



OTT Platforms: A More Convenient and Justifiable Medium for Novel Adaptations than Feature Films

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Abstract

The rapid growth of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms has significantly transformed the practice of literary adaptation in contemporary media. Traditionally, feature films have served as the primary medium for adapting novels; however, their limited runtime often leads to the omission of important characters, subplots, and thematic elements. In contrast, OTT platforms provide greater narrative flexibility through episodic storytelling, enabling a more comprehensive representation of literary texts. This paper examines the effectiveness of OTT platforms as a medium for novel adaptations and argues that they are more convenient and justifiable than feature films in preserving a narrative depth and textual fidelity. Using a qualitative and comparative approach, the study analyzes selected Indian novel adaptations, including *Sacred Games*, *A Suitable Boy*, and *Leila*. The findings suggest that OTT platforms offer enhanced opportunities for character development, thematic exploration, and audience engagement while remaining closer to the source material. The study concludes that OTT platforms have emerged as a significant and effective medium for adapting novels in the twenty-first century and contribute to reshaping the relationship between literature and visual storytelling.

Keywords: *OTT Platforms, Novel Adaptation, Feature Films, Literary Adaptation, Web Series, Indian Literature, Adaptation Studies.*

Introduction

Literature and cinema are two significant forms of storytelling that reflect human experiences, culture, and society. The relationship between novels and films has remained strong since the early development of cinema, filmmakers frequently adapting literary works for visual representation. Novel adaptations not only expand the reach of literary texts but also introduce them to wider and more diverse audiences. Traditionally, feature films have been the dominant medium for adapting novels. However, the limited runtime



of feature films often requires the compression of plots, omission of subplots, and reduction of character development. As a result, many adaptations struggle to preserve the complexity, thematic richness, and narrative depth of their source texts. The challenge of balancing fidelity to the original work with cinematic requirements has remained a central concern in adaptation studies.

The emergence of Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms has significantly transformed the landscape of visual storytelling. Platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar have popularized long-form and episodic narratives, provide a great flexibility to creators for adapting literary works. Unlike feature films, OTT series can extend across multiple episodes and seasons, allowing for a more detailed exploration of characters, themes, settings, and narrative structures. In recent years, several Indian novels have been successfully adapted into OTT series, including *Sacred Games*, *A Suitable Boy* and *Leila*. These adaptations demonstrate how the episodic format enables a more comprehensive representation of the source material while maintaining audience engagement. The extended duration available on OTT platforms allows filmmakers to preserve important narrative elements that might otherwise be omitted in feature film adaptations.

This paper argues that OTT platforms provide a more convenient and justifiable medium for novel adaptations than feature films. Through a comparative analysis of selected adaptations, the study examines how OTT platforms offer greater narrative freedom, improved character development, and a higher degree of fidelity to the original literary texts. The paper further explores the growing significance of digital streaming platforms in shaping the future of literary adaptations in contemporary India.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the growing role of OTT platforms in the adaptation of novels.
2. To compare OTT adaptations with feature film adaptations.
3. To analyze the effectiveness of OTT platforms in preserving narrative depth and character development.
4. To evaluate the fidelity of OTT adaptations to their source texts.
5. To explore the significance of OTT platforms in the contemporary adaptation of Indian novels.



Literature Review

The study of literary adaptation has attracted significant scholarly attention over the years. Adaptation scholars have examined the relationship between literature and visual media, they focus on issues such as fidelity, narrative transformation, and audience reception. Due to the emergence of OTT platforms, adaptation studies have entered a new phase in which long-form storytelling has become increasingly important.

George Bluestone, in *Novels into Film* (1957), argues that literature and cinema are distinct artistic forms with different modes of expression. According to Bluestone, a film adaptation cannot be judged solely on the basis of its faithfulness to the original text because the transition from written language to visual representation inevitably involves transformation. His work laid the foundation for modern adaptation studies and highlighted the challenges involved in converting novels into films.

Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), told that adaptation is a product and a process of reinterpretation. She suggests that adaptations should not be considered secondary to their source texts but rather as creative works in their own right. Hutcheon emphasizes that adaptation involves repetition without replication and that each adaptation reflects the cultural and technological context in which it is produced.

Robert Stam challenges the traditional notion of fidelity criticism and argues that adaptations should be evaluated through intertextual and cultural perspectives. According to Stam, an adaptation is not merely a reproduction of a literary text but a new creative work influenced by social, historical, and industrial factors. His approach broadens the scope of adaptation studies beyond the question of faithfulness.

Recent studies have increasingly focused on digital streaming platforms and their influence on storytelling. Researchers have observed that OTT platforms have transformed narrative structures by promoting episodic and long-form content. Unlike feature films, which are constrained by limited runtime, OTT series can devote greater attention to character development, thematic complexity, and narrative continuity. This flexibility makes OTT platforms particularly suitable for adapting lengthy and complex novels.

Studies on Indian OTT content have highlighted the success of literary adaptations such as *Sacred Games*, *A Suitable Boy* and *Leila*. These adaptations demonstrate how streaming platforms can preserve important narrative elements that are often reduced or omitted in



feature film adaptations. The episodic structure allows creators to explore multiple storylines, social contexts, and character arcs while maintaining audience engagement over an extended period.

Although considerable research has been conducted on film adaptations, comparatively a limited number of studies have examined OTT platforms as a distinct medium for literary adaptation. This gap in adaptation studies makes it necessary to investigate whether OTT platforms provide a more convenient and justifiable medium for adapting novels than feature films. The present study seeks to address this gap through a comparative analysis of selected Indian novel adaptations.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is based on Adaptation Theory and Fidelity Theory. These theories provide a framework for understanding the relationship between literary texts and their screen adaptations.

George Bluestone's theory emphasizes that novels and films are two distinct forms of artistic expression. Since each medium possesses its own narrative techniques and representational strategies, adaptation inevitably involves transformation. This perspective helps in examining how novels are modified when adapted into visual formats.

Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation views adaptation as a process of reinterpretation and recreation. According to Hutcheon, adaptations should not be judged merely by their fidelity to the original text but by their ability to create meaning within a new medium. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding how OTT platforms reinterpret literary works through episodic storytelling.

Robert Stam's approach challenges fidelity-based criticism and advocates the study of adaptations within broader cultural and intertextual contexts. Stam argues that adaptations are independent creative texts that interact with their source materials while responding to contemporary audiences and media environments.

The present study applies these theoretical perspectives to examine whether OTT platforms provide greater narrative freedom and textual representation than feature films. These theories help in evaluate the extent to which OTT adaptations preserve the themes, characters, and narrative structures of novels while adapting them to contemporary visual media.



Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative and comparative research methodology. It focuses on the analysis of selected Indian novel adaptations available on OTT platforms and compares them with the conventional practice of feature film adaptation.

The research is based on secondary sources, including books, journal articles, research papers, reviews, and adaptation studies. Four major Indian OTT adaptations—*Sacred Games*, *A Suitable Boy*, *Leila*—have been selected as case studies. These works are examined in relation to their source novels to assess the effectiveness of OTT storytelling.

The comparative approach enables the study to evaluate the strengths and limitations of OTT platforms and feature films as adaptation mediums. Particular attention is given to narrative structure, character development, thematic representation, and fidelity to the source text.

The collected data are analyzed through textual and thematic analysis. The findings are interpreted within the framework of adaptation theories proposed by George Bluestone, Linda Hutcheon, and Robert Stam. Through this methodology, the study seeks to determine whether OTT platforms serve as a more convenient and justifiable medium for novel adaptations than feature films.

Case Studies

1. Sacred Games: Expanding Narrative Possibilities through OTT

Sacred Games is based on Vikram Chandra's acclaimed novel of the same name. The novel is characterized by its complex narrative structure, multiple timelines, and extensive character network. Adapting such lengthy and intricate text into a feature film would have required significant reduction of plot elements and character arcs. However, the OTT format enable the creators to present the story through multiple episodes and allow sufficient space for narrative development.

The series explore the lives of Sartaj Singh and Ganesh Gaitonde in detail while maintaining the political, social, and historical dimensions of the original novel. Through episodic storytelling, the adaptation preserves the complexity of the source text and provide a deeper understanding of character motivations and narrative connections to the audiences . The success of *Sacred Games* demonstrates how OTT platforms can accommodate large-scale literary narratives more effectively than feature films.



2. A Suitable Boy: Preserving Literary Complexity

Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* is one of the longest novels in Indian English literature. The novel contains multiple families, social settings, and political developments that collectively depict post-independence Indian society. Adapting such work into a conventional feature film would have been extremely challenging due to time constraints.

Systematically, The OTT adaptation provide benefits from its extended duration, which allows the representation of major characters and important social themes. The series retains significant aspects of the novel, include family relationships, cultural traditions, and questions of identity and marriage. While certain modifications were inevitable, the episodic structure made it possible to preserve much of the narrative richness of the source text. This case illustrates the suitability of OTT platforms for adapting expansive literary works.

3. Leila: Reimagining Dystopian Fiction

Leila, adapted from Prayaag Akbar's novel, presents a dystopian vision of a divided and authoritarian society. The novel deals with themes of identity, surveillance, exclusion, and social control. These themes require careful narrative development and world-building to achieve their intended impact.

The OTT format enables the adaptation to gradually construct its dystopian universe through multiple episodes. Viewers are given adequate time to understand the social and political conditions that shape the narrative. The series develops the emotional journey of the protagonist while expanding the visual and thematic dimensions of the original text. Through its episodic structure, *Leila* demonstrates how OTT platforms can effectively translate complex literary themes into visual narratives.

Comparative Analysis

The selected case studies reveal several advantages of OTT platforms as a medium for novel adaptations. First, OTT platforms provide greater narrative space, enabling creators to include important plotlines that might be usually excluded in the feature films. Second, the episodic format supports detailed character development and allows audiences to engage more deeply with the narrative. Third, OTT adaptations can preserve thematic complexity more effectively than feature films, particularly when adapting lengthy or multi-layered novels.



In contrast, feature films often face limitations of runtime and commercial expectations. These constraints frequently require the simplification of narratives and the elimination of secondary characters and subplots. Despite their popularity, feature film's often face narrative limitations when adapting for lengthy and complex novels. The case studies therefore support the argument that OTT platforms provide a more convenient and justifiable medium for novel adaptations. Their flexibility, narrative depth, and ability to accommodate extensive storytelling make them particularly suitable for adapting contemporary Indian novels.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis of the selected case studies demonstrates that OTT platforms have significantly transformed the process of literary adaptation. The findings indicate that the episodic structure of OTT platforms provides greater narrative flexibility than feature films. This flexibility enables creator to adapt novels with minimal reduction of plotlines, characters, and thematic elements.

One of the major findings of the study is that OTT adaptations offer superior character development. In the selected series, characters are given sufficient screen time to evolve gradually, allowing audiences to understand their motivations, conflicts, and relationships. Such detailed characterization is often difficult to achieve within the limited runtime of feature films. The study also reveals that OTT platforms are more effective in preserving the thematic richness of literary texts. Complex themes such as identity, politics, social inequality, memories of the past events, and cultural transformation are explored in greater depth through long-form storytelling. As a result, OTT adaptations remain closer to the spirit and structure of the source texts.

Another important finding is the enhancement of audience engagement. The accessibility of OTT platforms, combined with binge-watching culture, encourages sustained interaction with narratives. Viewers are able to experience stories over multiple episodes, creating a deeper connection with characters and events.

The findings further support the arguments of adaptation theorists such as Linda Hutcheon and Robert Stam, who emphasize adaptation as a process of reinterpretation rather than simple reproduction. OTT platforms provide an environment in which literary texts can be reimagined while maintaining their essential narrative and thematic qualities.



Overall, the study suggests that OTT platforms have emerged as a highly effective medium for adapting novels in the twenty-first century. Their ability to combine narrative depth, creative flexibility, and audience accessibility makes them particularly suitable for literary adaptations.

Conclusion

The relationship between literature and visual media continues to evolve with the development of digital technologies and streaming platforms. This study has examined the role of OTT platforms in the adaptation of novels and compared their effectiveness with the feature films.

The analysis of *Sacred Games*, *A Suitable Boy* and *Leila* demonstrates that OTT platforms provide greater narrative space, deeper character development, and more comprehensive thematic representation than feature films. The episodic structure of OTT storytelling allows creators to preserve significant elements of the source text while adapting them for contemporary audiences.

While feature films remain an important medium of adaptation. But, their limited runtime often restricts the representation of complex literary narratives. OTT platforms overcome many of these limitations by offering flexibility, extended duration, and opportunities for detailed storytelling. The study concludes that OTT platforms are a more convenient and justifiable medium for novel adaptations than the feature films. The growing influence of OTT platforms indicates a new direction for literary adaptations in the digital age.

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