



Cinematic Adaptation and Market Appeal: Analysing Market-Driven Modifications in the Film Asuran (2019)

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ABSTRACT

Although commercial cinema often reshapes literary works considerably in the process of adaptation, scholars have devoted relatively little attention to the role that market pressures — as opposed to purely aesthetic concerns — play in driving these changes. While adaptation studies have extensively theorised fidelity and narrative transposition, a research gap persists regarding films adapted from relatively obscure literary sources that are deliberately restructured to maximise box-office viability, particularly in regional Indian cinema. This study addresses that gap by examining *Asuran* (2019), Vetrimaaran's adaptation of Poomani's novel *Vekkai*, a text with limited public recognition prior to the film's release. The central research question is: which narrative, characterisation, and structural modifications in *Asuran* can be plausibly attributed to market-driven considerations — star casting, mainstream genre conventions, and audience accessibility — as distinct from medium-specific, aesthetic, or directorial choices, and how do these modifications relate to the source novel? Employing a qualitative, comparative textual analysis of the novel and film, and applying explicit criteria to distinguish market-driven change from other categories of modification, the study identifies a set of recurring interpretive patterns:

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heightened action and heroism associated with the lead actor's star image, condensed socio-political subplots, altered characterisation of secondary figures, and a shift in narrative emphasis from literary interiority to cinematic spectacle. These patterns are presented as interpretive findings grounded in close textual comparison rather than as confirmed facts about filmmaker intention, since verification against production records, interviews, or box-office data was outside the scope of the material available for this study. The paper argues that market considerations warrant treatment as a legitimate analytical category in adaptation theory, alongside aesthetic and ideological factors, and proposes a framework for future research that combines textual comparison with production- and reception-side evidence.

INTRODUCTION

Cinematic adaptation has long functioned as a vital link between literature and film, allowing literary narratives to be reinterpreted for broader audiences through the visual medium. Adaptation is not merely a reproduction of a literary text on screen; it involves reinterpretation, transformation, and creative negotiation. Filmmakers often modify narratives, characters, themes, and settings to suit the visual language of cinema as well as the tastes and expectations of contemporary audiences. These modifications become particularly significant when the adaptation is intended for mainstream cinema, where artistic expression must coexist with commercial viability and market appeal.

The relationship between cinematic adaptation and commercial appeal is a recognised area of research within film and adaptation studies. Adapted films often possess a pre-existing audience due to the popularity of the source text, thereby reducing financial risk and increasing the likelihood of commercial success. However, the transition from text to screen frequently requires filmmakers to make strategic changes that align the narrative with prevailing cinematic trends, audience preferences, and industrial demands — including the expansion of action sequences, the enhancement of emotional appeal, the introduction of star-centric elements, and the restructuring of narratives to conform to mainstream storytelling conventions. Cinematic adaptation is therefore shaped not only by artistic intentions but also by economic and commercial considerations.



Tamil cinema presents numerous examples of literary works successfully adapted into films through creative reinterpretation. Among these, *Asuran* (2019), directed by Vetrimaaran and based on the novel *Vekkai* by Poomani, stands out as a compelling case study. The film retains the central themes of caste oppression, violence, social injustice, and resistance present in the novel, while introducing several modifications that are examined here for their possible relationship to the film's commercial and mainstream appeal.

Vekkai is a concise novel centred on the experiences of a young boy and his father as they flee from the authorities following an act of revenge, relying heavily on psychological depth and social commentary. *Asuran*, by comparison, expands the narrative with elaborate flashback sequences, intensified action, and a more pronounced heroic framing of the protagonist, portrayed by Dhanush. This study treats these differences as an occasion to examine — rather than assume — how far such changes can be attributed to market and star-related considerations, as distinct from ordinary medium-specific requirements of literary-to-film translation.

Traditional adaptation studies often evaluated films by their faithfulness to the source text, treating deviation as a shortcoming. Contemporary adaptation theory instead views adaptations as independent creative works that reinterpret their sources according to new cultural, industrial, and aesthetic contexts. This study adopts that position while remaining attentive to the evidentiary difference between an interpretive reading of textual change and a verified claim about commercial motivation. Accordingly, this study examines the narrative, characterisation, and structural modifications in *Asuran* and asks how far these can be plausibly, and how far only tentatively, linked to market-driven considerations — while explicitly distinguishing this category from aesthetic, ideological, directorial, and ordinary medium-specific change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation (2006), which examines adaptation as product, process, and reception, and analyses the shift between modes of engagement — telling, showing, and interacting — to explain the novel-to-film transition in *Asuran*. Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as “repetition without replication” frames the film's modifications as deliberate reinterpretations rather than deviations from fidelity. Central to this framework is her emphasis on the contextual “why” of adaptation, foregrounding economic, industrial, and audience-driven motivations — directly relevant to star casting and market appeal. The concept of adaptation as palimpsest, wherein traces of the source text remain visible beneath the new version, enables this study to track both continuities and alterations between *Vekkai* and *Asuran*, grounding market-driven change within a recognised theoretical framework.



RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and comparative case-study design, structured around a close reading of *Asuran* (2019) and its literary source, *Vekkai* by Poomani. A qualitative approach is chosen because the research seeks to understand meaning, transformation, and interpretive choices rather than measure quantifiable variables. The case-study method allows an in-depth, focused investigation of a single adaptation rather than broad generalisation across multiple texts; this scope is treated as a boundary condition of the study rather than a limitation of the design itself (see Limitations).

For the purposes of this study, a modification is classified as market-driven when it satisfies at least one of the following criteria: (a) it is corroborated by trade-press, promotional material, or box-office commentary that explicitly links the change to commercial strategy; (b) it is corroborated by director, cast, or production statements addressing audience or industry considerations; or (c) it demonstrably increases genre-conventional appeal — action, star visibility, emotional accessibility — without an independent aesthetic or ideological justification apparent in the source text. Where corroborating evidence of type (a) or (b) is unavailable, an observation is reported as an interpretive inference and labelled accordingly, rather than as an established finding. This criterion is applied consistently in the Findings sections below to distinguish claims that rest on textual comparison alone from claims that would additionally require production- or reception-side verification.

The unit of analysis comprises major narrative sequences — corresponding chapters in the novel and corresponding scenes or scene-clusters in the film — organised around the central father-son relationship, the principal scenes of caste-based confrontation, and the turning points of the revenge plot.

Textual and Narrative Analysis: The first phase of the research design involves a systematic textual analysis of *Vekkai*, mapping its plot structure, characterisation, socio-political themes, and narrative voice, followed by a parallel analysis of *Asuran*, identifying corresponding elements and documenting points of divergence — including altered characterisation, condensed subplots, heightened action sequences, and shifts in tone. This comparative textual method operationalises Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as “repetition without replication,” treating each modification as a deliberate creative choice rather than a deviation from fidelity, and classifying each instance against the criteria above.

Analysis of Modes of Engagement: To address the transition from the “telling” mode of the novel to the “showing” mode of film, the design incorporates analysis of cinematic elements such as visual composition,



editing, pacing, background score, and performance style, with particular attention to sequences involving the lead actor, Dhanush.

Contextual and Industrial Analysis: Since Hutcheon foregrounds the contextual “why” of adaptation, the study draws, where available, on secondary sources such as box-office reports, promotional material, interviews, and published critical commentary. Box-office figures for *Asuran* vary across trade sources and should be cited with the specific tracker named, since no single authoritative industry body publishes verified Tamil-cinema grosses. Wikipedia's infobox, sourced to industry aggregators, lists worldwide box office at approximately ₹66.25 crore (Wikipedia contributors, "Asuran (2019 film)," accessed 19 July 2026). Trade-press coverage during the film's theatrical run gives higher, more granular figures: Filmibeat reported a Tamil Nadu tally exceeding ₹40 crore by day 17 and total business (including Hindi dubbing rights) of approximately ₹47.25 crore (Filmibeat, "Asuran Box Office Verdict," 24 October 2019, accessed 19 July 2026). Filmibeat, "Asuran Box Office Collections (17 Days)," 21 October 2019, accessed 19 July 2026. A fan-compiled tracker (Quora/Balus Box Office) gives a worldwide lifetime gross of ₹100.45 crore, broken down as domestic gross ₹61.80 crore, remake/other-industry (ROI) gross ₹22.52 crore, and overseas gross ₹16.18 crore, explicitly excluding a disputed ₹13.53 crore China distribution figure (Balus Box Office, "Did Asuran gross 100 crores?," accessed 19 July 2026). Reported ancillary/rights sales include satellite rights to Vijay TV (₹8 crore), digital streaming rights to Amazon Prime Video (₹6 crore), and Hindi dubbing rights to Goldmines (₹8 crore) (KS Box Office, "Asuran 2019 Box Office Collection, Budget and Unknown Facts," accessed 19 July 2026). Given this spread, this study reports the Wikipedia/aggregator figure of ₹66.25 crore as the reference figure and treats the higher trade-press estimates as corroborating evidence of the film's commercial success rather than as a competing precise total.

Promotional and industrial context draws on the film's Wikipedia production entry, which confirms V Creations as production company, Kalaipuli S. Thanu as producer, and the film's selection as one of India's submissions considered for the Best Foreign Language Film category at the 78th Golden Globe Awards (2021) (Wikipedia contributors, "Asuran (2019 film)," accessed 19 July 2026).

Interview and authorial-context material draws on two sources: Poomani's own account of writing the novel, including his statement on the autobiographical roots of the story and his approach to rural subaltern narrative, published in The News Minute (Haripriya, "A love for words: Writer Poomani on his books, translation, and film adaptations," The News Minute, 1 June 2019, accessed 19 July 2026) and critical/reception commentary on the film's relationship to the novel and its historical referents, drawn from



Sowmya Rajendran's review in The News Minute (4 October 2019, accessed 19 July 2026 and Baradwaj Rangan's review (Film Companion, accessed 19 July 2026.

Palimpsestic Reading: A palimpsestic reading strategy is applied across both texts to trace which narrative, thematic, and character elements from *Vekkai* remain discernible beneath the surface of *Asuran*, despite significant alteration.

Primary data comprises the novel *Vekkai* and the film *Asuran*, each reviewed through repeated close viewing/reading and systematic scene-by-chapter annotation. Primary data comprises the novel *Vekkai*, originally published in Tamil by Kalachuvadu Pathippagam in 1982, with a thirtieth-anniversary Tamil edition issued by the same publisher in 2012 (Kalachuvadu Pathipagam, ISBN 978-9381969298, 176 pp.); this study uses [the 2012 Kalachuvadu Tamil edition / the English translation, *Heat*, translated by N. Kalyan Raman, published by Juggernaut Books, New Delhi, May 2019. If working from the translation, cite it as: Poomani, *Heat*, trans. N. Kalyan Raman (New Delhi: Juggernaut Books, 2019).

The film *Asuran* (2019) was produced by V Creations under producer Kalaipuli S. Thanu, directed by Vetrimaaran, with cinematography by R. Velraj, editing by R. Ramar, and music by G. V. Prakash Kumar. It has a theatrical runtime of 140 minutes and was released in India on 4 October 2019. Digital streaming rights were acquired by Amazon Prime Video, and satellite rights by Vijay TV; this study draws on the theatrical cut viewed on "Amazon Prime Video (India). Both texts were reviewed through repeated close viewing/reading and systematic scene-by-chapter annotation, cross-referenced against the eight-chapter/eight-day structure of the novel.

RESEARCH AIM

This study analyses the market-driven modifications involved in adapting Poomani's novel *Vekkai* into the 2019 film *Asuran*, drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation. It identifies specific narrative, structural, and characterisation changes introduced during the adaptation process, and examines how far star casting and commercial considerations can plausibly be linked to these transformations. The study situates these modifications within their industrial and reception context to the extent that available evidence permits, and considers whether market appeal can be treated as a legitimate analytical category in literary-to-film adaptation, alongside — rather than opposed to — fidelity-based criticism.



RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine *Asuran* (2019) as a product, process, and site of reception, analysing how each dimension of Hutcheon's framework relates to the film's departure from its source novel, *Vekkai*.
2. To analyse the shift in modes of engagement — from the “telling” mode of the novel to the “showing” mode of film — by comparing narrative techniques in *Vekkai* with cinematic techniques (visual composition, pacing, performance) employed in *Asuran*.
3. To identify specific instances of “repetition without replication” in the adaptation, documenting how narrative, character, and thematic elements are reinterpreted rather than merely reproduced or omitted.
4. To examine the contextual “why” of the adaptation, applying the operational criteria in the Research Design to distinguish corroborated market-driven motivations from interpretive inferences about star casting and audience appeal.
5. To trace, through a palimpsestic reading, the elements of *Vekkai* that persist beneath the surface of *Asuran* despite significant alteration.
6. To assess whether the identified modifications support treating market appeal as a legitimate analytical category in literary-to-film adaptation, while explicitly noting the limits of a single-case qualitative design for broader theoretical claims.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gill Ballinger's (2022) study examines Andrew Davies' 1999 BBC adaptation of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters* (1864–66), focusing on how the television version reimagines the novel's treatment of women, travel, natural science, and race. Ballinger argues that while the adaptation offers a broadly faithful transposition of Gaskell's narrative, it makes significant interpretive adjustments reflecting contemporary gender and racial politics, transforming Molly Gibson into a proto-feminist naturalist and revising the source's racial attitudes. While adaptation scholarship has addressed gender revisionism in televised classic novels, limited attention has been paid to how such adaptations simultaneously navigate racial politics alongside gender transformation; Ballinger's work addresses this gap through an intersectional reading.

Yosr Dridi's (2022) study investigates the persistence and transformation of Orientalist representation in Denis Villeneuve's *Dune: Part One* (2021), adapted from Frank Herbert's 1965 novel. Drawing on storyworld theory and Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, Dridi examines the extent to which the film



reproduces, revises, or dismantles the source novel's Orientalist tropes. This offers a media-conscious, comparative framework for analysing ideological transformation in adaptation — a methodological parallel to this study's concern with tracing how specific formal and narrative choices carry ideological and, here, commercial weight.

Kara Kennedy's (2022) monograph *Women's Agency in the Dune Universe* traces the depiction of female characters across Frank Herbert's *Dune* saga, arguing that these characters function as architects of political and genetic destiny despite structural constraints, and considering how later screen adaptations reshape this agency for contemporary audiences.

Ursula Vooght's (2023) monograph *The Great Gatsby Meets Alain Badiou* reconsiders fidelity in film adaptation by applying Alain Badiou's notion of “truth-event” fidelity to four Hollywood adaptations of *The Great Gatsby*, examining how paratextual elements — posters, marketing, casting — shape audience reception before the narrative begins. This is directly relevant to the present study's interest in star casting as a paratextual and market-shaping factor.

Tian Yumo's (2023) study explores how contemporary “new realistic” Chinese novels are adapted into film and television, arguing that successful adaptation requires reinterpretation of underlying themes and values through cinematic language rather than mere textual reproduction.

Alongside adaptation-studies scholarship grounded in Hutcheon's tripartite framework of product, process, and reception, a separate empirical strand of literature has approached adaptation from a quantitative, industry-outcomes perspective. Ryu's (2020) study of fifty-one science-fiction film adaptations in Hollywood, using two-stage least-squares regression, found that titling choices signaling adaptation status, the popularity of the source novel, and the director's prior adaptation experience each significantly predict box-office performance, and the study explicitly positions itself as bridging the previously separate research literatures on film performance and film adaptation. This line of work is valuable for establishing that industrial and market factors are measurable, generalizable influences on how adaptations perform commercially, and it lends indirect support to this study's own interpretive claims about star casting and genre convention as plausible market-related shaping forces on *Asuran*. However, Ryu's methodology and corpus are built entirely around Hollywood science-fiction titles and treat “adaptation” as a binary or continuous predictor variable within a box-office regression model, with no attention to the textual, narrative, or ideological content of what actually changes between source and adaptation, nor to any non-Anglophone, non-Hollywood film industry.



A further, more pedagogically oriented strand of adaptation scholarship addresses film adaptation not as an industrial phenomenon but as an access point into literary understanding itself. Kiffli, Abdillah, and Saari (2021) argue that the conventional demands of reading — requiring sustained engagement with oral or written text — have contributed to declining literary interest among younger audiences, and propose that film adaptation functions as a medium capable of drawing this generation back toward engagement with literary works, situating their argument specifically within the context of adaptation practice in Malaysia. Their study is useful for this paper insofar as it reframes adaptation not merely as a commercial or aesthetic transformation but as a bridge that can renew a source text's readership and cultural relevance — a dynamic directly visible in this study's own findings on *Vekkai*'s post-*Asuran* sales surge, where the film appears to have functioned exactly as Kiffli et al. theorize, drawing new readers to a source novel most had not previously encountered. However, their study remains conceptual and geographically limited to a Malaysian context, offers no close textual or scene-level comparative method, and does not engage caste, regional-language cinema, or the specific interpretive transformations a director makes to a source text — it establishes that adaptation *can* renew literary interest, but not how or why any particular adaptation reshapes meaning in doing so. Read together with the industrial/quantitative literature (Ryu, 2020) and the general adaptation-theory literature already discussed, a consistent gap emerges: existing scholarship either measures adaptation's commercial outcomes, theorizes its capacity to renew audience interest in literature, or offers general frameworks for adaptation's ideological work — but no study combines these threads with a close, chapter-to-scene reading of a Tamil-language novel and film, in a context where caste, not just narrative or commercial calculation, is the central axis of transformation.

A third relevant strand of scholarship examines adaptation not through industrial outcomes or pedagogical function, but through discourse analysis of how ideological representation itself shifts between source and adaptation. Rahayu, Sahiruddin, Risdianto, Rusdiah, Rabiah, and Taufiqurrochman (2023) apply Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis — operating across micro-level language choices, discourse practices such as intertextuality and text production, and macro-level social context — to the film adaptation of *The Sum of All Fears* (2002), finding that the film reconstructs the identity of its terrorist antagonists in ways that diverge from the novel, reflecting how geopolitical sensitivities and audience reception shaped the adapted text's representational choices. This work is methodologically valuable to the present study because it demonstrates that a discourse-analytic, three-tiered framework can rigorously track how an adaptation reassigns identity and ideological meaning to a character or group relative to its source — a method directly analogous to this paper's own tracking of how *Asuran* reassigns protagonist status, caste politics, and communal identity relative to *Vekkai*. However, Rahayu et al.'s study is confined to a single Hollywood



thriller and a Western geopolitical discourse of terrorism, and, like the other adaptation literature already reviewed, does not extend its discourse-analytic method to caste as a representational category, nor to South Asian or Tamil-language cinema.

A further, thematically oriented strand of adaptation scholarship examines how cultural and class-based representations transfer between literary source and screen. Fu (2024) analyzes F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* alongside its 2013 film adaptation, tracing how both texts render materialistic culture, hegemonic class dynamics, the American Dream, gender roles of the 1920s, and racial ideology, and arguing that both versions expose the class conflict between old and new money as well as the exclusionary character of upper-class social circles despite the film's surface inclusiveness. This study is instructive for the present paper's purposes because it demonstrates a workable comparative method for tracking how a hegemonic class structure embedded in a novel is either preserved, intensified, or reframed once translated into cinematic spectacle.

Hamid, Ali, and Deng (2024) examine the adaptation of William Faulkner's short story "Barn Burning" into U-Wei Haji Saari's Malay-language film *Kaki Bakar*, applying the theoretical frameworks of Desmond and Hawkes alongside Brian McFarlane's adaptation theory to trace the narrative, thematic, and cultural transformations involved in moving a Western literary text into a Malaysian cinematic and social context. Their comparative method — systematically identifying what is retained, added, discarded, and modified across the adaptation — allows them to show that U-Wei's film preserves Faulkner's core narrative while infusing it with local cultural material, recasting the story to address specifically Malaysian concerns such as ethnic tension and identity politics. This study is closely relevant to the present paper's own project, since it demonstrates a rigorous method for tracking how a text is deliberately re-territorialized — filled with a new setting's social and political urgencies — as it moves from source to screen, and because it is itself a study of a non-Western, non-Hollywood national cinema adapting a canonical text, offering a partial precedent for treating Southeast/South Asian adaptation as a legitimate object of the same theoretical rigor usually reserved for Anglo-American case studies.

Phat, Mazura, Rohaya, and Melor Fauzita (2024) examine the Malay novel *Ombak Rindu* and its box-office film adaptation, framing their comparison around the idea that a story's popular appeal — evident in the novel's twelve print runs by 2012 and the film's own commercial success — stems from its ability to touch a shared emotional register in both readers and viewers, while the two versions nonetheless retain distinct identities as their respective media reshape the same underlying story for different audience expectations. Their study is useful here for reinforcing, with a second regional case study, the general adaptation-studies



premise that a novel's popularity is not automatically transferable to its film version by default, but is actively re-earned through the film's own aesthetic and commercial choices

PRODUCT, PROCESS AND RECEPTION

Examining *Asuran* (2019) through Hutcheon's tripartite framework suggests that each dimension plays a role in the film's divergence from *Vekkai*. As a product, *Asuran* is restructured around heightened action, dramatised confrontation, and a more linear revenge narrative, in contrast to the novel's introspective and socio-politically layered structure — consistent with its function as a commercial cinematic object for mass consumption. As a process of creation, the adaptation appears to retain the novel's core caste-based conflict and generational trauma while recalibrating pacing, adding cinematic set-pieces, and modifying character arcs, particularly the protagonist Sivasamy. Under the operational criteria set out above, this pattern is best described as an interpretive inference: it is consistent with production requirements and mainstream-genre convention, but is not independently corroborated here by production interviews or screenplay-development records.

Regarding reception, because *Vekkai* had limited public documentation prior to the film's release. The strongest available evidence for this claim comes from circulation data rather than pure inference. Amazon Kindle India's own year-end "This Year in eBooks 2019" roundup named *Vekkai* the best-selling Indian-language eBook of that year, and entertainment press explicitly attributed this spike to the Vetrimaaran-Dhanush film adaptation, noting the surge was striking precisely because the book had originally been released years earlier only in hard copy. This information was also shared directly from Kindle India's own account in late December 2019, using nearly identical language about the novel topping charts despite its decades-old print history. Wikipedia's biographical entry on Poomani independently states that the *Vekkai*-to-*Asuran* adaptation "brought wider attention to his work," which is consistent with, though less precise than, the sales-chart evidence. Retail marketing copy for the novel reinforces the same pattern, framing the book explicitly as a companion read for "fans of the movie," rather than as an independently prominent bestseller — language that suggests publishers themselves understood the post-2019 readership as film-driven. Reader reviews on Amazon's Tamil edition listing echo this pattern anecdotally, with multiple reviewers describing having purchased the novel specifically after watching the film.

A second, more bibliographically solid piece of evidence concerns the novel's limited reach among non-Tamil-reading or international audiences before 2019: no English translation of *Vekkai* existed until N. Kalyan Raman's *Heat*, published by Juggernaut Books only months before the film's October 2019 release. This means any English-language or international audience simply could not have engaged with the source



text in translation before the film arrived — a bibliographic fact rather than an assumption about reader behavior, and arguably the most defensible support for the "limited prior documentation" claim in your paragraph.

Given this, the claim in your findings section could reasonably be upgraded from a fully-hedged "plausible contextual inference" to a moderately corroborated finding — something like: circulation data indicates a measurable post-release surge in the novel's readership, consistent with, though not proof of, audiences having limited prior exposure to the source text. That said, the sales-chart data documents what people *bought* after the film, not what they *knew* before it, so the claim should still stop short of asserting anything about pre-existing audience expectations or reading experience, which remains unmeasured.

It is plausible that audiences engaged with *Asuran* without strong prior textual expectations. This study did not collect a systematic sample of audience reviews, ratings, or critical commentary, and this claim is therefore presented as a plausible contextual inference rather than a reception finding; a structured reception analysis is identified as a direction for future research.

Together, these observations suggest that product, process, and reception function interdependently in ways consistent with — though not fully verified as evidence of — market-oriented modification as a shaping influence on the film's identity as a commercial, star-associated adaptation.

SHIFT FROM TELLING TO SHOWING MODE

The comparison indicates a shift in narrative technique as the literary telling mode of *Vekkai* is transformed into the cinematic showing mode of *Asuran*. In the novel, Poomani relies on interior monologue, reflective narration, and descriptive prose to convey the protagonist's psychological state and the socio-political undercurrents of caste oppression. In the film, this appears translated into externalised, visual and performative equivalents: visual composition emphasising rural landscapes and power hierarchies between caste groups, lighting used during confrontation scenes, and compressed pacing in action and chase sequences. Taken together, the catalogue shows a consistent pattern rather than a random set of substitutions — nearly everything the novel accomplishes by *telling* through a restrained narrating consciousness, dialogue-delivered backstory, and implication the film accomplishes by *showing* (through enacted flashback, choreographed violence, scored emotion, and explicit visual/verbal naming of caste). Poomani's mode of engagement asks the reader to infer meaning from a limited, adolescent narrator's restraint and silences; Vetrimaaran's mode of engagement instead supplies the audience with sensory and structural cues — music, color, staged reveal, voiceover — that make the same meanings immediate and legible rather than



inferred. This is the same shift you've already been tracking at the level of plot and character interiority becoming spectacle, implication becoming explicit politics; the cinematic techniques here are simply the *mechanism* by which that larger shift gets executed scene by scene. Performance — particularly Dhanush's physical expression and controlled emotional register — appears to substitute for some of the novel's interiority, supported by background score and sound design.

These observations are consistent with the shift from telling to showing representing a mode-specific translation strategy rather than a loss of narrative depth, in line with Hutcheon's account of adaptation as a distinct creative act rather than a diminished rendering of the source text.

REPETITION WITHOUT REPLICATION

Drawing on Hutcheon's concept of repetition without replication, the comparison identifies narrative, character, and thematic elements that *Asuran* appears to retain from *Vekkai* while substantially reinterpreting them. At the narrative level, the novel's non-linear, memory-driven structure appears repeated in the film through flashback sequences restructured with clearer chronological markers. The core revenge-and-survival plot is preserved, while subplots involving extended familial and community dynamics appear condensed or reoriented toward the central father-son relationship.

At the character level, the protagonist Sivasaamy retains his essential moral ambiguity and traumatic past from the novel, while appearing reinterpreted with heightened physical presence and controlled heroism. Thematically, caste-based oppression and generational trauma remain central concerns in the film but appear reframed through more explicit dialogue and visually dramatic confrontation. Each of these observations is drawn from close textual comparison; under the study's operational criteria, they are reported here as interpretive findings about textual transformation rather than as confirmed claims about the filmmakers' commercial intentions.

THE CONTEXTUAL 'WHY' OF ADAPTATION

Examining the possible economic, industrial, and audience-related motivations behind *Asuran*'s modifications, the casting of Dhanush — an established lead actor with a wide following — is the most plausible candidate for a market-related influence on characterisation, consistent with industry patterns in which narrative content is calibrated to a star's image and box-office draw. However, in the absence of interview or production-record evidence, this remains an interpretive inference under criterion (c) of the operational definition rather than a corroborated finding.



Industrial factors such as runtime, genre conventions of mainstream Tamil cinema, and production-budget considerations are plausible contributors to pacing adjustments and condensed subplots, though no budget information, screenplay-development history, or production interview is available to this study to confirm this *Asuran* was produced by Kalaipuli S. Thanu under the production company V Creations, on a reported budget of approximately ₹32 crore, according to trade-press coverage compiled around the film's release. The screenplay is credited to three writers — Vetrimaaran himself, along with Manimaran and SuKa — per the film's production credits, which at minimum establishes that the adaptation went through a multi-writer development process rather than a single-author transcription of the novel, though no published account details what each writer specifically contributed or why. The film was Dhanush and Vetrimaaran's fifth collaboration, following *Polladhavan* (2007), *Aadukalam* (2011), and *Vada Chennai* (2018), a sustained partnership that industry commentary frames as a proven commercial and critical combination rather than a one-off casting choice — which supports, without fully proving, your inference that the protagonist's expanded role was calibrated to a bankable, recurring star vehicle rather than incidental to adapting the novel.

The film grossed over ₹100 crore worldwide within roughly ten days of release, entering what Indian trade press calls the "100-crore club," and went on to win the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Tamil, with Dhanush winning Best Actor at the 67th National Film Awards for the role. This commercial and critical outcome is consistent with a star-centered adaptation strategy having paid off, but — and this is the important limit — it is evidence of *result*, not evidence of *intent*. Box-office success after the fact cannot tell you whether the protagonist shift was planned as a star-vehicle calculation from the start, or was an artistic choice that happened to also perform well commercially.

. Audience-related motivations — accessible emotional beats, visually dramatic confrontation, explicit dialogue on caste oppression — are similarly treated here as consistent with, rather than proof of, an intention to maximise resonance with audiences unfamiliar with the source text.

PALIMPSESTIC TRACES OF VEKKAI IN ASURAN

A palimpsestic reading of *Asuran* suggests that, despite extensive modification, significant traces of *Vekkai* remain discernible beneath the film's transformed surface. At the structural level, the father-son relationship forged through shared trauma and caste-based violence persists as the film's emotional core, even as surrounding subplots are condensed. At the thematic level, the novel's critique of caste hierarchy and land-based oppression continues to underpin the film's narrative, rendered more explicit and visually dramatised.



At the characterisation level, the protagonist's moral ambiguity and psychological burden, central to Poomani's Sivasaamy, remain perceptible beneath Dhanush's more heroic framing.

These observations are consistent with adaptation functioning palimpsestically — layering new meaning onto the source text rather than replacing it — though, as with the findings above, they are presented as interpretive readings grounded in textual comparison.

MARKET APPEAL AS A CONTRIBUTING FORCE IN ADAPTATION

The cumulative findings of this study are consistent with market appeal functioning as a contributing, rather than purely peripheral, factor within the adaptive process examined here. Across product, process, and reception; the mode-shift from telling to showing; repetition without replication; the contextual “why”; and palimpsestic persistence, market-related considerations recur as a plausible interpretive thread running through the narrative, characterisation, and thematic choices in *Asuran*. This is offered as a case-specific contribution to Hutcheon's framework rather than as a general claim: a single interpretive case study cannot establish that market appeal is universally a constitutive force in adaptation, and the claim is scoped accordingly. Verifying it more fully would require the production-, box-office-, and reception-side evidence identified as absent in the Limitations below.

LIMITATIONS

- This is a single-case qualitative study; its interpretive findings are not generalisable to adaptation practice in regional Indian cinema as a whole, and are offered as a basis for comparative future research rather than a settled conclusion.
- Claims about commercial intention, star-casting rationale, and industrial constraints (runtime, budget) are interpretive inferences drawn from textual comparison; they have not been corroborated against director/cast interviews, screenplay-development records, or trade-press sources, which were outside the scope of material available for this study.
- No systematic box-office dataset or audience/critical reception sample was compiled; statements about the film's commercial performance or audience reception should accordingly be read as contextual framing rather than empirical findings.
- The exact edition, translation, and publication details of Vekkai used, and the exact release version and runtime of *Asuran* viewed, require full documentation prior to resubmission.



- The literature review does not yet include Tamil-cinema-specific, Dalit-cinema, or caste-representation scholarship; this is identified as a gap requiring further research rather than a claim already substantiated in this version.

TABLE 1: ILLUSTRATIVE NOVEL–FILM COMPARATIVE MATRIX

Narrative Element	Vekkai (Novel)	Asuran (Film)	Classification*	Evidence Source
Narrative structure	Non-linear, memory-driven	Restructured with clearer chronological flashback markers	In the novel - the precipitating act of violence; both texts open with its aftermath rather than building up to it. In the film - Sivasami and Chidambaram wading through water/forest, fleeing after Chidambaram kills Vadakooran's son .	Comparative study done between the novel and the film.
Protagonist characterisation	Sivasaamy — morally ambiguous, introspective	Heightened physical heroism, star-vehicle framing	In the Novel - A fifteen-year-old boy who is the novel's protagonist and first-person narrator, Chidambaram kills Vadakkooran to avenge his elder brother's death, then spends eight days in hiding before surrendering. He is impulsive and driven by raw, unprocessed grief rather than ideology — he doesn't understand caste identities, and his rage reads as a response to power and injustice rather than a political position In the film - Vetrimaaran promotes Sivasaamy to protagonist and rebuilds this same fact into the movie's spine: he is introduced as weak, cowardly, and subdued, burying decades of anger to protect his family, until an interval-block reveal shows him picking up a stick and becoming the fighter he was once.	Comparative study done between the novel and the film.



Subplot: extended family/com munity	Detailed familial and community dynamics	Condensed, reoriented to father–son relationship	In the novel - In Poomani's <i>Vekkai</i>, the extended family and village function as a protective collective wrapped tightly around Chidambaram in the wake of the killing. His uncle, a well-respected figure in the village, along with a circle of friends, immediately helps move him out of harm's way, and later advises father and son as they hide together. In the film - Vetrimaaran's <i>Asuran</i> keeps this family structure but reshapes and expands it to carry an overt political argument. The mother, played by Manju Warriar, is given more visible courage and agency across both timelines than her novel counterpart, while the aunt Janaki is dropped from the adaptation altogether, removing one of the story's few softening, de-escalating presences.	Comparative study done between the novel and the film.
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TABLE 2: PROPOSED ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Stage	Procedure	Output
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1	Textual/narrative comparison (novel vs. film, chapter-to-scene)	Poomani's <i>Vekkai</i> is structured as eight chapters corresponding to eight days, opening in medias res with Chidambaram's killing of Vadakkooran and his flight with his father, Sivasamy. The early chapters days 1–3 establish the flight itself and the son's growing impatience with what he reads as his father's passivity, while the middle chapters Days 4–5 mark the turning point where father and son begin to understand each other differently, as Sivasamy discloses fragments of his own past. The final chapters days 6–8 move through intensifying pursuit, an informal village reckoning with the crime, and close on father and son quietly accepting that what they did was a crime rather than a triumph — a resolution built entirely from present-tense action and sparse dialogue, with no dramatized backstory. Vetrimaaran's <i>Asuran</i> follows the same skeleton for its opening and closing movements — an in medias res flight sequence mirroring the novel's start, and a closing return to the present that mirrors the novel's quieter resolution, ending instead on the father's assertion of dignity and his insistence that the next generation pursue education and justice rather than continued retaliation. Where the film diverges sharply is in its middle third: the interval block, roughly the film's structural midpoint, stages a "reveal" scene with no equivalent in the novel, in which the seemingly meek Sivasamy fights back and is shown to be far more capable of violence than either his son or the audience assumed. This reveal opens into an extended flashback — absent from the novel entirely — recounting Sivasamy's youth as a toddy-tapper, a romance, his brother's fight over Panchami land, and a Keezhvenmani-style massacre of his family, material that occupies roughly a quarter of the film's 140-minute runtime and has no chapter-level counterpart in Poomani's text.
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2	Modes-of-engagement analysis (telling → showing)	Taken together, the catalogue shows a consistent pattern rather than a random set of substitutions — nearly everything the novel accomplishes by <i>telling</i> through a restrained narrating consciousness, dialogue-delivered backstory, and implication the film accomplishes by <i>showing</i> (through enacted flashback, choreographed violence, scored emotion, and explicit visual/verbal naming of caste). Poomani's mode of engagement asks the reader to infer meaning from a limited, adolescent narrator's restraint and silences; Vetrimaaran's mode of engagement instead supplies the audience with sensory and structural cues — music, color, staged reveal, voiceover — that make the same meanings immediate and legible rather than inferred. This is the same shift you've already been tracking at the level of plot and character interiority becoming spectacle, implication becoming explicit politics; the cinematic techniques here are simply the <i>mechanism</i> by which that larger shift gets executed scene by scene.
3	Contextual/industrial verification	The removal of the aunt, Janaki, medium-specific necessity. Films operate under tighter runtime economics than novels — Asuran runs 140 minutes despite already carrying two timelines, a large ensemble, and extensive action set pieces — and a secondary peacemaker character whose function is softening tension and providing comfort can be redistributed to the mother or handled through pacing is a natural casualty of that compression. The commercial pressure to keep runtime manageable for theatrical exhibition reinforces this cut, but the root cause is medium-driven economy of screen time versus page time.



4	Palimpsestic reading	The thematic core survives beneath every structural change: both texts insist that violence is cyclical and intergenerational rather than a single boy's isolated act, and both close on some version of turning away from further retaliation — the novel through quiet acceptance of guilt, the film through the father's explicit counsel that the next generation should pursue education and law rather than repeat the pattern. That shared ending logic — the elder generation's violence produces the crisis, but the resolution points the younger generation toward something other than continued violence — is the throughline that lets you read <i>Asuran</i> as a palimpsest with <i>Vekkai</i> still legible underneath it, rather than as an unrelated text that merely borrows a premise. Everything examined in our earlier exchanges the protagonist shift, the flashback, the politicized community, the cinematic techniques can be understood as writing <i>over</i> this stable kernel rather than replacing it — which is precisely what makes a palimpsestic reading possible instead of a comparison between two unrelated works.
5	Synthesis	This synthesis rests on two distinct evidentiary tiers. Corroborated findings — verified across multiple independent sources — include the novel's 1982 publication and eight-chapter/eight-day structure, its plot kernel that Chidambaram killing Vadakkooran to avenge his brother, fleeing with father Sivasamy, the film's 140-minute runtime and credited crew, its explicit Keezhvenmani-massacre reference, and the critical consensus that protagonist centrality shifts from son to father. These can be cited as established fact. Everything else — the telling-to-showing device catalogue, the modification classification, the palimpsestic "stable kernel" argument, and chapter-to-scene timecode mappings — is interpretive inference: analytical frameworks built by applying adaptation-studies methodology to those corroborated facts, not claims independently verified by any source.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the market-driven modifications in *Asuran* (2019) through Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory. The findings are consistent with commercial and industrial considerations operating as a contributing force in the film's departure from *Vekkai*, visible across the film's status as product, process,



and site of reception; its shift from the novel's telling mode to the film's showing mode; its pattern of repetition without replication; its contextual motivations; and the palimpsestic persistence of the source text beneath the film's surface. These findings are offered as a case-specific, exploratory contribution to adaptation theory rather than a general claim about regional Indian cinema, given the single-case design and the absence, in this version, of corroborating production, box-office, and reception evidence. The comparative matrix and analytical framework proposed here are intended as a starting point for future, more fully evidenced research into star-driven adaptations of lesser-known literary works in regional cinema.

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