



FRESH APPEAL: *Nee Enge En Anbe* could offer 140 minutes of engrossing story-telling to all those not adept in Hindi. Even those who had seen *Kahaani* will find something new in the Tamil/Telugu versions.

Of adaptations and remakes

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

Cinema borrows heavily from books. Some of these adaptations are splendid. Some not so splendid. When you pick an author like Shakespeare or Arthur Miller, half the job is done. The stories they tell are superb and seldom get dated. They are also universal.

The late Vimal Bhagat, a great stage actor and director who introduced me to the Madras theatre scene in the mid-1980s, once told me that one can never go wrong if one were to theatrically adapt a Shakespeare or a Virginia Wolf. Bhagat and many others have spun great dramas out of literary works.

But, in cinema, one can also go horribly wrong as we saw in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Goliyon Ki Rasleela Ram-Leela*. It was *Romeo and Juliet* retold in the holy city of Varanasi. Really, nothing in the film rang true.

Earlier, when Vishal Bharadwaj made *Maqbool* (out of *Macbeth*) and *Omkara* (*Othello*) by retaining the essence of these two celebrated plays but placing them in essentially Indian situations and injecting a 'desi' flavour into them, the cinematic efforts were brilliant.

Here is another example of words to visuals that tells us something different.

Chetan Bhagat's *2 States* was recently made into a movie. It was an almost exact copy of the book. My good friend and film critic, Anupama Chopra, said that its weakest link was the story. Another reviewer slammed the movie and said, "better read the book".

The director of *2 States*, Abhishek Varman, must have been thoroughly perplexed. While Chopra was disappointed with the plot, the other critic seemed to suggest that Bhagat's novel was a better bet than the film. Was this critic talking about his writing style and skills or the story? Did Chopra expect Varman to give his own touch to the work? Was she hoping that he would add or subtract from the book?

Whatever the fact is that it is never easy to recreate images from passages. One who could have read a novel and later watched the movie made out of it, would in all probability, be disappointed. They are two different mediums, each with its own pluses and minuses. And, it is silly to compare a film with the book concerned.

However, some directors try and infuse something different, something new in the movie they could have adapted from a literary work. Kerala's Adoor Gopalakrishnan did this. His *Mathilukal* (The Walls) was culled out of a Basheer novella, and *Vidheyan* (Servile) from Paul Zacharia's work. Basheer was happy with what Adoor presented on the screen, but Zacharia was not quite so. Maybe,

he did not agree with the manner in which Adoor had interpreted his story. But I think what Adoor did was right. A film must have the director's stamp.

This is where I think Shekhar Kammula has scored. Although in his case, it is not an adaptation, but a remake. His latest bilingual movie in Tamil and Telugu, *Nee Enge En Anbe* (Where Are You My Love), has been remade from *Kahaani* in Hindi.

Unlike some other helmers who remade films – sometimes as a frame-by-frame copy of the original – Kammula thought it wise to whip up something different, although there is a lot of similarity between Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* (set in Kolkata with Vidya Balan) and *Nee Enge En Anbe*.

Nayantara, who steps into Balan's role as Anamika, arrives in Hyderabad (not Kolkata) from the US and heads, like in *Kahaani*, straight to the police station to report her husband's disappearance. Her cabbie is amused by this; "I have never taken anyone from the airport to the police chowki," he quips to Anamika.

A lot of what happens thereafter – including her friendship with Sarathy (Vaibhav Reddy), the Tamil-speaking cop (in a city where Anamika has a language problem, because everybody talks in Telugu), her decision to stay in a seedy lodging house (because her husband was there before he vanished) and the way she is brutalised by

law enforcement officer Khan (Pasupathy, who arrives from Delhi to investigate terror and the disappearance) – has all been seen in *Kahaani*.

There are some additions, though, in *Nee Enge En Anbe* – like a special task force humiliating Anamika in her hotel room, like Sarathy taking her to meet his mother and so on. And, Anamika is not pregnant like Balan's Vidya Bagchi, and Kammula, who has written the script along with Sai Prasad, gives a climatic twist which is completely different from Ghosh's.

Some may call this nationalistic or patriotic, but apart from the fact that the climax is singularly different from *Kahaani's*, it is also dramatic in an interesting way – much like, I would say, *Kahaani's* end.

On the whole, *Nee Enge En Anbe's* plot and narrative style gripped me as much as *Kahaani's* did. The Tamil movie is mounted well, and although it is not a nail-biting thriller, it is still very engaging. I did not find a dull moment, and thanks also to some smart editing.

What however disappointed me was the mediocre performance. Reddy is a poor patch on Parambrata Chatterjee (Ritwick Ghatak's grandson who played the part of the cop, Satyoki "Rana" Sinha in *Kahaani*, and befriends Bagchi). And Nayantara does not measure up to Balan, who was simply superb as a woman wronged by fate. But, yes, Pasupathy is as powerful as Nawazuddin Siddiqui was in a similar avatar in the Hindi edition.

All said and done, *Nee Enge En Anbe* is a good shot at a remake of sorts, and could offer 140 minutes of engrossing story-telling to all those not adept in Hindi. What is more, even those who had seen *Kahaani* will find something new in the Tamil/Telugu versions. A clever market move indeed, I should think

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