



# The Dialectics of Hegemonic and Non-hegemonic Masculinities in the Patriarchal family of *Joji* (2021).

*Dr. Navya V.K.*

*Assistant Professor, Department of English,*

*Government College Peringome, Kannur University.*

*Joji* (2021) is a psychological crime film directed by Dileesh Pothan and written by Syam Pushkaran. *Joji*, a contemporary adaptation of the Shakesperian tragedy *Macbeth*, is set in the high ranges of Central Kerala during the Covid pandemic of 2019. The narrative revolves around the affluent Panachel family headed by the authoritative patriarch Kuttappan. As Kuttappan suffers from a stroke, the power dynamics of the family changes and disruptions erupt in the family that leads to the murder of Kuttappan by his youngest son *Joji*. The family in the movie is a space of hyper and toxic masculinities (his father is formidably masculine, elder brother is burly) and *Joji* can be seen as the powerless and non-hegemonic masculine in the family. I would like to argue that the criminality displayed by *Joji* can be seen as his attempt to assert his power and agency both of which he could not claim in the presence of the hegemonic masculine father figure Kuttappan. This paper focuses on the workings of patriarchy in the making of criminality. The patriarchal structure of the dysfunctional family spawns pathological criminal tendencies in *Joji* who feels powerless and alienated in the system.

Kuttappan, the domineering father of the family, controls the finances and lives of his sons. A toxic atmosphere of male dominance pervades in the family where the hegemonic masculinity of Kuttappan suppresses the desires and agencies of the younger members of the family. Kuttappan is wealthy, physically strong and abusive. *Joji* on the other hand is physically weak (frail and pint sized in comparison with his well built and muscular father and brothers) and is perceived by his father as a “miscreant and loser”. On many occasions *Joji* is physically abused, bullied and humiliated by his father. This paper explores how the non-hegemonic Masculinities of the family forces the non-hegemonic masculine individual to resort to criminality as an empowering action. The toxic atmosphere in the family and long pent up frustration results in plotting and murder. He tries to find his space through his anti-social actions and his criminality should be contextualized in the context of toxic, hyper and hegemonic masculinities in the family that marginalizes him in the familiar structure.

## Hegemonic and non- Hegemonic Masculinities

The theory of Hegemonic Masculinity emerged in the field of Gender Studies in 1980s. This analytical concept was developed by Raewyn Connell (Connell 1987) and revised (Connell 2005) in her theory of Gender order as a frame to identify those attitudes and practices among men that perpetuate gender inequality, involving both men's domination over women and the power of some men over other. Hegemonic Masculinity is defined as :

a set of values, established by men in power that functions to include and exclude, and to organize society in gender unequal ways. It combines several features: a hierarchy of masculinities, differential access among men to power (over women and other men), and the interplay between men's identity, men's ideals, interactions, power, and patriarchy. (Jewkes and Morrell 2012, 40)

A core element of the construction of hegemonic masculinity is heterosexuality and is often constructed as a gender position that is neither gay or female. Hegemonic masculinity is as much for women as for men a cultural ideal of manhood, which is rewarded by women's interests, attentions and efforts to replicate this ideal in their male relatives and associates.

Gramscian concept of hegemony is adopted by Connell to explain gendered power relations and sexual politics. Connell identifies certain masculinities as socially central or as associated with social power than the other forms of masculinities. This concept confirmed the plurality of masculinities and the complexities of gender construction of men and gave evidence of the active struggle for dominance that is implicit in the Gramscian concept of hegemony. Hegemonic Masculinities also documents the costs of hegemony by uncovering the sexual politics and power dynamics in gender relations.

The fundamental feature of the concept remains the combination of the plurality of masculinities and the hierarchy of masculinities. Masculinities are theorised as multiple, fluid and dynamic. Cultural consent, discursive centrality, institutionalization, and the marginalization or delegitimizing of alternatives are widely documented features of socially dominant masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities are not the only forms of masculinities available in a society but as the other forms of masculinities are placed in relation with the dominant force, it becomes a kind of normative ideal for the "culturally accepted way of being a man"

Hegemonic masculinity was distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men. (Connell ,p 833)

The concept of hegemonic masculinity presumes the subordination of non-hegemonic masculinities. This paper attempts to understand the power dynamics of masculinities in a dysfunctional family as represented in the movie *Joji*. The critical enquiry analyse how the authoritarian and hegemonic father in Kuttappan subordinates his son Joji, whose masculinity falls under the spectrum of non-hegemonic masculinities.

### **The Patriarchal roots of Criminality : The Crisis of Masculinity in Joji (2021)**

A regional hegemonic masculinity provides a cultural framework that is materialized in daily practices and interactions. Panachel family is a patriarchal institution that is structured by the rule of the patriarch and a mother figure is absent in the family. Kuttappan has the traits of a hegemonic masculine figure, he is physically and financially powerful. There are three sons and a daughter-in-law in the family, and all of them are subordinated to the authority of Kuttappan. The eldest son Jomon is the one who resembles Kuttappan the most, he is muscular, authoritative and he signifies hyper masculinity. He is a divorced alcoholic living with a teenage son Poppy. The second son Jomon is married to Bincy, who wants to move out of the oppressive family system to make a new nuclear family. Jomon is pious and timid, he can be seen as a frustrated son who does not have the power to undermine the rule of the patriarch. Bincy, the unhappy wife, burdened by domestic chores and frustrated by the fact that she can not move to town for taking fertility treatment. She spends most of her time serving the men of the family and the patriarch treats her like a servant. Joji is the youngest of the sons who is intimidated by the hyper and toxic masculinity of his father. He is ambitious and dreamy but lacks initiative and consistency.

Kuttappan controls the lives and finances of his sons. He is stronger, authoritative and physically abusive. He does not divide the family property and keep the sons under his dominance. His family despise him for the oppression. He does not allow Jaison to buy an apartment in the city and his wife Bincy is treated like an unpaid maid of the family. Joji was physically abused by Joji on multiple occasions (over his investment in horse and trading and by mistaking him for money freud). On one occasion, Kuttappan chokes the dozing Joji with a distinctively brutal gesture and declare that he is of no value for his father. There are constant bullying and humiliation from the father.

In the gender dynamics of the family, Joji occupies the most subordinated position. His weak physicality and unsuccessful life (in comparison with his father and brothers) makes him extremely vulnerable. Joji is unsuccessful in most of his ventures to make money and loiter around most of the time. More than his elder brothers, he is financially dependent on his father. He is an engineering drop out and he does not have a career or family. He embodies a weaker and non-hegemonic masculinity that lacks power. People around him treats like a 'loser', he is not consulted on important decisions and he eats not in the dining table but in the Kitchen slab.

His lack of power is evident in many occasions and he is restricted to express his emotions or anguish when he is alone in his room. In the movie, we can see Joji as trying to empower himself through his aspirations such as horse trading and stock market. His ambition is to become a rich NRI, wealth in this context can be seen as emasculating his otherwise powerless persona. He was not provided any financial or emotional support from his father or family. From his position of relative powerlessness, Joji is shown as trying to gain some power in the family by (comically) asserting his authority over his nephew Poppy and by allying himself with the 'soft figures' of the family like Poppy and Bincy.

Kuttappan's fall brings in change in the power dynamics of the Panachel family. Joji, more than the other sons of Kuttappan feel free and empowered at the absence of the hegemonic masculine father and he could sell his horse by posting a captivating photo of the horse posing in front of his house, which is possible only because of the absence of Kuttappan. He further orders commodities like wrist watch by transferring money from Kuttappan's account. He rejoices at the thought of financial inheritance that can be conferred on him with the passing of his father. Jomon, the eldest son becomes the head of the family. Even though Joji anticipates his death, Kuttappan's recovery shakes his expectations. Joji rationally appeals to his father for dividing the property but even from the wheel chair, Kuttappan could overpower Joji. Kuttappan's recovery and his continuing humiliation of Joji are weakening the boosted masculinity of Joji and he was driven into the corner and his criminality, can be viewed as a response to counter the oppressive filial bond to which he was attached.

Joji replaces the medicine of his father and later murders him. The aggression and act of violence can be seen as the subordinate masculine's attempt to claim his share of power in order to assert his independence over his surroundings. This attitude is replaced by disregard and irritation soon after the murder of Kuttappan, revealing differences within the family. After the murder, Joji displays defiance, impulsivity, disruptive, anti-sociality and self-harm. Joji tries to claim power in the family and as he proceeds with his second murder to hide the first one, his fall from fortune happens and as his criminality gets slowly exposed in the society, he attempts to commit suicide by blaming society for his actions.

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is characterised by attributes such as strength, ambition, self- autonomy and drive. In this movie, Joji who is seen as passive, soft and weak in the presence of Kuttappan, is trying to be physically stronger ( he starts jogging) and he is even appreciated by his uncle for his intelligent interventions on the division of property. Violence and aggression are other characteristics he is adopting after the demise of his father. Through the second killing , where he eliminates a stronger elder brother ,he is removing the second hegemonic masculinity ( elder brother Jomon who is a replica of their father) from the family scene and temporarily restores his power in front of the society. His crime shows the terrifying rage that is hidden behind familial decorum. These acts of

criminality presents a sardonic vision of patriarchal tyranny and pathologies it spawns. It can be argued that this criminality was born out of the crisis of masculinity in the patriarchal Panachel family.

### Works Cited

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