

ISSN 0976 - 8165



THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

11th Year of Open Access

**Bi-Monthly Refereed and Peer-Reviewed
Open Access e-Journal**

Vol. XI, Issue-6 (December 2020)

Editor-In-Chief : Dr. Vishwanath Bite
Managing Editor : Dr. Madhuri Bite



The Criterion
www.the-criterion.com



AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529
Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Exploring the Visual Terrains of Domination: Sex, Ecology and Politics in *Jallikattu* and *Maoist*

Sidharth M. Joy

2nd MA English

Institute of English,

Thiruvananthapuram

University of Kerala.

&

Gokul Krishnan G.S.

Postgraduate (2018-2020)

Department of English,

Mar Ivanios College (Autonomous),

Thiruvananthapuram,

University of Kerala.

Article History: Submitted-30/11/2020, Revised-24/12/2020, Accepted-28/12/2020, Published-31/12/2020.

Abstract:

The movie *Jallikattu*, directed by Lijo Jose Pellishery, created a revolution in Malayalam cinema. The narrative design and visual vocabulary of the movie transcends already set notions of politics, ecology and social relations. *Jallikattu*, the movie by Lijo Jose Pallishery is an adaptation of the Malayalam short story *Maoist* by S. Hareesh. When one deconstructs the movie and short story to its fundamentals, several aspects of it could be connected to 'domination'. When an enslaved subject pushes itself towards freedom, the social power structures collapse and they try to settle it by suppression. This paper tries to locate this domination in sexuality, ecology and politics of our society as expressed within the rubrics of the movie and the short story. The works show a sexual domination and the violent pursuits to win sex. The works also criticize the anthropocene world in a deep ecological perspective. Beyond the sexual and ecological politics, the movie and short story puts forward politics revolving around state power and ideological apparatuses. These works give scope to rethink the status quo of established power orders.

Keywords: *Jallikattu*, *Maoist*, *Domination*, *Sex*, *Ecology*, *Politics*.

1. Introduction

Jallikattu is a window; a window opening up new paradigms of visual dialogue in Indian Cinema. The narrative design and visual vocabulary of the movie transcends already set notions of politics, ecology and social relations. *Jallikattu*, the movie by Lijo Jose Pallishery is an adaptation of the Malayalam short story *Maoist* by S. Hareesh. While the movie deals with the havocs caused by a single bull, the short story presents a bull and a buffalo. The movie maintains, or perhaps surpasses the already abstract presentation of the short story. Usually, movies are supposed to be more concrete and therefore when a literary work is adapted to a movie, the inherent abstraction in the literary work is plummeted. This gives no room for the spectators to ponder over. The movie *Jallikattu* preserves the literariness of *Maoist*. Human Beings have a tendency to dominate over his fellow beings. We express this domination in different spheres of life. Most of the social relations that we see around us are designed according to this crave for dominations. From patriarchy to colonialism, what we see is the tendency of human beings to subordinate and create an 'other'. We can see this violent tenet of domination in most of the animals. So this can be seen as a feature evolved from the prehistory which is still possessed by human beings. We claim ourselves to be the most civilized and refined among all other species. But the reality is that we still retain the animalistic qualities and violent features of domination which we can observe in many social incidents around us. Both *Jallikattu* and *Maoist*, the movie and the short story, unfolds the violent psyche of human beings through different abstract symbols. In both the texts, there are animals who have freed themselves from chains of oppression. And from the very moment of their liberation, they are designated as the enemy 'other' by the society.

The study aims to understand 'domination' as the central theme of both movie and the short story. The theme of domination can be disentangled from the knot of narrative by analyzing it through different dimensions. Sex and ecology are the two main elements considered for reading the implicit politics dealt in the texts. In both the movie and the short story, we can see men trying to dominate over women, system trying to dominate society and a violent mob trying to dominate ecology. The entirely extraordinary visual vocabulary of the movie offers new insights about the nature of human life and human relationships. The movie *Jallikattu* is an adaptation of the short story *Maoist* by S Hareesh. Usually when movies are inspired by literary works, they lose their abstractness and thereby its literariness. Most of the movies concretize the abstract ideas in a

literary text. Although the movie deviates from the narrative presented in the short story, it portrays many surrealist symbols which are abstract and thereby it opens up a whole new range of possibilities in reading the narrative. This symbolic presentation of Jallikkettu gives new perspectives on ecological issues, tribal issues, gender issues etc.

The movie can be very simply seen as a race between Kuttachan and Antony to win over Sophi, Varkey's sister. Sophi is the daughter of Varkey in short story and his sister in the movie. But anyhow, both Kuttachan and Antony tries to dominate over each other very violently, often abusing each other verbally, and at times physically. The implicit brutality of male libido is explored through the character of Antony. Insatiable desire of two characters to dominate each other is evident from the fierce fight between Antony and Kuttachan throughout the narrative. At the same time, it is also important to account for the way through which they try to establish their masculine dominance. They try to manifest their superiority by violently hunting an innocent bull. The bull becomes a tool for them to prove their sexual domination. The more violent one is supposed to be more masculine one. This is a demonstration of violent and animalistic desire in men.

The paper aims to study:

- 1) Domination by the masculine sex over feminine and over each other to gain control and power.
- 2) Domination by the humans over ecology and how ecology revolts back.
- 3) Domination in other political spheres in the society.

2. Domination of The Masculine State and Citizens

Most of the characters including the mob shows a dominant attitude towards sexuality. When Antony approaches Sophie, he behaves in a very atrocious manner. What we see in Antony is not love, but a violent and aggressive desire to sexually dominate a woman. Antony is a representative of toxic masculine figures that we see around us every day. Although the human race has evolved into a civilized community, at least in the narrative of Anthropocene, some primitive instincts perpetuate in us. Even in the twenty first century, we often associate masculinity with domination and aggression. This is not a problem with a particular individual, but gender subjectivity is imbibed naturally, as if conditioned, in the collective unconscious of society.

Antony expresses his love, if it can be called love, in a maniacal way. More than love, what persuades him is his fierce spirit to subjugate a woman and thereby defeat another man. Usually, animals show the nature of competing each other for a mate. They do this because they have an inner sexual drive to reproduce. Now, we see a human being doing the same.

The opening parts of the movie shows a police man beating his wife and shouting at her in rude tones. This gives an idea of the general approach of the movie towards showing the patriarchal society. The whole movie shows a masculine state where the citizens tries to prove their masculinity at various levels. Even the rivalry seen between Antony and Kuttachan could be broken down and understood as an urge to establish masculinity. The scene where Sophie chops of the phallus shaped tapioca in front of Antony shows the retort to the masculine gaze of Antony.

There are also instances in both the movie and short story where moral policing is shown. The commentary on Sophie by the various men and women, gives the whole policing attitude of the place. This attitude ultimately materialized when Kuriachan is accused of conducting sexual acts with a woman (though he isn't involved in the same for real) and then shamed and made to walk in public.

The short story throws more light into the moral policing tendencies. When the cattle were packed on the vehicle, a character teases and comments to them to have sex, but only till they reach the butchering spot. The mass running behind the escaped bull and buffalo could be seen as an act of moral policing as well. The animals here could represent any human being who are policed by the mass. This should be read in lights of occurrences of moral policing in the country.

3. Man v/s Ecology- A Deep Ecological Reading

How do humans wake from slumber? Alertness being regained while waking up is a gradual process that might last for a few seconds. This human method of waking up is in stark contrast to the animal way. Animals are alert even while they sleep and they open their eyes in fraction of a second, immediately springing back to external reality. This put us the question, how does humans in Jallikattu wakes from sleep. Their way of waking up is show in the opening scene of the movie, accompanied by a clock-ticking sound, indicating the need to switch to external reality. They do not open their eyes gradually like humans generally do. They open their eyes like animals, in a split-second. Therefore, the director establishes the notion under discussion, the

treatment of animals and humans on a same level of importance, the deep ecological view, in the opening of the movie itself.

The deep ecological notion argues the existence of human beings and non-human beings (the coinage is anthropocentric, and we see this as a linguistic fallacy) in this ecosystem to be of same worth, without placing humans above animals like general conceived notions. Both humans and animals have same inherent worth and value. Humans negate the existence of living beings that does not contribute to the wellbeing of humans, an argument against which deep ecology retorts. The movie *Jallikattu* and the short story *Maoist* should be seen as a struggle, between human and human, between human and animal, ultimately between human and nature. The struggle is unraveled through many non-deliberate and deliberate attempts of deep ecological notion to reduce the gulf between animal and humans. This ultimately places the humans and animals in a same stratum. The humans while fighting with nature to prove might, reveals the emptiness in the claim of being civilized. The pre-historic cave-human version of humans is shown in the last scene of the movie to establish the argument that millions of years of evolution has taken humans nowhere forward in fundamentals. The fundamentals of emotions of competition and eliminating the competitor that they carry remain the same. This single argument is strong enough to deconstruct the idea of human, like post-anthropocene post humanists argue. Once this idea is deconstructed, the placement of humans on higher strata to that of animals is eventually deconstructed. This will ultimately establish the deep ecological notion of animals and humans are to be seen with same focus.

The first scene in the movie that we have discussed, regarding the animal method of opening human eyes from sleep, is followed immediately by another series of shots that are rare in Malayalam movies. These are the shots where camera is placed on ground level, focusing on very 'trivial' (as humans would argue) elements in ecology like worms, grasses, soil etc. It is difficult to recollect a Malayalam movie that has given due importance in shot division to such elements in nature, treating them with equal importance as to that of humans.

The whole movie and the short story revolve around the escape of a bull (in short story, a bull and a buffalo) from the character Varkey while he and Antony were trying to butcher the animal for meat. This takes us to the fundamental question of survival. The whole world is a clash between beings in a food chain, in minimal terms. The survival is an attribute of the fittest and the

dominant. The animal(s) escaped to survive, from being killed. The domination of humans over animals is challenged from this point of the movie and short story. This again puts the viewer/reader in another question: who is the protagonist of the movie/short story. Though on an Anthropocene line, one can argue that the protagonist is Antony, the fundamental breakdown of the movie/short story will take us to the conclusion that the protagonist is the bull/bull and buffalo. The story revolves around animal(s) rather than humans. There is a great power subversion happening here. The ecology is normally dominated by humans. This is a result of millions of years of evolutionary and social process. One night, after the animal(s) escapes, the animal(s) gains control over the ecology. The damages done to humans post-escape are due inherent feature with in humans to dominate over animals. There are dialogues in movie/short story that substantiate the argument. One character says, to leave the animal alone and thus it will go elsewhere in peace. It is important to understand that all the troubles caused by the animal(s) are only mechanisms of survival. The animal(s) may not have caused damage if the humans had left it to be free.

Kuttachan, in movie, asks another character if he knew which the tastiest meat in the world was. Kuttachan says it is the human meat that is the tastiest. How does Kuttachan know this detail, if not he has had human flesh? The answer is, this was not Kuttachan speaking. The genes that run on his body has vestiges of ancient past and of civilizations where cannibalism could have been a practice. The cannibalistic tendencies got suppressed in process of evolution, but it emerged in Kuttachan's consciousness due to the frenzy of the night. The dialogue establishes the emptiness of civilized humans.

The land where this story takes place belongs to humans (perhaps, on an anthropocentric view, all earth belongs to humans), but the process of conquering is detailed. One character speaks of the history of the land. The land belonged to animals and the migrant settlers came to the land and cleared the forest and animals to make the land their own. This domination of humans has been happening for centuries, pushing other beings to periphery and making their existence more vulnerable. The character finally passes the comment that the humans he sees before him, they are animals, though they walk on two legs.

The escape of the animal is always helped by the nature. At first, when the bull escaped in the movie, the frame turns black for few seconds, indicating the absence of light. The darkness of the nature aids the escape. The second time the bull escapes, the frame again turns dark. The second

escape is assisted with the timely intervention of a rain. Before the event, there was no sign of a rain coming, but the nature was able to arrange the rain in perfect time, helping the bull escape. Once the animal escapes again, it causes further damage and a death. One shot of the movie is of footprints. The footprint belongs to two different species: one of the bull and the other of a human. The fine line between human and animal is erased.

The scene in which Antony forcefully kisses Sophie, the sound of human-Antony changes to the growls of an animal. This use of sound substantiates the argument against animal-human binary. The binary is again challenged when Antony and Kuttachan fight each other, this time on a note of personal vengeance, when broken down to fundamental is sexual rivalry. Although Kuttachan is repeatedly stabbed by Antony, Kuttachan says to other people that it was the bull that has attacked him. The swap of position between Antony and Bull proves that humans are no different from animals. In the short story, Antony will be at a state of confusion if the eyes that shine in front of him are that of Kuttachan or the bull.

The short story breaks the animal-human binary and shows the urge of humans to dominate through concrete and direct dialogues. Varkey who is nicknamed as Kaalan (the god of death who travels around in a bull) says that if a bull has escaped from Kaalan, then why he exists. There is also a statement in the short story that a four-legged animal can never escape humans forever.

The game children play in the short story is symbolic and foreshadows what is to come. A ten-year-old kid is seen pretending to be a bull, waking in four legs and a tale made of thread attached behind his back. This is the same state to which humans have gone to in the end. The kid is not yet aware of the anthropocene world and therefore, the kid doesn't hesitate to role play a bull. The elders, after imbibing the anthropocene, try to change the animal-human relation to a hegemonic one, where the center is always humans. S. Hareesh comments in the short story on a conversation about the bull by few humans, it seems they were not talking about an animal, but about a man with intelligence, vengeance, might and lust.

S. Hareesh compares the final fight between the bull and Antony to a game played in an ancient civilization. To translate it to English,

“When the crowd cheered and hooted from the top, it seemed like a stage, from an ancient civilization, where a hungry animal and a jailed human fights a deadly combat” (Hareesh).

The climax of the movie solidifies the argument. The humans jumping over the bull, one by one, building a huge human mountain ultimately shows the orderlessness to which civilizational climes have relegated. The end shot of prehistoric cave where ‘primitive’ humans fight each other is in no way different from the hunt of bull in the movie. The civilization is presented not as a linearly progressed idea, but a circle, where the start and end meet at the same point. The distinction between animal and human are now totally irrelevant. The anthropocene is thus proved to be a false claim.

4. Politics of Domination

Politics as a running trope is evident throughout the narrative of the movie and the short story. Perhaps they are the most politically charged narratives in recent times. The title of the short story itself is a political statement. The ambiguity of the title of the short story lies in the fact that there is no mention of Maoism as an ideology anywhere for one instance. The police comments on the son of the bull-owner that his reads are going suspicious recently and he should be careful. This indicates the control that the state is exerting upon citizens, tracking them down, based on their thoughts. This foreshadows many such power struggles coming in later part of the literary work. The reader is made ready to read the rest of the story under the conveyed equations in the power relations. The way the state hunts the dissenting voices and mobocracy is a major topic under discussion.

The line between chaos and order is perhaps thin. A state in crisis and a state inefficient to maintain peace will further blur the line. In *Jellikattu* and *Maoist*, we see a mob trying to dominate over a subservient subject. This subservient subject in the movie, the bull, and in the short story, the bull and buffalo, is a representation. They could represent any subject ostracized to margins on grounds of sexuality, gender, class, caste and more. The movie and the short story could be therefore read in a subaltern perspective.

No cultural product is manufactured in isolation. There is nothing like ‘artist as a genius’ or no artist is a ‘solitary thinker’. Both the art and the artist are connected to socio-political framework within which the artist produces art. *Jellikattu* and *Maoist* are no exemption. Though the question of author being intentional regarding the same is of no concern, the idea to ponder is the meaning that the reader generates. The works should be placed in the framework of

contemporaneity where lynching and fundamentalism have transmogrified into a sinister which destroy the tranquility of the nation. This establishes the notion that the movie and the short story are deeply rooted in politics.

The history of animal in the story hitherto history of a man-animal struggle. The animal might have undergone a series of oppressions. The living conditions of the animal is the one provided by humans. This should be read in parallel to the living conditions of subaltern dictated by the privileged class. When the subjugation reaches a saturation point, the subjugated will retort. The reaction is shown in the movie/short story. The animal tries to free itself and runaway. This should be seen as act to gain freedom from oppression. The animal becomes the representative of any marginalized community in the world.

The bull in the movie has damaged all social institutions that stand in its way. It has run into a bank, created havoc, damaging an institution of economy. Then it attacked flags of various political parties. It has also damaged properties of religious institutions. The bull has made every institution stand still and helpless. Thus, the bull becomes a force that threatens the existence of social institutions that are at times perpetuators of regressive social orders

The movie also subtly, rather symbolically points out the changing economic dimensions of the society. We have replaced the food crops from fields with cash crops that yield profit. Rubber is one such cash crop that yields profit. The scene in the movie where rubber sheets are being burned, without the consent of the owner, symbolizes the burning chaos in the society. The people not only burn the cash crops, but the police jeep us well. The fire used as a tool to express their frustration over state and economy.

5. Conclusion

The movie and the short story are revolutionary, in the sense that they discuss multiple topics concerning the society. The movie has won international acclamations and has set a trend in film making. It deviates wide form usual patterns in Malayalam movie, opening a new trend, which is devoid of spoon-feeding concepts. The movie successfully maintains the scope of thinking for the readers, like the short story.

The fundamental theme of domination is presented in overt and covert layers throughout the movie. This paper attempted to prove that domination in sphere involving sex, society, ecology and politics substantiating episodes from movie and short story. The study proves that domination is not always unidirectional. The static domination is challenged by revolting factors. When the humans tried to dominate over ecology, the ecology revolted back. Similar is the case with state-citizen relation. The state dominated the citizens in one portion while the citizens revolted against the state and created a power shift in other portions. Both the movie and short story did not try much to invert the sex-power structure. The masculine society though proves to be a failure in the end, when people jumped on top of the bull, making a huge mountain of piling humans, ultimately indicating death the humans, and thereby death of a masculine state.

The movie and the story bring new perspectives to ideology of domination. The fundamental question of whether evolution will bring a state of egalitarianism is discussed in the movie. The concept of equality is still an idea far and the farness is scrutinized in the works. They do not follow the idea of 'art for art sake'. Art is used to speak politics and as a tool to revolt. The works will go down in history as revolutionary attempts to understand the dominance is social orders.

Works Cited:

Garrard, Greg. *Ecocriticism*. Routledge, 2012.

Hareesh, S. "Maoist", *Appan*. 2nd ed., DC Books, 2018.

Pellissery, Lijo Jose. "Jallikattu." Friday Film House, 2019.

Marche, Stephen. "The Unexamined Brutality of the Male Libido." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 25 Nov. 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/opinion/sunday/harassment-men-libido-masculinity.html>.

"Toronto 2019 Review: In JALLIKATTU, The Line Between Man And Beast Dissolves." *ScreenAnarchy*, 7 Sept. 2019, <https://screenanarchy.com/2019/09/toronto-2019-review-in-jallikattu-the-line-between-man-and-beast-dissolves.html>.