

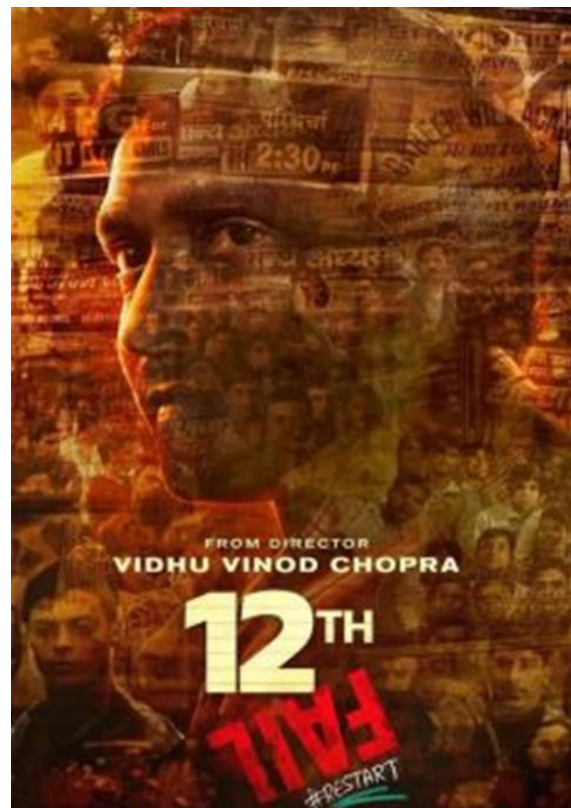
12th Fail: A Movie Review

Reviewed by
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**Haar Nahi Manunga... Raar Nahi
Dhanunga...**

The recital of these lines in the film 12th Fail undoubtedly creates a visceral symphony, creating goosebumps and evoking a kaleidoscope of emotions in the hearts of the majority of Indian youngsters. It acts as a catalyst, instilling in them a steadfast resolve to ‘restart’ the journey from scratch, to rekindle the flame of extinguished ambitions, to dream among the shards of broken illusions, and to brace themselves against the perilous currents of emotional fragility.

Certainly, cinema is a powerful tool with the ability to shape and alter perceptions on a



significant scale, both constructing and deconstructing notions. This has enormous implications for the film 12th Fail. While it is not unusual for low-budget films to elicit significant public emotions becoming the talk of the town, the discussion this time is more poignant since it addresses complex issues like education. In 21st-century India, where technology offers shortcuts for almost everything, the pursuit of success remains elusive in many fields. This stark reality is powerfully conveyed in 12th Fail, a Hindi film released on October 27, 2023, by the renowned director and producer Vidhu Vinod Chopra. Adapted from Anurag Pathak's 2019 nonfiction book, the movie narrates the true story of IPS Manoj Kumar Sharma, who overcame extreme poverty to achieve success in the Indian Police Services. Garnering critical

acclaim with ratings of 9.2/10 on IMDb, 90% on Rotten Tomatoes, and a 4.9 audience rating, this low-budget film defied expectations to become a surprise hit.

The narrative starts amid the dacoit-infested Chambal region, where Manoj Kumar Sharma, the son of an honest clerk, endures the furnace of hardship after his father is unfairly suspended for opposing corruption. The saga unfolds as Manoj, amidst the shadows of dishonesty, resorts to cheating in class 12th but encounters an obstacle in the form of DSP Dushyant Singh, a principled police officer crusading against academic dishonesty. This causes all to fail the exam that year. Manoj grapples with turmoil and starts a rickshaw service only to be ensnared in further tribulations, including false accusations against his brother. Inspired by DSP Dushyant's generous and honest demeanour, he wants to become an officer saying: "Main aapke jaisa banna chahta hoon sir", and the answer received shaped his destiny. Manoj embarks on a journey to embrace a truthful path. Determined to become a DSP, he overcomes academic challenges, earning a B.A. degree. However, fate deals a cruel blow as the MPPSC Group I exam stands postponed for three years. Undeterred, inspired by fellow aspirant Pritam Pandey, whom he met fortuitously, Manoj shifts his focus to Delhi for UPSC preparation. Amidst the labyrinth of aspirations, he encounters Gauri Bhaiya, whose benevolence provides not just a job and study space but a profound sense of belonging: "Kya samajhta hai tu, ki bas tumhara ladayi hai ye... Hum sabka ladayi hai. Ek ka bhi jeet hoga na karodon bhedh bakri ka jeet hoga." The other blessing comes as Shraddha Joshi, a UKPSC candidate from Mussoorie, the love of his life. Despite initial misunderstandings, their love evolves into a lifelong bond as marriage. Even in the face of personal catastrophes, like the tragic death of his grandmother, Manoj 'restarts' following 'the 'Gurumantra' with Gauri Bhaiya's everlasting support and Shraddha's unfailing love. Undiscouraged by setbacks and sustained by the cherished dream of his family "Ab bada police afsar bankar hi lautkiye", this '12th Fail' defies the odds and ascends to the pinnacle of achievement in his final attempt. With triumphant resolve, he not only overcomes the stigma but also emerges victorious in the most crucial test of his life.

The film presents a captivating plot that effortlessly aligns with its theme, employing innovative storytelling techniques to interconnect subplots. It is enriched with powerful and eloquent dialogues, enhancing the overall narrative impact. Through captivating scenes and impactful speeches, it delves deep into the complexities of students' lives, addressing issues such as poverty, ambition, and repeated failures with a bold and direct approach. It exposes the real image of the education system, shedding any diplomatic veneer to reveal the unadorned reality. The film boldly showcases the widespread flaws by focusing on a Chambal school that

openly endorses exam cheating. 12th Fail remarkably proclaims "Restart" as the quintessential panacea when confronted with obstacles, personifying the proverb "perseverance conquers all." It brilliantly emphasises the vital essence of nurturing hope, encapsulating the sagacity expressed in the classic lines, "Haar nahi manuga, raar nahi dhanuga," signifying an unwavering commitment to overcome adversity. Vidhu Vinod Chopra skillfully weaves the tale of a 12th-grade dropout navigating the challenges of the UPSC exam, employing a spectrum of emotions—anguish, wrath, failure, triumph, helplessness, and confidence.

The characters harmonise effortlessly with the film's theme, intricately woven into the fabric of daily life. Their contributions enhance the movie's captivating essence. Vikrant Massey adeptly shapes a character evolving from an oblivious teenager to a dedicated UPSC student. His character epitomises an indomitable spirit as reflects "Papa kahte hai bahar ke andhere se nahi, andar ke andhere se daro", and willingly sacrifices his sleep to devote hours to exam preparation undertaking menial jobs at a tea stall, aata chakki, and even cleaning toilets for survival. Massey flawlessly embodies Manoj's persona, leaving no room for criticism in his impeccable performance. In the role of Gauri bhaiya, Anshuman Pushkar deftly conveys determination. Despite failing to become an IPS, he dedicates his life to teaching and guiding others, emphasizing the philosophy of 'Restart.' Pushkar's impactful performance highlights the transformative influence of selfless mentorship. He has successfully painted the naked reality saying: "2 lakh Hindi medium vidhyarthiyo mein kewal 25-30 hi ban pate hain IAS IPS. Baki 199, 970 cut to 0". DSP Dushyant Singh, played by Priyanshu Chatterjee in a modest yet impactful role, intervenes at the school, disrupting cheating attempts and questioning the established norms. His magnetic words "Cheating chodhni padhegi", not only shape the entire plot but also serve as the pivotal moment that transforms Manoj's life. Medha Shankar has gracefully played her role as Shraddha Joshi. Throughout she remained the motivational force for Manoj. In all his failures, her love proves for him a comforting refuge affirming enduring support. When Pandey doubts Shraddha's commitment towards Manoj, her simple yet profound words "I love you" heal his wounded pride and provide strength to turn setbacks into stepping stones for a shared future. Anant V Joshi, who played Pritam Pandey, supplied the storyline and ensured the natural flow of scenes with his third-person narrative. Every other character has played an incredible role in enhancing the overall cinematic experience.

To glean a conclusion with lines: Tootte huye sapno ki kaun sune siski...Anshu na bahauga sirf muskarauga...Kah dena bhagya se mai kal fir laut aunga...profoundly resonating the excruciating journey of UPSC aspirants, enduring their persistent struggle year after year,

where some emerge victorious, while others choose to 'restart' and persevere. Its exploration of personal integrity, unwavering commitment, and the relentless pursuit of survival create a powerful and lasting impression on the hearts and minds of cinema enthusiasts. 12th Fail, a cinematic marvel, transcends the mundane with its everyday subject, imbued with a solemn gravity and an unbreakable connection that renders it timeless, touching the core of every student. Certainly, it not only expands the boundaries of filmmaking but also serves as a profound representation of the educational, bureaucratic, and socioeconomic challenges of its time. Far beyond a mere depiction, it stands as a guiding light, inspiring a generation to aspire for greatness despite the constraints of poverty, underprivileged circumstances, and the stark deprivation of necessities.

Note: Dialogues used in this article are translated by the reviewer and the image is abstracted from IMDb (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt23849204/>)