

# Intermediality in the Shaping of a Text: A Study of Ekphrasis in *Judgemental Hai Kya*

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## **Abstract:**

With the shift in the interpretation of many concrete as well as abstract ideas in literary criticism, literary theory, and literature in general, the concept of text and textuality has also been reconceived or recreated with each shift in the paradigm. Today anything that can provide an opportunity to decode or decrypt, irrespective of its form and structure, can be studied as a text. Thereby, inaugurating a possibility to resignify a piece of associated signs and signifiers in a totally new light. The present paper is aimed to study how Ekphrasis as an intermediary device shapes the film, *Judgemental Hai Kya* (taken as a filmic or cinematic text here). The paper will further study how the intermediary devices applied to a film(cinematic text) plays with and resignifies the conceived meaning as well as the spectator/ reader experience of the text.

**Keywords:** Intermediality, Text, Ekphrasis, Transmediation, Cinematic-text

## **1. Introduction:**

While distinguishing a 'Text' from 'Work', the French literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes, in an essay entitled, "From Work to Text" which was published in *Image—Music—Text* (1977), a collection of his essays in English that established him as a post-structuralist thinker, destabilized the foundational notion of 'Text', and reformulated the concept as:

The Text is not to be thought of as an object that can be computed.... the Text is a methodological field... a process of demonstration, speaks according to certain rules (or against certain rules)... the text is held in language, only exists in the movement of a discourse.... the Text is experienced only in an activity of production...

The Text can be approached, experienced, in reaction to the sign...The Text... practices the infinite deferment of the signified, is dilatory; its field is that of the signifier...its material vestibule.... (157)

Making a case for the inclusiveness and plurality inherited in the concept of 'Text', Barthes further noted:

The logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive...but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy... the Text is radically symbolic...Thus is the Text restored to language...

The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an irreducible...plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation...but to an explosion, a dissemination. The plural of the Text depends, that is, not on the ambiguity of its contents but on what might be called the stereographic plurality of its weave of signifiers (etymologically, the text is a tissue, a woven fabric). (157-159)

Following Barthes' idea of the text, the traditional bent of the theory concerning the concept of; what a text is, seems far intangible from the modern notion of a text. In a traditional sense, a text is understood either to be a piece of written and spoken material in its primary form or any stretch of language that communicates a given context meaningfully. Nevertheless, the concept of the text is not a static one but rather dynamic in nature, as with the shift in the literary nomenclature and conceptualizations, it has taken up an interestingly new shape. Now any encodation, be it an image, music, set of signs, or symbols, either in their primal form or in fusion, that can be interpreted and decoded in a certain way, levels up the criteria to be labeled a text.

Keeping this fluid idea of the text in mind, the paper aims to study how the intermediary device of ekphrasis shapes the film, *Judgemental Hai Kya* which has been taken up as a cinematic text. In this specific context the film being a text, also works in the same way a conventional text works for the conventional readers. As in the case of a literary text, where the usage of the literary tropes and rhetorical devices, shapes the understanding and comprehension of the readers towards the text, likewise, the inclusion of different semiotic systems (mediums), in a filmic text also leads to a new and enriching experience of the spectacle. Transmediation of these semiotic systems (mediums) in the filmic text, results in an intermedial experience, which in turn shapes or more appropriately, transforms the way readers or spectators perceive a given text, while simultaneously challenging the traditional approach of the spectators' perceptibility.

On the same note, it is not only the concept of text that has been transformed with the arrival of new theoretical dimensions but the idea, as well as the role of the reader, has also witnessed a shift in its paradigm. Now the reader is not just a passive consumer of the fabric woven by the Author-God but a proactive creator of the text, who through his multifarious faculty and active participation in the process of meaning-making, can transform the text. The transformed idea of text has been instrumental to the radicalization of the role of the 'reader'/interpreter', who can now be considered a sort of co-author for the text, by completing it rather than giving it a mere 'expression'. As Barthes himself puts it:

The Text is very much a score of this new kind: it asks of the reader a practical collaboration.... what he [reader] perceives is multiple, irreducible, coming from a disconnected, heterogeneous variety of substances and perspectives: lights, colours, vegetation, heat, air, slender explosions of noises, scant cries of birds, children's voices from over on the other side, passages, gestures, clothes of inhabitants near or far away. All these incidents are half identifiable: they come from codes which are known but their combination is unique, founds the stroll in a difference repeatable only as difference. (163)

This very idea of the amalgamation of different symbolic codes, like visuals (image), voices (music), and script (text), in order to attribute plurality and meaningful articulation to a given text, acts as a sort of foregrounding for the contemporary theoretical concept called 'Intermediality'. The term 'intermediality' as a discipline of theoretical inquiry, came into prominence during the later part of the 20th century, particularly around the 1980s, as a term referring to the relationships between varied media forms and is hence used to describe a huge range of cultural phenomena which involve more than one medium. But the general conception regarding intermediality seems quite narrower in its scope and requires a more comprehensive elaboration in terms of being an ever-evolving domain in contemporary academia.

In the course of time, intermediality has taken up an interdisciplinary turn and has now become a central theoretical concept in multiple disciplines such as literary, cultural, and theater studies as well as in art history, musicology, philosophy, sociology, film, media, and comics studies – and all of the aforementioned disciplines, deal with different intermedial constellations which demand specific theoretical approaches and definitions.

The present age, humans live in, is an age of digitalization, sometimes also called the 'New Media Age', which is marked by a plethora of multifaceted media systems permeating the lives of the masses. Cinema and films being an integral part of contemporary popular culture particularly had the most important place within intermediality studies. Defining the term intermediality, as adopted in contemporary film studies, Michael Ingham, in the 'Introduction' to her 2017 book, *Stage-Play, and Screen-Play: The Intermediality of Theatre and Cinema*, notes: intermediality can be broadly defined as the imbrication or intercalation of the one performance medium with the other. This can occur when acting style and spoken text rhetoric, the stage or film-set design, the camera angles, shot length and depth, the point-of-view, the spatial logic or continuity, editing techniques, scenographic framing, etc. are transcoded and/or fused. In consequence, traces of one medium are discernible, whether opaquely or transparently, in the other – i.e. stage drama in film drama or vice versa. Intermediality can be conceived of as operating in three necessarily linked domains: textual/formal; ontological/interpersonal; and conceptual/cognitive. (14)

Following the same thread, Nibbelink and Merx in their essay entitled, "Presence and Perception: Analysing Intermediality in Performance", explain how intermediality, by integrating one media within another, creates a hybrid of ideas which in turn shapes the process of signification, especially on the part of the viewers, as:

intermediality as performance and performativity practices in which media not only exist next to each other, but through their interplay results in both a redefinition of media and resensibilisation of the senses. (qtd. in Bay-Cheng et al. 208)

Hence, the theory of intermediality as a theoretical as well as an intellectual field of inquiry has been instrumental in bringing up the intricacies hidden in the interaction of different media forms within cinema, into the spotlight. The theory achieves its nuanced objectives by emphasizing the way in which moving pictures can incorporate other mediums of signification and can initiate meaningful fusions between distinct art forms like music, painting, and literature.

The film under consideration is a psychological thriller, which skillfully interweaves different media within one representation, making it a fairly new experience, more elaborately for its (informed) readers/viewers. The creators largely rely on some of the specific intermediary devices, one of which is 'Ekphrasis' while the other being 'transmedial storytelling'. The term ekphrasis has been one of the most discussed concepts in the history of literary interweaving. The origin of the term Ekphrasis lies in the Greek Rhetorical tradition, where it served prominently in the works of the classical writers like Homer and Socrates, as a rhetorical device. Being a rhetorical device, it was prominently used by the Greek Masters in their influential works as "a way of bringing the experience of an object to a listener or reader through highly detailed descriptive writing" (Welsh). Keeping the ancient formulation of the term in mind, as explained by Ruth Webb in her book, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice*, Ekphrasis has been defined as: a type of speech that creates immaterial images in the mind. The speaker of a successful ekphrasis is therefore a metaphorical painter, the result of his words is a metaphorical painting and this analogy emerges at certain points in the discussions. (27)

But over the last three thousand years, it has been shaped in fairly new dimensions. With the arrival of the digital era, a refocused concept of ekphrasis that could be potent enough to address the human experiences in the digital age was an imperative need of the hour. Therefore in order to situate the concept in a broader sense, ekphrasis has been reconceptualized as "the verbalization, quotation, or dramatization of real or fictitious texts composed in another sign system" (Eidt 20).

To further elaborate the shift in the scope of ekphrasis or more appropriately the ekphrastic description, as used in the contemporary digital world, Johanna Hartmann, in her essay, "Ekphrasis in the Age of Digital Reproduction", notes:

Ekphrastic descriptions, as inherently intermedial phenomena, rely on transformational processes between word and image and thus necessarily imply the crossing of medial boundaries. The advent of the digital age coincided with the inauguration of various 'turns' that seemingly announce the shift from word to image as the dominant system of signification. (Rippl 158)

Taking the shifting definition of Ekphrasis into account, in the present digitalized world, it can be said that ekphrasis as an important intermediary device, has largely been used in the film studies as an interpretive tool, which demonstrates how the artful amalgamation of different genres pertaining to various art forms, in either of the modalities, influence the way a reader or viewer reinterprets the nuances associated with a given work of art.

The film *Judgemental Hai Kya* shows a remarkable use of different categories of ekphrastic techniques, that are exquisitely blended within the film, in terms of providing a better signification of the nuances associated with the filmic text. Taking the types of ekphrastic techniques used, as categorized by Laura M. Sager Eidt in her book, *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film*, the film under discussion, would be analyzed under four categories of ekphrasis, namely: attributive, depictive, interpretive, and dramatic.

Attributive ekphrasis, being the first category of ekphrasis, is defined as a verbal reference or allusion to paintings or artworks, generally in the dialogic interaction within a film. It also refers to a scene in the

film that briefly shows a painting. This particular form of representation is either instrumental to the understanding of the narrative or characterizes the protagonists.

The film in question has many instances where an informed spectator can interpret the focus of the camera on such paintings, which are artistically interwoven with dialogues rendered in a given scene, in order to unravel the in-betweenness of the text. In the course of the film's plot, one of the major examples of attributive ekphrasis is projected methodically in the second half of the film. The scene is marked by a spatiotemporal shift in the female protagonist, Bobby's situation, as the scene reads "two years later" and the action takes place in London. Bobby goes to London from India, to be a part of a theatrical performance enacting the Ramayana in a modern and futuristic context, named Ramayana 2.0, where she is supposed to meet her cousin, Megha as well. But there she meets Keshav again, who has now adopted a new identity, i.e., of Shravan, and is introduced to Bobby by her cousin, as her husband and father of the child she is pregnant with. Bobby first encounters Shravan at a pub, where initially, both come across one another as strangers. While she confronts him and asks about his new identity, simultaneously the camera shifts the focus, in the background of the scene, which depicts a modernist absurd painting, which seems bleak, shady, and gruesome. It is accompanied by a text, which says:

"I want you to hurt me, Baby" ("Judgemental" 1:01:06). This image-text duo here though seems beyond gendered interpretation, but the image, text, and sounds residing in the particular scene, elusively suggest a shady undercover on the part of the characters portrayed in the scene, simultaneously concealing the fact about the identity of the real culprit and the victim.

Depictive Ekphrasis, the second category of ekphrastic representation, is a verbal discussion or reflection upon particular images, contributing to the meaning of the filmic text. This form of ekphrasis shows the closest affinity to the most comprehensive definition of ekphrasis as "verbal representation of visual representation". As even in the film, more or less like a literary text, it is largely verbal, although indubitably aided by camera movements as well as by other auditory effects like music and echo. Although the visual and auditory mediums introduced, act as viewers' surrogates, there is more of an explicit analysis of meaning through dialogues between characters or through narration. In the film, some of the instances of depictive ekphrasis lie in the second half of the plot, and most notable among them, is the description of Sita's situation. This particular scene focuses on the image of the character playing Sita, dressed accordingly. The scene was aided by camera movements and music but narration, in particular, is the most important part, as per the elucidation of the meaning.

Kya Sita Ravan ke jaal mein phansegī?

(Will Sita be entrapped in Ravana's fabrications?)

Kya uska Ravan ke jaal mein phansna pehle se taya tha?

(If her destiny to be trapped in Ravana's entrapments, was predetermined?)

Agni pariksha aur Ravan vadh, dono hi hain Sita ki kahani see Jude,

(The Fire test and Ravana's end, both are integral to Sita's story.)

Agar Sita Ravan ke jaal mein hi na phanse, Toh Ramayan hi na bane.

(If Sita can save herself from the entrapping of Ravana, then Ramayana would not have existed).

("Judgemental" 1:06:24-39)

The meaning through narration is further illustrated as:

Aaj kis chehre mein, kahan Ravan chipa hai Sawal yeh hai, kya Sita khud ko bacha payegi?  
(Where is Ravana hiding, in whose face today? The question is if Sita will be able to safeguard herself?).  
("Judgemental" 1:07:57-1:08:02)

The film in question uses the epic Ramayana as a frame narrative, where it appears as an introductory narrative in parts, for the purpose of setting the stage for a more emphasized second narrative, i.e., the plot of the film. The frame story allows readers/viewers to understand a part of the story, then jump to another part that can now be understood more appropriately. But simultaneously demands a prerequisite knowledge of the epic Ramayana, introduced as a framework, on the part of the spectators.

To define, interpretive ekphrasis as the third category of ekphrastic representation is a deeper verbal reflection on the image or a visual-verbal dramatization of the image through a mise-en-scene tableau vivant. The painting or the scene is often acted out by the characters, in visually artful ways through storyboarding, cinematographic effects, and in poetically artful ways through the direction. In a film, such a tableau vivant is usually typified by slow camera angles and zoom outs. This particular kind of filmic ekphrasis invites the viewers to see the film's visual representation analogous to the original image. Moreover, along with the commenting and interpreting voice resulting from the interaction between the characters, an additional verbalization of the original image through music or narration, adds further nuances to the already existing significations. Often this ekphrastic experience is achieved using transmedial phenomena, introduced deliberately by the creator for the intended reflections that sometimes go beyond the proposed theme of the text. One of the most striking examples of interpretive ekphrasis in the film lies when Bobby enacts the character of Sita and takes up the identity of the female character playing the role of Sita, in the Ramayana 2.0, a play that acts as the frame narrative within the film, in order to support the film's main narrative. Bobby dresses exactly like her and repeats the following dialogue:

Aaj kis chehre mein, kahan Ravan chipa hai Sawal yeh hai, kya Sita khud ko bacha payegi?

(Where is Ravana hiding in which face today? The question is if Sita will be able to safeguard herself?).  
("Judgemental" 1:07:57-1:08:02)

Here, the character of Sita was acted out by the female protagonist, Bobby. The scene was accompanied by music and narration, hence demonstrative of the "visual- verbal dramatization".

Dramatic Ekphrasis, the fourth and the most complex form of ekphrasis, is characterized by a higher degree of textual or filmic self-reflexivity and is acknowledged for infusing life in still images on the screen. This dramatizes the images to the extent where they "take on a life of their own". The animation of the image in question leads to a change in the original image. It is prominently marked by enargia, a rhetorical term for a visually powerful description that vividly recreates something or someone in words. Dramatic ekphrasis is often featured as an extended scene within a film. It is one of the most comprehensive demonstrations of how a film can succeed in the trans-medialization of images, from one

system of signs (medium) to another. But this form of ekphrasis calls for the prior knowledge of "the artist's oeuvre" (Eidt 63), on the part of the viewers. As Laura M. Sager Eidt notes in her book, *Writing and Filming the Painting: Ekphrasis in Literature and Film* :

With regard to reception, this is the most independent and imaginative type of ekphrasis, but also the most appropriating. Recognizable as ekphrasis only by those readers or viewers who are familiar with the artist's oeuvre, dramatic ekphrasis tends to hide its ekphrastic discourse, all but amalgamating the art work into the (their) own medium. (62-63)

There are two scenes in the second half of the film, where dramatic ekphrasis can be perceived in its abundance. One is before the denouement of the filmic text, where the paintings of the characters, like Lord Hanuman, Jataayu, and Lord Rama, whom the camera zooms in the theatrical set rehearsing futuristic Ramayana, as shown in the film, comes to life. Most part of the second half of the film shows the grand epic Ramayana, as an ekphrastic allusion in the backdrop of the film, which serves to invite the viewers, who are actually the readers of the filmic text, to create meanings out of the props adopted. Most notable among them is the concluding scene of the film, which is an extended climactic scene. It clearly demonstrates the interplay between different mediums (image-music-text), adopting an intermediary device called, transmedial storytelling, a technique of unfolding a story across multiple media platforms, "with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins 95-96). As the scene depicts the climactic battle between the protagonist, Bobby, and the antagonist, Keshav. The scene consists of mirrors, which are exactly ten in numbers. Here the mirrors act as a canvas and the image formed in it is analogous to the painting on a canvas. During the scene, as Keshav unfolds the darker side of himself, the images formed in the mirrors keep on changing, thereby taking the form of living pictures. The character of Keshav, revealed as a Psychopath, is portrayed as the ten-headed demon, Ravana from the Ramayana, a metaphorical reference to the different identities-essentially chaotic, which he took during the course of the film's plot as a Psychopath, to victimize his targets.

The film or more appropriately, the given cinematic text shows no clear demarcation among either of the four ekphrastic categories. Most of the scenes in the film are presented as an artistic amalgamation of two or more ekphrastic categories. Along with the already discussed ekphrastic types, the film also incorporates the fifth type of ekphrasis, called notional ekphrasis. To define, notional ekphrasis is a technique that may describe mental processes such as dreams, thoughts, and whimsies of the imagination. The filmic text in question uses many instances of notional ekphrasis as the film belongs to the genre of psychological thriller, dealing with mental illnesses like Acute/Brief Psychotic Disorder and Psychopathy, as experienced by the female lead, Bobby, and male lead, Keshav respectively. The majority of the illustrations rendering notional ekphrasis are in the form of hallucinations, experienced by Bobby being a Psychotic.

In conjunction with the Ekphrastic description (Attributive/ Depictive/ Interpretive/ Dramatic/ Notional), the film employs Ekphrastic simile, deployed through the metaphoric poetic comparison, which on the one hand compares Bobby, the female lead in the film with Sita and on the other hand Keshav to Ravana, the ten-headed demon king from Ramayana. The film also uses another technique within the umbrella term ekphrasis, called Ekphrastic allusion, marked by the introduction of the Ramayana theme. The film repeatedly alludes to, either through verbalization or visualization, the notion of the fire test (the Agnipariksha), which has been a central concern for feminist academic debate around the epic Ramayana

for ages. The film portrays the female lead as Sita, though, unlike the Ramayana, here it is not the Agnipariksha of Sita's character and her chastity but of her sanity, as presented the leading edge of the cinematic text.

To conclude, the present paper was aimed to study how intermediality shapes the understanding of the readers/viewers while dealing with a text, in this specific case, a filmic text. The film, *Judgemental Hai Kya*, as discussed in the paper, can be considered a specific instance, especially if taken into the larger context of Indian cinematic history, in which cinema seems to consciously position itself "in-between" multiple media forms and arts in general. As it engages techniques that bring into consideration, the multimedial complexity associated with cinematic delineation, dominantly witnessed in the western cinematic representations. The film, employing a face-to-face interaction of various media forms, skillfully exploits the possibilities offered by the distinctive characteristics of the media components involved in the process of signification, working within the filmic text. The film under consideration demonstrates how intermediality, with all its associated devices, can be used as an effective theoretical framework for a better interpretation, when applied in the fields of film and cinema studies, as it: denotes communication through several discourses at once, including through combinations of different sensory modalities of interaction, for instance, music and moving images. (Jensen 1)

Thus, leading to an overtly new and redefined viewer/reader experience.

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