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Film adaptation of book an additional bonus, not primary purpose: author Kunal Basu

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New Delhi, Jul 2 (PTI) Author Kunal Basu says though his writing is “imagery driven”, catering to film audience has never been the “primary focus” of his work.

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Basu, a true blue cinephile, acted as a child artist in legendary filmmaker Mrinal Sen's two films — "Punascha" (1961) and "Abasheshe" (1962), and decades later, the titular short story from his 2008 book "The Japanese Wife" was adapted into a feature by director-actor Aparna Sen.

The author said he is already in early discussions for the film adaptation of his new book "Filmi Stories", a collection of eight stories about "unforeseen terrors and adventures, surreal comedies, the apocalypses and the sublime poetry of everyday life".



“I come from a generation of writers who do not write to please a film audience primarily or to get a director interested in making a film. My first four novels were historical novels, and two of them were set away from India. So I had entertained no such thought that some film director would one day make a film out of these.

“If it happens, it is an additional bonus but that is not the primary purpose. I am not writing directly for cinema,” Basu, who divides his time between Kolkata and Oxford in the UK, told PTI in an interview.

That said, the majority of his writings, the bilingual novelist admits, are indeed “very imagery driven” making it apt for the silver screen.

The writer of bestselling “The Opium Clerk”, “In an Ideal World” and nine other Bengali and English novels, said he went one step further with “Filmi Stories”, where his writing aims to evoke the “audio-visual experience” in the mind of the readers.

“You have dance-drama, which is a combination of dance and theatre.. Opera, which is narrative in music. I really believe in the inter-relationship between the siblings of art. So I thought, maybe it is time for me to write literature or fiction in a way that evokes the audio-visual experience.” So, be it the story of a novice jailor breaking the law only to learn that nothing in this world is

beyond pardon or the one where an accidental friendship with a bunch of Bollywood strugglers rejuvenates a jaded tycoon, most tales in the new collection hit the right notes for a motion picture.

Celebrated filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj, known for directing Shakespearean adaptations “Maqbool” (Macbeth), “Omkara” (Othello) and “Haider” (Hamlet), has also endorsed Basu’s latest, saying “every story deserves an adaptation”.

Basu, who wrote these stories from his Kolkata home during the pandemic, believes though works of literature, every tale is “filmy” in the way the readers would read them.

“They would imagine as if they were films,” he added.

His favourite book-to-movie adaptations, ranges from Satyajit Ray’s “Charulata” based on Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore’s “Nastanirh” (The Broken Nest) to Oscar-winning masterpiece “The Godfather”, written by novelist Mario Puzo and adapted to screen by director Francis Ford Coppola.

The 67-year-old novelist, who writes “eight to nine hours” daily, also spilled the beans on his rather strange writing ritual where he looks for a piece of music — symphony, raga or even popular film song — that “captures his mood” and sometimes even complement the story idea.

So, what was his go-to song for “Filmi Stories”? “Lata Mangeshkar’s ‘Rahen Na Rahen Hum Mehka Kareng’,” he replied.

“Does it have anything to do with any particular story? I don’t think so. But in many ways it captured my mood, and my mental state as I was writing the stories. So I look for it (music), especially when I’m writing a longish novel. That’s my writing ritual. It is to find a piece of music that puts me in the mood to write,” he added.

The book, priced at Rs 499, is published by Penguin Random House India (PRHI). PTI MG SHD RB SHD SHD

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