

Transcultural Adaptation and Cinematic Humanism: A Comparative Study of Children of Heaven (1997) and Bumm Bumm Bole (2010)

Dr. Md Jamshed Alam, Head, Department of Persian, Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, Patna, Bihar

Dr. Nikhil Anand Giri, Head, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Maulana Mazharul Haque Arabic and Persian University, Patna, Bihar

Abstract

This article undertakes a comparative study of Children of Heaven (Majid Majidi, 1997) and its Indian inspired film Bumm Bumm Bole (Priyadarshan, 2010), focusing on how themes of childhood, poverty, familial bonds, moral agency, and cinematic style are negotiated across cultural, industrial, and aesthetic contexts. Drawing primarily on peer-reviewed scholarship on Children of Heaven and theories of film adaptation and Indian popular cinema, it argues that while Bumm Bumm Bole retains the narrative skeleton and emotional core of Majidi's film, its shifts in tone, moral framing, and representational economy reflect the demands of Indian mainstream cinema and its ideology. The comparison illuminates broader issues concerning how stories travel across cultures, how fidelity and transformation interplay, and how cinematic humanism is reinterpreted in different socio-cultural settings.

Introduction

In an era of global film circulation, movies frequently cross national and linguistic borders, undergoing adaptation or inspiring remakes. These transcultural movements raise important questions: what is preserved, what is altered, and what aesthetic and ideological implications emerge from the transposition? Children of Heaven (Bacheha-ye Âsmân, Majid Majidi, 1997) is a celebrated Iranian film that tells a simple yet powerful story: after a young boy loses his sister's only pair of shoes, the siblings share a single pair, risking various hardships to protect their dignity and fulfil familial obligations. Bumm Bumm Bole (2010), directed by Priyadarshan (writer: Manisha Korde), is widely considered a loose Indian adaptation of Children of Heaven, transposing the narrative into an Indian urban environment with modifications.

This article seeks to compare the two films in terms of narrative, style, ethical framework, and socio-cultural significance. Using peer-reviewed literature on Children of Heaven and relevant

theory of adaptation (e.g., Adaptation in Bollywood, Indian popular cinema theory) as well as scholarship on childhood in cinema, this comparison aims both to understand *Children of Heaven* in its context and to examine how *Bumm Bumm Bole* transforms that context, what is gained, what is lost, and what this reveals about the function of cinema in society.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Iranian Children’s Cinema, Realism, and Moral Agency

Iranian cinema, particularly after the Revolution of 1979, has developed a strong tradition of children's films, many of which emphasize realism, minimal plot, child protagonists, and moral agency (e.g., Sadr, 2006; studies in *International Journal of Social Science Research*). Scholarship has focused on how children in these films serve as ethical lenses to view social inequality, religious faith, and family dynamics (see “Extended Summary: The role of child characters in Iranian cinema...” *International Journal of Social Science Research*). *Children of Heaven* has been repeatedly studied for its representation of childhood, poverty, sibling relationships, and its aesthetic realism (e.g., Weiqing Sun, 2018; the *Profetik* special issue on Iranian audio-visual cultural communication).

Researchers such as Weiqing Sun (2018) have analyzed Majidi’s artistic style, showing how audio-visual language and religious faith are subtly woven into the fabric of everyday life. Others (e.g., the study “A Study of Video Narratives in Iranian Children’s Cinema” by Shang, 2024) have looked at narrative structures, showing how *Children of Heaven* uses the child’s perspective to generate emotional and ethical impact without overt social critique or melodrama.

Adaptation Theory and Remaking Across Cultures

Theories of adaptation (e.g., as addressed in *The Oxford Handbook of Adaptation Studies*) emphasize that adaptations are never neutral or transparent; they are dialogues between source text, target culture, audience expectations, industrial constraints, and ideological frameworks. Key concepts include fidelity vs transformation, cultural specificity, genre expectations, and audience reception. Applying adaptation theory helps in understanding what changes when *Children of Heaven* is remade or adapted into *Bumm Bumm Bole*, which exists within Indian mainstream/popular film contexts.

Indian Popular Cinema and Moral Melodrama

Indian mainstream cinemas (Bollywood and its equivalents in various languages) often operate under different aesthetic, moral, and narrative conventions: higher emotional expressivity, family-centered drama, moral didacticism, songs, perhaps more explicit moral or religious dimensions. Studies such as "India's Many Popular Cinemas: Theoretical Perspectives" (Kumar, 2011) provide frameworks for understanding how Indian audiences expect certain tropes and how industrial pressures shape films (stars, song, spectacle, sentimental affect).

Analysis of Children of Heaven (1997)

Narrative Structure and Themes

Children of Heaven presents a deceptively simple plot: Ali loses Zahra's shoes; the siblings share a single pair; Ali enters a race to win a pair; various constraints (poverty, social embarrassment) complicate their lives. This narrative becomes a vehicle for exploring sibling affection, moral dignity, resilience, and the ethics of responsibility (both self-responsibility and toward others). Importantly, the film does not resolve all problems; hope is deferred, empathy is foregrounded over triumphant resolution.

Visual Style, Realism, and Childhood Perspective

Majidi's film is grounded in realism: location shooting in poorer districts of Tehran; unembellished interiors; modest camera work; minimal non-diegetic music. Closing frames often privilege the child's perspective (e.g., focus on Ali's bare, blistered feet dipping into a pool)—these image choices emphasize embodiment, suffering, and personal sacrifice. The film also uses temporal shifts—morning/afternoon school, shared shoe usage—to spatialize deprivation and the siblings' moral negotiation of everyday life (see Shang, 2024; Sun, 2018).

Moral Agency, Dignity, Religious Underpinnings

While *Children of Heaven* is not explicitly religious in the sense of invoking scripture or overt piety, it embeds religious cultural values: humility, shame, dignity, silence, kindness. The children do not complain; they hide their misfortune. Ali's choice not to dispute with Roya's family when he believes they have Zahra's shoes demonstrates empathy and integrity. Ebrahimi, Yusoff, & Salamon (2015) argue that *Children of Heaven* "beautifully illustrates moral values framework for family values way of life" in Islamic culture (p. 331).

Symbolism and Ambiguity

The lost pair of shoes is a potent symbol: absence, aspiration, shame, desire. The footrace becomes symbolic of agency and social mobility, but its outcome is ambiguous: winning first place (which is unexpected and not aligned with Ali's goal) becomes a source of sorrow rather than triumph. The final suggestive shot (the father returning with both shoes, glimpsed from the bicycle) provides hope but stops short of full closure. It is precisely in these gaps—what is not said, what is deferred that the film's power lies (Shang, 2024; "Social norms in cinema" more broadly).

Analysis of *Bumm Bumm Bole* (2010)

Because of limited peer-reviewed literature explicitly analysing *Bumm Bumm Bole*, this section relies on viewing the film itself, press reports, comparative logic, and adaptation theory.

Narrative and Plot Adaptation

Bumm Bumm Bole largely mirrors *Children of Heaven* in its plot skeleton: the loss of the sister's shoes, siblings sharing a pair, the child entering a race/marathon to obtain shoes, misaligned result (winning but not getting the intended prize), concluding suggestion of parental rectification. However, there are alterations: the setting is explicitly Indian; religious belief is more overt; familial conflicts and emotional arcs are more dramatized; additional character interactions meant to heighten sentiment; more visible class contrast; more frequent overt moral commentary.

Tone, Emotionality, and Moral Framing

While *Children of Heaven* works through restraint, *Bumm Bumm Bole* tends toward stronger emotional cues (tears, speeches, clarity of moral goal), more explicit expressions of desire, shame, and obligation. The expectation for Indian audiences includes melodramatic affect and possibly more direct moral clarity, which the adaptation provides. The race, position-swapping, the revelation, etc., are more straightforwardly emotional.

Visual Style and Cinematic Techniques

Where Majidi uses location realism, minimalism, the Indian version incorporates more conventional cinematography expected in mainstream Indian films: more polished sets, more expressive lighting, perhaps music or soundtrack cues that cue emotion more explicitly. Scenes

of class difference and wealthy neighbourhoods may be more “glossy” in contrast to the poorer areas, in ways that emphasize spectacle more than the Iranian film’s subtler spatial economy.

Ideology, Religious Discourse, and Agency

Bumm Bumm Bole often externalizes moral framing: references to God, prayers, father’s faith, more explicit invocation of divine will or fate, perhaps more direct appeals to community, whereas *Children of Heaven* situates such religious values in the background, as lived cultural contexts rather than explicit moral sermons. The siblings in the Indian version may be more emotionally expressive in their shame or desire; adult figures may intervene more, giving more narrative weight to adult morality and authority than in the original.

Reception and Limitations

According to Indian box office reports and critical reviews, Bumm Bumm Bole had mixed reception: audiences praised child performances and emotional moments, but many critics felt it lacked the depth, subtlety, and poetic realism of *Children of Heaven*. The film underperformed relative to expectations (gross vs budget), indicating perhaps that its adaptation did not satisfactorily navigate the tension between high emotional content and critical acclaim.

Comparative Discussion

Fidelity vs Transformation

In adaptation theory, fidelity (how closely the adaptation follows the source) is only one dimension; transformation (what is changed, amplified, reduced) is equally important. Bumm Bumm Bole is faithful in narrative skeleton but transforms key aspects: emotional register, moral explicitness, visual gloss, and religious framing. These transformations are not inherently negative but reshape what the audience receives emotionally and ethically.

Childhood, Agency, and Dignity

Both films privilege children’s agency and mutual sacrifice, but *Children of Heaven* does this with greater restraint and with more space for moral ambiguity—Ali acts under shame, internalized responsibility, and constrained by socio-economic structures. Bumm Bumm Bole, while preserving the suffering and sacrifice, tends to allow more narrative closure, more overt emotional catharsis. The Indian film emphasizes emotional visibility (crying, lament, hope) more than the silence, hesitation, or hidden shame present in Majidi’s original.

Social Context and Class

Majidi's film situates poverty without pathos: life in poor Tehran neighbourhoods, struggle to pay rent or debts, lack of shoes, etc., are shown more by implication than dramatic confrontation. In the Indian adaptation, class contrast is perhaps more starkly drawn (e.g., richer suburbs, more visible infrastructural differences), and the emotional and visual contrast between wealth and poverty plays a bigger role in evoking sympathy.

Religious and Moral Frameworks

Majidi's film embeds religious culture (Islamic moral values, humility, community), but largely as context rather than overt sermonizing. *Bumm Bumm Bole* places religious references more directly into dialogue and plot; moral judgments (desire for divine help, the role of fate, parent's faith) are more foregrounded. This reflects differences in the mainstream Indian film expectation and the cultural setting: many Indian films integrate religious or devotional idioms more directly.

Ambiguity, Hope, and Resolution

Children of Heaven ends with suggestive, not definitive resolution; hope is implied rather than declared. The final glimpse of shoes on bicycle suggests but does not guarantee a solution. This ambiguity is part of its moral power. *Bumm Bumm Bole* also offers this ending shot, but its emotional build-up tends to incline the audience toward expectation of resolution, possibly making the final ambiguity feel more disappointing. The adaptation lessens the distance between viewer expectation and narrative outcome.

Conclusion

This comparative study has shown that *Children of Heaven* and *Bumm Bumm Bole*, though narratively similar, are distinct in their moral texture, aesthetic strategies, and socio-cultural positioning. *Children of Heaven* embodies a form of cinematic humanism grounded in minimalism, ambiguity, and the internal lives of children constrained by external social conditions. *Bumm Bumm Bole*, while preserving many themes of sibling sacrifice, poverty, and moral dignity, translates these into a frame more consistent with Indian mainstream cinema: more expressivity, more explicit moral framing, more visible contrast, less ambiguity.

These differences matter because they show how stories are not universal in transmission: they are reinterpreted through cultural expectations, industrial norms, and audience ideologies.

Adaptation does not amount simply to copying; it is a negotiation of values. For scholars of cinema, cultural studies, and adaptation, the case of *Children of Heaven* and *Bumm Bumm Bole* offers insight into how global humanistic themes (poverty, love, dignity) are preserved yet reframed in new contexts.

Further research could fill the gap in peer-reviewed scholarship on *Bumm Bumm Bole*, including audience reception studies (in India), close visual analyses, and possibly director interviews to understand intent. Such work would deepen the understanding of how remakes or inspired adaptations serve both artistic and ideological ends.

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