

Saratchandra's *Devdas*: A comparison between the original Bengali text and its two Hindi film adaptations



Salman Al-Azami*

Tasleem Shakur**

Abstract

Saratchandra Chatterjee's Devdas is one of the most famous novels in Bangla literature, one which has become the symbol of a tragic love story in the whole of South Asia. There have been many film versions of the story in various languages. Saratchandra's storytelling, characterization, and dialogues in the original text made it a popular story for film adaptations. This paper uses theories of narratives in fictions and films in order to compare between the narrative styles of the original Bangla text and its two famous Hindi film adaptations by Bimol Roy (1955), and Sanjay Leela Bhansali (2002). It also analyses how Sarat's characterization was influenced by Victorian novels, and compares the dialogues of the original text with those in its two Hindi film adaptations.

Keywords: narrative style, film adaptation, Victorian influence, film dialogue, song sequence

Introduction

Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Devdas* became a reader's delight right after its first publication in 1917. Since then, its protagonist *Devdas* has been the tragic hero in the hearts of millions of readers. Naturally, it is no surprise that *Devdas* became a film many times in the sub-continent. The *Devdas* narrative was first adapted into a silent film in 1928 by Naresh Mitra. Filmmaker P C Barua made three versions of this novel: in 1935, he directed a Bengali version, in which he himself acted as *Devdas*; in 1936, he made the legendary Hindi version with Kundan Lal Saigal as *Devdas*; in 1937 he made an Assamese version with Phani Sharma as *Devdas*, Zubeida as *Paro* and Mohini as *Chandramukhi*. In 1953, its Tamil and Telugu versions were produced. In 1955, Bimal Roy made the second famous Hindi version with Dilip Kumar as *Devdas*, Suchitra Sen as *Paro* and Vijayantimala as *Chandramukhi*. Along with Kundan Lal Saigal's *Devdas*, this film is acclaimed as amongst the all-time great classics in Hindi cinema. In more recent times, Sanjay Leela Bansali made this film in 2002 with Shah Rukh Khan as *Devdas* and Aishwarya Rai as *Paro*. Made in the era of India's economic rise, even though this film raked in more money than the earlier films, it was not well appreciated by the critics. In 2009, a postmodern version, entitled *Dev D*, was made by Anurag Kashyap. Very few stories have been filmed so many times in the history of film making.

Saratchandra wrote 30 novels and 22 of them have been successfully picturised. Why have filmmakers been so keen in adapting his novels? Hutcheon (2006) highlights several reasons why people produce adaptations: to make money, to extend the drawing power of a franchise, to borrow the cultural capital of a more prestigious text or genre, or for political or

*Senior Lecturer in English Language, Liverpool Hope University, UK: alazams@hope.ac.uk

**Editor, South Asian Cultural Studies (SACS), Edge Hill University, UK: shakurt@edgehill.ac.uk

personal motives. A classic novel, *Devdas* had all the ingredients of a successful film, particularly in a South Asian context. The Bengali novel was a masterpiece for its theme, characterization and depiction of conflict both externally and internally among the characters. Saratchandra's narrative style has the 'impression of reality', which according to Metz (1974:4), has the power to draw crowds. Mishra (2002) lists six 'orders' in *Devdas* that pushed the themes in the story to 'ambiguous extremes': the order of marriage; the order of social decorum; the order of patriarchal power; the order of pleasure in the *kotha* (brothel); the order of symbolic violation; and the order of the promise to return (p.27). It is these 'ambiguous extremes' that have always been important characteristics of South Asian films, which led *Devdas* to be such a popular story for film adaptation.

Hutcheon (2006) considers both financial and culturally enriching motivations as reasons for adaptation, which seems to be the case with this classic novel. However, there is a difference between a film's commercial success and its acclaim from the aesthetic angle, at least in South Asia. Every commercially successful film is not necessarily highly acclaimed by the South Asian connoisseurs, and vice versa. Thus, Bhansali's 2002 *Devdas* was a major commercial success and also won some national awards, but it was not well-received by those who had seen the earlier two Hindi films. They preferred the earlier Hindi versions, especially Bimal Roy's version, to this new version. In contrast, the young audience and the press were dazzled by the grandeur of sets and the forceful women in the film. Most of them had not seen the earlier versions.

This study discusses the narrative style of the original Bengali novel looking at the depiction of a sentimental love story. It also analyses how Sarat's characterization was influenced by Victorian novels. Finally, it compares the dialogues of the original text with those in its two Hindi film adaptations – the earlier one directed by Bimal Roy (a renowned Bengali director in the 1950s) which provides a more literal translation of the original Bengali novel, and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2002 blockbuster, which has a number of deviations from the original text. The reason for choosing these two versions is to show the contrast in storytelling between the two directors. Bimal Roy's version is chosen for its true representation of the original story along with its characterization that received critical acclaim. Bhansali's version is chosen to show how contemporary style in Bollywood cinema can convert a classic tale of tragedy into a glamorous Bollywood blockbuster by changing the whole sensitivity of the original story.

The Story

Devdas is a tragic story of a man called Devdas who loved but never got his lover. The protagonist Devdas shared a magnetic childhood with his lovely playmate Parvati (popularly known as Paro), and the supreme love matured in Paro's heart much before Devdas could realize. As the two playmates became youths, the love intensified in Parvati so much so that she was ready to do anything to get Devdas. But, unfortunately, Devdas failed to understand Paro's passionate love towards him and his whimsical 'no' at a very critical time created a permanent wall of separation between him and his beloved Paro. When he did realize how much his heart felt for Paro, it was too late, as the heartbroken Paro became the wife of another man.

This completely shattered Devdas. He was unable to bear the agony of a life without Paro. The absence of his beloved Paro in his life made alcohol his constant companion, but that could not make him forget the piercing pain. Even the unconditional love and devotion

of a beautiful courtesan, Chandramukhi, could not ease the pain of losing Paro. The pain ultimately brought his untimely death as he breathed his last at Paro's doorstep to keep his earlier promise that he would meet her at least once before his death.

Narrative Style of *Devdas*

Genette (1980:161-62) discusses three functions of narrative discourse, the second of which is 'mood'. He writes:

The narrative can furnish the reader with more or fewer details, and in a more or less direct way, and can thus seem (to adopt a common and convenient spatial metaphor, which is not to be taken literally) to keep a greater or lesser distance from what it tells.

Gunning (1984:460) looks at this theory from the perspective of the narrator's involvement in the story, which may correspond to the viewpoint of a particular character in the story. Gunning concludes that "the narrative adopts the character's point of view". The narrator in Saratchandra's *Devdas* is an omniscient third person narrator who goes through the minds of the major characters like Devdas, Parvati and Chandramukhi. Most of the time, the narrator informs the readers about the inner conflicts in the protagonist Devdas. For example, after posting a letter to Parvati saying that he cannot marry her, Devdas' state of mind is described by the narrator in this way:

/pOtrokhana jOtokkhon debdaS DakghOre nikkhep kOre nai, tOtokkhon Ek kOtha bhabiyachilo; kintu rOwna koribar pOrmuhurto hoitei onno kOtha bhabite lagilo. hater Dhil churia dia Ek drishTite Sei dike chahiya rohilo. EkTa OnirdiSTo SONka tahar moner majhe krome krome jORo hoitechilo. Se bhabitechilo, e DhilTa tahar mathay kibhabe poRibe. khub lagibeki? bacibeto?/

'Until Devdas posted the letter, he thought in one dimension; but once he sent it, he started to feel differently. It is as if he had thrown a stone and then kept on staring at the direction of it. Gradually, an uncertain fear seemed to grasp his mind. He thought, how will this stone fall on her head? Will it hurt? Will she survive?'

In contrast, during the earlier part of the story when the protagonists were in their childhood, the narrator had a different perspective of Devdas' mental condition:

/parbotir jOnoni konnake ritimOto prohar koriya ghOre aboddho koria rakhilen. debdaSer kOtha Thik janina; kEnona eSob kahini Se kichutei prokaS kOrena/

Parvati's mother beat her daughter and locked her inside the house. I don't exactly know what happened to Devdas, because he never discloses these matters to anyone.

In most situations, the narrator seems to know everything about Devdas, but in that particular context, the 'mood' of the narrator is completely different, which supports Genette's (1980) narrative discourse theory. However, at the very end of the novel, the narrator becomes more personal, and also very emotional – quite unusual for an omniscient narrator. The final paragraph of the story is as follows:

/Ekhon Etodine parbotir ki hoiyache, kemon ache janina. SONbad loiteo iccha kOrena. Sudhu debdaSer jonno bORo kOSTo hOy. tomra je keho e kahini poribe, hOyto amaderi moto dukkho paibe. tobu jodi kOkhono debdaSer mOto emon hOtobhaggo, OshoNjomi papiSTher shohit porichoy ghOte, tahar jonno ektu prarthona korio. prarthona korio, ar jahai hok, jEno tahar moto emon koria kaharo mrirttu na ghOte. MORone khoti nai, kintu Se shomoye jEno ekTi

snehokOrospOrSo tahar lolaTe pouche – jEno ekTio korunadro snehomOy mukh dekhite dekhite e jiboner Onto hoy. moribar shomoy jEno kaharo Ek fota cokher jOl dekhiya Se morite pare./

I don't know what happened to Parvati all these days; I don't know how she is and I even don't want to know. I only feel pain for Devdas. Those of you who will read this story will probably feel the same as us. Yet, if you happen to come across an unfortunate, unrestrained sinner like Devdas, then please do pray for him. Pray so that, come what may, no one dies a death like this. There is no harm in death. But pray so that at the time of death, he receives a loving touch of someone – pray so that he dies looking at a loving affectionate face beside him. Pray so that he witnesses a drop of affectionate tear before he dies.

The narrator uses the same pattern about the mental state of Parvati, which had been used earlier about Devdas' mental condition. The narrator's emotional involvement with Devdas' tragic end led to the refusal to know (or describe) what happened with Parvati. The narrator's personal involvement with the characters is also found in the expression */amader mOto/* 'like us', though it is interesting to note the use of first person plural form in this situation.

Sentimental Love Story

Devdas is a love story par excellence, though the two lovers do not unite. Mishra (2002) argues that the cinematic depiction of *Devdas* established the concept of 'sentimental lover' in Indian cinema. Parvati and Devdas' love for each other before marriage grows even stronger after their separation. It is revealed when they meet on the occasion of the death of Devdas' father. Parvati asks Devdas to come to her place so that she can look after him. Devdas says:

/amake jOtno korle jodi – tomar dukkho ghoce – ami jabo. morbar ageo amar e kOtha SOron thakbe/ 'If your sorrows are relieved by looking after me – then I will go. I will remember this until I die.' And Devdas keeps his promise. He dies right at the door of Parvati's house.

With the Devdas-Parvati love story so prominent, Chandramukhi, the courtesan's, one way love affair towards Devdas is often overlooked, though Devdas realises it at the final stage of the story when he makes a comparison between his two lovers as contrasting characters while talking to Chandramukhi:

/tomader dujone kOto omil, abar kOto mil. Ekjon obhimani, uddhOto, ar Ekjon kOto Santo, kOto SONjoto. Se kichui Soite parena, ar tomar kOto Sojjo! tar kOto jOS, kOto Sunam, ar tomar kOto kOloNko! Sobai take kOto bhalobaSe, ar keu tomake bhalobaSena./

You two are so different, yet so similar. One is so sensitive, so arrogant; the other is so quiet, so patient. She can't tolerate anything, but you have so much tolerance! She has such fame, such reputation, but you have such scandal! Everyone loves her so much, but no one loves you.

But Sarat did not want Chandramukhi's love to go in vain. So Devdas finally expresses his love towards her though he is not ready to accept her in this life. He says:

/pap-punner bicarkOrta tomar ki bicar korben janine; kintu mrittur pOr jodi abar milon hOy, ami kOkhono toma hote dure thakte parbona./

I don't know what the decider between good and evil decides about you; but if we meet after death, I will never be able to stay away from you.

Victorian Influence

Saratchandra was greatly influenced by late Victorian literature. The depression of Devdas is an influence of Thomas Hardy's characters; particularly, Devdas' escapism was likely influenced by 'The Mayor of Casterbridge'. His syntactic pattern has a deep Victorian touch. Like Charles Dickens' 'Great Expectations', the story of Devdas begins with a noticeably long sentence:

/Thik shei shomOyTite mukhujjoder debdaS paThSala-ghOrer Ek kone chera madurer upor boSiya, sleT hate loiya, chokkhu chahiya, bujiya, pa chORaiya, hai tuliya, OboSeSe hOThat khub chintashil hoiya uThilo; eboN nimishe sthir koria felilo je, ei pOrom rOmoniyo SomoyTite maThe maThe ghuRi uRaiya bERanor poribOrte paThSalay aboddho thakaTa kichu noy./

At that very time, Devdas of the Mukherjees was sitting on a torn mat in the corner of the school-room, keeping a slate in his hand, opening his eyes, then again closing them, stretching his legs, yawning, and finally becoming very philosophical and suddenly deciding that it is useless wasting this romantic time locked in school instead of flying kites.

Another Victorian influence is found in his characterisation, particularly the manner in which his female protagonists speak. While Chandramukhi represents the Bengali women of that time – quiet, enduring, yet philosophical – Parvati is made a woman of substance, similar to the women protagonists of Jane Austen's novels (for example, Elizabeth of 'Pride and Prejudice' or Emma Woodhouse of 'Emma').

Butler (1975:199) talks about the incredible amount of independence Elizabeth Bennett showed in Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice', in a society where women were dependent on their husbands and families, calling her "fearless and independent". A woman of substance would be even more unthinkable in a Bengali Hindu society at Sarat's time, but his characterisation of Parvati has colossal similarities with Elizabeth Bennett. The manner in which Parvati refuses Devdas' offer of marriage after her marriage is fixed reminds us the way Elizabeth refused Mr. Darcy's marriage proposal – there is similar strength in personality and self-pride, which is highly unexpected of a Hindu Bengali woman in the early 20th century.

The unconventional characterisation of Parvati is clearly evident in the dialogue of Parvati and Monorama regarding Parvati proposing marriage to Devdas. Monorama becomes utterly surprised that Parvati would propose to Devdas. She says:

/ami memanush – tor Soi, kintu Se je puruSmanuS paro./ I am a woman – your friend, but he is a man, Paro.

/ebar parboti haSia uThilo; kohilo,tumi Soi, tumi apnar – kintu tini ki pOr? je kOtha tomake bolte pari, Se kOtha ki take bOla jayna?/ Parvati smiles and says, you are my friend, very close – but is he a stranger? Can't I tell him what I can tell you?

It was quite unconventional for a woman at that time to propose marriage to a man. Even today, it is not that common in sub-continental societies. Yet, Saratchandra makes his heroine express this, an indication of his western influence. Another seemingly Victorian influence is the epistolary role in the development of the plot. In 'Pride and prejudice' Elizabeth's sister Jane writes to her informing some important events that happen in her absence. In *Devdas*, this role is played by Parvati's friend Monorama who writes to inform Parvati about the gradual downfall of Devdas.

Comparing Dialogues

Sarat's Devdas versus Bimal Roy's Adaptation

Before the latest version of Bhansali, as many as nine movies had been made on *Devdas* in different languages. But the moment one talked about *Devdas*, people thought of Bimal Roy's *Devdas*, starring Dilip Kumar in the lead. Bimal Roy, the celebrated director of the 50s, had earlier been a cameraman in P C Barua's film version in 1935. Roy's film adaptation of this famous novel was not a super hit, but received huge appreciation from the critics. It is still considered one of the best-directed Hindi movies.

Dialogue in film theory is a largely ignored area in Film Studies. According to Devereaux (1986), there is a stubborn idea in film studies that film is fundamentally a visual art form. She writes: "If the sound film is a marriage of word and image, then no adequate film criticism can ignore one half of that symbiosis (p 44)". Furthermore, Baumgarten (2004:20-29) discusses four aspects of the nature of language in films, the third being the audience's perspective: "The elements of a film that viewers most readily appropriate are the words, phrases and the manner of speaking of the characters on-screen".

Kozloff (2000) divided dialogue analysis in films into two broad categories: how words communicate narrative and how dialogue is used. Kozloff emphasized that beyond the linguistic usage, there are three elements that film dialogues are closely associated with – aesthetic significance, ideological persuasion, and commercial conditions. Bimal Roy's 1955 version successfully implemented at least two of these elements. His dialogues were aesthetically significant as well as persuasive. However, the dialogues in the original Bengali novel are so strong that many dialogues in the film retained them. Nabendu Ghosh, the scriptwriter, literally translated these dialogues from Bengali to Hindi. For example, the original story begins with the following sentence:

/Ekdin boi Sakheyo diprohorer roudrero Onto chilona, uttapero Sima chilona./

One day, there was no end to the sunshine at mid-noon of a Baisakh day, nor was there any limit of scorching heat.

The film starts with the same sentence in Hindi through a background voice:

/ek din baisakh ke dopeher me dhup ka ant na tha, aur garmi ki bhi had nehi thi/

The Bimal Roy version starts with a 'storytelling' style to substitute the narrator in the original text. Gunning (1984:474) uses the term 'narrativization', which "... binds narrative discourse to story and rules the narrator's address to the spectator". However, the film fails to maintain this style, as this type of storytelling does not occur any more in the film. In a later part, the inner conflict in *Devdas* is narrated through the inner voice of the protagonist *Devdas* (Dilip Kumar) who curses himself for refusing the marriage proposal of the female protagonist *Parvati* (Suchitra Sen).

Like the main novel, all the three main protagonists of Bimal Roy's film (the third one is *Chandramukhi*, the courtesan) are consumed by their total and devoted love for each other, but their desires remain unfulfilled. While *Parvati* and *Chandramukhi* sublimate their grief in *seva* or service, *Devdas* consoles himself with the bottle. In one instance of the film,

the scriptwriter even surpasses the novelist's aestheticism when he makes Dilip Kumar (Devdas) say:

/Koun kambakht hoS hone ke liye peeta hEi. hum to peete hEin ki zinda rah sake/ Which idiot drinks to remain in sense? I drink so that I remain alive.

The more he drinks the more forcefully he remembers his lost love, Parvati, thus actualising his ideal of 'living to love' rather than 'loving to live'. This is not exactly what Sarat wrote. The scriptwriter keeps the basic dialogue but makes some changes to suit the scene. The original dialogue in the novel was:

/Sojjo korbo bole mOd khaine. ekhane thakbo bole Sudhu mOd khai/ 'I don't drink to endure, I drink so that I can stay here.'

The whole Bimal Roy movie dialogues are almost literal translations of Saratchandra's Bengali dialogues in the original text, apart from one or two such dialogues. Unlike Sanjay Leela Bhansali's version, this version is a classic representation of a classic novel.

Sarat's Devdas versus Bhansali's Adaptation

Sanjay Leela Bhansali's 2002 version converts a classic Bengali novel into a Bollywood blockbuster with all its ingredients. The whole storytelling of this modern film version is a major departure from the original novel. Bhansali himself justified its modernity before its release:

Even though it (*Devdas*) will be a period piece set in the '30s, we will have to add a contemporary flavour to it. [*Devdas*] is a love story – great one at that. *Amanush*, *Muqaddar ka Sikander* and so many others have been versions of *Devdas* and were immensely successful. Quality literature is always relevant, never time bound. (Hindustan Times, 2000 cited in Mishra, 2002: 30)

The structure of a typical Hindi film, according to Mishra (2002: 4), is “designed to accommodate deep fantasies belonging to an extraordinarily varied group of people, from illiterate workers to sophisticated urbanites”. Bhansali's *Devdas* is full of ‘fantasies’ that captured the imagination of all sections of Bollywood audience and beyond – an aspect that made it a huge box office success, unlike Bimal Roy's classic version. In doing so, Bhansali makes so many departures from the original text that it seems almost a different story altogether. Beginning from the very opening of Bhansali's *Devdas*, which completely avoids the childhood scenes – an integral part of the novel to understand the personalities of both Devdas and Parvati – to the contrived meeting between Paro and Chandramukhi, the film has just the basic theme of the original novel with a completely new plot. Creekmur (2007) uses the terms ‘operatic’ and ‘overblown’ while describing Bhansali's film, which seems to ‘render the historical past as a museum-like display’:

Bhansali's film at first seems defensive, obscuring the story's emotional core by plastering the surface of the film with gorgeous yet distracting details to create an opulent, extravagant spectacle filled to the brim with vast sets and stunning costumes, often shot with breathless, rushing handheld (or steadicam) shots of swirling action and blinding color.” (Creekmur, p.186)

Saratchandra's text was rich in dialogues. Bhansali's film version is also full of highly philosophical dialogues. One intriguing aspect of Bhansali's *Devdas* is the use of repetition.

John Fawell (cited in Kazloff, 2000: 85) says that rhythms and repetitions have aesthetic functions in films. According to him, the most memorable lines in a film:

... are simple ones that are repeated, as a line of poetry might be, or a phrase in a musical score, and which through this repetition achieve a dramatic resonance that is central to the meaning of the film.

In one such innovative scene (which does not appear in the original text) in Bhansali's version, we see Devdas repeating the phrase 'chor do' (leave) several times when his mother asks him to leave the house. He says:

/babuji ne kaha ghar chor do. sabne kaha paro ko chor do. paro ne kaha Sarab chor do. aj tumne kaha ye haveli chor do. ek din ayega jab wo kahega duniya chor do/

Father said, leave the house. Everyone said, leave Paro. Paro said, leave drinking. Today, you are saying leave this area. A day will come when He (God) will say, leave this world.

Another interesting innovation in this film is the use of a series of words beginning with the same letter, which is a characteristic style of Chunilal, Devdas' friend in Calcutta who introduces him to Chandramukhi. We find Chunilal giving the following dialogue in the very first scene of his appearance in the film:

/ye da baRa peci hEy. da se dilbhi hota hEy, da se dard bhi hota hEy. da se duniya bhi, da se daulat bhi, da se dastuur bhi, da se doa bhi, da se dost bhi, da se diwana bhi. ab da se ye diwanapan choRo dost. yaha da se mera dam DhukRa ja raha hEy./

This *da* is a very complicated thing. You have *dil* 'heart' with *da*, and also have *dard* 'pain' with *da*. You have *duniya* 'world' with *da*, *daulat* 'wealth' with *da*, *dastoor* 'custom' with *da*, *doa* 'prayer' with *da*, *dost* 'friend' with *da*, *diwana* 'passionate' with *da*. Now please let go this *da* for *diwanapan* 'passion' my friend! My *da* for *dum* 'breath' is getting stuck here.

Bhansali does keep some scenes and dialogues similar to the original text, but unlike Bimal Roy's film, the dialogues are not exactly the same. For example, in one of the most famous scenes of the story when Parvati goes to see Devdas late at night, we find Parvati asking some rhetorical questions to Devdas when she justifies her arrival to the latter's room late at night:

/nadi sagar ki taraf kiu jati hEy? surajmukhi suraj ki taraf kiu dekhti hEy? Or ye paro apni swabhiman, apni kulki man-maryada sab kuch choRke ratke is waqt apni devki caranme jaga maNne kiu ati hEy?/

'Why do rivers flow towards oceans? Why does the sunflower look at the sun? And why has this Paro come at this time of night to demand a place at her Dev's feet leaving all her vanity and family status at this time of night?'

Song Sequence

Although Bimal Roy's version has song sequences, Bhansali's version gives it a complete commercial Bollywood film flavour through glamorous clothing, long song sequences, and contemporary music and dance. Song and dance scenes are one of the most common aspects of a commercial Hindi film. Manuel (1988, p.174-5) finds song and dance sequence as 'gratuitously inserted' into the plot of a film, but Booth (2000) contests Manuel's argument

and sees them as “carefully framed components of much larger narrative structures”. He continues:

... while some may appear as gratuitous insertions, careful examination and application of a range of Indian culture and convention-based understandings both suggest that truly gratuitous music scenes are many fewer than one might initially suspect (p 126)

Bhansali’s film follows this pattern where the story progresses through songs. The song sequences are carefully structured, and several songs lead to climax scenes. At the beginning of the film, Parvati’s mother sings and dances before proposing her daughter’s marriage to Devdas, which creates strong negative reaction from Devdas’ mother. A heated exchange of words leads to Parvati’s mother announcing that she will marry her daughter to someone wealthier within a week. Before another climactic scene, Parvati and Chandramukhi dance together at the former’s in-law’s house after which, Parvati’s step son-in-law discloses Chandramukhi’s background to humiliate Parvati for befriending a courtesan. Incidentally, both these scenes are complete innovations of Bhansali, as nothing such happen in the original story.

The most glamorous song and dance scenes in the film are unsurprisingly at Chandramukhi’s *kotha* (brothel). The presence and influence of *tawaif* (courtesan) is enormous in Indian popular culture, and their “sexual and personal pasts and futures are sources of narrative tension” (Booth, 2007:4). Booth terms them as “traditional conceptualization of female identity” understood by the society as cursed women. In Bhansali’s version Devdas himself defines Chandramukhi: “a woman is a mother, a sister, a wife, or a friend; and when she is nothing, she is a *tawaif*.”

Conclusion

Devdas, a hundred-year-old love story, is hugely adored and has never been forgotten (Creekmur, 2007:174). It is a ‘timeless’ story of a tragic hero that is admired even today in spite of its traditional melodramatic narrative. For over more than 70 years, the story has been told and re-told through several film adaptations in different languages. Some filmmakers (Bimal Roy) made a classic version of a classic novel, while others (Sanjay Leela Bhansali) modernized it to adapt to the present day film audience. However, the central theme of all the films remained the same: a rich upper caste man falls in love with a lower caste woman, but fails to transgress due to patriarchal influence, later regretting his decision, only to find brothels his destination, and alcohol his constant companion, leading to his untimely death. It is this unfulfilled love that has made this story so appealing. Indeed, as the famous English romantic poet Percy Shelley says, “our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought”.

It has been remarked by the fans of Bhansali's *Devdas* that instead of showing the tragedy of love, he attempted to show the weakness of Devdas as a person who wouldn't take a strong stand against the social hierarchies of his times and hence, was responsible for his own fate. Bhansali's outspoken women pose a contrast to the “weak” character of his Devdas. This angle is thought to have touched a chord in the hearts of the 21st century young audience of Bhansali's film. On the other hand, those who were familiar with the earlier versions of the film felt that Bhansali’s version lacked the depth and sensitivity of Bimal Roy’s version.

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Filmography

- Devdas (1928) Director: Naresh Mitra [Silent film]
 Devdas (1935) Director: P.C. Barua [Bengali]
 Devdas (1955) Director: Bimol Roy [Hindi]
 Devdas (2002) Director: Sanjay Leela Bhansali [Hindi]
 Dev D (2009) Director: Anurag Kashyap [Hindi]

