'Kirumi': IFFLA Review

Writer-director Anucharan Murugaiyan’s debut is an urban thriller with more on its mind than just cops and crooks.

With a title that translates as “virus,” Tamil-language Kirumi takes the acerbic view that official corruption is endemic to law enforcement agencies, a perspective that’s not limited to Indian regional cinema. Although Anucharan Murugaiyan’s film doesn't offer an especially innovative interpretation of the familiar crime genre, it’s absorbing enough to warrant further festival play and may also find favor on digital platforms beyond South Asia.

Murugaiyan’s antithero is Kathir (played by the actor Kathir), an inveterate loafer who relies on his endlessly patient seamstress wife Anitha (Reshmi Menon) and sponging off his drinking buddies to get by, apparently unmotivated even by the necessity of supporting his infant daughter. Instead, he attempts to stretch his meager pocket money by gambling at a local card room. His arrogant attitude earns him a reputation for being a poor loser, as well as a harsh attitude adjustment from the gangster running the racket after he mouths off once too often.
A chance encounter with Prabhakar (Charlie) reveals that his friend has been concealing his lucrative work as an informant for the Chennai police department. When Kathir asks for a recommendation, he’s introduced to the local police commander, who puts the young man on his crew of lowlifes involved in various shake-down and black-market scams. Collecting a portion of the bribes and protection money paid to the cops, Kathir proves himself a capable snitch and extortionist, earning an undercover assignment to entrap the card room operators, who can afford to pay the police a hefty fine to stay in business. Underestimating both the ruthlessness of his adversaries and the venality of the police, Kathir is quickly drawn into a local turf war that threatens not only his new livelihood, but the safety of his family as well.

Among the distinctions of the accomplished script, co-written by Murugaiyan and M. Manikandan, is its ability to integrate a variety of widely tolerated incidents of official criminality into the context of daily life, making them appear entirely routine. Prabhakar and Kathir, deeply familiar with the intricacies of widespread corruption, consider its prevalence an opportunity for profitability rather than an obstacle.

Playing his namesake character, Kathir makes for a particularly avid small-time crook, effortlessly cataloging useful information for the police officers he smoothly ingratiates himself with by dint of feigned respect and subtle manipulation. As his long-suffering wife, Menon graciously provides a hint of moral guidance, a role similarly fulfilled with even more authority by Tamil film veteran Charlie as Kathir’s father-figure and underworld guide.

Murugaiyan pulls together an experienced crew on his first feature, who imbue Kirumi with a heightened naturalism that consistently hints at the risks lurking below the surface of Kathir’s carefree scamming, until they inevitably erupt into full-blown crisis.

**Venue:** Indian Film Festival of Los Angeles

**Production company:** JPR Films

**Cast:** Kathir, Reshmi Menon, Charlie

**Director:** Anucharan Murugaiyan

**Screenwriters:** M. Manikandan, Anucharan Murugaiyan

**Producers:** S. Rajendran, L. Prithviraj, K. Jayaraman, M. Jayaraman

**Executive producers:** N. Subbu, Sethu Pandian

**Director of photography:** Arul Vincent

**Editor:** Anucharan Murugaiyan

**Music:** KNot rated, 105 minutes