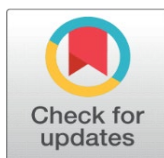


# FLOWING OF THE FEMININE; GROUNDING OF THE MASCULINE: EXPLORING SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND FAMILIAL HARMONY IN KUMBALANGI NIGHTS THROUGH THE LENS OF LUCE IRIGARAY

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## ABSTRACT

This paper critically analyzes the 2019 Malayalam film *Kumbalangi Nights* through the lens of Luce Irigaray's theory of sexual difference. The film's narrative challenges rigid patriarchal gender roles by contrasting the hypermasculinity of the character Shammi with the emotional evolution of four estranged brothers who gradually embrace vulnerability, care, and mutual interdependence. Drawing on Irigaray's critique of phallogocentric structures and her call for relational ethics rooted in gender difference, this study argues that *Kumbalangi Nights* envisions family harmony not through erasure of gender roles but through their fluid integration. The paper highlights how the film subverts dominant cinematic and cultural portrayals of masculinity and femininity, offering an alternative vision where coexistence, emotional expression, and respect for difference pave the way for healing and transformation within the family. Through qualitative analysis and close reading of key scenes, this work situates the film within broader feminist and philosophical discourses, emphasizing the relevance of Irigaray's ideas in contemporary cinematic narratives.

**Keywords:** Kumbalangi Nights, Luce Irigaray, Sexual Difference, Gender Dynamics, Toxic Masculinity, Feminist Film Theory, Malayalam Cinema, Family Harmony, Emotional Vulnerability, Phallogocentrism, Feminist Philosophy, Masculinity in Indian Cinema

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding gender dynamics is essential for examining the functioning of family structures and societies. Traditional gender roles often impose rigid expectation on individuals shaping relationships within the family. In patriarchal societies, masculinity is frequently associated with authority, control and emotional suppression while femininity is linked to passivity, dependence and submissiveness. These rigid binaries often create conflict, alienation and dysfunction within familial units. According to Irigaray the recognition of sexual difference rather than its erasure is important for creating meaningful relationships: "Sexual difference is one

of the major philosophical issues, not the issue of our age. Its ongoing repression leads identity social structures and ethical relations” (Irigaray3)

Madhu C Narayanan’s’ Kumbalangi Nights intricately explores these gender dynamics within the framework of dysfunctional yet evolving family set in Kerala. Set in Kerala, the film follows four estranged brothers -Saji, Bonny, Bobby, and Franky who navigate personal struggles and fractured relationships while living in a decaying household. The way they interact reveal the deep wounds caused by traditional masculinity and exerts control over his wife and her family by embodying an oppressive hypermasculine ideal. Shammi’s journey toward reconciliation, healing and an alternative form of masculinity one that integrates emotional vulnerability, care and responsibility against Shammi’s rigid masculinity position masculinity as the universal standard while reducing femininity to a subordinate “other”.

Kumbalangi Nights is 2019 Malayalam movie written by Shyam Pushkaran and directed by Madhu C Narayanan. The movie offers a compelling exploration of family ,gender and emotional healing challenging traditional notions of masculinity and femininity. The film displays a contrast between toxic masculinity portrayed by Shammi , who embodies rigid control and dominance and the evolving masculinity of the four brothers who gradually embrace vulnerability, care and independence. Drawing on Luce Irigaray’s theories of sexual difference. This paper examines how the film envisions family harmony through the dynamic interplay of masculine and feminine traits. Irigaray challenges Western thought for subordinating femininity to a mere reflection of the masculine arguing instead that true relationality requires acknowledging and valuing both feminine and masculine. “Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our ‘salvation’ if we thought it through” (Irigaray5) Kumbalangi Nights aligns with this perspective, illustrating how familial and social well-being emerges when individuals incorporate both masculine and feminine qualities rather than adhering to rigid gender norms. By reading the film through irigaray’s framework, this study highlights how embracing sexual difference rather than reinforcing hierarchical gender binaries creates space for healing, coexistence, and mutual transformation.

Kumbalangi Nights challenges these conventional notions by portraying masculinity as something that need not be defined by dominance and emotional detachment. Instead, the film suggests that true strength comes from vulnerability, care and the ability to express emotions – qualities often regarded as feminine within patriarchal societies. The film actively engages with contemporary discussions on masculinity and femininity. It critiques the destructive effects of rigid gender roles while offering an alternative vision where individuals can integrate both masculine and feminine traits for emotional well-being. As Luce Irigaray argues the problem with traditional gender structures is that they do not acknowledge sexual difference in a way that fosters mutual respect and coexistence. “The masculine has always functioned in such a way as to make the feminine it’s underside or negative” (Irigaray 12).

The film challenges this dynamic by presenting a model of masculinity that is not dependent on subjugation of femininity but instead thrives through its recognition. By portraying emotional openness and caregiving as strengths rather than weakness, Kumbalangi Nights arises as a powerful cinematic statement on gender dynamics and family harmony making it a thought provoking subjects for gender studies. Luce Irigaray’s work provides a critical lens for understanding gender dynamics in Kumbalangi Nights particularly in understanding how

patriarchal structures reinforce rigid masculinity and subordinate femininity. In 'Speculum of the Other Woman', Irigaray critiques phallogocentric thought, arguing that "Western philosophical traditions have constructed knowledge systems that corner and exclude the feminine. She asserts that the feminine has been defined only in relation to the masculine rather than as an independent subjectivity "Woman has not been defined as subject, as autonomous being instead she has been understood as the negative of man as lack or absence" (Irigaray Speculum 133) This critique is central to understanding Kumbalangi Nights in which characters of Shammi embodies a patriarchal system that negates the feminine by equating masculinity with control, discipline and emotional suppression. On the other hand, the four brothers represent a journey toward an alternative masculinity one that resists traditional phallogocentric definitions and integrates feminine coded traits like nurturance and emotional expression .In "This Sex which is not One", Irigaray expands upon this critique where she introduces the concept of feminine multiplicity as opposed to the unitary singular identity of masculinity. She argues that patriarchal discourse restricts women into oppositional rigid roles failing to acknowledge the fluidity and plurality of feminine subjectivity "Female sexuality has always been conceptualize on the basis of masculine parameters"(This Sex 23) .This binary construction is obvious in Kumbalangi Nights where the rigid masculinity in Shammi is pitted against the films evolving fluid characters .His need to control his wife Simi reflects an anxiety about the feminine uncountability. Meanwhile, the brothers go through a positive transformation where they embrace vulnerability, care and emotional openness -challenging the singularity of masculinity A significant aspect of Irigaray's work is her theory of sexual difference, which claims that gender should not be considered in hierarchical or oppositional terms but as two discrete yet relational modes of being. She argues that true relationality can only emerge when men and women understand and respect their differences rather enforcing dominance. "Sexual difference is a fundamental question for our age ; it's denial leads to erasure, while it's recognition offers new possibilities for human coexistence" (An Ethics5) The film echoes that perspective by portraying how harmony within the family is only possible when masculinity is no longer defined in opposition to femininity but in dialogue with it. Shammi's failure to uphold this balance results in his downfall while the brothers' reconciliation represents an alternative mode of gendered coexistence. Irigaray's critique of the symbolic order systems of language, culture and institutions that reinforce gender roles in particularly relevant in recognizing how patriarchy shapes familial structures. She argues that "patriarchal language and symbols reinforce men's dominance by ensuring that only their experiences and desires are articulated and recognized" (Language and Sexual Difference78).

In Kumbalangi Nights, hypermasculinity is supported through societal norms that reinforce his authoritarianism. His self-identification as the "complete man" highlights how cultural discourse privileges men who conform to dominant ideals of control and self-sufficiency. In contrast the brothers' transformation implies a disruption of this symbolic order that allows for a fluid and reciprocal form of masculinity. Feminist film theory further contextualizes this discussion particularly in Laura Mulvey's theory of Male gaze. In her seminal essay 'Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema', Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema is structured around the objectification of women, where female characters exist primarily to serve male desire: "Woman's image functions as a signifier for the male bound by the symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions" (Mulvey). The film subverts Mulvey's theory by shifting the focus from women as passive objects to active agents who challenge patriarchal norms. Baby in particular stands up against

Shammi's control refusing to be reduced to a silent submissive woman. Scholarship on gender and family in Indian cinema provides broader implications in how Kumbalangi Nights engages with wide social narratives. Writing on masculinity in Indian films R.S Rajan argues that Indian cinema often oscillates between reinforcing traditional masculinity and offering moments of subversion "While mainstream Indian films frequently validate dominant patriarchal values, they also contain fissures where alternative masculinities emerge". Kumbalangi Nights clearly shows the tension presenting both the oppressive masculinity of Shammi and the transformative masculinity of the brothers. Similarly, Preminda Jacob's work on gender representation in Malayalam cinema showcases how familial narratives often centers around the crisis of masculinity where men struggle between fulfilling societal expectations and embracing emotional vulnerability (Jacob 117). The film takes a step further by proposing a resolution -embracing both masculine and feminine qualities for familial harmony. Studies on gender and sexuality in Indian cinema have also noted how films portray familial conflict as a site where patriarchal ideologies are either reinforced or dismantled. As Shohini Ghosh notes,

"The Indian family film serves as a microcosm of the nation- state, where gender norms are negotiated and reaffirmed" (Ghosh 32). In this sense, Kumbalangi Nights questions dominant cinematic portrayals of the ideal Indian family by denying the notion that male authority is necessary for stability. On the other hand, it suggests that true familial harmony arises when individuals recognize and embrace emotional depth a perspective that aligns with Irigaray's vision of sexual difference. Through the lens of Luce Irigaray's feminist philosophy, feminist film theory and existing scholarship on gender in Indian cinema, Kumbalangi Nights arises as a film that challenges the patriarchal symbolic order, critiques toxic masculinity and presents a different vision of gendered coexistence. By applying Irigaray's ideas of sexual difference, the film shows a narrative where masculinity is not rigidly opposed to femininity but instead transformed through its recognition. This reading situates Kumbalangi Nights within broader feminist discourses on gender, family and the necessity dismantling hierarchical gender structures for collective healing.

Luce Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference argues that the gender equality does not come from erasing differences but from valuing and recognizing them in a non-hierarchical way. She critiques western thought for its tendency to subscribe the feminine into the masculine there by denying women their own subjectivity "sexual difference is one of the major philosophical mines if not the issue of our age" (An Ethics 5). While much of feminist theory has focused on dismantling patriarchal structures, Irigaray instead advocates for a reconfiguration of gender relations where both the masculine and the feminine exist in a state of mutual recognition and relationality.

Kumbalangi Nights aligns with this perspective by portraying a family structure that does not demean conformity to rigid gender roles but instead allow both masculinity and femininity to co-exist in a fluid, complementary manner.

Unlike dominant narratives that either reinforce patriarchal masculinity or encourage gender neutrality, the film luminously acknowledges sexual difference and highlights its value in achieving family.

However there has been little to no scholarly engagement with how Kumbalangi Nights aligns with Irigaray notion of an ethical relationship between the sexes. This paper fills this gap by demonstrating how the films depiction of evolving muscularity and femininity refills Irigaray's argument that true rationality is

possible only when gender differences are acknowledged and valued rather than erased.

This study employs a qualitative analysis to explore the themes and character dynamics in *Kumbalangi Nights* placing emphasis on how the film portrays sexual difference and family harmony. Qualitative analysis primarily suitable for analyzing cinematic narratives as it enables an in-depth exploration of dialogue unusual symbolism and character development.

Though a close reading specific scenes this paper examines how the film presents masculinity and femininity not as oppositional forces but as complementary elements for familial and social balance. Scenes like Saji's emotional breakdown and healing, Shammi's hypermasculine unraveling and the interactions between the brother and female character will be explored to demonstrate how the film engages with gender as a relational construed rather than a rigid binary.

The theoretical framework is rooted in Luce Irigaray's concepts of sexual difference feminine fluidity and masculine grounding Irigaray argues that "sexual difference" is an incredible component of human existence, and its erasure leads to the suppression of genuine relationality (*An Ethics*). This study employs her ideas to the filmi representation of gendered relationships artificially how the denial of ... muscularity and the acceptance of emotional openers create a space for authentic coexistence. The notion of feminine fluidity which Irigaray describes as "multiple, differ and in excess phallogocentric structures" (*This sex* 28), is used to examine character like Saji and Bobby who eventually embrace vulnerability and other qualities often regarded as feminine On contrast Shammi's acceleration on singular dominant masculinity reflects what Irigaray critiques as the patriarchal symbolic order that denies relationality (*Speculum* 133).

The spectrum of *Kumbalangi Nights* for this study is deliberate as the film challenges conventional representations of gender and family on Indian cinema. Diverging from the narratives common in mainstream Indian films that either reinforce patriarchal norms or present gender equality through the erasure of difference *Kumbalangi Nights* acknowledges sexual difference and highlights its necessity for harmony.

This positions the text as an ideal one for examining Irigaray feminist philosophy in a non-western cultural context – a dimension that has not been extensively explored in academic literature. Ethical consideration in this analysis primarily concerns the study of cultural narratives without enforcing western feminist paradigms on to Indian contexts while Irigaray theories prescribe a useful framework they will be applied with an awareness of the film's specific socio-cultural setting. Moreover, since this analysis involves secondary sources and does not engage directly with human subjects ethical concerns related to participant research do not apply. However, the analysis will be continued with careful attention to preserving the cultural and narrative specificities of the film mortgaging the risk over generalization. By integrating a close reading of unmated elements with Irigaray feminist theory this study aims to provide a named exploration of how *Kumbalangi Nights* reimagines gendered western knowledge through the acknowledgement and valuation of sexual difference.

Luce Irigaray's theory of sexual difference functions as the primary analytical lens for this study as it provides a way to understand *Kumbalangi Nights* beyond a simple critique of toxic masculinity. She challenges phallogocentric structures in western thought arguing that the feminine has historically been defined only in relation to the masculine making it invisible or subordinate (*Speculum* 133) she points that genuine gender equality cannot be achieved by absorbing women into

male-centered discourse but rather by valuing and recognizing sexual difference (This sex 28). In Kumbalangi this approach is particularly beneficial in analyzing how the film resists traditional patriarchal framework by embracing both feminine and masculine traits in constructing a harmonious family.

One of the key critiques of Irigaray is that phallogentrism organizes society around male ended values such as control, dominance and rationality relegating the feminine to passivity and lack (Speculum 139). Shammi the antagonist embodies this structure as he enforces toxic masculinity within the domestic space controlling the women in his family while regarding emotional vulnerability. His final downfall shows the films critique of this model in contrast the film presents an alternative though Saji and Franky who were to integrate qualities like emotional openness and care that are often regarded as feminine as “multiple, diffuse and fluid” resisting containment within patriarchal logics (This Sex 31). This brothers’ evolving relationship mirrors this idea showing how evaluating both masculine and feminine energies lead to personal and familial transformation.

Irigaray calls for an alternative symbolic order that does not erase difference but allows for mutual recognition is reflected in the film’s resolution. This lead of presenting gender as a hierarchy Kumbalangi Nights values difference as essential for relationality of much like Irigaray argument that “two different subjects must exist for love to take place”(An Ethics) The film does not advocate for the erasure of masculinity but rather acknowledge it

The primary aim of this paper is to analyse how Kumbalangi Nights portrays dynamics and their influence on familial relationships through the lens of Luce Irigaray theories on sexual difference. Irigaray argues that “sexual difference is the most important question of our age” and real relational harmony can only emerge when masculinity and femininity are acknowledged and valued in their own right (An Ethics 5). This study explores how the film challenges patriarchal norms and instead evaluates vision of social balance and familial harmony rooted in difference rather than hierarchy.

In order to achieve this aim the paper pursues several specific objectives. Firstly, it examines how the film showcases different forms of masculinity ranging from Shammi’s oppressive hypermasculinity to Saji’s evolving emotional openness and the consequences these expressions have for familial harmony Irigaray challenges patriarchal masculinity for defining itself through authority and exclusion, a dynamic that is evident in Shammi’s character (spectrum 133). Secondly the study analyzes the representation of feminine character particularly Baby, Simi, Nylah and Sati as fluidity and interconnectedness which Irigaray describes as “multiple diffuse and in excess of phallogentric structures” (This sex 28). Additionally, the paper evaluates the film’s portrayal of how patriarchal structures can be transformed when characters embrace sexual difference rather than repress it lastly it assesses the relevance of Irigaray concepts in an Indian cultural context demonstrating cinematic space for rethinking of gender relations beyond western feminist paradigms

Kumbalangi Nights presents a nuanced explorations of masculinity and femininity aligning with Luce Irigaray’s theories of sexual difference. The film challenges rigid toxic masculinity while embracing a more fluid relational understanding of gender reflecting Irigaray’s statement that “sexual difference is the condition for love, for a living together in different (An Ethics 7). Though its characters and narrative the illustrates how embracing the difference in sexes can lead to personal growth and familial harmony.

The female character particularly Baby and the mother figures embody Irigaray's notion of the feminine imaginary, which exist beyond the constraints of phallogocentric thoughts. Baby's resistance against Shammi's control and her choice to marry Baby on her own terms signify a relational patriarchal containment.

The females in the film facilitate emotional healing and transformation not by reinforce patriarchal norms but by introducing an alternative mode of existence based on care and fluidity.

The films conflict comes from the tension between phallogocentric rigidity and feminine multiplicity Irigaray says that masculinity as constructed by patriarchy relies on dominance and singularity whereas femininity is defined by its plurality and openness (This sex 8). In Kumbalangi Nights Shammi represents a rigid hierarchical masculinity that resists change leading to conflict and violence. In contrast the brothers particularly Saji gradually embrace a model of masculinity that is relational rather than authoritarian. The contrast between Shammi's suffocating domestic environment and the brothers' home initially chaotic but ultimately transformed into a space of acceptance illustrates Irigaray's vision of a world where sexual difference is recognized and valued rather than erased.

A scene-by-scene analysis of key moments in the film further highlights these themes. Shammi's introduction standing in front of the mirror and he says to himself 'Raymond the complete man' shows that he considers himself as a complete man then he continues to carefully remove bindi in the mirror which itself shows how he removes any trace of femininity. In contrast, the brothers are now undergoing a phase of transformation: Bobby becomes responsible and hence find a job as he fell in love with Baby, Saji embraces care and emotional openness. Meanwhile Nylah as foreigner brings music into their household The climax where Shammi is physically thrown out of the household symbolizes the rejection of patriarchal authority reinforcing Irigaray's argument that phallogocentrism must be actively dismantled to create space for authentic relationality. (This sex 34).

Kumbalangi Nights challenges the patriarchal symbolic order. Irigaray argues that symbolic order is structured to privilege masculinity shaping language, culture and social structures to sustain male dominance (Speculum 133). This is evident in Shammi characterization- he imposes social norms by dictating how women should behave and by punishing men who fail to conform to his version of masculinity. However, the film subverts this order by presenting an alternative mode of existence. The brothers' household initially becomes a place where gender roles are fluid and relationality is practiced over hierarchy. This echoes Irigaray's call for a new symbolic order, one that does not erase sexual difference but allows it to exist in a non-hierarchical, mutually enriching manner (An Ethics 12). The films setting- Kumbalangi, is a space surrounded by water systematically represents the possibility of fluidity and transformation mirroring Irigaray's vision of a world where "the two sexes co-exist without one absorbing the other".

Ultimately the film's resolution aligns with Irigaray's notion of "living the differences". The transformation of the brothers from destabilized individuals into a harmonious family until is not achieved by erasing gender differences but by embracing them in a non-oppressive manner. The film does not suggest that femininity should replace masculinity but rather that masculinity must be redefined to accommodate care, emotional expression and vulnerability. Saji's journey from aggression to caregiving, Bobby acceptance of the love on equal terms and Franky's role as a bridge between past trauma and future hope all illustrate Irigaray's concept of a new way of being, where masculine and feminine coexist without one subsuming the other. By applying Irigaray's theories to Kumbalangi Nights this

analysis reveals how the film presents a radical reimagining of gender relations. Rather than reinforce patriarchal norms or advocating for gender neutrality the film suggests that harmony arises when masculinity and femininity are acknowledged as distinct yet independent love.

One of the key findings is that the film challenges rigid masculinities and suppression of femininity and its consequences and putting forward an alternative model rooted in relationality and emotional openness. Hypermasculine control of Shammi is depicted as oppressive and suffocating reinforcing Irigaray's argument that patriarchal structures demand male dominance at the expense of feminine multiplicity (spectrum 133).

In contrast the male protagonist evolves by incorporating traditionally feminine qualities such as care, vulnerability and emotional expressiveness demonstrating that a non-hierarchical coexistence of gendered traits is essential for familial harmony. The brothers' journey from alienation to connection illustrates the transformative potential of gender renegotiation. By demonstrating a different family model- one that is not biologically determined but emotionally nurtured the film presents a radical reimagining and emotional reciprocity replace authority and control.

The transformative effect of Kumbalangi Nights extends beyond its narrative offering a cinematic discourse that challenges viewers to reconsider gender expectations. By portraying masculinity as something that can and should evolve the film disrupts dominant narratives in Indian cinema which often reinforce traditional gender roles. Its success within mainstream cinema suggest a growing appetite for narratives that question rigid patriarchal structures and advocate for alternative models of familial and social organization. This aligns with Irigaray's vision of a world where gender is not site of domination but of mutual recognition and coexistence (An Ethics 66)

In terms of contribution to knowledge this study extends scholarship on the interaction of gender, family and Indian cinema by applying Irigaray theories to a contemporary Malayalam film while much of feminist film theory has focused on western cinema this analysis accentuates how Irigaray's concepts can be purposefully applied to Indian cultural contexts particularly in a region like Kerala where historical matrilineal traditions complicate dominant narratives of patriarchy. Furthermore, the study bridges a gap in critique patriarchy but actively builds an alternative vision of gender and family grounded in sexual difference rather than erasure.

Future research in their area would explore similar themes in other Indian films that challenge traditional gender comparing Kumbalangi Nights and other regional cinemas could further illuminate how different cultural interest negotiate masculinity and femininity. In addition to that an intersectional approach incorporating caste and class dynamics could deepen the understanding of how gender operates within layered social hierarchies.

Irigaray theories could also be applied to analyze the role of space and environment in shaping gendered identities in cinema considering how settings like Kumbalangi function symbolically in the films discourse on fluidity and transformation.

Ultimately Kumbalangi Nights offers an influential narrative for remaining gender relations not as a binary struggle but as a space for mutual transformation. By embracing Irigaray's vision of rethinking familial and social structures beyond patriarchal dominance.



## 2. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined *Kumbalangi Nights* through the lens of Luce Irigaray's theories on sexual difference, demonstrating how the film critiques rigid patriarchal masculinity while presenting an alternative vision of familial and societal harmony through the integration of feminine fluidity and masculine grounding. The analysis has shown that the film does not seek to erase sexual difference but rather to acknowledge and value both the masculine and the feminine as essential forces for a balanced family structure. This aligns with Irigaray's argument that true coexistence between genders can only be achieved when difference is recognized without hierarchy (*This Sex* 35). Shammi, as the embodiment of phallogocentric dominance, illustrates the dangers of a masculinity that suppresses vulnerability, while the other male characters, particularly Saji, Bobby, and Franky, evolve by embracing relationality and emotional expression. In contrast, the film's feminine characters, such as Baby and the mother figures, represent fluidity and care, creating a counterforce to the oppressive structures upheld by Shammi.

The key findings highlight that *Kumbalangi Nights* not only critiques patriarchal norms but also offers a transformative vision of gender relations that resonates with Irigaray's work. The film portrays masculinity as something that is not fixed but evolving, capable of growth through emotional connection rather than control. This directly challenges the phallogocentric symbolic order that Irigaray critiques, where men are traditionally positioned as subjects and women as objects (*Speculum* 142). By dismantling this rigid structure, the film suggests that family harmony is achieved not through dominance but through interdependence. The rejection of Shammi from the household serves as a metaphorical rejection of patriarchal authority, making way for a new familial order that values difference rather than oppression.

Beyond its narrative, *Kumbalangi Nights* is significant in its ability to disrupt mainstream cinematic portrayals of gender. Indian cinema, particularly Bollywood, has long been criticized for reinforcing traditional gender roles through its depictions of hypermasculine heroes and submissive women (Gopal 67). However, this film challenges these tropes by presenting men who must learn to nurture and women who assert their agency without conforming to stereotypical expectations. In doing so, it offers a vision of gender that is more fluid and reciprocal, echoing Irigaray's call for a new symbolic order where both the masculine and feminine are recognized as integral to social harmony (*An Ethics* 71).

In the broader context of gender equality, *Kumbalangi Nights* suggests that the path to a more just society lies in embracing sexual difference rather than negating it. This perspective is crucial in feminist discourse, which has often struggled with the tension between equality and difference. Irigaray's work provides a framework that moves beyond this dichotomy, advocating for a world where gender is neither a tool for domination nor an identity to be erased, but a relational dynamic that fosters growth and connection (*I Love to You* 103). The film exemplifies this vision, showing that family and society can thrive when gendered traits are not rigidly divided but allowed to coexist and complement one another.

As we reflect on the significance of *Kumbalangi Nights* within both cinema and feminist thought, a pressing question arises: How can contemporary societies move toward a recognition of sexual difference without reinforcing oppression? The film provides one possible answer by portraying transformation as a process of unlearning dominance and embracing vulnerability. However, its implications extend beyond individual change—suggesting the need for structural shifts in how

we perceive family, gender, and power. In a world still shaped by rigid binaries and patriarchal hierarchies, Kumbalangi Nights serves as a powerful reminder that harmony is not found in erasure but in difference, in the delicate balance between the flowing of the feminine and the grounding of the masculine.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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