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Research ought to be active to create a major boundary in the academic world. It must enrich the neo-theoretical frame that facilitates re-evaluation and enhancement of existing practices and thoughts. Eventually, this will effect in a primary discovery and lean-to the knowledge acquired. Research is to establish, confirm facts, reiterate previous works ant to solve issues. An active endeavor to endow rational approach to these types for educational reformations through academic research has become the focal intention of the journal. Now, we feel very proud to bring the January, Volume 8, Issue 1, 2026 Issue contributed by the academicians and research Scholars of the literary field.

**Dr. M. Vinoth Kumar & Dr. S. Kulandhaivel**  
**Editors'-in-Chief**

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## Interaction of Caste and Gender in Bama's *Karukku* from an Intersectional Perspective

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### Abstract

*Bama's autobiography "Karukku" raises a powerful and universal voice against all forms of oppression that exist in the caste-ridden patriarchal Indian society. In the novel, Bama narrates her experience as a marginalised Dalit woman who gains enough courage and mental strength to invert the structures of domination prevalent in Indian society. While exposing the hypocrisy of the high-caste people, she reinstates the marginalised Dalit women and asserts the distinctive voice of Dalit women who speak differently from the savarna women. The present paper is an attempt to examine how the interaction of caste and gender function simultaneously in the subordination of Dalit women in Bama's "Karukku." By drawing upon the framework of Dalit Feminism, the study explores how Bama's novel transcends the 'victim' trope by positioning her life story as a place of social and political resistance. It argues that Bama's use of local Tamil dialect and her criticism of religious and social institutions that serve as vital tools for reclaiming organization in a setting of systemic exclusion. The paper explores the novel's reliance on subaltern orality and folklore and argues that Bama's use of dialect and communal memory transforms the memoir into a political 'testimonio.' Finally, the study concludes that the novel "Karukku" serves as a linguistic and cultural manifesto that reclaims the Dalit woman's body and voice from the margin of Indian literature to its center to acclaim liberty.*

**Keywords:** Dalit, Caste, Savarna, Gender, Autobiography.

***"No cultural liberation without women's liberation." -- James Ngugi***

Bama's autobiography *Karukku*, a landmark in the history of Dalit literature, raises a powerful and universal voice against all forms of oppression that exist in the caste-ridden patriarchal Indian society. In the novel, Bama narrates her experience as a marginalised Dalit woman who gains enough courage and mental strength to invert the structures of domination prevalent in Indian society. For Bama, writing is a political act, a weapon with which she can dismantle the hegemony of pervading casteism and gender discrimination of Indian society. The novel was written to heal the inward wound of Bama as a Dalit Christian woman. With the help of her personal story of childhood and her growth as a woman who resists patriarchy and caste system, Bama translates the history of her community who have encountered both denigration of self and culture as Dalits in Indian society: "It talks about their style of living, their hard work, their culture, their belief system, their entertainment, their spirituality, their love, their fight, their struggles, their pain and agony, their joys and sorrows, their tears and dreams" (Bama, "Dalit Feminist" 4). Though criticised and rejected by many for the use of Tamil people's language- language used and spoken by Tamil Dalits- and for the portrayal of



real people with real names who were still living, the novel becomes a success which could relieve the pains of those who are wounded. In the novel, Bama not only counters caste discrimination but also subverts patriarchy restoring the human dignity of Dalit women.

The life narrative of Bama as a woman brings out the harsh realities of the Dalit woman whose life is crushed by violence, cruelties and inhuman repressive measures. To give mental strength to rise up and assert the human dignity of Dalit women, Bama resurrects her life exposing the hypocrisy of caste Hindus and the Christians. While exposing the hypocrisy of the high-caste people, she reinstates the marginalised Dalit women and asserts the distinctive voice of Dalit women who speak differently from the savarna women. In the “Author’s Preface to the First Edition” of *Karukku*, Bama points out the driving forces that shaped her autobiographical novel:

The driving force that shaped this book are many: events that occurred during many stages of my life, cutting me like karukku and making me bleed; unjust social structures that plunged me into ignorance and left me trapped and suffocating; my own desperate urge to break, throw away, and destroy these bonds; and when the chains were shattered into fragments, the blood that was split-all these taken together. (XXIV)

The subjection of Dalit women to patriarchal domination within their own communities and the absence of Dalit women’s voice in mainstream literature are the immediate consequences of the multiple marginalisation of Dalit women by the pervading Brahmanical patriarchy of Indian society. Despite Dalit women’s effort to liberate themselves from the traditional bondage and subordination, they remain trapped in the century-old tradition. In this regard, Sunaina Arya points out the complex interplay of caste and gender:

The dalit women who are at the bottom of caste hierarchy suffered doubly-not only denial of rights (economic and educational) and individual freedom as ‘untouchables’, but also as ‘lower’ caste women. This vertical structure of caste and the horizontal strata of patriarchy render Dalit women fall lowest in the class hierarchy. Thus, they face intersectional violence which goes bypasses in the contemporary mainstream writings of savarna feminists. (XI)

Dalit women questions the homogeneity of experiences while expressing the demand for a reformulation of feminist politics in India. They even challenge the basic category ‘woman’, which denotes the high-caste savarna women as exclusive and partisan. The main reason for the invisibility of the experience of Dalit women is because of “masculinization of dalithood and savarnization of womanhood, leading to a classical exclusion of dalit womanhood” (Rege, “A dalit” 47). In an interview, Bama opines that there is need for a separate term “Dalit feminism” because “the term ‘feminism’ in India is not enough to encompass the liberative perspectives, aspirations, values, convictions and dreams of Dalit women” as Indian feminism does not include the annihilation of caste in its agenda of emancipation and empowerment of women and is not committed to the task of restoring the self-esteem and self-respect of Dalit women (Bama, “Dalit Feminist” 5).

In patriarchal Indian society, the struggle and the problems faced by Dalit women are entirely different from that of non-Dalit women or the high caste Hindu women. The unequal treatment meted out to the Dalit women is justified and legitimised by religion. In such an upper-caste male-dominated society, the oppression of Dalit women are manifold. The 2009 declaration of the National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) clearly highlights the three primary types of oppression of Dalit women: “We are concerned that dalit women in India suffer from three oppressions: gender, as a result of patriarchy; class, being from the poorest



and most marginalized communities; and caste, coming from the lowest caste, the ‘untouchables’”. The declaration encapsulates the view that the oppression of Dalit women is multi-dimensional and that there is intersection of gender, class and caste in this oppression. So, the emancipatory agenda of Dalit feminism shall have to be sensitive to these issues and stress the complex interplay of caste and gender in structuring hierarchies in society. In order to study how systemic oppression of caste and gender function simultaneously in Dalit women’s lives, Dalit feminists adapt the theory of Intersectionality. Intersectionality is a term coined by Black feminist, Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 in her article, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”. In her article, Crenshaw emphasises the necessity to take intersectionality into account to fully explore the multidimensionality of Black women’s experience and address the particular manner in which Black women’s voices are erased. She also highlights the need to rethink and recast the single-praxis framework of feminist theory and antiracist policy which fails to embrace the experience and concerns of Black women: “feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women” (Crenshaw 166).

Based on Crenshaw’s Intersectionality theory, Indian political scientist, Gopal Guru analyses the intersectional identity of Dalit women and explains how caste and gender intersect in the subordination of Dalit women in the Indian context. In his article “Dalit women talk differently” (1995), he observes that since non-Dalit women talk on behalf of Dalit women, the feminist theory developed by non-dalit women is unauthentic and fails to capture Dalit women’s reality. Hence, Dalit women need to talk “differently on the basis of external factors (non-dalit forces homogenising the issue of dalit women) and internal factors (the patriarchal domination within the dalits) (Guru 2548). This phenomenon of “talking differently” automatically becomes valid and foregrounds the identity of Dalit women. Feminist scholar and sociologist, Sharmila Rege in her article, “Dalit women talk differently: A critique of “difference” and towards a dalit feminist standpoint position” (1998), further highlights the complex interplay of different axes of inequality in the oppression of Dalit women. In the context of Dalit feminism, she argues:

What we need-instead is a shift of focus from ‘difference’ and multiple voices to the social relations which convert difference into oppression. This requires the working out of the cultural and material dimensions of the interactions and interphases between the different heirarchies of class, gender, race and so on. In other words this means transforming difference’ into a standpoint. (Rege, “Dalit Women” 40-41)

So, rather than viewing Dalit feminist text only from a literary perspective, it should be viewed from a sociological perspective. The autonomy of the Dalit literary text has to be re-examined taking into consideration the social factors involved in the oppression of the Dalits.

In the novel, to depict the authentic caste and gender based oppression of Dalit women, Bama recreates incidents and situation from her life which evoke the sense of humiliation, exploitation, pollution and untouchability. With authenticity, she explores the work, value, difficulties, challenges of women and also gives a valuable insight into Dalit women’s feelings and desires. While doing so, she produces a powerful critique of patriarchy and casteism. Bama’s spirit of resilience and rebellion can be seen from an early age. Her fight against the dominating and oppressive forces of caste system is revealed through her personal experiences of caste-based discrimination experienced in the public transport. While returning home for holidays from her boarding school, Bama narrates how and why she refused to give her seat to the Naicker woman in the bus:



When I went home for holidays, if there was a Naicker woman sitting next to me in the bus, she'd immediately ask me which place I was going to, what street. As soon as I said, the Cheri, she'd get up and move off to another seat. Or she'd tell me to move somewhere. As if I would go! I'd settle into my seat even more firmly. They'd prefer then to get up and stand all the way rather than sit next to me or to any other woman from Cheri. They'd be polluted, apparently. (Bama 20)

Another incident which brings out the rebellion in Bama as a Dalit woman is her experience in the college. Bama questions the college authority when the Principal and the Warden refuse to grant leave to attend her younger brother and sister's First Communion at home insisting that "there cannot be different rules for different caste, only the same rules for everyone" (Bama 22).

By narrating her mother's story of daily toils, Bama depicts the plight of Dalit women who work hard and suffered bodily pain: "In those days, my mother too used to go collecting firewood, leaned it against the wall, and then began vomiting vast globs of blood. But it was only by toiling like this, without taking any account of their bodies as human flesh and blood, that people of my community could even survive" (Bama 52). As a child Bama could not understand properly the exploitation of Dalits by the landowning high-caste people. Dalit girl's plight is also the same: "In the face of such poverty, the girl children cannot see the sense in schooling, and stay at home, collecting firewood, looking after the house, caring for babies, and doing household chores" (Bama 79). What is evident is the fact that Dalit girls are deprived of education and basic human rights. Because of their poverty, Dalit parents cannot afford education and good life for their children, especially girls. So, right from their childhood, Dalit women face multiple discrimination. At work places also, the exploitation of Dalit women takes place. Women always get lower wages than men. As a child, Bama wonders why different wages for the same work for men and women: "Even if they did the same work, men received one wage, women another. They always paid men more. I could never understand why" (Bama 54-55). Such incidents indicate the different context Dalit women live and the necessity to analyse Dalit feminist text from a different standpoint which considers caste and gender as key signifiers. The daily struggle of Dalit women also brings out the indomitable spirit and courage of Dalit women who can break through all kinds of situations without breaking themselves.

Bama decides to become a nun after completing her graduation and B.Ed. To her dismay, her decision to be a nun to educate and uplift the social condition of the downtrodden and humiliated Dalit children turns out to be an illusion. After entering the religious order, Bama thinks that she has arrived at a place which is free of caste. However, she soon realises that the dominating and oppressive forces of casteism prevails everywhere and at every level-education, employment, religion, marriage. Wherever they go, Dalits experience the pain of caste discrimination which divides and degrades human beings. The discrimination of Dalit women in the convent reaches the climax when the religious order takes the decision to transfer Bama from Madras. Bama's decision to leave the convent could have been averted if there were no changes in the decision of her transfer. After having a distressing time, her experience in Jammu again hastens her decision to leave the convent. On November 8, 1992, Bama leaves the convent to live a meaningful life. After leaving the convent, as a Dalit woman, Bama has to endure the hardships of being alone in the outside world. For nearly eight years, she was hiding away from reality and leading "a counterfeit existence" (Bama 120). In order to be able to stand on her own, she tries to find a new job. After facing the written test and the interview successfully for the post of a teacher in a school, Bama was



rejected because of her identity, the identity of a Dalit woman: “In any case, I didn’t get that job. Why? Because I am a Dalit. It was a school that is governed and run by the Nadar. It seems they only appoint Nadar women. I don’t know why, in that case, they make such a fuss about the interview, and invite us all to apply?” (Bama 118-119). This incident exposes the abuse of power by the dominant class and the duplicity of the high caste people who dominate and exploit Dalit women. It also brings out the perception of high caste people who think Dalits incapable of becoming efficient person and unfit for many prestigious jobs. Further, it is an authentic representation of the problems faced by Dalit women which emanate from their status as Dalits. At this stage, Bama is strong enough to resist and defy the dominating structures of Indian society-caste and patriarchy. She decides to remain single and educate the marginalised women and children. Bama’s recuperative effort reveals her deep concern for her community and her dream of an egalitarian society. She dares to speak up for herself as a Dalit woman and also encourages her fellow Dalits to raise their voice and proclaim that Dalit identity is praiseworthy and excellent:

We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change. We must crush all these institutions that use caste to bully us into submission, and demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high or low. Those who have found their happiness by exploiting us are not going to let us go easily. It is we who have to place them where they belong and bring about a changed and just society where all are equal. (Bama 28)

Karukku emerges as a symbol of strength to those marginalised people whose identities have been denigrated and erased. With her life narrative, Bama faithfully records the agony and sufferings of the marginalised and the hypocrisy of the dominant class. While exposing the hypocrisy of the high-caste people, she reinstates the marginalised Dalit women and asserts the distinctive voice of Dalit women who speak differently from the savarna women. The triumph of Karukku enables Bama to provide an alternative perspective on caste system, highlighting the importance to understand the different social contexts Dalits and the upper-castes live. By contesting the traditional concepts and representation of Dalit women, she reconstructs the history of Dalit women and gives confidence to the Dalits that caste system and patriarchy are not givens but social constructs.

### Notes

- [1] Savarna: It is an inclusive term for those who fall within the four main castes, namely Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.
- [2] Brahmanical Patriarchy: The Concept of Brahminical Patriarchy was elaborated by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his paper “Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development” (1916), while writing a critique of the marriage system of endogamy (the system of marriage within a particular group or caste). According to Ambedkar, Brahminical Patriarchy is responsible for upholding the twin evil systems of Indian society-casteism and sexism. This theoretical concept is used by Dalit feminists to understand and analyse Indian society.
- [3] Naicker: It is a dominant landowning caste found in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- [4] Parayar: It is a caste group found in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Until recent times, it is classified as a depressed community. In 2017, Parayars were listed as a scheduled caste in Tamil Nadu.
- [5] Nadar: It is a Tamil caste name. Nadars are toddy tappers and shopkeepers. Now they are



classified as Other Backward Class both by Government of India and Tamil Nadu government.

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## Psychological Exploration of Inner Violence and the Ruptured Psyche in the Redrum of Stephen King's "The Shining"

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### Abstract

*The study investigates the principle characters in Stephen King's novel entitled "The Shining". The novel weaves a stream of conscious of psychosomatic experiences of childhood trauma, the destabilizing effects of isolation and the destructive patterns of family dysfunction into a narrative. Childhood Trauma unfolds psychological impulse and derives experiences from past events. Isolation and psychological breakdown are related overlapping psychological experiences when a lack or loss of social interaction and a lack or loss of emotional support leads to a deterioration of mental functioning. Family dysfunction is a persistent form of unhealthy relationships and interactions that interrupts emotional care, safety and well-being within the family unit. Power is a multifaceted and destructive power dynamic that shows itself in interpersonal control, family structures and the supernatural powers. Stephen King's novel entitled "The Shining" is a clear example of such themes. The novel functions as a grim tale of the human mind under extreme stress. It weaves together the supernatural and the sociopolitical perspectives of life. Stephen King portrays the most terrifying 'ghosts' are not those that haunt the hallways of a hotel, but that reside within the memory of a dysfunctional family. The state of isolation, trauma, and power haunt the characters and systematically deconstruct every notion of the 'self,' by leaving behind a ruptured psyche where the boundaries between past, present and future, and reality and hallucination cease to exist. Thus, the novel "The Shining" is viewed as an exploration of how inherited trauma, poisonous relationships and the isolating power of environment may converge to deconstruct the human psyche.*

**Keywords:** Childhood Trauma, Isolation, Family Dysfunction, Madness, Power Dynamics.

### Introduction

The novel "The Shining" by Stephen King is not merely an engaging piece of literature presenting the reader with a haunted house or a supernatural horror narrative, as has been suggested by some critics. It is actually an exciting psychological character study of madness and alienation. Really, this is a novel about the combination of isolation, addiction and eventually a man's disintegrating ability to handle trauma and it is presented clear and loud in the horrifying symbolism of "Redrum". Jack Torrance, the protagonist of *The Shining* is a struggling writer who has worked hard to overcome alcoholism and face the psychological challenges associated with the concept of isolation and dependency upon alcohol. In *The Shining*, Jack Torrance is employed as the winter caretaker of the distant Overlook Hotel along with his wife and son, who has a special talent for perceiving thoughts and feelings of other people – Danny's "Shining". As the winter months lay obstacle against



their ability to escape, the family becomes prisoners in the castle the Overlook has become as Jack grows increasingly unaware of the disintegration of his rationality. While it may appear Jack is forced into his violent metamorphosis by the ghosts or perhaps the supernatural beings of the hotel, it is largely his internal conflict that precipitates his violence. The symbolism associated with “Redrum”, which is first uttered by Danny as he falls into a trance does not simply represent a supernatural indication of blood, but reflects a psychological construction that embodies Jack’s internalized rage and thus Danny’s psychic awareness of impending danger.

### **Madness and Mental Deterioration**

Madness and mental deterioration denote the psychological breakdown of a person and usually include symptoms of delusions, emotional dysfunction, irrational actions and the inability to distinguish self and reality. As it applies to literature and psychology, madness can represent the collapse of a mind due to traumatic intrusion, guilt, or internal conflict. Mental deterioration specifically refers to a slow and gradual decline in cognitive and emotional functioning usually exhibited by confusion, lack of reasoning and disorientation, which in extent erodes and sometimes disconnects the individual’s personal identity. Mental deterioration and madness together also may signify a catastrophic failure of the human psyche, so it is not surprising to find these conditions both as implicit and explicit meanings in literature .Especially as a reflection of the unintended consequences of addiction, isolation and undefined psychological wounds and legacies. *The Shining* by Stephen King has made many contributions along this path in terms of its character Jack Torrance as he moves from a delicately functional human subject with dormant rage and alcoholism to violence and madness given the horrific isolation of the Overlook Hotel and the personal demons he repressed resulting in drastic consequences both internally and externally for the main character and his family.

*The Shining* takes madness and mental deterioration out of solely psychological themes and positions it as the most interesting and themes developed through Jack Torrance. Jack’s mental spiral is stately but unavoidable due to a perfect storm of failures, unresolved childhood trauma, alcohol and isolation in the Overlook hotel. As the plot develops, we learn more about Jack’s character but, most importantly we are able to see how he is deteriorating and becoming increasingly dominated by hallucinations, paranoia and violent wishes. “Monsters are real. Ghosts are too. They live inside of us, and sometimes, they win” (King12). The Overlook serves during the arc of the story not only as supernatural force, but also becomes symbolic part of Jack’s deteriorating mental state which worsens Jack’s demons until they override his morality and identity completely. Jack’s mental deterioration can be represented by his movement from introspection and guilt to delusion and aggression and finally attacking his family. Jack’s memories of having an abusive father, how quickly he manifests anger and violence and Jack’s lack of ability to contend with sobriety all suggest an unresolved trauma existing. The Overlook Hotel serves as an agent forcing jack even further into psychological turmoil by confronting him with apparitions of his past both in a literal and figurative sense. The visions like Lloyd the bartender and the woman in room 217, notwithstanding their supernatural status represent wishes and fears drawn from Jack’s subconscious but they render the supernatural threatening imperfectly confused to underscore that the real threat is jack’s brain. As jack’s psychological condition is more and more reshaped and affected by the Overlook’s harmful energy, he is able to transform from an irritable grumpy mood state to the profoundly delusional and violent.

At a granular level, this metamorphosis is an obsession with order and sometimes a



return of inability to control violent impulses. King is utilizing Jack's demise to demonstrate how addiction, guilt and trauma may become madness when it is examined. Through Jack's disconnect from the world, he hastens his breakdown and indicates the potential for the mind to function like a prison in the absence of sociability, purpose and emotional repair. Danny has an ability called 'Shining' where he can see the evil and mental decay of Jack due to his time in the Hotel. Danny becomes a witness to Jack's devolution and also a casualty of the emotional space that surrounds him. Danny innocently shows how children can be perpetually made to suffer because of adult madness. "I never touched him. I never have since the night I broke his arm" (King123). Danny's visions of "Redrum" and eclipse shows Jack's fall and illustrate the psychological residue of exposure to domestic violence. Danny's fear of Jack becomes the emotional reference point of Jack's weakened mind, and the emerging possibility of survival sharply juxtaposes his father's profound destruction.

### **Childhood Trauma and Psychic Sensitivity**

Childhood trauma refers specifically to extremely distressing or shocking experiences that occur during childhood including abuse, neglect, domestic violence or experiencing something emotionally excessive. Childhood trauma can also cause persistent psychological distress including anxiety, dissociation, emotional regulation, trust and attachment and identity problems. In canonical literature, childhood trauma and psychic problems are depicted as experiences impacting not only the child's characters but also their realized world, actions and interactions and emotional responses throughout their lives. Psychical studies in literature increased perception or extrasensory ability that is capable of describing people more frequently in literature. Psychic ableness can be described using phrases often used to convey either positive or negative terms such as clear instinctive knowledge or even the idea of telepathy and are in association with the playful innocence, trauma and psychological lucidity of childhood innocence.

In *The Shining* author Stephen King illustrates the dynamics between childhood trauma and psychic sensitivity in the character of Danny Torrance and sets them up as key emotional and psychological forms of instability for the novel. Danny Torrance son of Jack and Wendy has an extraordinary gift called "the Shining", allowing him to feel emotions, see actions and connect with the souls of people all around him. This ability gives him insight into people's thoughts and feelings as well as enabling him to see spirits. "Danny had known that his father would hit him again" (King30). Danny's psychic sensitivity is not to be viewed as a powerful gift, but it certainly makes him in an emotional heaviness that is beyond his years. In the portrayal of Danny, King illustrates children as often quiet witnesses and victims of the dysfunction of adults, who must sift through fear, pain and confusion without the ability to make sense of any of it. His ability to shine is metaphorically tied to domestic disruption and emotional trauma, the crushing weight of emotional trauma is especially tied to the unpredictable intervention of his father, who he views uncomfortably as a parental figure of authority at the violent end of the spectrum of normal parental intervention. Jack is a recovering alcoholic and is trying to do better but Danny when he is sober, through unpredictable outbursts and with his mother's mounting instability in once assaulted Danny during a drunken rage. Sometimes Jack imposes emotional stress on environments when things progress quickly. Danny's psychic vulnerability also renders him especially vulnerable to the emotionally punctuated, roller coaster nature of his father's emotional being.

Danny's psychic abilities threaten to expose his vulnerability. As the Overlook Hotel starts to manipulate Jack, it also assesses Danny identifying his sensitivity as a threat and possible means of resistance. The supernatural horrors of the hotel in the form of ghosts



visions and the Room 217 terrify Danny deeply, yet he endures them with questionable courage. What Danny possesses internally is emotional clarity and the ability to discern between what is the actual reality and what is harmful. “The world was full of monsters with sharp teeth, and they were all real” (King 89). King prioritizes Danny as the character who conveys the resilience of children, the psychological fragility of children. Through Danny’s witness, we see the emotional cost of growing up as a child in a family with silent trauma and unresolved psychological distress and violence.

King’s focus on Danny Torrance also illustrates how childhood trauma is not always a direct result of abuse especially instinctive abuse but can also arise from the psychological environment that surrounds a child, tension due to silence, emotional indifference and the fear of parental instability. Therefore, Danny’s shining can be read as representative of the emotional genius and survival reflexes that emerge from children affected by trauma. In contrast to adults in *The Shining* who often repress, rationalize or deny reality. Danny faces reality with him even when it overtakes him. Danny is able to interpret the seriousness of their situation because his psychological sensitivity enables him to assess his family’s emotional state.

### **Isolation and Psychological Breakdown**

Isolation and psychological breakdown are related overlapping psychological experiences when a lack or loss of social interaction and a lack or loss of emotional support leads to a deterioration of mental functioning. Isolation can involve physical isolation, emotional isolation or psychological isolation and when it becomes sustained, it generally exacerbates feelings of solitude, anxiety and estrangement from reality. Psychological breakdown, mental or emotional collapse is an extreme and intense form of psychological distress in which a person cannot engage cognitively, emotionally or socially in a functional capacity through anxiety, delusions, hallucinations, disorganized thinking, convoluted thought processes or emotional instability. Combined the concepts of isolation and psychological breakdown demonstrate how much we as humans depend on connection, structure and meaning. And how these requirements are sometimes so fundamental that our identity and reasoning process disintegrate when they are removed. In literature and especially in horror and psychological fiction, isolation is often a key device in which the ‘unknown’ fears and suppressed emotions of characters emerge and either infect or instigate a breakdown character.

In “The Shining”, King demonstrates how isolating people and breaking down their mental capacity can lead to destruction, along with a deep sense of dread and horror at the Overlook Hotel that is located in the remote Rocky Mountains of Colorado, representing both a physical space for people to be isolated and a mental prison for people to endure. For the protagonist Jack Torrance on winter lockdown in the hotel, he disconnected from all romantic, professional, communal or social. What began as a self-discipline and creativity opportunity after Jack’s feet hit the ground in the hotel rapidly devolves into his psychological trap. The missing external cues of routine, social interaction and external structure creates a psychological vacuum in which as Jack’s repressed emotions such as anger, guilt and insecurity begin to rise to the surface they become a source of enormous pressure. King depicts the hotel as an environment beyond just being haunted but also as a mental crucible in which the shortened or disrupted social overview increases the negative impacts of prolonged isolation.

His apprehension of reality becomes obstinate as he perceives and interacts with supernatural beings that represent both his original and repressed desires in the form of fears.



The isolation of the hotel hastens his deterioration propelling him toward hallucinations and violent ideations. Any social feedback or grounding influence except for his weak wife and son Jack has no outside agency to engage him cognitively or supervise his thoughts. He is left repeating his own thoughts and perceptions in a semi psychotic echo chamber that is only vaguely influenced by the malignance of the Overlook. “Doc,” Jack Torrance said. “Run away. Quick. And remember how much I love you.” “No,” Danny said. “Oh Danny, for God’s sake—” “No,” Danny said. He took one of his father’s bloody hands and kissed it. “It’s almost over” (King 420). Jack’s internal narration shifts from self questioning to a delusional explanatory narration, and it is clear that Jack’s thoughts detail a gradual psychological decomposition. King illustrates Jack’s decomposition as supernatural and psychological, demonstrating how the manifestations of possession and madness are indistinct.

Wendy and Danny also endure the weight of isolation while being strong. Wendy grows not only more anxious but also more watchful. The more erratic Jack’s behaviour becomes the more vigilant Wendy gets. “I think all mothers shine a little, you know, at least until their kids grow up enough to watch out for themselves.”(King120). This same situation worsens for Danny when combined with his psychic ability to “shine” and perceive the evil in the hotel. Isolation not only exposes Danny to supernatural danger but increases the emotional impact. With Jack’s collapse he was now the emotional onlooker in his father’s drowning; no longer could Danny identify with it and had to endure the fear and confusion of a loved one going mad. “The memory of his father’s rage was something that never really went away” (King 36). King uses Danny’s perspective to point out the emotional toll of isolation and has not only the person who is experiencing psychological breakdown, but also the people around him who have to live and endure it.

*The Shining* presents a thoughtful argument regarding the pitfalls of isolation and the dangers of such a state in a human mind. Isolation removes distractions and buffers that allow humans to function with psychological and emotional stability. Thus, when truly isolated Jack does not only break down violently due to ghostly influences or apparitions his complete breakdown is the potential outcome of repressed emotions and traumatic experiences with which he did not deal, and the isolation only exacerbates those effects. King’s use of isolation is not limited to a necessity of plot development but as a comment on how the human brain and body actually needs other humans for connection, how ‘emotional’ repression can be dangerous, and how horrifying it can be to be isolated with our lowest selves.

### **Domestic Violence and Family Dysfunction**

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour that takes place in a home, usually perpetrated by one person over another in an attempt to assert power and control over the victim through either physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, sexual or economic abuse. Domestic violence is most often experienced by intimate partners or between parents and their children and can include intimidation, manipulation, coercing and physical violence. All forms of domestic violence, no matter how severe the injury, permanently alter the conditions of humanity. This mental and emotional trauma is either permanent or may cause trauma to children who witness domestic or physical violence against one or both of their parents. Family dysfunction represents a breakdown of healthy family roles, communication and systems of emotional support. In a dysfunctional family people are often struggling with unmet and conflicting emotional needs, unstable family relationships, neglect substance abuse, unresolved issues and conflicts etc. These dysfunctional dynamics create an atmosphere where abuse, denial and co-dependency can flourish and where the emotional and



psychological growth of family members especially children are obstructed. Dysfunctional dynamics often continue from generation to generation as trauma and maladaptive behaviours are passed down through families. When combined domestic violence and family dysfunction create an emotionally toxic atmosphere where an individual's emotional sense of identity, sense of safety and psychological wellness may be severely damaged. In both literature and psychology, this subject matter has often been explored to examine the origins of emotional instability, intergenerational trauma and the long lasting effects of violence in the supposed safety of the home.

Stephen King explores domestic violence and family dysfunction at a psychological and emotional level in *The Shining* as they largely constitute the driving forces in the novel and contribute to the horror of the Torrance family's isolation. Jack Torrance a man with a history of alcohol abuse and domestic violence and who wishes to write, but is unable to connect with his wife Wendy or his son Danny. Underneath supernatural fears presented by the Overlook Hotel lies the real horror of a broken and abusive family, suffering from neglect and trauma that goes unspoken. "You liar! He screamed, 'Oh, I know how you do it! I guess I know that! when I say, 'We're going to stay here and I'm going to do my job,' you say, 'Yes, dear,' and he says, 'Yes, Daddy,' and then you lay your plans. You planned to use the snow-mobile. You planned that. But I knew. I figured it out. Did you think I wouldn't figure it out? Did you think I was stupid?'" (King 409). Even prior to their arrival at the hotel, the family is marked by Jack's troublesome past and his alcohol dependency, especially regarding Jack's prior rage fuelled violence. Danny suffers the most from Jack's prior violence, especially considering the major event that Jack dislocated Danny's arm in a drunken rage that rings with terror and more importantly leads to a total mistrust of each other in the family unit due to this type of domestic violence.

Danny? You listen to me. I'm going to talk to you about it this once and never again this same way. There's some things no six-year-old boy in the world should have to be told, but the way things should be and the way things are hardly ever get together. The world's a hard place, Danny. It don't care. It don't hate you and me, but it don't love us, either. Terrible things happen in the world, and they're things no one can explain. Good people die in bad, painful ways and leave the folks that love them all alone. Sometimes it seems like it's only the bad people who stay healthy and prosper. The world don't love you, but your momma does and so do I. You're a good boy. You grieve for your daddy, and when you feel you have to cry over what happened to him, you go into a closet or under your covers and cry until it's all out of you again. That's what a good son has to do. But see that you get on. That's your job in this hard world, to keep your love alive and see that you get on, no matter what. Pull your act together and just go on. (King 372)

King's depiction of the Torrance family reveals patterns of emotional abuse and denial that occur in toxic family dynamics. Wendy, while loving and protective, frequently downplays Jack's behaviour and has an unrealistic hope for change and displays a high level of co-dependence. Her passivity and inner turmoil represent the coping mechanisms seen in survivors of cycles of domestic abuse. Meanwhile, Jack moves from expressions of regret to resentment in which he begins to externalize blame for his personal failures and frustrations. Jack begins to identify his family exhibiting characteristics of a hindrance on his way to redemption and success rather than a source of unconditional love. This decline of family bonds corresponds with a decline in Jack's mental stability and here King uses the family's deterioration as a metaphor for the larger disfunction of the Torrance family. Danny the most



emotionally perceptive family member suffers the most with regard to this dysfunction. His psychic ability, the “shining”, enables him to sense not only the supernatural forces in the hotel but also the significant emotional turbulence of his parents. Danny is in the role of an emotional caretaker, he knows his father’s rage, he knows his mother’s fear, but he cannot stop the family collapse. The same visions, such as “REDRUM” that vividly haunt him as he rises to meet Jack’s violence, display the trauma, anxiety and safety concern Danny internalizes.

The world a hard place, Danny. It don’t care. It don’t hate you and me, but it don’t love us, either. Terrible things happen in the world, and they’re things no one can explain. Good people die in bad, painful ways and leave the folks that love them all alone. Sometimes it seems like it’s only the bad people who stay healthy and prosper. The world don’t love you, but your momma does and so do I. (King 396)

King denotes Danny through representing domestic violence and peering into a child’s perspective concerning domestic violence to illuminate the depth of psychological harm domestic violence plays on children even when it is not apparent or expressed with their emotions. “Danny had begun to understand that the hotel was bad” (King 151). As the story continues, the Overlook Hotel serves as both a literal and metaphorical extension of the family’s dysfunction. Jack’s isolation at the hotel heightens the turmoil in his psyche and allows the tensions in the family to rise. Jack’s possession by the threatening aspects of the hotel is in lockstep with Jack’s full surrender to the violent aspects of his character the rage, the feelings of inadequacy and desire for power ultimately leading him to successfully attempt to kill them. This violent climactic moment is the result of not just supernatural influences, but also years of stifled rage, anger, repression and damage. Hence, King illustrates that domestic violence or dysfunction are not always the outgrowth of some other cause; rather, they are often the result of years of emotional wounds that have gone untreated and ignored.

### **Power and Control**

Power and control are means of establishing dominance, influence or authority over another person or group. In social psychology, there are different definitions for “power”. Power can be described as one person’s ability to influence another person’s behaviour, thoughts or emotions. The power may be displayed through use of manipulation, coercion, persuasion or force. Control is the actual use of power in order to limit, direct, or alter another person’s autonomy, choices, and decisions. Power and control are conceptual dynamics that emerge across personal relationships within institutions and in societies, with many shades and varieties of power and control from sub-textual emotionalism to straightforward physical domination. Power and control are often demonstrated in abusive relationships and dysfunctional contexts by creating or maintaining the presence of power and subservience in a social hierarchical structure. Issues such as intimidation, isolation, gas lighting, financial entrapment, and intimidation are patterns of power and control that impair an individual’s personal autonomy, purposeful self-concept, agency and overall sense of safety. Literature and film depict power and control as forms of oppression, trauma or moral dysfunction and may include aspects of domination through psychological means, physical violence or spiritual/magical possession.

Stephen King uses a psychological, familial, and supernatural approach to the theme of power and control in *The Shining*. The narrative centres on Jack Torrance a man who has lost his paternal identity, while battling addiction and feelings of failure. He increasingly descends into madness however in his work, author Stephen King provides us with



foreshadowing that the Overlook Hotel has some supernatural qualities, but it is not solely through the use of otherworldly forces that the hotel possesses. Jack as often depicted and expresses a symbolic assertion of power to attempt to regain control over his life, career and family members. By contending with linkages of Jack's ordeal with power, King has constructed Jack's struggle in two ways. Jack is struggling not only with himself and past actions of alcoholism, but he is encountering potent dark energies at the Hotel that push and manipulate Jack's long-standing suppression of anger and impulse authoritarianism.

Jack's relationship with his wife and son serves as an example of the problems associated with domestic power imbalance. Jack's vulnerability is exemplified in his masculinity and male self-worth is threatened by his failure to provide and protect, that translates into a need for domination. "Terrible things happen in the world, and they're things no one can explain. Good people die in bad, painful ways and leave the folks that love them all alone" (King 365). Jack's eventual frustrations propel him towards finding authority within familial spaces, first through verbal intimidation and finally through physical violence. This shows that toxic control can emerge through vulnerability and that a desire for control can often emerge out of fear of inadequacy. Wendy who initially plays the role of the passive and submissive wife emerges as a figure of resistance and emotional fortitude. The family dynamic in the novel reveals how the control is negotiated by which it is resisted and in Jack's case enforced in a violent manner. Danny is just a kid but he represents the opposing power: psychic sensitivity as he demonstrates with his supernatural ability which King refers to as "the shining". Danny's supernatural capability "the shining" is not a mode of power for domination, but rather for perception and connection. Danny's power is non-violent and intuitive, and stands in complete opposition to Jack's will full and aggressive assertion of his dominance as a father and husband. Indeed through Danny, King indicates that there is an alternative to patriarchal power: one of emotional awareness, empathy, and spiritual connection. The struggle between Jack and Danny then is the battle of destructive control versus protective sensitivity.

*The Shining* is more than simply a horror story; it is a psychological narrative that deals with many aspects of humanity. That consciousness means, how people's identity can be unwittingly fragile, and how trauma can be deadly for a person who represses it. The Overlook Hotel represents a wider view of many issues faced by people throughout the ages, where personal fears, unsolved matters, and historical trauma confront madness. Jack Torrance the subject of this change is not merely a victim of external agency and supernatural forces. He is a man weak and burdened by his own tendencies his addiction, abuse, previous failures, and chance personality, which become intensified by the deadly nature of the hotel. Power and control lie at the heart of a psychological breakdown present in the narrative. Jack's desire to control his family to assert authority as head of the household spirals into a compulsive and destructive need for dominance. Jack's violence is not initiated at the hotel but triggered and intensified by it. This psychologically rendered downward spiral shows how catastrophic damnation can occur from an unchecked craving for control and power, specifically in the context of the domestic space. Through Jack's descent into psychological harm, King shows how masculinity, based upon insecurity and anger, renders a person unpredictable. Wendy and Danny in contrast represent emotional fortitude and intuited strength these qualities often uncelebrated, but crucial to resisting both psychological and supernatural oppression. Danny's psychic phenomena are accordance with the perspective of "the shining". Danny's supernatural gift is more than a defined, controlled phenomenon; "the shining" is based more upon the concept of emotional truth and buried trauma communicated



through heightened sensitivities. Danny carries evidence of generational trauma, he both witness and cargo of trauma borne from things passed on through his father's volatility as he is also the product of a hotel steeped in suffering and horror. Danny emerges however as a bearer of hope. Danny's ability to identify danger to assess fear and to survive indicates that a combination of awareness and emotional connection reclaim as an effective weapon against destruction. In this case, King situates the child as an alternative to a passive victim. The family is physically isolated in the Overlook and Jack is emotionally and mentally separated from his family and the rest of reality. The hotel represents a pressure cooker of unresolved trauma and past abuse, all of which aggravate the psychological fragmentation of the occupants of the hotel. This situation of confinement and isolation echoes real life interactions where isolation can worsen mental health, particularly in conjunction with addiction and family systems.

### Conclusion

To conclude, *The Shining* is a frightening examination of madness, dominion, and the ghosts that live not only in spaces, but in people themselves. Jack's psychological disintegration Danny's psychic and intuitive abilities, and Wendy's drive for survival provides Stephen King with an opportunity to exhibit how trauma can repeat through generations as we see with the Torrance family and how the quest for power may result in violence. The terror of the text is realized through not just its supernatural aspects but the more real interpretation of a family on the brink, a mind disintegrating, and a child forced to negotiate a world created through fear. As a result, *The Shining* continues to stand the test of time as a psychological horror that speaks to the most shadowy periods of the human experience.

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## Women as Epistemic Authorities in *Mahabharata*: The Dialogue and Debate in the Shape of Dharma

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### Abstract

*The Mahabharata is one of the two principal epics in Sanskrit literature, offering a profound narrative of ancient Indian culture and civilization. It transcends a mere recounting of the conflict between the Kauravas and Pandavas, providing a comprehensive perspective on moral and ethical issues interwoven with complexities in relationships and duties. While the male characters are predominantly associated with battles and warfare, the female characters play a pivotal role in addressing and challenging the moral and ethical dilemmas within the narrative. The portrayal of women in the epic is intricate, prompting inquiries into the social and philosophical insights of that era. Despite the patriarchal constraints, significant female figures such as Satyawati, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, and even Amba, are not depicted as passive or silent observers of the male-dominated exploits. They have articulated objections and asserted their individuality when necessary. These women embody strength, foresight, determination, resilience, and intelligence, enabling them to navigate the complexities of social intrigues and court politics. This research paper closely examines some selected female characters in the epic Mahabharata from an epistemic perspective, analysing their role and dialogues in revealing the moral and ethical dimensions of the time. It also seeks to understand how their epistemic contributions shaped the broader understanding of dharma and the role of women within it. By exploring the key female characters and their respective incidents, the paper aims to highlight their dialogues and debates, establishing them as epistemic authorities in the epic Mahabharata.*

**Keywords:** Epic, Women, Mahabharata, Epistemology, Dialogue, Debate, Dharma, Ethics.

### Introduction

The *Mahabharata* is recognized as one of the two principal and longest epics in Sanskrit literature, offering a profound narrative of ancient Indian culture and civilization. This epic not only narrates the conflict and eventual war between the Kauravas and Pandavas but also provides a comprehensive examination of moral and ethical dilemmas, as well as the complex dynamics of relationships and responsibilities. While male characters are predominantly associated with battles and the battlefield, female characters play a pivotal role in asserting their independence by challenging moral and ethical issues. This aspect has been notably observed by Doniger (2009) that the epic “*Mahabharata* is not just a story of men; it is also a story of women who challenge, negotiate, and redefine their roles within a patriarchal framework” (123). The representation of women in the epic is both intricate and significant, raising inquiries regarding the social and philosophical perspectives of the time. Despite the constraints imposed by a patriarchal society, prominent female figures such as Satyawati, Kunti, Gandhari, Draupadi, and even Amba are not portrayed as passive or silent witnesses to the male-dominated endeavours. They articulate their objections and assert their



individuality when necessary. These women exemplify strength, foresight, determination, resilience, and intelligence, which enable them to navigate the complexities of social intrigues and court politics. Their roles are integral to the narrative, as they raise important questions about issues, such as dharma (righteousness), thereby rendering them even more central to the story. Narayan (1989) has noted in this regard, “the voices of women in *Mahabharata* serve to complicate the narrative, adding layers of moral complexity that challenge simplistic interpretations of dharma” (134). However the contributions and inquiries of women introduce complexity to the narrative, their dialogues and debates are indispensable for achieving a comprehensive understanding of dharma. Furthermore, they facilitate the understanding of the social, political, gender, and ethical norms of the period, uncovering deeper meanings beneath the surface of duties and responsibilities.

In the epic, Satyawati emerges as a pioneering feminist figure, assertively establishing her own legacy. Draupadi, arguably the most contentious female character in the epic, courageously addresses issues of justice and morality, asserting her struggle and identity as a woman in a male-dominated society. Meanwhile, Kunti and Gandhari exemplify motherhood, navigating the challenges of being mothers and wives, balancing sacrifices and personal desires. These women’s experiences illuminate the complex interplay of gender, duty, dignity, and individuality, encouraging readers to ponder their epistemic roles. Thus, it is undeniable that their presence in the epic transcends merely being counterparts to male characters and extend beyond traditional roles of daughter, wife, and mother. Their understanding of dharma during pivotal moments underscores their status as epistemic figures, a quality often lacking in their male counterparts.

This research paper examines some selected female characters of the epic *Mahabharata* from an epistemic perspective and analysing their dialogues and debates in unravelling the moral and ethical threads of the era. It seeks to understand how their epistemic contributions shaped the broader understanding of dharma and women’s roles within it. Thus, by examining key female characters and relevant incidents, the paper aims to highlight how their dialogues and debates place them as epistemic authorities in the epic. The paper adopts a feminist epistemology approach to explore their debates, perspectives, and notions of justice and righteousness, which guide their inquiry and insight. Additionally, it seeks to identify an alignment between their words and actions, furthering the understanding of the Indian female knowledge system.

### **A Cursory Look at the Key Female Characters in *Mahabharata***

The epic *Mahabharata* presents a diverse array of female characters, each assuming major or minor roles depending on the plot and the narrative. Nevertheless, every character is crucial and significant in contributing to the plot’s development. The most notable and essential attribute of these female characters is their focus on challenging patriarchal conceptions of dharma and morality, rather than engaging in self-aggrandizement or verbal abuse. McGrath (2009) points out:

The language of male heroes in the *Mahabharata* entails the use of certain speech acts—like formulaic avowal and boasting—as well as a great range of formally abusive and insulting rhetoric. Women however, in their speech within the epic, are often a source of law and social convention: they are the figures who give judgmental utterance to dharma, a term that is often translated as ‘rule’ or ‘decorum’. It is the women who are the speakers of what *should* be done by the *ksatriyas*. They are *knowers* of dharma—that which is valued as appropriate—and in speech proclaim what *karma* is right at certain moments in the narrative. They are the vocal interpreters of what is



worthwhile. (13)

Satyavati, the matriarch of the Kuru dynasty, is a pivotal figure in the epic, recognized as the first feminist character who governed the dynasty with determination and authority. She assumed control of the Kuru dynasty during the time when it was in dire need of an heir. It was Satyavati who summoned Krishna-Dwaipayana Vyasa, also known as Ved Vyasa, her son born out of wedlock with Sage Parashar, to engage in *niyoga* (levirate) with Ambika and Ambalika, thereby ensuring the continuation of the Kuru lineage. The lineage of King Shantanu concluded with Bhishma. Indeed, it is not an exaggeration to assert that the epic primarily revolves around the descendants of Queen Satyavati, namely the Kauravas and Pandavas, who are her great-grandsons.

In the epic, Draupadi, the queen of Indraprastha and wife of the Pandavas, emerges as a significant and dynamic character who propels the narrative forward. Her role becomes particularly crucial during the notorious episode of the dice game. In this infamous episode, Draupadi is subjected to humiliation and objectification, not only by the Kauravas but also by the Pandavas, as Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava, wagers her without seeking her consent. Despite this degradation, Draupadi maintains her composure and articulates her arguments. The silent response and downcast eyes of those present in the court validate the moral soundness of her arguments. Her action and reaction in such a dire situation demonstrate her strength and resilience. Draupadi challenges the patriarchal norms concerning a woman's identity and dignity thus demanding justice for the wrongs inflicted upon her under the guise of a husband's patriarchal authority. Her incisive questions in the court regarding righteousness and morality effectively challenge the moral fabric of society, positioning Draupadi as an epistemic figure in the discourse on dharma and morality. This interpretation has been explored by Kaur (2018) that, "Draupadi's defiance in the face of humiliation marks her as a pivotal figure in *Mahabharata*, one who embodies the struggle for justice and agency" (102). Furthermore, the role of Draupadi highlights the interconnection between gender and authority. Draupadi adeptly navigated the complexities of being the wife of five brothers while maintaining her agency as both a queen and a woman.

Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, too emerges as a pivotal character in the epic, offering a distinct perspective on the female knowledge system. Despite her unfortunate status as a widow, Kunti wields considerable authority over her sons. Her character is particularly commendable for her wisdom, resilience, and perseverance. She serves as both a guide and an instructor to the Pandavas, particularly in matters concerning duty and dharma. At critical moments in the epic, Kunti's guidance and insights reflect her profound understanding of dharma, as noted by Jha (2012), "Kunti's wisdom and her ability to navigate the complexities of motherhood and duty make her a crucial figure in *Mahabharata*" (56). The character of Kunti challenges the traditional perception of women as passive entities. She plays a pivotal role in shaping the significant incidents and developments within the epic, as well as influencing the progression of the central narrative. Consequently, Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas, embodies the complexities of motherhood and sacrifice, as she navigates her responsibilities while contending with her personal desires and the repercussions of her decisions.

Another character of similar nature is Gandhari, the blindfolded queen of Hastinapur and the mother of the Kauravas, who epitomizes the themes of loyalty and tragedy. She remains unwaveringly devoted to her husband and sons, even as she witnesses their downfall. Although Gandhari's character is often overshadowed by the male figures, namely Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana, she demonstrates profound wisdom and understanding of



dharma at critical junctures in the epic. She frequently warns Duryodhana of his unjust actions and even reprimands Dhritarashtra for his indulgence in overlooking Duryodhana's transgressions and unjust actions in the pursuit of power and authority. This is noted by Bhattacharya (2015) that, "Gandhari's insights into the moral failings of her sons highlight her role as a critical commentator on the events that unfold" (90). Gandhari's character challenges patriarchal stereotypes that portray women as mere appendages who unconditionally support their male counterparts. While she may appear passive in matters requiring action, she is notably active in critiquing the unjust actions of her son and the unrighteous decisions of her husband.

### **Women as Epistemic Authorities in *Mahabharata***

The conventional critiques of the epic *Mahabharata* often emphasize the portrayal of women as passive and silent observers of events and actions. However, a more nuanced examination reveals that women have significantly contributed to the shaping of dharma through their insightful words and dialogues. Through their sharp remarks and rejoinders, they have challenged patriarchal notions concerning morals and ethics, embodying the essence of righteousness. This is evident at critical junctures where women have advocated for what is right and just, a stance often absent among their male counterparts. Even in times of crisis, women emerge as torchbearers of dharma and justice. Figures such as Savitri, Draupadi, Kunti and Gandhari are depicted as capable of influencing emotions and articulating dharma within the epic. As noted by McGrath:

Draupadi is a steady and highly critical voice in this respect. She is the one to raise the legal question as to the propriety of Yudhisthira's gambling in the *sabha* 'assembly hall'. Kunti offers a model of good kingship at a moment in the *Udyoga parvan* when kingship at Hastinapura is undergoing a major quandary. Amba, through her extraordinary zealotry, is able to punish a wrongdoing in what is a typical form of *ksatriya* courtship procedure. (13)

In the epic, female characters assert their epistemic authority through their foresight and insightful experiences. The concept of epistemic authority suggests that claims made based on knowledge possess credible relevance. A critical and comprehensive analysis of the epic reveals that the female characters possess a profound understanding of dharma, as demonstrated in their arguments. At pivotal moments, they pose incisive and rational questions that challenge and defy the unjust actions of male characters. Their deep knowledge and wisdom of dharma provide insights into a knowledge system that is governed by females. Thus, it is reasonable to assert that the dialogues and debates of female characters highlight the epistemic authority of the women in the epic.

To have a deeper understanding of the epistemic positions adopted by the female characters, it is essential to revisit the epic and an endeavour be made to comprehend their debates and remarks, which constitute a significant foundation of the female knowledge system. To begin with, Draupadi, the most frequently discussed heroine of the epic, demonstrates her intelligence and patience in the direst circumstances. The questions she poses in the dicing hall establish her as a significant figure in the discourse on dharma and justice. During the notorious disrobing episode, she contested the court, resisting the humiliation inflicted upon her by the Kauravas, and challenged the authorities present there asking sharp questions. The intense exchange of arguments in this episode clearly highlights the conflict between righteousness and unrighteousness. When she was dragged into the court, she immediately posed the question of whom he (Yudhisthira) had lost first: himself or her (II.60.7). The question posed by Draupadi is highly pertinent because if he had already



lost himself in the gambling, what right did he possess to wager her? Simultaneously, she profoundly impacted the entire court with her debate on dharma and morality, particularly concerning the integrity and dignity of a woman. She reminds the court that it is exceedingly unchivalrous for a man to subject a woman to such treatment in the assembly (II. 62.9). This aspect of Draupadi underscores her profound understanding of dharma, enabling her to question the moral and ethical integrity of male characters. Correspondingly, Raghavan has noted this observation (2016), “Draupadi’s insistence on justice and her refusal to be silenced make her a powerful epistemic authority in the narrative” (89).

Another significant figure in the *Mahabharata* narrative is Savitri. Throughout the episode involving Savitri, her dialogue with the deity Yama demonstrates her profound understanding and clarity regarding the dharma of a wife. Her judicious speech not only succeeded in saving her husband’s life but also facilitated the recovery of her father-in-law’s confiscated property. Yama, impressed by her acumen and wisdom, bestowed upon her the blessing of a hundred sons and further ensured that her parents would also have sons. Thus, through her knowledge and wisdom, she safeguarded the future of her entire lineage. McGrath aptly comments on the discerning speech of Savitri:

Thus, her succinct and informed speech has won her husband back, and Death is most generous to her; Yama must therefore necessarily return not only the life of Savitri’s husband, but he must also extend the lives and fortune of Satyavat’s parents and return the sight to his father’s eyes as well as give the father a hundred sons. He is also obliged to enable Savitri to bear a hundred sons herself and to live for four hundred years together with her husband. Like so many of the women heroes in the poem, Savitri is not actually human but partakes of supernatural qualities. (108)

Gandhari, the queen of Hastinapura and mother of the Kauravas, also emerges as a significant character in the epic. During times of crisis, she repeatedly admonished her husband, Dhritarashtra, and her son, Duryodhana, urging them to alter their unrighteous paths. Gandhari embodies the theme of silent strength and perseverance, illustrating that silence can also be a manifestation of knowledge and wisdom. Furthermore, her warnings reflect a profound understanding of dharma. She possesses a deep comprehension of the running of an administration. Following the gambling incident, Gandhari reproached and admonished Duryodhana for his malevolent intentions towards his cousins, the Pandavas, cautioning him that he would inevitably lead to the downfall of the clan (II.66.30). She firmly urged her husband to disregard Duryodhana’s policy of causing the Pandavas to suffer, as such policies and decisions would ultimately lead to the clan’s destruction. She expressed her disdain for those present in the court who humiliated a woman and reminded the Kshatriyas that wisdom should arise from equanimity, from dharma, and from the insight of others (II.66.35). During the Udyoga Parvan, she unequivocally rejected Duryodhana’s proposal to imprison Krishna, who was serving as the peace envoy of the Pandavas (V.67.9). Despite Dhritarashtra’s actions, Gandhari consistently advised him to make ethical decisions, thereby demonstrating her wisdom and knowledge and establishing her as an epistemic authority. This perspective is also highlighted by Hawley (2005), “the epistemic authority of women in *Mahabharata* is not merely a reflection of their relationships with men but is rooted in their own experiences and moral insights” (45). At the conclusion of the Kurukshetra war, Gandhari emerges as the sole figure who advocates for all women who suffered the loss of loved ones during the conflict by singing a lament. Overcome by profound pain and grief upon Duryodhana’s collapse, she also contemplates the sorrows and sufferings of other women who experienced similar losses. She articulates their mourning and anguish, with



Krishna as her immediate audience. This act reflects her profound comprehension of loss and pain as she navigates the moral and ethical ramifications of the catastrophic war. This is aptly highlighted by McGrath:

She portrays the widowed women who are also there, weeping for the bloody corpses of their men, surrounded by scavenging animals, birds, and canines. All this is given in direct visual terms: Gandhari is singing in the same manner that a poet would, being inspired and having access to a world of insight which replicates material and objective reality, particularly that reality which is visible. It is this visual capacity which sets Gandhari apart from all the other women in the poem and which uniquely distinguishes her. No other woman possesses this ability of poetic and dharmic insight: such is the primary field for Gandhari's heroism. (98-99)

In addition to Gandhari, Kunti too emerges as a significant figure who embodies epistemic authority within the epic. In her maternal role, she navigates the complexities of her personal choices and the obligations of motherhood. Following the demise of Pandu and Madri, Kunti assumed full responsibility for the Pandavas, serving both as their guardian and mentor. She regarded it as her dharma to nurture her children and instil in them a sense of righteousness. During pivotal moments, she guided them to make decisions grounded in morality, ethics, and, most importantly, dharma. After the incident at Varnavat, when Kunti and her sons sought refuge in a village plagued by the rakshasa Baka, who periodically consumed Brahmin families, Kunti assumed the role of a mentor and instructed Bhima to confront and slay Baka. When Yudhisthira questioned her decision, she confidently asserted, 'The dharmic resolution was intentionally made by me!' (I.150.19) In her interactions with her sons, she emphasized the importance of adhering to a virtuous path and prioritizing the welfare of others over personal gain. This perspective underscores her role as an epistemic authority, serving as a guiding figure for the Pandavas whenever they faced dilemmas between righteousness and unrighteousness.

### Conclusion

The epic *Mahabharata* not only explores the intricacies of various situations and relationships but also examines character development through the complex scenarios, often presented as crossroads. It addresses issues of dharma, righteousness, justice, morality, and ethics, as well as the human condition in navigating these concepts. Although female characters do not explicitly participate in warfare, they play a crucial role in offering alternative perspectives on dharma and contribute to shaping the notions of justice and righteousness through their dialogues and debates. Characters such as Draupadi, Savitri, Gandhari, and Kunti are instrumental in highlighting a perspective of dharma that diverges from patriarchal norms. Their significant contributions to the moral discourse challenge the notion that women play a passive role in the narrative, thereby refuting the idea that they are merely appendages to male characters. While women in the epic do not engage in actions such as war or battles, they are active agents in discussions and debates concerning what is right and moral.

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## From Queer Abject to Queer Shame: Navigating the Spectrum of Queer Affect through Reparative Reading to Canonise 'The Banshees of Inisherin' (2022) as a Body Horror

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### Abstract

*The Banshees of Inisherin* released in 2022 is a modern day allegory set in the rural Ireland of 1923, rendering the ramification of violence and the cycle of hatred that sparks from quotidian pettiness. Conceptualised in a closed community of mundane survival, the cinematic plot functions like a classic tragi-comedy of existential dread, featuring two companions (read lovers) Colm and Padraic who abruptly drift apart for no apparent reason. This paper attempts to investigate the homosexual relationship between the two men through the prism of queer affect to explore the oscillating impact of the anti-relational (self-annihilating) death drive of the Sinthomosexual and the potential of gay shame as reparative affect. The paper draws its argumentative base from the theoretical paradigms of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (*Types of Reading*) and Lee Edelman's *Anti-relational queer theory* (with focus on the potential of positive relationality as an alternate model of queer sociality). The queer reading also highlights the challenges and complexities of portraying homosexuality onscreen. It equally addresses the sub-generic possibilities of 'The Banshees of Inisherin' by classifying it as a biological horror aligned with the standard tropes of corporeal assault, desecration and agential violence.

**Keywords:** Reparative, Sinthomosexual, Queer Affect, Gay Shame, Body Horror.

### Oh Brother, Where Art Thou? The Original Sin of Homosexuality as a Corrupting Presence in Inisherin

*As flies to wanton boys  
are we to the gods  
they kill us for their sport.*

King Lear, Act IV, Scene I

### Introduction

Martin McDonagh's body of work often borders on the singular theme of potency of fate, predestination and the redundancy of free will. From the graphic plays that he has authored /staged to the nuanced cinema that he has created, his fictional world is one of existential crisis with often severely decimated provision for redemption. The grim vision that he portrays is often showcased through tragi-comedic genre interspersed with violence and cruelty, designed to provoke a certain breed of humour and laughter. The *on-ye-face* theatre that Martin McDonagh specialises in, often projects an almost Pinteresque world of absurdity and uncertainty, peopled by Beckettian characters (mostly tramps and drifters) who keep bumping into each other without empathy or human connection. *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) is set in one such phantasmagorical idyll, an Irish island of rustic folk who appear as stock characters with stereotyped vices as if translocated from a Jonsonian play.



The sheer hopelessness of the characters trying to survive against a backdrop of a dysfunctional Church and absence of rule of law makes it a perfect vignette of post-modernist ontology. As typical of McDonagh's style of representation, the ace director attempts to queer the institutional building blocks of Ireland, namely Irish Identity, Nationalism, the Church, the Pub and the Police. This paper tries to critically look at the ideological sub-text of the cinematic discourse, specifically the rationale behind subverting identity markers like gender and sexuality. Colm and Padriac, the two central characters are caught in the flux of a tumultuous male-friendship that has a deep homosexual undertone.

After analysing McDonagh's oeuvre, Jose Lanters (2007) points out how “destabilising the very foundational elements of Irish nationalism, beginning with the nuclear family and extending to the public institutions of the state and the church” (17), McDonagh razes to the ground the fundamental signifiers of a quintessential Irishness. By subverting the fixed categories of not just the public institutions, the filmmaker also extends his iconoclasm to the bound categories of gender and sexuality by introducing homosexuality as an alterity within the framework of an imposed 'sameness'. To quote Lanters; “Consequently, the discourse of Irish nationalism has excluded homosexuality or branded it as foreign and corrupting” (Lanters, 2007). A queer reading of the cinematic discourse reveals certain aspects as antithetical to heteronormativity, for instance all the main characters, including the Priest, are uncoupled and there is very little focus put on depicting any hetero-conjugal relation. Interestingly, Dominic, the half-wit is sexually abused by an alpha male, his father, a man of law who eventually forces his son to take his own life. Again, this is a clever cinematic ploy to deflect from the taboo homoerotic elements that are part of the main plot. Death by suicide is a narrative stratagem popular in queer fiction. There is also an overwhelming milieu of exaggerated violence and melodrama in *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) with a connecting thread between hyper-masculinity and violence, *brute force* acting as *agent provocateur* to construct or disrupt agency. Colm and Padraic, closest pals burst unannounced into a scene of escalating violence, initially triggered by the former who decides one fine day that *he likes Padraic no more*. Colm tries to clarify his position by seeking absolution at the local church through a startling confession that *he has impure thoughts about men*.

The plot turns dicey at this point, and as the rural community becomes polarised on this 'buddy break-up', vestiges of affect tinged with queerness surfaces. While Colm, a man of the culture and arts hastily assumes melancholia and abjection (from social order) to supplant his sexual drive after his failed confession before the ineffectual priest, Padraic keeps playing the 'fecking gay boy' whose effeminate nature and timidity (when Dominic asks Padraic if he has ever seen a naked female, even if it his sister Siobhan, the latter assumes repulsion and indifference to heterosexual instincts) makes him an outcast in the community. The cinematic discourse strategically obscures sexual allusions in the context of covert homosexuality and harps on the repercussions resulting from sexual deflection. This paper further draws on the theoretical premise of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003) who famously proclaimed how most critical practices, including queer scholarship engage in clichéd paranoid readings to uncover hidden forces of oppression in textual structures, reinforcing once again the dominant drive of understanding sexuality through negative effect. Additionally, an attempt is made in this paper to explore the statute of Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) that conceptualises the absurdist position of *Sinthomosexual*, a neologism that Edelman coined to theoretically define narcissist subjects who driven by an incessant death drive disrupt the scheme of heteronormative reproductive futurism. Analysing the cinematic



discourse the paper tries to open a dialogue based along these lines to examine the reparative affect of gay shame and queer sociality that counters the *sinthomosexual's* lust for self-annihilation and violence; to recalibrate the universalising cultural fantasy of a *Queer* as a 'figure of sexual difference'. While the first segment of this essay pitches in on all the above governing ideas to queer *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022), the second and final segment decentres the popular generic possibilities of it ( a tragi-comedy, an existential slapstick, a farce, a black comedy, a dystopia) to (re)canonise it as a sub-genre of horror; namely body horror that projects *the body* as a medium, a prop to depict corporeal malleability, making the act of mutilation a form of autonomous action, and the violence an agency that offers a foil to the lack that queerness is discursively constructed by.

### **Incredible Paranoid and Melancholic Rise**

In the absence of overt narrative signifiers, reading the in-between spaces of textual ambivalence illuminates signification. *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) may present a very straightforward account of disrupted comradeship, but what it implicitly suggests is a provocative tale of restrained homosexuality, a magnetic affect circulating intra-subjectively between two friends with same-sex proclivities; one obsessed with creating music while the other likened to a 'sissy' because of his inherent 'niceness', proximity to his sister and extreme fondness for his male friend.

Vito Russo in his extensively researched work on portrayal of homosexuality onscreen, *Celluloid Closet* (1981) observes; "Homosexuality in the movies, whether overtly sexual or not, has always been seen in terms of what is or is not masculine. The defensive phrase, 'Who's a sissy?' has been as much a part of the American lexicon as 'So's your old lady'. After all, it is supposed to be an insult to call a man effeminate, for it means he is like a woman and therefore not as valuable as a 'real' man. The popular definition of gayness is rooted in sexism. Weakness in men rather than strength in women have consistently been seen as the connection between sex role behaviour and deviant sexuality.....Although at first there was no equation between sissyhood (reflections of an overabundance of female influence) and actual homosexuality, the danger of gayness as the consequence of such behaviour lurked always in the background (Russo, 1981, 9)". Russo further points out that "Webster defines sissy as the opposite of male and the line between the effeminate and real man was drawn routinely in every genre of American film, but comedies more often allowed the explicit leap to the homosexual possibilities inherent in such definitions (Buster Keaton and Chaplin comedies)...Thus the effeminate man, the symbol of weakness, takes it on the chin for everyone, becoming the scapegoat for the unstated homoerotic activity of the real but insecure men around him (Russo, 1981, 17)". Padraic becomes the butt of male scorn in the whole of *Inisherin* (next to Dominic), from taking beatings from the local policeman to insults from his closest male friend, his only real confidante is Siobhan, his sister who believes in Padraic's 'niceness' as pure and pristine.

The opening scene is a spectacular example of Padraic's latent sexual orientation and his complicated relation with Colm, caught in the same frame with an exquisite rainbow and background score, it appears to be the perfect *pride stride* for Padraic as he walks to Colm's cottage to invite him for a drink at the pub. Juxtaposed against the free spirit of the rainbow, the statue of Mother Mary and the local policeman appearing in frames immediately after represent the imposing nature of Religion with a disquieting surveillance hovering over *Inisherin* and the hostile nature of the local peace keeping force. The rainbow flag that represents the diversity, unity and inclusivity of the LGBTQ community is a six striped flag (red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet) designed by an openly gay artist Gilbert Baker in



1978 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2017). Incorporating a rainbow in the cinematic narration as a symbol of inclusion and diversity (and the Pride flag it resonates with) to represent the sexual subjectivity of the protagonist Padraic is an intentional stratagem of the film maker. Since sexual orientation is not *seen* as identity categories like Gender or Race, queer reading of *gay characters in buddy films* remains a challenge for critics trying to identify that hotspot of visibility represented onscreen. In the absence of overt narrative codes, cinematic cues buried within the dialogue can open up sub-text/s of restrained homosexuality to foreground queer readings of implicitly drawn gay characters.

On finding Colm sitting lonely in his cottage with his dog Sammy, Padraic asks him; ‘Are you *coming out* to the pub Colm?’ If ‘coming out’ can mean going out with someone for a social event, it can also mean expression/disclosure of self-identity in terms of sexuality and gender. The term refers to the process of telling someone else how they identify in terms of their romantic orientation, sexual, orientation, or gender identity (LGBT Center, the University of North Carolina). The Irish Pub holds a central position for mapping Irish national identity by reinforcing masculinity and traditional Irish culture. The spatiality of the pub offers elements of inclusion or exclusion, ‘*coming out*’ (*in terms of sexual reckoning*) to (before/in front of) the pub may lead to total ostracization and the possibility of social marginalisation. Allison Macleod (2021) in her work reviewing queer belongings in recent Irish films states “that poverty, the growing influence of the Catholic Church, and the increasing segregation of men and women into separate social spheres in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, led to hard-drinking groups becoming a form of remission for men and central to the cultural definition of masculinity in Ireland....The institutionalisation of male drinking practices within the pub further became a means of governing these practices even as they themselves constituted a rebellion against familial, religious, and economic obligations. Male drinking practices within the pub constitute a profoundly gendered national expression that is deeply imbricated within a struggle for power.” (Macleod, 2021, 165) Though the Pub confronts Padraic and Colm with a persistent query ‘Have ye been rowing?’ it eventually becomes a rhetorical question that serves as a cinematic refrain with almost every character interrogating the couple about *rowing*. If in British slang *rowing* signifies ‘having an altercation’, The Dictionary of sexual terms on the other hand define Rowing (the boat) as ‘Masturbating two males at the same time’. The response to this bizarre query, is always ambivalent (at different points).

Padraic: We have not been rowing.

I don’t think we’ve been rowing.

Have we been rowing?

Another intriguing connection in semantic terms can be formulated with the synonym of *Rowing* which is *cruising* and which in gay terminology signifies ‘*an act of looking for sexual partners*’. Though originally deployed as a code word in closeted gay community, the term is now assimilated within heterosexual vocabulary (A Modern Gay’s Guide, 2023). Again, the fact that ‘Rowing’ is a sport can lead to other synchronic (associated/co-existent) significations; Merriam Webster defines the noun ‘Sport’ as a ‘source of diversion: recreation’, ‘a sexual play’, and ‘a physical activity engaged in for pleasure’. That the entire gamut of the enigmatic equation between Colm and Padraic unfolds through the loaded term ‘Rowing’ is a reminder of how cinematic cues are subtly deployed to confront the challenges of representing homosexuality onscreen.

While some textual interpretations are based on ‘homosexuality as an established cultural pattern’, classical psychoanalytical studies of gayness look through the Freudian



prism of sexuality as a primal drive in the shaping of personalities. Elaborating on the genealogy of homosexual behaviour, Marcelo M. Hanza in his brief essay, *The Dichotomist Male: Theoretical Models of Male Homosexuality* (2007) observes; “Homosexuality, as it is represented in today’s culture, is a topic of varied social, political, biological, psychological and religious controversy. The term ‘homosexuality’ can be defined as any sexual activity between members of the same sex. In attempt to determine causation or reveal the mechanistic properties involved in homosexuality, two major areas of thought have been derived. The ‘nature’ view is in the realm of the biological sciences and stresses biological or genetic predispositions towards homosexuality. Contrastingly, in the social sciences, there is the ‘nurture’ view that stresses psychological and sociological factors leading to homosexuality rather than genetic variables (Hanza, 2007, 86)”. Marcelo M. Hanza further points out that certain ‘clinical psychological theories refute the idea that there is a direct genetic link between heredity and homosexuality’ and ‘seek to identify the various social and relationship roles, along with the ideation of sexual orientation, in order to explain various motivating factors of homosexual behaviour.’ Along with the popular Freudian conception of the ‘castration complex’ many other psychological theories (for example Joseph Nicolosi’s work) promote the idea that male homosexuality originates through the lack of association/identification with a masculine identity (absence of a father). This study, along with drawing inputs from theories such as these, also takes up a slightly different approach by heeding *Affect*, specifically the wide expanse of *Queer Affect* to look at how Colm and Padraic swerve between diverse emotions like paranoia, rage, disillusionment, melancholia and eventually abject to activate or deactivate their respective agencies. The deployment of extreme violence forces us to consider another conundrum: *Is Violence a normative mode of Queer Agency?* The fact that Colm wants to part ways with his closest buddy Padraic is (probably) based on sexual urges he tries to repress; Colm’s confession before the ignorant local priest only proves how dysfunctional the Church is with its logic of conservatism and dogma.

Priest: It isn't him you have the impure thoughts about, is it?

Colm: Are you joking me? I mean, are you fecking joking me?

Priest: People do have impure thoughts about men, too.

Colm: Do you have impure thoughts about men, Father?

Priest: I do not have impure thoughts about men. And how dare you say that about a man of the cloth?

Colm: Well, you started it.

This expository scene is set in the confession box of the Church and is very carefully composed in terms of its storytelling. As the repartee takes place between Colm and the priest (both are dressed in black), there appears a dark space in the extreme left side of the frame in which Colm appears representing the emptiness and dullness that he regrets in his life. However, as the conversation elevates to a climactic pitch, a glowing white cross adorns the same frame in which Colm is placed, symbolising Christ’s redemptive presence in the world of sin and sinners. The said confession scene is comprised of zoom-in shots of the two characters Colm and the priest, focusing on their individual emotional stand points and clearly outlines and demarcates the stark conflict of religion and the physical senses/creative and aesthetic pleasure.

An instance of queer affect is equally conveyed through a particular scene in the pub where Colm surrounded by ladies is playing his fiddle with musical accompaniment (singing by one of the women present); across the table at the other end of the room is seated a



nervous Padraic behaving like a jilted lover attempting to condemn his own jealousy through hard drinking. Tormented by constant queries in the pub, the same evening, (Is Colm there with you? But he is always there with you!) Padraic is alarmed when the pub master provocatively suggests; ‘All the ladies love Colm, always did’, to which Padraic’s half-hearted retort, ‘That’s not true’ enunciates distinctively the love dynamics of a complex homoerotic relationship. Heather Love in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the politics of Queer History* (2007) explores this negative turn in queer studies where queerness is contradictorily treated as both ‘object’ and ‘exalted’ and as a kind of ‘romantic exceptionalism’. Since the association of homosexual experience lived at the subjective level seems to be always tied up with loss and melancholia, Love (2007) asserts the need to exploit negative affect for action and volition. Thus, the feeling of queer shame should be less self-repulsive and more reparative and restorative.

In a similar ideological vein, Lee Edelman in his *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) introduces the figure of the *sinthomosexual*. Lee Edelman’s work on anti-relational queer theory examines selected examples from political discourse, literature and other cultural products to look at how the whole idea of futurity and its concomitant hope is fetishized through the figure of the ‘child’. The *sinthomosexual*, a coinage created by Edelman, hence, stands opposed as a deviant figure to the Child, a symbol of heteronormative reproductive futurism. The *sinthomosexual*, according to Edelman is miserably motivated by the death drive which is profoundly anti-social by nature. As Edelman registers:

“For the death drive marks the excess embedded within the Symbolic through the loss, the Real loss, that the advent of the signifier effects. In other words, while desire is born of and sustained by a constitutive lack, drive emerges in relation to a constitutive surplus” (Edelman, 2004, 9)

Edelman believes that it is this surplus that eventually produces a profusion of *jouissance*. As a figure of divergence, a *Sinthomosexual* is thus emblematic of negative social values, stands for social aversion and antagonism which eventually speeds up the spiritual damnation of the *Sinthomosexual*.

Edelman’s insistence then that “Sinthomosexuality also speaks, as neologic signifier to the ‘sin’ that continues to attach itself to ‘homosexuality’” is in essence played out in *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) through the anti-social drive of the *sinthomosexual* Colm Doherty whose depraved lust for self-annihilation on the pretext of aesthetic pursuits (arts and culture as having more meaning than aimless chattering with a dull companion) positions him at odds with the symbolic (social) order. As Colm decides to abruptly part ways with Padraic, dismissing Padraic’s claims that ‘Colm is nothing but depressed’, our *sinthomosexual* cites the ‘dread of death’ as what motivated his move. Colm starts by alienating himself from Padraic by refusing to share any space of affability with him, particularly visible in scenes where Colm denies receiving Padraic at his home by abandoning his own domestic space (Colm’s abode) and later by refusing multiple times to share a pint (drink) with him in the pub. Padraic’s visiting Colm’s abode to invite him for a drink is striking in its visual props; Colm’s house displays his empty bed and empty chair along with the wooden puppets and masks that exhibit and vocalise the narrative theme of hollowness and decay of social (human) relations. Colm’s departure from his own house with only the props of masquerade left behind to represent him evokes the complexities of disguise and identity crisis. When Padraic discovers Colm walking away from his house through a telescope, this cinematic prop underscores the growing distance between the two (the telescope appears again in a later scene with the same symbolism).



By attempting to mend their relation, Padraic forces Colm to an eventual conversation outside the pub later on; the specific scene in terms of its framing and composition (where the two men are in the same frame in a wide angle shot) again, accurately depicts where the two men stand in their complex equation; juxtaposed against the majestic sea lined by rocks and mountains, Colm's position is in the same frame with the rocks while Padraic sits with the sea in the backdrop (Colm exhibiting rock solid determination for detachment and Padraic displaying 'niceness' and calmness in mending their differences, each natural element corresponds to each character semantically). In another scene at the pub sometime later, when Padraic's bitterness flares into a certain hostile reaction (Padraic calls Colm's composed tune 'a shite tune'), both the men reluctantly sit down for a drink once again but strategically, this instance, the sea represents Colm while the rocks Padraic (their sitting positions are altered according to their oscillating temperaments) suggesting a terrible rift and an irreversible damage (the rift semantically depicted at a later scene as well where a landscape divided into two paths appears before the duo as a cinematic signifier). Colm's realisation that his life (and time) is slipping away if he engages in conversations with a 'limited man', forces him to account for his own creative impulse, his cultural drive to produce music. Coupled with that is his death drive that paints the grim temperament of Colm, whose status of non-agency (caused by his inability to contribute to the arts and culture) rapidly spikes to that of *volition and action* when Colm unceremoniously announces *severing his fingers off as ritual sacrifice* directed to a social order that often treats non-conformists and transgressors (Colm's infamous confession of harbouring immoral thoughts about men can be counted as a form of sexual transgression) with the penalty of castration.

The escalating violence bespeaks of how the agency of a *sinthomosexual* is articulated through brutality and gore, enacting in its turn the power dynamics of social relationships in the miniature island where the actual institutions (and their icons) are either depleted of power or are inept and redundant (the constancy with which every other scene highlights the statue of Mother Mary, the Cross and the Church are emblematic of the inconstancy and impotency these religious icons convey in spite of their gigantic façade and imposing nature). These religious signifiers only represent hollowness, conformity and surveillance through their presence in Inisherin. When Colm decides to self-mutilate himself, the barbaric act vocalizes the *sinthomosexual's* excesses, his *jouissance* which eventually engulfs Padraic and the pastoral peace of the insular island. Again, the liminal subtleties of intimate conversation bring us to the brink of a corporeal orgy where the visceral effect of the severed fingers hint at the self-terminating proclivities of *sinthomosexuality*.

Linguistic signifiers (Verbal cues like Dialogue) is a major component of McDonagh's cinematic universe that intentionally craft a space to explore the liminal caverns of sexual repression and as the *repressed tries to return* (Colm's classic coming-out) through ritual acts of self-cleansing, decapitation and disembodiment are in order. Whilst exploring alternate critical practices of queer scholarship, this study focuses on the continuum of queer affect which essentially is a vanishing point of diverse theories of queer ontology/identity. In *Feeling Down, Backward, and Machinic: Queer Theory and the Affective Turn* (2020) Wen Liu points out how theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her *Paranoid Reading* (2003) attempts to understand the repercussions of a theory of queerness as "it is structurally bounded with paranoid affect ever since the AIDS crisis" (Liu, 2020,5). The melancholia that has been generated because of this '*backward turn of suffering and homophobia*' necessitates the evolution of alternative queer methodologies. Wen Liu states how Sedgwick turns to Silvan Tomkins's theory of Affect and his notion of Shame that "disrupts the theoretical



attachment between sexual shame and "internalized homophobia" that has been taken for granted in the construction of queer subject" (Liu, 2020, 6) Liu couples Sedgwick and Tomkins to analyse how Shame becomes an antithesis to 'Distress' but rather as Tomkins puts it, "Shame is only felt when interest or joy has been activated" (Liu, 2020, 6). According to Liu, this reparative practice surprisingly opens up other focal points that are not restricted by the anxious paranoid position, and thus, moves away from the 'Death-drive' driven homophobic-centred readings that traditional psychoanalysis of non-binary sexualities offer. Gay shame is thus a reparative affect that engages with collectivity, opening and sociality, thus, often refuting anti-relational queer theories which have traditionally spawned a profusion of queer negative effect. As the plot of *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) traverse from the position of the *Self-destructive sinthomosexual*' (Colm) to that of the *'nice and shy effeminate male'* (Padraic) we see how queer feelings swing from 'negative affect' to 'reparative affect' as *'niceness'* and *'kindness'* invade the *sinthomosexual* at the climactic pitch; it is exactly then that Colm succumbs to the pleas of sanity offered by Padraic to renounce his violence and his position of abjection from sociality (his *will to violate* does not move beyond the mere mutilation of his fingers). At the end, the brutal act becomes a farce and Colm increasingly descends into acknowledgement and acceptance of his predicament. And it all happens because of his estranged partner Padraic, the *shy and nice man* whose persistent faith in the love of humanity (including kindness towards animals) makes him a redemptive figure, a queer rebel who resists the flow of counter-productive, anti-relational and anti-social affect displayed by Colm. Perhaps Martin McDonagh intended to create a lucrative model of gayness that is shy, kind and faithful and that which can act against the self-annihilating *sinthomosexual*.

*'Niceness'* is one of the most exuberant productive affects that the cinematic narrative depicts, not only does it have a utopian potential but it is also opens up alternate forms of social realities and possibly, alternate temporalities and futurities against heteronormative futurism. Padraic's niceness is however, never explored, it is a virtue without being virtuous, though it helped him coalesce into the insular community that Inisherin was. It was Padraic whose Christ-like innocence shines even when abandoned by all and sundry, this model of queer shyness, thus, serves as a reparative affect that not only recalibrates the power dynamics of the plot, but could have possibly provided a cathartic end to it. Tragically enough, *niceness did not last*. When Colm abandons violence and offers truce, the niceness that encapsulated Padraic's gay affect is replaced by vendetta. Padraic's eventual aggression in the pub when he witnesses Colm's growing closeness with the local policeman officer Kearney (a molester himself who routinely assaults his own son Dominic), is the beginning of the end. Padraic's ire further explodes when his miniature donkey chokes to death on Colm's severed fingers and he decides to pay a visit to Colm at his house, once again. This time Colm is more composed and talks about his fruitful musical composition, the tune that he calls 'the Banshees of Inisherin'. The ambience of Colm's house in this scene represents once more the dynamics of the volatile relation between the two men; two puppets are caught in the same cinematic frame; the hanging one representing Colm whose fate is trapped in an interstitial, limbo like space while the puppet sitting below in a posture of placation replicates Padraic who much like a wayward child threatens and begs to be taken back into the relationship. Eventually, Colm's horrendous act of self-mutilation is countered by Padraic's equally monstrous act of burning down Colm's house with Colm in it (despite Padraic's warning Colm stayed back); the spectacle of burning mimicking the unseen violence of the civil war across the mainland (occasionally alluded to in the narrative through gun and rifle



sounds). This flux of uncontrolled emotions that swerve and swing back and forth between the pair, strongly demonstrate the potential of queer affect in voicing irreverence against societal and systemic insouciance. The final scene presents a new conundrum; despite the halting of gunshots across the mainland, there is a hint of a new strife on Inisherin, between two men whose turbulent relation transgresses the bounds of religion, politics and law (the institutional figure heads of Irish national identity). Allegorically, the Irish Civil War (June 1922- May 1923) aptly resonates with the melodramatic action on the bigoted island of Inisherin, operating almost like an extended metaphor, cross-referenced cautiously by the cinematic narrative to convey the polarised state of politics that has always been part of Irish history and civil life. As the antagonising spirit of corrupt power (manifest through the church and the legal force) pits man against man (superbly paraphrased by Officer Kearney when he mentioned going to the mainland for the execution of a couple of IRA lads by the Free State lads and then gets confused if it was ‘the other way around’ and how ‘simply easy it was when we were killing the English’), the issue of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’ as calibrated through the binary of ‘us’ and ‘them’ actually reveals an internal splitting in the fragmented nature of Irish (sexual) identity (Colm’s struggle to gauge his homosexual instincts with the parameters of compliance of the local Church that results in his acknowledgement of the abject in himself, paired with Padraic’s devolution from demonstration of ‘niceness’ as a gentle gay man to his eventual, climactic aggressive (anti-social) instincts apparently directed against a gossip-mongering Inisherin where the fear of being ‘the rumoured couple’ may have caused the rift between the two men in the first place). When Colm mentions that his final tune hints less at the original Irish folkloric female spirits (The Banshees) who used to portend death but rather the modern Banshees who ‘just sit back and observe, amused’, the appearance of Mrs McCormick in the last scene, sadistically observing Colm and Padraic as they separate is a cinematic allusion to the voyeuristic audience that has always been part of McDonagh’s cathartic endings. This ambivalent cessation to *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) is a typical device of equivocation that McDonagh’s body of work brags of. Ultimately, the way out of the moral conundrum rests with the audience who have always been complicit with McDonagh’s narrative stratagems, something that he inherits from his theatrical background.

### **The Terminal Birth of Horror**

Maria Doyle in ‘Breaking Bodies: The presence of violence on Martin McDonagh’s stage’ (2007) observes how the visibility of violence both in terms of object destruction and in desecration of the body is a constant part of McDonagh’s stage plays. She further points out that ‘McDonagh has been categorized as one of Britain’s “New Brutalists”, a group of young playwrights devoted to generating a “visceral response” in the audience through a new level of “verbal and physical atrocities”’ (Russell, 2007, 97). Evidently, such depiction of structural violence bound with narrative mobility is something ubiquitous in McDonagh’s body of work that largely stems from his cinematic vision. Since McDonagh’s ideological stance rests on transgressing categorical limits of fixed, normative entities like identity, sexuality and gender, subverting the discursive bounds of corporeal reality becomes his pivotal preoccupation in *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022). Hence, *Body* assumes the status of *narrative signifier* that alludes to (signifies) its sheer fragility through demonstration of uncontrolled violence leashed upon it for its total revamp. The idea of breaking corporeal boundary is to essentially reflect upon the mutability and malleability of the body and the ridiculous nature of its social and cultural construction. Desecration and mutilation of the body in *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) makes a case for the horror sub-genre *body horror*



that features similar gore and violence as part of its generic conventions. This segment of the paper attempts to (re)canonize *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) as a body horror with identification of the popular tropes of the sub-genre in cinematic texts.

Ronald Allan Lopez Cruz in *Mutations and Metamorphoses: Body Horror is Biological Horror* (2012) defines Body Horror as “a genre trope that showcases often graphic violations of the human body, is also justifiably called *biological horror*....It brings an extreme level of gruesome disregard for the human body... This popular horror trope is characterized by the manipulation and warping of the normal state of bodily form and function (Cruz, 2012, 161)”. Cruz points out that body horror “plays on our natural aversion to pain and damage to the human body” and “Ultimately, it relishes the destruction of the organic form to the point of unnatural evolutionary insignificance (Cruz, 2012, 168).” Furthermore, “Body horror typically pushes the physical form of its subjects to their limits and beyond. Though the visuals can feel like an empty spectacle to the uninitiated, body horror is a subgenre that is prone to social commentary (Cruz, 2012, 168)”.

When Colm makes the unceremonious announcement of severing his fingers as an act of resistance to reproach Padraic’s proximity, his *sinthomosexuality* stands in direct opposition to the symbolic order: the heteronormative society; a society that either imposes binaried conformity or forced assimilation. For a *sinthomosexual* integration remains an impossible solution, his aversion for society springs from his own unique alterity that plays out in *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) as a form of (*self*) *abjection from social order*. Self-demolition and an untamed death drive serves as Colm's *jouissance* as he starts splashing his own blood in a novel rite of passage. This ritual act of self-mutilation appears as a symbolic feat of castration directed against a society and its institutions, namely the Church whose apathy to sexual deviance is striking. Colm's coming-of-age/coming-out tale becomes one of spiritual damnation as his monstrous act of sexual awakening equates him to the gothic villains of the early centuries whose presence in the horror canon resonated with collective social paranoia for all forms of non-normative sexualities. To expedite this argument further, let us borrow some observations of Laura Eldred from her work (2007); ‘Martin McDonagh and the contemporary gothic’; “Gothic works generally include a rather Byronic hero; dark, atmospheric locales; and a suspicion of the foreigner” and “strive to inspire discomfort and fear, and to centre anxiety upon a monstrous other, which is generally expelled or killed by the end of the tale....The first answer to why McDonagh uses gothic material is that he is a fan of horrific and violent entertainment, especially films” and has a “tendency to adopt and reinvent classic horror film plots by adding his own extra-gory, postmodern twists (The play *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* has inter-textual references to Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*)....Furthermore, these characters can be read as monstrous because they challenge traditional definitions of a nationalistic, Catholic, Gaelic speaking, rural Irishness. McDonagh loves to parody the Gaelic Romantic vision of Ireland...The horrific images and monstrous characters of McDonagh’s texts often subvert romantic, nationalist images and histories, as he forces his audience into identification with, and often qualified sympathy for, characters who destabilize traditional ideals of Irish national character...The gothic provides a way to organize national identity: that which must be expelled, which cannot be admitted, is made into a monster and exterminated (Russell, 2007, 113)”. It is evident that Colm’s self-abjection is born out of his abjection for the normative pillars of Irish national identity: the Church and the Family, ostracized from both by his self-acknowledged sins his moral damnation is complete and graphically externalised through his corporeal violation. The *Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) functions like a typical body horror which features the grotesque (almost



kafkaesque) transformation of the body and its dismemberment as a formula trope to disgust (and queer) the viewing experience of the spectators and to snap them out of their (straight) zones of sexual complacency. The ritual mutilation that Colm performs takes him further away from the heteronormative (symbolic) axis in an anti-assimilationist gesture. The epiphanic moment of his revelation (coming out) becomes not just one of monstrosity but also of historical contingency, specifically in an unempathetic Inisherin where gossips and not 'lived realities' are in rife. This brings us closer to the concept of *abjection* that acts as the generic backbone of body horror, wherein monstrosity springs from within, making body the classic trope of myriad metamorphoses. Brigid Cherry in her well researched book on Horror (2009), draws attention towards the zone of unsettling 'cognitive dissonance' which generic conventions of body horror produce (much like the emergence of homosexual behaviour to dislocate and disrupt normative sexual codes) by locating the source of narrative apogee in the domain of abjection.

"In Kristeva's model, abjection is linked to an adverse reaction such as disgust, nausea or horror caused by being confronted with an object that threatens to disrupt the distinction between self and other (or subject and object in Lacanian terms). Thus to be in a state of abjection is to feel revulsion when confronted by objects that threaten to cross (or do cross) the boundary. Kristeva suggests that this causes a collapse of meaning which results in the feeling of revulsion. There are obvious links to intended affect/s of horror cinema here. Abjection clearly applies to the object that is boundary between life and death itself: the corpse, which is seen in all kinds of horror film monsters. The corpse is particularly abject because it is not just that part of self which is expelled to become non-self, but is disintegration of self entirely (literally out of life and into death, 'I' is eradicated since 'I' no longer exists). But meaning may also collapse (and thus disrupt the boundary between self and other) around things that confront the self with the trauma of one's own death: open wounds, blood, pus, vomit, faeces, and so on (again, all of which are repeated motifs in the horror film) (Cherry, 2009, 112)."

As a body horror classic, it typically creates a cinematic spectrum of the strikingly odd principles, an impotent Church juxtaposed against a rowdy pub in a god-deserted space where the presence of the all protective spirit of Virgin Mary is just a spectral entity weighed against the powers of sorcery in the figure of the eerie fortune teller; Mrs McCormick (whose deathly presence in the setting only spawns decadence and despair). The Church is presented as a bright, colossal building in white, (sunlit on sunny days) while the interior is grim, bound by decorum and code, with the figure of the Priest (also clad in white) as overbearing and authoritarian. Even the holy cross and the statue of Mother Mary seemed to have abandoned that space, placed at some distance away from the Church, both seem apparently dissociated from the Church establishment. The pub, on the other hand, is full of music and merriment; if everything is morbid and orchestrated within the Church, everything in the pub, poised against it, is carnivalesque, vibrant and pulsating (If the pub is symbolic of the life forces the Church on the other hand is of sin and death). And as the plot approaches its climactic pitch the setting turns more and more gothic. McDonaugh's Inisherin, remotely set, is placed off the coast of Mainland Ireland where a terrible civil war has pushed the human population almost to the brink of zombification. Those left on Inisherin are shrouded in deep mystery or dark depression, either abandoning the island (like Siobhan, Padraic's sister) or ending up dead (like the dim wit Dominic). It is a zone of entrapment and persecution where escape comes only to those who manage to shun violence. Colm's fear of castration is vivid and real, manifest in his 'losing his own body parts/fingers' as an act of self-abnegation denoting



corporeal mutilation and loss. If Sigmund Freud classified the fear of emasculation as castration anxiety, Colm's act of desecration is symbolic and metaphorical, the loss of fingers (of an artist) perhaps equates both; a loss of creative potency and of masculinity. In his work, *The Dichotomist Male: Theoretical Models of Male Homosexuality* (2007), Marcelo M. Hanza discusses how in "the study of motivation, one of the most fundamental and innate factors assimilated into human behaviour is that of sexual reproduction (Hanza, 2007, 86)". Hanza goes on to explain how "Sexual reproduction is concerned with passing on one's genetic material, in order to perpetuate the survival of one's genes....Identifying both biological and psychological research pertaining to homosexuality is especially relevant to the study of motivation because, interestingly, homosexual behaviour seems to contradict standard theoretical explanations as a major source of motivation (Hanza, 2007, 86)". For Colm, the only point of motivation that could offset (heteronormative) sexual reproduction as in 'perpetuating the survival of one's genes' was his creative legacy, his composition of music that could help him transcend his sexual ambivalence. The denouncing of his 'fiddle fingers' is thus, not just an act of self-abjection but also a denouncement of his artistic legacy; and the corporeal loss symbolic of emasculation. The corpse eventually becomes a site/space of disgust and revulsion, as Colm's villainy not only vocalises through his deliberate act of self-mutilation but also in its orchestrated exhibition as he melodramatically casts his severed fingers after the gory act at Padraic's cottage door. The scene of blood bath is further exacerbated as Padraic chances upon his miniature donkey Jenny lying dead by choking on the fingers. Corpse after corpse haunts the grisly narrative as Dominic, the halfwit fool is suddenly discovered dead in a riddle that yet again baffles the Inhabitants. If Colm's abjection springs from his sexual identity and its social equation with monstrosity, the innocent deaths of humans and animals alike appear as concomitant part of the horror setting. Like in traditional Slasher cinema, our homosexual drifter (with violent instincts) haunts Padraic till *the hunted becomes the hunter*; Padraic's eventual transformation into a vengeful killer disrupts the last vestiges of hope as he burns down Colm's cottage (with Colm inside). However, the violence seems irredeemable, it does not end the cycle of evil and ill-omen that circled the island (intermittently reinforced through the premonition and charged vision of Mrs McCormick). This also brings us to the mythical *Banshees* who are female spirits in Irish mythology, symbolising death and decay. These signifiers of demolition and nihilism feature well in this biological horror which toys with the corporeal limits of human flesh and the realities of transgressing normative categories of sexual identity. The mutation of the body starts right from its core and accelerates to its total disintegration, bringing down, in the process, the very order of existence.

There is no end to this relentless show of gore, sadistic torture and foul play forced on the audience as part of the spectatorship ritual. Against the backdrop of devastation, the serene beauty of the island, however, keeps reverberating like some distant cathartic appeal that jolts the viewer from a 'fourth wall illusion'. Startle effects abound, the classic example of which appears in the scene where Padraic discovers his dead donkey Jenny, the gradation of action and the final release has the aptness of shock that such horror trope engages with. The psychological impact of cinematic horror is further accelerated through the graphic nature of sound effect, namely the grim background score that keeps reverberating like a refrain throughout the melodramatic action, often intervened by loud operatic music underscoring the meandering and fluctuating chemistry of Colm and Padraic. These two alternating modes of sound effect help create an aura of eerie suspense punctuated by unpredictable moments of abrupt violence. Pinned against such an ambience of morbidity,



not only does the body break down in extraordinary corporeal atrocity, so does the mind through trauma and repugnance for the inadmissible other, creating an environment of total dissolution and decadence that leaves the spectator bound in anticipation of more.

### Conclusion

Hence, the core investigation of this academic study is the complex world of sexual divergence and gendered realities that question the hetero-patriarchal status of the rural community of Inisherin where gossip and tell-telling seems to be the only teleological pattern of existence and historical continuity. The gradual diffusion of the closeted relation between the two men, Colm and Padraic mimics the insular nature of the community which remains untainted even at the height of the Civil War; this is exactly how Homosexuality is '*hidden in plain sight*' in societies where extreme sexual conservatism often leads to uncontrolled proliferation of sexual desire, a ramification of regulation and monitoring. Inisherin is imagined as a closed community grappling with a volatile social fabric that seems to be forever tied up with the institutional godheads of corruption: the Church and the Police, therefore, the emergence of *sinthomosexuality* in such a normative setting is far from awe. *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) depicts an account of repressed sexuality through an oddly paired couple and their socially awkward interactions, cocooning underneath a latent, homoerotic relation between them and their desires to '*confess*' and '*come out*' that ends in a shattering apogee. Eventually, Violence acts as volition for some of the social agents, but by its unforgiving and irreversible nature violence fails to resolve the quandary, throwing Colm, the *sinthomosexual's* act of self-mutilation in dispute and impasse; however, gradually when Colm starts reckoning the prowess of his sexual orientation and is close to acceptance and forgiveness, Padraic is a changed man. That model of gay shame that was exemplary from the beginning of the plot through the character of Padraic, retracts to a regressive plane, demonstrating how the wavering nature of queer affect can articulate desire and violence to embrace or renounce both. This ghastly violence and butchery that the circumstantial desecration unlocks, qualifies the cinematic discourse within the cult of biological horror, with all the parameters of the subgenre exhibited in the unfolding of the plot. This paper reclaims *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022) as a classic body horror examining the corporeal site as a conduit for sexual rebellion. The unwary spectator commutes through the lair of the *sinthomosexual* only to reach the final destination of exploitative cinema (Horror tropes are part of the exploitative genre where the usual ploy is a lone female pursued by a deranged killer; the clichéd trope is reversed ideologically here to depict a homosexual as the deranged killer grappling with his own sexual alterity, persecuting abstract social norms through acts of terror and abjection), where human flesh (in this case the 'severed fingers') act as the transcendental signifier of what the text could not contain in terms of sexual diversity.

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## Radical Decentering Towards Self Directed Learning in the AI Knowledge Sharing and Employing Duolingo Application and Methods

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### Abstract

*Structuralism laying its station on structures and systems had entangled the nation to look at its meanings and identities created out of vibrant intellectually bound minds. Intellectual standard of society goes unnoticed out of a systematized stable footed living. The theoretical boundary reserved is broken in post structuralism. Instead of binding one to the rules and regulations set, the rational sensibility in word and thought links one with the society that recreates all that are stable. This interlinking is carried over by technology. Self-Directed Learning through Duolingo makes inefficiency efficient. Easy handy application compact with the development of Language skills in AI assistance would make a student dive independently against the restricted gorges. This paper is an eye opener to the education system already prevailing and the standard students try to achieve. Hence, the opinion of the students on the methods of language learning amidst boredom created out of physical classroom and the teacher is deeply analyzed and evaluated for the well-being of the students.*

**Keywords:** Decentering; AI Integration; Self Directed Learning, Duolingo.

### Introduction

Decentered writings are independent intelligent gradations. They don't derive out of the Centre that keeps rotating to ever subjugate the development of thought but better handle the intelligence in accordance with one's systematical way of thought process. As denoted above, the very world that received the textual longings as treasure today looks it as pleasure. To state sarcastically, mere entertainment is the strength of education at present. Teaching to be played upon, booksthrown off, and question papers used to make paper cranes, ships and rockets. The very depth of education is in question due to the empowerment of technology. Computer Assisted Instruction, ICT enabled classrooms, blended mode of learning, flipped classrooms all are the demands of education. In such a scenario given birth is self-paced learning. The role of teachers here is limited and unexplainable. The methods of teaching using head now make the methods of teaching dead. Computer aided instruction looks at self-directed learner than a conventionally bound classroom groomed student and methods.

### Decentered Literature Review

Mastered methodological mentality could live to locate a nation of dependence. The productivity expected out of it is very less. Rigidity of resources and binary oppositions leaves nothing newer and admirable. It enforces laws and bounds one with the established norms. Guided in the light of structuralist principles the world recognizes something beyond



that is still in its recourse. The practice that leads one to the core theoretically established social norms, looks back only at the treasures left by the predecessors than the living legends. The legendary characters taking its shape in different forms will insurges is inconceivable.

Poststructuralism waking up the nation that create identities and meanings, structures, languages and systems do not only lead towards surmountable developments breaking open insurmountable that crouches the society but also leaving in its meanings multiple unimaginable bases that is possible. Impossibility made possible through structures of stagnation. Living with essential commodities make a person immersed with the goods available in hand and reachable but a person striving for something beyond the arch looks deeper as to find the hidden treasure which can be approachable if one comprehends the meanings one after the other. Poststructuralists dig at this. The more they dig, the more deeper the meanings and boundaries cloistered lifts its bolts to give way to fresher and never experienced and popularized terms that purifies the society and its conventional life style. Derrida states:

The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. The concept of centered structure although it represents coherence itself, the condition of the epistēmē as philosophy or science -- is contradictorily coherent. And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude, which itself is beyond the reach of play. (89)

Conceptual situational meanings derive out of poststructuralism. One singular word can intertwine one with the unnoticeable that may critically analyze to welcome into the standardized and labelled, the cultural social religious intermingling. When Jacques Derrida through his seminal lecture “Structure, Sign and Play in the discourse of the Human Sciences” plays with words and its intellect, Michael Foucault plays with the entire knowledge system. Julia Kristeva’s intertextuality and interconnectedness to the knowledge sharing in textual boardings are the values that review and retain and reshare the content that keeps floating.

The brain that restored what is taught in the physical classroom and had not the additional capability developing thinking to process inherent ideas, at the contemporaneous age not bothering about the teaching in the classrooms looks for the ideas to develop in its own. There is no botheration as to the effect that may remodel the ideas already there in intellect. Having trusting oneself completely one could accumulate the wealth surrounding within hours, there are many a student’s lost. The upliftment through aids too is forsaken for the better world that may lead to immeasurable uprising. This resurgence is expected not only from students but also from common folk with knowledge sharing out of computerized technical knowledge.

### **Technological Integration in Self Directed Learning**

Language Learning that had expressed its concern over LSRW, as it is of four letters had remained in the four little corners of the language classroom. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing had to struggle in a classroom while the teacher-oriented teaching learning blocked self-realization and the output that can be the centre of one’s external affairs. The nursed wisdom going barren bore no fruit in the midst of boredom. There is not a place left to retain the strength afforded of the language challenges in the classroom teaching. The emptied head looks at and accepts gem as hopeless as there is no practicality to entertain.



Teachers' continued teaching observed by the students to be subjective and dominative. Their modern thought mocks at the textual standard and the teachers' ability. In such a state it receives wholeheartedly a self honoured technology that can still entertain them.

Open Educational Resources (OER) are teaching and learning materials that are freely available online for everyone to use, whether you are an instructor, student or self-learner. Examples of OER include: full courses, course modules, syllabi, lectures, homework assignments, quizzes, lab and classroom activities, pedagogical materials, games, simulations, and many more resources contained in digital media collections from around the world. (Thamarasseri; Swayam ICT Module 24)

Self-paced learning starts here where there is acknowledgement of fun and joy. There are many applications that provide language fluency in fingertips. Wordwall, Chatgpt, Kahoot, Classpoint, Duolingo, Copilot AI, Blooket, Wayground as AI gamification tools can better provide self-directed learning without the guidance of the teachers. Even in classroom or out of the classroom students can learn at their own pace and interest. The more they engage with such application, the better they enhance in learning. Class centered teacher's role die as the students create meanings and identities and language roles with the native language influenced applications involved AI teachers. Colloquialism and the culturally, politically and religiously sided teacher perish to give birth to a technology self-centered legend to wake up. As noted in Maurice Gibbons' "The Self-Directed Learning Handbook: Challenging Adolescent Students to Excel",

SDL ends not in exercises but in action, and action as often as possible in the world beyond the classroom. Teachers do not direct students so much as they teach them to direct themselves by empowering them. SDL students work closely with other students and adults, not just independently. They are charged to learn academics, but are challenged with much more as well.(4)

### **Language Learning Duolingo: Web Application**

Duolingo is one such platform discussed for the study to evoke curiosity in the students to learn the language at their convenience and compliance. It is comprised of 44 languages to study. Duolingo app provides interactive quizzes, developing the reading capacity, listening skills developed upon the native tongue and systematic writing ability to pace with the listening speed. The scoring upon completing each task provided interestingly leads one to the other sections. Instead of students deteriorating with games, this language study interconnects students with the friends in competition. The leaderboard shows if one has scored more than his friend in control with the same task. Such a style of learning of language develops LSRW skills. The struggle faced for years of study made easy with AI powered language applications. Grammatical errors and spelling corrections are identified and spotted. The importance of language in each word, phrase and sentence is made known to the practitioners of language in Duolingo. One thing to be noted; it is provided free of cost and one can learn the language correctly at his own speed. Additional chances also given to wind up the task expediently.

### **Research Focus through Tabular Study**

The research paper tries to solve the research problem discussed of second language teaching learning using the quantitative methodology very poignantly. Students' multifaceted approach to the teaching of language in the English language classroom using interpretive, appreciative and analytical technological integration lives to open up the physical classroom that restricts open gestures for language development. The mentality of the present UG students to the acclimatization of ICT enabled AI tooled classroom stretches a way to look at

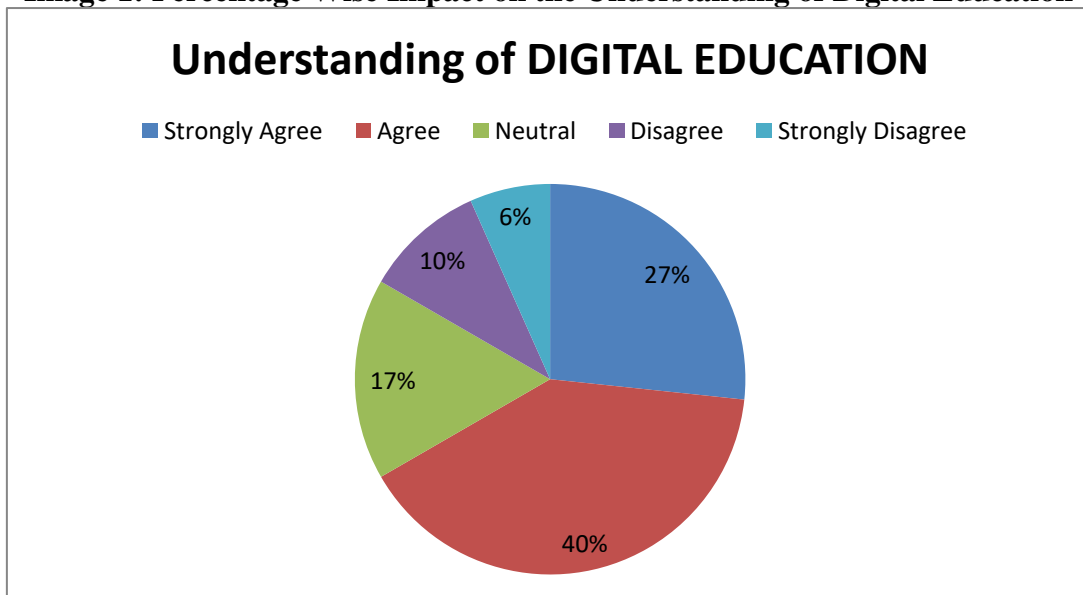
the other side of education that may live to challenge the conventional type of education all these years. The questionnaire circulated among students highlights the impact made even in the inner recesses of the student mentality.

The questionnaire was circulated through Google form for the reachability of the information so that the self-directed learning boosted up anyone seated in the cornered world with technology. Out of 200 students who responded to the Google form of questions, 30 students were randomly selected to finalize upon the impact of Duolingo in helping them to better learn the English language self-sufficiently away from the clutches of adoptive teaching learning. The topic under discussion for the paper after a careful examination of the questionnaire are understanding literary theories for the decentered meanings, students' views on language learning in and out of the classroom, digital learning methods used by them and the usefulness of language learning app like Duolingo that leads to the self-directed learning amidst AI influence of information generation. The lethargy gets dissolved through a handy application that interestingly leads for language fluency.

**Table 1: Empirical study of Students' Responses to Language Learning and Digital Education**  
Sample Size: 30 Students (UG)

Category	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<b>Understanding of Literary Theories</b>	8	12	5	3	2
<b>Views on Language and Learning</b>	9	13	4	3	1
<b>Opinion on Digital Learning Methods</b>	10	11	4	3	2
<b>Usefulness of Language Learning Apps (Duolingo)</b>	11	12	4	2	1

**Image 1: Percentage Wise Impact on the Understanding of Digital Education**





## Results and Discussion

The study details the core of decentered writings, the students' opinion on English language learning and its importance in them, the digital divide that united all in the same workplace called technology, the steady progress in language made through the guidance of AI enhanced Duolingo, developing in students the strength to meet the competitive world and leading internationally to set standard. 40% of the students agree upon the self-directed learning beneficial in developing LSRW and 27% strongly agree to the growth in advanced level digital app that takes over the teacher's role to guide on to the next levels to comprehend meanings and recreate self-mentored identities. 17% being neutral accept the role played by digital language and the learning adopted individually amidst the cloistered technological orientation. The student's ability to respond to the topic under discussion contributes to a better understanding of sub topics in table by going through a valid quantitative analysis. The response of the students indeed validates the classroom that is handled by teachers and the effort needed on the part of the teachers and learners for further invaluable involvement in AI powered applications that could develop the LSRW skills of the students. The students' support in the arguments reinstated strikingly the primary struggle faced by the students. Many of them eager to know about one such application that could develop their second language skill faster and without much effort.

Only 10% of the students disagree as the digital education is a bit far away from them as their local set up doesn't allow them to accommodate such a world of education. They denote their helpless state in handling such apps independently without the help of the teachers. Hence their response remains inconsistent. 7% strongly disagree as they hadn't understood the seriousness of the problems pertaining to the student community of AI technology. But the Pie diagram hopefully leads the students to a focused study plan for the successful completion of the tasks provided in the Duolingo app. The unaware are alerted on such app that may drive them to their own world undisturbed. Teacher centered listening, speaking, reading, writing becomes learner centered. The teacher fosters nurturing in the students through multiple roles as teacher and as facilitator. The struggle to bring up a better second language learner single handedly now falls upon the shoulders of the learner who is curious to support with the app that helps correct now and then mistakes made. A one-to-one correspondence is built between the application and the learner thereby it keeps the learner more engaged and not to go desperate of the simple mistakes made. It doggedly keeps in touch with the learner solving the issues of language learning; never like the teacher who admonishes for inattention and inability.

One may say that there may be technical difficulty in handling such educational method since everything involved happens with one single application. But one thing to be monitored here is the support that one gets out of the physical classroom. The very teacher who was the complete control peacefully takes rest while the student can balance with such application. The absence of the teacher or the center's vacant seat gets filled up with a restless ever bothered mentor AI that looks only at the positivity of the student. Continuous encouragement received amidst the vacuum left by the teacher fills up the gaps left emptied of. In such a state even the under developed, low graded communicator rises up to encounter the world AI powered confidently. The additional support of the app supplies what is left unpolished and unshaped. This is carried out only through self-directed learning techniques.

## Conclusion

Ascending than descending through decentering of contents are the effect produced. Language rigidly taught bring innarrow methods of teaching and narrow-minded student



community. Language should have its capacity to build relationships across. Duolingo plays a vital role in communicating in the native tongue to reach the students digitally interconnected and claustrophobic in adjoining with teaching interference in the physical classroom. The fear of technology broken down as virtual blending of education houses the weaker and the stronger together in a single platform for language learning. The student is not as that of one who timidly stood before a center that kept everything in one place and with one single person. The structure bounces back at the center leading to recognize the level of learning already there, so that independence and technology meet at one place. The pestering on the part of the teacher minimized thus. The huddles in the path of second language learning smashed through Duolingo.

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