



Adapting the Experience of Endurance: Waiting, Interiority, and Cinematic Form in the Two Uski Rotis

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Abstract: This paper examines Mani Kaul's 1969 film adaptation of Mohan Rakesh's short story *Uski Roti* through the interconnected questions of waiting, interiority, and cinematic form. Moving beyond a fidelity-based understanding of adaptation, it considers how Kaul reworks the experience of endurance that structures the source-text's narrative. In the source story, Balo's waiting is shaped through memory, anticipation, psychological uncertainty, marital obligation, and repetition; in the film, this experience is relocated into cinematic duration, silence, bodily stillness, spatial distance, and an attenuated narrative rhythm. Through Balo, Zinda, Sucha Singh's mistress, and the unnamed dead woman, the film creates a productive tension between visibility and knowledge: characters and events may become more physically present while remaining psychologically opaque. Drawing primarily on adaptation theory and on Deleuze's account of cinematic temporality, the article argues that Kaul does not simply make visible what remains unsaid in Rakesh's prose. Rather, he gives the unsaid a different formal existence, transforming literary uncertainty into an audiovisual experience of duration, silence, embodiment, and interpretive openness.

Keywords: Film Adaptation; Mani Kaul; Mohan Rakesh; cinematic temporality; Endurance

1. Introduction:

Mohan Rakesh's *Uski Roti* [Other's Bread] and Mani Kaul's 1969 film adaptation belong to two important moments of formal experimentation in post-Independence Hindi literature and cinema. Rakesh was closely associated with the *Nayi Kahani* [New Story] movement of the 1950s and 1960s, which engaged with questions of individual experience, complicated relationships, individual/societal alienation, and psychological uncertainty in the sphere of Hindi literature. *Uski Roti* reflects this shift through an apparently uneventful situation: Balo, a rural woman, waits by the roadside to give rotis [bread] to her bus-driver husband, Sucha Singh. Yet this ordinary act is entangled with issues of marital obligation, memory, anticipation, domestic labour, social and physical insecurity, and emotional uncertainty. Waiting is therefore not an empty interval in the story but a persistent condition through which Balo's everyday life derives "meaning". Kaul's adaptation carries this sporadic narrative into the experimental context of the 1960s New Indian Cinema. Instead of expanding Rakesh's story into a more conventionally dramatic film, Kaul makes it even more resistant to conventional narration. Causal connections between individuals weaken, chronology becomes uncertain, dialogue is infrequent, and gestures, objects, sounds, bodies, and stretches of apparent inactivity assume (un)usual importance. Moments that conventional cinema might compress are allowed to linger. The basic situation of Rakesh's story remains recognisable, but the experience of that situation changes significantly in the film adaptation. The movement from Rakesh to Kaul can therefore be seen not simply as the transfer of a story from page to screen, but as an encounter between the narrative experiments of *Nayi Kahani* and the emerging formal practices of New Indian Cinema (Rakesh 1957; Kaul 1969).

This transformation is especially pivotal in relation to what remains unsaid. Rakesh's story does not always articulate Balo's experience through verbal articulations; it emerges through waiting, recollection, anticipation, repetition, and the implications of what characters cannot or do not say. Kaul does not simply fill these silences



with cinematic information. He often preserves them while changing their form. Silence acquires duration, the body and its gestures become more prominent, isolated sounds interrupt stretches of quiet, and landscape and spatial distance take on expressive weight. The film can make visible what the story only refers to, yet greater visibility does not necessarily bring greater explanation. In this sense, adaptation becomes a way of giving the unsaid a different material presence while also creating new ambiguities of its own. It is through this movement between literary and cinematic form that the present article examines endurance in the two *Uski Rotis*. Endurance is understood here not simply as another word for suffering or waiting, but as a condition shaped by time, consciousness, bodily labour, space, and the unequal relations within which Balo's everyday life unfolds. The question, then, is not whether Kaul faithfully reproduces Rakesh's story, but what happens to this experience when literary narration is reconstructed through cinematic form. In this respect, the study follows the post-fidelity approach associated with Linda Hutcheon's understanding of adaptation as reinterpretation and recreation and Robert Stam's critique of fidelity as the primary measure of an adaptation. Kaul's film is consequently treated as a work in dialogue with Rakesh's story rather than as a secondary text whose value depends upon its closeness to the literary source.

The paper is organised into three interconnected sections that look into different but overlapping dimensions of endurance. Together, they consider how an experience first organised through Rakesh's prose is reworked through the temporal, visual, sonic, and embodied possibilities of Kaul's cinema.

2. Waiting as Endurance: From Narrative Time to Cinematic Duration

Waiting lies at the experiential core of both Rakesh's story and Kaul's film. The external observable action is minimal. Balo carries food (rotis) for Sucha Singh and waits by the roadside for the bus he drives. Yet waiting here is more than an interval between events. Repeated day after day, dependent upon an arrival Balo cannot control, it becomes a condition of endurance. Rakesh and Kaul construct this condition through the different temporal resources of prose and cinema. The story moves between the present moment and Balo's memories, anxieties, and expectations, while Kaul makes the passage of time itself unusually palpable. The adaptation thus changes not the basic fact of Balo's waiting, but the way that waiting is experienced. In Rakesh's story, the roadside is both a physical location and a point from which Balo's consciousness moves elsewhere. As she waits, the present becomes entangled with recollection and anticipation. Sucha Singh's arrival is imagined before it occurs; earlier experiences remain active in her mind; and anxieties originating beyond the roadside enter the immediate moment. Chronological and psychological time therefore cease to coincide. A relatively uneventful period acquires density because the present is continually occupied by what has happened and what might happen. Waiting suspends forward-moving action and allows the narrative to move inward and backward. The apparent absence of incident is therefore not an absence of experience. Memory, expectation, fear, and marital obligation fill the interval. Repetition deepens this effect. Balo prepares the roti, carries it to the road, and waits for Sucha Singh as part of an established routine. Endurance emerges precisely from this recurrence: it is not simply the ability to tolerate a long wait on one occasion, but the incorporation of waiting into everyday life (Rakesh 1957).

Kaul retains this situation but gives it a different temporal form. Even before the first narrative image appears, the opening credits are accompanied by the sounds of buses and other vehicles. The spectator enters the film through the sound of movement before seeing the woman whose life is organised around waiting for that movement. When Balo later walks along the unpaved path through the fields towards the main road and sits beneath a tree with a potli of rotis, the contrast becomes visible. The road carries vehicles elsewhere; Balo reaches it in order to stop. She walks so that she can wait (Kaul 1969).

Kaul also refuses to make this waiting cinematically economical. Pauses remain on screen, gestures are not hurried towards their consequences, conversations are interrupted by silence, and seemingly minor actions are allowed unusual duration. This rhythm extends beyond the roadside: domestic activities, looks, movements, and

encounters often last longer than their immediate narrative function requires. Waiting therefore becomes more than something represented by the film; it enters the film's rhythm. Because dialogue is sparse and responses are often delayed, silence itself takes up time. A face, gesture, object, or empty stretch of space may remain before us without immediate explanation. The spectator is consequently made to inhabit moments in which meaning, like Sucha Singh's arrival, is deferred (Kaul 1969).

This use of silence also reshapes the relationship between Balo and Sucha Singh. Kaul draws a sharp contrast between them: Balo is associated with patience, restraint, domestic labour, and waiting, while Sucha Singh belongs to a more mobile and socially expansive world. The film shows him eating meat, drinking liquor, gambling with his colleagues, travelling, and moving through spaces unavailable to Balo. More importantly, his encounters with her are marked by emotional distance. When he finally stops the bus and Balo approaches him with the rotis, he neither looks at her nor initiates a conversation. The absence of eye contact and speech makes their estrangement perceptible without requiring either character to explain it (Kaul 1969).

Rakesh's story presents a somewhat more complicated relationship. Sucha Singh is certainly patriarchal and often harsh towards Balo, but communication between them has not ceased altogether. The story indicates that when Balo is late in reaching the Nakodar road, he sometimes finds a way to keep the bus there until she arrives, even though he begins scolding her once she does. The gesture does not cancel his harshness, but it complicates it: irritation and expectation coexist with a degree of accommodation. The story also tells us that Sucha Singh returns to the village once a week, although it gives us little access to what passes between husband and wife during those visits. More significantly, towards the end, when he realises that Balo has continued waiting by the roadside for hours, his behaviour briefly softens. He pats her on the back, tells her to return home, and expresses concern that Zinda has been left there alone (Rakesh 1957).



Figure 1 Two shots from the adaptation showing the contrast between Balo's patient waiting and Sucha Singh's emotional distance.

Kaul greatly reduces such moments of interaction and relative warmth. The difference is important because the film does not merely shorten the couple's conversations; it alters the emotional texture of their relationship. Where Rakesh allows hostility, routine, dependence, and occasional concern to exist uneasily together, Kaul places greater emphasis on distance and non-communication. Even the few exchanges that remain are broken by long pauses, making conversation itself feel difficult and uncertain. Balo's waiting consequently becomes lonelier on screen. She waits not only for a husband whose movements determine her time, but for someone whose presence, when it finally arrives, offers very little relief from the silence that preceded it.



The film's uncertain chronology also unsettles ordinary temporal progression. Kaul does not always provide clear markers by which an image can be securely classified as present action, recollection, anticipation, or imagination. Different temporal registers appear alongside one another without being neatly ordered. This uncertainty corresponds closely to the experience of waiting itself. The person who waits inhabits the present but is mentally directed towards a future event while remaining vulnerable to memories of the past. In Kaul's film, this instability becomes part of the organisation of images rather than something that needs to be explained verbally. Gilles Deleuze's account of the cinematic time-image is useful here, particularly his argument that in certain forms of modern cinema the usual sensory-motor connection between "perception" and "purposeful action" becomes loosened. Time no longer remains merely the measure of actions moving a narrative forward; it can become perceptible in its own right. Balo's waiting creates just such a situation. She watches, listens, remembers, anticipates, and waits, but she cannot bring about the event towards which her attention is directed. Kaul's prolonged moments and weakened causal progression therefore allow time to emerge with unusual force. The significance of these sequences is not simply that "nothing happens." Rather, when action ceases to dominate the image, the spectator becomes more conscious of duration itself (Deleuze 1989; Kaul 1969).

The contrast between Balo and Sucha Singh sharpens this temporal asymmetry. Sucha Singh belongs to a world of buses, roads, travel, Nakodar, and relationships beyond the spaces Balo occupies. His life continues elsewhere while she waits for his passage through hers. The bus is therefore more than a narrative convenience: it embodies the unequal temporal positions of the two characters. For Sucha Singh it is a means of movement; for Balo its arrival structures anticipation. Even when the bus finally comes, waiting is only temporarily interrupted, because the routine that produces it remains intact. This is where the distinction between waiting and endurance becomes crucial. Waiting ordinarily implies an interval that will end with an expected event. Endurance suggests something more persistent: living within circumstances whose duration and resolution are not fully under one's control. Balo's endurance arises from repetition, uncertainty, and her dependence upon temporal rhythms organised elsewhere. Kaul intensifies this condition not by adding dramatic events but by making duration difficult to evade. The spectator must spend time with Balo rather than merely being told that she has spent time waiting.

The movement from Rakesh's narrative time to Kaul's cinematic duration therefore reveals one of the adaptation's most significant transformations. Rakesh allows the present to expand through memory and anticipation; Kaul gives temporal weight to images, pauses, sounds, silences, and uncertain transitions. In neither work is endurance simply synonymous with waiting. It emerges when waiting becomes recurrent, uncertain, and resistant to Balo's control. Kaul's adaptation takes this condition from Rakesh's prose and remakes it through cinema, turning the time Balo endures into time that the spectator, however briefly, must also inhabit.

3. Adapting Interiority: From Narrated Consciousness to Audiovisual Form

If waiting gives *Uski Roti* its temporal structure, much of its emotional depth comes from what remains within consciousness. Rakesh's story is concerned not only with what happens to Balo but with how ordinary events are registered through memory, apprehension, expectation, and uncertainty. Kaul therefore faces a particular problem of adaptation: prose can move directly between external events and a character's thoughts, whereas cinema need not, and in this case does not, offer the same kind of access. Rather than translating Rakesh's psychological narration into explanatory dialogue or sustained voice-over, Kaul disperses interiority across image, sound, silence, gesture, bodily stillness, and temporal discontinuity. Rakesh's prose moves fluidly between Balo's immediate surroundings and the thoughts they provoke. The anticipation of Sucha Singh's arrival, memories of earlier experiences, and anxieties about their relationship enter the present without requiring Balo to speak them aloud (Rakesh 1957; Kaul 1969).

What matters in such a passage is not only the information it gives us about Balo but the kind of access prose makes possible. Rakesh can disclose an unspoken thought without requiring Balo to explain herself. Kaul largely

gives up this privilege. Although cinema could reproduce narrated thought through voice-over, his film seldom resorts to such a device. The spectator is instead placed before bodies and faces whose emotional meanings remain incomplete. This is especially evident in the treatment of Balo herself. Her face is often held before the camera, but physical proximity does not produce psychological transparency. A close-up may invite us to look more carefully without telling us exactly what we are looking for. The same is true of a pause, a gesture, or a moment of stillness. Such details suggest an interior life without reducing it to an easily readable set of emotions. Balo is therefore simultaneously close to the spectator and inaccessible: the camera can bring us near her body without granting unrestricted access to her consciousness.

Kaul thus does not simply take what is “inside” Balo in the story and make it externally visible. He changes the terms on which interiority can be approached. Meaning has to be inferred from looks, gestures, sounds, silences, and relations between images, and those inferences are not always confirmed. The unsaid in *Rakesh* is therefore not eliminated in adaptation. It acquires another form. Zinda’s encounter with Jangi offers a particularly striking example. The scene is disturbing, but Kaul does not present it in a way that makes every aspect of the encounter unequivocal. When Zinda later appears distracted, looking blankly upwards, the film suggests that the encounter continues to occupy her, but it does not identify her emotional state for us. Her subsequent exchange with Balo does not fully settle the matter either. Her answers are sparse and delayed, and her account does not correspond straightforwardly to everything the preceding images have shown. *Rakesh*’s narration provides greater specification of Jangi’s behaviour; Kaul creates a more uncertain and ambiguous relation between actual event, recollection, speech, and visible response (Rakesh 1957; Kaul 1969). This ambiguity should not be mistaken for evidence that Zinda is unaffected simply because she does not display conventional signs of distress or trauma. Rather, the scene exposes the limits of reading another person’s interior state from outward behaviour. Her silence and distracted presence invite interpretation without becoming a transparent code. The spectator is made aware that seeing a person closely is not the same as knowing what that person experiences.



Figure 2 A shot of Jangi and Zinda. Unlike the source text, the film leaves the threatening nature of their encounter ambiguous rather than clearly depicting Jangi imposing himself on or molesting Zinda.

The same tension between visibility and knowledge shapes the film’s treatment of Sucha Singh’s relationship with an unnamed woman in *Nakodar*. In *Rakesh*’s story, the other woman is largely referred to rather than directly



represented. Kaul gives her a visible presence, showing her sharing an intimate space with Sucha Singh. Their sexual relationship is suggested indirectly through clothes being removed and thrown over a door. Yet this greater visibility provides remarkably little psychological explanation. We hear no substantial conversation that defines the relationship, nor is the woman given a statement through which she explains her own position within it. Her on-screen presence is accompanied by the old film song *Hamare Dil Se Kabhi Na Jana* [Do not ever leave my heart] from the film *Udan Khatola* (1955). Music therefore occupies a space from which dialogue is largely absent. The song supplies an affective atmosphere without becoming the woman's own speech or providing a definitive interpretation of the relationship. The film expands the world of the story while creating new areas of uncertainty within it. A similar process occurs in the episode involving the unnamed woman who has died by suicide. The source text clearly connects her death with abandonment by her husband. Kaul, by contrast, gives the event a physical presence: the water, the retrieval of the body, the gathering villagers, and the arrival of the village women are all shown, yet very little is said about what has happened. What is especially striking is the absence of any verbally articulated response from the women who gather at the scene. Their faces register shock, unease, and dismay, but the film does not turn their presence into an explicit expression of grief, sympathy, or female solidarity. Even at a moment when such a response might seem possible, Kaul leaves the emotional meaning of their presence unsettled. Once again, the film makes an event more visible while withholding the explanatory and emotional cues supplied more directly by prose. The paradox of seeing more while being told less is central to Kaul's treatment of interiority. The mistress acquires a visible body but little speech; the dead woman becomes materially present but cannot speak at all; Zinda is shown after her encounter with Jangi without providing an exhaustive account of what she feels; and Balo remains the film's central presence without becoming a psychologically transparent character. Cinema's capacity to show bodies, spaces, and actions does not automatically make them easier to understand. In *Uski Roti*, visibility often makes the limits of knowledge more apparent (Rakesh 1957; Kaul 1969).

Silence is crucial to this effect. It is not simply an absence of dialogue but one of the means through which the interior personality of the characters is suggested without being explained. Long pauses and delayed responses open gaps between question and answer, event and reaction. The spectator remains within these gaps without being told exactly how to interpret them. Silence therefore produces an unusual relation to consciousness: it makes us aware of an interior world while withholding full access to it. This difference between the story and the film illustrates why a fidelity-based approach is inadequate to Kaul's adaptation. Linda Hutcheon's understanding of adaptation as reinterpretation and recreation is useful precisely because it allows us to ask not whether every literary thought has found an audiovisual equivalent, but how a new medium reorganises our relation to that thought. Rakesh can narrate what his characters do not say; Kaul often chooses not to replace that narrative access with another form of explanation. What might initially appear to be a loss of psychological information therefore becomes a different way of constructing subjectivity (Hutcheon 2013, 7–8).

Kaul also unsettles the boundary between an inner world and an external one. Memories, anticipations, and present events are not always separated by clear cinematic markers, making it difficult to assign every image securely to one temporal or psychological category. Interiority consequently cannot be located only behind Balo's face or "inside" her mind. It spreads across the organisation of the film—its images, temporal transitions, sounds, silences, objects, bodies, and spaces. Subjectivity becomes something the film constructs formally rather than something a character simply possesses and explains. The movement from the source text to the adaptation therefore involves more than finding cinematic substitutes for literary consciousness. Rakesh can narrate what remains unspoken between his characters; Kaul often allows the unspoken to remain unspoken while making its presence felt through audiovisual form. The unsaid survives adaptation, but differently: it moves from the space between speech and narrated thought into the gaps between image, sound, gesture, silence, and interpretation.



4. Conclusion

Mani Kaul's adaptation of Rakesh's short story shows that adaptation involves more than carrying a narrative from one medium into another. Kaul retains the sparse situation of Rakesh's story, but changes the way that situation is experienced. Waiting, uncertainty, silence, and repetition remain central, yet they are now felt through the duration of images, the presence of bodies, sound, and the gaps that the film leaves unexplained. This transformation is especially evident in Balo's waiting. Rakesh allows the present to open into memory, anxiety, and anticipation, giving the reader access to the consciousness within which waiting is experienced. Kaul makes us remain more directly with the time of waiting itself. His pauses, silences, and prolonged moments make duration part of the spectator's experience. Balo's endurance arises not simply from waiting for Sucha Singh, but from the repetition of a routine whose rhythm she does not control.

A similar transformation occurs in the treatment of interiority. Rakesh can narrate thoughts that his characters never express aloud, whereas Kaul largely gives up this access without replacing it with explanatory dialogue or voice-over. His characters may be closely visible without becoming psychologically transparent. This tension between visibility and knowledge is central to the film: Kaul can show more while telling us less. The unsaid therefore becomes an important point of connection between the two works. What Rakesh holds between narration and speech, Kaul relocates into pauses, gestures, faces, sounds, bodies, and spaces. He does not simply make explicit what the story leaves implicit; uncertainty survives the process of adaptation in another form. This is also why fidelity offers only a limited way of understanding Kaul's film. Its departures from Rakesh reveal how an experience shaped through prose can be reworked through the particular possibilities of cinema.

Endurance brings these strands together. It describes more than Balo's ability to wait or suffer; it grows out of repetition, uncertainty, everyday obligation, unequal mobility, and her limited control over the rhythms of her own life. The source text gives this experience psychological and narrative depth, while the adaptation makes it palpable through cinematic form. The distance between the two *Uski Roti* is therefore not a deficiency to be measured but the space in which the adaptation becomes most revealing. Fidelity alone cannot account for what happens in this movement from story to film, since adaptation also opens the source text to multiple possibilities that need not be contained within its original form. In taking its own creative path, the film allows Rakesh's narrative to acquire new temporal, visual, and affective possibilities without erasing its underlying uncertainties. Rather than resolving those uncertainties, Kaul gives them another life through cinema. Adaptation, in this sense, does not merely reproduce a source text; it opens that text to new meanings and possibilities by allowing it to become something different.

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