

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the writer provides the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, also scope and limitations of the study

1.1 Background of the Study

Literature is a work that encompasses many things and various aspects. It can include written works such as poetry or novels, as well as take the form of films or theatre dramas. In recent years, the development of literature has progressed rapidly, allowing literary works to be found everywhere. However, as time passes, societal demands suggest that literary works need adaptation, whether in the form of films or series. The shift from literary works to film, colloquially termed *ecranation*, a term originating from the French word "*écran*," signifying 'screen,' is recognized as film adaptation in English Literature. This intricate procedure involves the translation of the novel's conceptual essence into a visual narrative, as discussed by Julie Sanders in her exploration of adaptation and appropriation (Sanders, 2006). Sanders highlights how adaptation serves to reinterpret and transform the original text to resonate with contemporary audiences while maintaining its core essence.

Linda Hutcheon (2006) defines adaptation as 'a form of repetition without replication, change without abandoning' (p. 8). Film adaptation involves translating a novel's linguistic elements into the visual language of cinema, transforming words into images to create a new cinematic work while maintaining a connection to the source material. Successful adaptations, such as the Harry Potter film series by J.K. Rowling, exemplify this process. Released between November 14, 2001, and July 15, 2011, the eight films achieved remarkable profits and acclaim.

Building on this success, Warner Bros. expanded the Wizarding World franchise by releasing another film adaptation of Rowling's works, the Fantastic Beasts series. As of this writing, the Fantastic Beasts series includes three films.

Some adaptations may surprise audiences with their innovation, such as Jurassic Park, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Transformers, The Chronicles of Narnia, The Maze Runner, and more. However, not all adaptations unfold smoothly. As acclaimed author Graham Greene (1995) aptly stated, "A movie is not a book. If the source material is a book, you cannot be too respectful of the book. All you owe to the book is the spirit."

Many factors, such as character adjustments, plot development, and actor selection, play essential roles in the success of film adaptations. When any of these elements fall short, it is almost certain that the resulting adaptation will lack the desired impact.

An example of a film adaptation that failed in the market is Percy Jackson by Rick Riordan. Out of the five novels published—The Lightning Thief (2005), The Sea of Monsters (2006), The Titan's Curse (2007), The Battle of the Labyrinth (2008), and The Last Olympian (2009)—only two films were successfully released. Factors contributing to the project's cessation include disappointment among fans, especially novel readers, due to significant differences in the adaptation. As Riordan himself remarked, "I still have not seen the movies, and don't plan on ever doing so. I judge them based on having read the scripts, because I care most about the story" (Riordan, 202). However, recent news indicates that Percy Jackson will be released as a TV series in December 2023.

In contrast, *The White Tiger*, another novel-to-film adaptation, gained acclaim for its poignant depiction of socio-political realities in India. Set in 2010 during the presidential election, it tells the story of Balram Halwai, a young man whose journey from academic promise to reluctant servitude reveals the harsh realities of systemic oppression. Once celebrated as *The White Tiger* for his academic brilliance, Balram's life took a darker path after his father's death forced him into the role of family provider. Working as a driver for a wealthy family, he endured abuse and humiliation that ultimately ignited his rebellion. This culminated in his drastic transformation after plotting and murdering his employer, Ashok, to

escape his oppressive circumstances. As Aravind Adiga (2008) writes, 'The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen,' reflecting how Balram's physical and moral struggles embody his rebellion against systemic inequality. Renaming himself Ashok, Balram embraced a new identity, rising to prominence in India at the cost of his morality. These adaptations highlight the varying receptions and outcomes of translating novels to screen, underscoring the challenges and opportunities in adaptation.

The novel, acclaimed for its success, not only secured a spot on the New York Times bestseller list but also clinched the prestigious Booker Prize.

The White Tiger functions as a profound piece of social commentary, addressing the entrenched inequalities that persist beneath the veneer of India's economic prosperity. In doing so, it critiques and deconstructs the collective euphoria of the Indian middle class, offering a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse of national progress. However, while Adiga's critique is incisive, his effectiveness as a novelist is more limited. His unrelenting focus on the grim realities of Indian life, while evocative, ultimately risks monotony. The persistent bleakness—manifested through the recurring motif of "the Darkness"—and the heavy-handed nature of his prose, though impactful in underscoring systemic cruelty, may detract from the narrative's overall engagement and complexity.

At the age of 33, Aravind Adiga achieved the remarkable feat of becoming the second youngest writer and the fourth debut writer to receive this esteemed award. Adiga, in describing his novel, expressed the intention of capturing the authentic voice of the individuals encountered while traversing through India—the resonant voice of the vast underclass. The driving force behind *The White Tiger* was Adiga's desire to illuminate the unspoken narratives of those residing in the impoverished regions of rural India, referred to as "the Darkness." He aimed to accomplish this without succumbing to sentimentality or portraying them as humorless, weak individuals, challenging prevailing stereotypes.

The reason the researcher uses this movie as a source of data is due to the impressive development of Balram's character. He begins his life not only at ground zero but in a negative position. Not only does he come from a poor family, but he

also loses his parents and must struggle to support his large family, which faces significant hardships. Furthermore, he is not allowed to attend school—despite having the potential to succeed academically—and instead must help his family work from the age of twelve. The film effectively portrays the class structure in India; as a member of the lower class, Balram is driven to do anything to ascend to the upper class.

Arvind Adiga, as a writer of the script, once told on the interview :

"I once asked my dad what amazed him most about America, and he said grocery stores, contrasting them with the bazaars of Mashad, Iran. He always reminded me that being different doesn't mean being better—having wealth and power offers advantages, but it doesn't make you more human than those without them."

This perspective resonates deeply with *The White Tiger*, where Adiga critiques the notion that economic prosperity equates to moral or human superiority. Through Balram's journey, the novel underscores how systemic inequalities often strip individuals of dignity, regardless of their social or financial standing. Adiga's narrative challenges readers to question the very foundations of societal hierarchies and the assumption that wealth inherently defines human worth.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the differences in the portrayal of Balram's character as an anti-hero in the film adaptation of *The White Tiger* (2021) compared to the novel?

1.3 Objective of the Study

To address the research problem, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze Balram Halwai's anti-hero character in *The White Tiger* (2008) and its 2021 film adaptation, focusing on differences through Machiavellian traits from the Dark Triad Theory and Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory.

1.4 Significance of the Study

1. Theoretically, This research contributes to adaptation studies, particularly in the exploration of anti-hero characters and psychological complexity in literature-to-film adaptations. By applying Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory, this study highlights how adaptations reshape narratives to suit new mediums. Through the

lens of Dark Triad Theory, specifically Machiavellianism, the study expands psychological approaches to character analysis, providing insights into how morally ambiguous figures like Balram are developed and depicted in film.

2. Practically, This study serves as a reference for students, researchers, and readers in English Literature and Film Studies departments, especially those interested in comparative literature, adaptation theory, and anti-hero analysis. It offers a clear example of how psychological theories, such as the Dark Triad, can intersect with literary and cinematic studies, opening pathways for further interdisciplinary research.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

1. The research focuses on the 2021 Netflix film adaptation of *The White Tiger*, particularly on the character of Balram Halwai as an anti-hero. The analysis emphasizes the Machiavellian aspect of the Dark Triad traits (excluding narcissism and psychopathy) as represented in Balram's actions and motivations.

Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory is used to analyze how Balram's character evolves and adapts from the 2008 novel to the film, with attention to narrative and thematic shifts.

2. Limitations: This study will not cover other media adaptations of *The White Tiger*, such as stage or television adaptations, nor will it investigate audience reception or interpretations of Balram's character. Additionally, the analysis will be confined from 2008 novel to the 2021 film adaptation and will focus primarily on Dark Triad traits, excluding other psychological or sociocultural factors that may influence Balram's actions and development as an anti-hero.