

# Cultural Translation and Market Strategy: Adaptation of Indian English Novels into Films

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## Abstract

Film adaptation serves as an important cultural and economic strategy that reflects the wider relationship between culture and commerce in developing countries like India, in addition to being an artistic endeavor. The adaptation of Indian literary stories into popular cinema is examined in this essay as a cultural translation process influenced by commercial demands. The study examines how literary texts are reinterpreted to appeal to mass audiences while meeting the demands of the film industry, with a focus on four well-known works: *The Guide* by R.K. Narayan, *Devdas* and *Parineeta* by Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, and *2 States* by Chetan Bhagat.

The study examines modifications in narrative structure, characterization, language, and thematic emphasis that match cultural meanings with commercial viability, drawing on adaptation theory (Linda Hutcheon, Robert Stam) and ideas from media economics. The study emphasizes how literary works are turned into lucrative cultural products through star-centric casting, music, genre conventions, and international marketing techniques. These modifications support the creative economy while reflecting India's changing socio-cultural realities, which range from tradition and postcolonial identity to urban modernity and consumer culture. The study makes the case that film adaptation in India is a dynamic negotiation between market strategy and cultural preservation, supporting cinema's dual roles as an economic venture and a cultural mediator.

**Keywords:** Film Adaptation; Cultural Translation; Indian English Literature; Narrative Techniques; Cinema and Commerce; Postcolonial Identity; Creative Economy; Audience Reception; Market Strategy

## 1. Introduction

In India, cinema is more than just a kind of entertainment; it is a major cultural sector that influences national identity and collective imagination. While juggling the demands of artistic interpretation and commercial viability, adaptation unites two potent media: literature and film. Cinema appeals to a large audience and converts elite cultural capital into popular cultural circulation, while literature caters to a niche readership.

According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation is "repetition without replication," in which a story is rewritten to fit a different audience, context, and medium (Hutcheon 7). Due to linguistic diversity, regional pluralism, and changing consumer behavior, this process becomes especially dynamic in India. In order to appeal to audiences who are familiar with cinematic grammar—romantic plots, melodrama, music, and visual spectacle—filmmakers adapt Indian English or regional literary texts while maintaining literary prestige.

This essay examines four case studies from various periods of Indian literary and film history: *Guide*, *Devdas*, *2 States*, and *Parineeta*. These pieces show how adaptation functions on two levels: using market strategies to increase economic potential and translating cultural narratives. The study reveals the relationship between narrative transformation and commercial strategy by drawing on theorists Robert Stam, John Fiske, and postcolonial critics.

## 2. Cultural Translation through Adaptation

Through film, spoken text is converted into audiovisual expression. Stam defines adaptation as an "intertextual dialogism" that concurrently tackles cultural shifts, industrial standards, and the audience's worldview (Stam 64). In India, cultural translation comprises:

- a) Language change: switching from regional or English to Hindi or mixed codes
  - b) Restructuring the story and changing the pacing to create cinematic excitement
  - c) Songs, romance, and conflict made visually and emotionally prominent are examples of cultural familiarity.
  - d) Ideological updating, particularly with regard to nationalism, class identities, and women's roles
- As a result, adaptation turns into a re-narration influenced by sociopolitical development and popular taste.

## 3. Using Adaptation as a Market Strategy

The commercial ecosystem of Indian cinema uses literature as pre-tested intellectual property (IP). Thanks to marketing and distribution, the story's circulation expands from a small readership to millions of viewers.

Key marketing tactics for Indian movie adaptations:

Approach	Goals
Star power	guarantees box office success
Choreography and music	Emotional attachment plus secondary income
Cross-promotion and brand tie-ins	Reach a wider audience than just readers
NRI and worldwide distribution	Makes money off of cross-cultural appeal and diasporic nostalgia
Simplifying the narrative	Aims for a varied rural and urban audience.

Thus, cinema transforms literature into a culturally branded commodity, boosting the creative industry's economic growth.

## 4. Case Studies of Adapted Works

### 4.1 *Guide* (1965) Adapted from R.K. Narayan's *The Guide*

The book explores the protagonist Raju's development into a spiritual figure and is reflective and morally dubious. On the other hand, romance, spectacle, and philosophical drama are highlighted in the movie.

#### Cultural Translation

- Rosie becomes a symbol of artistic freedom and feminine empowerment.
- The cinematic narrative highlights devotion and redemption visually.

#### Market Strategy

- DevAnand's stardom secured mainstream success.
- Hit songs enhanced cultural memory and long-term revenue.

Film thus repackages existential dilemmas into digestible emotional storytelling, reaching a broader audience than the novel.

### 4.2 *Devdas* (1936, 1955, 2002 Versions) Adapted from Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's Bengali novel

Due to repeated adaptation, *Devdas* has become a cultural phenomenon. Tragedy was turned into a cinematic spectacle in Sanjay LeelaBhansali's 2002 adaptation, which placed a special emphasis on visual grandeur.

## Cultural Translation

- Larger-than-life characterization intensifies emotional tragedy.
- Paro and Chandramukhi reinterpreted as strong, dignified women.
- Bollywood aesthetics replace the original's restrained realism.

## Market Strategy

- High-budget sets and opulent costumes boosted visual appeal.
- Shahrukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, and Madhuri Dixit ensured global attention.
- Bollywood diaspora marketing made the film an international success.

The narrative's tragic romance becomes a profitable brand that is continually consumed and reimagined.

### 4.3 *2 States* (2014) Adapted from Chetan Bhagat's bestselling novel *2 States: The Story of My Marriage*

Here, contemporary India's themes—cultural mobility, love marriages, professional aspirations—drive the adaptation.

## Cultural Translation

- Reduction of introspective narration to fast-paced romance-comedy.
- Regional cultural stereotypes become humorous rather than critical.
- English-speaking elite class represented through Hinglish dialogue.

## Market Strategy

- A youth-targeted campaign leveraged the novel's fan base.
- Music-and-romance-driven promotion suited multiplex audiences.
- Cross-marketing with Bhagat's popularity strengthened visibility.

The film aligns love with career success, reinforcing consumerist values of modern India.

### 4.4 *Parineeta* (2005) Adapted from Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's novella

Vidhu Vinod Chopra and Pradeep Sarkar's adaptation foregrounds nostalgia, music, and visual atmosphere.

## Cultural Translation

- Enhanced female agency compared to the novel's subtlety.
- Kolkata is romanticized to evoke heritage and elegance.
- Visual metaphor and melodrama intensify class conflict themes.

## Market Strategy

- A fresh star pairing (Vidya Balan and Saif Ali Khan) attracted younger demographics.
- The soundtrack played key role in marketing and emotional anchoring.
- The film targeted festival circuits and cinema enthusiast audiences.

Cinema transforms the novella into a lush period romance that satisfies both commercial and aesthetic goals.

## 5. Discussion: Literature to Cultural Commodity

These adaptations reveal a shared industrial impulse:

- Transform literary prestige into mainstream entertainment
- Reconstruct narratives to reflect national identity shifts
- Utilize familiar cinematic codes for mass appeal
- Align stories with market demands of each era

According to Fiske, a text's capacity to produce recurring cultural consumption determines its economic success (Fiske 23). To ensure replay value and cultural longevity, each adaptation amplifies iconic scenes, songs, actors, and emotional beats.

Thus, film adaptations:

1. Preserve — elements that signify literary authenticity
2. Transform — themes and characters to match contemporary values
3. Commercialize — via star power, music, spectacle, and global distribution

Adaptation becomes both artistic re-authorship and economic investment.

## 6. Conclusion

A complex interaction between cultural development, economic strategy, and storytelling tradition can be seen in the film adaptation of Indian literary works. As *Guide*, *Devdas*, *2 States*, and *Parineeta* show, adaptation is a compromise between the needs of popular entertainment and fidelity to the original. Film serves as a medium for cultural translation that advances commercial interests while maintaining collective identity in developing nations like India.

By transforming once-limited narratives into widely acclaimed cultural products, cinema broadens the audience for literature. An essential part of India's creative economy is represented by the conversion of literary capital into cinematic capital. Film adaptations will continue to be effective tools for cultural continuity, negotiation, and commercialization as media convergence quickens.

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