

Vol 05 05 المجلد	حَفَرِيَّاتُ الْمَعْرِفَةِ	Issn : 2830-912X
Num 02 02 العدد	Hafriyat Al-marefa	December 2025

Transcultural Adaptations : Exploring Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's Aşk-ı Memnu & it's Screen Adaptations in Turkiye, Spain & India

Dr. Shamenaz Bano

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Rajarshi Tandon Mahila Mahavidyalaya

Prayagraj, India

drshamenaz.2023@gmail.com

Abstract

We are living in the digital age, an age where people are not so much inclined towards reading books and are more and more interested in watching stuff on the internet. To make people aware of the literature of their country and other parts of the world it is necessary to adapt literary text into visual content. With the advancement of technology, adaptation of literary text into film or drama is gaining momentum, leading to the popularity of the text.

So, now literary texts are being adapted into screen presentations around the world and Turkiye is not apart from it. There are many successful screen adaptations of literary texts written by Turkish writers. One such work is Aşk-ı Memnu (Forbidden Love) by Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil, a prominent voice in Turkish literature. Although he has written many successful creative pieces, his novel, Aşk-ı Memnu is one such masterpiece which has been adapted not only in the native country of the novelist but also in Spain and India.

In my paper, I want to discuss the adaptation of the famous classical Turkish text, Aşk-ı Memnu which has been successfully adapted not only in its country but also in Spain and India and what are the transformations which have taken place with the change in time and geographical boundary.

Keywords: Transcultural Adaptation, Digital age, Turkish Literature, Screen adaptation.

Introduction

In the contemporary scenario, adaptation is a process which is highly popular around the globe. Adaptation of a written work whether it is novel or a drama means to transform it into a visual medium and hence make it available for a larger audience. This is the need of the hour as in this age of digitalization when people are going away from reading. So in the contemporary scenario, adaptation is becoming popular day-by-day, not only in a particular country but around the globe. With the advancement of technology, adaptation of literary text into film or drama is gaining momentum day by day. This is resulting in the popularity of the literary text being adapted into a drama series or a movie. It is so because a literary text is not read by people of all ages and fields but when it is adapted into any type of screen then it reaches people from all walks of life. Around the globe, people are more inclined towards watching stuff on screen hence now we see more and more adaptation of novels, plays into drama series or movies. This is not confined to a particular country or region but now a successful phenomenon carried by people around the globe.

Adaptation of a literary text into screen requires a procedure which a person involved in adaptation has to follow. This includes acquiring the rights to the novel as one cannot develop a screenplay and then produce a film without prior permission of the owner of the original work. Though we can say that successful adaptations require much hard work and it is indeed very challenging, the result is that it provides audiences a unique way which is a visual experience to the stories which have been loved by generations and most importantly a wider audience to the literary text which was once confined to specific people.

Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil occupies a prominent place in the history of Turkish literature. He belonged to the New literature movement of the Ottoman Empire of Türkiye. Uşaklıgil's *The Scarlet Letter* is considered as a significant work of the era but his another novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* has become very popular because of its adaptation worldwide. The first adaptation was by Halit Refiğ of the same name into a miniseries for TV in 1975, then another drama series, *Aşk-ı Memnu* was aired from 2008 to 2010 by Canal TV. In 2013, Telemundo aired the serial, *Pasión Prohibida*, a Spanish adaptation of the novel. It has also been adapted into drama series in India as *Dil Sambhal Ja Zara* aired on Star Plus and *Forbidden Love* aired on Zee5.

Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil belonged to the New literature movement of the Ottoman Empire of Türkiye. A Turkish author, poet and playwright, he is credited with founding and contributing to many literary movements and institutions. His timeless romantic novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* was censored by the Ottoman government because of his criticism of Sultan Abdul Hamid II. The novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* has been adapted many times in Turkey as well as other countries. In 1975, Halit Refiğ was the first to adapt it into a TV miniseries of the same name. But the most successful adaptation of *Aşk-ı Memnu* was aired from 2008 to 2010 by Canal TV which is even popular in India and Pakistan. There is a big difference between the setting of the novel and the TV adaptation. While the novel is set in Turkey of 1899, the TV series takes place in modern-day Istanbul. In 2013, Telemundo aired the serial, *Pasión Prohibida*, which was set in modern day Miami. Tarik Gunersal, a Turkish poet and playwright, made a 3-act play of the novel.

The story of *Aşk-ı Memnu* is about love and betrayal and the psychology behind it. The novelist has depicted intricate relationships existing in a family and how women deal with it. The gender portrayal is very significant as the novelist had shown the inner working of a woman's mind in it. The novel talks about betrayal and how it affects the entire family. At the same time, the novel has also presented women characters in an intricate way show-casing their inner feelings and desires.

The famous classical Turkish text, *Aşk-ı Memnu* which has been successfully adapted not only in its native country, Türkiye but also in Spain and India has made it a transcultural adaptation. With the adaptation exceeding geographical boundaries, there are many transformations which have taken place with the change in time and place. When any literary text is adapted into screen in some other country rather than the country of its origin then there are certain behaviours of the characters, beliefs and practices are transformed making it suitable to the audience of the specific nation. This also includes the reshaping of narratives and stories but at the same time maintaining the essence of original work. The process involved in transcultural adaptation is done basically to make the adaptation acceptable in the new culture or country or open for diverse cultural audiences. This process further leads to the modification of themes, characters and settings to make the audience transfixed with the work which is as per their cultural surroundings though being linked with some other country. This process has brought new insight into the field of adaptation where cultural polarities are abridging and people are becoming informed about the literature of those countries which was unknown to them.

Transcultural adaptation studies lead to cross-cultural communication and international communication making it an interdisciplinary studies. There are many creative works which have witnessed cross-cultural communication because of its massive popularity, Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-ı Memnu* is one such work. The novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* which was adapted first in its native language Turkish and became a massive hit in Türkiye was broadcasted first with English subtitles across the globe and then with the subtitles of native languages in many countries. It became very popular in the Indian subcontinent; India and Pakistan. So with gaining such popularity it was not only adapted on screen in its country of origin, Türkiye but also in Mexico and India.

Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil is considered as one of the most important novelists of the Wealth of Arts period and his novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* is regarded by critics and readers as one of the greatest novels in the history of Turkish literature. The main female lead in the novel is Bihter, a girl who is devastated by the sudden demise of her father. She considered her mother to be responsible for father's death because she cheated on him with another man. In a vulnerable state, she finds comfort and solace with her neighbour Mr. Adnan Ziyagil, who is old enough to be her father. Mr. Adnan, was enamored by her and proposed to her to marry. Knowing that her mother has an eye on Mr. Adnan, she marries him to take revenge on her mother. But soon she realizes that it is not the love she wanted in her life, indulging into a love-affair with Behlul, the main protagonist of the novel and the son of the friend Mr. Adnan, being brought up by him after his parent's death. They both connive to have an affair deceiving everyone in the family. Behlul, who has the character of a play-boy, was once involved with her elder sister, Peyker. Though showing immense love towards her, he later deceived her and agreed to marry Mr. Adnan's teenage daughter, Nihal Ziyagil who has a crush on him for many years.

Dwelling into the dynamics between all the characters, we find complicated relationships existing within a family leading to secrets, treachery and ultimately suicide. In the novel, we see the requited love of Ms. Deniz De Courton (Madmoizelle), a French woman living with Mr. Adnan's family towards Mr. Adnan and Nihal, the teenager who falls for the charms of Behlul, then there is Beşir Elçi, the driver of the house who secretly loves Nihal. The complexities of these relationships result in the tragedy at the end of the novel. The tragedy in the novel occurs due to the illicit affair of Bihter and Behlul. It was Behlul who went after her, being mesmerized by her beauty though he tried to control his feelings in the beginning as a guilt towards his Uncle but later he went "head over heels" for her. At first, Bihter rejected him as she held a grudge

against him for ditching her sister in love. But living together as a family in Ziyagil Mansion and encountering each other everyday, they fall for each other which later leads to the catastrophe disintegrating the family. So the main plot of the story is the forbidden love of Bihter and Behlul.

Through this story, Uşaklıgil has tried to convey a message to the readers that illicit affairs can affect a family. In the story we see that Nihal Ziyagil too had developed a feeling for Behlul and when Mr Adnan asked Behlul he was not able to say no as a gratitude for bringing him up by him. Moreover he was also conscious of his future which was secured with Nihal not Bihter so he turned away from her. At this juncture of time, Bihter felt completely disappointed because she wanted to be with Behlul. Having her dream shattered by the betrayal of her lover, she commits suicide and their love affairs were disclosed in the family. Both Mr. Ziyagil and Nihal were shocked by this revelation of their forbidden love. Her marriage was called off and Behlul was left to repent for being a coward.

Though we see Bihter as a tragic figure with her downfall, there are other characters who are also miserable like Nihal, Ms. Deniz De Courton and Beşir Elçi. Nihal was so shocked to hear about Bihter and Behlul affairs that she went into trauma. Ms. Deniz De Courton concealed her feelings for Mr Adnan and is left alone and Beşir Elçi dies of lung cancer. He was the first to find out the love-affair of Bihter and Behlul. All these characters and the other characters in the novel and drama series need to be scrutinized in terms of their active role in many of this novel, a tragedy. The first screen adaptation of the novel was made in 1975 by Halit Refiğ into a miniseries for Turkish television.

If we compare the novel and the drama series (2008), we find that the novel was set in the 19th century, which was an era of the Ottoman Empire so in the novel we find the setting, social norms and customs of that era. The drama series which was telecasted in 2008, by Canal TV in Türkiye relocated the setting to modern-day Istanbul exposing the modernity and Western culture which the city has embraced as a means to be accepted by the Western audiences or a way for targeting a wider audience. In terms of narrative style and depth, the novel exhibits a deeper introspective and psychologically driven narrative giving deep insights into character's inner working of mind leading to their actions resulting in catastrophe. This is done by the novelist by giving detailed descriptions and also by the soliloquies.

The novel has witnessed transcultural adaptation into Spanish by Telemundo into serial, *Pasión prohibida* (2013), which was set in Miami. The story of the novel, *Aşk-ı Memnu* took

place in Istanbul, Türkiye in the 19th century but was easily unfolded in the contemporary times of Miami. This is one of the aspects of transcultural adaptation. On one hand, the story seemed to be specific to Türkiye but on the larger context, it cannot be confined to any country or era. The novel talks about betrayal within a family which can happen in any cultural context. But when it is adapted in another country then it has to be adapted within the cultural realm of that country leading to transculturalism. As Wieland Schwanebeck and Iain Robert Smith have opined, “The concept of transculturalism, in its initial formulation by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, seeks to overcome traditional models of cultural difference”.

The story of *Pasión prohibida* is the same as in the original text, *Aşk-ı Memnu*. The female protagonist named as Binaca was in a vulnerable state after her father’s death as she was well aware that he died of cardiac arrest because of her mother’s treachery. So to take revenge from her mother, she marries Ariel Piamonte, old enough to be her father because her mother wanted to marry him. He was a distinguished millionaire and a widower with two children. He also adopted his friend’s orphan son, Bruno. Living in the same house Binaca and Bruno fall for each other resulting in forbidden love as Bruno was the nephew of Ariel. One of the interesting things which the serial showcases is suspense which was very much appreciated by the audience. The drama series became famous for its well-written script, blending the strong captivating story with equally strong performances of the actors, balancing the suspense with significant character interactions. Both audiences and critics liked the plot and characters’ performances especially of Monica Spear and Jencarlos Canela with their mesmerising performances. The telenovela is also known for many other aspects like visual appeal which made the audiences visually enthralled. Its lavish costumes worn by actors and actresses were very much liked, with extraordinary sets and amazing cinematography, the telenovela possessed all the qualities that are needed for popularity. But the fact is that, all these aspects were very different from Turkish set-up as it was made for different audiences and in different set-up.

The theme of *Pasión prohibida* is forbidden love which is core of the telenovela revolving around the forbidden relationship of Mr. Ariel’s wife, Binaca and his nephew, Bruno. Though Mr. Ariel was married to Binaca, she developed a passionate and intense relationship with Bruno. The illicit love affair within a family and its intricacies it arises in a house has been explored by the author which is further demonstrated by the producers and directors in various telenovelas. The timeless has been depicted in all the screen adaptations around the world which the author of the original text has reflected in his creation. The narration is based on family secrets and betrayals,

the dark secrets and betrayals hidden in a family which once disclosed disintegrate the family. The story gives an insight to traverse to the concept of family dynamics and subterfuge revolving a fervent love story. The story features people of different social classes as we see the disparity between the rich and poor; some characters are very powerful while some are very humble. By this the author has depicted the contradiction between various social classes existing within the same social milieu and how this difference affects their relationships.

Pasión prohibida became so popular that it has led to the discussions leading to the repercussions on the telenovela genre and the possibility that it can provide for stimulating consideration of themes like betrayal and forbidden love for others to make telenovelas on these themes. We all know that *Pasión prohibida* is a remake of the Turkish drama series *Aşk-ı Memnu* which is originally adapted from Ottoman Turkish novel *Aşk-ı Memnu*. The Spanish screen adaptation is a fine example of transcultural adaptation as it surpasses geographical and language boundaries. The novel and its first adaptation has different religion and society while *Pasión prohibida* has a different religion and society resulting in a totally different cultural scenario. This change in the shift of religion, language and society provides a basis for further exploration of the adaptation process between different cultures. It also explores what methods and techniques of narrations are used to reimagine for a different setting than the previous ones.

Both *Aşk-ı Memnu* and *Pasión prohibida* became very popular in their respective countries as well as other parts of the world. While *Aşk-ı Memnu* was not only popular in Türkiye, South Asia but in Europe, America and Latin America resulting in the adaptation of *Pasión prohibida* which also became popular in countries like the United States and Argentina.

The popularity of *Aşk-ı Memnu* reached South Asia especially India and Pakistan also and in India it was adapted into Hindi language telenovela as *Dil Sambhal Jaa Zara* which was aired on Star Plus. Produced by Vikram Bhatt and starring actors like Sanjay Kapoor and Smriti Kalra. The Hindi adaptation was not very popular as it ended in just four months starting from 23rd October 2017 to 2nd February 2018. But the Indian screen adaptation has a twisted story, this is due to the unpopularity of the show. Maybe the makers wanted to discontinue the show due to low trp so they had given it a different ending than the original one.

The story of *Dil Sambhal Jaa Zara* begins with protagonist Ahana Raichand lamenting the loss of her father whom she loved deeply. Her father died because of the shock he experienced due to the betrayal of his wife, Laila Raichand, an ambitious gold digger and devious lady. Ahana

happened to be there when a heated conversation occurred between her parents about the treachery of her mother resulting in the death of her father. This led Ahana, hating her mother, feeling disheartened she was comforted by Mr. Anant Mathur, a widowed neighbour who took advantage of her situation, proposed to her to marry him. She, being disillusioned, accepted his proposal.

She was frustrated because at home it was only her mother as her elder sister, Saloni Raichand was married to her boyfriend, Tarun Gupta. Anant's proposal for Ahana was a shock for Laila as she herself wanted to marry him for financial reasons. After their marriage, Anant friend's son Rehaan Khanna came as a troublemaker in the life of Ahana. Though in the beginning, he supported their relations but later he fell in love with Ahana making her life complicated. The age-difference between Ahana and Anant was also one of the reasons that was making their relationship as a husband and wife ambiguous. There were many other factors also which became hurdles in their relationships like society, rivalry, family and most importantly it was Rehaan. He also finds out that Ahana married Anant just to take revenge against her mother. Here the story takes a different turn than the original version.

Rehan after knowing the facts behind her marrying Mr. Anant who was a father figure to him felt annoyed as he thought his uncle was being cheated by her. He discloses this in front of his Uncle who didn't believe him and hence Rehaan had to leave the household in which was very much loved. But Anant was devastated hearing the confession by Ahana and their relationship crumbled. A time comes in their lives when misunderstanding grows so much between Anant and Ahana that she decides to abort her child which increases more tension between them. But later on, things get better as Rehan realises his mistakes and asks forgiveness from her and their love blossoms. Anant came to know about this from Rehaan's ex-girlfriend. The story ends with Anant discussing the matter with Ahana and Rehan.

The Indian show was not popular and it ended within a few months with an incomplete story. We have also seen another adaptation as Tarik Günersel, a poet and theatre-artist adapted the novel into a 3-act play. He also wrote a libretto for the Turkish composer Selman Ada, leading to an opera.

Conclusion

Transcultural adaptation and film adaptation have occurred simultaneously in history but they differ in theoretical research. The story of any literary work can be adapted across time, space and geographical boundaries and in this journey of adaptation the story also witnesses changes as per the culture of the place of adaptation. Sometimes, new dialogues are also added as per the existing culture making it a little different but adding new meaning from the original text but this is what transcultural adaptation means. Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil's *Aşk-ı Memnu* is one such novel which is a fine example of transcultural adaptation as it has exceeded its boundary from Türkiye to Spain and India. In my paper, I have tried to explore the novel *Aşk-ı Memnu* (Forbidden Love) by Halit Ziya Uşaklıgil and its screen adaptation as television series in Türkiye in 1975 and 2008 and further in Spain as *Both Aşk-ı Memnu and Pasi3n prohibida* in 2013 and in India as *Dil Sambhal Ja Zara* in 2017.

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