


# IMPERCEPTIBLE EMOTIONS – A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF VIRUMAANDI (2004)

Bavatharani Anantharaja <sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> PhD Research Scholar, Department of English, National College (Autonomous) Trichy, Tamil Nadu - 620001, India



## ABSTRACT

The field of psychology is frequently promoted in films. There are numerous and diverse intersections between psychology and film. Films are often influenced by psychological philosophies. The article focuses on the psychological perspective of the Indian Tamil Movie Virumaandi (2004). The aim of the article is to find out the psychological aspects of the characters portrayed in the movie and how it serves to be the reason for the conflicts that arises in the plot. It showcases how psychological condition affects the emotional stability of the characters and audience, relationships among people and behaviors by identifying the issues dealt with in the movie.

**Keywords:** Psychology, Emotions, Films, Beliefs And Actions, Behaviors, Audience

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### Corresponding Author

Bavatharani Anantharaja,  
[bavatharanianantharaja@gmail.com](mailto:bavatharanianantharaja@gmail.com)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Movies, in Tamil Nadu, have traditionally been one of the state's most socially and politically crucial enterprises, and so it becomes a part of the people's social, cultural, and political lives.

Given the importance of spatiotemporal attachment in the attribution process, it is familiar that the emotional stability of each character procreates the thematic view of the film. Cinema is often tied to a particular human being's life despite portraying society or its group of people. As there are few assessment characteristics from which a spectator might identify complicated, blended, and profound mental processes, character psychology becomes shallow in the movies.

Such characteristics stand in direct contrast to the pursuit of character psychology and the emotional response of the audience. Movies also depict various phases of human behaviour through the plot, settings, and characters of the films. The behavioural aspects replicated in movies is observed by Skip Dine Young, a professor of psychology, as

Social scientists have taken a magnifying glass to many behavioural domains shown in the movies including sex, violence, politics, gambling, gender, motherhood, smoking, drinking, sports, college, crime, juvenile delinquency, dreams, poverty, wealth, romance, anger, domestic violence, old age, psychotherapy, and mental illness. (Skip Dine Young 21)

Virumaandi (2004) is one such movie depicts the human behaviour through various actions portraying reality in the most accurate way. The film presents the story of a volatile farmer, who becomes entangled in a cold-blooded sept vendetta in a village in southern Tamil Nadu. The violence manifested in the film is thought to be devilishly vigorous, to the point where its demands are always met with. It is an action drama in which Kamal Haasan has acted, directed, and produced the film. The film wends through the controversy of death as retribution with discrete versions of same story delivered by two prison inmates Kothala Thevar (Pasupathy) and Virumaandi (Haasan). As a tale of avarice and caste-induced violence, Virumaandi is initially named as 'Sandiyar' which created a katzenjammer among Dalit political outfits. The title is surmised to aggrandize the caste pride of 'Thevar' community. The title was changed to 'Virumaandi' later when it was released in 2004. The film's cinematographer is Keshav Prakash, who also assisted Ravi.K. Chandran in *Marudanayagam* project.

The movie opens with a prologue delineating the law of death penalty, which is considered to be the judicially sanctioned murder. Angela Kathamuthu (Rohini), a researcher, reporter, and Doctor of Civil Law interviews different members of the judicial system to analyse the validity of capital punishment. Angela finds a death row convict Mariappan in Chennai prison, who provides her with information about the diabolic police officers put on duty in prison. This results in unconscious conflict creating a pandemonium. A riot broke out the next day outside the prison over the mysterious death of a death row inmate Maria pan. These unintentional actions provoke the behaviour of the characters in the movie which ultimately act as a seed for violence however, the director of the movie is aware of the intention.

The chief jailer (Nasser) asks Angela to finish the interviews faster as he realizes about riot that is yet to happen. Inspector Peikaaman (Shanmugarajan) suggests Angela, the two criminals who have committed 24 murders in Theni, a district in southern Tamil Nadu for the interview. The two criminals are the major representations of the society. Their unconscious actions unravel the social codes providing meaning for the plot. The aggressive behaviour of characters in films depicting violence is seen through the perspective of Young as:

While some believe that unrealistic violence is less disturbing to children, the authors point out that such depictions can be relatively more influential on children's behaviour because the negative *consequences* of violence are downplayed.....However, the good characters' actions tended to be lightly aggressive (e.g., a defiant gesture or a dirty look) while the bad characters' actions were more harmful to others (e.g., pressuring, casting harmful spells, or scheming, such as Gaston's plotting against the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*).  
Young, (2012)

In contrast to Young's statement about 'relational aggression', *Virumaandi* exhibits adult violence rather than graphic and humorous violence. The

consequences of this strange activity sometimes confirm what most people would anticipate intuitively, but they also challenge assumptions on occasion. Textual study of films reveals the emotional perception of themes. The movie explicates violence and features the repetition of essential concepts and aesthetic patterns. It thus emphasizes the importance of character's emotion. The plot is full of violence, bloodshed, gruesome deaths, and scurrilous language. It is one of the few Tamil films to depict violence in its distaste and repugnance. Women are viciously beaten, limbs are sliced up, heads roll, and blood spurts. With all the quiddity of violence, *Virumaandi* does convey the message which is intended.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is emphatic that the writer wants to convey the message of non-violence through a barbarous story line when Annalachumi teaches Virumaandi "One who can forgive is a man, one who asks for forgiveness is a respectable man" (*Virumaandi* 01:31:45- 50) Kothala Thevar monstrously massacres a large number of villagers stating to be twenty-four in Theni with reference to the judgment. He is the predominant reason for the suicide of Annalachumi by throwing her to his henchman. The seed for violence starts with that of land acquisition. It is Kothaala Thevar who tries to decimate Virumaandi to get his wealthy land and gives false allegation on Nallama Naicker. However, the truth is later revealed by Annalachumi. She shows sickle with Kothaalan's symbol 'Ko' engraved in it to Virumaandi making him understand the villainous plot of Kothaala Thevar. Meanwhile, Thevar claims it to be a stolen sickle and develops hatred for the fact that Annalachumi and Virumaandi falls in love with each other.

Violence in all the other movies are advantageous and used as deterrent. The need to solve problems is profoundly ingrained in our genetic structure. However, violence is no longer a reliable means of resolving conflicts in modern society *Virumaandi* expresses crucial violent indications, which affect the mental stability of the characters. It avoids giving solution while leading to numerous other impacts in the storyline. The persistent dominance of male heroes in Tamil cinema reflects the continuation of a hegemonic masculinist discourse [Velayutham and Devadas \(2020\)](#). *Virumaandi* serves as an exception in portraying the protagonist not as superman who can do many things at a time, but as a common man who takes blame for someone's felony and gets punished hence quits the job in Singapore. A middle-aged woman (Ganthimathi), who offers her house for Virumaandi and Annalachumi, gives credential about Virumaandi to Annalachumi saying, "You are lucky to marry him. He is one of a kind. Wish I had a son like him. But God bestowed me with a donkey." (*Virumaandi* 01:55:14-23) The film gives equal importance to female characters by highlighting the injustice happened to them and the way they rebel against such injustices.

The film substantiates the cultural momentousness of the practices and traditions in a lucent manner. The emotions fabricated with culture and its effect on the society is explained by Young as,

One explanation why film achieve such rapid emotional response has to do with their ability to show facial expressions. Extensive cross-cultural research has demonstrated that a set of basic expressions (sorrow, anger, disgust, happiness) are accurately interpreted by people from all cultures. Humans also have powerful emotional reactions to these expressions. Through close-ups, movies vividly portray facial expressions, thus conveying information about emotions instantaneously. (Young 107)

The audience understands the motive of the characters' action which enhances the empathy. The intensity of face expression is shown in the movie correlating the emotions of main characters. The protagonist of the movie Virumaandi constantly expresses his inner experience through his emotions. His narration of the story thus reflects his life of joy and tribulations. The narrative unravels the plot based on the Rashomon effect. The second accused, Kothaala Thevar (Pasupathy) starts his own version of story. He serves a life sentence and whose narration further followed by the first accused Virumaandi (Kamal Haasan) with a different perspective. Virumaandi is sentenced to death by hanging for seduction and murdering of Analachumi (Abhirami) along with acrimonious massacres. The two versions of the two accused explain the clashes between two rural communities. Virumaandi serves as the crucial reason of mayhem in the former version, while he is just a pawn in the later. Kothaala Thevar initially agrees to give his niece Annalachumi to Virumaandi, keeping an eye on Virumaandi's land with ample water resource. The continual change between ambiguity and certainty in events and consequences are essential components of mainstream narrative in the movie. The last-minute rescue of the characters by the writer is the most prominent example, which results in critical conflicts. Archetypically, such ambiguous situations induce optimism or terror in the characters concerned. Joy, relief, grief, frustration, and disgust may occur when then conclusion of a scenario is ultimately understood.

The difference between relief and contempt, in the movie, is primarily based on the character's possessive or repulsive motive [Persson \(2009\)](#). The feeling attributed to Virumaandi when he manages to escape death is most likely relief than delight. He escapes from the cops again and again and thus achieves success in escaping death rather than an objective due to circumstances. The whole story revolves around Virumaandi's attempt to bring truth to the limelight. He does justice avoiding violence and human tragedy, which frequently puts his feelings on the negative side of the scale. Kothala Thevar, on the other hand, is motivated by a possessive objective. The emotions of Thevar emphasize the audience that it is mere depiction to enhance the commiseration of the other existing characters. The spectator may feel relief in Virumaandi's situation, but how and why such feelings originate in the spectator is a separate and far more nuanced narrative. The one kind-hearted, genuine guy Nallama Naicker (Napoleon) who is the head of the village is impuissant to stop the villainous plot made by Kothaala Thevar. Kothaala Thevar keeps entire police force, which is corrupt at its best, under his own control.

### 3. PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE MOVIE

Movies generally elicit strong emotional responses from the audience. *Virumaandi* occasionally make the viewers to experience trauma, sadness, or hallucinations as a result of its viewing experience. Thought and diction serves ultimate purpose in amplifying the spirit of the film. It is essential that the language is flexed for the story and character setting. Kamal Haasan takes serious efforts in each of his films to depict the exact slang and dialects based on the particular storyline. He uses Palakkad Brahmin Tamil dialect in his film *Michael Madana Kama Rajan* (1990), *Kongu Tamil in Sathi Leelavathi* (1995), colloquial Madras slang in movies like *Pammal K Sambandham* (2002) and *Vasool Raja MBBS* (2004), *Brahmin Tamil in Avvai Shanmugi* (1996), *Srilankan Tamil in Tenali* (2000), *Nellai* dialect in recent successful venture *Papanasam*. In *Virumaandi*, he uses Madurai Tamil as the story revolves around Theni district, villages of Madurai and Chennai. He portrays the reality of rural Tamil Nadu exclusively with the language and its style. Many words including 'Kolaru', 'Urutikitte', 'Aaththi', 'Inngaaraa' gives realistic appeal to

the audience. In the film, *Virumaandi* uses abusive language whenever he feels emotionally unstable. The characters' enunciation of dialogues with perfect dialect adds density to the film. The usage of such words affects the action as well as the plot of the movie in an emotional way. The film blends words, images and sounds to provoke the characters' as well as audiences' emotion. Movies, which propagate such effect on audience, are interpreted to focus on the dialogues. Young explains such interpretations as,

Audience studies focused on viewer interpretations provide a means of extending other forms of research. Movies that fall into the category of the "new brutalism" (*Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Casino*, *Natural Born Killers*) challenge Zillmann's dispositional theory in which the enjoyment of violence is based on justice and bad characters being punished. Such movies feature a combination of gruesome violence mixed with witty dialogue and imaginative cinematic techniques. (Young 125)

To have a panoramic view of a movie, from multiple perspective, gives intense essence. The psychological perspective of movies gives strong message. The psychological approach to films enables the audience not only to comprehend, but also to nuzzle films [Bywater and Sobchack \(1989\)](#). Themes are highly cohesive with psychological imbalance of the characters, like sex, violence and casteism are seen in *Virumaandi*. Portrayal of sex and violence in movies is always intriguing [Damodaran, , and Gorringer \(2017\)](#). For a woman in Tamil Nadu, the idea of virtue has a lot to do with her chastity, as it always takes place in Tamil Literature. Kannaki in *Cilappatikaram* represents an optimum wife-material, whereas Annalachumi in *Virumaandi* is an ideal wife. She is a brave wife, who rectifies all *Virumaandi*'s fallacies and makes him untrammelled. She remains chaste and loyal to her husband throughout the plot and kills herself when her nuptial knot was removed and tied again by a henchman forcibly through Kothaala Thevar. Misogyny is at its peak when Thevar brutally beats Annalachumi. Many women characters, in the movie, undergo violence and are abused by men. Angela Kaathamuthu escapes one such violence in the premises of prison. However, female characters like Supputhai (*Virumaandi*'s grandmother), Annalachumi and Angela Kaathamuthu are epitome of boldness and courage. They tolerate all the external forces, primarily violence, and demands self respect in their life, despite of all the male dominance.

The depiction of southern Tamil Nadu, as physically distinct, male, homogenous and violent village ghetto in contemporary Tamil cinema, has turned the neighborhood's small villages into hostile environments that fuel the casteist obsessions and demands [Kumar \(2015\)](#). The obsession over knowing people's caste is seen when Inspector Peikaaman eagerly enquires about Angela's hometown and her mention of Kilvenmani is one specimen of the director's subtlety. *Virumaandi* reveals how villages like Chinakolarupatti get coded as domains, and how people from different community demarcate their turf with emblem and frequent rendezvous at specified locations, with certain personalities and gestures. Space, in the film, is mostly shaped through social interactions. It embodies distinct conventions of affiliation, regional stories, and historical representations, which confers cultural and historical ideals. Such ideals evolved from caste beliefs. Traditional Tamil films concerning caste conflicts in rural Tamil Nadu intentionally or accidentally portray violence as a means to a peiphery, but in *Virumaandi*, violence is the denouement. The film showcases Thevar and Naicker, the two different castes. Thevars, as a community, historically possess a combative self-image. They have a complicated history as members of royal ancestry, ravaging warriors, warlords, guardians and highwaymen. The community discovered to be

settled class engaged in agriculture. Kothala Thevar wants to benefit himself from non-cultivating landowners by weakening their rights, thus reinforcing their domination in rural areas. In each scene, Kothaala's caste pride is shown through his behaviour.

A false allegation is however made on Nallama Naicker in an attempt of trying to kill Virumaandi and getting his land with water resource. The director, it seems, uplifts the Naicker clan as legitimate, and those who withstand for truth and dharma. The venture in taking efforts to save Virumaandi, after realizing that he was betrayed by Kothaala Thevar, makes the audience to believe the character traits of that particular community. Petharaasu, the son of Nallama Naicker, remains decompress even after knowing the cause of his father's death. He awaits truth and justice to recompense the murder of his father despite knowing that Kothaala is the one who has murdered his father. He follows his father's ideals throughout the storyline. Virumaandi is called by the name 'Sandiyar' throughout the movie. "Sandiyar means a rogue, an anti-social, a rowdy" (Warrier). Virumaandi refuses to accept when people call him 'Sandiyar.' He says to Thevar, "My mother named me Virumaandi. You call me by some other name and expect me to respond?" (*Virumaandi* 23:17- 21) when a side kick of Kothaala Thevar calls him "Hey, Bully! (Sandiyar)" (*Virumaandi* 23:13- 17). However, he accepts the fact that he is one such when Annalachumi calls him 'Sandiyar', while conversing each other. He instantly says, "What's wrong in getting married to a bully (Sandiyar)? You'll give a birth to tiger cub." (*Virumaandi* 01:18:37-39)

Virumaandi never fails to writ large the quintessence of Tamil tradition. The story at a point unfolds with Jallikattu, the traditional sport of Tamil Nadu. The ancient sport elevates the story to the pinnacle despite screened for few minutes. It is also evident that the characters treat the bulls just like the member of their families. They provide bulls with traditional names like 'Veerapandi' and even the name of God 'Sorimuthu.' Bull serves to be the symbol of help in the movie. Sorimuthu accompanies Annalachumi, who brings up the bull on which she stands up and hangs herself to death. Later, when Virumaandi goes in pursuit of Kothaala Thevar and finding the reason of Annalachumi's suicide, Virumaandi avails Sorimuthu to abscond from the police.

Jallikattu, metaphorically, encompasses the narrative and the audience thus unable to manifest dissension between Virumaandi and a bull, which Annalachumi points out as "I see no difference between this animal and you. The minute I open the cowshed, it will charge out to attack just like you." (*Virumaandi* 01:30:33-1:30:37) Both Virumaandi and bull possess a corybantic propensity and sustain transmutation, when they have contact with others. It is seen when Thevar tries controlling Virumaandi and keep him under his control, which results to act him as a pawn. The impact of protagonist's behaviour is expressed as,

For most viewers, enjoyment comes from the moral dispositions that they feel toward the characters. If a character (usually the hero or the protagonist) is seen as positive, viewers empathize with him or her. They enjoy the film if good things happen to the character but do not when bad things occur (particularly at the end). On the other hand, if a character is viewed as negative, viewers experience gratification when bad things happen to him or her, since these events are felt to be justified by the character's evilness. (Young 117)

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The film provokes a powerful emotional response amongst the audience. It is an ode to humanity. When Kothaala Thevar confabulates on dharma and destiny, Virumaandi conveys death, fear of death and destiny as his intentions. The movie is given additional screen time in order to demonstrate how capital punishment is brought about by malfeasance of power. At the same time, grandiose action sequences of prison riots detract from the message and instead provide us with psychological states of narrative necessity. The narrative, presented by protagonist Virumaandi, is prioritized by the writer. Kamal Haasan does not attempt to claim there are two sides of a coin in the story, whereas he clearly demarcates the truth and lying by imparting adequate wretchedness to the protagonist. Thus, it proves that the acting and physical performances are not the reflections of a mental state, rather they are factors which give the third degree to audience's reasoning ability.

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