

Negotiating Spiritual and Material Dimensions of Environmentalism in Third World Narratives: Eco Marxist Postcolonial Critique and Spiritual Ecology in *Kantara*

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Abstract

Over the past few decades Eco Marxism and indigenous spiritual heritage have developed an intersectional space between them which has been debated over significantly in the discourse of environmentalism. Western ecocritical frameworks primarily adopt either a sociopolitical approach or an overtly aestheticized approach owing to the popularity of deep ecology. However, none of them could completely resonate with the exclusive intricacies of third world environmentalism and its evolving challenges. In the critical discourse of postcolonial ecocriticism, the spiritual dimension emerges as a pivotal analytical lens through which indigenous ontological frameworks are interrogated and understood. This epistemological approach foregrounds the intrinsic cosmological and spiritual worldviews endemic to postcolonial nations, challenging Eurocentric environmental narratives by centering indigenous metaphysical conceptualizations of nature, landscape, and ecological interrelationality. In the last few years, the fastly evolving field of ecocritical cinema has provided a fertile ground to address these complex theoretical intersections. It is in this context that movies like Rishab Shetty's Kantara exemplify a perfect blend of the sociopolitical critique of the exploitation of the environment and a spiritual understanding of man-nature bond. This paper attempts to present a nuanced investigation of the intersection between Eco Marxism, postcolonial criticism and Ecocinema theory to negotiate the differences between the sociopolitical and the spiritual dimensions of the current environmental debate primarily in the third world nations.

Keywords: Eco-marxism, Indian knowledge systems, indigenous rights, postcolonial-ecocriticism, *Kantara*.

Over the past few decades Eco Marxism and indigenous spiritual heritage have developed an intersectional space between them which has been debated over significantly in the discourse of environmentalism. Western ecocritical frameworks primarily adopt either a sociopolitical approach or an overtly aestheticized approach owing to the popularity of deep ecology. However, none of them could completely resonate with the exclusive intricacies of third world environmentalism and its evolving challenges. In the critical discourse of postcolonial ecocriticism, the spiritual dimension emerges as a pivotal analytical lens through which indigenous ontological frameworks are interrogated and understood. This epistemological approach foregrounds the intrinsic cosmological and spiritual worldviews endemic to postcolonial nations, challenging Eurocentric environmental narratives by centering indigenous metaphysical conceptualizations of nature, landscape, and ecological interrelationality. For the indigenous communities, nature is not only a source of livelihood rather it's an entity which provides them with spiritual and livable identity. However, mainstream environmental debates yet could not acknowledge the potential of human nature as both material and metaphysical space. One of the primary challenges in this debate is the gap between the materialist ideology of Eco Marxism and the inherently spiritual notion with which the indigenous cultures align themselves with. Though Eco Marxism vehemently critiques the exploitation of the environment owing to the capitalist systems, it could neither fathom or appreciate the significance of the deeply spiritual, non-material, sacred connections that the indigenous communities develop with nature. These communities often attach a spiritual value on the land or the forests which often transcends beyond economic and political concerns. This apparent divide between these two ecological ideologies leads to the requirement of an integrated framework that values both the material as well as spiritual dimensions of the contemporary ecological challenges.

In the last few years, the fastly evolving field of ecocritical cinema has provided a fertile ground to address these complex theoretical intersections. It is in this context that movies like Rishab Shetty's

Kantara exemplify a perfect blend of the sociopolitical critique of the exploitation of the environment and a spiritual understanding of man-nature bond. The movie is a compelling narrative that investigates the intersection of human beings and nature within the spiritual realm, demonstrating how the environmental everyday struggle of these regions is deeply woven with indigenous belief systems.

This paper attempts to present a nuanced investigation of the intersection between Eco Marxism, postcolonial criticism and Ecocinema theory to negotiate the differences between the sociopolitical and the spiritual dimensions of the current environmental debate primarily in the third world nations. Films like *Kantara* facilitate a better understanding of the intricate ways in which indigenous cultures deal with environmental challenges within the purview of the spiritual paradigm. By employing this interdisciplinary approach, the present paper aims to explore the possible intersectional spaces that the convergence of the material as well as the spiritual dimensions of the debate opens up. Such a lens of analysis exposes the potential of cinema to make the audience reconsider the nature of their relationship with the natural and mystical environment and the interactions between the two. However, critics like Andrew Hageman caution against reducing ecocinema to mere aesthetic or moral messages, warning that this approach risks overlooking the contradictions within cinematic representations of nature, particularly the tension between environmental advocacy and the ecological impact of the film industry itself (Monami and Hageman 203).

Cultural portrayals in mass media have mostly been rendered to suit and reproduce the capitalist status quo. In 'Cinema as Eco-critical Criticism: Can Movies Represent the Conscience of the Anthropocene?' Pop (2020) questions how cinema is to fulfil its function as an intellectual director of global consciousness that promotes human values advancing towards a progressive future, when the movie industry is just another extension of the capitalist expansion in different domains. However, both Indian and global cinema in recent times, are coming out of the capitalist mould to critically engage with Ecocinema and often critiquing the capitalist agenda through nuanced cinema, especially in the 21st century. The roots of this bold endeavors may be found emerging in the late 1990's through the works of Sean Cubitt, Scott MacDonald, Adrian Ivakhiv and others, who explore the complex man - nature relationship through cinema and its role as a reflection of this relation. Scott MacDonald's concept of ecocinema positions films as spaces for ecological respite, counteracting the consumerist dominance of commercial media by fostering ecological consciousness and a deeper connection with nature (MacDonald 3). Jennifer Fay on the other hand refers to cinema "technology of the Anthropocene" and reflects on the duality of cinema promoting environmental awareness also contributing to ecological degradation through production and consumption (Fay 231). In this context, Ecocinema can highlight the issues of the environment, but their commercial conditions complicates its capacity to genuinely engage with ecological issues. To be critically effective such cinema has to go beyond the aesthetic and commercial aspects to highlight the larger socio-economic-cultural contexts that shape the narratives surrounding environment and indigenous issues.

This paper argues against an over simplistic interpretation of *Kantara* as just another narrative in the ecological genre, but posits the ontological differences and cultural proxies portrayed by the movie within the ecological cinema genre. *Kantara* may be analysed within the Ecocinema framework on two primary accounts- Firstly, the complex social and ecological relationships portrayed in the rural Indian society negotiating with the state and modernity, and Secondly, the linkages between myth, mythology, spiritual traditions and cultural practices depicted in the film. The usurpation of natural resources by the state and its consequent impact on local community and nature is examined on one hand, while the relation between indigenous spiritual, mystic and shamanistic practices (rooted in Indian Knowledge System traditions) with the land, forest and livelihood of the *Tulu* people of rural Tulu Nadu region is explored on the other hand. The former serves as a contemporary tool of critiquing capitalist expansion in the name of modernity and its consequent exploitation of nature through the state apparatus, while the latter explores the traditional Indian knowledge practices like *Bhoota Kola*, *Kambala* and other depictions which serves as a cultural tool to showcase the inherent connection between the indigenous people with nature, at the same time also portraying the significance of their sacred traditions and mystical practices in protecting nature and providing alternative ecological perspectives.

In contemporary studies, the material exploitation of nature is examined using a Marxian or Postcolonial lens while mysticism and the metaphysical connections to nature is scrutinized from an Indigenous cultural perspective, but they are juxtaposed at odds with each other, whereas the two perspectives ought to be considered within a common framework along the lines of Ecological self-

theory which emphasizes the profound interconnectedness between humans and the environment, and other Ecocritical discourses. In this context, *Kantara* exposes the tensions between these perspectives and implores for a ground of assimilation of the materialist, cultural and socio-economic agents as well as the mystical and spiritual dimensions of environment and indigenous knowledge systems.

In "Examining (In)justice, Environmental Activism, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Indian Film *Kantara*" Karmakar asserts the importance of engaging with indigenous philosophy, beliefs and practices which perceive nature as a living entity with spiritual significance, rather than only those which conceptualise nature as a resource to be protected and managed (Karmakar 3). Such notions challenge the commodification of nature in the major ecological studies, which is in turn a challenge to the larger capitalist framework. Cinema like *Kantara* thus, must be analysed from the larger perspective of the indigenous knowledge framework, rather than a mere perspective of class conflict and capitalist expansion, to understand the social and cultural aspects rooted with the ecological issues. Karmakar's focus on indigenous epistemologies raises important questions on understanding such cinema with a mix of lenses that holistically address environmental and social concerns. It also raises the critical tensions between the frameworks of analyses, the epistemologies and the socio-political dimensions of ecological critique. *Kantara's* social and cultural narrative, that is intertwined with its spiritual and mystical elements, also deal with the material concerns of protecting the forest, the rights of the indigenous people, and resisting the state apparatus. It is indeed a challenge to negotiate between these elements and create a holistic framework of environmental activism that represents the co-existence of these intertwined elements.

This paper examines this gap in literature and attempts a nuanced analysis of *Kantara*, moving beyond a simple categorization of ecological and mystical concerns, but instead explores the deeper connections between the two, which ultimately merge with environmental protection and justice for the indigenous people. Thus, the paper attempts to reconcile the seemingly different positions of environmentalism and indigenous spiritualism, to offer a holistic analysis of *Kantara's* ecological, philosophical and social motifs. To this end, we primarily engage with two different theoretical traditions: First the Eco Marxist critique of capitalist exploitation leading to degradation of the environment, and Second the Postcolonial Ecocriticism which sheds light on the man nature relationship in postcolonial contexts. To these two divergent perspectives, we add the lens of Indian Knowledge Systems to negotiate between the two, the role of spiritual and mystical elements in harbouring an inclusive relationship between the natural, material and metaphysical environments.

Eco-Marxism, developed by scholars such as John Bellamy Foster, James O'Connor and others extend classical Marxist thought to encompass ecological concerns, not descriptively but rather argumentatively. It posits that the capitalist mode of production is fundamentally at odds with environmental sustainability, leading to what Marx termed the "metabolic rift" between human society and nature (Foster 23). Marx, in his 1867 book "*Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*," articulates a perception of nature defined in terms of its material value. This materialist perception is further advanced by

D. Pepper, in "*Eco-Socialism: From Deep Ecology to Social Justice*," where he argues how nature is regarded merely as a material resource contributing to production, disregarding its intrinsic worth beyond materiality (Pepper 4). Scholars like Clark and Foster argue that the present global climate breakdown results more from the 'capitalist greed' of profit maximization than from resource scarcity. Thus the focus of most of the Ecomarxists particularly concentrates on the material effects of the capitalist expansion on the marginalised and the indigenous communities. However, despite the vehement critique of capitalism, the Eco Marxist approach could not acknowledge or appreciate the spiritual or ontological dimensions of Third world environmentalism considering the intrinsic human-nature relationship among the indigenous communities.

Contrary to it, Postcolonial criticism as argued by Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin not only critiques the Western environmental discourses, highlighting their often exclusionary and hegemonic nature, but emphasizes the importance of indigenous knowledge systems in environmental conservation (200). Furthermore, postcolonial ecocriticism interrogates the representation of nature in postcolonial literature and media, seeking to uncover the ways in which these narratives engage with and challenge dominant environmental ideologies. It focuses on the need to incorporate indigenous world views into broader environmental discourses, specifically emphasizing on the non exploitative ways of interaction with nature often considering the significance of the spiritual real within which the human-nature relationships operate in indigenous communities. Postcolonial

Ecocriticism thus challenges the dominant environmental ideologies advocated by the western world.

By integrating these two polar critical frameworks, the materialist critique of capitalist environmental degradation as expounded by Eco Marxism and postcolonial Criticism's focus on indigenous culture and spiritual relationships with nature- this paper attempts to investigate the conflict and tension that emerges in Rishab Shetty's 2022 movie *Kantara*. This present paper seeks to critically bridge the gap that arises in the movie owing to the conflicting principles of the two ecological approaches and explores how *Kantara* resolves the conflict between socio ecological concerns and the indigenous spiritual practices. The suggested negotiation between these polar viewpoints can promise a more holistic understanding in context of Third world environmentalism. Therefore, both these critical frameworks are approached in an unconventional and deconstructive manner through the reading of this movie to expose the inherent binary in the concerned ecological discourses. By suggesting a non hierarchical and dialogic negotiation between these frameworks, this paper challenges their traditional applications leading to a more fluid and multifaceted understanding of the current ecological debate considering both the socio-political and spiritual dimensions. Moreover, The paper employs ecocinema theory and its evolving features as the most potential paraphernalia to approach the debate. Ecocinema theory further enhances the film's ecological engagement. Cinema is not only an aesthetic representation of nature but a weapon for generating ecological consciousness. *Kantara* presents an alternative to the commodified, capitalist narratives often found in mainstream cinema. The cinematographic tactics in movie such as the vibrant portrayal of the rituals, folklore and the vivid description of the forest as both a physical and spiritual entity exemplify the unconventional capacity of ecocinema to go beyond the mere aestheticization of nature for the westernized audience and foster deeper contemplation of the exclusivity of third world environmentalism.

Hitherto research evaluating *Kantara* as ecocinema has involved both the socio-ecological aspects that the movie entails and the elements of mythology and mysticism that operate as a potential for addressing the ecological concerns the movie raises. However, none of these approaches have seriously addressed the inherent contradiction that lies between these perceptions from which the movie is approached. Gautam Karmakar asserts in his paper "*Examining (In)justice, Environmental Activism, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems in the Indian Film Kantara*," effective environmental activism must be grounded in "indigenous philosophies, ontologies, and epistemologies" (3). This assertion underscores the necessity of incorporating indigenous perspectives to accurately represent and address environmental issues.

The intersection of postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-Marxist critique, and ecocinema theory provides a robust framework for analyzing *Kantara*. This multifaceted approach allows us to explore how the film negotiates the tensions between capitalist exploitation, state power, and indigenous rights, while also examining its representation of nature and traditional knowledge systems. A pivotal contradiction in *Kantara* is its deployment of mythology and indigenous knowledge systems within an eco-Marxist framework. This intertwining of mystical and eco-Marxist approaches is justified through a revised Marxist perspective in a postcolonial context. The movie creates an environment that reflects the deep bond between indigenous peoples and their traditional lands, recognizing the significance of "native ontologies" in shaping their worldview and relationship with the earth. (Karmakar 122). In this manner, the film interweaves eco marxist tendencies with indigenous epistemologies developing a space that is both material and epistemological.

The cinematic world of *Kantara* is set in the picturesque Tulu Nadu region spanning from Kasaragod in Kerala to parts of coastal Karnataka, presenting a rich tapestry of mythological elements interwoven with contemporary socio-political themes. This analysis explores the film's engagement with indigenous cultural practices, ecological concerns, and the tension between tradition and modernity. At the heart of the narrative lies a triangular tension between state authority (personified by the forest official), aristocratic influence (manifested in the landlord figure), and the native populace. This three-way power dynamic serves as a cinematic illustration of Karl Marx's concept of "metabolic rift" - the estrangement between human civilization and the natural world. The forest department's efforts to restrict villagers' access to forest resources align with Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence" - a gradual, often invisible form of environmental degradation that disproportionately affects marginalized populations (Nixon 45). Yet the movie problematizes this eco marxist critique by integrating indigenous spiritual practices with the materialist analysis of the environmental degradation and socio economic marginalization that the people in the village undergo. This synthesis of the material and the spiritual in the movie proves vital in interrogating the rigid boundaries between

secular marxist environmentalism and the mythological aspects of indigenous knowledge.

Kantara's depiction of the Bhoota Kola ritual and the Kambala buffalo race serves a dual function. From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, these practices represent indigenous knowledge systems that foster a harmonious relationship with nature, aligning with what Joan Martinez-Alier termed the "environmentalism of the poor" (Martinez 10). Simultaneously, these cultural practices function as sites of resistance against the encroachment of capitalist and state power, resonating with eco-Marxist notions of class struggle and resistance to capital's appropriation of nature (O'Connor 1998). The *Bhoota Kola* festival where Shiva the protagonist is possessed by the *Daiva*, serves as a focal point for exploring ideas of spirituality and community consciousness. This ritual practice bears striking similarities to other regional traditions: Theyyam art form of northern Kerala, sharing commonalities in music, costumes, and trance elements. *Velichapadu*, the oracular tradition in Kerala temples, which similarly acts as an intermediary between deities and devotees (Panigrahi 2). *Kola*, also known as *Daiva Kola* or *Néma*, is an animistic form of spirit worship prevalent in the coastal districts of Tulu Nadu, parts of Malénadu in Karnataka, and Kasargod in Northern Kerala. This highly stylized dance ritual is performed to honor local deities revered by the Tulu-speaking population.

The possession of Shiva's consciousness by the spirit of *Daiva* demonstrates a synthesis between the secular and the spiritual which disrupts the conflict between eco marxist (materialist) resistance and the local spiritual rituals which are often aestheticized or romanticized by western ecocritics annihilating any possible relation they can have with the material world. Thus a new negotiating space between the two ecological paradigms persuades the western ecocritics to acknowledge the significance of the indigenous practices in the discourse of third world environmentalism. His initial confrontations with forest officials and the zamindar reflect a traditional Marxist approach to class struggle. However, his eventual embodiment of the *Guliga Daiva* during the Bhoota Kola ritual represents what Ariel Salleh might term as an "embodied materialism" (Salleh 3) synthesizing material and spiritual forms of resistance. This narrative arc challenges the binary often maintained between eco-Marxist and mystical approaches to nature, suggesting a more holistic understanding of environmental justice.

This ritual is a powerful manifestation of indigenous cosmologies that resonates with Postcolonial criticism's focus on the relevance of indigenous knowledge systems which helps in developing a sustainable as well as spiritually awakened relationship with nature (Huggan and Tiffin 200). The forest in the movie is not a physical entity but a metaphysical space, a "mysterious forest" as the word "*Kantara*" in Kannada means, where spiritual and ecological meet with each other. Director Rishab Shetty's choice of the title *Kantara*, underscores the film's engagement with indigenous cosmologies. As Shetty notes, the term is "used in Yakshagana [a theatrical dance-art form] too, where we call a very mysterious forest '*Kantara*' (quoted in Karmakar 120). This linguistic choice emphasizes the film's rootedness in local cultural traditions and its attempt to articulate environmental concerns through an indigenous lens of Eco-Marxism and indigenous cosmologies.

However, this indigenous cosmology generates a conflict within the Ecomarxist paradigm as it conventionally emphasizes on the material conditions causing environmental degradation often overlooking the spiritual or ontological aspects. The film's resolution, which relies on mystical intervention to restore justice, raises important questions about the role of indigenous spirituality in environmental and social struggles. While this approach might seem at odds with traditional Marxist materialism, it aligns with what Arturo Escobar terms "pluriversal" approaches to ecology, which recognize multiple ways of knowing and being in relation to nature (Escobar 137). Employing Ariel Sarah's concept of "embodied materialism", it can be argued that *Kantara* combines the spiritual and the material to generate a holistic form of resistance.

The vivid cinematographic representation of the Bhoot Kola festival employs various visual techniques such as intense close ups, rhythmic drumming, dynamic movements to attract the attention of viewers towards the trance-like state of Shiva. The ritual is a spectacular portrayal of inherently rooted spiritual connection between the forest and the forest. This cinematic portrayal of the ritual questions the eco marxist focus on material conditions by incorporating the mystical aspect of resistance and thus presents an alternative mode of engagement with nature. The vibrant depiction of the ritual informed with its spiritual significance brings out the role of ecocinema in combining the materialist with spiritual resistance within the same narrative frame, transcending the binary opposition of these two approaches.

Another point of convergence of the material and the indigenous ontologies emerges with Postcolonial Criticism's deployment of indigenous epistemologies in the film's portrayal of land disputes and forest governance in India. As Bhattacharya et al. (2024) note "Forest governance in India has been characterized

by prolonged bureaucratic intervention into the land and livelihoods of [indigenous] communities. Contemporary forest regimes in India have been established through the denial of forest-dwelling communities' identities, both during and after colonial rule. The introduction of the character of the Forest Officer, Murali symbolizes the bureaucratic state driven conservation efforts which is a continuation of the colonial legacy of forest governance in India. Murali's initiative of demarcating the forest boundaries restricting villagers' access to the resources of the forests reverberates the ongoing colonial supremacy over indigenous autonomy. The movie's presentation of the forest as a site of legal and spiritual contestation demonstrates the tension between modern state power and local indigenous ways of life. However, the Forest Rights Act 2006 has, to some extent, mitigated this trend by addressing 'historical injustice' to forest dwellers" (1).

The zamindar's take on the land dispute further complicates the persisting debate between the material and the spiritual tendencies of the two different ecocritical frameworks. While the state's bureaucratic measures to demarcate forest land and the forest officer's action can be understood as a capitalist expansion using the state apparatus, the inherent zamindari traditions also provide a complex obstacle in the path of the people's land rights. The zamindar character, Devendra Suttooru, is deceitful and vengeful, but perhaps more dangerous than the state apparatus, as his real intentions are masked under his seemingly benevolent nature. The zamindar's perspective on land encroachment is that the land belongs to him because his ancestor was a king and he plays the innocent villagers against the forest officials, in his bid to usurp the tribal forest lands for himself, and this land encroachment in rural India remains a critical conflict throughout the film, exploring the perspectives of the zamindars, indigenous people, and the government. The zamindar believed that the land which is accessed by the local people in the name of Daiva is a deliberate deification of the forest which he regards just a material entity and not a metaphysical space as worshipped by the villagers. His claim, therefore, reflects the Marxist critique of land as a commodity, something to be fought over and controlled for profit, rather than a communal and sacred space. The film illustrates how capitalist forces, embodied by the zamindar and supported by the state, seek to commodify land and forest resources for personal and governmental gain.

The resistance of the villagers, initially against the forest officials, and later against Devendra Suttooru, is symbolic of the class struggle of the exploited against the exploitative capitalist forces. While the state and the Zamindar's claims to the land and its resources are representative of the capitalist accumulative tendencies and greed, the people's resistance is not only a representation of their indigenous land rights but also fight for preservation of indigenous culture and practices, a cry for social justice against the system. This perspective exhibits postcolonial ecocriticism emphasizing on indigenous knowledge systems which defies the commodification of land.

Rishabh Shetty, director and lead actor of *Kantara*, skillfully portrays the protagonist Shiva as an eco-socialist figure who also serves as a conduit for mystical forces. This duality is most pronounced during the Kola festival, where Shiva, initially depicted as a secular individual, becomes possessed by the Daiva following his cousin's death. This transformation challenges the conventional binary between eco-Marxist interpretations of nature and aesthetic/mystical renderings, suggesting a more nuanced interplay between these seemingly disparate worldviews. Shetty's portrayal of Shiva embodies the synthesis of secular and mystical elements, which complicates a straightforward eco-Marxist reading of the film. Traditionally, eco-Marxism focuses on the material conditions and socio-economic factors driving environmental degradation, often eschewing spiritual or mystical interpretations. Indeed, in *Kantara*, the integration of indigenous mythologies and spiritual practices with eco-socialist themes creates a rich, multifaceted narrative. Shiva's evolution from a secular figure to one possessed by the Daiva signifies the deep connection between the indigenous community and their environment, a relationship that transcends purely materialistic or rationalist interpretations. This transformation underscores the film's message that environmental activism and conservation are not solely about political or economic struggles but are also deeply rooted in cultural and spiritual traditions.

By positioning Shiva as both an indigenous and an eco-conscious figure, *Kantara* presents a more holistic approach to environmentalism. This duality illustrates how indigenous knowledge systems, with their intrinsic spiritual dimensions, can coexist and even enhance eco-Marxist critiques of capitalist exploitation and environmental degradation. The film thus advocates for a decolonized understanding of nature, one that honors the sacred and mystical elements inherent in many indigenous cultures. This nuanced interplay between secular and mystical elements challenges the often rigid dichotomy in environmental discourse. It suggests that effective environmental activism must embrace a plurality of perspectives, integrating scientific, socio-economic, and spiritual insights. *Kantara's* narrative thus becomes a compelling argument for an inclusive and holistic approach to ecological and social justice. The

film skillfully synthesizes secular and mystical elements through the character of Shiva, presenting a complex and nuanced narrative that transcends traditional eco-Marxist interpretations. By integrating spiritual and indigenous perspectives into the eco-socialist framework, the film challenges conventional binaries and advocates for a more inclusive and holistic approach to environmentalism.

In Leela's character the conflict between her indigenous heritage and her commitment to the modern, state-sanctioned employment reflects again a similar kind of binary opposition. This psychological tussle in Leela emphasizes the postcolonial dilemma often encountered by many indigenous people who are caught in this struggle between their choice of the traditional knowledge system and the modernized world. Leela's recruitment in the forest department can be regarded as the recently formed postcolonial state's endeavour to incorporate the indigenous people into the capitalist system. Her character in the movie symbolizes the institutionalization of state power that may often lead individuals like Leela to compromise with their dedication and attachment towards their indigenous culture and divine cosmology. Despite her deep rooted spiritual and cultural ties with the forest, she joins the Forest Department which reflects the internalized colonial legacy to impose the western notion of modernity on the autonomy of indigenous cultures. This act of Leela's commitment to her duty to the Forest Department hints towards an epistemic aggravating the marginalization of the local people who are oppressed by bureaucratic and capitalist culture.

However, Leela's colonial consciousness is defeated by Shiva's awakening of dormant spiritual consciousness. Leela's overtly material outlook had to give in to Shiva's more holistic and dynamic integration of culture and divine cosmology.

Conclusion

Through a seamless synthesis of diverse approaches like eco-marxism, postcolonial discourse as well as indigenous knowledge perspectives, the film excels in a dialectical construction of environmental consciousness, mythical realism and ecological justice. The cinematic prowess of *Kantara* is expressed through its nuanced articulation of the environmental and social dynamics through multifaceted visual and narrative strategies. It transcends the traditional disciplinary boundaries to problematize simplistic narratives of ecological discourse and offers a holistic interdisciplinary understanding of material and metaphysical resistance mechanisms, that evoke amongst the viewers an intersectional discernment of man-environment relationship.

The film's performative critique operates on multiple hermeneutic levels, simultaneously interrogating capitalist modes of production, systemic environmental exploitation, and the complex negotiations of Indigenous identity and state sovereignty. Using cinematic aesthetics as a critical tool *Kantara* delivers a sophisticated dialogue on the relationship between ecological exploitation, social and economic structures and cultural ontologies. Nevertheless, the film's critical potential may be tangled with its commercial compulsions and structural positioning within the capital-driven media production landscape. Scholars like Monami and Hageman point this out, arguing that ecocriticism within a film's narrative is compromised by the nature of the commercial production, distribution and consumption of cinema. There lies an inherent contradiction and the viewers need to consider not only the content of the film but also the broader context of its material production.

Kantara thus provides an exemplary show of cinema's engagement with critical environmental discourse, within the context of postcolonial societies and Indian knowledge systems. Through the amalgamation of postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-Marxist theory, and ecocinema the film presents a synthesis of inclusive, holistic, indigenous take on environmental conservation and social justice. Interrogating the exploitation of nature and the indigenous people, juxtaposed within the mystical and spiritual praxis of Indian traditional belief systems, *Kantara* challenges the audience to confront the prevalent legacies of colonialism, casteism, capitalist accumulation, even scientism and negotiate the composite relation between indigenous culture, associated myths, human nature and natural environment. To this end, it successfully showcases cinema's potential in shaping ecological consciousness, within the very environmental and commercial limitations it aims to deconstruct. Thus, *Kantara*'s socio-political take on eco-consciousness and message of ecology preserved through Indian knowledge systems is powerful and unparalleled in contemporary Indian cinema.

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