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Female Body in Social Incarceration in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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Letter of Recommendation

Ms. Kamana Aryal has completed her thesis entitled “Female Body in Social Incarceration in Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*” under my supervision and guidance. She carried out her thesis from August 2017 to February 2018. I, hereby recommend her thesis to be submitted to viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled "Female Body in Social Incarceration in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*", submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Kamana Aryal has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research paper tries to inspect the brutalities endured by the protagonist, Yeong-hye, through the lens of body politics, when her body does not act in terms of the society's norms and regulations in Han Kang's novel, The Vegetarian. Her desire to transform into a tree resists fulfilling the demands of her husband, father, mother, brother-in-law, sister, hospital and many other. Her bizarre steps to enact her desire break every societal norm and solely allot her tortures leading her to the deathbed. As Yeong-hye dares to enact her desire, the patriarchal society stands as a thorny bar. Depending on the theory of body politics, this research paper explores how the body of the protagonist is tormented in order to stop her from accomplishing her goal because vegetarianism makes her desirous to transform into a tree. It expounds how Yeong-hye turns to be the dust in the eyes of the society when her body resists to fulfil its demands. The researcher investigates upon novel, The Vegetarian, with the support of theoretical insights from Susan Bordo's Unbearable Weight, Feminism, Western Culture and the Body Judith Butler's Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity and Michel Foucault's Discipline And Punish: The Birth of the Prison and The History Of Sexuality. The paper claims how a society constructs discourse of female body and acts as a powerful organ to control over females.

Key Words: Feminine Body, Desire, Discourse, Power, Society, Patriarchy, Sexuality and Insanity

Female Body in Social Incarceration in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

This research aims to investigate how the issue of body politics works in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*. The body of the Protagonist, Yeong-hye, is a vital focus in the triptych narrative, where Kang tries to portray the adversities of Yeong-hye due to her strong vow for vegetarianism. Her butchery dream changes her into vegetarianism that is solely different from the rest because, in the beginning, she prefers to eat only green vegetables but slowly and gradually, she stops eating anything. It is because she wants to transform herself into a tree. The people around her stand as obstacle to preclude her from achieving her desire. When her body does not fulfil the demands of others and resists traditional norms then conflict occurs in the plot. The extremity of her zeal, against which the society is standing, forces Mr. Cheong to give divorce to Yeong-hye, allows her sister's husband to rape her, compels family to abandon her and finally to get admitted in a psychiatric hospital. Depending on the issues of female body and its politics, societal laws and regulations and power over sex, this research paper explores how a female body is subjugated to these societal conventions where she is not allowed to pursue her dream and desire.

The protagonist in *The Vegetarian*, Yeong-hye is very reserved, silent and less social woman. These behaviors, later on, become the major source for this society to declare her insane. Due to her violent dream with full of flesh and blood, she accepts vegetarianism and later on confesses that she wants to be a tree. When she attempts to make it true, neither her husband, nor her family and societal organs allow her to enact her wish. Immensely terrifying dream changes her radically. The dream distresses her all the time where she has only fear if she does not accept vegetarianism, the dream will plague her more. The tree is very pure and only takes water and sunlight to sustain its life so Yeong-hye wants to convert into a tree to be

pure and virgin because she considers human as animal. Her attempt to enact her desire, in real, makes her different from traditional women because she does not hesitate to expose her bodily organs that become the major turmoil to this society.

Yeong-hye becomes increasingly thin like a skeleton, a source of fun for the public gazer, refuses for sexual intimacy with her husband because he is an animal for her. Mr. Cheong cannot tolerate that his own wife is not fulfilling her demure role and the family deserts her for infringing patriarchal laws. She is not an acquiescent daughter who never says no to her parents. Its only In-hye, her sister who never leaves her hand though Yeong-hye ruins her sister's family life. Yeong-hye's body becomes a source to satiate the needs of those who are eyeing over her body. Her own brother-in-law rapes her to achieve his goal of making pornographic video. Even Yeong-hye becomes ready for the video shoot because she naively thinks that painting flower on her body will end her violent dream from coming recurrently. The hospital declares her a schizophrenic and anorexic patient due to her complete surrender to her vision. The discourse of her life is written by the societal institutions, which do not let her free to enact her desire.

The power and discourse of this patriarchal society snare the women in its ferocious web from which they cannot free themselves. If Yeong-hye would be free to accomplish her goal, she would not be considered as a mad. If, only, her husband tried to understand her, she would be in different phase of her life. Different torments from different sources constrain her to hate human world and that coerces her to dream of being a tree. If a woman who is attempting to free her body from all the traditional burdens, the ego of the patriarchy gets hurt. However, in this case her body is in the center which bears pains because her desire is not allowing her body to act in the terms and rules of patriarchal society. The discourse of insanity is put over her head, instead of allowing to live her life as she wants, that drives her towards the death.

Body Politics refers to the issues related to the body parts that were, once, under the eraser or marginalized from the cannon of literature. It is because talking about the body was considered uncouth and derogative. Actually, Body Politics is a theoretical insight which helps to give justice to those, either male or female, who are suppressed and subjugated in terms of their body. However, this research paper stresses over the body parts of the novel's female protagonist, Yeong-hye. It tries to portray how the writer uses her huge sense of autonomy to expose her female protagonist and at the same time, she is arguing that females should get right to live their desires. To revolt against the bodily tortures that Yeong-hye gets from the society, Kang dares to naked her. The society controls over human body with its power, discourse, rules of discipline and sexuality. Though Kang picturizes, experimenting optimal sovereignty, Yeong-hye's body parts but this demonstration bisfords as a life-threatening bomb to rest of the people. It is because until now women are not endorsed to experience their bodily freedom as they want.

This novel, in this research paper, is analyzed through the lens of body politics whereas the predecessors have probed it from various perspectives. A reviewer, Porochista Khakpour, of *The Vegetarian* from *The New York Times* states:

All the trigger warnings on earth cannot prepare a reader for the traumas of this Korean author's translated debut in the Anglophone world. At first, you might eye the title and scan the first innocuous sentence- "Before my wife turned vegetarian, I thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way"- and think that the biggest risk here might be converting to vegetarianism. (I myself converted, again; we'll see if its lasts). But there is no end to the horrors that rattle in and out of this ferocious, magnificently death-affirming novel. (12)

Khakpour merely talks about unending horror and violence that is uprooted in the novel. She explains about the turmoil that occurs in the novel *The Vegetarian* due to Yeong-hye's acute vegetarianism. The author even says that living meat does not mean that one can get illumination. However, she confesses her transformation into vegetarianism but not sure how long she will sustain over it.

The Vegetarian is an expedition of its protagonist, Yeong-hye, from her youth to the threshold of her death. However, the author startles and creates suspense among the readers by ending the novel without any conclusion where we cannot know whether Yeong-hye will die or not. Lori Feathers, a reviewer, in her review article "Han Kang's Vegetarian", from *The Online Magazine for International Literature* argues:

The failure to comprehend the very people with whom we should be closest is an underlying theme of the novel. Kang punctuates our erroneous faith in the ability to understand one another by silencing Yeong-hye and instead allowing her story to be told by her husband, her sister, and her brother-in-law. Their inability to "know" Yeong-hye creates frustration, disillusionment, and isolation. Only In-hye, who in, the midst of her own personal crisis, rejects the temptations of the primal, ultimately finds some meaning in Yeong-hye's choices. Kang's provocative novel calls into question our reliance on others for emotional sustenance when the primal side of our natures remains always unpredictable, always incomprehensible. (n. pag.)

Feathers argues that incapacity of the character to understand the trauma of Yeong-hye form novel's plot. She states that human beings have two sides: greedy and accountable to family and society. It is a mammoth challenge for the readers to comprehend the real side of Yeong-hye because she does not speak in the novel.

When In-hye suffers herself then she understands her sister. That means one cannot predict other's self until he/she suffers the same.

The Vegetarian is really a stupendous novel that dramatizes the remorseful plight of its Protagonist due to her desire. Her own declaration about her desire moves the plot with horror and split of the relations. Daniel Hahn in his review article "The Vegetarian By Han Kang Review: An Extraordinary Story of Family Fallout" from British daily newspaper *The Guardian* opines:

This is Han Kang's first novel to appear in English, and it's a bracing, visceral, system-shocking addition to the Anglophone reader's diet. It is sensual, provocative and violent, ripe with potent images, startling colours and disturbing questions. As Yeong-hye changes, the book's language shifts, too, with Deborah Smith's translation moving between the baffles irritation of Mr. Cheong's first-person narration in part one, the measured prose of In-hye's world, the dense and bloody narrative of Yeong-hye's dreams, and seductive description of living bodies painted with flowers, in states of transformation or wasting away. Sentence by sentence, *The Vegetarian* is an extraordinary experience. (n. pag.)

Hahn gives the overview how the relationships break into pieces in the novel only because of Yeong-hye's severe vegetarian attitude. Yeong-hye loses every relation. Her hyped reaction to her bloody dream creates shocking and ghostly images in the plot with the shift in narration. The novel's plot is based on Yeong-hye's conversion into vegetarian, including different voracious sensual acts with the naked painted bodies of the characters, and how it transmute her into an isolated schizophrenic character.

The novel may be the revolt of Kang against human brutality. Yeong-hye can

be the symbol of purity and peace who wants to convert into a plant. Seemita Das in her article, “Review: The Vegetarian” from *Times of India* argues:

Experiencing erotic exploitation and befriending helpless eyes, discarding worldly echoes and embracing floristic world, Yeong-hye moves from a home to a studio to a hospital with incredible equanimity and singular desire- to become a ‘plant’. Aesthetically translated by Deborah Smith, Han Kang’s narrative is subtle yet reverberating. Raising questions on human dichotomies and their constant collision against the inherent shackles of society, she deploys a triptych to highlight viewpoints from various angles. (n. pag.)

Das reasons over Yeong-hye’s decision of choosing vegetarian world by leaving erotic, vulgar and seductive, carnivorous and murderous giant society. Das stresses over the pathetic journey of Yeong-hye where she is left by her husband, raped by her brother-in-law and locked as a psychiatric patient. She suffers from such brutality only because of her stubborn desire. Kang succeeds to attract the readers with curiosity and visual description of Yeong-hye’s physical and mental trauma.

Everyone has fundamental right over his/her body. However, in the case of women, their bodies do not belong to them. Their bodies are the slave of their men and the patriarchy. Lisa Zeidner in her article, “A woman going mad, and a radical refusal in *The Vegetarian*” from *The Washington Post* highlights that, “Kang posits vegetarianism as a feminist choice, a revolt against conformity and patriarchy- especially when Yeong-hye, who always enjoyed going braless, starts stripping bare in public places” (n. pag.). Zeidner elucidates about the step that Yeong-hye takes, seems as if she is fervidly fighting for her self-emancipation from the cage of patriarchy.

In the same attitude, Alexandra Alter in her review article “The Vegetarian, a

Surreal South Korean Novel” from *New York Times* forwards:

The story stars an unhinged heroine who believes she’s turning into a tree, and features some of the strangest erotic passages in literature. (In one unforgettable scene, Ms. Han renders clichéd sexual metaphors about flowering plants and protruding pistils quite literally.) The mesmerizing mix of sex and violence was not what fans and reviewers expected from Ms. Han, a celebrated and award-winning poet and novelist. (n. pag.)

Alter points out Kang’s motif behind choosing a crazy protagonist, with her sexual and psychological domination, in order to visualize the readers the inhuman violence, mainly sexual, when a woman desires different from the patriarchal norms. The horror and savagery faced by an innocent woman really makes the novel a cherished one.

Yeong hye’s denial to stick to the laws of the patriarchy havocs the groundwall of her smooth life. In this case, Daniel Amir, in his review article “Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*” from *The Oxford Student* views:

Her independent choice is a personal one and yet it is interpreted as a familial affront, purely in the context of its effects on others. The abuse she suffers at the hands of her family culminates in a shocking episodes of violent force-feeding and attempted-suicide that ultimately dismantles the meaningless suburban relationship around her and sets far more disturbing ones in motion . . . Her struggle may thus be viewed as a strife to secure herself within this system, where her body may be the only space that remains her own. (n. pag.)

Yeong hye’s individual decision to choose vegetarianism turns out to be the malediction to break the family apart. Amir argues over the limitation that a female has to face, in patriarchal space, while declaring her personal wish. This may be the reason due to which Yeong-hye fights with the society to treat her body as she wants.

It is because it is her own property.

Han Kang was born at Gwangju, South Korea, in 1970 and currently teaches at the Seoul Institute of arts. *The Vegetarian* won the 2016 Man Booker International. The novel is about the scrap between a woman self and the society. Her recent published novel *Human Acts*, won Manhae Literary Award, is also about the violence caused by nastily suppressed student uprising. Many critics and reviewers find the novel, *The Vegetarian*, with theme of sexuality, vegetarian versus non-vegetarian, selfishness, multiple selves of human being, negligence, psychology and many more. However, this research paper attempts to show how society reacts when a female acts with bizarre bodily attitude.

Kang tries to film, modeling Yeong-hye, the human brutality, vehemence and at the same time power of patience to live in the midst of ferocity. During 1980s in Seoul, when she was just nine years old, government troops attacked pre-democracy activists that killed thousands of innocents. Yeong-hye is the mouthpiece of the author. Yeong-hye dares to oppose, although faintly, to every domination even from her childhood. Yeong-hye's reluctance to retrieve to home, due to her father's violence upon her, when both sisters get lost in the jungle reflects Kang's real intention to rebel against terror and callousness. In order to show, how much the society uses its means of brutality upon the docile bodies, she casts a simple and naïve heroine. Yeong-hye's body endures every human horror although she stays steady to live in peace in the hub of violence. Yeong-hye's vegetarianism symbolizes her strong vow and power to neglect all those despondencies that patriarchal authority enforces upon her body.

Thus, the researcher examines Han Kang's interrogative novel *The Vegetarian* drawing the theoretical insights from Susan Bordo's *Unbearable Weight, Feminism,*

Western Culture and the Body, Michel Foucault's *Discipline And Punish: The Birth of the Prison* and *The History Of Sexuality*, Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of Identity* and many other critics' ideas on body politics and societal power over sex and body in order to support the researcher's major claim. This research dominantly focuses on the tussle between the body of the protagonist and the society. It mainly tries to investigate that the body of the protagonist is not safe in either case. She is tortured as a daughter, wife and even after being a single, her body becomes the reason to be tormented and leading to the pathetic life.

Kang being a female writer is nauseating silently against this patriarchal society making her protagonist docile and pathetic. She compels this patriarchal society to open its eyes to view its inhuman deed to women. The setting of the novel is Korea, Asian country, which is still far behind in terms of modernization of women's condition. Mr. Cheong marries to Yeong-hye only because he finds her very timid and docile though he was not attracted to her in his first meeting due to her "Middling height; bobbed hair neither long nor short; jaundiced, sickly-looking skin; somewhat prominent cheekbones; her timid, sallow aspect told me all I needed to know" (3). Even at the first meeting, he ogles over every part of her body and gadgets she wears. She is massively good for her until her decision to be vegetarian. Yeong-hye is a "woman of few words" (4) who never complains her husband and fulfils her every responsibilities as a perfect housewife as "uncomplaining woman-an ideal of patriarchal culture" (Bordo 177).

Yeong-hye shows very peculiar behavior, after five years of their marriage, only because of the awful dream that she saw. Once, Mr. Cheong wakes up at four in the morning he finds his wife standing in the kitchen and when he tries to communicate with her she only speaks "I had a dream" (8). Then, she decides to be

vegetarian, emits every items of meat from her refrigerator, and does not stop even in her husband's resistance. From this moment, their relationship starts to crumble. She starts to cook only vegetarian items that Mr. Cheong hates. As the time passes, Yeong-hye starts to eat only rare vegetables and soups. She is becoming thinner and bony with no charm and beauty in her body. She appears no more than a hospital patient and it disgusts Mr. Cheong because she is not giving sexual gratification to him. Therefore, one night he rapes her as he says:

I grabbed hold of my wife and pushed her to the floor . . . she put up a surprisingly strong resistance and spitting out vulgar curses all the while, it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully . . . she lay there in the dark staring up at the ceiling, her face blank, as though she were a 'comfort woman' dragged in against her will, and I was the Japanese soldier demanding her services. (30)

Yeong-hye's body is abused and despoiled because she desires distinct from the rest. Yeong-hye has just become a toy for her husband. In this regard, Luce Irigaray argues that, "Not knowing what she wants, ready for anything, even asking for more, so long as he will "take" her as his "object" when he seeks his own pleasure. Thus she will not say what she herself wants; moreover, she does not know, or no longer knows, what she wants" (25). As a husband, he does not feel the trouble his wife is facing when, suddenly, she behaves unresponsive with complete lack of reaction as if she is solely lost in her own world. Rather, he thinks only to sate his sexual appetite. He is the perfect example of the patriarchy as Judith Butler says, "Only the feminine gender is marked, that the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood" (13-14). He really proves that "power regimes of

heterosexism and phallogocentrism” (Butler 32). In this case, Michel Foucault is right when he says:

Since the eighteenth century the Family has become an obligatory locus of affects, feelings, love; that sexuality has its privileged point of development in the family . . . But in a society such as ours, where the family is the most active site of sexuality, and where it is doubtless the exigencies of the latter which maintain and prolong its existence, incest-for different reasons altogether and in a completely different way-occupies a central place; it is constantly being solicited and refused; it is an object of obsession and attraction, a dreadful secret and an indispensable pivot. (108-109)

Instead of understanding her trauma, Mr. Cheong calls his wife insane. He perceives her only as a sexual being but does not try to comprehend her changed behavior and motif behind it. Yeong-hye is disobedient in her husband’s eyes because as a wife she has to please her husband and perform every task of a typical housewife. Yeong-hye stops sleeping and she even does not like to sleep with her husband because he is also made of flesh. Mr. Cheong starts to hate his wife because “She did not come to bed until five in the morning” (16). Patriarchy is in the powerful position even in the twenty-first century where the woman like Yeong-hye becomes the bone stuck in the throat of the patriarchy if her body performs in a different way from others.

Neither Yeong-hye eats nor does she feed her husband as a demure wife rather she has become a public gazer in public events wherever she goes due to her skeleton body and visible breasts, without bra, but she gives damn care to “her nipples resembling a pair of acorns as they pushed against the fabric of her blouse” (25). She is not sexually fascinating for him because “without a bra, a woman’s breasts are also deobjectified, desubstantialized. Without a bra, most women’s breasts do not have the

high, hard, pointy look that phallic culture posits as the norm” (Young 83). It is because “the body- what we eat, how we dress, the daily rituals through which we attend to the body- is a medium of culture” (Bordo 165). Mr. Cheong starts feeling embarrassing taking his wife in front of public due to her bizarre behavior of eating nothing, skinny body and her habit of not wearing bra. People use to laugh seeing her scrawny body.

The dream of animal butchery shakes her from deep inside of her heart. She becomes so traumatic that derives her to act so bizarrely and astonishingly. The recurring dream makes her mentally numb and still. She even talks rarely with her husband and every time remains awake and isolate. She answers him in minimal words only when he asks something to her. In her dream, she sees the “Dark woods. No people . . . blood-red gashes of meat, blood still dripping down . . . there are no end to the meat, and no exist. Blood in my mouth, blood-soaked clothes sucked onto my skin . . . my face . . . that vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling” (12). In her dream, Yeong-hye finds herself surrounded by pieces of flesh and soaked by blood that terrifies her vehemently. Mr. Cheong starts eating meat items outside and due to Yeong-hye’s vegetarian tasteless food, which contains only water and salt. When women are positively depicted as sensuously voracious about food (almost never in commercials, and very rarely in movies and novels), their hunger for food is employed solely as a metaphor for their sexual appetite (Bordo 110). Mr. Cheong starts hating his wife because without appropriate nutrition she starts looking sexually unattractive. Her father, in wrath, tries to fill her mouth with the pork and even slaps her when she resists strongly. She “growled and spat out the meat. An animal cry of distress burst from her lips” (40). Still, she does not get changed. Instead, she cuts her wrist and is admitted in the hospital.

Yeong-hye becomes much confident on her decision of choosing vegetarian life after her husband's forceful rape. Her husband's brutal behavior constrains her to think that human being is really a beast and then she becomes much determined not to be in contact with such animals afterwards. Mr. Cheong has no emotional attachment and feeling towards his wife, rather he expresses his loathsome feeling because he is planning to get divorced with Yeong-hye after she is discharged from the hospital. In this regard, Michel Foucault argues:

It is worth remembering that the first figure to be invested by the deployment of sexuality, one of the first to be "sexualized," was the "idle" woman. She inhabited the outer edge of the "world," in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations. (121)

Yeong-hye does not stand in the conservative role of a wife and thus Mr. Cheong feels disgusted by seeing her and does not even concern whether she is vomiting or her wrist is bleeding. As Michel de Certeau argues that, "What is at stake is the relation between the law and the body- a body is itself defined, delimited and articulated by what writes it" (139). When Yeong-hye discards for sexual relation, she has to pay a huge cost to erase her identity as she dares to reject the patriarchal order. The society reaches to the apex of technological development but its mindset is still poor and pathetic in the case of women. The one who tries to break her caged wall will be another Yeong-hye.

The mount of torments and anguish from her nearer rather makes her mentally numb and traumatic. She acts as if she is in subconscious state. She is obsessed with her desire and does not even care that she has committed suicide, disappears from her ward. Mr. Cheong finds her outside the hospital in naked condition. The people are

crowding to see her but she is exclusively out of her mind. As Iris Marion Young mentions:

Her specific body lives in a specific context— crowded by other people, anchored to the earth by gravity, surrounded by buildings and streets with a unique history, hearing particular languages, having food and shelter available, or not, as a result of culturally specific social processes that make specific requirements on her to access them. All these concrete material relations of a person’s bodily existence and her physical and social environment constitute her facticity. (16)

Yeong-hye’s unresponsive attitude to her naked body and her wounded wrist from where the blood is licking at “sutured area” (51) makes people to consider her a crazy woman. The degree of violence that her dream overflows on her body as electronic shocks makes her a living dead because she does not have any reaction over anything. It is because she does not even conscious that “She had removed her hospital gown and placed it on her knees . . . emaciated breasts and brown nipples completely exposed” (51) and “her lips stained with blood like clumsily applied lipstick” (52). Rather, she naively smiles and asks to Mr Cheong that, “It’s hot, so I just got undressed . . . Have I done something wrong?” (52). And shamelessly she is trying to cover her naked chest.

Not only she is trespassing the patriarchal norms set for women rather she is contemplated to be a undisciplined wife, daughter and sister. Discipline is the unitary technique by which the body is reduces as a ‘political’ force at the least cost and maximized as a useful force (Foucault 221). There is also a conservative notion that a submissive woman always walks under the footsteps of patriarchy and surrender her body to her husband. In this regard, Michel Foucault forwards his view:

Disciplinary control does not consist simply in teaching or imposing a series of particular gestures; it imposes the best relation between a gesture and the overall position of the body, which is its condition of efficiency and speed. In the correct use of the body, which makes possible a correct use of time, nothing must remain idle or useless: required. A well-disciplined body forms the operational context of a gymnastics- a whole routine whose rigorous code invests the body in its entirety, from the points of the feet to the tip of the index finger. (152)

However, in the case of Yeong-hye, she does not become able to please her husband from either food or sex or child. Rather she takes strong decision about her body that goes wrong to everyone. For her, the human animals who focus only on the erotic, fetishist and seductive consumption contaminate this world.

The social norms and values are mostly restrictive on behalf of women. Even after committing suicide, Yeong-hye cannot stand on her desire. Yeong-hye takes step to accomplish her desire but without considering how she will deal with those giant agents of the society. Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, In-hye's husband, lures her, with devil intention, to act in his pornographic video. After hearing from his wife that Yeong-hye has still the Mongolian birthmark on her buttock, he becomes obsessed with sexual appetite, stands inside the bathroom, and masturbates. In this regard, Sussan Bordo argues:

Conscious intention, however, is not a requisite for females to be seen as responsible for the bodily responses of men, aggressive as well as sexual. One justification given for the exclusion of women from the priesthood is that their mere presence will arouse impure thoughts. Frequently, even when women are silent (or verbalizing exactly the opposite), their bodies are seen as "speaking"

a language of provocation. When female bodies do not efface their femaleness, they may be seen as inviting, flaunting. (6)

This shows that Yeong-hye is only the source of consumption. In-hye's husband imagines the "Image of a blue flower on a woman's buttocks, its petals opening outwards. In his mind, the fact that his sister-in-law still had a Mongolian mark on her buttocks became inexplicably bound up with the image of men and women having sex, their naked bodies completely covered with painted flowers" (59). He is suffering with the sexual appetite as Young says, "A fetish is an object that stands in for the phallus—the phallus as the one and only measure and symbol of desire, the representation of sexuality" (77). However, his wife is beautiful but he feels that Yeong-hye energized him. He becomes extremely fetishist thinking about Yeong-hye when his penis suddenly gets jerked and he also knows that this is nothing to do with his wife because he has not sex with her for long time. Yeong-hye is not free from nowhere because she is not performing her conventional compliant role and the beast like her brother-in-law waits for the moment to trespass over her body. In this case, Valerie Hey emphasizes:

Gender not as essence nor socialization, but as the consequences of performative (i.e. recurring) 'citations' of gender thought as actions that institute 'girthing' for example . . . These norms of behaviour (e.g. how girls [ought to] walk and talk) or how they (should) take up dress as a gendered aesthetic (e.g. looking like a 'normal' woman) operate ideologically to structure the fictive solidity of gender. These are interactive, interpersonal and intra-subjective processes that sustain our lived sense of inhabiting a gendered body and psyche. (439-440)

After being a vegetarian, Yeong-hye's body looks no more than a ghost. Even In-

hye's husband, a patriarchal figure, finds her more seductive and sensual than his own wife. Yeong-hye goes against the power and rules of the patriarchy and takes pleasure on what she does, the patriarchy, on the other hand, is also propelling its agents to punish and anguish her. It is because the power is centered on the patriarchal figure that cannot let anyone, specially a female, who is endeavoring to traverse its boundary.

She is unknown to the reality of outside world. Here, Kang, with the optimum use of freedom, discloses the body parts of Yeong-hye. Through *The Vegetarian*, she is ironically expressing her anger to this society. She is struggling to show how the society murders a woman only because her body is not performing in its terms. Kang is giving the novel to the hands of this society as its progress card so that it can grasp its own deeds to women. Kang makes Yeong-hye naked by the hand of patriarchy. In this case, Michel de Certeau opines:

In order for the law to be written on the bodies, an apparatus is required that can mediate the relation between the former and the latter. From the instruments of scarification, tattooing, and primitive initiation to those of penal justice, tools work on the body. Formerly the tool was a flint knife or a needle.

(141)

In-hye's husband paints the body of Yeong-hye where we can see her every body organ with visual description of words. It attests the power of patriarchy over female corpus as In-hye's husband coops his authority by means of his painting over Yeong-hye's body. He even takes his crude sexual amusement remembering "her single-lidded eyes; the way she spoke, so blunt as to be almost uncouth, and without his wife's faintly nasal inflection; her drab clothes; her androgynously protruding cheekbones" (63). Males are in the apex of power in patriarchal society and "power's

hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law” (Foucault 83). In-hye’s husband is deeply lost in his tawdry and uncouth thought that he does not understand himself what he is doing. His penis gets jerked after seeing the naked body of Yeong-hye in her apartment. Then, he gawks over her “waist narrowed sharply, her body hair was fairly sparse, and the overall effect, aside from the line of her thigh” (74).

Yeong-hye does not give any sign of approval for the video due to which In-hye’s husband becomes hysteric and brutally rapes his wife in the search of that Mongolian mark. As a bastard, he sexually abuses his wife. Judith Butler views that, “The conflation of desire with the real—that is, the belief that it is parts of the body, the “literal” penis, the “literal” vagina, which cause pleasure and desire—is precisely the kind of literalizing fantasy characteristic of the syndrome of melancholic heterosexuality” (90-91). In-hye’s life is dilapidated due to Yeong-hye. Though Yeong-hye is not directly responsible but she is the main cause to ruin everything of her closer one. In-hye does not get any emotional assist, love and concern from her husband because of his indulgence over Yeong-hye.

Kang picturizes how the body and soul of Yeong-hye gets raped again by her brother-in-law. Yeong-hye’s rejection to his offer for sexual relation hurts his ego and he, as a *Rawan* (villain character in the holy book of Hindu, *Ramayana*), encroaches into her house with the intention to rape her. Helen Singer Kaplan argues that, “In one senses, this sensitivity places us above animals whose ardors are not diminished by the objections of their sexual partners or by ethical considerations” (33). Yeong-hye, who is mentally retardate, does not even sense that someone is raping her. Michel Foucault opines that, “But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it,

force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (25). Michel de Certeau forwards the similar notion that, “It remains that law constantly write itself on bodies. It engraves itself on parchments made from the skin of its subjects” (140). Yeong-hye becomes like *Sita Maiya* (heroine of the holy book of Hindu, *Ramayana*) who has no sovereignty and power over her body because *Rawan* seizes her body as his victory to prove his machismo. In-hye’s husband sets all the filming equipment and then forcefully catches Yeong-hye by “clutching at her breasts with one hand and haphazardly sucking her lips and nose as he hurriedly unbuttoned his shirt . . . as soon as he was naked he pushed her legs wide apart and entered her. A constant panting sound, as if from a wild animal, was coming from somewhere” (112). Like a beast, he rapes her and even thinks his act as the “preserve of flirtatious young woman” (112).

Yeong-hye’s dream surprisingly stops to come after In-hye’s husband paints flower on her body and she allows him to do so because she thinks she is transforming into a plant. Yeong-hye is really a foolish woman because she thinks whatever her brother-in-law is doing with her, both flower painting and raping, is to help her to end the route of her bad dreams. In-hye’s husband succeeds to hypnotize Yeong-hye, who, now acts in his direction. Michel de Certeau states:

Books are only the metaphors of the body. But in times of crisis paper is no longer enough for the law, and it writes itself again on the bodies themselves. The printed text refers to what is printed on our body, brands it with a red-hot iron with the mark of the name and of the law, and ultimately effects it with pain and/or pleasure so as to turn it into a symbol of other, something said, called, named. (140)

The dream has drastically shaken Yeong-hye which blinds her to defend herself from the hazards rather endures the pain. What In-hye’s husband starves, from long time,

finally triumphs to seize Yeong-hye's body. The scratches and wounds of her body prove his power over her. The patriarchy, therefore, by means of its evil agents, imprints its law on the skin of females. Instead, to rebel against his brutal attempt Yeong-hye allows him to impinge her body. Even, with innocence, she asks to him, "Will the dream stop now?" (105). Irigaray confronts that, "Just as a commodity finds the expression of its value in an equivalent-in-the last analysis, a general one—that necessarily remains external to it, so woman derives her price from her relation to the male sex" (188). However, in the case of Yeong-hye, she does not achieve any value of being a woman in return rather becomes a dumb doll that is brutally squeezed under the feet of several men.

Yeong-hye's desire for vegetarianism makes her unconscious to think what society will do with her if she nudes her body all the time. That is why, the man like her brother-in-law approaches her to make his work done. In-hye's husband degrades himself to level of gutter to complete his video, he even asks J, her male nude partner, to have sex with Yeong-hye. Manmeet Kaur Senthok Singh points out:

For several thousand years, the female body has been used as a canvas for painting the lineaments of patriarchal domination and exploitation. Enormous efforts — under the pretext of biological determinism, social norms, cultural traditions and religious practices — have been made by patriarchy to maintain control over the female body and claim access to female sexuality. While female corporeality has been defined in terms of passivity, dependence, weakness, irrationality and volatility; female sexuality has been oriented towards procreation and the fulfilment of men's needs. (148)

Kang shows the objectification of Yeong-hye. J's penis also gets jerked when Yeong-hye's nude body touches his body. He also panics with sexual appetite and tries to

conceal his engrossed penis. No man is virtuous rather everyone's penis gets strong if he feels he can have the chance to sex with the woman. Yeong-hye is obviously piloting herself towards hell but still she is oblivious about it. Her desire becomes expensive that makes her no more than a toy.

In-hye, Yoeng-hye's sister, admits Yeong-hye and her husband to the psychiatric hospital. However, Yeong-hye stops, somewhat, eating medicines too. The final chapter of the novel covers the leap of three years where we find Yeong-hye's rejection to every food item to convert her desire into reality. The hospital is also a social institution that has the power and authority over its patients. The doctors make the discourse that Yeong-hye is suffering from schizophrenia and anorexia. In this case, Sussan Bordo opines:

Women and girls frequently internalize this ideology, holding themselves to blame for unwanted advances and sexual assaults. This guilt festers into unease with our femaleness, shame over our bodies, and self-loathing. For example, anorexia nervosa, which often manifests itself after an episode of sexual abuse or humiliation, can be seen as at least in part a defense against the "femaleness" of the body and a punishment of its desire. (8)

Kang tries to show how a female becomes an anorexic patient when nobody understands and supports her. Yeong-hye's desire becomes a virus, for the society, that can contaminate any disease to people. Different organs of the society, one after another, are afflicting, both psychologically and physically, to Yeong-hye. She wants to be free from all these nooses of life but nobody leaves her in her own condition. The doctor explains to In-hye that, "We're still not sure why exactly it is that Kim Yeong-hye is refusing to eat, and none of the medicines we've given her seem to have had any effect" (141). Now, Yeong-hye solely plunges into the snare of the societal

precepts from which she will not be able to abscond and even though she wants.

If society left Yeong-hye in her own condition, she would get such agonies neither from her family nor from the hospital. Everyone abandons her except her sister, whose family is also ruined by Yeong-hye. However, if Yeong-hye would be a male, she would not get such violent treatment but the Patriarchy has its own set of rules for the women, which cannot endure if one female is roving in naked body. It is because “the body as lived is always enculturated: by the phonemes a body learns to pronounce at a very early age, by the clothes the person wears that mark her nation, her age, her occupational status, and in what is culturally expected or required of women” (Young 17). Yeong-hye gets proteins and glucose through IV but now all the veins are damaged and there is no place for a needle to put in. That is why, due to these stresses and torments, Yeong hye’s mentality starts to wreck and the society declares her as a mad.

The problem is not about her eating disorder rather about her unconventional attitudes and hitting the rules and regulations set by the institutions of the society. In-hye finds Yeong doing handstand in her last visit because she wants to be a tree, which needs only water and sun and uses to wander into the jungle to photosynthesize herself. In second time, she finds her doing handstand again. Yeong-hye says to In-hye that, “I thought trees stood up straight . . . They actually stand with both arms in the earth . . . I was in a dream and I was standing on my head . . . leaves were growing from my body, and roots were sprouting from my hands . . . I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch so I spread my legs; I spread them wide” (148). For her, tree is pure and source of enlightenment. The doctors claim to In-hye that, “Fifteen to twenty percent of anorexia nervosa patients will starve to death” (140). She uses to vomit blood in these days and her “stomach acid is eating away” (150). Her

obsession with desire makes her to eat nothing because she thinks she has put on weight.

She might be doing what Bordo says:

No wonder the anorexia is experienced as liberating and that she will fight family, friends, and therapists in an effort to hold onto it- fight them to the death, if need be. The anorectic's experience of power is, of course, deeply and dangerously illusory. To reshape one's body into a male body is not to put on male power and privilege. To feel autonomous and free while harnessing body and soul to an obsessive body-practice is to serve, not transform, a social order that limits female possibilities. (179)

If she sees dishes containing meat she reacts violently and she stops eating anything then. From the last four days she has not eat anything falling herself into dehydration. She has not period for a long time and has weight below thirty kilos. She is striking to stand on her desire but nobody leaves her in her own condition despite knowing her strength to struggle and fight for her desire.

Yeong-hye's body is source for the doctors' experimentation on anorexia. The doctors decide the life of Yeong-hye because they are the agents of power who create the truth of the patients' lives. According to Michel de Certeau, "Every power, including the power of law, is written first of all on the back of its subjects. Knowledge does the same" (140). That is why the hospital is the symbol of power to research upon the docile body of Yeong-hye as Foucault says:

While the hospital itself, which was once little more than a poorhouse, was to become a place of training and of the correlation of knowledge; it represented a reversal therefore of the power relations and the constitution of a corpus of knowledge. The Veil-disciplined' hospital became the physical counterpart of the medical 'discipline'; this discipline could now abandon its textual

character and take its references not so much from the tradition of author-
authorities as from a domain of objects perpetually offered for examination.

(186)

Now, the medical prescription concludes the truth of Yeong-hye. If she was left in her own condition even from the beginning, perhaps, she had been fine. However, due to the anguishes and exploitation of the external world she cannot get any chance to execute her goal. One is always "inside" power, there is no "escaping" it (Foucault 95). Though how much determined and steady Yeong-hye is in her desire, she cannot be escaped from the power of societal institutions. The more resistance she shows, the more tortures she has to bear by the mechanisms of power.

The doctors play the role of Hitler in the life of Yeong-hye. Metaphorically, they are also raping her body. The body belongs to Yeong-hye but she has no sovereign over it. It is because there is no blank space that is not bruised by IV needle. She is padlocked all the time because of her unstable mind. The doctors even treat her with force if she shows denial attitude. Towards the ending of the novel, when doctors try to treat her, as a final attempt, she growls as an animal, "Leave me alone! Leave me alo- o-one!" (173). They bind her arms and legs laying her on the bed but she howls like a savage beast, "I . . . don't . . . like it! I . . . don't . . . like . . . eating!" In this case, Michel Foucault further opines that, "One would be concerned with the 'body politic', as a set of material elements and techniques that serve as weapons, relays, communication routes and supports for the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge" (28). The doctor, with huge force, tries to insert the tube into her mouth through the nasal system so that he can irrigate food and water in her body but she blocks her mouth. However, when the tube has been inserted, with huge struggle, within a

moment, the blood, startlingly, spatters over nurse's face because "the blood is gushing out of the tube, out of Yeong-hye's mouth" (175).

Yeong-hye's resistance is so strong that none can believe she is suffering from anorexia, whose body has only bones. She is silent but it does not mean that anyone can impinge her body. The frustrations of starvation, the rigors of the constant physical activity in which anorectics engage, the pain of the numerous physical complications of anorexia: these do not trouble the anorectic. Indeed, her ability to ignore them is further proof to her of her mastery of her body (Bordo 149). Doctors have no fault rather it is the social conventions that is set in everyone's mind that has brought Yeong-hye near the cave of death.

Once called perfect woman, Yeong-hye, now turns into a giant figure. In-hye, with great exertion, recognizes Yeong-hye with her long thick hair. She has no flesh in her face except pointed bony cheeks. She behaves very ghostly as well. In-hye gets terrified when Yeong-hye does not wake up in many calls but when In-hye goes near to her face, suddenly her "eyelids flutter open" (167). In-hye screams to Yeong-hye, "You're actually insane . . . Have you lost your mind?" (167). She is aware of her surrounding too that is why she is different from other catatonic patient. The mechanisms of power change the courses of her life. In this regard, Michel Foucault views:

Sex and its effects are perhaps not so easily deciphered; on the other hand, their repression, thus reconstructed, is easily analyzed. And the sexual cause-the demand for sexual freedom, but also for the knowledge to be gained from sex and the right to speak about it-becomes legitimately associated with the honor of a political cause: sex too is placed on the agenda for the future. . . If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence,

then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. (6)

The more resistance she shows, the more tortures she has to bear. Her sexual identity is questioned and being almost erased now but she is constant in her decision. She is not unconscious rather her consciousness is concentrated only to her desire.

Therefore, she remains unaware to her surroundings. Moreover, if someone tries to awake her from her deep concentration she remains awake whole time. It is because she has the fear of the doctors who may end her route to reach to her desire.

Han Kang films the lopsided reality of twenty-first century's Asian Countries where still women needs to think thousands time before enacting their desires. The alike situation holds in our Nepal too. Due to the immense root of conservative thoughts in the Nepalese society, woman like Yeong-hye cannot get chance to live with freedom because they are sent to the asylum. In-hye scolds Yeong-hye to pity herself but she does not react. In pain, In-hye scolds her, "You're dying. You're lying there in that bed, and dying. Nothing else" (170). Yeong-hye does not display any reaction over it rather remains stagnant like a ghoul. She is happy in her plight. In this case, Judith Butler's argument is best fitted to Yeong-hye's situation as Butler notes:

Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (23)

Therefore, Kang's exposition of Yeong-hye's body, her constancy in her desire disobeying the social organs and massive obsession upon her bodily transformation without any hesitance and fright means a colossal attack to this society. Attempt of

breaking patriarchal laws means losing human identity as Yeong-hye has lost all the human qualities and seems as if she is an alien. In-hye transforms her to another hospital, in haste, due to her violent reaction over her treatment but the readers are not notified whether she will further live or die.

In conclusion, Yeong-hye, despite mounts of hardships and glooms over her body, does not move a bit rather stands on her vow of vegetarianism. Her one step dismantles every relations. Mr. Cheong, despite understanding the trouble of Yeong-hye, gives divorce to her because he does not get sexual pleasure from her. Her body is just a mean to satisfy his crude sexual appetite. He is much confident, while choosing Yeong-hye as his life partner, that he can use her as he wants. He even rapes her as a patriarchal evil. The family ditches Yeong-hye because she wants different which does not suit to a submissive and sedate girl. In-hye's husband takes the benefit of her loneliness and bizarre state of mind. He gets obsessed with her, due to her Mongolian Mark, and rapes her to complete his pornographic video. These numerous tortures transform Yeong-hye into an anorexic patient. The doctors even do not let her free because she is a docile body under the tyranny of society's organ.

Kang makes ambiguous ending of the novel where the readers cannot know whereabouts of Yeong-hye. It is because Kang wants to keep her heroine alive as a metaphorical figure so that no other Yeong-hye, further, suffer from such brutality under the regime of Patriarchy. Yeong-hye wants to live far from this carnivorous world of butchery transforming into a plant but as a social creature, she could not go far away from the hostility of social customs and laws. Moreover, she is a female and as we all know, still women are the caged bird of the patriarchy. Thus, Kang, metaphorically, messaging to stop violence over female body and brawling for women's right over their body.

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