

Representation of Women and Nature in the Movie *Jigarthanda Double X: An Ecofeminist Analysis*

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Abstract

This article analyses the representation of women and nature in Karthik Subbaraj's 2023 film Jigarthanda Double X through the lens of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism is a branch of feminism that examines the connections between women and nature. It posits that women and nature are linked through their shared experiences of oppression and exploitation under patriarchal structures. Cultural ecofeminism contends that women have a more intimate relationship with nature because of their gender roles (e.g., family nurturer and provider of food) and their biology (e.g., menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation).

Drawing on ecofeminist theory, particularly cultural ecofeminist theory, this article explores how the narrative of this film intersects with the portrayal of female characters and natural environments, reflecting broader themes of gender, ecology, and power dynamics. Through an analysis of key scenes and character dynamics, the paper delves into how ecofeminist principles intersect with the narrative. It examines the character of Malaiarasi, whose deep-rooted connection to nature and traditional healing practices challenges conventional gender roles and emphasizes the importance of preserving indigenous ecological knowledge. Furthermore, the article examines scenes that depict the mistreatment of women and the exploitation of nature in the case of Paingili, drawing parallels between the two. Additionally, the paper analyzes the use of color symbolism and mise-en-scène elements to convey themes of life and exploitation in natural environments. This analysis demonstrates how Jigarthanda Double X employs cinematic techniques to emphasize the principles of ecofeminism, advocating for the empowerment of women and the protection of the environment as interconnected struggles for justice and equality.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Women, Nature, Empowerment.

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The representation of women and nature in films has long been a subject of critical inquiry, with scholars and activists alike examining how cinematic narratives shape perceptions of gender, ecology, and social justice. *Jigarthanda DoubleX* is a 2023 Indian Tamil-language action drama film written and directed by Karthik Subbaraj, an Indian film director, writer, and producer working mainly in Tamil cinema. “*Jigarthanda Double X* confronts tribal land struggle with a searing question: ‘Rulers, why?’” (Kuttappan).

The story is set in 1973, where Police Officer Rathna Kumar (Naveen Chandra) goes on a mission to catch a famous elephant poacher named Shettani in a dense forest called Kombai Kaanai. During the search, the police start hurting the local Kanakkal tribal people to get information, even though those same tribes are suffering because of Shettani’s actions. He tortures the men and women of the tribe and even sexually assaults a tribal girl named Paingili. Meanwhile, in the city of Madras, a man named Kirubakaran, also known as Kirubai (SJ Suryah), is wrongly accused of a crime and sent to jail. Jeyakodi (Shine Tom Chacko), Rathna’s brother and a prominent figure in the ruling party, aspires to become the new Chief Minister. He asks Rathna to help him get rid of four gangsters who support his rival, Karmegam. Kiruban, hoping to clear his name, agrees to help.

Things get even more complicated when Kiruban pretends to be a filmmaker to get close to one of Karmegam’s supporters, Alliyus Caesar (Raghava Lawrence). Alliyas was the original name of Alliyus Caesar, who was an ardent fan of Clint Eastwood. Kirubai, now in the name Ray Dasan, discovers that Caesar has a dark past and is linked to the Kanakkal tribal people who are troubled by Shettani. Alliyas and his father killed elephants for a thousand rupees offered by a Britisher. The people of the Kanakkal tribe, being protectors of the forest, were against killing elephants. Alliyas’s brother was killed by a she-elephant named Athini, which drove his father insane, and Alliyas ended up hating nature, his tribe, and the elephants. So, Alliyas and his family were cast out of their tribe. To keep up their Kanakkal tribal roots, Alliyas was married to Malaiyarasi (Nimisha Sajayan), a woman of the Kanakkal tribe. Malaiyarasi shows a deep connection with nature even though she lives in Madurai with Caesar.



Figure 1 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*



Figure 2 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

In the film, the character Malaiyarasi, whose name means "queen of hills," is introduced in a scene where she prepares a paste using herbal leaves (Figure 1 and 2). Her costume suggests her adaptation to urban life. Despite wearing a saree draped in a city-style manner, she remains connected to nature and her traditional medicinal practices. The significance lies in her connection to nature and traditional medicinal practices. The portrayal of Malaiyarasi's fusion of traditional healing practices with her urban lifestyle subtly highlights the concept of ecofeminism. This scene also emphasizes Malaiyarasi's deep-rooted bond with her tribal heritage and her inherent knowledge of ecology and herbal remedies.



Figure 3 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

Caesar slaps his pregnant wife in her baby shower ceremony (see Figure 3). So she leaves the city and goes to the Kanakkal forest. Caesar, along with Ray Dasan, goes to the forest to continue his film shooting. When people there ask if he's going to apologize to his wife, he refuses. This shows that he doesn't want to admit he did something wrong to her. It also suggests that men often treat both women and nature in a similar way. In the context of ecofeminism, this scene shows the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature by patriarchal systems. The refusal of Caesar to apologize to his wife reflects a societal attitude that devalues women's experiences and perpetuates a sense of entitlement over their bodies and rights.

In the movie, when Caesar goes into the forest with the goal of capturing Shettani and liberating his tribe for the sake of shooting his film, the storyline undergoes significant developments. Up until this point, the urban scenes in Madurai are depicted with striking red hues, while the beauty of the Kombai Kaanai forest is captured with lush green tones. This deliberate use of color is explained by the cinematographer, Thiru, who emphasizes the significance of the color green in this context. Thiru, in an interview, says:

Usually, a forest is depicted with a lot of gloominess, but here, that gloominess is already there in the story. So we went the opposite way. A forest is full of vibrant life. It provides life to so many tribals, and I wanted

to show how they were losing something that is so abundant and resourceful. Also, using colors the routine way for this film felt too contrived. (Chandar)

Despite the gloominess in the forest's reality in the movie, the use of green hues serves to depict the forest with life and richness. This approach aligns with color theory in film analysis, where colors are chosen not only for aesthetic purposes but also to convey themes, emotions, and narrative elements. Thiru's intentional use of green hues highlights the lively nature of the forest in the story while also challenging conventional portrayals of natural environments in cinema.



Figure 4 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

When Caesar endeavors to free his tribal people from captivity by the DSP, a distressing scene unfolds where Paingili, a member of the tribe, is subjected to his torment, possibly hinting at a threat of sexual assault. Her fear upon seeing the DSP depicts the trauma she has endured, positioning her as a symbol of nature itself (see Figure 4). Through the film, we discern the portrayal of the forest as untouched and the tribal people as its guardians, aligning with the principles of ecofeminism. But intruders like the police force and Shettani are exploiting nature for profit and political power.



Figure 5 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

Additionally, a striking image captures several women positioned behind a net in the police camp. This symbolizes the figurative crippling of women by men (Fig. 5). Notably, all the tribal women are depicted behind the net, emphasizing how women are subjected to various forms of torment and exploitation, similar to the plight of nature. The emotions expressed by the tribal women mirror the anguish of the Kombai Kaanai forest, besieged by ruthless policemen and heartless elephant poachers like Shettani. This juxtaposition once again emphasizes the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature, as both are victims of patriarchal domination and exploitation.

As the film progresses, Ray Dasan captures in his camera an old woman recounting a tale about their deity Sethukalli Amman, which holds a significant backstory (Figure 6). In the story, the king of the land attempted to take the elephants from the forest for his army. In protest, a tribal girl from the community sang the Kaattu bharani (song of the forest) and set herself ablaze, proclaiming that, "A forest without elephants and the land without forest is no good (*Jigarthanda Double X* 01:03:56 -01:04:00). After witnessing this sacrifice, the king felt compelled to return the elephants, demonstrating the Kanakkal people's deep love and connection with nature.



Figure 6 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

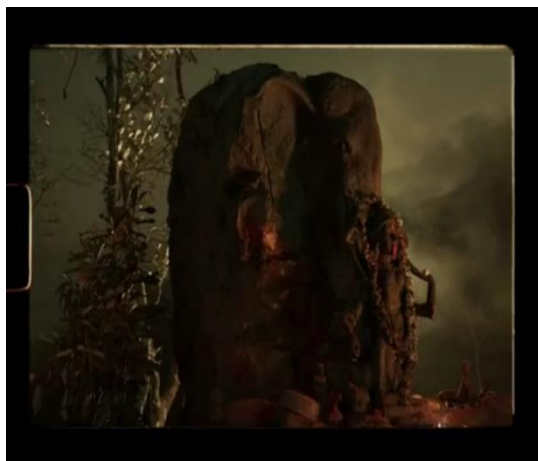


Figure 7 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

The mise-en-scene portrays Sethukaali standing before an elephant, symbolizing her role as the protector of elephants and nature. The darkness enveloping the area, with the only illumination coming from the fire lit in front of Sethukaali Amman, symbolically represents the forest's plight, with Sethukalli serving as the sole beacon of hope (Figure 7). This reverence for nature and women as divine entities reflects the cultural ecofeminist ideology, where women are worshipped as embodiments of nature and revered for their inherent connection to the environment.



Figure 8 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

In another impactful scene, the village faces intrusion from members of Shettani's group. Tribal women, skilled in archery as traditional food gatherers, demonstrate their bravery by engaging in combat alongside men (Figure 8). This challenges the notion that only men possess certain skills, highlighting women's versatility and resilience. Their actions underline the idea that women were adept at various tasks and roles, including nurturing and protection.



Figure 9 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

Malaiyarasi has a lot of reputation in the Kanakkal forest, contrasting with her mistreatment in Madurai by her husband. In the forest, her expertise in traditional medicine earns her reverence from the community. Malaiyarasi, despite her husband's torture, selflessly saves Caesar's life through surgery and her knowledge of herbal remedies (Figure 9). This illustrates women's capacity for compassion and care, even in the face of adversity. The parallel between the benevolent actions of women and the nurturing qualities of nature emphasizes the interconnectedness of women and nature, despite being exploited by humans.

One night, an elephant named Atthini unexpectedly appears in Malaiyarasi's backyard, causing fear among the people. Caesar's father reveals that he killed this elephant's parents. Everyone, including Caesar, is afraid that the elephant has come for revenge, and no one dares to approach it. However, Malaiyarasi, holding a torch, bravely approaches the elephant without fear. While others assume the worst, she believes

differently, stating, "She is here not to exact revenge but to show gratitude."(*Jigarthanda Double X* 01:51:41 - 01:51:46)



Figure 10 - Scene from *Jigarthanda Double X*

As a pregnant woman, Malaiyarasi empathizes with the elephant's maternal instincts, understanding that it has recently given birth. This incident highlights the principles of cultural ecofeminism, which suggests that women's biology, including pregnancy and lactation, fosters a deeper connection with nature and its beings. In the mise-en-scene, with Malaiyarasi holding a torch symbolizing wisdom and understanding, it signifies her unique perspective and responsibility to dispel misconceptions held by others in her tribe. Malaiyarasi's encouragement to Caesar to look into the elephant's eyes shows her intuitive connection with nature and her role as a mediator between humans and the natural world (Fig. 10). This scene emphasizes the idea that women, particularly pregnant women, possess a heightened sensitivity and understanding of the natural world, aligning with the principles of cultural ecofeminism.

As the story goes on, Caesar and Kirubai team up to stop Shettani and expose the government's role in elephant poaching to clear the forest of all its inhabitants. But their efforts end tragically when Shettani's secrets lead to the slaughter of the tribal villagers, including Caesar and Malaiyarasi. Despite the sadness, Kirubai survives with Caesar's newborn son, giving hope in the middle of all the chaos. The movie ends with Kirubai naming the baby Sethu after the tribal village deity Sethukaali amman, showing that their fight for justice will continue. Through it all, the forest and its people show how human greed and destruction harm the environment, but also how people can stay strong in tough times.

In conclusion, this analysis of the movie *Jigarthanda Double X* through the lens of cultural ecofeminism reveals profound insights into the interconnectedness between gender, ecology, and tradition within cinematic storytelling. Ecofeminism offers a valuable framework for understanding how women and nature are portrayed in film and their shared experiences of oppression and exploitation under patriarchal systems. This paper has analyzed the representation of nature and women, specifically in the case of Malaiyarasi, a tribal woman. The use of green color

and various mise-en-scène elements in the film plays an important role in understanding the representation of women and nature in the movie. Through its portrayal of character dynamics, visual motifs, and narrative elements, the film invites viewers to reconsider their relationship with nature and recognize the intrinsic value of both women and the environment in the pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

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