledge that the source text, too, is an intertext that depends on previous texts for the production of meaning. The source text maintains an intertextual relationship with its previous texts, which is same as the filmic text’s relationship with its source text. If adaptation is an intertext, the source text is also an intertext in terms of its relationship with the previous texts. Thus the myth about the originality of the source text is proved fallacious. If the source text is not original, the argument for fidelity to the source text on account of its originality becomes groundless. Therefore, the film text becomes just another intertext that depends on its source text to generate meaning just as the source text depends on its precursor texts.

One of the primary objectives of this study was to defend the process of adaptation in the light of post-structuralism. In order to achieve this end the source texts were analyzed closely to uncover the intertexts that were embedded in them. Similarly, the film text was also subjected to close scrutiny to expose its
intertextual relationships with other texts. This analysis has established the fact that all texts, whether they are filmic or literary, are intertexts. As both the source texts and filmic texts are composed of several intertexts, the insistence of fidelity and the claim of originality become invalid. This frees the filmmaker from his obligation to follow the source text literally and allows him to use it as a creative platform to experiment and expand his reading.

In this study, four films by Akira Kurosawa and Francis Ford Coppola and their corresponding literary texts from which they were adapted were considered for close analysis. Akira Kurosawa’s films include *Idiot* (1951), *Lower Depths* (1957), *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960) and *Ran* are considered. These films were adapted respectively from Dostoyevsky’s *Idiot*, Maxim Gorky’s *Lower Depths*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Francis Ford Coppola’s films include *Godfather* (1972), *Godfather Part II* (1974), *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), which were adapted from Mario Puzo’s *Godfather*, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*.

Analysis of Kurosawa’s films show that his films are not derived from the source texts only. The filmic text does depend on the source texts. However, it is not the sole source of the meanings generated from it. The film text remains as a site where various texts interact together. In a general statement on filmmaking, Kurosawa has acknowledged the medium’s plural textual structure: “Cinema resembles so many other arts. If cinema has very literary characteristics, it also has theatrical qualities, a philosophical side, attributes of painting and sculpture and musical elements” (191). Though Kurosawa was inspired by the western film makers and western literature, Kurosawa’s film making had a truly Japanese
character. His experiences, the literature and arts, which he interacted with during his life time, all remains as an intertext in his films. Kurosawa had deep understanding about Japanese culture and history which enabled him to produce genres like *jidai geki*, the period drama and *gendai mono*, the story of modern life. James Goodwin observes that the state of Japan after the Second World War is reflected in the films like *Record of a Living Being, Rashomon* and *Throne of Blood*. Even when he directed films adapted from Western literature he used the methods of Japanese dramaturgy in film making. His films were often influenced by the methods of Japanese drama. He often made use of the conventions of Noh, a classical stage art, for the screen. Noh performances combine the dramatic text with narrative, dance, music, pantomime, and masks. In *Throne of Blood* he employed the possibilities of five categories of Noh plays. *Shingeki* dramatic movement which ushered the Japanese version of western plays had an influence on Kurosawa’s films. All these illustrate the presence of diverse intertexts in the films of Kurosowa.

Similarly Francis Ford Coppola’s Italian tradition formed a major intertext in his films, prominently seen in the *Godfather* trilogy. His collaboration with a fellow Italian, Mario Puzo, whose works he adapted, added the Italian influence. The presence of Italian musical tradition in his films was from Carmine Coppola, his father who composed music for his films. Coppola’s education at UCLA films school and his apprenticeship with Roger Corman are evident in his film making. Roger Corman who was well known for his adaptations of Edgar Allan Poe stories was an influence on Kurosawa’s career from his first film, *Dementia 13* (1963) to *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992). His admiration for Kurosawa’s films, especially
*Kagemuzha* was evident in the war scenes of *Dracula*. Coppola’s work in the commercial atmosphere of Hollywood film making made a mark in his films. However, he deliberately moved away from it to the styles of European art movie tradition in *Godfather* films, to begin a new style of popular cinema in Hollywood.

The source texts which were adapted by Kurosawa and Coppola had rich intertextual links with various previous texts. Texts by Dostoyevsky intertextually linked with Christianity, Existentialism, Nihilism and Psychology. The Bible and the Christianity had influenced Dostoyevsky. Intertextual links with texts of Gogol and Pushkin were evident in his works. Maxim Gorky’s texts were marked by the social and political atmosphere of his time. Intertexts of Balzac, Pushkin, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Scott, Dickens, Gonchorov, and Flaubert were seen in his works. Almost all of the plays written by Shakespeare were adapted from early plays, poems, travel books, and from history. Mario Puzo wrote in the tradition of popular crime novels, in the Italian-American back ground. Puzo’s major works could be intertextually traced to the earlier crime fiction in the British and American literature. Joseph Conrad’s texts have affiliations with the narrative styles of British literary traditions. Bram Stoker’s lineage starts with the gothic novel inaugurated in the seventeenth century with Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*.

Disintering the intertexts in the source texts and filmic texts reveal the futility in the insistence for fidelity. Intertextuality demolishes the myth of originality of the source text thereby enabling the adaptor to approach the source text as an interpreter. Thus an adapted film text is a pastische where multiple texts interact with one another to create a system of signification. It invokes texts of the
past, which are itself intertexts. So any argument for the originality of the source text is neutralized. Approaching adaptation studies from the perspective of post structuralism widens the possibilities of interpreting the literary texts. Every enduring literary text is capable of producing new interpretations in the hands of masters, at different points of time. Numerous classics have been subjected to adaptations time and again. Creative adaptations are needed as they extend the scope of literary work beyond its medium. Another objective of this study was to illustrate diverse modes of adaptation practiced by the two masters of cinema from two different traditions and cultures. The methods of adaptation vary according to the way the source material is treated.

Adapted films by Kurosawa and Coppola illustrate various methods of transposing literary text to screen. Among the films by Kurosawa, *Idiot* (1951) was his first attempt to adapt a major literary text into film. However, *Idiot* is not regarded as one of his best films. Analyzing the film, it can be seen that it has many flaws as an adaptation, the reason why it is important to be studied. Kurosawa, with his obsession for the fiction of Dostoyevsky, wanted to follow the novel faithfully to the screen, which affected the film negatively. This resulted in a lengthy film with running time of 265 minutes which was reduced to 166 minutes by the Shokitchu Studio. This abridgement affected the totality of the film considerably. The ideas and emotions originally conveyed using dialogue sequences were synopsized by title inserts. The film today remains as an illustration of a failed attempt by Kurosawa to adapt the novel page by page. However, the adaptation is not devoid of merits. In *Idiot* Kurosawa appropriates the characters, plots and themes and the background of the source text to
Japanese. This approach offers an opportunity to compare the cultural contexts of both Russian and Japanese traditions and study the verbal and visual analogies that bridge/distance the two cultures.

Though *Idiot* is appropriated to Japanese background, the film acknowledges the intertextual link with Dostoyevsky’s text by its title and by the introductory subtitle. Later Kurosowa updated his method of adaptation and appropriation in *Lower Depths* (1957). Kurosawa appropriated Gorky’s text into a *jidai-geki*, period drama. For transposing the Gorkian play set in imperial Russia to Japanese background, Kurosowa searches for a similar period in the history of Japan, and fixes the Edo period, in which the life of the lower classes were similar to those in Tsarist Russia. Thus the relevance of the text in adapting was effectively brought out in his commentary on Maxim Gorky’s play.

*The Bad Sleep Well*, Kurosawa’s take on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* remains as one of the remarkable approaches to adaptation. Unlike the above-mentioned films, *The Bad Sleep Well* is not intertextually linked to its source text by its title. Here, the intertextual relationship is embedded within the filmic text. However, the film can be read as an independent text, and an unearthing of the intertext expands its reading. *The Bad Sleep Well* is set in the modern day Tokyo in the background of corruption in government offices, thereby treating the revenge drama in a different milieu. Kurosawa’s approach to adaptation finds perfection in *Ran* (1985), his appropriation of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. Here, too, the film can remain independent of the source text, as it was conceived as the story of an aging war lord who was deposed by his disloyal sons. Its similarity with the plot of *King Lear* induced him to approach the film as an adaptation. *Ran* also belongs to
analogy as it remains independent of the source text thereby enhancing the reading of the source text.

Coppola’s *Godfather* is directly translated to the screen with a minimum of apparent interference. However, how Coppola transformed a popular crime novel into a classic film lies in the way he handles the medium. In *Godfather*, instead of following the style of commercial Hollywood film, Coppola adopts the techniques of European art film. The film’s narrative techniques, style, language, music, portrayal of life and every aspect of the film has the excellence and value that is ever expected from a serious filmmaker. Coppola has his signature in every scene of the film that it can be called only as Francis Ford Coppola’s *Godfather* rather than Mario Puzo’s *Godfather*. *Godfather* Part II was still innovative in terms of its adaptation. The film was a prequel and sequel of the previous film. The prequel draws from the Book III of the novel, which is not filmed for *Godfather* Part I, and the sequel draws from an original story. However, the whole film could be treated as an adaptation of the source text. The sequel is imaginatively written and filmed and follows the thematic mood and style of the earlier film. The film is regarded as superior to Part I owing to its narrative structure, which intercuts between the prequel and sequel. This film can be classified as transposition and commentary of the source text. The prequel part of the film belongs to the category of transposition and the sequel is a commentary on the source text. In this sense, every sequel can be regarded as an adaptation of the previous text.

*Apocalypse Now* (1979), inspired by Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and grows beyond the work into an entirely new text. It can also be regarded as a case of appropriation except for the fact that it retains the language of the source text.
The novella in the imperial Congo towards the end of nineteenth century is transposed to the setting of Vietnam War. This change of setting seems appropriate as the source text exposes the colonial exploitation while the film critiques the American occupation of Vietnam. Still, the film can be read independent of the novella. However, juxtaposing the source text and the film offers an opportunity to compare the life and art of two periods of time. Though Coppola approached his source texts without insistence for fidelity, he titled his adaptation as *Bram Stoker’s Dracula*. However, it would have been appropriate if he had titled the film as *Francis Ford Coppola’s Dracula*. In the film, Coppola and collaborators carved a romantic and tragic figure out of the hitherto appalling figure of Count Dracula. In his attempt, he transposed a Victorian gothic tale into tragic love story. What Coppola has done is to alter the character functions of two central characters, namely, Dracula and Mina. The rest of the film follows the narrative of the novel. Every frame of the film is magically captured, with innovative camera positions and imagery.

Analyzing the adaptations of these master filmmaker’s illustrate that comparing and contrasting the theme, narrative and plot of the source text and adapted film have been inadequate for unveiling the value of the film. As films have a language of its own, the critical tools of film criticism should be employed to evaluate it. The detractors of film adaptation who viewed adapted film as inferior to the literary text employed yardsticks of literature to evaluate the film. Though film shares the features of literature, theatre, music, dance and painting, it is entirely a different art, which requires critical tools of its own to evaluate. Robert Stam is of the opinion that “the conventional language of the critique of
adaptations (‘infidelity’, ‘betrayal’, and so forth) translates our disappointment that a film version of a novel has not conveyed the moral or aesthetic impact of the novel” (Literature and Film 46). Good films that please spectators by essentially cinematic qualities do not throw up issues of betrayal or infidelity. Thus, when measuring the value of an adapted film, the ultimate question is not whether a film is faithful or not, instead whether it is effective as a film.