

Article

## ***Twelfth Fail*: The Book vs. The Film – A Study of Adaptation, Mass Outreach and Cinema’s Cultural Power**

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Accepted version published on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2025

DOI <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16941679>

**Abstract:** This research paper examines the transformative journey of *Twelfth Fail* from Anurag Pathak’s motivational non-fiction book to Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s acclaimed Bollywood film. It comprehensively explores the nuanced narrative, thematic, and structural differences between the two media, investigating how the cinematic adaptation profoundly amplified the story’s mass outreach and public reception. Furthermore, the paper critically analyses the film’s significant role as a powerful cultural testimony to the transformative and democratizing power of cinema. Drawing on detailed textual analysis of both the book and the film, insights from audience reception studies, and principles of cultural criticism, this paper demonstrates how *Twelfth Fail* evolved from a niche inspirational text, primarily consumed by civil service aspirants, into a compelling cinematic phenomenon that resonated deeply with millions. Its success sparked widespread national conversations on critical issues such as education, personal integrity, social mobility, and the inherent value of resilience in the face of adversity, showcasing cinema's unparalleled ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers.

**Keywords:** Film Adaptation; Cultural Power; Mass Outreach; Indian Cinema; Resilience; Education; Social Mobility

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## Introduction

Tales of triumph and overcoming adversity in the face of long odds have always captured our collective imaginations as a species, viewing them as compelling stories throughout all generations and societies. However, hardly do stories leap from an obscure inspirational text to a pan-Indian cultural phenomenon as effortlessly as *Twelfth Fail*. The book (2019) by Anurag Pathak thoroughly documented the life of Manoj Kumar Sharma, a village boy who fought abject poverty, flunked in several academic years, and faced daunting systemic barriers to accomplish his dream of becoming an Indian Police Service (IPS) officer. Although the book has been a major source of inspiration, its readership was restricted to people who prepare for civil service exams as well as those who regularly read self-help books.

In 2023, Vidhu Vinod Chopra, the celebrated filmmaker, took the task of adapting Pathak's book into a Hindi film, featuring veteran Vikrant Massey essaying the role of the protagonist. This film adaptation not only held to the inspirational ideals of strength, unyielding integrity, and unending hope that form the foundation of the source material, but also left a deeper footprint on the story. The film quickly became a national conversation topic, with record-breaking box office numbers and sizeable streaming numbers. What follows is a detailed investigation into the complex process of adaptation, an analysis of the main variations between the novel and the film version, and an examination of the many reasons for the film's huge cultural success and enduring appeal.

Transmedia literature adaptation studies are a vast and developing field that has, for years, faced numerous obstacles and possibilities in the translation of literary works into successful visual storytelling. Linda Hutcheon's (2006:8-9) centre piece, *A Theory of Adaptation*, draws special attention to the fact that adaptation is rooted in a twin relationship with both repetition and invention. It is a high-level "transcoding" of narrative, theme, and emotional affect from one mode to another, and it must recognize that the new mode has its own and new protocols. In the vibrant Indian film environment, the process of adapting novels to films has evolved over the years, ranging from ultra-faithful adaptations, such as *Guide* (1965), *Parineeta* (2005), to more radical and audacious ones, such as *Dev. D* (2009) and *Maqbool* (2003).

There are also times when it can be argued that the Bollywood formulation's conflation of melodrama, realism, and spectacle serves as an inherent volume control, helping to project the emotional and social stakes of its original scenario onto a larger canvas. As excellent observers such as Rachel Dwyer and Ashish Rajadhyaksha have pointed out, Indian cinema is a more far-reaching and influential form than almost any written work. This instinctive strength is what makes adaptation such a powerfully subversive instrument of cultural propagation, capable of burrowing deeper into the national psyche to find a receptive home.

The one area that motivational literature, specifically focused on competitive exam-loving India, has occupied is a niche but substantial one. These types of books often interweave very personal stories with nuts-and-bolts advice. However, their

readership is limited by factors that are very human, such as language barriers, literacy levels, or an interest in a particular subject. However, the very themes of tenacity, unrelenting honesty, and the quest for social acceptance cut very close to the bone in a society that practically views education as the first, if not only, gateway to ascent and improvement.

The unique, dual—and occasionally corrective—role of cinema as both a mirror and a maker of social values has been well documented. Movies such as *Taare Zameen Par* (2007), which sensitively brought to light learning disabilities, and *Super 30* (2019), which delved into the systemic disparities in education, have been able to spark the much-needed national conversations successfully. In the realm of mass media, there is nothing quite like cinema when it comes to making stories accessible and affecting people everywhere. Such impact transcends barriers of language, geography, and class. *Twelfth Fail* is a testimony to this in-built power, and how a small, personal exploration, carried to the extent of one street, one square, can be blown into a nation-wide narrative of hope and courage.

### **The Book: Anurag Pathak's *Twelfth Fail***

*Twelfth Fail* — an excerpt Anurag Pathak's 2019 novel, *Twelfth Fail*, is the basis for this intriguing film. It is a non-fiction biography, a real account that narrates the uphill task fought by Manoj Kumar Sharma. In order to comprehend the filmic adaptation, there has to be an examination of the form, plot, and reception of the book.

### **Structure and Narrative**

The *Twelfth Fail* of Manoj Kumar (Pathak) is primarily presented as a linear, first-person narrative that recounts the story of Manoj Kumar Sharma, a rural-bred boy from Madhya Pradesh who rises to become a successful IPS officer. The novel highlights some significant moments and facets of Manoj's formative years, as well as the post-facto travails:

**Manoj's early life:** The story beautifully delves into abject poverty, the harsh cruelty of rural life, and the dangerous acceptance of failure by an entire community. This initial background lays the foundation for the sheer scale of the problems that Manoj encounters.

**The cheating culture:** And one theme emerges large and gnarly: the bottomless, institutional corruption of local schools, with teachers and students alike thumbing their noses at mass-cheating schemes. This atmosphere first sets Manoj's attitude about exams.

**Turning point:** The story zeroes in on Manoj's epiphany that, though cheating results in immediate relief, it is a surefire way of achieving "hollow victories." Perhaps, this realisation is also borne from his meeting with upright and principled DSP Dushyant Singh, who symbolises unwavering honesty. It is this instant that becomes the moral pivot of Manoj's transformation.

**The Delhi battles:** After shifting to the national capital, the book covers the huge struggles of Manoj. This involves doing a range of menial jobs in order to make ends

meet – struggling to break past difficult language barriers in a fierce English-language-obsessed competitive exam culture, while dealing with the huge impact that repeated failures to ‘crack’ (clear) the UPSC exam have on the psyche.

**Essential backing:** Pathak underlines the importance of several people who formed part of Manoj’s distressing journey. This includes mentors who keep him motivated, friends who bring camaraderie and help Vijay, and, most notably, Shraddha Joshi, his future wife and a successful IRS officer, who becomes his biggest support system.

**Success and deep thought:** Manoj successfully clears the UPSC exams and becomes an IPS in a fitting end to the book. It is part of a larger accomplishment—one Pruett shares modestly on these pages, and also with a deeply introspective look at his own legacy, along with his driver’s fierce determination to serve honestly and with unfailing dedication—two of the true north pieces of his internal stakeholders’ moral GPS as he shuttles through his own journey of the heart and soul.

It is a simple, but always inspiring book. Crafting simple advice, tips, and tricks one should consider, and a peek into what works and does not work for civil service trying minds vs minds that have cleared civil services. Pathak’s language is readable, targeting a broad spectrum of readership within its specific range. It does at times come across as preachy with its too blatant "Lesson of the Day" (or rather, the unwavering virtues of hard work, moral fibre, and, above all else...never giving up).

### Target Audience and Reception of the Book

The primary target audience for Anurag Pathak’s *Twelfth Fail* was clearly defined: civil service aspirants, college students preparing for competitive examinations, and a broader readership interested in Hindi motivational literature and real-life success stories.

Within this niche, the book was notably well-received. Readers praised it for its relatability, with many aspirants finding a reflection of their own struggles and aspirations in Manoj’s journey. Its actionable advice and inspirational message were particularly valued. However, despite its strong reception within this specific segment, *Twelfth Fail* did not achieve mass popularity or widespread cross-linguistic appeal. Its circulation was largely limited to Hindi-speaking regions and specific circles of competitive exam preparation, preventing it from becoming a national phenomenon in the same way the film would. The book laid a strong foundation, providing a compelling real-life story and a moral compass. However, it lacked the inherent reach and universal accessibility that the medium of cinema inherently offers.

### The Movie: Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s *12th Fail*

Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s 2023 film version, *12th Fail*, brings the gripping story of Anurag Pathak’s book to the screen, reaching out to many more people through its mass viewing experience. By preserving the fundamental arc of Manoj’s remarkable journey, the movie takes several tactical and symbolic decisions that ‘gear’ it from being a piece of motivational masterpiece to a popular cultural phenomenon.

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## Cinematic Adaptation and Enhancements

In that it can do what you cannot do on a printed page, and take advantage of what you can do with pictures, the movie captures something the book does not:

**They are wordless:** The movie excels at bringing its mood, atmosphere, and especially setting to life, often without the necessity of words. Sequences such as “Manoj studying under streetlights” or “muqabla of Mukherjee Nagar” are not mere backdrops; they function as vivid visual metaphors for the protagonist’s resilience, the harsh life-stakes he is up against, and the bustling competitive universe that he inhabits. This visual opulence provides an immersive experience that captivates the audience even further.

**Expanded character arcs:** Throughout the narrative, other main characters receive some representative treatment (Manoj, who is at the centre of the novel, mostly), but the film goes beyond the book in presenting other character arcs at greater length. The character of “Shraddha Joshi’s struggle” has been well written, for that matter, as not just being the sidekick but as an independent and ambitious girl with dreams of her own (IPS officer). The movie also vividly conveys “the fellowship among competitors,” in which the racing aspirants shared challenges, helping hands, and a sense of all being in it together. Moreover, “the moral conflict faced by Manoj’s mentors”, particularly DSP Dushyant Singh, is depicted with more nuance, which makes the point about the difficulty of being an honest officer in a venal system. This group method of telling adds depth and complexity to a story that is relatable to many people.

**Socio-political backdrop:** The film unapologetically locates Manoj’s conflict in larger socio-political debates relevant to a modern India. It is frank about “language, class, and corruption in Indian education,” putting everything in that pipeline that usually refuses to come to the surface. For example, the struggles of vernacular-medium students in an English-heavy UPSC environment are highlighted, prompting the audience to reflect on educational equity. This crucial angle is what makes the movie more than just an inspirational piece and more of a powerful statement about society.

**Emotional pacing:** Chopra shows clinical brilliance in the emotional pacing of the direction. Silence, music, and montage...tension, plot, and catharsis are also strategically increased. This film has much emotional resonance. For instance, quiet bursts of the kind of resolve that comes unannounced or inspiring background scores playing over scenes of strife effectively pull us into Manoj’s emotional universe, bringing home the visceral connection that is more difficult to achieve in print.

## Key Thematic Treatments

The book laid the groundwork, but the visual and narrative interpretation of the film deeply underscores its themes:

**Honesty, not cheating:** The moral of both works is a transparent theme of honesty. However, the movie dramatizes Manoj’s steadfast “refusal to cheat,” even if it brings with it the recurring possibility (and reality) of failure, in visually rapturous and adrenalized set-pieces. The “mass cheating sequence,” which begins with cheating and later features scenes of students dealing with corrupt teachers, is especially lucid. It

highlights not the personal but the systemic nature of dishonesty and the real bravery required to refuse to participate. "Manoj's declaration at this juncture that he will not cheat again, no matter how many times he has to fail, is the first big takeaway motivation lesson in the movie: morals are non-negotiable" (Popcorn Reviews, n.d.).

**Resilience and hope:** The "restart" concept – Manoj's deep conviction to start over again post each setback – turns into an inspiring battle cry for the audience. This message is conveyed not only through words but also through physical demonstrations, marked by numerous cracks and an undeniable pursuit. At its heart *12th Fail* is a tale of new beginnings, of dusting the self and taking a leap each time, you fall." – Kathmandu Post, 2024 This endless tale of failure, introspection and refusal to be cowed down has found an echo among the larger mass of people, reflecting a universe beyond the relevance' of UPSC exams.

**Social mobility and solidarity:** The book focuses on individual grit, whereas the film effectively de-emphasizes this and highlights the "collective struggles of aspirants" in Mukherjee Nagar. Depictions of "shared meals, group study sessions, and mutual support" remind the viewer of the indispensable role of mentorship, friendship, and community in getting us through the brutal grind of competition. "Moral of the story is Gauri Bhaiya, though he was a drunkard, led a merry life paying for the ride." On a positive note, Gauri Bhaiya is optimistic and resilient even when he fails, and this is a good example for us all that sometimes, success includes keeping alive the well-being of others, not only oneself" (Indiacurrents.com, n.d.).

**Gender and partnership:** The film seriously develops Shraddha Joshi's character, transforming her from a supporting member into a co-protagonist. Her 'parallel journey as an IRS officer' is not only subversive of received gender norms, but also provides a strong embodiment of how egalitarian and supportive personal relationships can be profoundly transformative. "Shraddha Joshi, Manoj's love interest, is not just the girl in love, but an independent, ambitious woman who follows her dreams while also standing by Manoj. This is not a common one of partnership in action for mutual support or hindrance." (LinkedIn, Vinayak Yadav, n.d.)

### Reception and Legacy

*12th Fail* is a "smarter than you think" comedy that is breaking records in several ways and marks an important moment of pop culture:

**Box-office success:** The high-brow, non-star-driven, story-driven film raked in "over ₹69 crore" at the box office, giving Hope such hope to go big and broad! It is an industry rarity for a movie to have a "25-week theatrical run" at cinemas, indicating both long-standing appeal to audiences as well as robust word-of-mouth.

**OTT boom:** The OTT (Over-The-Top) release of the movie created a huge impact and was streamed massively in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, especially amongst the youth. Available on streaming, it forced itself into people's faces beyond movie theatres – and helped make itself a hit. "*12th Fail*- a great hit with the youth in Bangladesh" (The Daily Star, 2023).



**Critical acceptance:** Film won multiple awards, including Best Feature Film - Critics' Choice Awards, and it had "Standing ovations at international Festivals." Critics appreciated it for its realism, strong acting, and relevance to modern society.

**Catalyst for national dialogue:** Maybe the best thing Underground did was get people talking in living rooms across the country. The said movie opened up important dialogues on "educational reform," the "value of honesty," and the "psychological impact of competitive exams" on the minds of the students. "The lessons from the film have not only gone beyond the movie screen and entered into something a lot broader, but inspired discussions around the reform of education, the importance of hard work, and the need to remove the stigma of failure" (Journals-times.com, 2024).

**Comparative Analysis: Book vs. Film**

The transition from Anurag Pathak's book to Vidhu Vinod Chopra's film marks a significant evolution in how Manoj Kumar Sharma's story is told and received. While both mediums share the same inspirational core, their narrative scope, thematic treatment, and accessibility differ profoundly, highlighting cinema's unique power for mass outreach.

**Narrative Scope**

Aspect	Book (Pathak)	Film (Chopra)
Narrative Focus	Primarily, Manoj’s internal journey and struggles.	Manoj, along with an ensemble of supporting characters and aspirants.
Structure	Linear, introspective, didactic at times.	Non-linear elements, visually rich, emotionally layered.
Setting	Rural Madhya Pradesh, Delhi (more descriptive).	Expanded, immersive, detailed, and visually evocative.
Characterization	Manoj-centric, with mentors in supporting roles.	An ensemble cast, depicting deeper and more complex relationships.
Social Critique	Subtle, woven through Manoj’s personal experiences.	Explicit, systemic, highlighting collective societal issues.

The book, as would be expected, is a much more intimate and reflective exploration. It gets into Manoj’s mind, influencing his reasoning and the practical advice he collects. The movie commodifies this intimate story into a much larger picture. In widening the frame to take in the "ensemble of aspirants," the film details the mass fight and mutual comradeship of so many people in Mukherjee Nagar. By shifting from a solo adventure to a shared journey, the film gains a more human and emotional resonance. The power of the visual medium lets the landscape serve as a "character" too – from the overcrowded hostels to the bustling coaching centres, the

environment can also be presented in an “immersive, detailed” (they are actually translated versions of her quotes) fashion. In addition, “the explicit, systemic, collective” social critique in the film is much more immediate and powerful than the book’s more oblique treatment, using the visual force of cinema to reveal things like corruption and language bias, for example.

### Thematic Treatment

Although the central issues are similar in both editions, there is a mismatch in their presentation and priority:

**Honesty:** The Hobbit did not stretch the concept to the breaking point, as the value of plain dealing was front and centre in both works. Moreover, an ironclad “refusal to cheat, even when it means risking failure,” is a core principle with Manoj. However, the film makes this visceral and visually arresting, with scenes of intense action. Take the opening mass cheating sequence, a harrowing illustration of the endemic nature of corruption, which firmly establishes the moral terrain that Manoj (and the viewer) will be negotiating. This visual dynamism, in turn, brings home the principle of integrity more vividly to the viewer. “Manoj’s unwillingness to cheat even when everyone else is cheating is depicted as it is not naivete but rather real courage” (Popcorn Reviews, n.d.).

**Resilience:** The book is all about Manoj’s determination. While the film seeks to convey some of this spirit, it shows that spirit is given more meaning by “collective struggle and solidarity.” The “restart” theme takes on a collective philosophy among the candidates; when thwarted, it becomes a community ideal rather than a personal one. “That the film is called Living Proof is already saying that, really, failure is not the end. f, it is not the end, but a call and challenge to “restart” as many times as required (Kathmandu Post, 2024).

**Education and Mobility:** It provides pragmatic tips on how to deal with the education system and competitive exams. The film goes a step further by overtly “critiquing systemic inequities” in Indian education – including the prejudice against vernacular-medium students, he added. Moreover, while it too “celebrates aspirational India,” it does so by displaying the dreams and doggedness of ordinary young people from all over striving for upward mobility through education.

**Gender Roles:** This film does much more for “Shraddha Joshi’s role” because she becomes not a supportive girlfriend but a co-protagonist. “Both that, and her own journey as an IRS officer, and her dynamic with Manoj, flips the power play that exists in such traditional tales on its head! This relationship is presented as one of “mutual inspiration rather than distraction” (LinkedIn, Vinayak Yadav, n.d.), providing an ideal and up-to-date example of encouraging and equal partnership.

### Accessibility and Mass Outreach

Here is where the movie truly distinguishes itself and proves what only a film can do as a medium.

**Language and literacy:** The book’s Hindi language prose made it accessible to only one section of society and “thus to some extent limited its reach”. However, the film does



utilise the universal language of visual narrative. Though it was a largely Hindi-speaking film, its strong story, picturization, relatable dialogues, (often subtitled) also made it "accessible to a pan-Indian and international audience. The film had a very strong impact even in Bangladesh and Nepal, which demonstrates that a good visual story can break language barriers. "12th Fail strikes a chord with Bangladesh's youth" (The Daily Star, 2023).

**Emotional Engagement:** since a book can make readers feel all the feels, the film's spirit-sucking volume — "the performances, the music, the pacing" — made for a "visceral connection with audiences." In a way that the motivational genre could never achieve, the emotional arc, the fights, and the victories were all more immediate and felt more deeply, as they bequeathed the motivational genre to become an incredibly touching human drama. Very nuanced and intense performances, especially Vikrant Massey, who brought Manoj's life to life and evoked a strong emotional response.

**Social Network and Cinematic Virality:** The movie's dialogues, iconic scenes, and especially the "restart" went viral overnight on social media. That prompted a deluge of "memes, discussions, and even policy debates." The hashtag #Restart came to be a symbol of resilience, widely shared by students, job-seekers, and anyone unfortunate enough to be set back. This sort of virality massively increased the reach of the film's message, and has kept it salient in men's press rooms - and homes - for much longer than the film's run in the theatres, something books struggle to accomplish outside of the film realm.

### The Film as Cultural Testimony: Cinema's Ability to Democratize Stories

The sensational success of *Twelfth Fail* is a fine example of how cinema has what they call the uncanny power of democratising stories, allowing them to be accessible to and resonate with everyone. However, it also demonstrates how the moving image can cross borders of culture, language, and social class to become a powerful force for cultural transmission and social reflection.

### Cinema's Power to Democratize Stories

The film's trajectory from a niche book to a national phenomenon epitomizes several of the most deserving humanizing powers of cinema:

**Bridging Divides:** The movie struck a serious chord "across the class, language and regional divide" by turning "Manoj's individual journey into a universal narrative of human struggle and triumph." This universality really speaks to the power of film as a tool for change and positive representation, and this ability to reach out to so many people is what makes great films resonate, where one person's story acts as an allegory for millions.

**Catalysing conversation:** In powerfully dramatizing urgent social issues, such as "language bias, systematic corruption, and the often-unacknowledged toll on students' mental health," the film "stimulated significant public dialogue about educational reform." It forced people to ask themselves about the justice and effectiveness of the status quo and to go from what was, in fact, a personal plight to a question of structural

dynamics. "Beyond the personal motivation, the film fingers systemic flaws – corruption in education, the grind of vernacular-medium students, and the psychological cost of competitive exams. By framing Manoj's trajectory in these larger frameworks, the film challenges not only man-women relationships, but also society and its perception of itself and therefore the other," (The She Saga, 2024).

**Motivating Interest:** The symbolic dust-off, repeated throughout the movie, evolved from a catch phrase into an "inspiring rallying cry for students, job-seekers, and anyone else who feels discouraged..." This inspiration was not just a feeling; it was put into action in various ways: from social media-driven movements where people shared their progress on social media using #Restart, to multiple "community screenings" in schools and colleges, always with active discussions about how to use the film for change.

### Representation and Authenticity

One of the things that has contributed to the cultural impact of the film is the way in which it has endeavoured for truthful representation:

**Rural and Urban Realities:** Its realism, which reflected rural poverty, struggles in the city, and the fierce competitive exam culture, lent a candid and yet extremely vivid reflection of the life of aspirants, rarely seen in commercial Indian cinema. This realistic grounding generated a strong viewers' identification with things they knew to be their own or of their communities, shown on the screen. "The film grounds the story in a recognizably Indian reality in a way that is not always done," he said. "It uses its settings – rural Chambal, the bedlam of Mukherjee Nagar, the cramped hostels – very efficiently. These places serve as a metaphor for Manoj's inner struggle and the struggles of aspirants across the country." (Fickle Sorts, 2024)

**Aspiration India:** In its simple belief of "ordinary people, extraordinary things," the film beautifully captured the spirit of the times in a young, can-do, aspirations-based country. It was a hymn to meritocracy and the work ethic, a story of hope that was one with the aspirations of a people looking to rise.

### Challenging Bollywood Conventions

Credit for the commercial and critical success of *Twelfth Fail* could also be attributed to its dramatic deviance from any norm expected in the world of Bollywood:

**Substance over Flash:** The movie's epic blockbuster status absolutely "threatened the supremacy of formulaic, star-driven blockbusters." It dramatically showed that a feel-good, plot-driven cinema, rooted in strong storytelling and real performances – rather than depending on stars with a fan following, "can also make money and can get cred. This statement would be critical for the industry.

**Traditional narration:** The film presented a "new blend of realism, inspiration, along with social wisdom" that would affect domestic and biographical films in India. It showed that tales of regular people, portrayed with honesty and depth, could be as compelling and lucrative as high-octane commercial fare, and it nudged the industry toward more diverse and grounded stories. "Unlike commercial potboilers, *12th Fail* is

honest and presents an inspiring real-life story about failure, yet does not take failure for an answer and dreams the impossible" (Indiacurrents.com, n.d.).

### Thematic Concerns

What were the central strands that *Twelfth Fail* rides on, that resonate more strongly than what composed the book—narrational and visual filmmaking lend higher and larger sociological significance.

### Honesty and Integrity

The book and the movie both suggest that truth is the single, fundamental moral value. Manoj's determination to never "cheat" even at the most desperate moment, even if it means the possibility of a lost life, is the moral spine of his brainwashing journey. The film mines this adherence for visually arresting and harrowing sequences that dramatize the ethical decision in the here and now. In an opening scene depicting "mass cheating" in the 12th-grade examinations, Imtiaz shows how deeply rooted corruption is. When Manoj finally decides to walk the righteous path under the guidance of DSP Dushyant Singh, it is not a personal commitment; it is an indictment of a system that is broken. "The fact that Manoj makes the promise of not to cheat again, no matter how many times he fails, is the first big motivation you get from the movie: honesty is a must" (Popcorn Reviews, n.d.). The movie adds an even deeper dimension by revealing how corruption was so widespread that it was not just the failing of some human beings but that of whole systems, thus upholding cleanliness in such an environment was extremely, excruciatingly hard.

### Resilience and Hope

The motif of "restart" is symbolic of both the stories and becomes a reflection of Manoj's relentless spirit. It reflects his readiness to "start over after every failure" — whether in failed academics, money troubles, or personal disappointments. The theme of disgracing runs in a culture where 'academic' disappointments (and even career failures) are incredibly stigmatized, and they carry a huge amount of social weight. The cyclical structure of the film — it loops around and returns again and again to show Manoj falling and getting back up — makes failure seem like a natural and cyclical part of life and not so much an end but the end to an end, a coda from which everything can and must restart. "*12th Fail* is essentially a tale of restarts—about getting up every time you fall and giving things a fresh try" - Kathmandu Post (2024) That cinematic and emotion storytelling of the film has made this theme extraordinarily accessible and inspiring to a very large audience turning one man's journey of trying to stand into a universal call to never giving up.

### Social Mobility and Solidarity

Pathak's novel emphasizes Manoj's own struggle for upward social mobility through education; the film expands on this tale to highlight the "collective struggle of aspirants in Mukherjee Nagar. Scenes showing the "shared meals, group study, and mutual support" amongst these boys from various backgrounds drive home how essential solidarity and community are to travel the gruelling road of competitive

exams. Set in Mukherjee Nagar, the film is not just a geographical location but a microcosm of aspirational India, where people from across class and caste backgrounds converge under a singular dream. This focus on shared experience and communal support (rather than individual success) makes the story more interesting and highlights the strength found in numbers when it comes to facing hardship. Gauri Bhaiya's hopefulness and strength in the face of his own defeat are a poignant statement about how success is not only about what we achieve but also who we can help uplift. (indiacurrents.com, n.d.).

### Gender and Partnership

The movie brings in a rather complex and firm "understanding gender and companionship"-especially through the character of Shraddha Joshi. Unlike the book, in which her participation might be looked at as more passive and supplementary, Shraddha plays a far more active and leading part in the film. She is portrayed as an "independent, ambitious girl" with her own aspirations to become an IRS officer. This contrasts with the character in the film, who is not the girl your hero loves and does things for you at their demand. "Shraddha Joshi, Manoj's girlfriend, is not just a love interest but a woman with her own dreams, an ambitious girl who follows her ambitions and supports Manoj in his journey" (LinkedIn, Vinayak Yadav, n.d.). Their bonding is portrayed as a genuine "mutual motivation" and equal partnership, thereby defying the stereotypical roles often assigned to Indian women in most Bollywood stories. That provides an updated template for a model of companionship that relies on neither party infantilizing the other, and instead places value on being just as much a partner as they are as a protegee – when it comes to successful and talented, mutual respect might be the new sexy.

### Adaptation: Problems and Innovations

Making of a critically acclaimed Bollywood Film: Converting a motivational non-fiction book, *Twelfth Fail* (Anurag Pathak), into an engaging and successful Bollywood film was a daunting project, but it also involved great opportunities to be innovative. Vidhu Vinod Chopra's approach and style made a world of difference in how the written word was turned into a compelling and moving movie.

### Translating Text to Screen

The particular tension between a book as a personal, introspective project and a mass-market film required delicate creative decisions to ensure that both authenticity and mass appeal were preserved.

**Keeping it Real:** The biggest challenge, according to him, was to keep the film grounded in the honesty and hard-hitting nature of Manoj Kumar Sharma's real account. Chopra's "novel choice of casting relatively unknown actors," such as the actor Vikrant Massey, and his decision to "shoot extensively on location" in real exam centres, coaching institutes, and hostels in Mukherjee Nagar were key. This dedication to realism forwent stereotypical Bollywood gloss, giving the film an undoubted air of authenticity that found an audience who recognised the authenticity of this story with

an audience that had previously experienced this life. This was a good decision, because the movie never felt like a stylized, over-dramatized epic.

**Saving The Melodrama:** Inspirational stories often tend to be too sickly sweet, even within the Indian context. The film's "restrained, naturalistic style" was purposeful, the better to escape the cliches of inspirational cinema. By zeroing in on subtle performances and restrained emotional graphs, the movie succeeded in not only making the story more accessible, but also more potent – allowing the drama within Manoj's fights to complement the narrative rather than have to contrive it. This technique helped make the movie's emotional loops feel earned and authentic.

**Balancing Individual and Collective Narratives:** Though the book is largely Manoj-centric, the film had to do more to engage the collective narrative cinema required. Chopra found this balance by "rescaling the focus on other aspirants and mentors. Moreover, that made for a much more vivid world of communal hardship and shared resolve. By focusing on characters like Gauri Bhaiya and Shraddha Joshi and telling their stories more effectively, the film became the story of a community of dreamers, rather than a singular person, making it both more universal and more emotionally expansive.

### **Innovations in Cinematic Storytelling**

To convey these emotions and their visual impact on the film, Chopra had to use several innovative film techniques:

**Visual Metaphors:** The film communicates through images. "Simha" and his "use of light and shadow" are notable, as seen in scenes of Manoj studying underneath dim streetlights. This device comes to represent his battle over adversity and search for enlightenment. "Crowded spaces" in Mukherjee Nagar represent fierce competition and high numbers of aspirants. The "physical obstacles" on his travels become images, reflecting the inner and outer wars he is fighting, in a potent visual narrative that is as steeped in dialogue and plot.

**Sound Design:** The sound design of the film is carefully executed to enhance emotional impact. Especially effective are the strategic "contrasts between silence and noise. Loud fear or creaking realisations are punctuated by nothing sold, leaving the audience to pick up on Manoj's resolution internally. Moreover, the din of Mukherjee Nagar and the exam halls hollers out his external pressures well enough, making it a more immersive watch and also an emotionally dense show.

**Non-linear Storytelling:** However, even though there is a linear story running through the text, it makes 'strategic use of flashbacks and parallel narratives'. These are not stylistic flourishes; they develop suspense, deliver essential backstory, and deepen our empathy for the characters. For example, asides into Manoj's backstory or subplots about other aspirants add depth to the main story, enhancing the audience's wider view of the world of competitive exams and of all the different kinds of struggle that inhabit it.

These trials and innovations taken together amount to Chopra's masterclass in adaptation – a way to turn a very good book into a movie so strong, and so tailored to the medium of film, that no one could suppress its message.

### Societal Impact and Legacy

The astounding achievement of *12th Fail* goes beyond the usual success story at the box office and even the rave reviews it has garnered; it has cast a larger-than-life impact on Indian society, shaping trends and views, influencing minds, and even questioning the rules and protocols by which the film industry abides. Its legacy is complex and testifies to cinema's ability as a mirror on society and a force for change.

### Policy and Reform

The film's brutal exposé of systemic corruption in the Indian education and civil service examination system renewed calls for change:

**Advocacy for Vernacular-Medium Students:** The realistic portrayal of the hurdles placed before non-English medium students – from language issues in study materials to bias in coaching centres – the film started important “debates on language bias and the need for inclusive policies” to provide a level playing field for all students. It revealed the frequently ignored plights of a huge section of India's youth trying to make a career through mobility.

**Anti-Cheating Argument:** The raw depiction of rampant cheating, specifically that which took place during the first round of school exams, prompted discussion of the legitimacy of the examination process. It emphasized the imperative need for stronger “anti-cheating” measures and the pernicious “psychological impact of high-stakes testing” on students, contributing to a re-evaluation of ethics in education.

**Mental Health Awareness:** The relentless workload, repeated attempts, and sense of social isolation of those competing for a job feature in Manoj's journey. The movie's sensitive examination of those issues led to “greater awareness of the stress that students face”. It emphasized “the need to support them psychologically,” an important discussion in the competitive field.

### Cultural Resonance

However, the impact of the film was far broader than policy debates; the movie was part of the cultural milieu and was an incredibly potent piece of inspiration:

**Inspirational Icon:** Manoj Kumar Sharma, played by Vikrant Massey, evolved into a national “image of hope and resilience” from his true self. The movie, “which draws heavily on Midwestern work and business practices, inspired countless students and job seekers around the country, giving them a relatable hero who succeeds out of pure resolve and honesty.” “*12th Fail* has managed to connect with people from all walks of life. A movie that gives hope and a sense of validation to UPSC aspirants and to students (LinkedIn, Anubhav Deep, n.d.).

**Community Screenings:** The encouraging phenomenon was that the film was screened in almost all schools, colleges, and public halls across the region. “These screenings were



accompanied by interactive discussions and workshops” where teachers, mentors, and educators were able to utilize the film’s story as a catalyst to teach about traits such as determination, honesty, and being prepared. This is an indication of the film’s value as a didactic tool.

**Memories in Memes, on Social Media:** That is why, significantly, “dialogues and scenes became viral content” in the diverse worlds of social media. The “restart” theme in particular gave birth to endless memes and trending topics, ensuring that the discourse about the film kept on raging on and on long after it came out. Its organic virality spread its message and expanded its cultural footprint a millionfold, showing how the digital model could succeed in taking cinema further afield.

### Breaking Bollywood Rules

With his *Twelfth Fail*, as you would imagine, he also made an impression on Bollywood itself, and there may be a direction for producers, or perhaps even for us audiences:

**Content Over Stardom:** A commercial success with no conventional superstar performing; this big hit marked the rise of “content-driven cinema.” It was proof that people are willing to spend money on a good story and good storytelling, even without a big-name star. This goes against the age-old industry perception that it is only star vehicles that work for commercial returns and could open doors to more subtlety and realism in storytelling going forward.

**Re-defining success narrative:** It was not only about showing triumph, but *12th Fail* “redefined success narratives in Indian cinema. Rather than worshiping only the end point, it honoured the “messy, difficult and often lonely journey of self-improvement.” This honest depiction of struggle and failure, not just success, made the film resonate so much with audiences and felt revolutionary, allowing for a much more authentic and empowering message about success.

### Conclusion

The power of adaptation and cinema that persists is ultimately at the heart of this small East Anglian miracle of better living through cultural resistance to cinema. The evolution of " The evolution of *Twelfth Fail* from a cult motivational book to an earworm national phenomenon is proof positive of the transformative power of adaptation and the singular ability of cinema to steer the cultural discourse. If Anurag Pathak’s book managed to light up a generation of UPSC aspirants offering a close-up view of Manoj Kumar Sharma’s survival, Vidhu Vinod Chopra’s film democratized this mighty life story, making it three-dimensionally reach out to you, so relatable, and so heartbreakingly emotional; it pierced through millions across every corner of India and the world.

The film’s massive achievement lies not just in its fidelity to the source’s values, but even more in its clever, cynical rewriting of narrative to address larger social, cultural, and political questions in today’s India. In foregrounding universally cherished values of unflagging honesty, irrepressible grit, and, above all, the imperative of

solidarity, and in directly subverting prevailing Bollywood conventions with a gritty, tactile film rather than studio glamour, "Twelfth Fail" is an unambiguously cultural testament. It is a strong affirmation of the continuing potential of cinema to not only reflect the world, but to critique it and suggest change within it. "In a world full of spectacle and cynicism, *12th Fail* is a film that takes on hope, inspiration, and reminds us that our biggest achievement is the courage of 'Restart' (LinkedIn, Pooja Srinivas, n.d.).

At a time when India is still wrestling with those fundamental questions – of education, of equity, of opportunity for its vast array of very different people – *Twelfth Fail* is both a vital mirror to hold up to the travail of reform, and a powerful guide for working through it. It is a tale beautifully told, where failure and hope – individual resilience and collective struggle – are stitched together and where the possibilities are infinite when individuals and communities dare to "restart" in the wake of disaster. Its memory will always live on, not just as a chorus of the best narrated stories to ever grace the silver screen, but as an evergreen fount of inspiration that will remind generations to come of the fact that hard work and honesty are the true grails of success, irrespective of the time, people, or culture we belong to.

**Author Contributions:** All authors contributed equally to this work. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data sharing policy does not apply to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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