



Translocation and adaptation: Analysing *Shal* (Kazakh film) and *The Old Man and the Sea*

Sandeep SS

Guest Faculty in English, Higher Secondary Section, SMV Government Model Higher Secondary School,
Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, India

Abstract

The paper deals with the film adaptation of the Kazakhstan movie *Shal* (The Old Man) by Ermek Tursunov from the famous English novel *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. There are many adaptation theories of films and here I have selected translocation theory for this paper. Although adapted many for the screen in many times by many directors before, Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* had not experienced a genuine reinvention like *Shal*. In *Shal*, Ermek Tursunov, the director, not just attempt to recreate the tale, but he reworks it to translocate into Kazakh landscape and culture that takes its pivotal themes from American author's writing. The study traces on the change of culture and place when the plot shifts from America to Kazakhstan.

Keywords: translocation, adaptation, substitution

Introduction

This paper focuses on the film adaptation of the Kazakhstan movie *Shal* from the famous American novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Film adaptation has become a genre and this paper focuses on a specific adaptation theory called translocation theory.

Film adaptations continue to have a central position in our literature and profound resonance in our culture. For a time novels were most acceptable form of literature and people loved it. But when films became popular, the novels had to suffer a huge challenge to withstand with the film. At that time the thought of film adaptations came into the minds of the film directors. They took beautiful novels, made script and made new films from them. Some films were mostly alike the novels but were much more different. Then the critics found that a new genre called film adaptation is getting famous and new theories were put forward from film adaptations. They are called film adaptation theories.

Robert Stam, the famous film critic, in his essay "Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Apaptation" says:

"The novel has a single material of expression, the written word, where the film has at least five tracks: moving photographic image, phonetic sound, music, noises and written materials. In this sense, the cinema has not lesser, but rather greater resources for expression than the novel and this independent of what actual film makers have done with these resources.

Translocation is one of the major film adaptation theories. In translocation, the plot of the story is being translocated from one place to another. The plot of the novel and the adapted film will be the same but the culture, language and everything will be different. Translocation happens when the director and the novelist are from different regions.

The Old Man and the Sea is an adventurous novel by Ernest Hemingway, his last major work published by him. The novel proves to be a monumental work in the history of twentieth century American Literature. The crux of this

novel constitutes of the theory of the survival of the fittest. The protagonist of the novel, Santiago, an old man, advocates the contemporary ethos of the American society. The novelist uses a new kind of literary adventurism in his story. The readers are being immersed into the story. Nature is also become a major character in this novel. The novel becomes a struggle between man and nature. Darwin's theory of 'the survival of the fittest' can be seen in this novel. The protagonist Santiago shows extreme courage and dedication to his job even if he is old and tired.

The American landscape and culture is beautifully portrayed in this novel. Here the protagonist, Santiago is a fisherman who is old. Through this novel, the author shows us the daily routine and culture of fishermen of America. Santiago is being presented as a courageous man with a powerful heart. Santiago refuses to give up after months of failure to catch a fish.

The movie *Shal* (In English – *The Old Man*), released in 2012, written and directed by Kazakh film director Ermek Tursunov is an adaptation of the American novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. The film was selected as the Kazakhistani entry for the Best Foreign Language Film in the 86th Oscar Awards, but it was not nominated. Erbulat Toguzakov, 64 year old non-professional actor received National Film Award for the Best Actor for acting the main role in this film. Erbulat Toguzakov acted as the titular old man Kasym, a shepherd living on the remote steppe of Kazakhstan who loves international soccer and so he names his sheep with the names of the famous football players. His livelihood and life is the unforgiving steppe that surrounds the area. There are some scenes of the old man and his grandchild which shows the differences between tradition and modernity. The old man ventures into the icy plains of Kazakhstan with the herd of sheep and his precious horse 'Eagle'. Suddenly he lost his way and a group of wolves came and started attacking the sheep and the old man. The emotionally rugged, but physically fragile old man tried to overcome this situation using his experiences. The ferocious wolves attack them without any mercy and Kasym fights till his last breath. Throughout the film, Kasym fights fiercely to

survive through his cunning skill and energy. Kazakh films are influenced by Russian style.

Ermek Tursunov, the director of *Shal* tells about the movie;

“Everyone knows Hemingway. I have the steppes instead of the sea, as it possesses a similar power: the space and the scale. All the elements are the same, but it is rethought differently. The main message of the movie is that a human can be killed, but never defeated.”

The plot of *Shal* is based on Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Tursunov substitutes a shepherd for the fisherman, sheep for Marlin, wolves for sharks and a grandson for the novel's young apprentice. The unending fog and snow covered Kazakh steppe serves as the backdrop of the Kasym's last stand, translocating Hemingway's turbulent sea.

Kazakhstan is the largest land locked country in the world that is there is no sea. So unlike other adaptation movies, there is a large difference between the novel and the film. There are many adaptation films including Harry Potter Series where there is not at all given much change when adapted from novel to film. But here the situation is different. Here language is different (English and Kazakh), culture is different (America and Kazakhstan) (Don't forget that Kazakhstan was a part of USSR and now it became a republic country.) and almost every aspects are different. But the plot remains the same.

The landscape of the novel is being translocated from America to Kazakhstan or from sea to icy landscapes. Kazakhstan has a deep history about the disappearance of the Aral Sea, which lied between Tajikistan and Kazakhstan and latter consequences. When USSR was split into many nations, the neighbouring areas Kazakhstan and Tajikistan became two neighbouring countries. They acted cruelly against the nature. They made as many dams as they could and Kazakhstan lost their water resource Aral Sea and the fishermen lost their job. Those fishermen had nothing to do and so they started grazing sheep. The Aral Sea became a barren land and only the wolves are living in it.

When the plot is translocated from America to Kazakhstan or from sea to ice, the old men remain powerful, fearless and courageous. They know the nature very well. Their culture and job is closely linked with nature and nature is a part of their life. In the plot, the nature is one of the central characters. Both the film and the novel remind us of old days where humans closely attached to nature and the old men were the representations of it. The sea is one of the major characters in the novel, but the director places his movie in the midst of ice.

When the translocation is done, only the basic plot remains the same. The novel discusses the problems of the fishermen in America whereas the film *Shal* deals with the problems of men living in Kazakhstan. Both the landscapes are apt in proclaiming the motto of the plot. When the place is being translocated, the next thing is the games. When Santiago engages in reading news about Baseball game, Kasym engages in watching soccer league in television. The translocation happens even in games.

Translocating a novel like *The Old Man and the Sea* is not a simple task. Because the sea is the major character in the plot. So when it is being recreated into a new film, the director has to give equal preference to the plot and the

location. Kazakhstan does not possess a single piece of sea area. So understanding the audience, they won't accept the original story of the novel. They need something familiar, something that feels it's their story, it is what they wanted to express to the world, the real problems of the working class of our nation. They must feel that the story is theirs but the plot must remain same. The challenge was really tough but Ermek Tursunov beautifully manages the plot and the story. When he created the character Kasym, he gives all the characteristics of Santiago, a fearless, courageous old man. Kasym is just the recreation of Santiago. Then his next challenge was to translocate the storyline from America to Kazakhstan. So he made a new story inculcating the problems of the working class people who lives their livelihood by grazing sheep. The major challenge of them was wolves which were hiding in the steppes of Kazakhstan waiting to eat the sheep. So Tursunov takes the idea from there and fills up the plot with their problems. Thus Kasym becomes the embodiment of the working class people. After all this, Tursunov recreates the Marlin as the wolves. When Santiago attacks the huge Marlin which is twice the size of his boat, Kasym attacks a pack of wolves that comes to attack him. The two attacks takes place at different places: one is in the sea and other is in the ice. But the main plot remains the same. The two old men win the attack and shows extreme courage and self-confidence even at the old age. Ermek Tursunov is given preference to the film without affecting the plot of the novel.

Conclusion

Shal is the movie where the story of the novel *The Old Man and the Sea* is being easily translocated from all the way from America to Kazakhstan. America is a capitalist country and Kazakhstan is historically a communist country. That is they are ideologically and culturally belong to two different countries and Ermek Tursunov recreates an American story in Kazakhstan landscape and wins the minds of the audience across the country. Translocation, one of the major theories of adaptation is being used very intelligently in his film. Here not only the location of the plot but also the total story is translocated without changing the inner plot of the novel. Now it is understandable that *Shal* (The Old Man), Kazakhstan movie, is a perfect example of translocation theory in film adaptation.

References

1. Stam, Robert. Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader: Second Edition*. Ed. Timothy Corrigan. London: Routledge, 2012, 72-94. Print.
2. Leslie, Felperin. The Old Man (Shal): Film Review. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2015.
3. Corrigan, Timothy, ed. *Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader; Second Edition*. London: Routledge, 2012, Print.
4. Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. Ed. by Singh, R.N. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Print, 1999.
5. *Shal* (Kazakhstan movie) by Ermek Tursunov. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiALyHJ7pWo>