

Urban Denial and Ecological Reality: *Gaganachari* as a Warning from the Future

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Abstract:

The Malayalam language science fiction mockumentary *Gaganachari* intervenes in contemporary ecocritical discourse by staging urban denial, the ideological illusion that technological progress can shield human societies from ecological disaster. Set in a climate-ravaged future, the film reconstructs Kerala's urban spaces as ephemeral sites of infrastructural collapse, resource scarcity, and ecological amnesia.

Drawing on urban ecocriticism and Anthropocene theory, this paper analyses how *Gaganachari* critiques anthropocentric development through representations of submerged landscapes, deteriorating infrastructure, rationed resources, and climate-induced social breakdown. The film's mockumentary form blurs speculative futures with present conditions, transforming satire into ecological witnessing.

Crucially, the film's alien figures function as posthuman observers and displaced ecological subjects whose presence decentralises human exceptionalism and mirrors histories of planetary extraction and exhaustion. Rather than offering redemption, these beings testify to repeating patterns of denial and exploitation that structure technological civilisation itself.

By analysing dialogue, narrative, and visual motifs, this paper establishes *Gaganachari* as a significant contribution to ecocritical cinema studies. The film restructures urban spaces from sites of development and mastery into sites of environmental vulnerability and moral breakdown. Ultimately, *Gaganachari* functions as a speculative warning that demands urgent reconsideration of urban ecological consciousness, sustainability, and environmental responsibility in the Anthropocene.

Keywords: Urban Ecocriticism, Anthropocene Cinema, Urban Denial, Ecological Collapse, Posthuman Witnessing, Infrastructure Failure.

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I. Introduction: Urban Futures and Ecological Amnesia.

The modern present is a radical crisis that calls out the urgent reconsideration of the ways of imagining, constructing, and being in cities. Two interconnected catastrophes define our present: the ever-growing planet climate crisis and the downward spiral of urbanisation as a development model. They are not two independent phenomena but two expressions of the same hidden disaster, based on human relationships with the earth; during the last three centuries. In fact, according to the environmental theorists, man has reached a period of paradoxical agency, "acting as agents of power, making disruptive transformations in the earth system" while remaining "susceptible to climate cataclysms that are of their own making and yet out of their control" (Lee 76). This paradox frames the essential problem of our moment: urbanisation itself, hailed as the victory of human resource and technical achievement, has become the main mechanism through which planetary limits are crossed, infrastructure fails catastrophically, and ecological systems collapse into ruin.

The Malayalam movie *Gaganachari* proves to be an ecocritical intervention to this urban imagination, namely because it does not want to oppose the climate crisis and urbanisation; it does not want to oppose cinema as a source of false hope or technological redemption either. Instead, the movie is a tool of ecological testament and eye-witnessing the mechanisms of urban denial as a state of Anthropocene. The urban denial, is what is denied in this case, not just psychologically or ideologically, but is more structural: the systematic institutionalisation of disavowal, in every technological apparatus, every offer of infrastructures, every account of development, that the future can be postponed, bargained with, bought, or eluded by all the more ingenious human improvisations. As Chakrabarty argues, the great expansion of the globe through industrialisation, capitalism, and technology has paradoxically led humanity toward "an awakening to the consciousness that we are not always in practical and/or aesthetic relationship with the planet and yet, without it, we do not exist" (Chakrabarty 182). However,

this realisation, instead of being enlightenment, often appears as catastrophe precisely because the mechanisms of denial have become so thoroughly rooted in the urban and technological fabric that consciousness arrives too late - when alternative futures have already been predetermined.

The condition of urban denial is an Anthropocene one that manifests in various ways. It is expressed on the infrastructural level in the belief that, the technological systems can cope with the crises on earth forever: water systems, energy systems, communication technologies are believed to have the capacity to cushion the human species against ecological constraint and aftermath. At the geopolitics level, urban denial appears in the presupposition that rich countries are capable of getting "lifeboats" of comparative security and stability as the global South becomes expendable, submerged, deserted (Chakrabarty 45). At the individual consciousness level, it functions by the normalisation of environmental disaster as such, inundation, illness, extinction, and as tolerable externalities instead of indicators that the whole structure of modernity is unsustainable. It is this sort of progressive failure of all such denials that Gaganachari stages which one can observe unveiling how urban infrastructure itself is revealed as a location of uncontrollable breakdown, how wealth is no protection against planetary rupture, and how the realisation of ecological reality when it comes can never be detached any longer, as of the material breakdown of civilisation itself.

The movie can be read as an ecocritical work of urgency within contemporary cinema, not because it offers solutions or constructs myths of recovery, but in the sense of presenting ecological collapse as an existential crisis with tangible effects. In refusing satire and embracing a mode of sober testimony, *Gaganachari* aligns itself with what environmental scholars recognise as cinema's essential role in the Anthropocene, to serve as a "technology of emotional and imaginative preparation for worlds already in collapse" (Persinger, Vint, and Canavan 52-53). This, then, is not cinema as escapism, cinema as propagation of hope, but the

mind-wrenching record of what it means to be on a planet on which human futures had radically foreclosed, where any minute could bring invasion, breakdown of infrastructure, dissolution of all categories of familiar security and belonging, etc.

The thesis outlining this analysis is that, *Gaganachari* is a profound ecocritical cinema, precisely through its insistence that urban denial is not simply a state of mind that can be remedied by awareness or education, but is a structural position that will continue to exist even as civilisation visibly crumbling. The movie challenges the viewers to contemplate a world which humans are still stuck in the logics of denial, consumption, and self-interest as the material foundation of their lives falls apart. Furthermore, in this refusal of redemption, at this point that even denial itself is an Anthropocene condition as enduring as any political awakening or technological innovation, the film tends toward what could be called a posthuman realism; a form of thinking and feeling about human futurity that is not specific to the fantasy that human beings can overcome, control, or otherwise magically transcend the catastrophic circumstances in which they placed themselves. In the era of ecological crisis, cinema must turn out to be the witness of what it would be, to reside in that world, neither with the balance of false hope nor the paralysis of despair, precisely the reflective and conceptual work that *Gaganachari* accomplishes.

II. Theoretical Framework

The emergence of ecocriticism as a reaction, to the systematic marginalisation of environmental issues in literature and culture, dates back to the late 1970s. Yet, it has quickly matured into a diverse and interdisciplinary field engaging with questions of planetary survival, human agency, and ecological justice (Buell 13). The key intervention of the movement insist that humanity cannot be separated from nature, nor can literary and cultural texts be extricated from their environmental condition. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that Anthropocene constitutes

an essential discontinuity in the history of humanity: humans have become "geological agents," capable of altering planetary processes on timescales measured in millennia (Chakrabarty 182). This shift from viewing nature as an external resource to recognising it as a co-constitutive material reality transforms ecocriticism's stake profoundly.

However, Chakrabarty warns that, without any cautious questions, we should not accept an "awakening narrative" according to which more knowledge of the environment is miraculously converted into ethical action and transformation of the system (Chakrabarty 85). Rather, he points out a disturbing paradox: the more humans expand global systems of extraction and exploitation, the more they encounter the planetary realm that resists human mastery and control (Chakrabarty 90). Urban environments are the examples of this paradox. Cities use excessive resources and seem to go beyond ecological boundaries with technological mediation, but at the same time, they also concentrate the environmental vulnerabilities. Jason W. Moore's concept of the "Capitalocene" extends this analysis by insisting that, the ecological crisis is not simply a human problem but an outcome of capitalism's voracious material metabolism and it's imperative to treat nature as disposable commodity (Moore, cited in Chakrabarty 87). The work of ecocriticism, then, is to find out how cultural texts, such as cinema, express not only the technological fantasies but also the material realities of life on the edge of the planetary disaster.

Until recently, ecocriticism concentrated on rural and wilderness spaces, naturalizing a division between urban and natural environments that obscures how thoroughly cities are ecological systems (Buell 84–128). Lawrence Buell notes that "for ecocriticism to recognise the city as something other than non-place is itself a great and necessary advance" (Buell 84). Urban ecocriticism challenges this blindspot by asserting that urban cities are not external to nature but are, in fact, unique regimes of environmental change. Matthew Gandy's *Concrete and Clay* illustrate the infrastructures, water systems, parks, transportation networks of the New York

City are not triumphs over nature, but rather, different reworkings that are continuously locked up with ecological processes and social inequalities (Gandy 1-15). The infrastructure itself becomes a mask of naturalised power relations: the seeming universality of piped water or paved streets conceals whose interests are served and whose ecologies are ruined (Gandy 4).

Urban denial emerges as a critical concept for understanding how modernity has continued to create an ecological illusion based on the institutional belief in technology and planning. This is not simple ignorance but an ideological confidence in the fact that the ingenuity of human beings can eternally bolster the civilisation to the limits of the planet. As Gandy argues, the city's seeming mastery of nature through engineering, hides an underlying ecological dependence and vulnerability (Gandy 5-10). This is exactly the disappointment that Gaganachari describes when Kochi floods: the bunkers, the vertical farms, the artificial intelligence that is meant to keep people alive are turned into tools of isolation when the monsoons descend and infrastructure fails. The issue of urban denial is structured: embedded in zoning regulations, investment strategies, technology discourses, and aesthetic decision-making the built environment seem natural and inevitable rather than contingent and contested. Gandy stresses that the urban nature can only be produced in connection with capital accumulation, real estate speculation and racialised geographies of environmental injustice (Gandy 2-5). Cities do not fail because of incompetence; rather, their choices are made to prioritise profit, property and power over livability and justice.

Film and speculative narrative occupy most privileged roles in contemporary ecocritical work due to their ability to make visible the impacts and time of living through ecological crisis. Ursula K. Heise proposes the idea of speculative fictions as a “cognitive laboratory” where one can imagine the future of the planets, allowing audiences to experience otherwise abstract or deferred catastrophes as immediate and embodied (Heise 11-12). Unlike scientific reports or policy documents, cinema engages the audience affectively and somatically, presenting

ecological decline not as a piece of information but as an experience. *Gaganachari* functions as what might be called ecocritical mockumentary: it employs the elements of documentary realism, interviews, surveillance footage, news-style broadcasting, to set up credibility and at the same time employ narrative breakage and absurdity to subvert the very systems it promotes. This formal strategy proves crucial because it resists both false hope narratives (wherein technology solves all problems) and apocalyptic despair (wherein collapse is unavoidable and irreversible).

Gerry Canavan and anthropocene cinema researchers attach importance to the speculative cinema functioning as "emotional and imaginative preparation for worlds already in collapse," helping viewers grapple with the psychological and ethical dimensions of living under permanent ecological threat (Canavan 52). The refusal of redemption by *Gaganachari*, its insistence that, denial continues even as the ecological disaster is visibly crumbling, makes cinema fit the description Heise makes of it being an "eco-cosmopolitan imagination," an aesthetic and political commitment to seeing the interrelation between local ecological disasters and the global economies of production and extraction (Heise 1-10). The film's speculative mode therefore functions not as escapism but as testimony: it bears witness to how human societies persist in denial even when material evidence of collapse surrounds them, how infrastructure and technology become sites of false security rather than genuine flourishing.

III. Urban Denial and the Illusion of Control in *Gaganachari*

The opening scene from *Bharat Space Station* in *Gaganachari* establishes the interrogation of the technological hubris that is the central theme of the film as the urban denial. At an altitude of 700 kilometers, the space station operates as the primary locus from which the flooded earth is observed, surveyed, and supposedly managed. A morning announcement promises to "get your patriotic juices flowing" with a "wonderful melody," immediately collapsing the

distinction between emotional manipulation and technological control. The station's monitoring systems receive "reports on heavy rainfall and cyclones" in Kerala but this does not translate to any real action but bureaucratic action. Ajayya Sena volunteering statement, "Attention! Your safety is our responsibility! Namaste", shows the way in which technological surveillance is offered as one alternative to the true ecological involvement. As Matthew Gandy argues, infrastructure itself masks the power relations it contains, creating "apparent universality" of control while obscuring whose interests are actually served. The space station broadcasts reassuring messages to citizens navigating the flooded landscape below, insisting "you are now traveling at a safe elevation from water level," yet this safety is illusory and spatially isolated from the catastrophe unfolding beneath.

Victor's iron bunker shows same logic of technological impunity applied to the earthly urban level, as a model. The bunker, which is protected with AI, security doors that say "main door open," vertical farms, sleep pods, surveillance networks, and similar ensure full isolation against the ecological collapse. When a cosmonaut admits that his home region does not exist anymore. Water rushed in and wiped out everything, the contrast comes down to point: the spaces of elite, such as the bunker, have technological systems which ensure survival and the mass populations are subjected to destruction. Victor explicitly rejects stepping outside saying "the government has started observing everything. Watching! But the surveillance is to save us from those beasts, right?" The identification of ecological disaster with the danger of security makes technological surveillance be used as a psychological sedation, in which the ecological disaster as a danger is redefined as a chance to master the system of control. When reporters express shock that the government has banned AI after the alien issues, yet Victor has an AI monitoring and controlling the bunker, Allen responds: "Sir is a national hero, right? So, all this will fall under his privileges." Urban denial therefore runs on institutional exemption whereby, the rich and those that are strategically worthwhile are allowed to retain the same

technologies which are promising salvation, but to the rest of the people the same technologies turn out to fail in the end.

The idea of 'slow violence' by Rob Nixon is both a concept of environmental destruction that operates on such extended timescales and spatial scales that it is almost invisible within the prevailing systems of media. Gaganachari employs this idea to make catastrophic climate change as banal as possible in the diegetic world. One of the characters, when questioned about the duration of time Victor's house has been underwater, answers in a flippant manner: "Hasn't been too long. He moved to the bunker when the island drowned. They had to airlift him." Flooding turned into pure logistical inconvenience, which is resolved by means of technological extraction and relocation. The monsoon rains, which will destroy the landscape, are not introduced in as a apocalyptic prophet but rather as a normal anticipated routine: "If this continues tomorrow, Kerala will drown." Yet even this declaration of full ecological disaster is at immediately, pushed aside by bureaucratic issues of transit of checkpoints and evading police.

Rationing systems transform material scarcity into normalised social practice that hides the violence of ecological depletion. Rationing geef (artificial meat replacement) is casually debated, food points are available, consumption is adjusted with great care. These restrictions are addressed as a normal aspect of the livable world, not as an ultimate sign of systemic disaster. Trying to explain rations to the alien visitor, Allen says: "Since you eat very little cat food, the food for you is rationed from today. So, if you go easy while eating, you can live for one week." Slow violence integrates itself into the texture of daily life until collective catastrophe becomes indistinguishable from normalcy.

The most heart-breaking expression of slow violence in the film is represented by the paradox of knowledge about the environment and lack of ecological response. Characters themselves

understand the fact that Kerala drowned, that all the dams are collapsed, that climate disaster has made lots of areas uninhabitable. However, this knowledge does not lead to any political mobilisation, no emergency action, no recognition that the systematic transformation is necessary. Instead, the awareness of how the ecology is collapsing becomes a background noise in the life that otherwise is filled with the romance plots, cooking and acting out the cultural traditions. Victor learns Kathakali dance to stop the extinction of the art form, yet watches passively as the civilisation failing. This lack of connection between information and action defines what Nixon calls as the representational failure of slow violence: it goes beyond the temporal and narrative structures in which human consciousness typically perceive crisis.

The patriotic system sustains urban denial by systematising attention away from ecological disasters and toward state-sanctioned narratives of security and order. The morning broadcast plays a patriotic song, complete with military drumming, designed, as the narrator explicitly states, to "get your patriotic juices flowing." This is not a soft stuff ideological manipulation but broad light manipulation for emotional investment into nationalist identification.

The surveillance systems play the role of both tools of ecological protection and mechanism of political control, blurring the boundaries between safety and control. After the aliens' arrival, "the government began the night curfew in order to catch these man-eaters... whose heads are worth 50 Lakh points." The danger of the ecological situation is twisted into making of a militarised state. Ajayya Sena, a sort of militaristic group with uniforms and recognitions that resembles as fascist aesthetics, gives the narrative explanation as to why social surveillance is comprehensive. On inquiring how they had broken into all the houses, a member of Ajayya Sena is proud to say: "An ultimate access to everyone's privacy. Yes." However, this violation is presented as service, protection, patriotism. The organisation collects protection money of people who live in the country illegally, represents the caste-based recruitment (You should be

born into the warrior clan! We just check if it is upper caste in the certificate"), and uses these mechanisms to enforce compliance.

Nationalism and spectacle become technologies for displacing attention from ecological reality. When Victor celebrates the arrival of Kathakali dancers, when characters gather for patriotic songs and martial arts demonstrations, these cultural performances constitute deliberate redirection of consciousness away from the material fact of civilisational collapse. The film's most withering critique arrives through Potti's final blessing ritual: he chants about the sanctity of the nation, then performs elaborate religious ceremony, and invokes apocalyptic threat. All these, while the actual ecological catastrophe is visibly occurring around him. Ecological distraction is not ignorance but active ideological labour: it requires constant maintenance, ritual performance, and institutional reinforcement to prevent awareness of climate catastrophe from translating into systemic response.

IV. Ecological Collapse and Infrastructural Failure: The City as a Site of Vulnerability

The opening revelation in the film that the hometown of the cosmonaut, Haripad - "doesn't exist anymore. Water rushed in and wiped out everything"- establishes the foundational premise of the fact that urban spaces are ecologically temporary, sustained only by perpetually maintained infrastructural systems that inevitably fail. When one of the characters notes that "four years ago, these roads were not motorable. The Ajayya Sena guys cleared this place later," the dialogue reveals that even the mere access is reliant on constant state action and military work. The island where Victor's bunker is located represents an extreme case of this fragility: it was inhabited, then drowned, then partly restored through organised cleanup efforts, and finally becomes the site where Victor retreats to avoid the catastrophe that destroyed it in the first place. his recursive structure - building safety within spaces already marked by submersion - demonstrates what Matthew Gandy calls the "ecological distancing" produced by modern

urban infrastructure, wherein technological systems create the illusion of transcendence from environmental limits while remaining utterly dependent on the material ecologies they purport to master.

The film's representation of Kerala's transformation is devastating due to its rejection of the spectacularised apocalypse. Rather, drowning becomes a normal infrastructure failure. When asked: "If the rains also start, it will be complete depression," the informal linguistic replacement of 'depression' by the word 'disaster', defines how disastrous environmental change becomes internalised in the vocabulary of emotional conditions rather than systemic collapse. The submerged city is not pictured as a dramatic ruin but as non-existent, it merely stops existing as a living environment. Those who still lived there are now dispersed, living on state rations and bureaucratic approval of existing. The city does not fall spectacularly but quietly disappears; its former inhabitants reduced to anecdotes and cautionary references. This silent displacement of the urban space resembles what Rob Nixon calls the invisibility of slow violence: environmental devastation that occurs over years can only be made visible in terms of accrued absences, cities which no longer exist, resources which no longer flow, populations which can no longer sustain themselves.

The film's most profound intervention concerns the demolition of modernity's faith in perpetual progress through technological innovation. Victor represents this failed story: he is simultaneously a renowned war hero, an AI-user, a Painter, a dancer who is studying traditional arts, and a person who spends the last years of his life in a bunker and watches the sunset on the TV, rather than experiencing them directly. "I learned Kathakali, the age-old art form, for 6 months... so that it should not go extinct"- Victor's efforts to keep Kathakali dance alive, is a futile effort to preserve culture at the time when civilisation itself is becoming inhabitable. The gesture is touching precisely because it is utterly insufficient: saving art forms means nothing if the society capable of valuing them disappears.

According to Chakrabarty, the Anthropocene compels humanity to face an apparent paradox: humans have become "geological agents" capable of altering planetary processes, yet this godlike power reveals only human powerlessness before the consequences of accumulated industrial extraction. This paradox has been demonstrated by Gaganachari via the inversion of mastery of technology. The catastrophe can be seen by the space station at the 700 kilometers altitude which is equipped with global surveillance systems but it can neither prevent nor reverse the catastrophe. Victor has a bunker, filled with high-tech sleep pods and AI assistants, where he can get a temporary escape into the world that has become fundamentally uninhabitable. The city - humanity's greatest technical achievement - reveals itself as a temporary structure erected within an ecological system that tolerates no permanent human settlement.

Loss of progress narratives are eminent in the way the film deals with cultural memory. The characters recall old films, dead art forms, lost cities, not as a piece of historical importance that needs to be stored in an academic facility, but as a reminder of a world that is dying out. When Victor speaks of watching films "from the cold dawn" and describes cinema as escape, he articulates the reduction of culture to psychological survival mechanism rather than meaningful human expression. The final revelation that even this minimal existence - survival in bunkers, consumption of synthetic food, management of declining populations - cannot persist indefinitely, produces the film's deepest ecology: human civilisation is not permanent, and the technological systems that once promised transcendence of natural limits have instead become monuments to ecological impossibility.

V. Alien Witnesses and Posthuman Ecological Perspective

The aliens in the film do not act as the protagonists of the invasion narrative, but as ecological refugees, whose planet was destroyed, bearing witness to human civilisation's capacity for

environmental annihilation and speculating on whether human communities might learn from their catastrophe. When Victor writes about the first landing of aliens, he develops a historical analogy that is deep: "These creations landed in many places around the world. Though people were initially scared of it, it became a thing of amusement in no time." The quick normalisation of alien invasion parallels humanity's own normalisation of ecological collapse; both phenomena are absorbed into the texture of daily life as curiosities instead of as something of prophecy. The aliens themselves have histories of planetary extraction and destruction histories on their worlds of origin. When the AI Raghavan, informs humans that aliens are the inhabitants of a plethora of different planets, and that their physiologies are incompatible with the human environments, the film implies that environmental annihilation is not a specific issue to Earth, but is a trend of planetary depletion that preconditions the existence of interplanetary life in general.

Jason Moore's analysis of capitalism as an "ecological regime" emphasises that planetary extraction is not incidental to modernity but constitutive of it - entire civilisations are built upon the appropriation of "unpaid work-energy" from ecosystems and enslaved/colonised peoples. The presence of the aliens in *Gaganachari* could be interpreted as a material expression of this logic of extraction becoming planetary scale: they represent worlds exhausted by the same processes that are drowning Kerala, burning forests, and creating the conditions under which human survival becomes questionable. However, the film refuses the logic of alien invasion narratives that would position these beings as threats to be eliminated. Rather, their existence exposes the contingency and weakness of human civilisation. Victor, a military hero whose very identity is made by the use of violence against non-human creatures, encounters with a creature that has no military danger to the whole world and whose very existence reveals the futility of militarised reaction to the ecological disaster.

The alien who is visiting the bunker turns into a figure with whom the movie questions the type of knowledge that can be considered as ecological testimony. She is incapable of talking like a human being; her existence is unsettling instead of being stabilising. However, her observation of human behavior - watching movies, witnessing romance, experiencing touch - becomes a form of anthropological documentation that renders human activity strange, contingent, and potentially incomprehensible to a posthuman observer.

Rosi Braidotti argues that posthumanism requires abandoning the assumption that human perspective constitutes the default position from which reality should be interpreted. The alien's presence in *Gaganachari* literalises this decentring: she observes human behavior not from within the framework of human exceptionalism but from a position of radical alterity. When Allen struggles to explain human courtship rituals and emotional bonding, his inability to translate these experiences into terms the alien understands exposes the contingency of human behavior itself. She watches humans eat, work, perform rituals, pursue romance, and accumulate possessions - activities that seem self-evidently meaningful to humans but which appear, from an alien perspective, to be compulsive repetitions disconnected from survival necessity.

According to the idea of 'companion species' by Donna Haraway, the ethical and epistemological engagements of significance are not produced by the proclamation of human superiority, but instead through the practices of 'becoming-with' beings whose otherness to us cannot be reduced. The alien in the bunker cannot be integrated into human social hierarchies; her presence produces only discomfort, strange attractions, and anxious attempts at communication that repeatedly fail. However, the failure creates the most intense ecological knowledge of the film. When Allen attempts to explain human attachment to a being from another planet, he articulates the disconnect between human emotional investment and planetary survival: "I realised what's in her mind... from that kiss she gave me that day." The

non-comprehension of the alien makes human intimacy visible, as a means of distraction of the ecological disaster that is taking place around it.

The film deploys the alien encounter to stage what Cary Wolfe calls the fundamental problem of posthumanism: the recognition that human subjectivity is not self-transparent but dependent upon relationships with non-human others whose subjectivity exceeds human comprehension. The AI-Raghavan attempts to explain that humans and aliens are not different, biologically speaking, but this assertion is an understatement as it makes it clear that they are absolutely different: they are anatomically similar but occupy worlds which are incommensurable, process information in incompatible sensory systems, and they experience time at different rates. This arrival of the alien, then, is a symbolic representation of what Wolfe refers to as the posthuman condition itself: the recognition of the fact that human exceptionalism- the belief that humans have special consciousness, rationality, or moral status, has been conclusively undermined, but which generates no liberation but instead vertigo.

Worst of all, the movie suggests that the alien, a being of a doomed world, recognises human civilisation as the same patterns as those which annihilated her world and destroyed it She observes humans' cycles of accumulation, consumption, and technological expansion not with incomprehension but with the recognition of species-level patterns that repeat across planetary systems. The alien becomes a mirror in which humanity sees not its unique exceptionalism but its participation in a systemic logic of extraction and collapse that transcends individual planetary histories.

The documentary aesthetic adopted in the film, including interviews, surveillance shots, announcements by broadcast, and documentary style documents, serve an important theoretical purpose: they assert authenticity upon speculative ecological histories, at the same time digesting the assertion by formal contradictions. As the documentary crew informs Victor that

they are shooting a 'biopic' of himself and he continues to insist that it is a "documentary, not a biopic," the dialogue underscores the inconsistency of genres meant to assert facticity. This formal ambiguity is not decorative but essential: the mockumentary allows the film to simultaneously offer testimony about ecological catastrophe and acknowledge its own status as constructed narrative unable to fully represent planetary-scale devastation.

Ursula K. Heise argues that "ecological imagination" requires developing frameworks for comprehending systems that exceed human temporal and spatial scales, a task for which conventional realist aesthetics prove inadequate. The mockumentary form allows Gaganachari to document a future that functions simultaneously as present warning and inevitable trajectory. When Victor narrates his history as a nationalist hero, the film captures not factual autobiography but ideological performance; when authorities explain surveillance systems, they expose the collapse of any distinction between security and control. The documentary form thus becomes a mechanism for capturing the performance of denial itself rather than providing access to "the truth" of ecological collapse.

The alien's arrival in the bunker produces the film's most devastating mockumentary moment: she is not interviewed, not given language to testify to her own planetary destruction, not permitted to speak her experiences into the archive. Instead, she becomes object of speculation, explanation, and anxious interpretation by human observers who cannot comprehend her. Her silence, imposed by technological and communicative barriers, becomes the film's most powerful testimony: the ecological catastrophe that destroyed her world exists outside human documentary conventions, beyond the reach of interview footage or archival recovery. What remains is only the alien's visual presence, her embodied witness to human civilisation's inability to prevent its own repetition of the planetary annihilation she has already survived.

In this structure, the mockumentary reveals itself as inadequate to ecological testimony precisely because it claims to document human experience and human decision-making while the actual archive of planetary destruction, the alien's silent presence, resists all human representational strategies. The final collapse of documentary authority of the film, thus becomes its greatest ecological insight: testimony to the Anthropocene cannot be fully captured by human narrative frameworks because the Anthropocene itself is the product of frameworks, economic, technological, epistemological - that have exhausted the planet's capacity to sustain them.

VI. Gaganachari as Anthropocene Warning and Ecocritical Intervention

The way Gaganachari interferes with the ecocritical discussions of our day is by rejecting the utopian technological remedies and the apocalyptic stagnation, making the Anthropocene more of a state of constant ecological denial only to be broken by the appearance of the witnesses, human and posthuman, who cannot be incorporated into the ecological survival discourses. The film's central innovation lies in its recognition that ecological catastrophe does not automatically produce ethical awakening or systemic transformation; instead, it generates intensified efforts to maintain denial through state surveillance, nationalist spectacle, and the psychological management of survivors. When the characters are still busy making romantic future; practicing cultural rituals; gathering possessions, the movie stages what Chakrabarty describes as the core paradox of the Anthropocene humans are now geological agents who can destroy the planet yet are still caught in the social, economic, and psychological traps of a world with lots of resources and no end.

The film's insistence on the persistence of denial - rather than its eventual overcoming through knowledge or crisis - constitutes its most significant ecocritical claim. In the dialogue between two the Ajayya Sena members, they casually says that anyone can be easily attracted to our

force. "Anyone can easily join our force. It is very easy. It is not that easy to join. You should be born in the warrior clan!," the paradox of rhetorical openness and actual exclusivity is the summary of the way in which ecological disaster is the chance to establish the existing hierarchies, instead of destroying them. The bunker that was meant to preserve a national hero becomes a monument to the impossibility of individual survival separated from collective ecological fate. Urban spaces designed as sanctuaries from ecological limits reveal themselves as temporary refuges that defer rather than prevent catastrophe. When Victor notes that he "hasn't come out of the depression I had, due to her demise" and resolves to "watch the sunset from the moon at the earliest," his escape fantasy is a literalisation of the film attack on technological transcendence: even the thought of leaving the planet is more an effective psychological maneuver than having to face the need to transform the structure of the earth.

The alien observer of *Gaganachari* is a kind of 'troubled kin' figure as described by Haraway an alien who is a survivor of a ruined world and who disrupts human assertion of superiority without providing an alternative, redemptive option. She cannot save humanity; she can only observe its repetition of the patterns that destroyed her own civilisation. Such rejection of the redemptive posthumanism is the moral intrusion of the film: that 'becoming posthuman' or enlarging one consciousness to accommodate non-human viewpoints will simply produce ecological wisdom. Rather, the alien is exactly what she is a creature of another world, the survival requirements, epistemologies, and time scales of which are beyond human understanding. The movie suggests that ethical response to the Anthropocene cannot rest on achieving understanding or achieving solidarity with non-human others; rather, it must begin from the acknowledgment of radical alterity and incommensurable differences that cannot be reconciled through dialogue or recognition.

This collapse of human exceptionalism that *Gaganachari* captures in the form of a mockumentary is itself a critical technology of ecological pedagogy. By claiming documentary

authenticity while staging patently speculative futures, the film invokes what Heise identifies as the necessary function of speculative fiction in the Anthropocene: to render planetary-scale ecological transformations perceptible and emotionally immediate through narrative, image, and sound. The movie does not argue that viewers should accept its specific predictions about Kerala's future or believe that aliens will arrive; rather, it stages the necessity of developing aesthetic and narrative frameworks capable of making visible systems of extraction and collapse that exceed conventional perception. The failure of the bunker of Victor, the inability of the rationing systems, the necessity to resort to surveillance as the major tool of order maintenance, the film records not the impossibility to survive but the inevitability that the survival, provided it comes at all, will mean the abandonment of the dreams of boundless expansion, technological transcendence, and national sovereignty with which modernity has been organised.

Gaganachari ultimately offers no direction toward redemption, no dialogue that might bridge the gulf between human denial and ecological reality, and no disruption capable of transforming the fundamental systems producing catastrophe - yet it achieves ecocritical significance precisely through this refusal. The film insists that the Anthropocene cannot be understood as a problem to be solved but as a condition to be inhabited, with full awareness of its incompatibility with human aspirations for permanence, progress, and control. By centering urban spaces, infrastructural failure, and the persistence of denial even in the face of undeniable catastrophe, Gaganachari maps the territory of contemporary ecological crisis not as abstract planetary system but as experienced degradation of the built environments through which humans have attempted to transcend their ecological embeddedness. The film's final image - not of redemption but of continued survival within collapsing systems - becomes testimony to what it means to exist in the Anthropocene: not as the moment of human triumph through geological agency, but as the prolonged encounter with human finitude and the recognition that

planetary destruction does not generate ethical awakening but only deepening patterns of denial, surveillance, and managed scarcity.

VII. Conclusion: Rethinking Urban Futures in the Age of Ecological Crisis

The analysis of *Gaganachari* presented here has argued that the film stages urban denial not as a temporary aberration that scientific knowledge or political mobilisation might overcome, but as the fundamental condition of Anthropocene existence - a structured, institutionalised, and affective refusal to permit ecological reality to disrupt the narratives, infrastructures, and social relations through which modernity perpetuates itself. The city, understood through urban ecocriticism as a site of concentrated ecological extraction and technological mastery, reveals itself in *Gaganachari* as profoundly vulnerable precisely because it has been constructed in denial of its own ecological embeddedness. The bunkers, space stations, surveillance systems, and rationing bureaucracies that promise protection from catastrophe function instead as machines for extending denial - they permit survival within collapse while forestalling the systemic transformation that actual ecological response would require.

Yet the film's intervention extends beyond diagnosis of denial to a more unsettling claim: the Anthropocene is not arriving in the future but is already the condition of present existence. When characters navigate flooded landscapes, consume synthetic food, and experience daily power blackouts, they are not rehearsing future catastrophe but inhabiting the present reality of those already displaced by climate change, resource extraction, and infrastructural collapse. The film's insistence that "four years ago, these roads were not motorable" and that vast regions now "don't exist anymore" references not speculative scenario but documented history. *Gaganachari* thus functions as ecological testimony disguised as science fiction, bearing witness to conditions already legible for those whose cities have already drowned, whose

resources have already been exhausted, whose survival already depends on rationing and state management.

The arrival of alien witnesses who carry knowledge of their own planetary destruction constitutes the film's most profound ecocritical gesture. These beings from elsewhere cannot save humanity; they can only observe and testify to the repetition of patterns that exceed any single planetary history. Their presence decenters human exceptionalism not through utopian posthumanism but through the stark recognition that ecological destruction is a systematic feature of technological civilisation itself, capable of manifesting wherever that civilisation establishes itself. The film refuses to offer these aliens as solution or redemption, insisting instead that they remain what they are: witnesses to patterns that humans continue, despite full knowledge of their catastrophic consequences.

The mockumentary form through which Gaganachari documents this collapse of human control becomes itself a critical tool for what Heise calls "ecological imagination" - the development of narrative and aesthetic capacities sufficient to render planetary-scale transformations comprehensible and emotionally vivid. Cinema's particular strength lies in its ability to juxtapose scales, temporalities, and perspectives in ways that expose the constructedness of the present and the contingency of assumed futures. By staging denial persisting even as infrastructure visibly fails, by documenting continued performance of cultural rituals even as civilisation crumbles, by featuring romantic attachments and aesthetic pursuits amid rationing and surveillance, the film exposes the ongoing work required to maintain denial in the face of undeniable ecological reality.

The question that Gaganachari leaves unresolved - and which becomes therefore the most pressing question for contemporary urban ecocriticism - is whether recognition of denial's persistence can itself generate transformation, or whether such recognition merely produces a

more sophisticated, more aware form of the same denial. The film suggests no comfortable answer: it documents the possibility that humans will continue, indefinitely, to survive within collapsing systems while performing the rituals, maintaining the technologies, and articulating the narratives that sustain hope for a permanence that is ecologically impossible. What the film insists, however, is that this denial cannot persist forever. When Victor watches sunsets on television from his bunker while the actual sky darkens with catastrophe, when characters distribute cat food as survival ration, when the alien watches humans perform love while civilisation drowns - these moments document not the triumph of denial but its exhaustion.

Urban futures in the age of ecological crisis will be determined not by technological solutions or individual ethical awakening, but by how thoroughly denial can be maintained, how long infrastructures can be patched, how effectively spectacle can redirect attention from material reality. Gaganachari offers no hope that this maintenance will ultimately succeed. It offers instead testimony: to the creativity with which humans persist in denial, to the weight of systems that make denial feel like survival, and to the arrival of witnesses - from other worlds, other temporalities, other forms of being - whose presence testifies that the Anthropocene is not a future condition but the collapsed present we continue, impossibly, to inhabit.

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