

Adaptations of Sunil Gangopadhyay's 'Kakababu' in Bengali Cinema: Critical Analysis through the Lens of the Culture Industry

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Abstract

This study examines whether the SVF-produced Kakababu films function primarily as literary adaptations or as products of the contemporary culture industry. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's culture industry theory, the research analyses *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013), *Yeti Obhijaan* (2017) and *Kakababur Protyaborton* (2022), comparing them with earlier non-SVF Kakababu adaptations. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study explores changes in adaptation practices, characterisation, franchise development and commercial strategies. The findings reveal a significant transformation from standalone literary adaptations to a contemporary corporatised franchise built around exclusive adaptation rights, recurring stars, promotional music, product placement, merchandise and cross-media branding. While the films remain recognisable adaptations of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novels, they simultaneously operate within the logic of the culture industry. The study argues that the SVF Kakababu films occupy the intersection of literary adaptation and the culture industry, where creative reinterpretation and commercial motivations coexist, demonstrating how contemporary Bengali cinema negotiates artistic and industrial demands.

Keywords: Kakababu, Bengali Cinema, Sunil Gangadhayay's Kakababu, Film Adaptation, Culture Industry

Introduction

"The culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises." -
(Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989)

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's idea of the culture industry is useful for studying literary adaptations in contemporary Bengali cinema. It shows how the culture industry turns literary works into popular films to meet market and audience demands (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989).

Created by Sunil Gangopadhyay in 1979, Kakababu first appeared in *Bhoyonkor Sundar* and later featured in thirty-six adventure novels published between 1979 and 2012. His real name

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is Raja Roy Chowdhury, a former Director of the Archaeological Survey of India. A jeep accident in Afghanistan cost him a leg and he walks with the aid of a crutch. Yet his physical disability never limits his adventures. A skilled cryptographer with extensive knowledge of art and history, Kakababu deciphers hidden clues, solves mysteries and helps uncover hidden treasures. His adventures take him across India and different parts of the world, making him one of the most popular characters in Bengali adventure fiction (Bhattacharya, 2016); (Majumder, 2022); (Chakraborty D. , 2021).

The popularity of the series soon extended beyond literature and into cinema. *Sabuj Dwiper Raja* (1979), directed by Tapan Sinha and produced by the Children's Film Society of India, became the first screen adaptation of a Kakababu story. It established a lasting connection between the literary series and Bengali cinema. This connection later became reciprocal when *Mishawr Rohosyo*, the fifth Kakababu novel, referred to the success of the earlier film adaptation (Sinha T. , 1979); (Gangopadhyay, 2011); (imdb, 1979). The next major adaptation was *Kakababu Here Gelen?* (1995), based on Sunil Gangopadhyay's novel of the same name and directed by Pinaki Chowdhury under the banner of the National Film Development Corporation (Chaudhuri P. , Kakababu Here Gelen, 1995); (Solgama, 2008). Chowdhury later directed *Ek Tukro Chand* (2001), based on the novel *Santu O Ek Tukro Chaand*, with support from the Children's Film Society of India (Chaudhuri P. , Ek Tukro Chand, 2001); (Children's Film Society India (CFSI), 2014). These early feature films were standalone adaptations produced by government-supported institutions and independent filmmakers rather than parts of a planned commercial franchise. These films laid the foundation for SVF's later transformation of Kakababu into a corporatised film franchise.

Founded in 1996, SVF emerged during the post-liberalisation transformation of Bengali cinema and became the first fully corporatised production house in Tollywood. By bringing production, distribution and exhibition under one corporate structure, the company introduced a new way of making and marketing films. Over the years, it expanded into television, music, digital cinema and OTT platforms while producing a wide range of films, including commercial entertainers, literary adaptations, prestige films, multiplex-oriented cinema and family adventures. A major milestone came with *Chokher Bali* (2003), which combined literary adaptation, star power, international distribution and innovative publicity, while its collaboration with *Anjali Jewellers* reflected the growing role of commercial branding in Bengali cinema. By 2005, SVF had developed a successful commercial formula built around romance, family drama, action, comedy, popular music and high production values, supported by extensive marketing through television, newspapers, FM radio, music launches and digital platforms. The company also strengthened its visual identity by filming in overseas locations, culminating in *Dui Prithibi* (2010), the first Bengali film shot in Italy and the second mainstream Bengali film shot in Europe. Adaptation remained central to its business strategy, with South Indian remakes attracting mass audiences and literary adaptations appealing to multiplex viewers. Through films such as *Autograph* (2010) and *Baishe Srabon* (2011), Srijit Mukherji became an important creative collaborator, while Prosenjit Chatterjee's performance in *Autograph* linked the legacy of Uttam Kumar with contemporary Bengali cinema. Together, these strategies established SVF as the leading corporate force in the transformation of modern Bengali filmmaking (Nag & Bhattacharya, 2021).

A new phase in the cinematic history of Kakababu began when SVF acquired the exclusive Bengali audio-visual rights to Sunil Gangopadhyay's Kakababu series through a formal

agreement on 25 January 2012. This allowed SVF to produce screen adaptations and develop Kakababu as a long-term film commercial franchise. Its first production under the agreement was *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013), directed by Srijit Mukherji and Bengali superstar Prosenjit Chatterjee as Kakababu while introducing Aryann Bhowmik as the new Santu. To safeguard its exclusive adaptation rights, SVF filed a legal case against the heirs of Sunil Gangopadhyay and R. P. Tech Vision over the proposed film adaptation of *Jongolgorer Chabi*. The Calcutta High Court ruled in favour of SVF and upheld its exclusive rights (Times News Network (TNN), 2017). The judgement strengthened Kakababu's legal status as protected intellectual property within the contemporary culture industry rather than simply as a literary character. *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, released during the 2013 Durga Puja season, marked a turning point for both the Kakababu franchise and contemporary Bengali cinema. Competing against several festive releases, the film secured a strong position at the box office. Packed theatres and sustained audience demand reflected its wide popular appeal. More importantly, the film demonstrated that a literary adaptation could be reimagined as a successful mainstream commercial entertainer. Its success revived Kakababu on the big screen and encouraged SVF to continue the franchise with later feature films such as *Yeti Obhijaan* (2017) (Anand, Samar, 2020). *Yeti Obhijaan* (2017) was followed by *Kakababur Protyaborton* (2022). Both films were directed by Srijit Mukherji and retained the Kakababu-Santu pairing of Prosenjit Chatterjee and Aryann Bhowmik. Their strong box-office performance and houseful shows reaffirmed the commercial franchise's enduring appeal among family audiences. Mukherji described the audience response as overwhelming and noted that children and families connected strongly with the films. He also viewed the Kakababu stories as adventure-travelogues and designed the films as immersive theatrical experiences (Adhikary, 2017); (TIMESOFINDIA.COM, 2020); (Arindam Chatterjee, 2022); (team millenniumpost, 2022).

The commercial success of the SVF Kakababu films invites academic discussion about the changing nature of literary adaptation in contemporary Bengali cinema. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the culture industry transforms cultural works into commodities for mass consumption and profit. According to them, advertising is central to this process because cultural products are repeatedly promoted through branding, publicity and familiar formulas. Popular stories and established characters are reused to minimise commercial risk and attract audiences, while star power helps maintain consumer interest and brand recognition (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989). The SVF Kakababu films provide a useful case through which these ideas can be examined. They combine the popularity of Sunil Gangopadhyay's literary works with the commercial practices of a corporate production house. Developed through adaptation rights, recurring characters, star casting and long-term production strategies, the franchise demonstrates how literary adaptation can operate as both a cultural and an industrial process. It therefore provides an important context for understanding the relationship between literary adaptation and the contemporary culture industry, as well as the transformation of Kakababu cinema from standalone literary adaptations into a corporatised film commercial franchise.

Literature Review and Research Gap

Existing studies on Sunil Gangopadhyay's Kakababu series have explored many themes. Somasree Sarkar and Goutam Karmakar, Nibedita Bandyopadhyay, Sarmistha Roy and Sandip Kumar Mishra discuss ecology and environmental issues (Sarkar & Karmakar, 2022); (Bandyopadhyay, 2018); (Roy, 2024); (Mishra, 2022). Debaditya Chakraborty studies ageing

and disability in the series (Chakraborty D. , 2021). Surendra Nath Dey examines the literary importance of Kakababu (Dey, 2025). Shatarupa Sinha explores the relationship between Bengali detective fiction and cinema (Sinha S. , 2021). Poddar and Banerjee analyse *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, the first SVF Kakababu film, as a literary adaptation, arguing that it remains largely faithful to the novel while introducing selective cinematic transformations (Poddar & Banerjee, 2025).

Although these studies have enriched the understanding of the Kakababu series, most focus on literary themes, characterisation or individual adaptations. The influence of corporatised production practices, adaptation rights, branding, star casting and commercial strategies on the SVF adaptations has received limited attention. Comparative studies between earlier government-supported adaptations and the SVF productions also remain scarce. Consequently, the relationship between literary adaptation and the contemporary culture industry in the SVF Kakababu films remains underexplored. The present study addresses this gap by comparing the SVF films with earlier adaptations and examining how they negotiate the relationship between literary adaptation and the contemporary culture industry.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as stated below:

- To compare SVF-produced films based on Sunil Gangopadhyay's protagonist Kakababu with earlier government-supported film productions in order to understand the changing nature of film adaptation of Bengali literature;
- To analyse the nature and style of SVF-produced Kakababu film adaptations in relations to literary adaptation and the contemporary culture industry.

Theoretical Framework:

This study is based on the adaptation theory of Linda Hutcheon and the culture industry theory of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (Hutcheon, 2006); (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989). Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) provides a theoretical framework for this study. Hutcheon challenges the traditional belief that an adaptation should be judged only by its faithfulness to the original text. She argues that an adaptation is a creative and interpretative work in its own right. For this reason, she describes it as "a derivation that is not derivative" and "second without being secondary." According to Hutcheon, adaptation is "repetition without replication" because a familiar story is recreated for a new medium, audience and cultural context. She explains adaptation in three related ways. It is an acknowledged transformation of an earlier work. It is also a process of reinterpretation and recreation by the adapter. At the same time, it is an intertextual experience for audiences who connect the new work with earlier texts. Hutcheon describes adaptations as "palimpsestuous" because they preserve the memory of previous versions while creating new meanings. They may even reconstruct an entire fictional world or "heterocosm" for contemporary audiences. She further explains that stories can be told, shown or experienced through interaction. These different modes create meaning in different ways and give each medium its own strengths. Hutcheon also argues that adaptation is shaped by artistic, economic, legal, cultural, personal and political factors. Audiences enjoy adaptations because they offer both familiarity and novelty. Readers

and viewers who know the original compare it with the adaptation, while new audiences can appreciate it as an independent work. She also shows that stories change as they move across different cultures and historical periods through transculturation and indigenization. This framework helps to analyse the SVF Kakababu feature films as creative adaptations that reinterpret Sunil Gangopadhyay's works, recreate the Kakababu world for a new generation and negotiate the relationship between literature, cinema and the contemporary culture industry (Hutcheon, 2006).

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's "*The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception*" (1944) provides the second theoretical framework for this study of the SVF Kakababu feature films. Their theory complements Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory by examining the relationship between cinema and the culture industry. While Hutcheon sees adaptation as a creative process, Adorno and Horkheimer focus on the commercial nature of modern popular culture. They argue that films, radio, magazines and other forms of mass media work together as a unified system that produces similar cultural products, since "culture now impresses the same stamp on everything". According to them, the culture industry is driven more by business interests than artistic values and entertainment is created mainly for profit. A major feature of this system is standardization. Different films, genres and stars may appear different but they often follow similar formulas, narrative patterns and production methods. Variety exists but much of it is carefully controlled to create the feeling of choice without encouraging real difference. Audiences become familiar with these patterns and learn to expect certain endings, characters and emotional experiences. Adorno and Horkheimer apply this argument directly to adaptation itself, observing that a literary work is "garbled in a film script" in much the same way that a musical composition is crudely "adapted" for a soundtrack, treating adaptation as one of the clearest instances of this industrial standardization. Adorno and Horkheimer also explain that the culture industry depends on branding, advertising and the star system to attract consumers. They describe this reliance on stars as producing "pseudo-individuality," in which a performer's apparent uniqueness is in fact "a monopoly commodity determined by society" and "falsely represented as natural," so that recurring stars sustain a commercial franchise's identity while remaining interchangeable within the system. Popular stories and successful formulas are repeated because they reduce financial risk, while new and experimental ideas are often avoided. They argue that entertainment encourages passive consumption by offering familiar pleasures and predictable experiences. The culture industry also creates a strong connection between advertising and cultural products, making promotion an important part of the entertainment itself. As a result, audiences continue to consume similar products because they promise satisfaction and enjoyment. However, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that this promise is never completely fulfilled, since "the culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises." Entertainment offers temporary pleasure but encourages people to return for more, creating a continuous cycle of consumption. This theoretical framework is useful for analysing the SVF Kakababu films as products of the contemporary culture industry, where literary adaptation, commercial franchise building, commercial interests, branding strategies and audience expectations work together to shape popular Bengali cinema (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989).

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research design and employs qualitative textual analysis to examine how the SVF-produced Kakababu films negotiate the relationship between literary

adaptation and the contemporary culture industry. Purposive sampling was used to select the study materials. The primary corpus consists of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013), *Yeti Obhijaan* (2017) and *Kakababur Prottyaborton* (2022), the three SVF-produced Kakababu feature films available on the JioHotstar OTT platform during the period of data collection. These films represent the development of the Kakababu franchise under SVF. *Vijaynagar 'er Hirey* (2026), the fourth SVF-produced Kakababu feature film, was excluded because it was not available on OTT platforms during the study. For comparative purposes, the earlier feature film adaptations *Sabuj Dwiper Raja* (1979), *Kakababu Here Gelen?* (1995) and *Ek Tukro Chand* (2001) were accessed through YouTube and analysed alongside the SVF productions.

The original novels *Sabuj Dwiper Raja*, *Pahar Churaye Atonko*, *Mishawr Rohosyo*, *Jongoler Modhye Ek Hotel*, *Kakababu Here Gelen?* and *Santu O Ek Tukro Chaand* were also consulted through *Kakababu Samagra* Volumes I, II and III, published by Ananda Publishers, to understand the adaptation process from literature to cinema. The analysis focused on narrative transformation, characterisation, adaptation strategies, franchise development, branding, star casting, product placement and other culture industry practices. A comparative analysis of the earlier and SVF adaptations was conducted to identify changes in adaptation practices and to examine the influence of commercial and franchise-oriented strategies on Kakababu cinema. The interpretation of the findings was guided by Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory and Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's culture industry theory.

In addition, secondary sources such as newspaper reports, interviews, promotional materials and relevant websites were consulted to contextualise production practices, marketing strategies and franchise development.

Analysis and Interpretation

Early Kakababu Adaptations

Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's view that adaptation is an acknowledged transposition and a creative act of reinterpretation rather than a simple reproduction of a source text, *Sabuj Dwiper Raja* (1979) first exemplifies this process (Hutcheon, 2006). Starring Samit Bhanja as Kakababu and Arunava Adhikari as Santu, it retains the core narrative of Kakababu and Santu's journey to the Andaman Islands to stop a criminal gang from obtaining a meteorite in the territory of the indigenous Jarawa community, while omitting, condensing and modifying several episodes and characters from the novel. Characters such as Rini are removed, while Santu remains a school-going boy of roughly the same age as in the literary text, a characteristic that later SVF adaptations would significantly rework. The film also expands Santu's role in the investigation, making him a more active participant through his observations, curiosity and skills in karate and boxing. At the same time, it reframes the adventure through a nationalist lens by opening with the Cellular Jail, incorporating the story of a former freedom fighter and concluding with "Vande Mataram." Several foreign elements from the novel are also reworked into Indian characters, connecting the mystery to anti-colonial history and national memory and giving the narrative a distinctly Indian cultural identity. Despite these changes, the film preserves the novel's action-adventure spirit, character dynamics and cultural atmosphere. In Hutcheon's terms, it functions as "a derivation that is not derivative" and "second without being

secondary,” creating a distinct cinematic text while maintaining a meaningful relationship with its literary source (Sinha T. , 1979); (Gangopadhyay, 2011); (imdb, 1979).

Kakababu Here Gelen? (1995), directed by Pinaki Chaudhuri, demonstrates a comparatively higher degree of narrative fidelity to the source text. While certain events and characters are condensed to accommodate the temporal limits of cinema, the film largely preserves the plot structure, character relationships and investigative atmosphere of the novel. The adaptation introduced a new cast, with Sabyasachi Chakrabarty as Kakababu and Arghya Chakraborty as Santu, while Soumitra Chatterjee appeared in a major antagonist role. Rather than substantially reworking the narrative, the film transfers the literary text to the screen through selective modification and condensation, maintaining its recognisable identity and Bengali cultural setting. In Hutcheon’s terms, the film exemplifies adaptation as a process of reinterpretation rather than simple reproduction (Chaudhuri P. , *Kakababu Here Gelen*, 1995); (Gangopadhyay, 1995); (Solgama, 2008).

Chaudhuri continued a similar adaptation strategy in *Ek Tukro Chand* (2001). Although the narrative was condensed and adjusted for cinematic storytelling, the film remained close to the source text in terms of plot structure, characterisation and atmosphere. Sabyasachi Chakrabarty continued as Kakababu, while Soham Chakraborty portrayed Santu. Like the earlier adaptations, the film preserved Santu’s active role in the investigation and retained the adventure-oriented spirit of Sunil Gangopadhyay’s novels. Together, these early Kakababu films followed a literary adaptation model in which narrative transformation remained limited and the primary objective was to recreate the experience of the novels on screen. They therefore illustrate Hutcheon’s argument that adaptations can generate new meanings while maintaining a strong and visible relationship with their literary sources (Gangopadhyay, 1995); (Chaudhuri P. , *Ek Tukro Chand*, 2001); (Children's Film Society India (CFSI), 2014).

SVF and the Commercial Reinvention of the Kakababu Franchise

***Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013)**

The SVF adaptation project marked a major turning point in the screen history of Kakababu. After acquiring exclusive adaptation rights in 2012, SVF transformed the character from an occasional literary adaptation into a long-term franchise (Times News Network (TNN), 2017); (Nag K. & The Telegraph, 2013). Unlike the earlier films, which were produced as standalone projects by individual directors and public institutions, *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013) was conceived not only as a literary adaptation but also as a reintroduction of Kakababu as a commercial franchise (Adgully Bureau, 2018). The film trims the literary narrative and concentrates primarily on the Egyptian adventure and mystery. From the opening flashback centred on Hetepheres to the final scenes, the narrative continuously directs the audience toward Egypt. The title sequence features images of the Sahara Desert, while cast and crew names appear alongside hieroglyphic-style script and English text, reinforcing the film’s Egyptian setting. Television news reports repeatedly refer to contemporary political unrest in the country and small details such as Santu saving Rini’s contact under the name “Hetepheres,” referring to an ancient Egyptian queen. These narrative and visual cues work together to orient the audience toward the foreign adventure from the very beginning. Rather than gradually constructing mystery, the film repeatedly foregrounds its destination and thematic focus, leaving little room for suspense or discovery. There is hardly any surprise in the way events unfold, as the narrative continuously signals its direction and reduces the sense of mystery that

is central to an adventure story built around the revelation of a secret (Mukherji, 2013); (Gangopadhyay, 2011). This emphasis on spectacle and destination over suspense demonstrates how the adaptation reshapes the novel's mystery structure to enhance its visual and commercial appeal.

SVF reduced market risk by adapting a popular Kakababu novel while concentrating on its most recognizable adventure elements. At the same time, the company modified several aspects of the text to suit contemporary commercial cinema. The casting of superstar Prosenjit Chatterjee, investment in large-scale production and shooting in exotic locations across India and Egypt enhanced the film's commercial appeal. The film primarily targeted children and young adults, an important audience segment in the Bengali film market (Mukherji, 2013); (Hutcheon, 2006); (Yashodeep Sengupta, 2013). Director Srijit Mukherji also gave Kakababu a contemporary makeover. As he stated, "Kakababu looks and conducts himself the way he should, in 2013." The character now uses a tablet, high-end mobile phone, laptop, iPad and Twitter. He appears with stubble, sunglasses and branded clothing, presenting a technologically updated version of the character. Even Kakababu's iconic crutch was redesigned into a more modern and visually distinctive accessory, reinforcing the character's contemporary adventure-hero image and aligning him with the expectations of commercial action cinema (Mukherji, 2013); (Yashodeep Sengupta, 2013). However, some reviewers argued that while Prosenjit looked convincing as Kakababu, his body language occasionally resembled that of a local guy delivering commercial film-style one-liners rather than the restrained literary adventurer described by Sunil Gangopadhyay (Bose, 2013).

Santu also undergoes substantial modernization. He is portrayed as an older teenager who rides a motorcycle, uses mobile phones and wireless earphones and shows an interest in learning salsa for his girlfriend, emphasizing romantic concerns over the adventurous qualities traditionally associated with the character. These changes introduce a romantic dimension that is largely absent from the literary image of Santu. Rather than appearing as the adventurous, resourceful and karate-trained boy from the novels, he often resembles a conventional romantic hero. Reviewers criticized the romantic subplot between Santu and Rini, describing it as unnecessary and arguing that scenes such as the rooftop kiss contributed little to the adventure narrative. The innocence traditionally associated with the character is largely absent and Santu appears more dependent on and subordinate to Kakababu than the active and capable companion depicted in Sunil Gangopadhyay's stories (Mukherji, 2013); (Gangopadhyay, 2011); (Bose, 2013). The inclusion of romance, action and multiple songs further reworks the source text into a mainstream commercial entertainer aimed at a broader audience.

The film further demonstrates its commercial strategy through music. There are seven prominently placed songs throughout *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*. The soundtrack was composed by Indraadip Dasgupta, with lyrics by Srijato. Songs were performed by some of the most popular singers of the period, particularly among younger audiences, including Arijit Singh, Sonu Nigam, Rupam Islam and Shreya Ghoshal. Their inclusion enhanced the film's commercial appeal and broadened its reach beyond the adventure genre. At the same time, several songs appear only loosely connected to the narrative and function more as promotional attractions than as integral components of the story (Mukherji, 2013); (JioSaavn, 2013). The use of popular singers and multiple songs reflects the integration of adaptation into broader promotional and marketing strategies.

Another significant feature of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* is its extensive use of product placement. The film reflects the growing trend of passive advertising and brand integration within Bengali cinema. Various brands appear throughout the narrative, including *LG* mobile phones used by Santu; Kakababu eating *MPS Pickles*; Santu's family watching *Kolkata TV*; Al Mamun and his driver listening to *Fever 104 FM*; goons using *Gliders* helmets; Kakababu suggesting *Himani Fast Relief* to Santu for his leg pain; and both Santu and Kakababu wearing branded clothing such as *Red Tape*. Santu is also shown using a *Polo Sports* bag, while Kakababu frequently uses *Apple* iPads, iPhones and *Twitter*. The group's journey to Egypt is shown through *EgyptAir*, extending the film's pattern of brand visibility into the travel sequence. *Amez Tea* is presented as Hani Alkadi's favourite Darjeeling tea. These brand appearances often function as commercial insertions rather than organic elements of the narrative. In total, at least twelve identifiable brands and media partners are visibly integrated into the film's narrative world, demonstrating how the adaptation combines literary material with contemporary strategies of media commercialization and brand promotion (Mukherji, 2013); (Bose, 2013). The extensive visibility of brands demonstrates how literary adaptation becomes intertwined with commercial promotion within the contemporary culture industry (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989). Released during the Durga Puja season, *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* became one of the biggest Bengali box-office successes of 2013 (The Telegraph, 2013).

***Yeti Obhijaan* (2017):**

Following the success of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013), SVF expanded the Kakababu franchise with *Yeti Obhijaan* (2017), adapted from Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Pahar Churaye Atonko* (Gangopadhyay, 2011). The film retained the same director, stars and much of the established creative team while introducing several Bangladeshi actors (imdb, 2017); (The Daily Star, 2017). The modern versions of Kakababu and Santu returned once again. Nepal and Switzerland provided visually attractive backdrops (Press Trust of India, 2017) and high production values remained central to the commercial strategy. Released during Durga Puja, the film was supported by extensive promotion through trailers, television appearances and social media campaigns (Ghosh, 2017). These elements demonstrate how SVF continued to develop Kakababu as a recurring commercial franchise supported by large-scale production and promotional strategies.

Unlike its predecessor, the soundtrack contained only two songs. "Kakababur Obhijaan" and "Jete Hawbe", composed by Indraadip Dasgupta and performed by singers such as Arijit Singh, Rupam Islam, Anupam Roy and Papon, formed the musical component of the campaign (Mukherji, 2017); (Genius, 2017). The film was released theatrically in India on 22 September 2017 and simultaneously premiered in Nepal, where it became the first Bengali film to be dubbed into Nepali. It was later released in Bangladesh on 24 November 2017, reflecting SVF's efforts to expand the Kakababu franchise beyond the Bengali-speaking market (IANS, 2017); (Protidin & Our Time, 2017). The film's transnational release strategy reflects SVF's efforts to expand the commercial reach of the Kakababu franchise beyond its traditional Bengali audience.

Although adapted from *Pahar Churaye Atonko*, the film departs from the novel in several significant ways. Action, humour and romance receive greater emphasis than mystery. Like *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*, the film continues SVF's project of modernising Kakababu and Santu. Kakababu retains his stylish appearance, uses modern technology and moves comfortably with

his updated crutch, keeping pace with the contemporary world. His playful exchanges with Santu, self-aware humour and frequent use of guns position him closer to a commercial action hero than a conventional literary adventurer. Santu, meanwhile, is portrayed as a more mature and love-struck teenager. In a dream sequence he remembers his school teacher in a voyeuristic manner and recalls intimate moments with Rini. Romance repeatedly becomes a source of humour. Kakababu asks about Rini and learns that the relationship has ended. He then breaks the fourth wall and remarks, “ebar shanti hoyechhe to?”, a playful response to criticism of the Santu-Rini romance in *Mishawr Rawhoshyo*. Later, he begins narrating a story about his own romance before abruptly stopping. Such moments give the character a lighter and more self-reflexive quality. Through punchy one-liners and comic interactions, Kakababu emerges as a mainstream action protagonist, quite different from the more serious figure found in the novel (Mukherji, 2017); (Gangopadhyay, 2011); (Bose, 2013). The adaptation also modifies several supporting characters. In the novel, Jung Bahadur Rana represents the Nepal government, while Gurudutt Verma is an officer of the Indian government. The film expands the importance of both characters and changes Gurudutt Verma into Chitragada Verma, a female government representative. It further introduces a romantic relationship between Jung Bahadur Rana and Chitragada Verma, a subplot that is entirely absent from the source text. These changes add humour and emotional engagement while reflecting the film’s broader emphasis on commercial entertainment (Mukherji, 2017); (Chakraborty S. , 2017). Together, the increased emphasis on action, humour, romance and music transforms the adaptation into a commercially oriented adventure film that incorporates several features of the mainstream masala format.

The film also extends SVF’s strategy of commercialising the Kakababu universe. Sherpa characters appear in fashionable outdoor clothing, while branded consumer products are woven directly into the narrative. Touring equipment from *The North Face*, *Jack & Jones* and *Quechua* appears throughout the journey. A *Titan* store is featured. Kakababu and Santu repeatedly use *Quechua* (marketed by *Decathlon*) products, almost as if demonstrating them to the audience. Other brands, including *Balaram Mullick & Radharaman Mullick*, *Sugar & Spice*, *Pantaloons*, *Adidas*, *Anmol Marie Plus*, *Wai Wai* and *Polycrol*, receive visible screen presence. Together these appearances strengthen the integration of consumer culture into the narrative world and further align the franchise with the logic of commercial entertainment (Mukherji, 2017). Such brand integration further illustrates the growing influence of consumer culture and commercial promotion within the adaptation.

Kakababur Protyaborton (2022)

After a five-year gap, SVF continued the franchise with *Kakababur Protyaborton* (2022), adapted from Sunil Gangopadhyay’s *Jongoler Modhye Ek Hotel* (Gangopadhyay, 2012); (TIMESOFINDIA.COM, 2020). Released on 4 February 2022 during the Saraswati Puja season, the film retained the contemporary versions of Kakababu and Santu established in the previous films while introducing a new adventure set in Kenya and Maasai Mara National Reserve. Extensive location shooting in Africa and the inclusion of international performers further expanded the visual scale of the commercial franchise. SVF also intensified its branding strategy around the film (imdb, 2022). The film was also released in Bangladesh on 5 February 2022. Referring to the success of the previous Kakababu films in Bangladesh, director Srijit Mukherji expressed confidence that *Kakababur Protyaborton* would similarly appeal to Bangladeshi audiences, reflecting SVF’s efforts to cultivate a transnational Bengali audience beyond India (TBS Report, 2022).

Prior to its release, SVF collaborated with *Bongmade* to launch official *Kakababur Protyaborton* merchandise, including T-shirts, diaries and coasters inspired by the commercial franchise. The launch event, attended by members of the cast and crew, reflected SVF's efforts to extend Kakababu beyond literary adaptation into a commercial media brand (The News Desk, 2022). Music remained an important part of the film's promotional strategy. *Kakababur Protyaborton* (2022) featured three songs composed by Indraadip Dasgupta: "Phire Elo Kakababu", sung by Rupam Islam; "Teen Tirikke Noy", performed by Upal Sengupta, Anindya Banerjee and Chandril Bhattacharya; and "Nei Bhoi", sung by Shaan. With lyrics by Srijato, the soundtrack supported the film's marketing campaign and helped extend the Kakababu franchise across music and digital platforms (Spotify, 2022); (Mukherji, 2022). These strategies demonstrate how the franchise extends beyond cinema into a wider network of branded cultural products.

At the textual level, *Kakababur Protyaborton* departs considerably from *Jongoler Modhye Ek Hotel*. The film streamlines the source narrative by condensing events, removing several secondary incidents and reorganizing the story into a more conventional adventure-thriller structure. Yet the adaptation's most significant intervention lies in its characterization and intertextual references. Although Amal De appears in the source text, *Kakababur Protyaborton* substantially expands and reconfigures the character's narrative importance. Portrayed by Anirban Chakrabarti, Amal De emerges as a prominent comic presence whose humour, eccentricity and narrative function strongly recall Lalmohan Ganguli from *Feluda*. Several reviewers noted this resemblance, observing that Amal De frequently evokes Jatayu's familiar screen persona. The casting becomes particularly significant because Chakrabarti had already gained recognition as Jatayu in *Feluda Pherot*, produced by SVF and directed by Srijit Mukherji. The film further strengthens this intertextual connection through an explicit reference to *Chinnamastar Abhishap* (1978), a *Feluda* story that had recently been adapted by SVF as part of *Feluda Pherot* (2020), when Kakababu, Santu and Amal discuss its events. As a result, the film encourages audiences to draw connections not only between the Kakababu and *Feluda* universes but also between two contemporary SVF literary commercial franchises. Through this strategy, *Kakababur Protyaborton* extends beyond the boundaries of the source novel and positions itself within a wider network of Bengali literary and cinematic commercial franchises (Mukherji, *Kakababur Protyaborton*, 2022); (Chaudhuri S. R., 2022); (TMDb); (Self Correspondent, *anandabazar.com*, 2020). The adaptation therefore functions not only as a retelling of a novel but also as a mechanism for commercial franchise expansion and cross-franchise association.

The film further expands this strategy through self-referential and intertextual references absent from the source text. During a conversation at the Little Viseroy Camp, Kakababu and Amal De discuss famous hotels and eventually refer to Sankar's *Chowringhee* and its legendary Hotel Shahjahan. The reference links the Kakababu universe with another celebrated Bengali literary text while simultaneously recalling Mukherji's earlier adaptation, *Shah Jahan Regency* (2019), itself based on *Chowringhee*. Such moments contribute little to the central mystery but enrich the film's network of cultural associations. The adaptation also incorporates broader references to Bengali adventure traditions that invite comparisons with SVF's successful *Chander Pahar* cycle. Consequently, the film positions Kakababu within a wider constellation of literary properties, cinematic commercial franchises and audience memories. These additions demonstrate how SVF's adaptation strategy extends beyond translating a novel to the screen;

it actively constructs a shared cultural and commercial universe in which literary characters, star personas and previous franchise successes reinforce one another (Mukherji, Kakababur Protyaborton, 2022).

The film also retains the novel's reference to *Chander Pahar*, reflecting Sunil Gangopadhyay's engagement with the broader tradition of Bengali adventure literature. The allusion situates Kakababu within a lineage of exploration narratives associated with Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay and reinforces a shared literary heritage of travel and discovery (Gangopadhyay, 2012). This connection is further emphasized during the journey to Kenya when Santu remarks that he cannot see any dense forest from the aircraft, prompting Kakababu to jokingly reply that they would have to travel to North America to see such vast forests. The exchange foregrounds geographical exploration as a central theme of the narrative while recalling earlier Bengali adventure texts built around journeys into unfamiliar landscapes. For contemporary audiences, the mention of *Chander Pahar* may also evoke memories of its popular cinematic adaptations, *Chander Pahar* (2013) and *Amazon Obhijaan* (2017). Consequently, a literary reference inherited from the source text acquires additional meanings within a commercial franchise-oriented media environment, linking Bengali literary heritage with contemporary adventure cinema (Mukherji, 2022); (Jaya Biswas, TNN, 2017).

Product placement continues to be an important feature of *Kakababur Protyaborton* (2022). Several commercial brands are integrated into the narrative through dialogue, props and costume design. *Anmol Marie* biscuits appear prominently in conversations and on the dining table shared by Kakababu, Santu and Amal De. The antagonist Amar Pal explicitly mentions purchasing *Gelusil* in a dialogue, incorporating the brand into the film's narrative. Kakababu and Santu are associated with a range of branded consumer products throughout the film. Kakababu is seen wearing a *G-Star* jacket, while Santu wears a *Sonic Youth* T-shirt, reflecting the contemporary styling of the characters. Food and health-related products also feature within character interactions. Kakababu and Santu are shown consuming *Candyman Fantastik Choco Stick*, while Kakababu recommends *Dabur Honitus Herbal Cough Remedy* to Santu when he develops a cough (Mukherji, 2022). Such brand visibility further integrates commercial promotion into the narrative structure of the adaptation.

The film also reinforces franchise continuity through explicit references to Kakababu's earlier adventures. In several conversations, Kakababu and Santu recall past expeditions, mentioning experiences such as being trapped in a house on a plateau and their journey across the Egyptian desert. These nostalgic exchanges evoke memories of *Mishawr Rawhoshyo* (2013) and *Yeti Obhijaan* (2017), encouraging audiences to connect the film with previous instalments of the series. The strategy is further strengthened during the end-title sequence, which incorporates footage and visual moments from earlier Kakababu films. By combining verbal references with archival images from previous entries, *Kakababur Protyaborton* presents itself not as a standalone adaptation but as part of a continuing cinematic commercial franchise, inviting viewers to revisit and remember the broader Kakababu screen universe (Mukherji, 2017). These references strengthen franchise continuity and encourage audiences to engage with Kakababu as an ongoing media property rather than as a standalone adaptation.

Findings and Discussion:

The comparison between the earlier Kakababu adaptations and the SVF productions reveals a significant transformation in the nature of Kakababu cinema. *Sabuj Dwiper Raja* (1979),

Kakababu Here Gelen? (1995) and *Ek Tukro Chand* (2001) were produced as standalone literary adaptations by individual filmmakers and public institutions. Although these films condensed and modified their source texts, they largely preserved the narrative structure, characterisation and adventure-oriented spirit of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novels. By contrast, the SVF films transformed *Kakababu* into a long-term franchise supported by exclusive adaptation rights, recurring stars, integrated marketing campaigns, merchandise, music promotion, international distribution and brand partnerships. This shift demonstrates how *Kakababu* cinema evolved from individual adaptations into a corporatised franchise system.

Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory helps explain this transformation. The SVF films are not simple reproductions of the novels but creative reinterpretations designed for contemporary audiences. *Kakababu* is modernised into a stylish, technology-savvy adventurer, while Santu is reimagined as an urban teenager whose romantic interests, emotional concerns and contemporary lifestyle differ considerably from his literary counterpart. The films also introduce new subplots, alter character relationships and expand supporting roles. Amal De's transformation into a Jatayu-like comic companion, references to *Feluda Pherot*, *Chinnamastar Abhishap*, *Chowringhee* and *Shah Jahan Regency*, and repeated callbacks to earlier *Kakababu* adventures demonstrate what Hutcheon describes as the "palimpsestuous" nature of adaptation, where familiar texts are reinterpreted and audiences experience new meanings. This supports Hutcheon's argument that adaptation is "repetition without replication," where familiar narratives are re-created for new audiences and contexts (Hutcheon, 2006).

At the same time, the franchise displays many defining characteristics of Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry. Standardisation operates beneath the appearance of variety. Although the films move from Egypt to Nepal and Kenya, each follows a similar formula built around exotic locations, recurring stars, humour, action, consumer branding and eventual resolution, supporting their argument that "culture now impresses the same stamp on everything." The continued presence of Prosenjit Chatterjee and Aryann Bhowmik across the trilogy reflects the operation of the star system and what Adorno and Horkheimer describe as pseudo-individuality, where apparent uniqueness functions as a commercially recognisable franchise identity (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989).

Commercialisation extends beyond narrative structure. Music functions not only as part of the films but also as a marketing device through promotional releases, popular playback singers and digital circulation. Product placement becomes increasingly integrated into the narrative world, with numerous brands appearing through dialogue, costumes, props and character interactions. The launch of official merchandise for *Kakababur Prottyaborton* further demonstrates how *Kakababu* was transformed from a literary character into a marketable media brand. International distribution, including the Nepali-dubbed release of *Yeti Obhijaan* and the Bangladesh releases of both *Yeti Obhijaan* and *Kakababur Prottyaborton*, reveals efforts to expand the franchise beyond its traditional audience

The films also employ commercial franchise-building strategies largely absent from the earlier non-SVF adaptations. References to previous adventures, archival footage in end-title sequences, discussions of *Chinnamastar Abhishap* and connections with other SVF properties encourage audiences to view the films as part of a larger interconnected media universe. Such

self-referentiality reinforces audience loyalty and promotes continued engagement with the commercial franchise. In this respect, the films illustrate Adorno and Horkheimer's observation that the culture industry continually generates new forms of consumption while sustaining audience attachment to familiar products (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1989).

Therefore, the SVF Kakababu films negotiate a complex relationship between literary adaptation and the contemporary culture industry. They remain recognisable adaptations of Sunil Gangopadhyay's novels, preserving core characters, settings and adventure narratives. Yet these literary elements are consistently reshaped through branding, commercialisation, franchise continuity, star power and market-oriented strategies. The franchise demonstrates that in contemporary Bengali cinema adaptation functions not only as a creative process but also as an industrial and commercial practice. The SVF Kakababu films are therefore best understood as both adaptations and culture-industry products, where literary reinterpretation and commercial imperatives operate simultaneously, though the latter increasingly determines the form and direction of the adaptation.

Conclusion

This study has been set out to enquire the nature and style of cinematic adaptation of famous character Kakababu, created by Sunil Gangopadhyay in his writing, and its relation to culture industry. The findings suggest that these films are both cinematic adaptations of literature and manufacturing of cultural commodities in the culture industry. The SVF films remain genuine adaptations in Hutcheon's sense, creatively reinterpreting Sunil Gangopadhyay's novels and reconstructing the Kakababu world for contemporary audiences. At the same time, the comparison with earlier adaptations reveals a clear shift from standalone literary films to a corporatised franchise built around exclusive rights, recurring stars, promotional music, product placement, merchandise and franchise continuity. Rather than one displacing the other, adaptation has become the form through which the culture industry operates in contemporary Bengali cinema. Kakababu is neither adaptation corrupted by commerce nor commerce disguised as adaptation. Instead, it represents a form of contemporary Bengali cinema in which creative reinterpretation and commercial imperatives work together.

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