

Tribal Masculinity: An Alternative of Anti-ecological Masculinity

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Abstract

Masculinity is considered as behavior and attributes expected out of men. It is a socially constructed concept that is shaped by gender roles, societal expectations, and power dynamics that vary across cultures and historical periods. The studies concerning men, masculinity, and nature relations emerged as a response to the essentialized notion of associating men with culture, patriarchy, oppression, and women with nature, rather than focusing on the complexity of masculinities and their relation with nature. Further, Ecomasculinity and Ecological masculinism are Western concepts and frameworks that evolved out of the studies concerning men-nature relationships. Considering the plurality of masculinity and the nuances of men-nature relationships, this paper explores the intersection of men, masculinity, and nature in Tribal society in the context of South India. The study employs textual analysis as a method to explore men-nature relationships. The text considered for the analysis is the novel *Huntsman* by Lakshmi Saravanakumar, translated into English by Aswini Kumar. The novel presents an indigenous tribal society rooted in the forest with interpersonal connections between humans and non-humans. The paper demonstrates how the concept of Home, Indigeneity, and life in tribal society caters to the construction of the notion of masculinity, which emphasizes caring attitudes toward nature. The perspective of indigenous society challenges the traditional notion of masculinity as dominant and oppressive. This paper argues that masculine discourse in Tribal society is counter-hegemonic, and is built on caring towards humans and nonhumans rather than domination.

Keywords: Ecomasculinity, Ecoman, man-nature relationship, Tribal masculinity, tinai

1. Introduction

Masculinity refers to the set of behaviours, traits, and social roles that are commonly associated with men and the male gender. It is considered a socially constructed concept shaped by cultural and historical contexts, individual experiences, and identities. The definition of masculinity varies across different societies and cultures and is often influenced by factors such as gender roles, power dynamics, and societal expectations. Further, Hegemonic Masculinity (Connell, 2020) propounded by Connell speaks about the existence of multiple masculinities rather than a universal single notion of masculinity.

Men and Nature interaction are Primarily looked at from the Perspective of Ecofeminism, which places women and nature in the same domain, in terms of experience of exploitation. Whereas Ecomasculinity is concerned with the nuances of man-nature relationships. The concepts and frameworks like Ecomasculinity and Ecological masculinism are the concepts and frameworks evolved as a reaction to the lack of studies concerning the complexities of masculinities and nature relations.

Further, the said concepts are put forth in the context of the West. Considering the diverse masculinities and intersections, the study attempts to analyse Ecomasculinity in an indigenous society of Tamil Nadu. Further, the study uses the ‘tinai’ concept to understand the workings of tribal society. In the case of South India, Tamilnadu has a vast tradition of Tinai society, which is noted for its sustainable lifestyle associated with nature. It has been lost with the advent of caste-based and state societies in the plain region, and the Tinai society has been restricted to some mountain regions, seacoasts, and arid tracts, and some of them still survive (Selvamony, 2012, p. 61).

This paper attempts to study the nuances of the relationship between masculinity and nature in Tribal society. The study uses textual analysis. And, the text considered for the study is *Huntsman* by Lakshmi Saravanakumar, translated into English by Aswini Kumar. The tribal society represented in the novel aligns with the ‘tinai’ concept. hence, it can be considered a representative of tinai society. This paper argues that masculinity in tribal society is built on infinite care for human and non-human entities.

2. Literature Review and Knowledge Gap

Masculinity, referred to as manhood or manliness, encompasses a range of attributes, behaviours, and roles associated with men and boys. The understanding of masculinity can be viewed as socially constructed (“What do we mean by "sex" and "gender"?", 2012), influenced by both cultural and biological factors. The extent to which masculinity is shaped by biology or society is a topic of debate (Wharton,

2009). Additionally, standards of masculinity vary across cultures and change over time, reflecting the influence of cultural and historical contexts.

Throughout history and across different cultures, the understanding of masculinity has undergone changes. As stated by Raewyn Connell, the perception of what defines masculinity has been diverse in different periods and locations. Therefore, it is found to be more fitting to explore the concept of "masculinities" rather than assuming a singular and universal definition. (Connell, 2005)

Recognizing the multiple masculinities, Connell put forth hegemonic masculinity, which is a part of the gender order theory. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a set of practices that uphold the dominant position of men in society and rationalize the subordination of both ordinary men and women, as well as other marginalized expressions of masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity seeks to shed light on the mechanisms by which men sustain their privileged social roles in comparison to women and individuals with gender identities considered "feminine" within a particular societal context. (Scott et al., 2014)

Whereas, Mark Allister in the introduction to *Eco-man: New Perspectives on Masculinity and Nature* Observes that "Social construction of masculinity" exclude Nature. His anthology, *Eco-Man*, emerged from a 2001 panel that focused on masculinity and nature during the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment conference. The primary objective of this anthology is to establish a connection between the academic disciplines of ecocriticism and men's studies (Anderson, 2006, p.237). He adds that Connell's work *Masculinities* 'ignores the influence of nature on man'. (Allister, 2004). Initially, the Masculinity and Nature relation is studied from the perspective of Ecofeminism. It places women and nature in the same domain in terms of exploitation. Ecomasculinity emerged as a reaction to Ecofeminism and the lack of studies in the area of masculinity and nature. (Birkedal, 2022, p. 15). It is a complementary idea to Ecofeminism, which attempts to broaden the idea of 'Nature' and 'Masculinity'.

Connell and Messerschmidt, in 'Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the Concept', hope for 'less oppressive means of being a man might become hegemonic, as part of a process leading towards an abolition of gender hierarchies' (2019, p. 833). On the contrary, considering hegemonic masculinity to be rooted in the imperative to exercise control over everything that falls under the category of 'nature', Richard Twine suggests that practising a caring attitude 'breaks the link of interdependency that exists between hegemonic masculinity and those discourses which resource, objectify and expel nature' (Twine, 2021).

Further, in his thesis *A Declaration of Caring: Towards Ecological Masculinism*, Paul Pule speaks about a framework - Ecological masculinism'. He suggests the concept of 'eco men'- Men with caring and nurturing attitudes towards nature, for a deep green future. In short, he puts forth that the 'ethics of caring' should replace the 'ethics of daring', which is a prevailing feature of masculinity capable of harming the environment. *Ecological Masculinism* believes that men have an infinite capacity to care, which has been superseded by ego-driven superiority, and patriarchal conditioning of dominance accompanied by hegemonic social arrangements. Moreover, Ecological masculinism opposes hegemonic masculinities, enabling men to adopt behaviours and attitudes traditionally associated with women. Briefly, he considers Ecological masculinism as counter-hegemonic. (Pule, 2013). Greta Gaard, (2014) states that 'Pule does not consider the strong influences of race, class, sexuality, and culture in constructing masculinity'. Further, examining 160 research papers, Susan Paulson and William Boose have found a 'fertile moment for thought and action around masculinities and environment.' (Susan Paulson, William Boose, 7). They found that the inclusion of concepts like eco masculinities, eco-genders, and ecosexuality is necessary, and tensions between hegemonic, non-hegemonic and new masculinities are necessary to address environmental challenges. (Susan Paulson, William Boose, 7).

In addition, Greta Gaard in 'Towards New EcoMasculinities, EcoGenders, and Ecosexualities' mentions that 'masculinity has not always been defined in opposition to ecology'. In the context of the West, women, nature, and fertility have rendered different values before the commencement of Patriarchal and monotheistic religion. She mentions that many spiritual groups have identified it as impossible to jump back or revive ancient traditions (Gaard, 2014).

From the above discussions, it is evident that discussion on Ecomasculinity, and Ecological Masculinism primarily pertains to the Western scenario, and the exact parallel may not be drawn in the Indian context. However, the masculinity and nature relationship in tribal society is viewed through an ecofeminist lens. The article *Green Indigeneity: Forest Gynocracies and Subaltern Eco-masculinities* presents an ecofeminist analysis of specific works by Mahasweta Devi. The author explores the dichotomy between state society and tribal society, highlighting the phallogocentric nature of the former and characterizing the latter as a "gynocentric ecological kinship structure." Association of forest with woman, femininity, and motherhood, Aruabha Bose asserts that the forest is a feminine space, the gynocentrism of which caters to a more egalitarian society than the phallogocentric post-colonial development and civilizations. The forest serves as the focal point for reestablishing the forgotten ecocentric nurturing and "natural history," allowing individuals to reconnect with the neglected maternal essence of nature.

Rather than viewing the forest as a feminine space, this study uses the concept of 'tinai', to understand the dynamics of tribal society. In the context of Tamilnadu, before the commencement of state society and caste-based society, tinai society existed. Nirmal Selvamony identifies that traces of the lifestyle are still found in some scenarios (2012, p.61). Considering the novel as a representation of tribal society, this paper attempts to study the Ecomasculine traits built on caring and nurturing attitudes. It is evident that Man in a tinai society is nurtured with the attitude of living for human and nonhuman others, as subjective attitude and Self-centredness are not a way of living in tinai society.

2.1 Methodology

To delve deeper into the intricacies of these issues, this study employs the method of textual analysis. Specifically, the paper analyzes the novel *Huntsman* by Lakshmi Saravanakumar, translated into English by Aswini Kumar. The novel provides insights into how masculinity is constructed and perceived within the context of a Tribal society. By choosing textual analysis as the methodological approach, this study aims to dissect the text *Huntsman* to uncover the subtleties, themes, and representations related to masculinity and its relationship with nature within the narrative. This method provides a structured framework for uncovering the nuances of masculinity and nature within the context of a Tribal society.

3. Discussion

3.1 Overview of the Novel

Huntsman is a novel authored by Lakshmi Saravanakumar and translated into English by Aswini Kumar. The novel is set in the Mokkanilai forest area in the latter half of the nineteenth century, focusing on a tribal community that lives in harmony with the forest and considers it a unified organism of which they are a part. The narrative revolves around the complex relationship between Thangappan, a Huntsman, and his foster son Vaasi, a young man from the tribal society. Thangappan resides with his three wives and adheres to his own set of rules. The novel commences with Thangappan hunting and killing a female tiger and concludes with meeting his demise at the hands of the offspring of the same tiger. Whereas, Vaasi, portrayed as a Woodsman deeply connected to his indigenous roots, views the forest as his home. The book encompasses four major sections - Season 1, Season 2, Season 3, and Season 4. The initial two sections consist of six subsections each, while the latter two seasons expand to seven subsections each.

Season 1 introduces readers to Thangappan, a hunter, and 'Karumandi' - a person who knows the entirety of the forest, and Vaasi has a profound compassion for the forest and its creatures. This season culminates with Thangappan grappling with wounded masculinity due to Vaasi's rejection of him as a father figure. Season 2 witnesses the transformation of the hill landscape, a significant portion of which had been turned into a plain. Within this season, the animosity between Thangappan and Vaasi intensifies. Further, the chapter deals with the arrival of Zamindar, an outsider to the forest for leisurely hunting. His hunting expedition concludes tragically as he kills a pregnant deer and vanishes into the depths of the forest. Vaasi begins to nurture the offspring of deer. Simultaneously, Vaasi finds himself drawn towards the tribal settlement and is observed by Sadayan, his biological father.

In Season 3, Thangappan relinquishes his aspiration of passing down his hunting prowess to Vaasi. On the other hand, Vaasi becomes increasingly captivated by Sadayan's perspective on the forest, delving deeper into its secrets. The season also sheds light on Thangappan's extensive elephant hunting, during which Vaasi's attempt to save the majestic creatures leads to him being subjected to Thangappan's violent outburst. Thangappan kills the fawn, which Vaasi brought up. Later, he gets arrested for the act of hunting.

The last season captures Thangappan's downfall and realization phase. Having returned from prison out on bail, he was subjected to an animal attack. He undergoes a gradual transformation and develops a mixed feeling of fear and affection towards Vaasi. Eventually, he bequeaths his gun to Vaasi. On the contrary, Vaasi orchestrates a tiger hunt that ultimately leads to Thangappan's demise at the paws of a tiger, a poignant reminder of the consequences stemming from Thangappan's initial act of killing a female tiger. Briefly, the Forest and its ecological units, Hunting, Masculinity, Tribal society, and the problems they face are the central ideas explored in the novel.

3.2 Tribal Society

The treatment of the forest in the novel is not reduced to the backdrop of human actions, or objective or subjective. Instead, forest dwellers exercise a kith and kin relation with the forest. It signifies the tiNai lifestyle and philosophy. To put it in Selvamony's words, 'they dwell in it like its flora and fauna' (2008, p. 151). It is a self-sustained society. Saravakumar states that 'the indigenous people have all knowledge about sources, and living. And the knowledge has been stolen by the outsiders, and are advised to do in our ways', which he finds unnecessary as he is wealthy in his way. It challenges the mainstream education system. Their not-to-change lifestyle is better and resistant to commercial attitudes. (Lakshmi Saravanakumar's Speech at Thamaraiakarai, 2019)

Further, 'tiNai is the word for a family of human and nonhuman members living off their indigenous, ancestral homestead. Both a family and a kind of living, tiNai is where you ought to be and what you ought to do. Human inhabitants of tiNai regarded plants and animals as members of their own family (Selvamony, 2010, p. 138). The tribes represented in the novel share an indigeneity and ancestry to the forest. They consider their forest as their home and kin. In a tiNai society, the concept of home is not reduced to house, people, warmth and comfort. It includes the place. As in the novel, Vaasi and most of the forest dwellers consider the forest their home, including the entire ecological and spiritual units. 'When one of their women delivers a child, she does it entirely on her own. No one would touch her or her child for three days. After severing the umbilical cord, she displays her child first to this forest. Because the child had already imbibed the scent of the forest while still in its mother's womb, it quickly identified and related to its location. Having lived and died in this state, their soul does not migrate elsewhere.' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 70). The scene emphasises that belongingness begins before birth by association with scent, continues with life by association with place, and extends to the aftermath of death.

Further, the forest dwellers

had the faculty of meeting every crisis head-on and sorting it out satisfactorily. Once his duty to the forest has been done, his soul would merge with that of the forest forever and

ever. In a sense, the entire forest was operating via the souls of these tribals. The trees, plants and creepers of the forest were inhaling their very life breath so they could survive.

The people simply carry out their assigned duties and leave the rest to the forest goddess. (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 189).

In addition, according to the legend of the forest dwellers, trees are the child of the moon, and the soul of the dead forest dwellers, which are part of the spiritual realm, resides in the trees. Further, the entire forest is considered an organism of which the forest dwellers are a part and not a centre. The God, Palichi, which the forest dwellers worship, is the soul of the forest. The said scenarios emphasize the 'Sacralisation of nature'. The forest and trees are sacralized. When Thangappan hunted the tiger, it is mentioned that the forest dwellers experienced grief rather than fear. As, 'For one born in the forest, along with his body and thoughts, is inculcated the feeling that Palichi and the tiger are both gods.' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 38) Here again, the sacred element – palichi is naturalized.

The idea of sacralization of nature and vice versa aligns with the concept of 'Ontic Continuum'. Selvamony in 'Interrelatedness: tinai, Ecocriticism and Envirocriticism' says that 'In a tinai, the humans, nature and the sacred are continuous ontically and agentively' (Selvamony, 2012, p. 63). Ontic Continuum is a concept that states that the said entities are alive, which means 'life is a thread that runs diffusively through all the entities in the continuum' (Selvamony, 2012, p. 62).

In contrast, the outsiders represented in the novel have an objectified view of the forest and its ecological units. Selvamony observes that the civilized ones can relate to each other, nature, and the spiritual world only in economic terms, thereby laying waste to their powers. (Selvamony, 2013, p. 36). The act of exploitation signifies that they have a distance from the forest and have a disengaged relation from the Ontic Continuum. In the case of the individuals- the outsiders represented in the novel position themselves to be superior, and the ecological units are constrained to resources to be exploited.

The view of the outsider and that of the forest dwellers meets at a point in the novel, where Kattayan witnesses the cutting of trees by the outsiders. He holds the view that the trees are the souls of the forest dwellers and children of one on the moon, who would punish the one who would be swallowed by a snake. 'How come the snake had not swallowed them yet was the question that troubled Kattayan' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 70). On the contrary, the people cutting the tree hold the objectified view, where the tree is reduced to a resource of utility and profit. The outsiders were able to relate to nature only in economic terms. Kattayan, while witnessing the cutting of trees by the outsiders, explains that 'Their eyes did not reflect any compassion for the thought that trees were living things too' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 71). Lakshmi Saravanakumar describes the view of the forest dwellers as follows - 'The Forest that I saw was very different indeed from the one described to me by the displaced tribals...' (2019).

Further, he mentions that when a Paliyar- the forest dweller represented in the novel, is asked about his life, he would say that he is very happy. Whether they have food or not, they keep themselves happy. I have never found an answer like that. They don't think of life as a burden. They live happily and joyfully. (Lakshmi Saravanakumar's Speech at Thamarakarai, 2019).

In Brief, the novel vividly captures the Tinai form of a lifestyle of the tribes as in the case of a home, indigeneity, ontic continuum, and the philosophy of life.

3.3 Tribal Masculinity

3.3.1 Thangappan Vs. Vaasi

As tinai is 'the relational web integrating the human, nature and the spiritual realm' (Selvamony, 2008, p. 153), the life of the forest dwellers is inherently associated with Nature. And, 'Each person inhabiting a tinai will be part of a community of human and non-human beings who inherit a set of cultural practices from their ancestors' (Selvamony, 2008, p. 153). In the case of the novel, the inheritance is evident with the view and perception of the forest. For instance, Chellayi, while defining Vaasi, mentions that he 'will forever remain a forest dweller, who believes the forest is a living thing, and a person should not take more than he needs from it' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 91). The inheritance enables people of the tribal society to have a kith and kin relation with non-human entities. Further, they consider the forest as their home. The character, 'In tinai tradition, it is one's place or home that integrates all the aspects of a specific tinai' (Selvamony, 2008, p. 156). In the novel, Vaasi, Boosani, and Kattayan are the characters who inherit the traditions and share indigeneity and homing concepts of the tribal society. Eventually, the said concepts nurture caring and protective attitudes towards nature. For instance, Vaasi mentions that the forest is his home (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 192) which, in his view, includes humans and non-humans. The character, Boosani, is stubborn not to leave the forest, irrespective of the problems.

Further, Selvamony, while describing life in primal society, mentions it as a 'life lived for others, a life of love, in which you emptied yourself to accommodate the legitimate need of the other' (Selvamony, 2021, p. 282). The concept of life also caters to the caring attitude, which is evident in the character Vaasi. When the Paliyar community is subjected to attack by the elephants, Vaasi doesn't care about his life and ventures to save his community. During the incident 'Vaasi looked up at the sky and the stars. Each star was the soul of a dead tribal. He tearfully pleaded with them, not for his own life, but for the safety of the settlement' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 243).

'When humans, nature, and the spiritual realm are regarded relationally, humans do not occupy a central place as in the objective and subjective types of treatment...' (Selvamony, 2018, p. 152). This aspect forms the core difference between Vaasi and Thangappan. The presence of Thangappan in the novel highlights the difference between the form of masculinity built with and without the notion of indigeneity. As Vaasi is a man of tinai society, inherently, he has kith and kin engagement with the non-humans. Several instances in the

novel show Vaasi's caring attitude to non-human entities. He sympathizes with the animals killed by Thangappan. He involves himself in Thangappan's hunting troop to save animals as much as he can. He nurtures the deer, he has saved.

Whereas Thangappan's masculine identity is built on his skill in hunting and expertise in killing animals like elephants and tigers. He holds his hunter identity in high esteem. Thangappan uses the knowledge of the forest and builds his identity as 'karumandi'. Thangappan, though knows everything about the forest, doesn't develop a caring attitude towards the forest. This is evident when he is involved in butchering several elephants. He considers Vaasi his opponent and considers hunting an activity that asserts his superiority over him. His venture is centred on the human cause. He hunts tigers and elephants to prevent animal intervention in human properties. Secondly, he enjoys the act of hunting rather than for money. He picks the tiger's whiskers and Elephant's trunk as enough for his act and symbol of pride. But the rich considered him as a 'temporary quick fix' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p.188). 'While Thangappan was capable of reading and hunting any animal, he did not possess the capacity to converse with any soul' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p.138).

Further, he went to see the film Vettaikaran, an MGR movie. He considers MGR's performance as that of a clown as the representation of Huntsman in the film contradicts the reality, of which he is an expert. He finds MGR's way of acting effeminate and woman-like when he cries (Saravanakumar, 2019, p.76). Knowing about the MGR's greatness, he was tempted to bow his head to his figure. But he finds the act as nonsense and says, 'I have faced the tiger and the tusker in the jungle with my head held high. Why should I bow to this person?' he mentally berated himself. (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 77). This shows his masculine identity being tied to hunting.

But his masculinity is hurt when he finds that Vaasi doesn't consider him his father. Thangappan, considering Vaasi as his son wishes to inherit his hunting skills to him. Contrarily, Vaasi wished to learn the secrets of the forest from his biological father Sadayan. (Saravanakumar, 2019, p.138). Thangappan finds himself 'disgraced, like a poisonous creeper taking deep roots inside his soul' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 82). The indigency of Vaasi makes him deny the fatherhood of Thangappan, who is a hunter without love towards the nonhumans. Whereas Vaasi's masculinity is built on infinite care. Vaasi is mentioned as 'the remnant of the heir to this forest, and he was well aware that his duty lay in leaving behind other heirs to protect the forest' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 89). Vaasi is destined to save the forest and leave offspring to protect the forest from humans. He believed that his ancestors and forefathers belonged to this forest and my descendants too will inhabit this land' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p.168).

On the other layer, Vaasi's biological father, who exercises infinite capacity of care for the forest is certainly an ecomasuline figure. He is described as a person 'not meant to be confined to a hut. He encompasses the whole forest within himself' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 140). He is in complete synchronization with the forest and nonhumans, which is beyond human perception. It is evident when he rides a wild elephant to save the tribes.

In Brief, Vaasi's indigency enables him to position himself as a human subject in the integral web of humans, nature, and the sacred. Thangappan is an individual rather than a 'human subject'. Eventually, this notion builds a varied form of masculinity between the two.

3.3.2 Hunting and Masculinity

In a stereotyped manner, the ethnic people have always been considered as a hunting population who can never be tender with nature. (Chakraborty, 2019, p. 593). On the contrary, the novel presents varied notions of hunting, rather than reducing it to an act of exploitation. It primarily presents three perceptions of hunting. Firstly, for Thangappan, hunting is a spectacle of power and masculinity. He prides himself in identifying himself as a hunter. He feels proud of his identity of being a hunter. Secondly, for the forest dwellers being a hunter-gatherer society, hunting is perceived as an act of livelihood. Thirdly, Zamindar hunting is a sport and pleasurable activity.

While hunting a deer, the Zamindar is stopped by Vaasi as it is a pregnant female. But the Zamindar continues to hunt. 'It was a pregnant female. But these rules apply to humans, not urban animals like Zamindar (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 124). On the contrary, thangappan has his set of rules for hunting, which is also destructive and human-centred. He is the entitled 'Huntsman' of the novel. Knowing the forest, Thangappan establishes his identity as 'Karumandi'. He inherits the skills and knowledge of hunting from his father. Thangappan held his own rules, concerning the consequences of hunting. And, the novel begins with Thangappan deliberately breaking one of his rules: killing a female Tiger.

Whereas Vaasi is a person, who would not take anything above needed from the forest. He is mentioned to hold the weapon for protection. Saravanakumar mentions it as 'A true hero would take up arms only during a time of dire need' (2019, p. 242). He learned 'one aspect of the forest in the company of a hunter (Thangappan), while by birth and by nature, he was a tribal, keen on conservation' (Saravanakumar, 2019, p. 133)

Chellayi is noted to be a prominent hunting woman. Chellayi is exempt from the forest dwellers' way of living and engages in hunting out of her will. Traditionally, men have been associated with dominance, and nature is feminized, for it has been exploited by men. The characterization of Chellayi as a hunter challenges the notion of hunting being traditionally considered a male domain. In a speech, Lakshmi Saravanakumar shares his view on hunting. Witnessing a cave painting that is 2500 years old, he finds that 'Hunting is a thing beyond gender' (Lakshmi Saravanakumar's Speech at Thamarakarai, 2019)

4. Conclusion

Connell identifies that 'change in gender relation involves not only personal relations, identities, and intimate life but also large-scale institutions and the structural conditions of social life.' (Connell, 15, 2012), which highlights the role of structural and social conditions in shaping masculinity. This paper attempted to render attention to the existence of a masculine discourse and the dynamic of the society

which inherently builds caring and nurturing attitudes among men. The study finds that the characteristics of the tribal community, including the concept of life, home, ontic-continuum and the idea of indigeneity, cater to Ecomasculine attitudes among men. The exploration of masculinity and its relationship with nature in the context of the novel representation of tribal society reveals contrasting perspectives and value systems. The concept of masculinity emerges as a counter-hegemonic trait within the tinai society, representing a caring attitude and a deep connection to the environment. The characters of Thangappan and Vaasi exemplify different forms of masculinity. Thangappan's identity is built on hunting prowess and a sense of power, asserting his superiority over others and prioritizing human interests. In contrast, Vaasi embodies an eco-masculine figure deeply rooted in the tinai society and values. He sees the forest as his home and exhibits infinite care and concern for the non-human entities within it.

Further, the analysis of hunting in the novel renders the multifaceted nature of hunting. For Thangappan, hunting represents a spectacle of power and masculinity, while for the forest dwellers, it is livelihood. The zamindar sees hunting as a pleasurable sport, disregarding ethical considerations. However, Vaasi's approach to hunting aligns with the principles of the tinai society, where it is done out of necessity and only to the extent required for survival or protection. Furthermore, the presence of Chellayi as a prominent hunting woman challenges the essentialized notion of men as the sole exploiters of nature. It underscores the idea that hunting transcends gender boundaries and should not be strictly associated with dominance.

Overall, the study highlights the clash between different masculinities, with Thangappan embodying a destructive and human-centred form, while Vaasi represents a caring, indigenously rooted masculinity that values the interconnectedness of humans, nature and the spiritual realm. This exploration sheds light on the complex dynamics between masculinity, nature, and societal values in the context of the novel and Tinai society. It can be considered that Tribal masculinity is counter-hegemonic and also can be counted as the one, which could be potential hegemonic masculinity, which is less oppressive and embraces the non-human.

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