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**Filmic Adaptation of Amado's Gabriela:
Distorting the Theme**

AUTHOR

Dr. Sudha Swarnakar

Prof^a. Titular

**UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DA PARAÍBA-UEPB
BRAZIL**

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Filmic Adaptation of Amado's Gabriela: Distorting the Theme

Prof^a. Dr^a. Sudha Swarnakar¹

ABSTRACT: Relationship between literature and film has been a favourite topic for both the literarily and the film critics. Most literary genres have been the subjects of the film but the novel seems to be the most common source of inspiration for film makers. Adaptation of a literary work not necessarily propagates the theme or essence of the literary work. Often the film makers are driven by the acceptance by the audience and mould or distort the literary work. Looking from this point of view this work discusses most prolific Brazilian writer Jorge Amado's novel *Gabriela, cravo e canela: crônica de uma cidade de interior* and its filmic adaptation. The objective is to show how despite helping to reach common public the filmic adaptation takes it far away from Amado's novel, his theme and his message.

Key words: Gabriela, Jorge Amado, film, Bruno Barreto, female sexuality

The possibility of adaptation of a literary work to other mediums, specifically the T. V. or film, occurs because of the fact that it has the elements which television or cinematic narration desires; it is the intricacy of the life itself or the melodrama which apart from presenting relevant historic or cultural episodes is recognizable by the people. Literature has been the most favorite of film and T. V. producers hence the critical attention has been drawn to these adaptations. As Linda Hutcheon (2006, p. XI) very aptly observes "a great number of critical works have concentrated on the the filmic transposition of the literary works". The complexity of these adaptations, apart from actualizing the literary work, involves a number of questions such as the co-authorship, fidelity and a sort of identity between the public taste and these adaptations.

When I first read Jorge Amado's novel, *Gabriela, cravo e canela: crônica de uma cidade de interior*, I was bit confused because I had seen "Gabriela" both on the T. V. and on the cinema screen before I led my hands on the novel. It made me think and question, "was it the same novel I had seen in the T.V. serial and the film adaptation?" I checked again the title of the serial and the film and found it was the same novel which the

¹ Sudha SWARNAKAR, Ph. D., Universidade Estadual da Paraíba-UEPB, DLEA/ MLI
suswarna2001@yahoo.co.uk sudha_swarnakar@hotmail.com

T.V. "Rede Tupi", "Rede Globo", and then, Bruno Barreto had used for the film production. Both the T. V. serial and the film "Gabriela" start with a scene which I could not find till I finished reading almost hundred pages of Amado's novel. Definitely, the adaptation of the novel in both, T. V. and cinematic production had ignored the beginning of the novel. I was posed with a number of questions. Why did the media producers (both T. V. and film) wipe away hundred pages of the beginning of the novel? Why did they ignore one of the major parts of the story? Why did they pay no attention to one of its main theme? I was also curious to know how Amado reacted to these omissions.

Working, two years ago, on Indian novel *The Guide* (1960) by R. K. Narayan and its cinematic adaptation by Vijay Anand, I came across similar situation. The dilapidated story, a love affair between dancer Rosie and Raju, was given a very colourful and live presentation in Anand's film. He meddled with Narayan's theme, replaced his favourite fictitious city "Malgudi" with the city of Udaypur in Rajasthan, and transferred the focus of the story from Raju to Rosie. Surely Narayan was not very pleased with these changes and in his interviews he gave voice both to his dissatisfaction and his displeasure. Vijaya Anand's reply to the author was that he was never interested in merely copying any work of art from one medium to another unless there was scope for value addition. This reflects on the difference of angle between the author and the producer and on the delicate situation of adaptation of a literary work for other art forms.

Coming back to *Gabriela, cravo e canela*, and to search for answers, this paper will focus on two aspects of Amado's novel. First, it will focus on the plot, theme and characters as they are presented in the novel and then will look at the representation of these elements in the film. The objective is to analyse the aims and objectives behind the adaptation of the novel for the film and to see how this reshaping affected, enhanced or distorted its literary and social message.

Robert Stam observes that adaptation is different from the original and this difference is brought due to the change of means in which it is being transferred. The change he calls is from "verbal single track" to the "multitrack" of the film. Hence the difference in two forms is obvious but my objective in this paper is not to judge the adaptation of novel or question the fidelity but to analyse how this process of adaptation interfeares with the litterary value of the work.

It is important to note that Amado's novel is published in a period which is crucial in Brazilian history. The period 1956-1961 is important because of two reasons. First, it was the "Era of Juscelino Kubitschek", a period of great social and political changes. Second, it is when Nélon Pereira dos Santos, with his film "Rio, 40 graus", (1955) launched the New Cinema in Brazil.

Looking at the number of works, outside Brazil, that focus on Amado, it will not be an exaggeration to say that among Brazilian writers, he can be seen as the most popular Brazilian writer out of Brazil. Also he

stands alone as a Brazilian writer whose work has been translated in more than forty two languages. Moreover, his work has been an inspiration for the artists from different fields who transformed it in form of poetry, drama, radio, television production and film. A large number of Amado's novels have been adapted by T. V and film producers. *Gabriela, cravo e canela* has been the favourite from the beginning and as I mentioned before it was adapted by both film and television producers.

In 1960, Zora Seijan presented the first adaptation of the novel on T. V. channel "RedeTupi". It was directed by Maurício Sherman and he selected Janete Vullu de Carvalho who was a stage actress for Gabriela. In 1975, another T. V. Channel, "Rede Globo" presented second version of the novel. Walter George Durst² adapted the novel for television presentation under the direction of Wálter Avancini, with Sonia Braga playing the role of Amado's protagonist Gabriela. The success of this television presentation motivated Bruno Barreto, the producer director, to adapt the novel for film and in 1983 the first cinematic adaption of *Gabriela* was released.³ Barreto selected Sonia Braga as the heroine and the musicality of the film enhanced with inclusion of Tom Jobim's music.

Apart from these adaptations, the novel also inspired the dance company and was adapted for a ballet dance production which was performed by the "Balé de Teatro Municipal" of Rio de Janeiro. The magazine *Amiga*, in October 1975, presented it in form of a picture-novel and in the same year Editora Brasil-América, Rio de Janeiro, presented it in form of a children's comic book.

Gabriela, Cravo e Canela was published soon after Amado's return from his self imposed exile in Paris in August 1958. Amado openly admits his detachment from the communist party and declares he will pay more attention to his literary work and keep himself away from party politics.⁴ The public reception of the work was overwhelming and in less than two months the first edition of twenty thousand copies was sold out. It is important to note that this was Editora Martin edition of the novel in simple hard red cover and the paperback with the image produced by famous Brazilian artist Carybé. This fact is important as when the "Editora Record" took over the publishing of Amado's novels the cover pages of almost all

² *Gabriela* (1975). Direction: Wálter Avancini. Series T.V. (soap opera). Adaptation: Wálter George Durst. By Rede Globo. The soap opera was presented from 14 April to 24 October 1975 in 132 episodes. Main actors participated in this version were Paulo Gracindo, in the role of coronel Ramiro Bastos, José Wilker, as Mundinho Falcão, Fúlvio Stefanini as Tonico Bastos, Elizabeth Savalla as Malvina, Nívea Maria as Jerusa, Dina Sfat as Zanolha and Milton Gonçalves in the role of Filó.

³ *Gabriela* (1983). Direction: Bruno Barreto. Serie: Cinema (Film). Plot: Bruno Barreto and Leopoldo Serran. Music by Antonio Carlos Jobim, interpreted by the famous singer Gal Costa.

⁴ I personally feel he was a communist not only in his ideology but at heart. Hence though he declares that he is breaking away from the party he could never keep himself away from being a communist. Till his last work his concern was the oppressed, the miserable and the prostitutes. In his interview to the magazine *Manchete*, "O Jorge Vermelho" he shows his passion for the communist ideology similar to what we see in the Russian writer Maxim Gorky.

of his works were changed.⁵ The cover page of the novel maintained the image prepared by the artist Carybé as Sônia Calda observes, “o destaque de Gabriela como capa do romance é do ano de 1973, numa capa de autoria do pintor Carybé”. After 1975 production of T. V. Globo this amadian character became, in Freire’s words (1992, p. 397), a real woman of “pele morena e viva de Sônia Braga”.

Amado’s reaction was favorable to this change as his declaration in the Salvador news paper *A Tarde*, in 1975 shows:

Sei que é atriz de muito talento e pessoalmente pareceu-me ter as qualidades fundamentais para viver o papel de Gabriela – dengue, sensibilidade, força de vida, a pureza fundamental da mestiça Gabriela.

Critical attention was soon drawn to this new Gabriela as the following comment shows:

Gabriela retirante, Gabriela cozinheira de mão cheia, Gabriela flor e mulher foge da imaginação dos milhares de leitores de Jorge Amado para, pela primeira vez, ter um corpo, um rosto, uma voz definitiva, a cores, via Embratel. Cada leitor, potencialmente um apaixonado por Gabriela, a imaginava a seu modo, cada admirador do mito da mulher brasileira típica podia ver Gabriela na vizinha, amiga ou mulher. Agora Gabriela tem um nome – Sônia Braga.” (SILVEIRA, 1975)

Some critics; RAMOS (1963), SWARNAKAR (1998) do not see Gabriela only as a display of *mulata* sensuality or sexuality but see her as an icon of female liberty.

Starting from the selection of the title of the film as “Gabriela”, one becomes aware of what to expect from Barreto. A careful analysis of the title of Amado’s novel shows that it is focused on three major aspects; first, “Gabriela” the woman, second, her racial identity “cravo e canela” and third, “*a crônica da uma cidade de interior*”. Amado’s plot follows these elements of his title as he presents the city of Ilhéus with its people, their history and their customs before he presents Gabriela, the mulatto woman, her qualities and her sexuality.

5 From 1975 onwards all of Amado’s novels were published by “Editora Record”. This brought a major change from literary point of view as in the process of reprinting they replaced the plain red cover used by “Editora Martin” with the cover pages with images of women (unknown or famous actresses who participated in the climatic production of the works like Sonia Braga, Betty Faria etc) For full discussion of the topic see SWARNAKAR, Sudha. *The Fallen Woman in English and Brazilian Literature: A Comparative Analysis of D. H. Lawrence and Jorge Amado*. An unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Warwick, 1998.

The film also distances from the novel as Barreto ignores the message Amado transmits through the structural organization of the novel. Apart from the title with its focus on female character Amado's novel emphasizes the female condition in Ilheus society as he selects the titles for the sub division of the novel. The novel is divided in two parts and each part is divided in two chapters. The first chapter of part one is "O langor de Ofencia" and the second chapter is titled as "A Solidão de Glória". The third and fourth chapters, part of Second part "Gabriela, cravo e canela" are titled as "O segredo de Malvina" and "O luar da Gabriela". This structural division of the text, into two main and four sub divisions, with its titles show that Amado's objective was neither culminated only in female body nor only in the sexuality of his protagonist. The selection of adjectives in the titles of the sub chapters call attention and make the aware reader to think and get his message. The adjectives; "langor" (the languid), the "Solidão" (loneliness), the "segredo" (secret) and the "luar" (desire) in the four sub chapters clearly indicate Amado's concern for these women that makes him to raise his voice against the social exploitation and discrimination of woman in general. One cannot ignore to see that what Amado is trying to present is not merely the female body but he is also trying to call attention to the social and cultural pressure a woman goes through in general and in this small town of Bahia with its provincial nature and rigidity, in particular. What he seems to emphasize is woman in general and her condition as a "second sex" in a rigid patriarchal world.⁶ As further discussion will show Amado's message is totally lost in the cinematic adaptation of the novel. Of course it is not because of the mechanism of the process of adaptation but mainly because of the choice made by Bruno Barreto.

The focus of the film, similar to the critical reception of the novel, was Gabriela, the sensual mulatto woman with her liberal sexual attitudes, conquering the heart of rich and poor of the city as she is presented both in the novel and the film. Barreto, ignores the city of Ilhéus, its people and customs as he chooses his title for the film reducing it to only "Gabriela". By doing so he breaks the tie with Amado's novel and is free to concentrate mainly on the woman "Gabriela", her sensuality and her sexuality. By doing so, he also eliminates the racial qualities of Amado's protagonist. A comparison between the choice of the title in two mediums of expression, the film and the novel, highlights the difference one finds in these two productions. Compare to the film in the novel the use of "Gabriela" in his title helps Amado to achieve his objective and transmit his social message. Gabriela in Amado's novel is presented as an icon of free woman who brings freedom and change in a society where her sexuality is blended with her simplicity and humanity. The film focuses on Gabriela,

⁶ Amado was very close to Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. The couple had stayed with Amado family at Rio Vermelho, Salvador, his residence, while in Brazil. Amado's Gabriela, in my comprehension shows strong ties with feminist ideology of Beauvoir and also the German writer Ana Seighers who was also very close to Amado.

the female body, as the camera moves to her body parts exposing her youth and making her an object of desire. The choice of a sensual heroine Sonia Braga, with her short dresses and the focus on explicit sexual scenes combine with the objective of Bruno Barreto and no doubt it becomes a box office hit.

Apart from the characters and the plot, Barreto's film also makes changes as he presents the Vesúvio bar. In Amado's novel the bar occupies a central role with a provincial flavour it helps Amado to present the local colour and typical flavour of the interior of Bahia. It serves as a meeting point for the important people where ideas and events are discussed, an important place of interaction between Ilhéusan people whereas in film it is limited into a place of amorous exchanges and love disputes.

The objective behind Barreto's choice seems to be that the first major theme of the novel, with its political affinity and power struggle appears a strong dose for general public. Removal of this major conflict and the cutting of almost one third of the novel hampers with Amado's social concern. The film starts with the scene one finds after hundred pages in the novel (as I have mentioned in the beginning of the paper). In this opening scene Barreto's concern is Gabriela hence the camera rapidly goes through the episode Amado presents in which the reader sees Gabriela as a kind simple and young woman helping an old lady with familial affection. The camera quickly casts a glance on the group of immigrants from neighbouring states running away from draught. It highlights the poverty, hunger and desperate situation of these people but they are soon ignored as it moves and focuses on the healthy, tender body of a beautiful woman being exposed through her poverty. The viewers follow the camera and instead of feeling her humanity and solidarity they are taken to see and feel more of her young flesh. The scene successfully reduces the distance between the viewer and the female character making her the object of desire and voyeuristic pleasure.

The main plot of the novel, along with a number of sub-plots, is concerned specifically with two conflicts. First, which involves the regional politics presents the struggle between old and new politicians; a dispute between *Coronel* Ramiro Bastos, *Coronel* Altino Brandão and others representing the old ideology and Mundinho Falcão and younger generation of these *Corneis*. Though these younger Ilheusans have no courage to express themselves and support the new ideas openly, they agree with him. Thus, this presents the first major theme of the novel which is very skilfully knitted as "the political dispute".

The second conflict directly involves Nacib and Gabriela which Amado uses to raise the questions of love and passion suggesting a change in sexual behaviour of a traditional and rigid society of a small growing town like Ilhéus. Instead of presenting a linear story of love between two people he deals with it in a way that takes hold of whole society. This second conflict helps him to concentrate on the second major

theme of the novel “the love relationship” or the sexual behaviour in new and old terminology. Thus Gabriela presents the regionalist, esthetical, flavour on one hand and on the other hand it presents the political ideology of Brazil, the “coronelism”. *Coronel* Ramiro represents the old power which does not bend in front of the new ideology of people like Mundinho Falcão and younger generation. What is more important that the attitudes of these cornels show no tolerance to opposition as they refuse to make any compromise with the changing time both in matter of love and in politics.

Amado’s novel is set in the city of Ilhéus of 1925, the period of rapid growth of cocoa plantation, depicting the richness and rigidity of the provincial people. The beginning of the novel is very rich in this sense as it presents, with minute details, the early period of cocoa prosperity. Amado depicts a society full of hopes and aspiration eager to share this richness. He also presents a society growing with people from different regions, different nationalities who come to Ilhéus to prosper, to ascend in life and to fulfil their dreams. The reader is taken by the simplicity of language and beauty of style of this regional writer who portrays a lively picture of a provincial town, its culture and its people. Amado does not miss to record the effect of this advancement as he proceeds to show how everyone gets affected with the coming of the new people and feels the impact of new ideology. A number of sub themes structured around these questions result in a literary work that is important not only for Brazilian literature but also for the historians as it presents the simple and pure record of the implantation of cocoa culture in this region.

In case of Jorge Amado, a number of his novels have been adopted for cinema both in Brazil and in other countries. His most beautiful work *Terras do sem fim* (1930) was the first to call attention of foreign critics and film producers. It was translated in English and was adopted for film in The United States of America. It was a trophy for someone who was branded as a left wing writer to get acceptance in a democratic world.

Cinema critics (Kracauer, Dudley Andrew etc), in general, agree that the selection of a literary work for cinematic adaptation depends mainly on its plot. The adaptation takes place only when it bases on reality and not on mental or spiritual experience. A number of realist novels, *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck, or *L’Assomoir*, by Emile Zola were made of the material that was appropriate for their presentation on cinema screen. At the same time others from the same writers, were rejected from the beginning as they did not seem to present emotional reaction of the central characters in relation to the world they were surrounded by. Looking at cinema in Latin America, specifically in Brazil, one may disagree with what these critics say. In Brazilian cinema, sexuality plays a major role and the films with beautiful and almost nude women seem to get immediate success at box office. The liberal presentation of female body seems a secure element to draw a large number of public to the

cinema. The success of the adaptation of a literary work for the cinema seems to follow this formula. A number of films based on a literary work, despite a strong political theme, use female body and display liberal sex to get success on box office. Even the films with political theme such as ones, based on the life and death of Brazilian president Getulio Vargas, can be cited as the example of such productions.

Bourdieu (1997) argues that the logic of film/television production promotes great pressure which is extraordinary. He also points towards the effect occasioned by the indices of audience that results in the pressure of urgency, rapidity and velocity of this new medium of art. Looking at the cinematic adaptation of *Gabriela* we note Barreto with his focus on what Bourdieu calls the "indices of audience" takes the film far away from Amado's novel. In his process of recreation he joins hands with public taste.

To present a film of popular test and get success on box office Barreto uses the base material "body and beauty" of a woman like Sonia Braga. The T. V. "Globo" production of the novel had won fame for this Brazilian beauty and Barreto selects her as his "Gabriela" to assure his profit. Most of the film has its focus on Sonia Braga, her body and her love affair with Nacib. In doing so he successfully casts away other major characters of the novel *Mundinho Falcão*, the political opponent of Coronel Ramiro Bastos and João Fulgêncio the owner of a book shop and a man of knowledge.

Bastin (Cited by MACCANN, 1966) observes that the change of "genre" (transposition of novel for cinema) requires the translator to make choice, to select or reject certain elements from a literary work as he adapts one form of art into another." In case of adaptation of *Gabriela, cravo e canela* we see the translator's choice as he concentrates and enhances the part of novel that deals with Gabriela and her sexuality. He also chooses to ignore completely the part of the novel that deals with power politics or presents people with double standard who condemn an extra marital affair of a woman and approve death punishment for her but see no wrong in the same display of behaviour in a man.

André Bazin (2004) in his article "For an impure cinema" links the question of adaptation to the question of origin. For Brian McFarlane (cited by MacCann, 1966) the film follows simple transposition of what he calls the plot and character etc., the elements which are directly transferable from literature into film as they are easy to adopt. Whereas he argues that "the transfer of sentiments and sensation are done in a way that is more appropriate to cinema" he forgets that there is one more very important element that guides this process of adaptation which is the viewer. Amado's *Gabriela* is much more than mere body as Amado himself says, she is the "Corpo formoso" with "alma de passarinho" (AMADO, 1959, p. 398-399).

Commenting on *Gabriela*, Eduardo Assis Duarte (1997) observes "Hoje, Gabriela é dessas personagens que têm alcance extraliterário,

figurando no próprio imaginário popular como símbolo de impetuosidade e erotismo". No doubt eroticism is constantly present in Amado's novels and Gabriela is not an exception. However, in part, it can be attributed to the culture and region he selects as the setting for his novels. *Gabriela, cravo e canela* is not an exception to the rule. Amado uses it in mild dose which can be tolerated in the cultural background he presents but the film intensifies more the sexual aspect as Grecchi (. P. 8-9) observes:

[...] o filme dirigido por Bruno Barreto, baseado na obra de Amado, intensifica o erotismo e poderemos ver Gabriela, na mesma Sonia Braga, já mais madura, mas cuja estética consegue ser exatamente a mesma da novela, porém bem mais insinuante: há várias cenas de sexo explícito e a sensualidade de Gabriela apaga-se diante dessa nova visão. [...] O erotismo, no entanto, não está somente na personagem vivida por Sonia Braga, mas é um elemento explorado na adaptação.

In Amado's novel there are scenes where Gabriela the female protagonist appears completely nude but it is more to present the female sensuality hence there is no erotic expansion of the text, However, both the T. V. soap opera and the film adapt these scenes in a way that the nudity is gulped up with extensive erotic presentation.

It is true, as Haroldo Campus observes that (1992, p. 35), "a tradução do textos criados será sempre recriação ou criação paralela, autonoma, porem reciproca." We also know that the process of adaptation of a literature work for the film involves both the moments of convergence and of divergence as it deals with a process that involves not only the problem of adaptation but also the politics of marketing, publicity and box office success. We know that Barreto's *Gabriela* is as an autonomous recreation yet we cannot overlook the fact that it damages the social and literary aspect of the novel.

André Delveux (1988, p.9) observes that "...une transformation de l'écriture même du film...", does not obliterate the study of novel and film but in case of Amado's novel it does. Keith Cohen (1979) observes that: "What makes possible, then, a study of the relation between these two separate sign systems, like novel and film, is the fact that the same codes may reappear in more than one system". However, in case of Gabriela it does not happen in such simple manner. The film tempers with Amado's message, it obliterates his position as a social critic and it places him among the writers who need such cheap means of publicity. Also it reduces the literary value of the novel to such an extent that the later publications of Amado's novel change the cover page and substitute his female protagonists with the images of film actresses and Gabriela, Dona Flor and Tieta are replced by Sonia Braga or Betty Farias. Such filmic adaptation and publicity on one hand project Amado as a popular writer

and on the other hand the flavour and identity of his female protagonists is lost in the glamour of these film actresses; Sonia Braga and Betty Farias (the actress who acts as Tieta). The film adds in making one to see and judge him as a popular writer whose work explores only sex and nudity. We know that the duration of cinema (two or three hours) does not permit the long narrative scenes thus to fit the film in this time imposes some limits on the director who makes cuts to reduce the literary narrative but what happens in case of *Gabriela* is the inappropriateness of these cuts that destroy its literary beauty and obliterate its social message.

Bazin explains the "corrupting will" when examining the contemporary practice of adapting a literary piece for film, and so opens a new period: adaptation is not only a matter of which film techniques are available, but that of the well-describable intention of film-makers and producers working in a given cultural, historical and economic setting. Barreto's choice to eliminate a carefully constructed background, a number of sub themes and episodes which Amado uses before he presents Gabriela makes him to totally obliterate Amado's message.

Amado presents Gabriela at a crucial moment in the novel that is the assassination of Sinhazinha for adultery and depicts a society with divided public opinion about such assassinations. It seems Gabriela is an answer to such radical and brutal acts. By introducing her exactly at this time Amado is trying to make his reader feel the change and judge the sexual behaviour in a new light.⁷ Omission of conflict between modern and traditional ideas makes the exploration of sensuality/ sexuality sound hollow in Barreto's *Gabriela*. By ignoring these aspects of the plot, and focusing mainly on Gabriela, the female body and sexuality, the film becomes one more addition in the line of sexually overt films. One may question was it necessary to sacrifice a novel like *Gabriela, cravo e canela* to produce a film like Gabriela? Or do we have to agree with Ingmar Bergman (Cited in MacCann: 1966), who in a blunt way affirms that "Film has nothing to do with Literature".

⁷ For detailed analysis of this aspect see SWARNAKAR, 1998.

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