

Tribhuvan University

**Association of Fidelity and Marketability in the Adaptation of Bhagat's *Five Point*
Someone into Hirani's *Three Idiots***

**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, T.U.,
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Approval Letter

This research work “Association of Fidelity and Marketability in the Adaptation of Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* into Hirani’s *Three Idiots*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Gobinda Kaini has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “Association of Fidelity and Marketability in the Adaptation of Bhagat’s *Five Point Someone* into Hirani’s *Three Idiots*” submitted to the Office of the Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University is an entirely original work, and I have made due acknowledgement to all ideas and information borrowed from different sources in the course of writing this dissertation. The results presented in this dissertation have not been presented anywhere else for the award of any degree or for any other reasons. No part of content of this dissertation has ever been published in any form before. I shall be solely responsible if any evidence is found against my declaration.

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Gobinda Kaini

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the complex relationship between fidelity and marketability in the adaptation of Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* into Raj Kumar Hirani's *Three Idiots* with a specific focus on how the film balances loyalty to the source text while addressing the demands of the cultural industry. Bhagat's novel offers a critical examination of India's rigid educational system whereas the film significantly reconfigures the original narrative by altering characters, themes, and plot elements to heighten emotional resonance and broaden mass appeal. This study, therefore, argues that these deviations from textual fidelity are not a mere creative freedom, but a strategic adaptation designed to enhance the film's marketability in a competitive entertainment landscape. By applying adaptation theory alongside frameworks of the cultural industry, this research emphasizes how the restructured narrative, star power, and emotional storytelling work together to make the film more accessible and commercially successful. The film's deliberate prioritization of market-driven elements, without entirely abandoning the novel's core theme, allows *Three Idiots* to reach a wide audience and achieve significant box-office success.

Keywords: Fidelity, Marketability, Adaptation, Culture Industry, Box-office

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Chapter I: The Novel, The Film, and The Market

Background Overview

This dissertation explores the adaptation of Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone* into Raj Kumar Hirani's blockbuster film *Three Idiots* with special focus on the creative, economic, and cultural dynamics at play in the transformation process. In fact, it attempts to find out how a relatively simple, youth-focused novel was re-imagined into one of the most successful and influential films in the Indian cinema. By analyzing how the narrative was reshaped to fit cinematic conventions and appeal to a wider audience, it aims to highlight the significance of medium in determining the reach, interpretation, and overall impact of a story. This adaptation provides a case study for understanding how narratives evolve across formats and how these changes influence public discourse around issues such as education, conformity and personal freedom.

One of the most striking aspects of this research is to find out the possible key factors behind the film's extraordinary commercial success. The film became one of the highest-grossing movies in India and gained massive international popularity, especially in countries like China. This overwhelming box-office performance raises intriguing questions about what made the film resonate so powerfully with audiences across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The scale of its success makes it an ideal subject for examining how films can surpass their literary source material in cultural and economic influence.

A central focus of this research is the question what influenced *Three Idiots* to generate significantly more public attention and financial success than *Five Point Someone*. While the novel certainly had a youthful, relatable appeal and contributed to Bhagat's rise as a popular author, its reach was limited in comparison to the film. Moreover, this study aims to explore several contributing factors such as the power of visual storytelling, the inclusion of Bollywood stars namely Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor, the emotional and comic depth

added by the screenplay and the film's strong promotional campaign. It also examines how the adaptation altered certain themes and characters to make the narrative more universally appealing and emotionally resonant that attracts a broader audience than the novel could reach on its own.

This research employs adaptation theories alongside the lens of the culture industry to analyze the transformation of narrative from novel to film. Rather than adhering strictly to *Five Point Someone*, *Three Idiots* reinterprets and reconstructs the novel's core ideas to conform to cinematic conventions, audience expectations, and market-driven imperatives. The film introduces new characters, modifies key plotlines, and amplifies emotional resonance—deliberate creative choices shaped not only by artistic vision but also by the cultural industry's influence on popular media. By situating the adaptation within this dual framework, the study emphasizes that adaptation is not solely a matter of fidelity to the source text but a process of reimagining narratives to meet both expressive and commercial objectives. This approach positions *Three Idiots* as a distinct cultural product that simultaneously engages with and departs from its literary origin.

Similarly, the study adopts a qualitative research design that enables a deep and interpretive investigation of both the novel and the film. Rather than focusing on quantitative metrics, it emphasizes detailed thematic analysis, narrative comparison and contextual understanding. This approach is particularly effective for exploring the subtleties of adaptation concerning how values, tones, and messages shift between the novel and the film. It also incorporates interviews of the novelist and the film makers, critical reviews and audience responses to support its analysis. By prioritizing the interpretive richness of qualitative research, it uncovers layered insights into how and why the adaptation achieved such wide resonance.

A key method employed in this research is close analysis of *Five Point Someone* and *Three Idiots*, comparing and contrasting how each medium develops characters, presents conflict and conveys themes. For example, the film introduces a new narrative frame and a more dramatic emotional sensibility that are absent in the novel while the novel retains a more grounded, realistic portrayal of a particular college life. By closely examining the elements such as dialogue, structure, humor, and cinematography, the study reveals how adaptation can serve as both a creative and ideological act. This method helps illuminate the artistic choices behind the film's success and the cultural shifts that occur when a text is moved from page to screen.

The implications of this research extend across multiple domains. It contributes to adaptation studies by offering a detailed case of how a commercially successful film diverges from its source material even by preserving its essence. Both for filmmakers and authors, it offers insight into how stories can be reshaped for different audiences and platforms. For educators and scholars, it provides a lens to understand how narratives about education, pressure and personal relationship are constructed differently in literature and film. Finally, the study emphasizes how adaptation is not just a retelling but a reinvention.

Overview of *Five Point Someone*

Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* follows the journey of three engineering students namely Hari, Alok, and Ryan at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). The novel provides a critical look at the intense academic environment of IIT by shedding light on the psychological and emotional challenges students face within a rigid and performance-oriented system. From the outset, the trio enters IIT with excitement and ambition, but they are soon disillusioned by the culture that values grades over creativity and individuality.

The narrative centers on the boys' struggle to navigate an academic structure that is unforgiving and overly competitive. Professor Dubey known as 'The Terminator', who merely emphasizes grades and discipline over holistic learning, symbolizes the harsh institutional expectations. Each character embodies a different response to this pressure. Alok, burdened by family obligations and economic hardship, crumbles under the weight of expectations; Ryan, the rebellious thinker, challenges the system's limitations and advocates for learning beyond grades. And Hari, the narrator, often finds himself caught between these two extremes who seek meaning and balance.

Their consistently low academic performance earns them the tag of 'five-pointers' that reflects their GPA — metaphorically, their marginal status within the IIT hierarchy. Despite their academic failing, the trio discovers strength in friendship and solidarity. Ryan's principle, 'Cooperate to Dominate', encourages them to resist the system collectively. The novel also critiques the system as the 'rat race' mentality ingrained in elite educational institutions that Ryan describes IIT governed by the 'Mice Theory', a system that pushes students to mindlessly compete without fostering originality or critical thinking. Similarly, romantic subplots, especially Hari's relationship with Neha, Professor Dubey's daughter, provide moments of personal growth and emotional depth that offers a softer counterpoint to the academic pressure.

As pressures mount, the trio resorts to escapism through alcohol and poorly thought-out schemes like 'Operation Pendulum', which reflects a desperate attempt to improve their grades. In fact, these strategies fail to address the root problem, a system that prioritizes conformity over curiosity. As a result, Ryan's eventual decision to leave IIT marks a symbolic break from institutional control and prompts Hari and Alok to reflect more deeply on their values. In the end, *Five Point Someone* concludes not with a dramatic academic triumph, but with a quiet moment of self-realization. Through a simple act called sharing

'Kaju Barfi', the characters find solace in friendship and small joys. The novel closes with Hari's conversation with Professor Dubey, where he acknowledges that true success lies not in grades but in personal growth, resilience and authentic human connection.

Comparative Overview on *Three Idiots* and *Five Point Someone*

Raj Kumar Hirani's *Three Idiots* (2009) is a cinematic adaptation loosely based on Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone* (2004). While the film draws its central premise from the novel, the story of three engineering students who endure the extreme pressures of a highly competitive academic system, it diverges significantly in terms of narrative structure, character development and thematic presentation. It means that the adaptation retains the novel's critique of a rigid, grade-centric education system but reimagines its elements for a broader, emotionally resounding cinematic experience.

At its core, both the novel and the film revolve around a trio of friends who struggle to fit into a system that values conformity over creativity. In the novel, the characters Hari, Alok, and Ryan represent different facets of student life within IIT: Hari as the insecure narrator, Alok as the family-burdened struggler and Ryan as the charismatic rebel. But, in the film, these characters are renamed Raju, Farhan, and Rancho respectively. With slight adjustments to their personalities and back stories, Farhan, like Alok, comes from a modest family and is torn between his passion and his parents' expectations. Likewise, Raju, echoing Hari's anxieties, constantly fears academic failure and its consequences. Rancho, on the other hand, inspired by Ryan, is portrayed as an idealistic genius who resists the system and inspires others to learn for the joy of learning rather than the pursuit of grades.

Despite these retained character parallels, *Three Idiots* introduces significant innovations in both plot and technique. One of the most notable changes is the film's non-linear narrative structure. Unlike the novel's chronological unfolding of events, the film uses a series of flashbacks interwoven with a present-day journey that creates a dual timeline

adding suspense and emotional depth. This structural shift not only enhances the dramatic impact but also allows the film to explore character transformations over time. It is something that the novel does less explicitly in its plotline.

Additionally, the film places greater emphasis on emotional and philosophical messaging. It introduces new characters by using star power and scenes to reinforce its themes. For instance, the character of Pia, Professor Viru Sahastrabudhe's daughter, and Rancho's love interest with her, serves a more central role than Neha in the novel. Pia's presence adds emotional nuance and further humanizes the conflict between institutional rigidity and personal freedom. Moreover, the film also intensifies the social commentary by addressing issues such as a student's suicide, parental pressure and the commercialization of education. These are the elements that the film highlights but the novel has less prominence in its plot.

Moreover, the film's tone differs markedly from that of the novel. While *Five Point Someone* often adopts a satirical and introspective voice, *Three Idiots* leans toward optimism and reformism. It advocates systemic change through empathy, innovation and passion. Rancho's repeated mantra, 'All is well,' encapsulates this shift in tone and suggests a philosophy of resilience and hope by contrasting with the novel's more resigned attitude toward academic oppression.

The film also employs typical Bollywood devices, particularly the musical sequences, comedic interludes and heightened emotional scenes that probably increase its marketability and mass appeal. These additions, while not present in the novel, serve to engage a broader audience and make the story more accessible and entertaining for border audience. The result, in fact, contributes the narrative that sounds both commercially viable and intellectually provocative.

In conclusion, *Three Idiots* retains the foundational elements of *Five Point Someone*, particularly its critique of institutional education and the value of friendship but transforms the narrative through new characters, non-linear storytelling and emotionally charged additions. These changes reflect the dual goal of the adaptation to remain thematically faithful to the novel while reshaping its content for cinematic success. Thus, the film's creative departures highlight how adaptation can balance fidelity with innovation shaped by market-driven concerns.

Chapter II: Literature in the Age of Visual Storytelling

Shifting Focus from Novel to Cinema

Adaptation theory has evolved significantly over time that has shifted from a rigid focus on fidelity of the original texts to a broader understanding of creative reinterpretation into another genre. When it comes to the creative reinterpretation of the texts into films, there always have certain imperatives that motivate to adapt. Early theorists emphasize that successful adaptations should closely follow the narrative structure, tone, and emotional depth of the original literary works. That time, films were expected to act as faithful reproductions to preserve the 'essence' or 'spirit' of the source material. However, by the mid-20th century, this perspective has shifted toward recognition of cinema's unique language and its capacity for realism. In fact, this perspective has focused on creative freedom of the adapted form.

The concern of creative freedom in adaptation actually lays the foundation for a more flexible and intertextual approach, where adaptations are viewed as transformative dialogues rather than strict translations. In recent decades, particularly along with the rise of global franchises and commercial cinema, adaptation theory has further embraced the idea that adaptations are not only artistic interpretations but also market-driven products. Cultural relevance, audience engagement and brand value now play a central role in shaping adaptations. It moves the discourse well beyond the constraints of fidelity and creative freedom. Bhagat's *Five Points Someone* into Hirani's *Three Idiots* perfectly demonstrates this example in which culture industry becomes central issue behind its adaptation processes.

Tracing back to the history of adaptation theory, fidelity criticism dominates in the early stage. The scholars namely George Bluestone and Geoffrey Wagner focus on how closely film adaptations should follow the source texts. Viewing in the nature of adaptation, Bluestone believes that certain changes happens when novel is transformed into film , but

film makers must remain true to the original texts. In *Novels into Film* (1957), Bluestone highlights, "Changes in adaptation are inevitable, they should still aim to preserve the essence of the original novel" (73). It suggests that adaptations should remain close to the narrative and tone of the source material and then they are allowed to add on things in films.

Similar kind of interpretation comes from Wagner as well. In *The Novel and the Cinema* (1957), he develops the concept of typology of adaptations and views that adaptation actually transports original work of art into another form, but the transformation should carefully be done by remaining truthful to the original form. He argues, "Adaptations incorporate transposition, commentary and analogy but with transposition being the most faithful form to the original texts plot and structure" (6). This view point hints that, in adaptation, fidelity is indispensable, and the film makers use their creative freedom with certain changes or modification. This early view lays the foundation for discussions around fidelity and creative choices in adapting novels into films.

Continuing the argument between fidelity and creative freedom in the debate of adaptation, John Harrington contributes a significant opinion. He simply focuses on the spirit of the primary texts or the source texts rather than how they are presented in the adapted form. In his *Film and/as Literature* (1977), he focuses on the 'spirit' or 'essence' of a literary work in its adaptation to other genre such as film and writes "Adaptations should strive to maintain the literary integrity of the original text" (84). It clearly highlights that films, when they adopt its stories from novels, the issue of fidelity comes first rather than add on other cinematic elements.

However, towards the 20th century, this view of fidelity has shifted into realism. Creative genre such as the films should focus on realism as it attempts to include border audience from various backgrounds. Andre Bazin, the pioneering figure to this kind of view point, in *What Is Cinema?* (1958), believes, "Adaptations should preserve the spirit of the

original work rather than attempting to faithfully reproduce the narrative ... realism is what adaption actually priorities for" (23). By this, Bazin means the realism is all what matters in adaption. It is not the ditto photocopy of the original texts that should be followed by film. Instead, taking the spirit of the original novel, the films can focus on real world so that the audience from all background may appreciate the film as their own story and they entertain them.

Bazin's focus here on realism in films, further contributes new kind of discussion among film critics. One of them is Claude Chabrol who emphasizes the need for authenticity and integrity in adaptations, but creative freedom of the directors also needs to be respected. Chabrol, in *Le Cinéma français* (1956) opines, "... directors should remain true to the text's underlying essence, but they express their own creative vision through the medium of film" (52). This view underscores the idea that adaptation of novels into films is done not merely being detailed to the original texts, but essence of the texts is enough and films exercise their own creative choice in order to cater the sentiment or aspiration of its audience of all backgrounds.

This paradigm shift in adaptation studies, towards the end of the twentieth century opens up a more nuances view that focuses on the nature of the narrative of novels. They argue that the narrative of novels are multidimensional and can be interpreted through multiple perspectives. So, in adaptation of novels, films incorporate one of the best possible interpretations. To this condition, they call, 'intertextuality' of the narrative of novels. Robert Stam is a pioneering figure to envision this idea. In *Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation* (2000), he encourages scholars to "...see adaptations as dialogues between texts, rather than as mere re-creations" (41). Stam by recreation here means the intertextuality of the narrative of novels that allows film-makers to use their specific perspectives. And the

perspective used by the film directors is creative to catch the recent issue in the field. While doing so, film lures larger audience.

Stam's vision on intertextuality in adaptation seems to be motivated by Brian McFarlane's idea of adaptation processes as translation. Adaptation process for him should be viewed as translation of a language, and translation always involves cultural aspects, rather than its strict linguistic forms. In *Novel to Film* (1996), he expands the complexity of adaptation by categorizing adaptations into three distinct types: transposition (faithful adaptations), commentary (more interpretive adaptations), and analogy (adaptations that loosely connect to the source text). He states, "Adaptations should be viewed not as mere translations but as creative processes" (34). By comparing novels into films processes with language translation, he means the essence should remain the same as that of the original texts but it needs to allow certain freedom to incorporate which fits audiences' taste at its level best.

Towards the end of the century, even more powerful voice in adaptation appears along with scholar, Linda Hutcheon, who further advances Stam's ideas by completely rejecting the notion of fidelity of the original texts. In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), she describes adaptations as 'repetitions with variations'. She emphasizes, "Adaptations engage in a process of critical re-imagining that contributes to a broader cultural conversation" (56). This statement declares that adaptations are not about faithful reproductions of the original texts, but it is about how they re-contextualize the original work that may offer new perspectives and interpretations.

Having surveyed with the aforementioned adaptation criticism, it becomes obvious that the theory of adaptation has largely been influenced by the debate between fidelity and creative freedom. Also, it can be concluded that films should remain truthful to the original texts but the method to be truthful to the original text is not the ditto copy but essence or

theme may be enough for this. While doing so, the film makers are allowed to use their own creativity and the film that they make may gain public attention effectively. However, these all have had less discussion on what may be the imperative of film makers behind their use of creative re-imagination. It is not the issue that fidelity is good or bad in creative choices, but understanding what influences creative choice in adaptation needs to be investigated.

One of the possible motivations behind creative choice of film makers in the age of consumerism now may be economic imperatives. Adapting contents from the novels, they want to make money out of it, which is the sole purpose why films are made these days particularly in the age when the rise of franchise filmmaking and blockbusters in global cinema matter all the more important. In fact, films have increasingly taken a commercial turn now. Addressing this economic turn Thomas Leitch, in *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (2007), particularly critiques fidelity-focused approaches and argues that adaptations should be evaluated based on their cultural relevance and artistic contribution, rather than how closely they adhere to the source material. Leitch considers, "Adaptations are not only as artistic interpretations but also as market-driven products" (87). It precisely states that films are generally motivated by money making imperatives, and thus it values brand recognition. For this purpose, films must meet audience expectation and makes money out of it.

Reviewing film as culture industry to make money, recently many cultural critics have appeared in adaption theory. Julie Sanders, in *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006) further critiques the focuses, "Adaptations are appropriations...often diverging from their source material to introduce new cultural meanings" (92). Here Sanders by cultural appropriation means that the concept of fidelity should be replaced with a focus on how adaptations engage with cultural issue. She seems to be rightly pointing out the term 'appropriation' in adaptation as per new cultural meaning. For example, the rise of comic

book adaptations and franchises such as Harry Potter and The Lord of the Rings demonstrates how marketability, audience appeal and brand recognition now play a significant role in determining the success of an adaptation. So does *Three Idiots* from *Five Points Someone*.

Looking at the success of *Three Idiots* as one of blockbuster movies, Md. Hasan Ashik Rahman, a renowned Bangladeshi scholar, in his "From *Five Point Someone* to *Three Idiots*: Politics behind Adaptation", highlights Anubha Mukherji's assertion that film adaptations are shaped by political constraints, auteurist redirections, charismatic stars and new technologies, thereby it frames the adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *3 Idiots* as a complex interplay of these factors that influence both the creative and economic dimensions of filmmaking. Rahman quotes, "The film adaptation of a novel is also largely dependent on the political constraints, auteurist redirections, charismatic stars and the new technology" (22). It clearly indicates that certain changes are inevitable when a literary work is adapted into a film. These changes are shaped by various factors such as political and economic constraints. *Three Idiots* greatly relies on star power, Amir Khan and Karina Kapoor, to attract audiences and maximize profit.

James McMahon, professor at the University of Toronto, has significantly focused on this idea. He believes that films are made to entertain audience or audience goes to movie to entertain themselves, and entertaining them, the film makers collect revenue. Focusing on the economic rise of Hollywood, in his article entitled "The Political Economy of Hollywood", James argues:

Yet the purpose of Major Filmed Entertainment is to create an order of cinema that benefits its business interests. And when Major Filmed Entertainment has the institutional means to shape the movements of the cinematic universe – social relations and all – it possesses a greater ability to affirm, modify or deny film projects and ideas according to their perceived function in capital accumulation. (208)

It shows the actual motivation why films tend to adapt already popular plot of novels, which is for maximizing benefit. In other words, when novels are adapted into films, decisions regarding what to include, exclude, or alter are often guided by marketability rather than anything else.

In recent years, Hindi popular cinema, the Bollywood, has attracted growing scholarly interest. Tejaswini Ganti's *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*, an ethnography-based study, explores how Bollywood has evolved over the past two decades into the global brand today. Drawing on a decade of participant-observation fieldwork, Ganti's research investigates how the neoliberal restructuring of Bombay's film industry has changed the ways films are made, and the types of films produced, as the industry increasingly caters to India's resident middle class and diaspora. In the chapter nine, Ganti articulates her core argument: "Since the early 1990s, the Hindi film industry has been gentrified and restructured to conform the middle-class taste" (4). By the middle class taste here Ganti may mean the larger audience, having multiple identities in terms of age, sex and origin, as their leisure activities. By doing so, the film becomes able to collect significant box office which shadows the strict fidelity of the original text, the novel.

To cater the sentiment of middle class, the larger audience, films uses star power and emotionality as its strategy so that it may give them the highest possible economic benefit. Rachel Dwyer, critiquing the growing popularity of Indian movies in global scale focuses on emotionality of audience and argues:

As one of India's most influential cultural industries, Bollywood often reflects and shapes societal narratives, including those related to economic development and social change. The success of films like *Guru*, which delves into the complexities of economic liberalization, underscores Bollywood's role as a mirror to the nation's aspirations, anxieties, and evolving identities. (6)

It suggests that by capturing the emotional sentiment of audience, Bollywood has evolved over the decades. Finally, the sole purpose of the film makers is to make money by entertaining audience.

When it comes the issue of entertaining audience and making money, film industry such as Bollywood can be taken as culture industry as argued by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. In their seminal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they argue, "The culture industry transforms art into a commodity driven by the commercial demands of capitalist production" (136). This means that cultural products—whether films, music, or literature—is produced primarily to generate profit and as a result, they are standardized and formulaic designed to appeal to the broadest possible audience.

In the case of *Three Idiots*, this principle is evident in how the film adapts *Five Point Someone* for mass-market appeal. While Bhagat's novel critiques the Indian education system through the lives of three students in an engineering college, *Three Idiots* makes significant changes to the novel's characters, plot and tone to ensure it resonates more widely with a larger audience. In other words, the film emphasizes humor, emotional drama and melodrama—elements that align with Bollywood's entertainment formula. The character of Rancho, played by Aamir Khan, is an aspirational figure who challenges the rigid education system and the film's non-linear structure, catchy songs and visually appealing set pieces are all designed to engage viewers emotionally and keep them entertained, and it finally broadens the film's commercial success.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, this process leads to passive consumption, where audiences are offered the illusion of choice through a wide range of cultural products but are eventually confined to a system that standardizes and homogenizes their experiences. Even works that might have originally been critical of the system, like *Five Point Someone*, are reshaped to fit within this cultural industry framework. *Three Idiots*, while still addressing

the pressures of the education system, does so in a manner that neutralizes the critical potential of the original novel. The film's focus on humor and the emotional triumph of its characters ensures that its audience enjoys the entertainment without fully engaging with the deeper social critique about the education system or the pressures placed on students. In this way, *Three Idiots* exemplifies how even seemingly critical works are absorbed and neutralized by the culture industry to maintain the status quo.

Debate on Adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots*

The release of *Three Idiots* in December 2009 was met with immense critical acclaim and commercial success. However, behind the scenes, a major controversy brewed between author Chetan Bhagat and the film's creators. Bhagat, whose novel *Five Point Someone* (2004) served as the basis for the film that publicly voiced his dissatisfaction with how he was credited. This dispute ignited an intense public debate about authorship, adaptation and creative ownership in Indian cinema.

Bhagat's primary grievance centered around what he saw as inadequate acknowledgment of his contribution. Shortly after the film's release, he wrote, "I wasn't properly credited for the story. My name appears only in the rolling credits at the end. But 70% of the movie is from my novel *Five Point Someone*" (Bhagat, 2010). This statement underscores his belief that his work had been a foundational source for the movie, and yet his contribution had been minimized. Bhagat also expresses his frustrations in interviews analyzed in *BananaIP*, saying, "They took my story, didn't give me due credit in the beginning, and the audience didn't even know it was based on my book" (*BananaIP*). His grievance seems in the line of fidelity that the film according to him did not acknowledge truly to his popular novel.

On the other side, the filmmakers Raj Kumar Hirani and Vidhu Vinod Chopra defended themselves vigorously. They claim they had credited Bhagat appropriately, in

accordance with the contractual agreement. In multiple press statements, they assert that *Three Idiots* was a highly modified version of the novel. “We gave him credit in the film, as per contract. We also changed a lot in the movie—characters, events, tone and message. It is not a copy”, (Iyer). Chopra, known for his emotional temperament, even lashes out during a press conference, says, “If he has a problem, he should go to court. But don’t insult our hard work. This is unfair” (*India Today*). Hirani supports this view, adding, “Yes, the starting point was the book, but we used it only as a seed. The movie grew far beyond that” (Iyer). This suggests that they value their creative freedom more than the fidelity of the texts.

As the controversy unfolds, media coverage and public reactions amplifies the debate. Social media and news outlets are abuzz with opinions. Many sympathize with Bhagat by agreeing that the film’s narrative and characters closely mirror the novel. They argue that the filmmakers had downplayed Bhagat’s role to maintain a certain creative autonomy and avoid the label of 'adaptation'. At the same time, others defend the filmmakers, contending that *Three Idiots* offer a more powerful, socially relevant message and that adaptations often diverge significantly from source texts.

The debate actually highlights a deeper question in adaptation studies: To what extent must filmmakers stay faithful to the source material? Supporters of Hirani emphasize that adaptation is not replication. Indeed, the film tackle themes like the pressure of academic excellence, mental health and the need to rethink educational systems—topics that were only partially explored in Bhagat’s original novel. This raises important questions about the artistic liberties of adaptation and whether credit should be tied to content fidelity or conceptual inspiration.

Interestingly, the controversy led to an unexpected commercial benefit for Bhagat. His name trended across digital platforms, and the sales of *Five Point Someone* skyrockets. Many readers, curious about the source material, bring the book in droves. This phenomenon

illustrates how public disputes over authorship and creative ownership can drive consumer interest, even while stirring artistic tensions. The line between authorial recognition and marketing advantage blurred as Bhagat became both a figure of controversy and a best-selling author.

Eventually, both parties soften their stances. After several weeks of media frenzy, Bhagat update his blog with a more conciliatory tone: “I am happy the movie worked. I just wanted proper credit. I don’t want to fight anymore” (Bhagat, 2010). The filmmakers, too, extend an olive branch, stating in a press note, “We respect Chetan’s work and thank him for the story that inspired this movie” (*Reconciliation Note*). These gestures signaled a quiet end to the public feud, even if unresolved tensions lingered beneath the surface.

Despite its resolution, the incident sparks broader academic and creative conversations about the ethics of adaptation. Scholars and critics begin revisiting key theories of adaptation, especially the debate between fidelity and creative freedom. The *Three Idiots* case has become a textbook example in film and literature courses across India demonstrating how adaptations can light debates not just about artistic merit but also legal and moral obligations. The controversy opens the door for further exploration of how contracts, credits and creative inputs intersect in the filmmaking process.

Finally, the *Three Idiots* controversy serves as a reminder that adaptation is not merely about translating words to screen. It is about navigating the complex relationships between authors, directors, audiences and markets. Whether one sees the film as a loose adaptation or a re-imagination, the debate underscores the importance of transparency and mutual respect in collaborative storytelling.

Contrary to the emotional and ideological tension portrayed between Chetan Bhagat and the filmmakers, the real driving force behind the *Three Idiots* controversy may lie in the franchise-driven, profit-oriented nature of contemporary cinema. Both parties, while publicly

debating credit and creative freedom, were in fact entangled in a larger ecosystem where stories are repurposed less for artistic fidelity and more for market viability. The thematic shifts from *Five Point Someone* to *Three Idiots*—such as the deeper focus on educational reform, mental health and innovation—were arguably not just creative liberties but strategic decisions to widen appeal and increase box office success.

In this context, adaptation is less about loyalty to the source material and more about reimagining content to suit the tastes of mass audiences and global markets. Thus, the debate was not simply about artistic ethics or misattribution, but about negotiating value in a media environment where stories are commodities and every narrative shift is a potential branding opportunity.

Chapter III: Qualitative Analysis of Adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots*

The Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the adaptation of Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone* (2004) into Raj Kumar Hirani's film *Three Idiots* (2009). A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for this research as it allows for a nuanced and in-depth analysis of the narrative, thematic and structural transformations that occur during the adaptation process. Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on numerical data, a qualitative approach prioritizes interpretive depth and contextual understanding—essential for exploring how and why specific creative decisions are made when translating a literary text into a cinematic form. This method supports close reading and comparative analysis by enabling the study to investigate how themes such as academic pressure, personal ambition and institutional critique are reshaped to resonate with a broader audience in the film.

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in adaptation theory, particularly the works of Linda Hutcheon, Robert Stam, and Brian McFarlane. Hutcheon's view of adaptation as 'repetition without replication' positions adaptation not as a secondary or derivative act but as a creative reinterpretation that engages actively with the source text. This perspective is critical for understanding how *Three Idiots* both draws from and diverges from *Five Point Someone*. McFarlane's distinction between 'transfer' and 'adaptation proper' provides a useful lens to differentiate between elements directly lifted from the novel and those re-imagined to fit the demands of the cinematic medium. Stam's concept of 'intertextuality' further enriches the analysis by recognizing the film as a product of multiple influences beyond just the source text. These frameworks collectively allow for a detailed exploration of the adaptation as a dynamic and transformative process rather than a simple conversion.

While adaptation theory provides the primary conceptual tools for this study, Tejaswini Ganti's perspective on how movies set scenes for appealing the middle class sentiment and Rachel Dwyer's notion of emotionality of audience for entertainment give a meaningful ground for analysis. In addition, this study also acknowledges the relevance of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's cultural industry theory. Their critique of the commodification of art under capitalism offers a valuable perspective on how *Three Idiots* reflects the pressures and priorities of the Indian film industry. Adorno and Horkheimer argue that mass cultural products are often shaped less by artistic intent and more by market logic, designed to appeal to the widest possible audience.

In this context, the study examines how elements such as emotional appeal, humor, and star power—particularly the casting of Aamir Khan—were strategically employed to enhance the film's marketability. Acknowledging cultural industry theory thus deepens the analysis by highlighting the intersection of creativity and commerce in the adaptation process. By integrating qualitative analysis with insights from adaptation and cultural industry theory, this research design offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how literary narratives are reshaped to align with both artistic vision and commercial imperatives in contemporary Indian cinema.

Input Sources

The primary sources for this study are the original novel *Five Point Someone* and the film *Three Idiots*. These two texts provide the foundation for analyzing the adaptation process, allowing for a detailed examination of the shifts made in translating the novel's narrative into a cinematic form. In addition to these primary sources, secondary sources include interviews with the filmmakers and cast, media articles discussing the film's reception, blog posts written by Chetan Bhagat, the author of the original novel, director commentary, and audience reception studies. These sources provide valuable insight into the

intentions of the creators and the interpretations of the audience. By including such diverse sources, the study ensures a well-rounded analysis of the adaptation, balancing both the creators' perspectives and public reception. The triangulation of these various sources types—primary and secondary—ensures that the analysis is comprehensive and credible, adhering to the standard practices of qualitative research.

At the core of this research design is the close textual and filmic analysis of the source material and the adaptation. The study employs a close reading of *Five Point Someone* to unpack its language, tone, character development and underlying themes. It enables to identify the central elements that the film adaptation seeks to preserve or transform. Similarly, close viewing of *Three Idiots* allows for an in-depth exploration of cinematic techniques such as mise-en-scène, editing, soundtrack, and performance. For example, one of the most significant adaptations is the transformation of the central character, Ryan, into Rancho in *Three Idiots*. This transformation is not simply a name change but also reflects a profound philosophical overhaul.

In the novel, Ryan is depicted as a free-thinking, rebellious character who challenges the conventional educational system, while in the film, Rancho is imbued with similar qualities but also serves as a more universally relatable figure. This shift is captured through visual motifs, dialogue and scripting, highlighting the filmmakers' focus on making the character more emotionally resonant with a broader audience. The close viewing method helps track both surface-level changes, such as character names and deeper structural shifts in the adaptation, such as the way thematic elements are reinterpreted to fit the cinematic form.

An essential layer of this research design is the cultural and industrial analysis that situates *Three Idiots* within the context of the evolving Bollywood film industry. The study recognizes that *Three Idiots* emerges at a time when Bollywood was increasingly becoming more commercialized and globally oriented. The rise of franchise culture and the emphasis on

mass appeal plays a significant role in shaping the film's adaptation. Therefore, the adaptation is read not just as an artistic transformation but also as a product of market logic and economic realities. This is reflected in the decision to foreground themes such as mental health, academic pressure and the critique of India's educational system. These themes resonate with a wide audience, both in India and abroad and can be seen as both socially conscious and commercially strategic. The film's exploration of these pressing social issues enables it to engage with the public on a deeper emotional level, while its mass appeal ensures commercial success. Understanding this dual motivation behind the film's thematic decisions adds an important layer of complexity to the analysis, illustrating how the adaptation is not solely about artistic interpretation but is also heavily influenced by market-driven decisions.

However, it is important to acknowledge one limitation of this research design: the subjectivity inherent in qualitative analysis. Interpretations in qualitative research are often shaped by the researcher's perspective, and alternative readings of the adaptation are certainly possible. For example, one could argue that the filmmakers' emphasis on emotional storytelling compromises the novel's deeper critique of the educational system, or that the film's focus on entertainment detracts from the intellectual richness of the source text. This subjectivity is addressed by ensuring transparency throughout the research process. Multiple sources and perspectives are incorporated into the analysis, including statements from Chetan Bhagat and the filmmakers, as well as audience feedback and reviews. By including a diverse range of viewpoints, the study aims to mitigate the impact of researcher bias and provide a more balanced interpretation of the adaptation.

Ethically, the research is committed to acknowledging the interpretive nature of adaptation. All adaptations, by their very nature, involve a degree of creative reimagining. As such, the study respects the intellectual contributions of all parties involved in the adaptation

process, from the original author to the filmmakers. It also recognizes that adaptations can take many different forms and that there is no single correct way to adapt a literary work into a film. This approach ensures that the research remains respectful of the creative process while also critically engaging with the commercial and cultural factors that shape these adaptations.

This research design offers a comprehensive qualitative framework for analyzing the adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots*. Through a combination of adaptation methodology, close textual and cinematic analysis and cultural and industrial inquiry, the study aims to uncover the complex dynamics between artistic creativity and market forces in the film adaptation process. By examining how literary narratives are reshaped to fit new media forms and market demands, the study demonstrates that adaptations are not merely straightforward translations but multidimensional processes that reflect the broader cultural, economic and artistic context in which they are produced.

To sum up, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how the adaptation of literary works in contemporary cinema is shaped by both creative freedom and commercial imperatives, offering insights into the evolving relationship between literature, film and the cultural industry. The study's emphasis on the triangulation of sources, the use of a qualitative approach and the integration of cultural industry theory ensures that it provides a nuanced and critical perspective on the adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots*.

Chapter IV: Association of Fidelity and Marketability in the Adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots*

This chapter delves into the textual analysis of the adaptation process of Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone* into Raj Kumar Hirani's cinematic portrayal, *Three Idiots*. Central to this analysis is the exploration of how the original narrative, which centers on the lives of three engineering students navigating academic pressures, is transformed in a way that caters to the commercial logic and audience expectations of mainstream Indian cinema. This chapter addresses the narrative and structural shifts made during the adaptation by focusing on how thematic elements, such as the critique of the education system and the pursuit of personal dreams, are reinterpreted to align with the broader goals of a mass-market blockbuster. It examines the ways in which Hirani's adaptation embraces not only the core issues presented in Bhagat's novel but also incorporates elements designed to resonate with a wider demographic that results in a film that reflects the evolving landscape of franchise culture and commercial filmmaking in India.

The analysis takes into account the cultural and economic forces that shape adaptations by paying particular attention to how the film fits within the broader context of franchise-driven cinema. By tracing the shifts in tone, character development and plot, this chapter uncovers how *Three Idiots* functions as a commercial reimagining, strategically adjusted to ensure its appeal to a global audience while remaining rooted in Indian cultural specifics. Through this detailed exploration, the chapter also offers insights into the ongoing transformation of the relationship between literature and film in contemporary India, where creative fidelity and commercial imperatives must constantly negotiate.

***Five Point Someone* and *Three Idiots*: A Comparative Analysis**

Both *Five Point Someone* and *Three Idiots* examine the rigid and highly competitive nature of the Indian education system, particularly in engineering colleges. Through the lives of three friends, these narratives highlight the immense academic pressure placed on students and the struggles they face within an elite institution. While the novel presents a realistic and grounded portrayal of student life, the film adaptation takes a more dramatic and inspirational approach, which emphasizes the importance of creativity over rote learning.

In both *Five Point Someone* and its film adaptation *Three Idiots*, the core themes of academic pressure, rebellion against the educational system and the search for personal fulfillment remain central. However, while the themes are largely consistent between the two works, the characters undergo significant transformations in the adaptation with notable shifts in their personalities and roles within the story. Three major characters—Hari, Ryan, and Alok in the novel and their counterparts in the film are re-imagined to suit the cinematic narrative and the inclusion of the professor's daughter adds further layers to these themes of pressure and self-discovery.

In *Five Point Someone*, Hari serves as the narrator and the character who embodies the struggles of an average student in an elite institution. He is caught between his academic challenges and his sense of inadequacy in a system that emphasizes grades above all else. Ryan, on the other hand, represents the voice of rebellion, with his critiques of the IIT system being the backbone of the novel's argument against rote learning. He argues that the system forces students to conform to a predetermined path, stifling creativity and independent thought. Alok, the third member of the trio, is weighed down by both the academic pressure and the financial burden of his family, which makes his struggle all the more poignant. This conflict is evident in moments Ryan critiques' IIT system in Chapter nine, entitled 'The Mice Theory'. He says:

And this IIT system is nothing but a mice race. It is not a rat race, mind you, as rat sound somewhat shrewd and clever. So it is not about that. It is about mindlessly running a race for four years, in every class, every assignment and every test. It is a race where profs judge you every ten steps, with a GPA stamped on you every semester. Profs who have no idea what science and learning are about. Yes, that is what I think of profs. I mean, what have IITs given to this country? Name one invention in the last three decades. (101)

Ryan's critique of the IIT system in here reflects a deeper frustration with an education model that prioritizes rote learning and relentless competition over true intellectual growth. By calling it a 'mice race' rather than a 'rat race,' Ryan emphasizes that students are not even acting out of calculated ambition; instead, they are blindly running a repetitive, exhausting cycle without questioning its purpose. His words expose the mechanical nature of the system, where students are constantly assessed, ranked and reduced to a GPA rather than being encouraged to think critically or innovate.

In *Three Idiots*, the characters are adapted with some variations to fit the cinematic style and emotional appeal of the film. Rancho, played by Aamir Khan, replaces Ryan's character but is portrayed with a more optimistic and active approach to defying the system. Rancho not only critiques the educational structure but also challenges it through his actions, experimenting with new ways of learning and encouraging others to do the same.

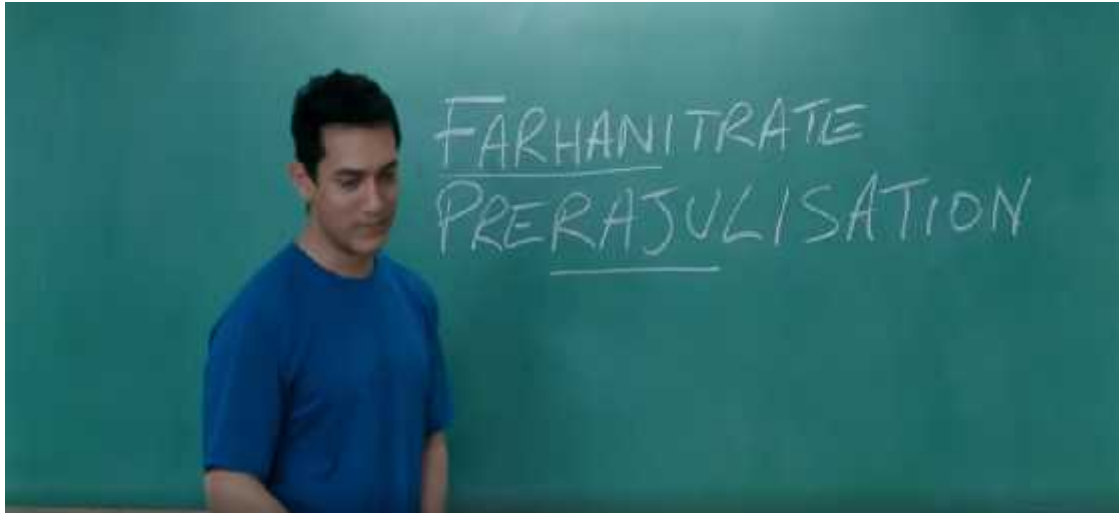


Figure 1 Screenshot: 42:04

His journey focuses on finding a balance between knowledge and creativity, and his character pushes for an education that fosters curiosity and innovation rather than just grades. The letters in the figure are nothing but his attempts to show meaninglessness of mugging common in education system he wanted to defy.

Farhan, played by R. Madhavan, takes on the role of Hari from the novel. In the film, Farhan's internal struggle is framed around his passion for photography, which he wishes to pursue instead of engineering. His emotional journey is more deeply explored, as he struggles to meet the expectations of his parents while grappling with his true desires.



Figure 2 Screenshot: 2:37:48

This figure shows his keen interest in photography though he is forced to take engineering course by family pressure.

In *Five Point Someone*, the character, especially Hari, is not shown to have personal passions beyond surviving IIT's academic pressure. The novel focuses on their struggle within the system but does not explore their individual interests. In chapter three, Barefoot on Metal, Hari expresses his dissatisfaction about the education system as, "Continuous mugging, testing and assignments. Where is time to try out new ideas?" (25). He does not have time to explore anything new since he is pressurized by the strict routine. In contrast, *Three Idiots* reshapes this by giving Farhan a clear passion for wildlife photography, which becomes central to his character arc. This change highlights the theme of following one's true calling that adds emotional depth and reinforcing the film's critique of a rigid education system that often suppresses individuality and creativity—something the novel leaves unexplored.

In *Five Point Someone*, Alok is portrayed as a serious and often pessimistic character weighed down by the financial burdens of his lower-middle-class family. He is deeply anxious about securing a job to support his poor family condition, his paralyzed father and unmarried sister, which makes him overly cautious and fearful of failure. In the chapter Line Drawing, the poor condition of his house is described as, "There was light, but no lampshades, there was living room, but no clothes, there was TV, but not a colour one" (33). This description vividly provides the miserable condition of his family. His desperation even leads him to consider extreme steps, such as distancing himself from his friends to protect his grades, and at one point, he attempts suicide—highlighting the intense pressure he feels but offering limited emotional depth or character development.

In *Three Idiots*, Raju, played by Sharman Joshi, is a reimagined version of Alok but with greater emotional nuance and relatability. While he shares Alok's financial struggles and

familial responsibilities, the film presents him as more vulnerable and sympathetic, allowing the audience to connect deeply with his fears and insecurities. Raju's turning point comes when he is forced to confront his fear-driven mindset and begins to take control of his life when he learns to trust himself and his capabilities. This evolution is more fully explored in the film than in the novel.



Figure 3: Screenshot: 45:57

The "khujli wali roti" scene in *Three Idiots*, though humorous, symbolizes the harsh reality of Raju's family burden and the incompatibility between poverty and academic pressure. This addition, absent in the novel, deepens Raju's character and highlights how personal growth and emotional resilience become central to his journey—transforming him from a fearful student into someone who learns to face challenges with courage. When Professor Virus learns that they have consumed rum, he summons Raju to his office and instructs him to write a letter to his father on behalf of the professor, "Dear Sir, your son Raju Rostogi is rusticated from Imperial College of Engineering" (*Three Idiots*, 1:50:18). Then Raju, with tears in his eyes, requests him not to do so, "It kills my dad sir...he lives just to see me become an engineer" (1:50: 43). He expresses deep fear, helplessness and desperation. His voice, choked with emotion and tears in his eyes, reveals how much pressure he carries, not just for himself, but for his entire family. Becoming an engineer is not merely

his personal dream; it is his father's dream and hope for a better future. The idea that a negative report could destroy the dream makes Raju feel ruined since it would literally break his father's spirit, or even cause his death from grief. This dialogue shows how overwhelming the burden of expectations is on Raju. The seriousness in dialogue alteration contributes for appealing the middle class audience.

Another important addition in the film is the character of Pia, Professor Sahastrabudhe's daughter, who plays a significant role in the narrative. In *Five Point Someone*, Neha, the professor's daughter, has a relatively passive role, mostly serving as a romantic interest for Ryan. In one of her visit to Ryan, Neha says, "So, Mr. Jogger, did not see much of you after that day. Did I scare you off? She began to giggle" (44). Ryan sounds a bit nervous in the beginning of their visit. However, in *Three Idiots*, Pia (played by Kareena Kapoor) is a more independent character who actively challenges the academic system. As a medical student, Pia represents a different perspective on the pressures of higher education, where the focus is not only on grades but on practical, life-saving knowledge. She is not just a love interest for Rancho but also a catalyst for his growth, as their relationship underscores the film's broader message about following one's passion and not being constrained by societal expectations.



Figure 4: Screenshot: 49:48

Pia's character in the film highlights the theme of rebellion and the pursuit of one's true calling, just as the three main characters do, but with her own unique perspective on the pressures of education and career.

Through these characters, *Three Idiots* adapts the novel's core themes to a more cinematic and emotionally engaging format. While the educational system's flaws remain a central critique, the film places a stronger emphasis on the possibility of change, with characters that actively fight against the oppressive system rather than simply lamenting it. The inclusion of Pia adds a layer of complexity to this rebellion, showing that the quest for individual fulfillment and true learning transcends gender and background, and is something that everyone—students, teachers, and even family members—can and should strive for. Drunken Pia brings her father's office duplicate keys to Rancho and lets him steal the question papers. She says, "The duplicate key of Virus' Office...the question paper's in a cover with red seal. Dad has set it" (2:9:51). It reveals Pia's involvement in helping Rancho challenge the corrupt system. By providing the duplicate key and revealing that the question papers are securely sealed by her father, she is indirectly supporting Rancho's rebellion against the rigid educational system. This act signifies her willingness to go against the authority of her father, Virus, who represents the oppressive structure that prioritizes rote learning and unjust competition. Pia's actions show that she aligns with Rancho's belief in a more liberated, questioning, and authentic approach to education. The red seal on the cover symbolizes the official nature of the system she is about to break into. Drunken Pia's character portrayal through this dialogue presents the modification of the narrative of the novel shaping for mass audience.

In the early chapters, the novel establishes how their 'five-points' grade point average (GPA) places them at the bottom of the academic hierarchy. Unlike the top-ranking students

who conform to the system, the trio experiences frustration with a structure that values memorization over critical thinking. After the result while sitting in Ryan`s room, Hari shares about their condition as, “From now on, every prof would know that I was a below average student and that would influence my grade in future courses” (62). His remark reflects his bitter reality after the grade he secured. Ryan, in particular, voices strong opposition to the rigid curriculum, arguing that education should be about innovation rather than blind adherence to textbooks.

This criticism aligns with the broader argument against an education system that measures success through marks and rankings rather than creativity or practical knowledge. Ryan`s statement, “But has IIT ever invented anything? Or made any technical contribution to India?”(34) directly challenges the role of professors who, according to him, do not inspire innovation but instead enforce rigid academic rules. The fact that he questions the contributions of IITs to the country—demanding to know what invention has come out of these institutions in the last three decades—reinforces his belief that the system fails to produce thinkers, inventors, or visionaries. Instead, it merely churns out graduates trained to follow instructions rather than create something new.

This critique is central to both the novel and its adaptation in *Three Idiots*, where Rancho embodies Ryan`s philosophy in a more idealistic and action-driven manner. Rancho not only criticizes the system but also actively proves that knowledge and curiosity should take precedence over grades.



Figure 5: Screenshot: 23: 55

While Ryan voices frustration, Rancho challenges the system through real-life experiments and by showing that true education should inspire students to explore and create. This distinction between passive resentment and active defiance marks a key difference between the novel and the film.

Ryan's words capture a fundamental flaw in traditional education: the failure to foster independent thought and innovation. His critique reflects a widespread concern in academic institutions where students are trained to compete rather than collaborate, memorize rather than understand, and chase grades rather than knowledge. His dissatisfaction with the IIT model is not just a personal grievance but a broader commentary on how an education system focused on competition rather than creativity is ultimately unfruitful.

In this context, Martha C. Nussbaum, a renowned philosopher, in her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* shares a similar critique. She thinks that priority on technical skills and economic productivity over the humanities, making them help shape students into job-ready individuals rather than critical thinkers results in a narrow educational approach that undervalues deep reflection and intellectual exploration. As a

consequence, students may lack awareness of the broader moral and political implications of their knowledge and actions. She argues:

The current education system, particularly in democratic societies, has become increasingly focused on technical skills and economic productivity, often to the detriment of the humanities. This trend leads to a narrow conception of education, where students are trained for jobs rather than being encouraged to think critically, . . . humanities engage them in deep reflection, and understand the broader moral and political implications of their actions. (25)

Nussbaum warns that an education system that prioritizes economic outcomes over intellectual and ethical development ultimately erodes the qualities essential for democratic citizenship. In fact, her argument aligns with critiques of education systems that, like in *Five Point Someone*, fail to inspire creativity and independent thinking, reducing students to mere performers of academic tasks rather than active, thoughtful participants in society.

In the first chapter of titled "Bare Beginning", the protagonists are introduced to Professor Dubey, a character who embodies the tough and unforgiving nature of the academic pressures at IIT. Professor Dubey's strictness and harsh demeanor serve as a wake-up call for the three friends, signaling the end of their carefree high school days. At the end of first day lecture Professor Dubey instructs the students, "If you do well, the world is your oyster. So, don't slip, not even once, or there will be no oyster, just slush" (11). Up until this point, Hari, Ryan, and Alok had experienced a relatively relaxed academic life, where they could rely on their intelligence and minimal effort to get by. However, upon entering IIT, they quickly realize that the reality of higher education, especially at such a prestigious institution, is far more demanding and intense than anything they had anticipated.

Professor Dubey represents the harsh and competitive academic environment that the students must now navigate. His rigid teaching methods, high expectations, and lack of

empathy for students who struggle highlight the unforgiving nature of the system. In this chapter, the protagonists come to terms with the fact that success at IIT will require more than just talent or the ability to skate by—it will demand discipline, hard work, and conformity to a system that values grades above all else. The narrator, Hari describes the moment:

Prof Sen distributed the answer sheet in the class two days ago. "I got seven." Alok Said. I have three. How about that? One two, three, Ryan said, counting on his finger. Prof Sen wrote the customary summary scores on the blackboard. Average: 11/20, high: 17/20, Low: 3/20 . . . I have the lowest. Did you see that? Ryan whispered. (19-20)

The trio begins to grapple with the overwhelming pressures of their new academic life, setting the stage for the personal and academic challenges they will face throughout the rest of the novel.

In the film adaptation of *Three Idiots*, a similar scene is depicted, though it is dramatized for cinematic effect. In the movie, the emphasis is placed on the emotional weight of the moment. As the characters receive their marks, the humiliation of getting low scores is palpable. Alok, who struggles the most, reacts with despair, feeling the weight of his failure not just as a student, but as someone who is being judged by the standards of a highly competitive environment. Ryan, in his usual defiant style, comments on the situation with sarcasm and humor, perhaps as a coping mechanism to shield himself from the deeper anxiety surrounding academic performance.

The film amplifies the tension by focusing on the emotional toll of the characters' academic struggles, underscoring the unfairness and oppressive nature of the educational system.



Figure 6: Screenshot: 1:21: 36

The scene illustrates the disconnection between the human experience and the cold, mechanical grading system that defines their success or failure. Just as in the novel, it serves as a stark reminder of the competitive and high-pressure nature of the IIT system, but the film version adds visual cues—such as close-up shots of the disappointed students and their reactions—to make the emotional impact more visceral.

In both *Five Point Someone* and *Three Idiots*, friendship is portrayed as the backbone of the college experience, especially for students who are often labeled as "underachievers" due to their academic struggles. However, their understanding of the IIT system is entirely negative. In Chapter Ten, titled 'Cooperate to Dominate' (C2D), they summarize the IIT system in five key points:

The IIT system is unfair because:

1. It suppresses talent and individual spirit.
2. It extracts the best years of one's life from the country's brightest mind.
3. It judges you with the draconian GPA system that destroys relationship.
4. The profs don't care for the students.
5. IITs have hardly contributed to the country. (107-8)

Three boys criticize the IIT system for being overly rigid, stifling creativity, and pressuring students into a strict academic mold. The intense GPA-based evaluation creates immense

stress, leading to burnout and strained personal relationships. They feel unsupported because professors prioritize research over mentorship, making academic life even more challenging for their personal well-being.

In *Three Idiots*, a powerful scene that underscores the value of friendship over grades occurs when Raju and Farhan refuse to betray Rancho despite pressure from the college director, Virus. After a prank lands them in trouble, Virus threatens to expel Raju—who is already on academic probation—unless he distances himself from Rancho.



Figure 7 Screenshot: 1:50:28

Despite the risk to his future and the weight of his family's expectations, Raju stands by Rancho, choosing loyalty and integrity over personal gain. Farhan, too, supports their friend without hesitation. This moment, filled with emotional tension, highlights how genuine friendship triumphs over the cutthroat competition and grade obsession that dominates their college life.

The three boys challenge the rigid IIT system by prioritizing friendship over academic pressure. They recognize that the intense GPA-focused environment is harming their mental well-being and personal relationships, so they create a six-point agreement to support each other. Their plan includes sharing assignments, dividing course responsibilities, and collaborating on lab work, ensuring that no one struggles alone. The C2D plans are:

- a. All assignment to be shared.

- b. We will divide up the course responsibilities.
- c. We share lab experiment observation.
- d. Our friendship is above GPAs.
- e. We combine our hostel rooms into one living unit.
- f. We split the cost of vodka regardless of how many drinks each person has had.

(108)

These lines showcase how much they value friendship more than their grades, choosing to stick together rather than compete. By merging their hostel rooms into one shared space and even splitting the cost of vodka equally, they reinforce their belief in unity and collective survival over individual academic success.



Figure 8: Screenshot :1:19:14

In *Three Idiots*, even though riding with three people on a scooter is not allowed, the trio still shares one as a symbol of their unity, tackling their problems together. The scooter becomes more than just a mode of transport. It reflects their collective spirit, mutual support, and the idea that no challenge is faced alone. It marks a turning point in the narrative, showing that

true success lies not in academic scores, but in standing by one's values and relationships—an emotional depth that the novel *Five Point Someone* only hints at but the film powerfully brings to the forefront.

The novel begins with a first-person narration by Hari, who introduces the readers to his life as an engineering student at the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT). Hari, along with his friends Ryan and Alok, is struggling with the overwhelming pressures of the academic system. The story kicks off with Hari reflecting on the failure of his academic journey, setting the stage for the main conflicts. It also opens with a flash-forward of Hari and his friends in a more troubled state, setting up the narrative structure of revisiting past events.

In contrast, the film *Three Idiots* opens with a present-day mystery that sets the tone for a dramatic and emotionally charged journey. Farhan, now an adult, receives a sudden phone call that reveals a clue to the whereabouts of his long-lost friend, Rancho. This prompts him and Raju to begin a road trip to find him, and it is during this journey that the film transitions into a long flashback of their college years.



Figure 9: Screenshot: 1:38

The narrative is told through Farhan's voiceover, but instead of following a strict chronological order, the film shifts between past and present. This structure not only builds

suspense but also allows the audience to discover Rancho's character and philosophy gradually. By starting with a quest rather than reflection, the film adds emotional depth, humor, and dramatic tension, distinguishing its storytelling approach from the novel's more straightforward and introspective beginning.

The song "Behti Hawa Sa Tha Woh" plays a pivotal role in the film's emotional narrative. It is used during a reflective moment when Farhan and Raju are reminiscing about their friend Rancho, as they journey to find him years after college. The lyrics describe Rancho as someone who was free-spirited, curious, and different from everyone else—like the wind that flows wherever it wants. The imagery of the song evokes a sense of nostalgia and admiration, portraying Rancho as a person who refused to be confined by societal expectations or academic pressures.



Figure 10: Screenshot: 8:29

The essence of the song "Behti Hawa Sa Tha Woh" lies in its heartfelt tribute to a free-spirited, fearless, and inspiring friend—Rancho. The lyrics paint him as someone who moved through life like the wind or a flying kite, untouched by restrictions or fears. While others were guided by rigid paths and burdened by anxiety about the future, he carved his own way, embracing each moment with joy and curiosity.

Also, the lines reflect a deep contrast between conventional living—bound by routines and worries—and Rancho’s philosophy of living in the present, celebrating life, and learning through experience. His journey wasn’t free from stumbles, but even in falling, he danced. The song captures the nostalgia of his friends, who now realize the depth and beauty of Rancho’s approach only in his absence. It celebrates individuality, passion, and the courage to live authentically, making it one of the most emotionally resonant moments in *Three Idiots*.

The song "Behti Hawa Sa Tha Woh", which does not appear in the original novel *Five Point Someone*, is a cinematic addition that powerfully caters to the emotional resonance of a broader, global audience—especially those grappling with academic pressure and societal expectations. Through its poetic depiction of Rancho as a symbol of freedom, curiosity, and individuality, the song speaks to anyone who has ever felt trapped in a system that values grades over growth. It offers a moment of reflection for students and adults alike, reminding them of the importance of living fully, thinking differently, and valuing joy over mere achievement. By portraying Rancho as someone who celebrates the present and dares to break away from the crowd, the song becomes a universal ode to authenticity and resilience, striking a deep emotional chord across cultural and educational boundaries.

The middle of the novel delves into the lives of the three friends, focusing on their challenges with the education system. Hari, Ryan, and Alok experience various tensions, from academic failure and parental pressure to personal growth. Ryan, the most rebellious of the trio, frequently clashes with the system, while Hari tries to reconcile his fears of failure and Alok struggles with his family’s expectations. In the chapter titled *Vodka*, Ryan said to Hari, “You have busted your ass for this course already. You mess up, and there is no hope for you man.”(149). This middle part also explores their relationships with the professors, particularly Professor Cherian, and the pressures they face in trying to meet societal and

academic standards. The trio engages in pranks and rebellious acts, yet they also reflect on their dreams and what they want out of life, highlighting their personal dilemmas.

In *Three Idiots*, the essence of the C2D agreement from *Five Point Someone* is captured through various hostel room scenes that emphasize friendship over academic pressure. The mise-en-scène plays a crucial role in visualizing their unity, with their shared space appearing messy yet lively, filled with books, food, and personal belongings that reflect their camaraderie. Rancho's room, much like the novel's merged living space, becomes the central meeting point where they study together, share assignments, and support each other through life's challenges. The camera work enhances this dynamic, using close-up shots to highlight emotional moments—such as when Rancho reassures Raju or when they celebrate small victories—while wide shots place all three within the frame, visually reinforcing their collective strength.

Lighting design further distinguishes their bond, with warm hues creating a sense of comfort in their shared moments, contrasting with the cold, sterile lighting of classrooms that symbolize academic pressure. Additionally, sound design and music, particularly the song *All Is Well*, amplify their defiance against the system, embodying the novel's idea that friendship and emotional support matter more than individual success. Though the film does not explicitly name a “C2D agreement,” its spirit is effectively conveyed through these cinematic choices, portraying their shared struggles and triumphs in a way that prioritizes unity over competition.



Figure 11: Screenshot: 33:25

These lines from the song "All Is Well" capture Rancho's unique way of reassuring his friends during moments of stress and uncertainty. When life feels overwhelming and "out of control," Rancho uses humor and a simple phrase—"All is well"—to lighten the mood and shift their focus away from anxiety. He encourages them to pucker their lips and whistle, using playfulness as a coping mechanism in the face of fear. The line "*Murghi ka jaane, ande ka kya hoga?*" (What does the hen know about what will happen to the egg?) humorously reflects the unpredictable nature of the future, suggesting that worrying about what has not yet happened is pointless.

In the film *Three Idiots*, Joy Lobo, a bright and creative engineering student, tragically commits suicide after his project is rejected by the strict and unsympathetic college director, Virus (Virus Sahastrabudhe). Joy's practical submission is delayed due to personal family problems, but instead of receiving understanding or support, he is humiliated and expelled from the college. This harsh punishment pushes him into despair, ultimately leading to his suicide.

Joy's death is a powerful commentary on the intense academic pressure faced by students and the lack of emotional support within rigid education systems. His character

reflects the darker side of competitive academic environments, where students are often treated as machines for performance rather than individuals with emotions and challenges. This incident becomes a turning point in the film, motivating Rancho to challenge the system more openly and advocate for an education model that supports creativity, compassion, and mental well-being. The song "Give Me Some Sunshine" from *Three Idiots* is a heartfelt anthem of frustration and longing for freedom. "Give me some sunshine, give me some rain, Give me another chance, I wanna grow up once again" (29:42).



Figure 12: Screenshot: 29:42

The song powerfully captures the emotional struggles of students suffocated by academic pressure and the rigid expectations of an unforgiving education system. The lyrics, especially "*Saari umr hum mar mar ke jee liye, ek pal to ab hume jeene do*", reflect the silent pain of students who feel trapped in a life dictated by grades, competition, and fear rather than growth and curiosity. This sentiment is closely tied to the suicide of Joy Lobo in the film, whose creative spirit is crushed by the harshness of a system that values discipline over understanding. The song becomes a plea for a second chance—not just at academic success, but at truly living. It highlights the broken relationship between students and teachers, where instead of mentorship, fear and pressure dominate. Through its deeply

emotional tone, the song urges for empathy, reform, and a reminder that education should nurture life, not break it.

While *Five Point Someone* explores the pressures faced by students at IIT, it does not delve as deeply into the emotional toll of academic systems, such as mental health struggles or the tragic consequences of these pressures, like student suicide. The novel, while focused on personal growth and the characters' academic journey, lacks the emotional depth and universal appeal captured in *Three Idiots*, particularly through the song "Give Me Some Sunshine". This song, paired with the tragic death of Joy Lobo, expands the narrative to address broader issues such as student despair, the oppressive nature of education, and the need for emotional freedom. The film's addition of this poignant moment allows it to resonate more strongly with a global audience, giving voice to the silent suffering of students everywhere, something the novel fails to do. The film thus offers a more relatable and impactful message, highlighting the mental health struggles of students and the need for a more compassionate, supportive educational system.

The song "Give Me Some Sunshine" further reflects the philosophy of experiential learning through the lens of T.S. Eliot's theory of the Objective Correlative. The lyrics "Give me some sunshine, give me some rain" operate not merely as poetic imagery but as symbolic correlatives of emotional and intellectual liberation. Eliot states, "Emotion can only be effectively expressed when tied to a tangible image or situation that evokes the same feeling in the audience" (145). In this case, sunshine and rain become metaphors for the duality of growth—the joy of self-discovery and the trials of academic struggle.



Figure 13: Screenshot: 2:36:19

These natural elements mirror the internal world of students trapped in a rigid education system, pleading for another chance to live and learn freely. The song captures the essence of Rancho's critique of the system: it does not merely state his belief in holistic education but enacts it through emotionally resonant images, thus fulfilling Eliot's idea of emotion made manifest through external correlatives. As such, the film uses this musical moment not just for dramatic effect, but to symbolically represent the desire for balance, freedom, and meaningful learning.

The ending of *Five Point Someone* is understated and realistic, staying grounded in the everyday consequences of an unforgiving academic system. Hari and his friends, Ryan and Alok, do not drastically overcome the rigid structures of IIT. Instead, they accept their average academic performance and reflect on the mistakes they made during their time at the institute. The novel ends with Hari writing, "And that is when I realized that GPAs make a good student but nit a good person" (261) as a kind of apology and a warning to future students not to blindly follow the rules without thinking for themselves. However, this resolution lacks a strong challenge to the system itself; it subtly criticizes the academic model but ultimately shows the characters adjusting to it rather than transforming it. Their personal growth is implied but remains constrained by the limitations of their environment.

In contrast, the film *Three Idiots* presents a far more dynamic and hopeful resolution. Rancho, who embodies Ryan's anti-conformist spirit but with greater clarity and purpose, is revealed to be a globally renowned scientist and innovator living under the name Phunsukh Wangdu.



Figure 14: Screenshot: 2:46:58

This revelation not only surprises the other characters but also significantly redefines success—not as a product of grades and degrees, but of creativity, integrity, and passion. The film's ending emphasizes reconciliation, purpose, and change: Farhan becomes a wildlife photographer with his father's blessing, Raju secures a job on his own merit, and they all reunite with Rancho. This triumphant conclusion issues a bold challenge to the education system, suggesting that authentic learning and success come from following one's curiosity, not conforming to pressure. The film, thus, offers an emotionally satisfying and ideologically powerful closure, inspiring audiences to embrace reform and personal freedom over societal expectations.

In the middle of *Three Idiots*, the welcome speech delivered by Chatur Ramalingam (nicknamed "Silencer") serves as a powerful satire on rote memorization in the education system. Chatur, who blindly memorizes a Hindi speech written by someone else,

unknowingly recites absurd and inappropriate words—like "balatkar" (rape) and "stan" (breasts)—in front of an audience of faculty and students, due to deliberate alterations made by Rancho. While Chatur delivers the speech with pride and confidence, unaware of the blunders, the audience is left in shock and laughter.



Figure 15: Screenshot: 1:01:28

This scene starkly reveals the hollowness of rote learning, where students are trained to memorize without comprehension. It critiques an educational model that prioritizes grades and repetition over understanding and critical thinking. Chatur becomes a symbol of how such systems produce students who may excel in exams but lack true knowledge or the ability to think independently—contrasted sharply by Rancho's emphasis on learning through curiosity and conceptual clarity.

The ending scene of *Three Idiots* is both emotionally satisfying and ideologically powerful, bringing full circle the film's core messages of friendship, passion, and the redefinition of success. After a long search, Farhan and Raju finally locate Rancho in Ladakh, only to discover that he is now a world-renowned scientist and inventor named Phunsukh Wangdu. This twist not only surprises them but also flips the conventional definition of

success on its head—Rancho, who rejected rote learning and academic rat races, has become someone the academic world now reveres.



Figure 16: Screenshot: 2:48:11

The reunion scene is touching: the three friends, along with Pia, reconcile joyfully as Rancho maintains his same humble, curious spirit, still surrounded by students and inventions that reflect his hands-on, joyful approach to learning.

Significantly, when the arrogant Chatur (now a successful corporate executive) realizes Rancho's real identity, the power dynamics shift. Chatur, who once mocked Rancho for not focusing on grades, now pleads for a business partnership with the very man he looked down on. This reversal is symbolic—Rancho's journey proves that genuine curiosity, human values, and innovative thinking matter more than superficial metrics of success. The scene encapsulates the film's final challenge to rigid education systems: true excellence lies not in conforming, but in questioning, exploring, and living with passion. It ends on a celebratory note, showing that success is not about ranks or degrees, but about the impact one creates through knowledge, kindness, and authenticity.

The Romantic Subplot Alteration in *Three Idiots*

In both *Five Point Someone* and *Three Idiots*, a romantic subplot adds a layer of complexity to the characters' personal journeys, particularly through the relationships formed

between one of the protagonists and the daughter of a strict professor. In *Five Point Someone*, the protagonist Hari finds himself entangled in a romantic relationship with Neha, the daughter of a demanding professor, Professor Cherian. This romance serves as both a source of personal growth for Hari and a reflection of his struggles to navigate the oppressive academic environment. Similarly, in *Three Idiots*, Rancho develops a romantic relationship with Pia, the daughter of the rigid and traditional Professor Viru Saahasrabudhe, or "Virus." Both relationships are not merely about love but also serve as a vehicle for challenging the characters' own beliefs about education, success, and personal fulfillment.



Figure 17: Screenshot: 2:42:56

These romantic subplots are significant because they bring attention to the power dynamics between the students and the professors, especially in the context of strict, authoritarian figures who represent the traditional, dogmatic aspects of the educational system. In both the novel and the film, the protagonists' romantic relationships with these women serve as a means of pushing back against the oppressive forces of conformity and authority represented by their fathers. The romantic connections are not only about love but also symbolize a break from the societal norms that these strict professors embody. For Hari, Neha becomes a symbol of liberation and a way to challenge his own fears and insecurities

about failure, while for Rancho, Pia represents a chance to connect on a deeper, more meaningful level beyond the academic pressures imposed by her father.

Furthermore, both romantic subplots highlight the growth and transformation of the protagonists. In *Five Point Someone*, Hari's relationship with Neha becomes a source of emotional support that motivates him to reevaluate his perspective on life and his future. In *Three Idiots*, Rancho's relationship with Pia allows him to question the notion of success as defined by grades and to prioritize happiness and self-discovery. Both relationships also serve as a narrative tool that connects the protagonists to the women who, while initially caught in the expectations of their fathers, ultimately challenge the conventions of their own academic worlds. The romantic subplots thus offer a nuanced exploration of how love, rebellion, and intellectual growth intersect within the backdrop of a highly pressurized educational system.

Box Office Strategy in the Film *Three Idiots*

The 2009 film *Three Idiots* stands as a prime example of how literary adaptation can be strategically leveraged into a lucrative cinematic franchise. Adapted from Chetan Bhagat's bestselling novel *Five Point Someone*, the film retains the core themes of academic pressure and non-conformity but repackages them for mass entertainment. While the narrative is deeply rooted in the Indian educational context, the film was meticulously crafted to maximize box office potential. From the deliberate use of sensational elements to the incorporation of star power and a globally resonant message, *Three Idiots* represents a master class in turning local content into a transnational, money-making phenomenon.

One of the most evident strategies employed in *Three Idiots* is the use of sensationalism to appeal to a broad audience base. Unlike the subtler tone of *Five Point Someone*, the film amplifies the emotional drama, comedic elements, and high-stakes moments. Scenes such as the dramatic childbirth over video call or the suicide of the

character Joy Lobo are emotionally charged, almost melodramatic, designed to captivate and stir audiences.



Figure 18: Screenshot: 2:27:25

These moments, though slightly exaggerated compared to the book, serve a critical function—they elicit strong emotional responses, making the film more memorable and thereby more likely to generate word-of-mouth promotion, a key factor in box office success.

A crucial component of the film's commercial appeal lies in its star-studded casting, particularly the inclusion of Aamir Khan and Kareena Kapoor. Aamir Khan, known for his credibility as both a performer and a perfectionist, attracted viewers across age groups and regions. In various interviews, Aamir Khan expressed his personal approach to film selection, stating that he avoids formulaic roles and chooses scripts that resonate with his values. As he noted in a *Times of India* interview, “I don’t play roles for money or popularity; if a story speaks to me, I do it” (*Times of India*). His involvement lent authenticity to the film while simultaneously ensuring commercial viability. Similarly, Kareena Kapoor’s presence, given her massive fan following and established screen persona, added glamor and a romantic angle, further broadening the audience spectrum. She commented in *The Hindustan Times* interview that the film was “not just another college drama” (*The Hindustan Times*) praising its depth and social message.

Another strategic move is the adaptation of an already famous book. By using *Five Point Someone* as the narrative skeleton, the filmmakers tapped into an existing readership. This pre-established literary base served as a built-in audience, generating initial interest and publicity. This inherent popularity ensures that film adaptations are more likely to secure a ready-made audience, as film critic Anupama Chopra, one of renowned film critics in India, asserts, “The familiarity of a beloved novel significantly lowers the risk for producers by guaranteeing an initial interest that can be capitalized on at the box office” (45). Although the film diverges significantly in terms of character arcs and narrative focus, the association with Chetan Bhagat’s name—even amidst controversy over credit—boosted its promotional outreach. The debate over how closely the film adhered to the book also kept the media cycle active, inadvertently serving as free publicity.

Additionally, the filmmakers employed narrative restructuring to enhance mass appeal. The original novel is written in the first person and revolves around three average students struggling through the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) system. However, the film refocuses the plot on the character of Rancho, transforming him into an idealized, almost messianic figure. This not only allows for a more cinematic narrative arc but also creates a strong central figure around whom promotional materials and merchandising could revolve. Rancho becomes a brand in himself—quotable, meme-worthy, and inspirational—key ingredients in cultivating a franchise-like reception.

The visual design and music of the film also play a significant role in its market strategy. The film’s soundtrack, composed by Shantanu Moitra, with songs like “All is Well,” became instant hits, contributing to the film’s cultural imprint. These musical numbers are both catchy and thematically relevant, reinforcing the film’s core message while also being commercially exploitable through music sales, concerts, and digital downloads. Vibrant

cinematography and slick editing further made the film appealing to multiplex audiences both in India and abroad.

What is particularly noteworthy is how *Three Idiots* took a local subject matter—the Indian education system—and globalized it. The theme of academic pressure, identity, and non-conformity is not limited to India. Through careful scripting and emotionally charged storytelling, the film universalized these struggles, making them relatable to students and parents across cultures. Its subsequent success in markets like China, where it became one of the highest-grossing foreign films, speaks to its transcultural resonance. The filmmakers localized global emotions within an Indian context, thus achieving both cultural specificity and global appeal.

Further, the marketing strategies employed are innovative and aggressive, involving campus tours, online contests, and social media engagement that went beyond traditional promotion. Aamir Khan even undertook a disguised promotional campaign, traveling incognito to different parts of India and asking people to identify him. These marketing stunts created buzz and built a grassroots connection with the film's target demographic—students and youth.

The film also capitalized on educational reform discourses, a hot-button issue in contemporary India. While the book critiques the rigidity of the IIT system, the film expands this into a broader commentary on societal expectations, parental pressure, and the need for educational reform. This alignment with ongoing public debates enabled the film to position itself not just as entertainment but as a socially conscious narrative. This ideological layer gave the film a certain gravitas, encouraging schools, colleges, and even policymakers to engage with it, further boosting its popularity and legitimacy.

In terms of franchise potential, *Three Idiots* becomes more than just a film—it turns into a cultural brand. From merchandise and mobile ringtones to TED Talks and educational

seminars referencing the film, the content extended far beyond the cinema halls. The film's phrases, like "All is Well" and "Pursue excellence, and success will follow," became part of everyday discourse. This level of cultural penetration is a hallmark of successful franchises, laying the groundwork for future spin-offs, remakes, and academic discussions.

The adaptation also sparks international dialogues about education and youth mental health, subjects that are gaining importance globally. Unlike the novel, which remains largely a domestic phenomenon, the film invited participation from educators, psychologists, and students worldwide. It was screened at educational conferences, used as teaching material in classrooms, and discussed in global forums—a testament to its reach and impact.

In conclusion, *Three Idiots* stands as a shining example of how literary works can be strategically adapted for cinematic success. By harnessing sensational storytelling, leveraging star power, utilizing a well-known book, and globalizing a local theme, the film achieved massive commercial and cultural success. The adaptation is not merely a creative reinterpretation but also a calculated commercial venture, where every element—from casting to narrative choices—was aligned to maximize reach and profitability. In doing so, *Three Idiots* set a new benchmark for how Bollywood can turn literary narratives into globally successful, emotionally resonant, and financially rewarding film franchises.

Audience Reception Analysis

The audience reception of *Three Idiots* was overwhelmingly positive, both in India and internationally, demonstrating the film's broad appeal beyond its literary source, *Five Point Someone*. The film's success can be attributed to its engaging narrative, emotional depth, and strong social message, which resonated with viewers across different demographics. As Stuart Hall theorizes in *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse*, "Audiences do not passively consume media but actively interpret it based on their cultural and social backgrounds" (136). In the case of *Three Idiots*, different audience

groups decoded the film's message in various ways—some viewed it as an entertaining college drama, while others saw it as a critique of India's rigid educational system. This adaptability in interpretation contributes to its widespread success and enduring popularity.

One of the key reasons for the film's strong reception was its emotional relatability, particularly for students and young professionals. The film struck a chord with Indian youth who felt burdened by the immense academic and parental pressure embedded in the country's education system. Henry Jenkins, in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, emphasizes, "Audience engagement is highest when media texts resonate with their lived experiences, making the consumption of such texts more personal and meaningful" (88). The portrayal of college life, friendship, and struggles with societal expectations allowed the film to connect deeply with viewers, leading to its cult status among students. Furthermore, the film's humorous yet thought-provoking approach ensured that it was accessible to a wide audience, reinforcing Geoffrey Wagner's argument in *The Novel and the Cinema* that successful adaptations often integrate elements of popular entertainment while retaining their core messages.

Internationally, *Three Idiots* received immense recognition, particularly in East Asian countries such as China and South Korea, where academic pressures are similarly intense. The film's universal themes of educational reform, innovation, and personal freedom allowed it to transcend cultural boundaries. Thomas Leitch, in *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents*, argues that adaptations succeed globally when they emphasize universally relevant themes rather than remaining confined to their original cultural context. The film's success in China, where it became one of the highest-grossing Indian films, aligns with Leitch's perspective, showing that the struggle against rigid academic expectations is not unique to India but resonates worldwide. The reception of *Three Idiots* in China led to extensive discussions on

educational reform, with many Chinese students and parents expressing their identification with the film's themes on social media and academic forums.

Despite its overwhelmingly positive reception, some critics and scholars pointed out that the film oversimplifies the complexities of educational reform. Ranjani Mazumdar, in *Bombay Cinema: An Archive of the City*, argues, "Bollywood often employs exaggerated dramatization to make social issues more digestible for mass audiences, sometimes at the cost of a nuanced discussion" (113). While *Three Idiots* highlights real problems in India's education system, some scholars believe that its solution—following one's passion without concern for societal expectations—is idealistic and impractical for many students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, as Linda Hutcheon suggests in *A Theory of Adaptation*, adaptations often emphasize certain themes over others to ensure narrative coherence and audience engagement. In this case, the film prioritizes an emotionally uplifting resolution over a complex, systemic critique, which ultimately contributed to its mass appeal.

The novel concludes on a bittersweet note. Despite their rebellious acts and personal growth, the friends face the harsh realities of the system they are trapped in. Alok's family pressures ultimately result in his emotional breakdown, and the group parts ways. Hari, while having gained some insight into his own life, realizes the reality of failure and compromise. There is no dramatic resolution; instead, the ending conveys that life continues, and each character must move forward, dealing with the consequences of their choices. The focus is on the characters' inner transformations rather than external success, giving the novel a realistic and grounded conclusion.

In conclusion, *Three Idiots* exemplifies how the culture industry reshapes literary narratives to maximize commercial appeal. By significantly altering the plot of Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*, the film employs star power, heightened emotional drama, and

mass-appeal humor to cater to a broader audience and ensure box office success. This transformation is not merely a creative choice but a strategic move rooted in the economic imperatives of the film industry, which, as part of the culture industry, prioritizes profitability over fidelity. Thus, the adaptation underscores how commercial cinema often molds artistic content to fit market demands, transforming literature into a commodity designed for mass consumption.

Chapter V: The Adaptation of Literary Work into a Cultural Franchise

This dissertation has explored the complex relationship between fidelity and marketability in the adaptation of Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* into Raj Kumar Hirani's *Three Idiots*. At the heart of this inquiry lies a fundamental tension familiar to adaptation studies: the balancing act between remaining loyal to a literary source and making strategic alterations for commercial success. However, this study reframes that tension not as a binary conflict but as a productive association—one where fidelity and marketability are not opposing forces but complementary strategies that, when harmonized, can result in significant cultural and commercial achievements.

The analysis has shown that *Three Idiots* departs from its source text in key ways by altering characters, restructuring the narrative technique and introducing new thematic emphases. These changes, while at first glance undermining fidelity, are purposeful adaptations driven by the demands of the cultural industry. The Indian film market, shaped by audience expectations, box-office competition and the socio-cultural context of Bollywood, necessitates certain formulaic elements such as heightened emotional appeal, musical interludes, comic relief, and star power. Hirani's adaptation incorporates these components with calculated precision, making *Three Idiots* not just a film version of a novel, but a cinematic product tailor-made for mass appeal.

One of the most critical findings of this research is that *Three Idiots* does not completely forsake the essence of Bhagat's novel. Despite structural and thematic modifications, the film retains the core critique of the Indian education system. In fact, by infusing the narrative with emotional drama, powerful performances and accessible humor, Hirani arguably amplifies the novel's social message. The film's ability to provoke public discourse on educational reforms, youth pressure, and the need for creativity in learning environments is testament to the strength of this adaptive strategy.

This synthesis of fidelity and marketability is achieved through a set of deliberate choices. First, the character of Rancho, an invention not found in Bhagat's original character of Ryan, becomes a charismatic vehicle for the film's social message. Played by Aamir Khan, Rancho embodies not only the ideal student who challenges rote learning but also represents the aspirational ethos that Bollywood often constructs—a rebel with a cause who transforms the lives of those around him. Rancho's character marks a shift from Bhagat's somewhat cynical tone to a more hopeful and reformatory one, making the critique of the education system more palatable to mainstream audiences.

Second, the narrative structure is significantly altered to accommodate cinematic conventions that enhance engagement and emotional investment. The novel's linear progression gives way to a non-linear plot, replete with flashbacks, mystery elements (such as the search for Rancho's identity) and an emotionally charged climax. These structural choices, while diverging from the novel, increase the film's dramatic appeal and help maintain viewer interest, a crucial requirement in a commercial cinematic setting.

Third, the adaptation infuses the story with visual and auditory spectacles that the novel could not offer. The presence of songs, stylized settings and choreographed sequences aligns the film with Bollywood's entertainment formula, which is itself a product of the cultural industry's market demands. These elements, while absent in Bhagat's prose, play a pivotal role in making the film marketable and memorable.

By situating *Three Idiots* within the framework of the cultural industry as theorized by Adorno and Horkheimer, it underscored the ways in which market forces shape creative production. The adaptation is not a passive reproduction of a literary source but an active reconstitution, molded by the need to satisfy audience desires, industry standards, and distribution economics. However, as this study has shown, this does not necessarily lead to

artistic compromise. Instead, it creates an opportunity for reimagining the source material in a way that enhances its reach and relevance.

The film's massive box-office success—becoming the highest-grossing Indian film of its time—is a direct outcome of this strategic reimagining. Hirani's adaptation succeeds because it did not confine itself to the expectations of fidelity. Rather, it engages with the source text as a starting point for broader cinematic creativity and market appeal. The adaptation thus stands as a case study how commercial and artistic objectives can be aligned when handled with thoughtful direction and cultural sensitivity.

Moreover, this study contributes to a broader understanding of adaptation as a dialogic process. Fidelity, as traditional adaptation theorists argued, is not the only metric of a successful adaptation. In contemporary contexts, especially within popular cinema, fidelity must be viewed in relation to audience reception, market expectations and the political economy of media production. *Three Idiots* demonstrates that a film can stay "faithful" to the *spirit* of a novel while simultaneously taking creative liberties that enhance its cultural and commercial viability. This conclusion also invites us to rethink our evaluative frameworks in adaptation studies. The adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots* illustrates how fidelity and marketability can co-exist, not as mutually exclusive objectives, but as interdependent aspects of a successful adaptation strategy.

On a theoretical level, this research opens up possibilities for further exploration. For instance, how do adaptation practices change across different media platforms in the digital age? How does transnational adaptation complicate or reinforce the balance between fidelity and marketability? How do marginalized narratives get reshaped in the name of mass appeal, and what ethical question does this raise? These are avenues that future scholars may pursue, building on the foundational insights provided in this dissertation.

To sum up, the adaptation of *Five Point Someone* into *Three Idiots* exemplifies the complex association between fidelity to a source text and the demands of marketability in the film industry. Hirani's cinematic adaptation diverges in several significant ways from Bhagat's novel by altering characters, plotlines and thematic emphasis. It does so strategically to appeal to a wider audience and to maximize commercial success. This process demonstrates that strict fidelity is often sacrificed in favor of emotional resonance, broader relatability and cinematic viability. Moreover, the success of *Three Idiots* suggests that thoughtful deviations can preserve the spirit of the original while enhancing its impact within a different medium. Overall, the adaptation highlights how creative reinterpretations, when handled with sensitivity and insight, can bridge the gap between artistic integrity and the commercial imperatives of the cultural industry.

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