COLLEGE LIBRARIES
Vol. 41 No. 1 March 2026 pp. 47-53

Received on 18-10-2025 Reviewed on 17-02-2026 Paper Accepted on 25-03-2026

Projection of the Library and the Librarian in the Movie 'The Storyteller' : A Critical Review

Ashish Sharma[a] and Snigdha Naskar[b]*

Abstract

This paper critically investigates how The Storyteller reimagines the conventional cinematic depiction of libraries and librarians. It aims to understand how the film redefines the library as a dynamic cultural institution and a space of memory, care, and resistance against epistemic erasure, rather than a passive repository of order and information. Adopting a qualitative and interpretative approach, the study undertakes close textual and visual analysis of the film. Through the examination of visual metaphors, sound design, and character construction, the paper analyses how cinematic form and narrative techniques symbolically reconstruct the library's cultural and emotional significance. The findings reveal that the film positions the library as both a sanctuary and a site of subversion. The librarian transcends the stereotype of an information custodian to become a storyteller, mediator, and silent activist who bridges the textual with the oral and the institutional with the personal. The film foregrounds gendered labor, emotional resilience, and cultural continuity as integral to librarianship. This paper contributes an interdisciplinary perspective that merges film studies, library and information science, and cultural memory theory. It proposes that The Storyteller redefines librarianship as an act of emotional and intellectual reclamation and conceptualizes the library as a living, breathing organism animated by empathy and storytelling.

Keywords: Epistemic Resistance, Film Critique, Gendered Librarianship, Library in the Movie, Librarian in the Movie, Storyteller

1. Introduction

In many films from throughout the world, libraries are places where private imagination meets public memory. However, the librarians who work there are generally shown as narrow stereotypes instead of as cultural moral agents. The Storyteller (2022), directed by Ananth Mahadevan and based on Satyajit Ray's short story Golpo Boliye Tarini Khuro, offers a nuanced cinematic reflection on libraries, storytelling, and intellectual integrity. Set in the National Reading Library of Ahmedabad, the film follows Tarini Bandopadhyay, a storyteller from Kolkata, who

[a] Research Scholar, Department of Library & Information Science, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-4435-0092, Mobile: 70442 72172, Email: ashishrbu@gmail.com

[b] Assistant Professor, Department of Library & Information Science, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, Mobile: 6289667426, https://orcid.org/0009-0007-1960-4591 and https://vidwan.inflibnet.ac.in/profile/697200, Mobile:62896 67426 Email: snigdha.naskar@rbu.ac.in, *(Corresponding Author)

Sharma, A. & Naskar, S. (2026, March). Projection of the Library and the Librarian in the Movie 'The Storyteller': A critical review. *College Libraries, 41*(1), pp. 47-53

© WBCLA

responds to an unusual advertisement by Ratan Garodia, a wealthy businessman suffering from chronic insomnia. Hired to tell him stories that induce sleep, Tarini gradually uncovers Garodia's deceit, as the latter, under the pseudonym "Gorki", appropriates Tarini's tales as his own. Central to this moral and creative conflict is Suzie Fibert, the librarian, whose warmth and perceptiveness defy traditional cinematic stereotypes of the librarian as a silent custodian. Instead, she emerges as a cultural mediator, guiding Tarini toward self-realization and justice. The library itself transcends its function as a mere repository of books, transforming into a vibrant site of discovery, ethical awakening, and resistance to intellectual exploitation. As the industrialist Ratan Garodia exploits Tarini's original tales, the film's fundamental conflict between creation and appropriation, civic memory and private commodification unfolds, culminating in a plagiarism reckoning that explicitly references canonical literature. Lasting approximately eight minutes of screen time, the library scenes encapsulate key narrative tensions, between originality and plagiarism, truth and deception, creation and consumption. This review explores how The Storyteller reconfigures the cinematic imagination of libraries and librarians, portraying them as active participants in the moral and creative life of society. In doing so, the film underscores the library's enduring role as a guardian of both narrative authenticity and human empathy, redefining librarianship as a profession of ethical stewardship and cultural preservation.

2. Literature Review

The film Heartbreak Library helps reshape public perceptions of librarians by linking audiences to real-world issues and conveying moral lessons through assertive communication between librarians and patrons (Adi & Maulida, 2015). Similarly, Smart Library Makes Smart People emphasizes that libraries must actively engage communities rather than wait for visitors, highlighting the need for innovation and dedication among librarians (Kamaludin, 2018). Film representations significantly influence how society perceives libraries and librarianship. Kambodja (1955-1965) portrays Danti, a librarian whose story intertwines personal and professional dimensions, symbolized by the frangipani flower (Mayesti, N., 2023). Rajkumar Santoshi's 2006 Hindi Bollywood film Lage Raho Munna Bhai effectively integrates the government's archive. The main character, Munna, pretended to be a history professor to impress his girlfriend (Biswas & Mitra, 2022). He needed Mahatma Gandhi knowledge to face her family. The Rastriya Gandhi Sangrahalay, government Mahatma Gandhi archives, help here. Munna spent three days at the archive reading Mahatma Gandhi's books, letters, artefacts, and other materials without eating. Thus, Munna, the film's main character, saw Mahatma Gandhi. The film pointed out that Rastriya Gandhi Sangrahalay was always empty because the archivist was too busy to see Munna (Biswas & Mitra, 2022). The Library (2015) depicts libraries as enjoyable and uplifting spaces, contrasting with traditional portrayals of dull and restrictive environments (Morita & Laksmi, 2018). In Chinese cinema, librarian portrayals have evolved from unfriendly and rigid figures to intelligent and dynamic professionals, reflecting broader technological and societal changes (Meng et al., 2017). However, Indonesian films continue to depict female librarians stereotypically older, conservatively dressed, and traditional failing to mirror the profession's modernization in the information age. These studies call for renewed representation of librarians, particularly women, as vibrant, knowledgeable, and proactive agents of information (Mayesti, N. et al., 2019; Paramaratri & Wijayanti, 2021).

3. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to understand how the film redefines the library as a dynamic cultural institution, however, the

© WBCLA

following specific objectives were identified:

- To evaluate the symbolic function and ethical significance of the library in the film's narrative.
- To examine how the librarian in this movie is shown and how she helps assist to user
- To evaluate the film's interaction with plagiarism, authorship, and intellectual property, as well as the library's corrective functions.
- To observe the state of the library as it is depicted in this film

4. Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to identify both manifest and latent meanings within The Storyteller (Gorman & Clayton, 2005). Using literature and document study methods, data were drawn from film dialogues, scenes, and related sources. The movie was divided into separate parts, and all of the library scenes were separated and tracked. Important conversations that made moral claims were typed up with notes on tone and discussion. There were no human participants, hence there was no need for an institutional review (Singh & Khajuria, 2022). Film frames and phrases were managed in accordance with scholarly fair use, while demonstrating cultural sensitivity to multilingual environments. The analysis classifies dialogues, expressions, and visual symbols to examine how the library and librarian are portrayed (Macnamara, 2003). As an individual film textual analysis, the conclusions are analytically substantial. The study is confined to libraries, the librarian, and the ethics of storytelling inside the film's narrative.

5. Summary of the Movie -The Storyteller

Inspired by Satyajit Ray's Golpo Boliye Tarini Khuro, The Storyteller (Dir. Ananth Mahadevan) follows Tarini Bandopadhyay (Paresh Rawal), a gifted yet insecure storyteller from Kolkata who avoids documenting his tales for fear of criticism (Roy, 2025). After losing his job at Amrit Publication, he responds to an unusual advertisement by Ratan Garodia (Adil Hussain), a wealthy but insomniac businessman from Ahmedabad seeking original bedtime stories. Though surrounded by books, Garodia never reads them, believing wisdom can be absorbed by ownership (The Storyteller, 2022). As Tarini narrates stories, he discovers Garodia has plagiarized his work to impress his former love, Saraswati (Revathy). With help from a librarian (Tannishtha Chatterjee), Tarini exposes the deceit, turning the narrative into a moral reflection on creativity, ownership, and karma. The film explores the tension between commerce and art, originality and imitation, and features witty dialogue, such as Tarini's line, "Nakal ke liye bhi akal chahiye" ("You need intelligence even to copy something"). Despite its leisurely pace, The Storyteller captivates through strong performances, evocative visuals, and a resonant conclusion that equates the storyteller and storywriter, emphasizing the shared essence of creation and reaffirming the film's central critique of plagiarism (Roy, 2025; The Storyteller, 2022).

6. Projection of Library and Librarian in the Movie

The Storyteller offers a profound re-imagining of both the library and the librarian. It shifts the cinematic discourse from the static to the dynamic, from the custodian to the creator. The library becomes a breathing organism, and the librarian-its heart-animates it with compassion, memory, and defiance. The film ultimately reminds viewers that storytelling, in any form, is an act of preservation: of humanity, of truth, and of connection.

6.1. The Library as a Symbolic Space

In The Storyteller, the library functions as more than a physical setting; it becomes a liminal zone where past and present intersect. The cinematic mise-en-scène, dimly lit aisles, tactile presence of aging manuscripts, and the muted

© WBCLA

sound design, transforms the library into a contemplative arena of memory. The library stands as sanctuary and stage, a sacred archive of forgotten narratives and a site for rediscovery.

The film's direction crafts the library as a metaphorical "memory theatre," recalling Walter Benjamin's concept of the archive as a living entity that resists oblivion. Each book, each shelf, carries the resonance of unspoken histories. The library, thus, mirrors the storyteller's own act and gathering fragments of human experience to weave meaning and coherence.

6.2. Representation of the Librarian

The librarian in The Storyteller defies conventional cinematic depictions. Traditionally, filmic librarians are typecast as rigid, introverted, or comically pedantic figures. However, the protagonist here emerges as a deeply human character i.e. empathetic, intuitive, and quietly rebellious against institutional decay. The librarian becomes a "storyteller" in her own right and not merely managing information but giving voice to silenced narratives. She acts as a cultural translator, bridging generational gaps between the oral and the textual, the historical and the contemporary. Her character resonates with Foucault's idea of the archaeologist of knowledge, one who excavates layers of meaning rather than imposing order.

The National Reading Library, a grand, well-organized building, serves as the setting where Suzie Fibert, a courteous and efficient librarian, assists users with empathy and professionalism. When Tarini, a visitor from Kolkata, seeks membership, Suzie guides him through the process and even helps with a personal query about the local market. Over several visits, Suzie demonstrates her dedication to readers and checking catalogues, explaining library policies, and discussing literature with insight. Through Suzie, Tarini learns that his own stories have been published under the pseudonym "Gorki" by businessman Ratan Garodia. Suzie's knowledge of Gujarati literature bridges Tarini's linguistic gap, revealing her role as both facilitator and interpreter of knowledge. Their interactions extend beyond the library, where conversations about writers like Ruskin Bond and Premchand reveal Suzie's intellectual curiosity and warmth. In her final meeting with Tarini, she expresses her love for stories, while Tarini mentions his invitation from Mahasweta Devi, signifying mutual respect between reader and storyteller. Suzie thus embodies the modern librarian who is helpful, informed, and empathetic and bridging literature, language, and human connection.

The title of the film suggests that the library serves as a central location where users seek to fulfill their needs. Tarini visits the library to prepare for a new position as a storyteller, responsible for narrating stories to help his employer sleep. Consequently, it becomes essential for Tarini to access the library, read the stories, and relay them to his patron. Tarini regularly visited the library to borrow storybooks for his patron. The library had a large collection, and many readers could often be seen reading there. To borrow books, Tarini became a member and checked out several titles for his work. Previously, Tarini created his own stories. One day, while speaking with Suzie, a library staff member, he noticed a user requesting a reserved book that was unavailable. Upon checking the book and seeing Gorki's image, Tarini realized that his employer, for whom he told stories, was deceiving him. Garodia used the pseudonym Gorki to publish stories and avoid detection. Fortunately, Tarini recognized Gorki. After this, Tarini began telling Garodia stories by Rabindranath Tagore, presenting them as his own. Garodia then published these stories as if they were his original work. Unfortunately, Garodia was caught by the Rabindranath Tagore Foundation for copyright violation and plagiarism, and was fined heavily. This incident shows how the library helped Tarini uncover his patron's dishonesty and ultimately taught Garodia a lesson. The library played a crucial role in this outcome. Since Tarini was from Kolkata, he was familiar with Bengali. When he saw an image of Gorki, who published his stories in Gujarati, Tarini asked Suzie, who

© WBCLA

knows Gujarati, for more information. Suzie explained that Gorki brought significant change to Gujarati literature through his publications. Tarini then asked Suzie about the stories published by Gorki, and she shared the details with him. Tarini realized that all of Gorki's publications were attributed to him by mistake. The librarian was dedicated and hardworking, always willing to assist users. Suzie provided substantial assistance and guidance to Tarini on multiple occasions. Outside the library, she met with Tarini twice at a cafeteria or restaurant. Garodia, also known as Gorki, attended an award ceremony to receive recognition for his work. On the same day, another collection of his stories was published, and the host invited him to speak about this new release. During his speech, an audience member questioned the authorship of the stories, to which Gorki asserted that they were his original works. That person then suggested that Tarini consider negotiating an agreement. He, affiliated with the Tagore Foundation, informed Gorki that legal action would be pursued for publishing Rabindranath Tagore's stories under his own name while claiming them as original works. Members of the Tagore Foundation demanded a payment of 10 lakh rupees from both Gorki and the publisher of Kala Saptahik. These demands were based on allegations of plagiarism and copyright infringement. The incident came to light when Tarini discovered in the library that his stories had been published by Garodia without proper credit or royalty. The story ended very dramatically with the charges of plagiarism and copyright.

6.3. Gendered Dimensions of Librarianship

The film subtly interrogates the feminization of librarianship. Through the librarian's persona, The Storyteller explores how emotional intelligence, care, and patience, those traits often coded as feminine and become instruments of resistance within bureaucratic systems. The librarian's nurturing relationship with readers, especially marginalized visitors, positions her as a quiet activist, championing access and empathy over authority and control.

6.4. Narrative and Cinematic Techniques

The film's cinematography amplifies the emotional texture of the library. Warm sepia tones evoke nostalgia, while close-up shots of hands turning pages signify tactile intimacy with knowledge. The slow pacing reflects the contemplative rhythm of reading itself. The juxtaposition of silence and ambient sounds, the rustle of paper, echoing footsteps, everything constructs an auditory landscape that emphasizes the meditative quality of the space.

Flashbacks and inter-textual references interlace the narrative, reinforcing the idea that stories within the library exist in perpetual dialogue with each other. This narrative layering blurs the line between librarian and storyteller, text and experience.

6.5. Library as a Site of Resistance

At a socio-political level, The Storyteller presents the library as a space of quiet defiance against the forces that devalue knowledge and memory. The film critiques the growing commodification of learning and the decline of public intellectual spaces in an age dominated by digital convenience and cultural forgetfulness. As funding dwindles and relevance is questioned, the library becomes a metaphor for endangered wisdom. The librarian's steadfast effort to preserve the oral and local histories of her community, even amid institutional neglect, redefines her role from caretaker to resistor. Her act of safeguarding stories becomes an assertion of identity and continuity and a refusal to let collective memory disappear. In this way, the library emerges as a living site of resistance, where storytelling itself becomes a form of survival.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the depiction of the library and the role of the librarian in the film. A

© WBCLA

critical analysis reveals that the library enables Tarini to discover that his stories, which he narrates to his patron as bedtime tales, are being misused. Tarini's patron, Garodia, publishes these stories under his own name, falsely claiming authorship. Garodia adopts the pseudonym Gorki to conceal his identity. The library is the setting where Tarini learns that Garodia, a businessman, has published his works. The librarian is portrayed as highly supportive of her patrons. She engages Tarini in discussions on various topics, including authors and literary subjects. She informs Tarini about Gorki's Gujarati stories, which have significantly influenced Gujarati literature at a young age. In response, Tarini decides to expose Gorki, also known as Garodia. He begins narrating stories by Rabindranath Tagore, which Gorki subsequently publishes under his own name. Tarini remarks, "nakal ke niye bhi akal chahiye." During the award ceremony, officials from the Tagore Foundation confronted Garodia. He was charged with plagiarism and copyright infringement. He was required to pay a fine of 10 lakh rupees or face legal action. In portraying the library as both archive and living narrative, The Storyteller contributes richly to the evolving image of librarianship in cinema - from the keeper of silence to the keeper of souls.

References

Adi, A. A., & Maulida, N. (2025). Representation of librarians' assertive behavior in resolving librarian conflicts in the film heartbreak library. Jpua: *Journal Perpustakaan Universitas Airlangga: Media Informasi & Komunikasi Kepustakawanan.*

Biswas, Ashis, and Sanjukta Mitra. "Role of Indian Cinemas in Creating Awareness about Archives: the treasure trove of information." *College Libraries 37,* no. III (2022): 33-41.

Gorman, G. E., Clayton, P. R., Shep, S. J., & Clayton, A. (2005). Qualitative research for the information professional: A practical handbook. Facet Publishing.

Kamaludin, K. (2018). Societies expectation and library values: content analysis of the movie "smart library makes smart people". *Journal of Documentation and Information Science, 2*(1), 37-50.

Macnamara, J. R. (2005). Media content analysis: Its uses, benefits and best practice methodology. *Asia Pacific public relations journal, 6*(1), 1-34.

Mayesti, N. (2023). Public library and librarian stereotypes in the Indonesian film Kambodja. *Buletin Al-Turas, 29*(2), 185-198.

Mayesti, N., Salam, A., & Noviani, R. (2019). Female Librarians Stereotype in the 2000s Indonesian Film. Shaheen Majid Nanyang Technology University, Singapore Universitas Airlanga, Indonesia, 41.

Meng, Y., Sun, Y., Guan, R., Li, D., & Zhang, Z. (2017). The Changing Stereotypes of Librarian in Chinese Movies. *World, 4*(2).

Morita, S., & Laksmi, L. (2018). Representation of Public Library Recreation Function in the film The Library (2015). *Journal of Library and Information Science, 2*(2), 163-182.

Paramaratri, D., & Wijayanti, L. (2021). Non-Stereotypical Female Librarians in the Library Wars Film. Khizanah al-Hikmah: *Jurnal Ilmu Perpustakaan, Informasi, dan Kearsipan, 9*(2), 169-181.

Roy, D. (2025, January 28). The Storyteller Movie Review: Paresh Rawal shines in this witty tale of art versus ambition. The Times of India. Retrieved from: https://timesofindia. indiatimes. com/entertainment/hindi/movie-reviews/the storyteller/ottmoviereview/ 117627714.cms

Singh, P. K., & Khajuria, R. (2022). Content analysis of Encyclopedia Britannica (Online) based on evaluation Indicators and website metadata: A mix-method approach. *College Libraries, 37*(IV), 64-74.

Sitompul, S. N. W., & Batubara, A. K. (2023). Representation Of Librarian And Library Users In The Movie" Heartbreak Library". *Journal of Humanities and Social Studies, 7*(01), 370-374.

The Storyteller (2022). IMDb. Retrieved October 9, 2025, from https://www.imdb.com/title/ tt7782402/

© WBCLA



Mr Ashish Sharma works as an Assistant Librarian at Techno India University, West Bengal. He is pursuing Ph D program in the Department of Library & Information Science from Rabindra Bharati University, under the supervision of Dr Snigdha Naskar. He qualified for UGC NET and WBSET in Library and Information Science.



Dr Snigdha Naskar, Assistant Professor, Department of Library & Information Science, Rabindra Bharati University, West Bengal. She has more than 14 years of teaching & research experience. She is a member of NAAC steering committee, Research Ethics Committee, Research & Development Cell, and Internal Quality Assurance Cell of Rabindra Bharati University.

© WBCLA