

# Unravelling the Shades of Love, Obsession and Bloodshed in the Vanga Universe: A Psychoanalytical Reading of the Movie *Animal*, with an Emphasis on the Protagonist Rannvijay Singh

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## Abstract

This paper presents a qualitative, descriptive psychoanalytic reading of Sandeep Reddy Vanga's film *Animal* (2023), focusing on the psychological architecture of the protagonist, Rannvijay Singh. Drawing upon Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian archetypal theory, Bowlby's attachment theory, trauma studies, and scholarship on toxic masculinity, the study interprets cinematic scenes, dialogue, and narrative structure as data to trace the formative impact of childhood neglect and paternal absence on adult behaviour. The research argues that the film presents a sustained depiction of psychological fragmentation, in which love, possessiveness, and violence are closely connected. Rannvijay's moral decline is analyzed as resulting from unresolved attachment wounds, narcissistic injury, and cultural expressions of hegemonic masculinity. The methodology involves close textual and thematic analysis of selected scenes and character development of the protagonist Rannvijay, employing cinematic representation as a basis for psychoanalytic interpretation. The findings indicate that the movie *Animal* reflects and perpetuates problematic cultural narratives about masculinity. The film also provides a valuable case for examining the narrative construction of trauma and intergenerational dynamics in Popular Indian cinema during the contemporary times. The paper concludes by considering implications for both film studies and mental health discourse.

**Keywords:** *Animal* (film), psychoanalysis, attachment theory, toxic masculinity, trauma, masculinity studies, Indian cinema

## Introduction

Sandeep Reddy Vanga's films have provoked recurring debates about representations of masculinity, desire, and violence in contemporary Indian cinema. Where *Kabir Singh* (2019) raised questions about romantic obsession and cinematic endorsement of regressive masculinities, *Animal* (2023) intensifies the register—offering a cinematic world in which filial longing, betrayal, and spectacular violence converge. This research paper examines the film 'Animal' as a cultural text. It explores how the film presents pathology as a spectacle and shows how the main character, Rannvijay Singh, is shaped by both personal trauma and patriarchal expectations.

The study is not an attempt to diagnose a fictional character clinically, but rather to interpret how psychoanalytic concepts and contemporary theories of attachment and masculinity can elucidate the film's narrative choices and thematic operations. By placing Vanga's film within a lineage of Indian films that complexly entwine love and violence, the paper reads *Animal* as both symptomatic of broader social anxieties about masculinity and as an active contributor to their shaping.

## Theoretical Framework

This research draws from three complementary theoretical clusters: classical psychoanalysis, attachment and trauma theory, and critical masculinities studies. From psychoanalysis, Freudian concepts of the Oedipus complex, repression, and defense mechanisms provide language for understanding intrapsychic conflicts and the primacy of early object relations (Freud, 1916/1917). Jungian formulations—especially the notion of the shadow and the father complex—are used to account for the projection and externalisation of unacceptable impulses into violent action (Jung, 1959). Attachment theory theorises how early caregiver availability shapes adult relational templates; Bowlby's model and later empirical refinements by Ainsworth show how inconsistent caregiving can produce anxious-preoccupied patterns and hyperactivation strategies in adulthood (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978). This research draws from three complementary theoretical clusters: classical psychoanalysis, attachment and trauma theory, and critical masculinities studies. Trauma studies (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014) explore how intense early experiences can disrupt emotional regulation, sometimes leading to physical and behavioral expressions of anger. Research on hegemonic masculinity and toxic patriarchy (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) offers a social perspective, placing Rannvijay's personal struggles within larger systems that promote dominance, emotional restraint, and aggressive protection as typical male ideals in a patriarchal society.

## Research Methodology

The present paper uses a qualitative, descriptive, and interpretative psychoanalytic approach. The study relies on textual and thematic analysis of the film \*Animal\*, considering elements like dialogue, mise-en-scène, montage, performance, and soundtrack as data for exploring psychological meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This method follows psychoanalytic film criticism, which applies theoretical ideas to uncover deeper meanings instead of aiming for statistically generalizable results (Elsaesser & Hagener, 2010).

Selected sequences were transcribed and coded for recurring motifs: paternal absence, revenge enactments, intimate violence, possessiveness, and moments of affective collapse. The analysis is descriptive, hermeneutic, and reflexive: interpretations are explicitly theory-laden and the researcher's positionality—acknowledging the interpretative imposition of psychoanalytic categories on a text—has been considered. Keeping ethical aspects of the research in mind, the study pays careful attention to how concepts regarding mental health is represented, making sure not to support any negative stereotypes. It looks at the portrayal of the character critically and discusses how it might affect the way people view mental health in general.

## Analysis and Discussion

### Psychoanalytic Dimensions: Freudian and Jungian Perspectives



Figure 5: Jung's Model of the Psyche.

<https://medium.com/@rohitlokwni17/understanding-the-differences-between-freuds-and-carl-jungs-philosophies-ea34f66fc52a>

A psychoanalytic approach focuses on how the protagonist's early relationships shaped his mind and personality. The film opens with a series of early-life images and flashbacks—distribution of chocolates at school, the abandoned birthday cake, and the child's plaintive letter to his father—that function as formative signifiers. From a Freudian vantage point, these moments index unresolved libidinal investments in the paternal figure that are never adequately mourned or symbolised (Freud, 1916/1917). The intensity of Rannvijay's love for his father is not merely filial affection but becomes structured like a compulsive repetition: an attempt to repair, reenact, and finally to surpass the paternal absence through deeds that demand recognition. Freud's account of mourning and melancholia is instructive: where mourning allows the ego to detach from a lost object, melancholia arrests the process and can convert object loss into a hostile relation (Freud, 1917). Rannvijay's oscillation between adoring filial rhetoric and homicidal rage suggests that the lack of symbolic reparation produces a personality in which love and aggression are fused rather than differentiated.

Jung's notion of the father complex and the shadow supplements this analysis. Where Freudian theory foregrounds intrapsychic drives and object relations, Jung registers how cultural archetypes sediment into the psyche. The father—here an authoritarian industrial patriarch—is both an ideal and a source of wound. The shadow, Jung's term for the disowned aspects of the self, appears in Rannvijay as the eruption of violent, unregulated impulses when the normative channels of social recognition fail him (Jung, 1959). The film's recurrent emphasis on masks, doubles (the body double

episode), and performative masculinity visually stages the split between social persona and shadow. Instead of integrating this shadow through symbolic work, Rannvijay externalises it—projecting danger outwards in spectacular acts of revenge.

### **Attachment, Trauma, and Emotional Neglect**

Attachment theory gives empirical specificity to the developmental dynamics the film dramatizes. Bowlby's synthesis links caregiver responsiveness to the emergence of internal working models—cognitive-affective templates that inform expectations of others (Bowlby, 1969). Ainsworth's formulations identified anxious-ambivalent (preoccupied) strategies in children whose caregivers are inconsistently available (Ainsworth et al., 1978). Rannvijay's childhood memories—waiting for a father who never arrives, being punished for small offences while craving paternal validation—map onto an anxious attachment style. In adult relational contexts, these early templates translate into hyperactivation strategies: intense proximity-seeking, heightened sensitivity to perceived abandonment, and emotional volatility when attachment security is threatened. The textual evidence is compelling. Rannvijay's marriage to Gitanjali is not anchored in mutual attunement but in a request for an attachment figure who can reassure him of his worth. When his father refuses to sanction the marriage and later when betrayals appear (real or imagined), Rannvijay's defensive repertoire—surveillance, interrogation, control—activates. These are classic manifestations of an anxious-preoccupied adult style in which the fear of loss is omnipresent and prompting controlling behaviour becomes a misguided attempt to secure attachment.

Trauma theory further nuances the picture. Judith Herman (1992) emphasises how traumatic experiences derail the integration of affect and memory. Early relational trauma—experienced as chronic neglect or repeated emotional unavailability—does not always produce classic post-traumatic symptom clusters; often it produces enduring disturbances in affect regulation, identity coherence, and relational trust. Van der Kolk's clinical and neurobiological work (2014) supports the observation that trauma is often enacted somatically and behaviorally; rage may be the body's way of articulating unsymbolised grief. \*Animal\* stages such enactments: Rannvijay's violence can be understood not simply as moral failing but as symptomatic of a history of dysregulated affect that has never been given symbolic treatment.

### **Masculinity, Control, and Toxic Patriarchy**

Rannvijay's subjectivity cannot be disentangled from the cultural grammar of hegemonic masculinity that structures the film's diegesis. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity highlights how particular male behaviours—authority, emotional suppression, violent protection—are valorised within patriarchal orders (Connell, 1995). Vanga's film mobilises this grammar repeatedly: the protagonist is idealised as an 'alpha' whose very *raison d'être* is to protect and to dominate. The film naturalises violence as a masculine idiom—revenge becomes a rite of manhood rather than a moral aberration.

Specific sequences underline how gendered expectations produce suffering for both men and women. Rannvijay's objectification of women (the crude sexual remarks to Gitanjali), the shaming of menstruation, and his belief that marriage must contain 'fear and control' exemplify toxic patriarchal norms. These acts are not isolated lapses but

structurally embedded choices that index a cultural ecology where male identity is validated by dominance rather than emotional reciprocity. From a critical perspective, the film thus both depicts and potentially normalises forms of domination unless the audience actively interrogates its representational politics.

The ‘alpha’ rhetoric in the film—invocations of predatory metaphors, hunting, and the moral code of the strong—works as mythmaking. It projects a biological essentialism about male behaviour while occluding the histories of social learning and attachment that more accurately explain aggressive enactments. The danger of such cinematic mythmaking is twofold: it individualises systemic problems by focusing on a singular heroic figure and it aestheticises violence into emotional catharsis for audiences who may identify with the fantasy of righteous retribution.

### **Violence, Moral Collapse, and Narcissism**

The film’s spectacular violence is narratively entwined with Rannvijay’s moral collapse. The theoretical lens of narcissistic pathology helps explain why violent acts are accompanied by an absence of remorse and a pervasive entitlement. Object relations theorists and self-psychologists have documented how chronic failure in early mirroring can produce a fragile self that demands grandiose restitution (Kohut, 1971; Kernberg, 1975). Rannvijay’s pronouncements—‘I will slit his throat’—are compensatory fantasies that shore up a threatened sense of self by enacting dominance in the external world.

Moreover, the film stages an ethically troubling logic in which murder is rationalised as progress rather than punishing wrongdoing. This displacement of moral responsibility is a recurrent defense in severe personality pathology: the internal world is split into good and bad objects, and aggression is projected onto the latter. Rannvijay’s inability to feel remorse—illustrated when he cajoles his sister to remarry and minimizes the death of her husband—signals a failure of empathic attunement and a corresponding moral impoverishment. This lack of conscience is cinematicized through the film’s *mise-en-scène*: close-ups that flatten interiority, montage that prioritises action over reflective aftermath, and soundtrack choices that sentimentalise violence.

At the same time, it is important to be cautious about pathologising violent masculinity without recognising structural contributors. While psychoanalytic categories help us read the protagonist’s inner architecture, socio-economic pressures, family power structures, and the legitimising rhetoric of honour and revenge in certain cultural contexts also animate violent choices. A multi-level reading that integrates individual psychodynamics with social analysis better accounts for the film’s complexity.

### **Redemption, Optimism, and Psychological Fragmentation**

The film intermittently gestures toward redemption—through the father’s apology, the protagonist’s brief displays of vulnerability, and an ostensible wish to relocate the family to the United States for medical treatment. Yet these moments are fragile and often quickly subsumed beneath the dominant narrative of revenge. From the perspective of defense mechanisms, Rannvijay’s hyper-optimism (the conviction he will survive, secure a new heart, and thus ‘restart’) operates as a form of denial and magical thinking. Rather than enabling growth, the hope is used as a shield against psychic pain.

The film's ending—ambiguous in its moral stance—fails to offer a robust process of symbolic reconciliation. The father's late apology mitigates but does not fully repair the structural pathways that produced the son's pathology. Clinically informed readings would suggest that symbolic repair requires sustained relational rework, therapeutic intervention, and social acknowledgement of harm—elements that the film significantly underplays. As a cultural product, *Animal* therefore stages a tragic loop: individual trauma yields violence, which in turn damages relational fabrics without offering mechanisms of social or moral repair.

### **Implications for Film Studies and Mental Health Discourse**

Two interrelated implications arise. First, *Animal* exemplifies how mainstream cinema can naturalise harmful representations of masculinity while simultaneously offering rich material for psychological critique. Scholars and critics should therefore approach such films dialectically—acknowledging their aesthetic and narrative power while critiquing their social costs. Second, the film's depiction of psychological disturbance risks furthering stigma when violent behaviour is simplistically equated with mental illness. Responsible criticism must distinguish between symptomatic enactments of trauma and clinical psychosis, and avoid equating cinematic violence with psychiatric pathology in ways that mislead general audiences.

For mental health professionals and public educators, the film presents an opportunity to initiate dialogues about attachment, intergenerational trauma, and healthy models of masculinity. Film screenings accompanied by expert panels or public-facing explanatory material could help audiences contextualise cinematic dramatizations within clinical and social frameworks, reducing misinterpretation and potential stigma.

### **Conclusion**

This paper read *Animal* through a psychoanalytic and socio-cultural lens to argue that the film stages a tragic entanglement of love, obsession, and sanctioned violence. Rannvijay Singh's character trajectory—rooted in childhood abandonment, narcissistic wounding, and hegemonic constructions of masculinity—demonstrates how private anguish and public performance of power can become mutually reinforcing. While the film offers narratively potent moments of vulnerability, its larger economy privileges spectacular retribution over processes of symbolic repair. The analysis underscores the importance of integrative readings that combine intrapsychic theory with social critique: only by attending to both psychic histories and cultural formations can scholars fully account for the film's appeal and its social consequences. Future research might compare the film to other regional and global films that link paternal absence with violent heroism, investigate audience reception empirically, or explore interventions for more nuanced cinematic portrayals of trauma and recovery.

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