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Kyung sook Shin's *Please Look After Mom: a Portrait of Alienation*

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By

Basanta Bahadur Ale

Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu,

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TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Approval Letter

This thesis entitled “Kyung-sook Shin’s *Please Look After Mom: A Portrait of Alienation*” submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Basanta Bahadur Ale has been approved by the following members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

Internal Examine

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: - _____

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Basanta Bahadur Ale

Abstract

The present research aims at recalling different modes of alienation in Kyung-sook Shin's novel *Please Look After Mom* (2011). The research will explore Shin's characters of the novel applying Heidegger's ontological alienation and Jean Paul Sartre's ethical alienation; and other existential theories may be taken as a help.

Heidegger's notion of alienation is a situation in which man forgets his own possibilities to be but carries and dwells in his inauthenticity. Sartre's ethical alienation occurs when human beings refuse to accept 'responsibility' for their own freedom. Kyung-sook Shin's characters' fail to be authentic in both Heidegger's and Sartre's notion, so are in dread, despair and alienation. At last the characters realize themselves as human being with individual 'self'.

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I. Average Everydayness in *Please Look After Mom*

The present research on Kyung – sook Shin's novel *Please Look After Mom* (2011) examines the protagonist 'mother' Park So-nyo as a "Portrait of Alienation" in the light of existentialism. Park So-nyo suffers alienation due to her in-authentic choice of existence. The study brings forth her life of sacrifice to her family, the hardships of her life which turns to be futile and leaves her in isolation. It further digs out the problems of mother and her family in knowing each other and the problems faced by two generations. It also highlights the indifference of the family members taking mother; a 'human' as granted; as an object, a challenge to her subjectivity.

In the novel *Please Look After Mom*, Kyung-sook Shin writes about the problem faced by the protagonist, a traditional woman Park So-nyo. After her children became capable enough to stand on their feet and settle in Seoul, the mother finds that her children no more need her help and no more care about her. Shin gives the strong impression that Park So-nyo is extremely devoted to her work and is the sole support for her family, supporting them to stand from extreme poverty to the Seoul's city lives. Park So-nyo devoted her to a life of work and self-sacrifice, following every order and expectation to a scurrilous degree. Her husband was always indifferent to her but she had her children as a meaning for living. This too turns futile when her children grew up and settled in Seoul and mother had nothing to do with their busy lives. Her family has no further use of her; she feels a burden to her family. There comes to be a gap between two generations having traditional, rural attitudes and the so-called modern attitudes.

According to existentialist and Shin, people have both an individual side and a side with the commitment with society. It is our choice that must be in moderation of the

two, to maintain balance. If a person chooses himself over society, he will lose the support of society, however if a person chooses society over himself, he will lose his individuality. Mother initially chooses society over herself, which in turn transformed her into a working machine in the eyes of her family members. In *Please Look After Mom*, Kyung-sook shin writes: "The book you choose, while mother stood outside the bookstore was *Human, All Too Human*. ... Is this a book you need? ... Actually you didn't know what this book was. It said that it was written by Nietzsche you'd just picked it because you liked the way the title sounded (60). What can be the connection between Kyung-sook Shin's *Please Look After Mom* and Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human*? Why Kyung-sook Shin makes her character Chi-hon buy a book by Nietzsche?

Nietzsche is one of the precursors of existentialism. In *Human, All Too Human*, Nietzsche describes what he means by free spirits in the preface to the second edition. Free spirits contrast with the typical human being of his era, who was as the title suggests, all too human. Free spirits in contrast are ideal companions that do not yet exist but may appear in the future. They are those who have freed themselves. From the chains of dominant culture, even from the bonds of reverence for those things they once found most praiseworthy. The dangerous period of the free spirits is introduced by the desire to flee whatever has been one's previous spiritual world, a desire that leads to a reconsideration of matters that previously had been taken for granted. The ultimate aim of this liberation is independent self-mastery and supreme health in a life of continual experimentation and adventure. Kyung-sook Shin has surely invited to analyze *Please Look After Mom* from an existential view; otherwise she would not have mentioned the book written by Nietzsche.

Since the publication of Kyung-sook Shin's novel, *Please Look After Mom*, in 2008, it attracted the attention of many critics and reviewers. Since the book has been published in 31 countries and translated in various languages, this novel was read by a considerable number of critics whose interpretation is different according to their own understanding. Shin's novel *Please Look After Mom* is judged in various ways from different angles. Therefore, the criticism depends on the reader how s/he interprets. In this connection, reviewer Katherine A. Powers writes:

Poor Mom. Born in 1936, she was married off against her wishes at a young age to save her from being carried off in one of the frequent raids made by renegade North Korean soldiers after the end of the Korean conflict. After their marriage, her husband disappeared for long periods, leaving Mom to give birth to and provide for their growing number of children. This she managed by ceaseless toil and scrimping, to which she added further labor and sacrifice in order to scrape together the money to educate at least some of the children. Her own illiteracy was one of her greatest sorrows: "I lived in darkness," she reflects, "with no light, my whole life." (2)

Katherine A. Powers conveys the message that the novel *Please Look After Mom* is about a tradition where marriage against one's will was possible; the period of Korean War before transformation to a democratic country. Her focus is upon the optimistic view of mother and her devotion in educating her children though she herself lived in 'darkness' without education. Katherine's indication is also towards the irresponsibility

of a husband who disappears and come in intervals. This shows mother's emotional isolation and hardship in the absence of her husband.

In the same way, concerning the novel's post war pang, its universal themes, loss of traditional values, critic Jill I. Shtuman interprets the novel as follows:

This simple portrait of a family shocked into acknowledging the strength and heroic-self-sacrifice of the woman at its center is both universal and socially specific.... Partly a metaphor as construct for Korea's social shift from rural to urban, partly an elegy to the intensity of family bond maintained by self-denying women, this is a tender writing. (7)

Critic Jill I. Shtuman has especially noted, "the heroic self-sacrifice of Park So-nyo and her attitude of self-denying. Existentialist focus on gaining the "self" and take life as giving meaning to the "Self", but Park So-nyo seems to be in opposite. She sacrifices her 'self' denying the self of herself. Similarly reviewer Gray Shteygart the author of *Super Sad True Love Story* puts some different view regarding the theme of the novel, he states that:

Please Look After Mom is an authentic moving story that brings vivid life, the deep connection that lies at the core of Korean culture. But it also speaks beautifully to an urgent issue of our times, migration, and how the movement of people from small towns and villages to big cities can cause heart breaks and tragedy. (Shteygart, 5)

In the above lines Shteygart agree that *Please Look After Mom* is an authentic picture of postwar Korean culture in the lens of 'Realism'. Shteygart points that "it speaks to an urgent issue of migration as one of the theme of the novel" (Shteygart, 5). Critic Shteygart views migration as one of the causes of alienation in general sense. His focus is

on one of the of major social problems of modern society where people are leaving from small towns to big cities to fulfill their dreams which has been the cause for family break down and are left in isolation and estrangement. Another critic Janet Maslin writes in the title 'A Mother's devotion and A Family's Tearful Regrets' about mother's disappearance:

The book is about the selfish family a woman who got lost in the crowd at train station in Seoul and has not reappeared. Shocked into decency, her husband, two sons and two daughters find themselves replaying all the button pushing, tear-jerking moments that illustrated this woman's love and devotion. It would be grievous understatement to call her mere martyr. (Maslin, 8)

Janet Maslin calls mother a martyr of love and devotion. This clearly shows how much she cared for her family. A martyr is someone who chooses to sacrifice himself for others or mother is the mother who lives her life not as an "individual" but for the 'they', for only her family. Janet Maslin declares the mothers family as 'selfish' and mother as martyr of love; that is to say that mother's love and devotion was only one sided.

Regarding Park So-nyo's way of life reviewer Mythili G. Rao states that:

Only after her children grow up and leave their home in Chongup does Mom's strength and purposefulness begin to flag. When Chi-hon visits unannounced ... Mom suffering private anguish. The daughter is stunned: "Mom got headaches? So severe that she couldn't even cry?" ... Mom's debilitating headaches are the byproduct of a stroke she told no one about. Other discoveries come gradually. After one of Chi-hon's older brothers leaves the village for Seoul, she is responsible for writing letters to him,

dictated by Mom. For years, Chi-hon assumes this is just an additional chore. The reality is revealed in another question she asks of herself:

“When was it you realized that Mom didn’t know how to read?” (Rao, 23)

In the above review Mythili G. Rao projects that 'Mom's' purpose flagged after her children settle in Seoul. Mother loses purpose and meaning of her life. Mythili G. Rao puts that mother has sacrificed her life for her children .Mother being left alone in Chongup is suffering terrible headaches which was not known to anyone of the family members. Shin weaves an irony around the family and mother. The family she cared all her life doesn’t care her. They are unknown of mother’s pain which happen to be of a stroke she had before. It was mother who supported the children for their education. Mother realizes that her children must get education in order to live in the better world, all the family is aware of mother’s illiteracy but no one cares. Most of the critics have seen *Please Look After Mom* as a tribute to motherhood. They have focused on the love, sacrifice and devotion of mom to her family. In another word they have viewed mother as a traditional mother, who does household works and cares for the family. But critic Kim Mi-hyun puts his different view in this way:

The self-sacrificing mom in the novel transcends what might categorize as "anti-modernist" or "anti-feminist". The novelist goes beyond that to create a Mom who is actually 'post-modern and post-feminist'. Therefore, the caring mom is not a passive existence of ‘is’ but a multifaceted dynamic character who ‘does’ ... The underlying theme of the novel is not so much about mom as endeavoring to identify mom and find of her life.

In this sense, *Please Look After Mom* is a novel that portrays that motherhood and family of the 21st century. (Mi-hyun, 63)

Critic Mi-hyun finds mother as an active human who "does", not a passive existence of 'is'. According to existentialism a being comes into existence through action one does. Then again, what they tend to find is whether it is authentic or not. Critic Mi-Hyun points that mother in *Please Look After Mom* is not only a traditional mother but a dynamic character.

Kang Yu-jeong is one critic who has expanded the issue to the realm of feminism:

The mother in *Please Look After Mom* is not so much a close resemblance to a real woman in her 70s but rather the image of an "ideal mother [...]" The substance testifying to what has been lost, is not what myth is all about? As something that has been lost, motherhood as a utopian space, and the maternal space as myth-these things are directly and secretly connected with nostalgia for the days when such values were possible. As we remember our lost mother and the mythical values that she stands for, we forget for a moment the weariness of the present, Grief over the missing mother is a means of granting salvation to the family in crisis, and that is substance of the return to prison and the myth of motherhood.(qtd.*Creation and Critism*,2)

Kang Yu-jeong's criticism is severe. She takes the novel as not close to reality but as an imagination. She has concluded that "Mother" is no more than a figment of the imagination and treated the novel as an old fashioned work that glosses over reality. She

connects the novel with the past where such values like sacrifice, devotion were possible which are now only a myth. As for severity of criticism, Jo Yeongil needs to be cited as he said, "By placing greater value in Shin's new novel, *Please Look After Mom* than is warranted by popular fiction (in other words, treating it as a work worthy of literary Criticism in the first place) means not so much revival of Korean fiction but its collapse"(qtd. *Creation and Criticism*, 10). Jo Yeongil views the novel as useless; not even worth for literary criticism.

In the same line, Goh Bong-jun analyzes the nature of the novel's emotional appeal and degrades emotion to something lower than inspiration. Pitting emotion against inspiration, Goh says that "emotional impact is something habitually reproduced from a certain kind of sentiment," while inspiration denies the "common sense or commonly accepted ideas" that results from such habitual reproduction and accompanies 'creation'. Putting the current family narratives in the former category, Goh takes issue with the people who habitually think of emotional impact as a genre of literature. "Why does the family always have to be understood and communicated?"(qtd.*Creation and Critism*,4) Goh asks, He sees the popular appeal of stories about family aimed at understanding and communication to be the product of sentimental immersion by people who are far removed from creative self-reflection (i.e. inspiration). He argues that *Please Look After Mom* is nothing more than popular culture hampering the self-awakening of reader (qtd.*Creation and Criticism*, 4).Critic Yoo Hui-sok views *Please Look After Mom* from another perspective:

The unique achievement of *Please Look After Mom* is its revival in today`s terms of the self-sacrificing meaning of mother without damaging it in the

name of individualism , and the deep-seated grudge of one individual who because of her motherhood, could not do what she wanted. This is also the secret to the novel`s popular appeal. (Hui-sok, 4)

In the above lines critic Hui-sok has revealed the reality of a Korean family of today facing the crisis. The self-sacrifice of the mother is almost incompatible with the desires of the mother as an individual. In his view Shin Kyung-sook`s literary world is different as it gives the experience of a totally different kind of life. He further expresses that the novelist has been able to save the novel from falling in the name of individualism and preserve the traditional side of motherhood.

Though the above mentioned critics and reviewers have presented and interpreted Kyung-sook Shin`s *Please Look After Mom* from different critical perspectives none of the critics have analyzed it from the perspective of alienation through existentialism .Therefore, the present research purposes to carry out the research from the point of Existentialism and the concepts developed by Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and other Existential theorists. Both Heidegger and Sartre agree that Alienation happens in inauthenticity.

The concept of alienation is one of the most important and fruitful legacies of Hegel's social philosophy. Both Marxist and Existential idea of alienation comes in critical response to Hegel. Existential alienation got its root from Kierkegaard, he states in the present age individuals are estranged from themselves the world, which is experienced as hostile to subjectivity and individuality.

Such estrangement takes the form of "inauthenticity", of not "being oneself or "true to oneself. For Kierkegaard such estrangement is characteristic situation generally.

Similarly, for Heidegger "inauthenticity" is our normal "everyday" state. It is not specific to modern society or to any particular social or historical conditions. On the contrary, for Heidegger, inauthenticity is that kind of Being which is closest to Dasein and in which Dasein maintains itself for the most part (220).

Existentialists don't accept the enlightenment idea that the self has a pre-given nature which will flourish if left alone, uninfluenced by society. What they believe is that the self is necessarily engaged in the world and with others. Authenticity is a mode of being-in-the-world and being-with-others. In the first place, the existential self has no predetermined "essence" to be realized; rather it must determine and create itself (Golomb, 534). Second, the existentialists reject the Hegelian view that is in and through our social roles. On the contrary, we tend to lose ourselves in them.

Heidegger insists that authenticity cannot be achieved merely by doing one's duty or fulfilling an objective social role. Too, normal social life is no guarantee of authenticity. On the contrary, in our everyday social existence we are estranged from our selves" and inauthentic. In everyday social life we fall away from ourselves, into the world and into the relations with others (220). We are "dispersed in our involvements, lost in the world, dominated by the "they" (166). Such "fallenness" is not the product only of particular social or historical circumstances; it is the normal mode of human existence. Inauthenticity, self-estrangement is an 'ontological' characteristic of "Dasein". Heidegger tend to regard authenticity as a subjective and individual affair which resides in the way in which one chooses one 'self' and live one's situation, whatever that maybe. The implication is that it is possible to respond more or less authentically in any situation,

regardless of the specific circumstances. There are no objective conditions which are in and of themselves alienating or which prevent or engender authenticity.

For Sartre, alienation occurs in the “bad faith” that refuses the responsibility and freedom of human existence. As an outright atheist, Sartre argues that because God does not exist, human beings are free to create the meaning and value of their lives. He writes, “The best way to conceive of the fundamental project of human reality is to say that man is the being whose project is to be God” (Sartre 63). Such freedom, however, is initially experienced as a tremendous burden when they realize that they have no one but themselves to rely on. Only humans, then, can be praised or blamed for their successes and failures in life and whatever meaning they do or do not achieve. Alienation occurs when humans refuse to accept responsibility for this freedom. Sartre calls this, “Bad Faith”. Bad faith is for-itself escaping itself. They can either deny the actuality of whom they are (based on their past choices) or else deny the possibility of who they might become (through our future choices).

In bad faith, the Being attempts to, “flee what it cannot flee, to flee what it is” (115). This is similar to Heidegger’s inauthenticity, when Dasein realizes that he is free and also does not want to deal with freedom. With freedom comes much responsibility. So in both cases, the being in question denies it. Sartre feels that in bad faith however, the being is fleeing from more than just freedom; it’s fleeing from several aspects of its life, basically any type of lying. For Heidegger, Dasein submits to Dasman in order to avoid freedom, guilt and anxiety. Dasein has too much freedom and cannot handle it. When Sartre used the phrase “bad faith,” it was to refer to any sort of self-deception which denied the existence of human freedom. Sartre distinguishes between lying to oneself and

lying in general. "The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding. A man does not lie about what he is ignorant of; he does not lie when he spreads an error of which he himself is the dupe; he does not lie when he is mistaken"(78).The phenomenon of bad faith is paradoxical one. Bad faith is the flight from oneself done so in anguish to escape some aspect of being.

For both Heidegger and Sartre alienation is not inescapable. Authenticity is possible but it is an individual rather than an historical achievement. Heidegger's view is that to find myself is to be authentic, I must stand back; I must detach myself from the "they" from my social existence and make contact with my authentic individual self. Individuals must now choose their social place and role, in doing so, create their own identity. In the same line, for Sartre authenticity is achieved (and so alienation overcome) by not taking flight in the face of this existential anxiety or dread. Instead humans should assume responsibility for their choices and in turn create their own selves.

In *Please Look After Mom*, the protagonist Park So-nyo marries against her will to marry. She gives her desire to stay with her mom obeying the traditional norms prevailed in Korean cultures. To do what others do is to 'fall' into 'average everydayness' in Heidegger's view. Michael Inwood writes, "The they" is others, but it also includes myself in so far as I do, think, and feel what "they" do, think and feel. It is not definite named others, it is everyone and no-one (27). Heidegger calls this situation as-being-in-the-world in which Dasein is blind to its possibilities. "Everydayness" is associated with the "they" (Dasman), Heidegger states, Dasein is inauthentic in so far as it makes as it does thing simply because that is what one does. It is authentic in so far at it makes up its

own mind, its own person, or true to its own self. Regarding Mom's average everydayness Kyung-sook Shin writes:

'Do I have to get married?'

'What?'

'Can't I just live with you?'

'No'

'Why not? The young woman had sorrow in her voice.'

'Do you want to be dragged off by the mountain people?' It's not a bad thing to get married. It is something you can't avoid. (142-143)

In the above lines, Kyung-sook reveals that mother married because it was the choice of her mother. Her mother chose Park So-nyo's marriage because she feared that she could be dragged by the hill people. It is not the fact but idle talk because 'they' say that the young girls are taken by the hill people. Again, Park So-nyo thinks that marriage is unavoidable because her mother thinks so, her mother thinks so because it is the traditional norms. Park has ceded her decision to the 'they'. This is what Heidegger calls 'Average Everydayness'. By this, he means the way we live our lives without reflecting on the meaning of our existence. In this situation the 'self' of Park is not her own 'self' but the 'theyself'. The 'self' of Park's is alienated from her 'own self'. Mother married father without her wish which is her inauthentic choice. She is alienated from herself because she did not will to get married, she married according to what they thought and said. After her marriage she felt more loneliness. Her husband had a nomadic life; 'you (husband) left this house whenever you wanted to and came back at your whim' (140). After their marriage, her husband disappeared for long periods, leaving Mom to give

birth to and provide for their growing number of children. She couldn't escape from responsibilities as her husband; her husband was in bad faith. She devoted herself to work and her family. Shin writes: your mother's house was like a factory; she prepared sauces and fermented bean paste and hulled rice, producing things for the family year round (3). Throughout the novel Mom is seen and seen working. Park's devotion to work can be noticed in the following lines:

"Cancer" Your wife said that it was impossible: she didn't have time to lie in bed ill, she had too much to do ... But cancer cells were growing in your wife's left breast. If you had gone back to hear the results right away, they might not have had to cut off her breast. Soon after the surgery, her chest still wrapped with bandages, your wife planted potatoes in the field. (158-159)

In *Please Look After Mom*, it seems that mom never knew anything more than work. She does not recognize herself as an individual. Her devotion to her family and work had led her in alienation. Park was a dutiful mother and wife. Her cut of breast indicates her physical alienation. She was doing the role of mother and wife as expected by the Korean culture. In this connection Paul writes in his review: 'But in a country where it is routinely expected of a woman to hang upon a cross for her family... What *Please Look After Mom* highlights is the tendency, in no way unique to Korea, to treat women as little more than a commodity'. Paul's review clarifies that mom was just playing a role of a traditional mother; she was only performing her duty. What she did was only to fulfill others expectation. But for Heidegger too normal social life is no guarantee for authenticity. Since every Dasein lives in the world, in 'everydayness'; this everydayness

has to do with the fact that we all exist in a society as individuals, yet –to some extent at least Heidegger labels this everydayness as an ‘averageness’ that we fall into. In our averageness, we become accepting of authority figures and mainstream views; we become unreflective selves who are unable to think on our own. Park’s life itself is an example of averageness, for she has closed the doors of other possibilities. Deep in her heart she had a desire to read but she never listened to her heart. This averageness is lived out by ‘the-they.’ ‘The they’ are the Others that we are all a part of and which we do not distinguish ourselves from. In our everyday lives, our individuality is absorbed into ‘the-they’ and this absorption is labeled as “fallenness.” The ‘they-self,’ which we become when we are like Others is contrasted with the authentic self, which we become when we confront possibility (167). Hence, from this, Park cannot be said to be authentic, to be we need to separate ourselves, in some way, from Others. Park drowned in pond of average everydayness is unable to see the individual side of her life. Though the time and situation has changed, the war was over, the family could feed by itself; Park So-nyo remains the same. In *Please Look After Mom*, mom routinely performed the same actions again and again; her children could tell what mom was doing without seeing Mom. "If someone asked you what mother was doing, you could reply in ten seconds. ‘She’s probably drying ferns, since it is Sunday, she must be at church’” (17). Kyung-sook puts Mom’s life as follows:

Only after mother went missing did you realize that her stories were piled inside you, in endless stacks, mother's everyday life used to go on in a repeating loop, without a break. ... You realized that her life hasn't changed even after war was over When the family got together..., sat

around ...talked about the president elections. Mother would cook ... food and wash dishes and clean and hang damp rags to dry. Mother took care of repairing the gate and the roof and the porch. Instead of helping her ... that she did non-stop, even you thought of it as natural and took it for granted that this was her job. ... Despite never having been well off, tried so hard to give you the best of everything. (252-53)

From the above passage we come to know Mom's everydayness and how the children took her in their understanding. Kyung-sook here clearly reveal the truth of Mom that she has presented herself as a present-at-hand entity; in other words through her actions she has gained the identity of 'is'; a fixed identity a mother; a wife, like a stone is a stone. Michael Inwood in *Heidegger: A Very Short Introduction*, putting Heidegger's view, 'Why Dasein go wrong?' writes: because Dasein is primarily engrossed in things in the world, it tends to regard itself as a thing, as *zuhanden* or more likely, as *vorhanden* in the way that things it deals with are (51). Heidegger calls this the 'ontological reflection back of world understanding onto Dasein interpretation' (BT, 16). The children realize mom's life only after her disappearance that is to treat mom as a present- at- hand entity, that is to say that Mom merely exist. Because Mom's 'everyday' life used to go on in a repeating loop, without a break; it was the same as the others do. She has presented herself as something useful for doing, her significance was in being useful, doing house works, like, cooking, repairing etc .It is to forget its own being. Mom affiliation to 'they' has been so extreme that her own children come to regard her life as granted and natural. The mom is absorbed in the world of 'they'. She has put herself as an object; she is inconspicuous to the family before her disappearance. When she writes, instead of helping her to do the

work that she did non-stop, even you thought is as natural and took it for granted that is her job; despite never having been well off, she tried so hard to give you the best of everything; it both show her devotion to her family and her inability to gain her individuality. In losing her individuality she is in alienation.

As far as chapter division of this research is concerned, the study has three chapters altogether. The first chapter is concerned with the brief introduction to the whole research that tried to introduce the issue and the hypothesis of the study. It introduces whole project with some information about the text, its scholarly criticisms and theory through which the study has been conducted. The second chapter is the textual analysis which gives the overview of the actual reading of the text through existential theory of Martin Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre and other existential theorists in order to prove the hypothesis. The third chapter is the conclusion of the entire project that restates the finding of the study.

II. Alienation in *Please Look After Mom*

This research explores the way Kyung-sook Shin attempts to portray the alienation faced by the first generation Koreans who saw the divide of Korea, the war, dictatorship, poverty and the traditional values. The first generation who worked through their lives for the transformation from a war-ravaged, poverty ridden, police state to a fully modern, democratic environment is in dilemma, they neither are able to leave their traditional values nor adopt the new one. Park So-nyo is the representative of the first generation Korean who is illiterate but optimistic. She wants to be literate but is not able to leave her traditional attitudes. The second generation takes first generation as for granted. The generation is unable to understand each other. The second generation adopts the city life which is alien to the traditional old generation. In *Please Look After Mom* Kyung-sook Shin has used the motif of contrasting Mom's rural, hands-on, family-centric life with the modern, soulless city lives that her children have chosen.

The novel *Please Look After Mom* is divided in four sections and an epilogue. It is helpful to examine how everyone is addressed in the novel. Excluding the narrator Park So-nyo, the mother, who seems to see everything from the outside, the daughter, a personification of the author, is addressed as "you", the eldest son, who carried all the mother's hopes and dreams but had the added burden of looking after his younger siblings, is called "him"; and the narrator's husband, who had enjoyed all the privileges of a patriarch in the old system, is called "you." The place of the narrator, "I," is occupied by the missing mother, Park So-nyo, and the author describes the flow of the story from "you" to "him" to "I" as the process of "one form of self in search of another form of

self.” The narrative style as explained by the author is nothing new or experimental in itself, but the flow of the narrative and the effect of the terms of address are not that simple.

It is interesting to note that Shin has created Park So-nyo as a unique character. Though she is traditional but she is optimistic. Shin has weaved together a quiet irony in Chi-hon’s relationship with her mother. Chi-hon has chosen a career as a novelist while her mother has never had the opportunity to become literate. In existentialists view man is free once he is thrown in the world. Thrown because he can’t choose to be born, but once he is thrown in the world, he is free and at the same time is responsible for his actions. Famously, Sartre claimed the French public was as free as ever during the Nazi occupation. In *Being and Nothingness*, he passionately argued that even prisoners are free because they have the power of consciousness (622). A prisoner, though coerced, can choose how to react to his imprisonment. The prisoner is free because he controls his reaction to imprisonment: he may resist or acquiesce. Since there are no objective barriers to the will, the prison bars restrain me only if I form the will to escape. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre gives a similar example, he notes that a mountain is only a barrier if the individual wants to get on the other side but cannot (628). Mom even though she feels herself in prison in doing always the same thing over and over, though she herself is tied in the chains of "they", she still can dream like an individual. Kyung-sook Shin puts the same view as existentialists put that freedom can't be suppressed. Kyung-sook Shins regarding Park’s desire to read writes: ‘Why did she keep me at home? I lived in darkness with no light, my entire life’ (62).

Shin reveals mom deep interest in being literate but she could not go to school because her father had died in an accident when she was three years old and her widow mother could not send her to school because of poverty. Existentialists call this facticity which put limitations. Facticity signifies all of the concrete details against the background of which human freedom exists and is limited. After her marriage, the situation gets even worse. Mother could not pursue her education because of poverty; Shin has brought another situation of the same kind which happens after her marriage; her family can't send Kyun, her-brother-in-law to middle school. Her husband and sister -in-law did not accept to take the responsibilities, although mother kept on insisting to send Kyun to school. Shin has juxtaposed the two situation; both Kyun and Park So-nyo couldn't go to school because of the facticity of poverty.

So, in her anguish, she sent her children's to school still having her dream to be literate. Mother felt guilty, fear and ashamed of not being able to be literate. She tried to escape from situation when ever there was question of literacy. She herself says, 'When Hyong-Chol went to elementary school. I didn't go with him, In case I might have to write something, I made this or that excuse and sent him with your aunt (198). The problem of Park So-nyo is that she does not take herself as an individual, she is not able to recognize her freedom. She is absorbed in the world of the 'they' 'Dasman'. Instead of pursuing her dream herself; she prepares her eldest son Hyong-chol to fulfill her dream. When Hyong-chol tried to help, Mother said, "You go and study and pushed him to words his desk" (94). Mother reminded him, you have to become a prosecutor (93). Mother continued to refuse to let him help in the fields (95). This shows her preparation

for her inauthentic choice. Sartre calls this giving it to quietism. It is like, 'let others do what I cannot do'. Kyung-sook Shin writes Mom putting her dream as follows:

He never became a prosecutor. Mother always called it his dream but he hadn't understood that it had been Mother's dream, too. He only thought of it as a youthful wish that couldn't be achieved; it never occurred to him that he had deflated mother's aspirations as well. He realizes that that mother has lived her entire life believing that she was the one who held him back from his dream. I'm sorry Mother, I didn't keep my promise.

(123)

In the above excerpt Kyung-sook convey mother's deep interest in reading. She felt herself insulted of not being able to read but doesn't try to overcome herself, instead she puts her dream on Hyong-chol, when Hyong-chol fails, and she is hurt. She had put her dream on Hyong-chol. In existentialism man is a free being, man individually should decide how to be; it is up to him how he defines himself through his actions, to be is self-making in situation. A critical claim in existentialist thought is that individuals are always free to make choice and guide their lives towards their own chosen goal or "project". The claim holds that individuals cannot escape this freedom, even in overwhelming circumstances. For instance, even an empire's colonized victims possess choices: to submit to rule, to negotiate, to act in complicity, to commit suicide, to resist nonviolently, or to counter-attack. Park as a human is also free to define herself, to fail to recognize to one's own freedom is bad faith. As Sartre describes it: "One puts in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams"(qtd. *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction*, 72). Park So-nyo is in bad faith for she does no action to pursue her desire to

be literate. On contrary she puts forward Hyong-chol for her dream. To put a desire on other person's shoulder is she to go to sleep because one doesn't do actions in sleep. Mom put the responsibility of pursuing the dream of her to be literate on Hyong-chol which he was unknown. Man individually should be able to make himself through his actions. When Hyong-chol graduated from college and passed the entrance exam for the company, he works at now, Mother wasn't happy. She didn't even smile when the neighbors congratulated her on Hyong-Chol's employment at a top corporation, when he came with her first pay cheque, she barely looked at it. Shin writes; she coldly shot at him, "What about what you were going to be?"(96). Hyong-chol's failure hurt Mom more than Hyong-chol himself. When Hyong-chol failed to pursue Mom's dream she turns to the other way.

After mom went missing in Seoul station father went to Chongup alone. A woman named Hong Tae-hee comes from Hope house, an orphanage to fetch mother. Everyone in the family knew that mom did not know how to read but none of them helped her. When Hyong-chol went to Seoul for further studies, she relied on Chi-hon to read the letters he sent. Whenever some of her children ignored her, she would think it was her education: "This child is ignoring me because I don't have anything and have no education" (103). Kyung-sook Shin reveals Mom's interest in reading through her character Hong Tae-hee, when she says, "I was supposed to read her a book the book supposed to read to Mom was the book by Chi-hon, the novelist daughter, To Complete Love"(125). Shin has woven an irony between mom and Chi-hon; the daughter is a snappiest writer whereas the Mother is suffering the consequences of illiteracy. At this point Shin writes:

You remember how your wife looked hurt, as if you had insulted her, the day you found out that she didn't know how to read. She believed that her husband misbehaved her, because of her illiteracy... You wonder, 'How hard your wife must have worked to hide from this young woman the fact that she didn't know how to read. Your wife couldn't tell this young woman that the author was her daughter, but blamed her bad eyes and asked her to read it out loud. Your eyes sting. How was your wife able to restrain herself from bragging about her daughter to this young woman? (130-131)

In the above lines, It is clear that she has a life away from the family, but again mom choose to be inauthentic who is illiterate, has been getting someone to read out her daughter's novels to her. Too ashamed to admit that she can't read, she blames here eyes. By blaming to her eyes she was in self-deception; she might have been able to lie that young woman, but she was aware that was a lying to herself also. She was trying to escape from freedom of choice and responsibility. When the father comes to know that mom is illiterate she is hurt, mom notice that she has been an object of the other's look, therefore objectified. This objectification of my ego is only possible if the other is given as a subject. Mother could not read because of the facticity, and the facticity is she herself. It is because she didn't attempt to learn to read by herself. She is in despair and alienation, she is not herself. In her view the father and her children ignore her; she thinks so but doesn't try to break free. She felt proud of her daughter being a novelist, mother often boasted about her daughter. "If someone asked what her daughter did ... she said you wrote words" (180). But to save her from being objectified as an illiterate; mother

blames her bad eyesight and in her shame she could not tell Hong Tae-hee that the writer was her daughter. Park So-nyo is both deceiving the young woman and to herself. Park So-nyo being ignorant of her own freedom; she lived for others obeying the cultural norms, never feeling as an individual.

On November, Chi-hon returned from Pohang, where she had been for her to promote her newest book translated in Braille for blind people. She tells mother but her new experience saying that she was rejecting what exists. Of all the people she met, they listened to her words the most intently ... she told mother that they revealed such positive feeling about that book, more than anyone else she had encountered. Mother, who was listening quietly, said, "Still, even they've read your book" (33). ... "Even though he's blind travelling was his hobby" (33). Shin here has compared the blind people with mother, the blind people could not see with their eyes but through the eyes of education; they were able to see the world. Mom physically was able to see but was blind to the world. Park was not able to travel without the assistance of family members. Shin writes, "Nobody said aloud, but at some moment he and his family tacitly came to believe Mother couldn't go anywhere in this city by herself. So, whenever she came to Seoul, someone was with her" (100). Mother may have felt pity on herself. She must have felt alienation. Mom is both in despair and anguish. So, in her anguish she decides to pursue her dream, Mom says: One day, holding my pounding head, I promised myself that I would read at least one book that she wrote before she came back from Japan and I went to learn how to read, still holding my head. I couldn't continue when I tried to learn to read, my condition quickly got worse (219). Although mom was having a severe headache she chooses to go to read. Mom at this point accepts that there are things which human

has to achieve personally. Existentialists say that external circumstances may limit individuals; they cannot force a person to follow one of the remaining courses over another. In this sense the individual still has some freedom of choice. For this reason, individuals choose in anguish: they know that they must make a choice, and that it will have consequences. But again Mom surrenders to her facticity, her bad health. Mom's failure here is of not being true to be a true individual. To escape freedom is to assume the role of an object in the world, not a free agent, but merely at the mercy of circumstance, it is being-in-itself. Mother in being not able to gain her true 'self' is in alienation.

Park So-nyo marriage was a journey from a poor family to an extremely poor family, where her family could not send him to middle school though he wanted badly. Although, Kyun begged his brother and sister to let him go to school, they escaped their responsibility. When his brother and sister didn't listen to him, Kyun begged Park So-nyo. Park So-nyo insisted father to send Kyun to school by selling the garden but when her sister -in-law heard this, she drove Park away from the house to her hometown. Park So-nyo choose to insist to send Kyun to school but she too could not stand forth to take responsibility which haunted her through her life. Mom whispered, almost to herself, "When I got married, Kyun was the nicest to me ... I was his sister-in-law but I couldn't even send him to middle school, even though he wanted it so badly" (174) . Parks husband had a nomadic life; he wasn't at home when his second son was born; Kyun chopped down the old apricot tree to warm the mother and the baby. His sister was furious about cutting the tree because traditionally it was believed that if someone chop

down a family tree family members would start dropping dead. Presenting the dark side of Korean culture Shin writes:

Kyun yelled, 'I did it! Why are you accusing her?' Your sister grabbed Kyun by the throat. 'Did she tell you to chop it down? You bastard! You awful boy!' But Kyun refused to back down. His large dark eyes glittered in his pale face. 'Then do you want her to freeze to death in a cold room?' He asked. 'Freeze to death after having a baby. (170)

In the above lines Shin depicts the inhumanity of sister-in-law. In the existentialist view, a person is defined by his/her action, sister-in-law behave cruelly, and so, her character is of a cruel person. She is in the world of 'they'. She treats Park as less important than the apricot tree. For her the tradition is more important than a human life. Since existentialism take man as the central theme a philosophy, Kyun is authentic. Kyun decides by himself and he took the responsibility of cutting the tree. As an individual he dares to take responsibility. He choose not only freely, when he sees a needy, he not only looks and feels and at once without thinking rationally, without thinking what will other say; he decides and goes into action and take responsibility for his action, so here Kyun is authentic, but what happens when one is forced to take responsibility of the action not done. After the quarrel, Kyun in despair; he leaves for the city to work; and comes home with illness. The sister- in- law blame Park for his death; for which mom wasn't responsible. Shin writes:

Before they determined the cause of death, a rumor that she'd poisoned her brother-in-law with pesticide spread to the neighboring village. Your sister screamed at your wife, her eyes reddened, 'You killed my baby

brother!'Your wife was calm as she was being questioned by the
detectives. 'If you think I killed him, and then just put me away'. (171)

Existentialists say you are responsible for the actions you take but here mother was forced to take responsibility for what she had not committed. Perhaps, it is what Nietzsche says herd morality, or Heidegger's chatter or idle talk. Sartrean engagement can be usefully compared to common conceptions of moral responsibility. Sartre accepts the notion that a person should be held morally responsible for an action that she intentionally causes. Though there are no direct causes for Kyun's death. Kyun died because of frustration of not being to go to middle school. Kyun brother and sister rejected to be responsible to send him to school but Mom could not also stand forth to be responsible. Kyun's brother and sister both are guilty. The distinguishing mark of Sartre's view is his broad extension of the notion of causal responsibility. Sartre holds an extremely demanding view of negative responsibility (responsibility for omissions). Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* claims, "Passivity is equivalent to activity" (707). Any omitted action is an action for which an agent is culpable. In a variety of works, Sartre uses the case of war to illustrate his view. If I am the citizen of a nation at war then the war is "mine" and I bear a direct, personal responsibility for the action of my government. Sartre's essay "We Are All Assassins" ("Nous sommes tous des assassins," 1958) epitomizes his view: average French citizens are all equally culpable for the French government's action of enforcing the death penalty. According to Sartre Mom is also responsible for Kyun's death.

This situation made mom alienated, firstly, because of Kyun's death; he was only the one who behaved mom as human not an object of use, secondly, because she was

accused of killing her which left her torn into pieces, which left her in confusion; in the middle of night she would suddenly run out to the bathroom and crouch next to the toilet. She would put her hands out as if she was pushing someone away and scream, “It wasn’t me, it wasn’t me!”(175). Death of Kyun had led mom in complete isolation and alienation. And the behavior of sister-in-law and her husband was also made her feel homelessness, estranged from her environment. For mother the house more than a jail. Mother had even thought of committing suicide, which existentialist take as an inauthentic response to death. ... “After what happened to Kyun ... I just wanted to die. Everyone else made things difficult for me” (213).Mother’s life was so futile, dreadful that it was being hard tolerate for her. Mother’s sister- in- law is so cruel that she doesn’t give enough medicine even when she had diarrhea. Mother just had a baby hand she wanted to get well soon. But the sister –in-law said, “Why do you need more medicine? This is enough” (157). The sister-in-law and her husband didn’t get her medicine. “You realize that you’ve never handed your wife a glass of warm water when she couldn’t keep food down for days, her stomach upset” (155). Shin has shown the relation between mother and her family as slave and master. Mother is taken as an object of use not a human. According to Sartre both the party is in bad faith. To oppress another is to attempt to validate one’s sense of self by denying the freedom of another in Sartre’s view. Her husband and sister-in-law both are in alienation because they are also absorbed in the world of ‘they’. Both of them are functioning through their social roles. They are suppressing Mom by their superior position given by social norms. The self-contradictory nature of oppression led him to the optimistic conclusion that oppression is not an inevitable, ontological condition, but a historical reality that should be contested, through

both self-assertion and collective action. In this regard Shin writes: Animals don't eat when they're ill. Cows, pigs ... when they're ill they stop eating. Even chickens, the dog stops eating when it's ill. ... People are the same way. My stomach is not feeling well, and even the food is great, it's like poison when it gets inside (157). Mother had been all her life farming, she was quite aware of the habits of animals; what they do when they are ill. Mother being absorbed in her environment feels like an animal herself. Mother here doesn't have any power of decision in her family. She is suppressed by the 'they'. Her subjectivity is invaded by the 'they'. She no more feels herself as a subject who has the capacity to build her own identity, she is attached to the fixed identity given by the 'they.' Much of the time Dasein is in the world in the way as dogs, pigs and chickens are. But Dasein is also in the world in another sense, a sense in which other entities are not. Dasein is aware of and familiar with the world, aware of other things in the world and itself, and it is so in virtue of its "understanding of being"(Inwood, 31). Park so-nyo takes herself as an object, and behaves like an animal. Park does so, because she is behaved that way. She finds herself no way better than those animals.

In *Please Look After Mom* Park-so-nyo married father at the age of seventeen, fell into a situation of poverty. Her husband had a nomadic life; Shin writes, "You left this house whenever you wanted to, and came back at your whim" (140). Father never took responsibility though he chooses to marry and have children. He never wanted to live his entire life farming. "You were preoccupied not with marriage but with how to raise money to open a brewery" (141). Father was free to choose he chooses freely not to do action but only wander. Through his life he was just dreaming, a day dreamer. Existentialists call this bad faith. It is to flee from what it actually is. Father was denying

who he is. In Heidegger's view it is inauthentic; when Dasein realizes that he is free and also does not want to deal with freedom. It is clear that father did not have any intention to marry but choose to marry. In this regard Kyung-sook Shin writes:

In those days, it was common for people to marry without ever having glimpsed each other's faces. ... Once the ceremony date was set, people teased you if you smiled, saying that you must be happy to be getting married. You neither liked nor disliked the idea. Because your sister did all of the housework in your house, everyone said you had to hurry up and get married. It made senses, but it occurred to you that you couldn't live with a woman you'd never even laid eyes on. (141)

Kyung-sook Shin here portrays picture of Korean culture where marriage was possible without looking at each other, that means marriage was traditionally chosen. Father chooses to marry but "neither liked nor disliked the idea" (141); he was in dilemma to be or not to be. Finally he chose to marry because "everyone said you had to hurry up and get married" (141). Their marriage was to fall into the 'they'. Father married only because it was said by the 'they' though he had no intention to marry. Father married mom because he needed someone to do housework, which is to say that he needed something useful; a tool to finish his housework. In his view, the mother was only an object of use. He was deceiving both mother and himself. He was clearly aware the purpose of his marriage and he couldn't live with a woman whom he was about to marry. He both denies the existence of mother and himself. Bad faith refers to any sort of self-deception which denied the existence of human freedom. According to Sartre, bad faith occurs when someone tries to rationalize our existence or actions through religion,

science, or some other belief system which imposes meaning or coherence on human existence. Father rationalizes his actions through tradition.

Father's irresponsibility put mom an extra burden on her shoulder, to look after the house hold, to provide food for the growing number of children and to educate them. Mother took the responsibility but her choice to take the family turns her to a working machine. Shin portrays mother as a typical Korean traditional mother who is ready to sacrifice her desires, her life for the betterment of the family, having no time to think herself as an individual. Lesley Slack, (*BLOGCRITICS.ORG*) in book review of Kung – sook Shin's novel *Please Look After Mom* writes: "While the family looks for their lost mother they reflect on the sacrifices that she made on their behalf; and how they rarely demonstrated their appreciation for the woman whose life revolved around making other people happy"(10). Lesley slack puts that mother's life was for the others, her husband, her children, her family and society. Though existentialists say humans are not objects to be used by God or a government or corporation or society. Nor are we to be "adjusted" or molded into roles --to be only a waiter or a conductor or a mother or worker. We must look deeper than our roles and find ourselves. Park So-nyo took the opposite way. Park So-nyo accepts the role of wife and mother according to the traditional Korean culture.

Mother has been always useful to the family. When her eldest son Hyong-chol needed his high school graduation certificate and sent a letter requesting father to go to the bus terminal with a copy of the certificate and ask someone coming to Seoul to take it for him and asked to call him He waited and waited, but there was no phone call. In the middle of the night, as he was wondering what he could do about the application, which was due the next day, someone bandaged the door on the door of the office, where he was

living at the time. The employees had to take turns on night duty, but since he didn't have a place to stay, it was decided that he would live in the night duty room he was on duty every night. His mother was standing ... shivering in the cold. Before he could say anything she said, "Hyong-chol, it's me, mother!"(77).

Father was away from home but this dutiful mother after Hyong-chol's sister read his letter to her, she went to his high school, got a copy of his certificate and hopped on the train. This clearly show that how much she loved and cared for her family. In the night mom sleeps next to the wall to save him from draught; saying, "I can fall asleep better if I'm next to the wall" (79). This clearly shows her devotion and love toward her first born child Hyong-chol. Mother has been habituated to work; At dawn when he woke up, mother was sweeping the office floor; ... "as if she would be punished if she weren't doing anything" (82).Mother is absorbed in the world of the 'they', she acts as if she was born to work for the family. When father was at home she was always ready to help him.

Shin writes:

Sometimes you stood in the spot and watched your wife busily doing something in the shed, and she would look over at you even if you didn't call her. And she'd ask, 'What? Do you need something? If you said, where are my socks? I want to go to the town,' she would quickly peel off her rubber gloves and come inside to find your clothes for you. (139)

In the above lines Shin conveys that mother was always trying to identify her as something useful, something ready- to- hand. It seems that she is always waiting for an order from her husband. But what Existentialists say is 'be yourself,' although they do not suggest being eccentric. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger's aim is to get at the meaning

of 'Being'. That is, Heidegger wants to understand what a thing is in its most basic state, or what makes a thing the thing that it is. An important part of understanding Being is inquiring into the necessary structures that beings exist in. For example, human beings are defined by the world we live in, by the fact that we are aware of our Being, and that Being is an issue for us. Mother in *Please Look After Mom*, wants herself to be noticed as something useful. "I can just live here, and if I can't live here by myself, I can go to Hyong-chol's and be useful-peel garlic and clean" (147). Heidegger's focus on the meaning of Being is centered on human beings; however, in theory, he does not limit his inquiry into the meaning of Being to human beings alone. In fact, Heidegger employs the term "Dasein" which is meant to capture a broad range of beings. Essentially Dasein is, "that for which being is an issue" (32). But in his view he also adds that Dasein can go wrong, like Park So-nyo, when absorbed in the world she dwells, without being an issue to her Being, living inauthentically. It is up to the Dasein how to live in different ways in which humans interact with the rest of society, and the ways in which they choose to live their lives. The goals mother set for their future is helpful to the family, and by this way she lose the nature of her own and fall into averageness. Shin gives another example of her being ready-to-hand in the following excerpt: Around the time the fee for middle school was due, the gold ring that used to be on Mother's middle left finger, her sole piece of jewellery, disappeared from her hand. Only the groove on her finger, etched by many years of wearing the band, was left behind (41). In the above excerpt, Shin has revealed mother was always ready to give everything for her family. Though mother had desire to be literate herself which she could not fulfill, she was ready to help her children by any means. The mother is ready to sacrifice everything for her family. She chooses

Chi-hon to go to study in Seoul but put the responsibility on Hyong-chol. "Since she's a girl, she has to get more schooling. Somehow you have to make it possible for her to go to school here. I can't have her live like me?" (97). Existentialists call this, bad faith. One is free to choose, but one must be responsible for the choice made. Mother is not able to take her responsibilities so, she is inauthentic, and so, she is in alienation. Authenticity is often taken to mean "the real thing," or, "an original." It is something true to its Being, true to oneself. The authentic person is she who is an original, or is living a "real," non-superficial life. Mom living a life for only others can't be called authentic. She is only fulfilling the role of a mother. Mother's devotion to work has made a portrait of her, in this connection Shin writes:

Since father was the eldest, there was always a relative or two staying with us. I don't think Mother liked being in the kitchen at all. You were caught off guard. You had never thought of Mother as separate from kitchen. Mother was the kitchen and kitchen was mother. You never wondered, did mother like being in the kitchen? (57-58)

In the above lines Shin reveals the truth of mother figure. Mom had worked hard to make her children's life comfortable, sacrificing her whole life to work and the family. She lived for them; having no time for her own dreams and desires. She has been tied to an image 'mother'. Her children find her no separate identity from the kitchen. To look mother as kitchen is not to view 'Dasein' as Dasein. It is an error. But when Dasein fails to make its own identity; absorbed in average everydayness can be seen as an object. For Sartre it is to dwell in bad faith. Mother has been attached to the role 'mother', she sees no other possibilities. Chi-hon now grown-up, a novelist, asks mother if she liked

being in the kitchen. "Did you like being in the kitchen? Did you like to cook?" (63). Mother replied: "I don't like or dislike the kitchen. I cooked because I had to. I had to stay in the kitchen so you could all eat and go to school. How could you only do what you like? There are things you have to do whether you like it or not" (63). In this connection Shin writes:

I couldn't see an end to it. At least with farming, if you plant seeds in the spring you harvest them in the fall. If you plant spinach seeds, there is spinach, where you plant corn, there's corn. But there's no beginning or end to kitchen work you eat breakfast, then its lunch, and it's dinner, and when it's bright again, its breakfast again. It might have been better if I could have made different side dishes, but since the same things were planted in the fields, always made the same panchan. If you do it over and over, there are times when you get so sick of it. When the kitchen felt like a prison. I went out the back and picked up the most misshapen jar lid and threw it as hard as could at the wall.

When went to get the new lid, I thought it was so wasteful and felt terrible, but I couldn't stop. The sound of the lid breaking was medicine to me. I felt free. (63-64)

Kyung-sook Shin reveals that her protagonist in the novel longs for freedom. Her feeling kitchen as a prison and breaking the jar lids shows that she is in existential anguish. It shows her desire to be free. When life is the same every day, doing the same things again and again makes the mother feel sick. She feels boredom having no change in her life but does not attempt to look for other possibilities. Instead of searching the possible was to

express her freedom, she breaks, and jar lids when she feels like being in a prison in the kitchen. She is forced to do the job, for it is the duty of a mother to take care of the family, whether she liked or disliked. She does the duty as they do, for her it was not the question of choice or freedom. She thinks that she can't make a choice to escape from her boredom because it's her duty. Her view is that one has to do the duty whether one likes or not. Existentialists say that man is tied by norms everywhere, if only the person thinks that way. For existentialists there are no true norms. Human can't have fixed significance, like animals and other entities. Human choose what is good for him; what is true for him. Sartre 's straightforward vision of existentialism lays emphasis upon the existence of individual-“first of all man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only after wards defines himself”(13).For existentialists, man is responsible for his actions and how he defines himself. So, mother here is herself responsible for being objectified. She herself has created her own figure through her actions. Though mother is in her old age, has constant bad head-aches, is suffering from cancer and dementia; Chi-hon still believes: “You never stopped calling her Mom. Even now, when Mother's missing. When you call out “Mom” you want to believe that she's healthy. That Mom is strong. That Mom isn't fazed by anything” (19).Entities like stones can remain the same but human can both be changed and can't have fixed significance. Mom did her duty whether she was well or not. Her actions made her children think that she is always healthy, strong and never fazed by anything. The children take Mother as granted; they don't notice her before she went missing. Chi-hon reflects:

I want to read to children who cannot see. ...

I want to own a small theatre. ...

I want to go on pilgrimage to Santiago. Underneath were thirty more sentences starting with 'I'.

'What is this?' Last New Year's Eve, I wrote down what I wanted to do with my life, other than writing. Just for fun. The things I wanted to do in next ten years. But I didn't plan on doing anything with mother. I didn't realize that while I was writing it. But now, when I look at it after Mother's gone missing. ... (118-19)

In the above lines Shin gives the sense that Mother had nothing of her as her 'self'; She was no more than 'categorical' that have fixed significance; the significance for human use. A thing is noticed only when human thinks of using it or when it goes wrong. It is inconspicuous when it is ready-to-hand; just lying here or there. When one finds it not in workable condition, it comes in existence as something to be made or repaired. And when it get lost or removed from its proper place, it comes to be noticed. It shows its existence in absence but only when there is Dasein to perceive it. In the absence of Dasein, it no more exists. Shin gives strong impressions that mother losing her own 'self' is no more than a categorical. Mother's children realize that before she went missing, she was not present to them.

In *Please Look After Mom*, Shin here highlights that her grown up children no more need her. Now the children ignore her, the value she carries doesn't make any sense to her children. They don't come to the ancestral rites and family get together. Shin puts how much the children ignored her in the following excerpt:

One parents Day in May, years ago, none of the children called. you wife went to the stationary shop in town and bought two carnation buds, each

ties to a ribbon that said, 'Thank you for giving me life and raising me'. She found you standing by the new road and urged you to come home, what if someone sees us? You follow her home. She persuaded you to come inside and locked the door, then pinned a carnation to the front of your jacket, 'What would people say if we went around without a flower pinned to our cloths when everyone knows now many children we have? That's why I bought these your wife fastened a flower on her clothes, too. The flower kept drooping, so she repined it twice. You took off the flower as soon as you left the house again, but your wife went around the whole day with the flower. (127)

In the above excerpt Shin highlights that children having no use of them no more cares them; they could not even make a phone call and make a wish. The Mother was in fear; she thought that what others would think if they knew that their children no more care them. She buys flower buds and pin them on their shirts. Mother knows that her child doesn't care them but she pretends that they love her; she is deceiving herself. Maureen Corrigan in *'Please Look After Mom': A Guilt Trip To The Big City* writes her children as "breast beating children" (1). The children are absorbed in their city lives as the parents are absorbed in traditional values. They don't even come in home to celebrate their parents' birthday. Their parents have to go to the city to celebrate their birthdays. Shin writes:

At some point, the children's trip to your Chongup became less frequent, and Mother and father started to come Seoul more often. And then you began to celebrate each of their birthdays by going out for dinner. That

was easier. Then even Mother suggested, 'Let's celebrate my birth day on father's. She said it would be a burden to celebrate their birthdays separately, since both happen during the hot summer, when there are also two ancestral rites only two days apart. ... Then you all started to give Mother her birthday gift on father's birthday. Eventually, quietly, Mother's birthday was bypassed. Mother, who liked to buy socks for everyone in the family, had in her dresser a growing collection of socks that her children didn't take. (3)

In the above excerpt the protagonist sacrifices her birthday so that it may not be a burden to her children. In existentialist sense, a birthday is the day in which a person is thrown into the world. Macheal Inwood writes, "He may choose to die, but he cannot choose to be born, or to be born in a situation rather than another'. He is, as Heidegger puts it, 'thrown' into the world. But once Dasein is thrown, it has more control over its own being than just the option of suicide if it does not like what it is"(24). It is clear that to be born is not transferable, it is the point where life starts in ordinary sense. Existentialists take it as the starting point from where the Dasein starts to try to understand the world; he knows the world and he chooses his way among various possibilities in making himself. A birthday is the identity of coming into the world.

Then, why did Mom choose herself to celebrate her birthday on father's? In fact mother was suffering alienation, alienation of not being able to create her own identity. Mother could not define her separate identity from father. So, she may have chosen to celebrate her birthday on father's birthday. No one calls by her name. She is someone's wife, someone's mother, someone's sister-in-law; never just herself. In the whole novel, Lee

Eun-gyu (that man) was only the person to ask her name. Mom reflects: "You were the first person since I got married to ask me my name" (212). Park So-nyo meant little girl in Korean language which may refer to any of the little girls. Park So-nyo doesn't even have a proper name. Her children came to know after she went missing that she doesn't have a fixed birth date too. When Chi-hon write mother's birth date as 24 July, 1938, her father corrects saying that she was born in 1936. Official records show that she was born in 1938, but apparently she was born in 1936. Mother had nothing that could be said to be her own, not even her birthday. The other cause of celebrating birth day together was, the ancestral rites and the way they celebrate their birthday by going out for dinner. Which was easier, Mother made her children much easier by celebrating their birthday together. Mother's philosophy of her life was to help others and never to be a burden to others. Mother could sacrifice birthday but not ancestral rites. Everyone family knew: "When your Mother went to market and bought a red skate and dropped it next to the well, this meant that an ancestral rite was approaching" (45). To existentialists action speaks; Mother who buys socks as gifts for her children, the gifts are not taken. That means they no more longs for her love, which is love rejected. The two generations are not able to understand each other, in this connection Shin writes:

Mother said, weakly, "You're right", and said she would go into town and get some rice cakes-she always gets rice cakes for your birthday. So I said, 'Don't nobody eats those rice cakes any way and we just take them home and put them in the freezer. "I told her not to act like a country bumpkin; she should just go to Seoul without taking anything. She asked me if I

really stuck all the rice cakes in the freezer, so I said, "Yes, I even have some that are three years old." And she cried, 'You're a bitch'. (179)

In the above Shin convey the traditional attitudes of Mother that she likes to take rice cakes for her children. Her children find no interest in rice cakes she brings. When the children were little it was one of their favorite dishes. Their mother believing that her children love them took rice cakes on special occasions. When Chi-hon tells her that nobody eats rice cakes, Mother is hurt. She finds herself completely in estrangement. It was not the family she knew; she feels homelessness. She feels more alienated when her daughter tells her not to act like a country bumpkin. The daughter objectifies Mom as country bumpkin which reminds Mother's failure to be literate. The children have differentiated between Mother and them, City and rural, literate and illiterate, the modern and the traditional. Mom felt hurt whenever her illiteracy became an issue. Chi-hon punched in the heart of mother; she is wounded, she calls her daughter a bitch when Chi-hon called her country bumpkin and yelled at her. Chi-hon herself reflects: "Mother hates it when we yell ... and we always yell at her" (179). Mother's highest values have been devalued. Mother's children care her less than a dog. Shin has built a bitter irony in the following excerpts:

But Mother insisted, nobody, not even in the country, lets their dog run around. Everyone ties their dog on a chain if you don't, it'll get lost.' You shot back, "Then you have to get a longer chain. If you tie it up with such a short chain, now is a dog supposed to survive in this heat? Do you treat it like that just because it can't speak up for itself? 'I gave you the money for it and everything, country people are terrible...How can such a big dog

live in such a small contraption? Otherwise, let him roam free in the yard, don't you feel bad for the dog?"(50-51)

In the above excerpt Shin has compared between Mom and the dog. As the dog is tied in chains mother is also tied in the traditional chains. It is not because she wanted to be but forced to take the role of Mother. Their children think that Mom can't go anywhere in the city and if she does; she will get lost and the dog will be lost if left free. It is because no one helps her do the work, everyone takes mom as granted. The overloaded work of mother, her bad health and illiteracy is compared to the "heat". The irony comes when Chi-hon asks Mom; do you treat it like that just because it can't speak up for itself? Chi-hon asks the question but the question aims towards her. The questions are for Chi-hon herself; do you treat Mom like this because she is illiterate or because she is traditional or Do you treat her like this because she never spoke for herself? When Chi-hon asks Mom, "Don't you feel bad for the dog?"(51). Mom answers back-"You only care about the dog and not your own mother" (51). Kyung-sook Shins reveals the truth that if one loses ones individuality he is like an animal or an entity like tools. Through Mom's example Shin conveys her existential view. Through her actions Mom could not define herself as an authentic self.

Heidegger claims that the only way "to achieve authenticity is to live a life in pursuit of possibility, and that we pursue this through resoluteness" (345). However, Heidegger is careful to note that living a life of pure possibility is not what it means to be authentic, because authenticity does not involve one becoming a "free-floating 'I' (344). Heidegger then goes on to imply that the authentic life is striking a balance between actuality and possibility (344). There is no doubt that Mom has been a successful mother

but it is not her own self. Central to existentialist philosophy is the notion that existence precedes essence. Hence, our essence is not determined before we are born, which is to say that we create our essence through our free choices. Thus, we ought not to be defined by what we might currently be, but rather, by what we may potentially become. As an existentialist, Heidegger reinforces this notion by saying that not only do we create ourselves through our actions, but it is a necessary part of our being that we define ourselves through possibility: “In determining itself as an entity, Dasein always does so in the light of a possibility which it is itself...” (69). Heidegger later adds to this by saying, “Dasein is in every case what it can be, and in the way in which it is its possibility” (183). In other words, possibility is an essential part of our Being; this is part of what it means to be human. Hence, when Heidegger says that authenticity lies in possibility, he means that we can break free from the actual circumstances of everydayness that we each find ourselves in, and live a more authentic life by confronting possibility. Actuality has to do with the actual circumstances we find ourselves in. Possibility has to do with our potential for becoming. Being a traditional mother she doesn't have too much desire but a few desires, like being literate, travelling etc. She didn't get to chance to fulfill her desires because of herself; making busy in the house hold, she doesn't herself think as a human. I don't think I ever thought I was in my youth (206).

In *Please Look After Mom*, Park So-nyo's husband has been presented as a person who tries to escape from the anxiety of freedom. He chooses to be a husband be never tried to be responsible. “You thought that you didn't love your wife very much, because you married her only seeing her once, but every time you left home and some time

passed, she reappeared in your thoughts”(144).The father always ignored mother, to him she was merely an object of use. But in fact he was deceiving himself. He thinks that he doesn't love and leaves home but that can't last more than three seasons. He knows that he is deceiving himself. Mother and father both are in self deception because mom when father brought home a fair lady. Mother left home and after some days she came home and drove both the lady and the husband away for the sake of her children. She thinks that she didn't want see him again but after some days she put rice in his bowl and keeps in the warmest part of the house. They know they love each other but can't expose the 'self' they have. They are living a lie. They think they don't love but have four children that is to say that they are not realizing themselves fully as human but an object of human producing machines. They are denying their freedom. The husband always moves ahead of mother, that is to behave according to the social norms, it is to think that woman is inferior. In this connection Shin writes:

She would tell you, I'm sorry but what would people say if they saw us? If they saw us, who live together, but one person is all the way up there and the other person is all the way back here, they would say, "Those people must hate each other so much that they can't even walk next to each other "It's not good to appear that way to other people. I won't try to hold your hand or anything. So let's just go slower. What are you going to do if you lose sight of me? You'd stopped and waited for her, but you'd never walked next to her, conversing with her, as she wanted-not even once.

(152)

Existentialists do not distinguish between man and woman but they take human as a whole collection of individuals. Father here pretends that he doesn't love her but in doing so he is moving far away from himself. He has made an object out of himself. Father, knows that what mom is saying to show his superiority he walks leaving her behind. Heidegger refers to this concept of the One in explaining inauthentic modes of existence, in which Dasein, instead of truly choosing to do something, does it only because "That is what one does" or "That is what people do". Father did this because traditionally women were thought to be the second 'other,' as Margaret Hillenbrand puts in *Financial Times Book Review*: Confucian lore holds that a woman is always defined in relation to her significant others. She is someone's daughter, sister, wife, mother, and mother-in-law – never just herself (8). Consistent with his general methodology, Sartre in Critique denied that oppression reduces to either individual attitudes or impersonal social structures. Oppression is simultaneously "praxis" (the result of intentional acts) and "process" (a supra-individual phenomenon, irreducible to intentional states of individuals) (716). In *Notebooks*, Oppression is defined by Sartre as the "exploitation of man by man . . . characterized by the fact that one class deprives the members of another class of their freedom" (562). The father is in complete slave to the traditional behavior, mother who showed love through her actions; who was always on her side whenever he needed her used to behave her like a dog that is fated to follow its master. Shin writes: "Habit can be a frightening thing. You spoke politely with others, but your words turned sullen towards your wife. Sometimes you even swore at her" (135). On the interpersonal level, oppression is a master/slave relationship; the oppressor tries to gain a robust sense of selfhood by dominating others. Sartre, like Hegel, showed that domination is a self-

defeating practical attitude. The dominator tries to force others to recognize him as superior; but ironically, the dominator receives little confirmation of his superiority as he has ruled out in advance the weight of others' judgments (Anti-Semite and Jew, 27).

Father's oppression can be seen in the following excerpt:

Once in a while, when your wife said her stomach hurt, you were the kind of person who would reply, 'My back hurts, when you were ill, your wife put a hand on your forehead and rubbed your stomach and went to the pharmacy for medicine and made you mung-bean porridge, but when she wasn't feeling well, you just told her to take some medicine. You realize that you've never even handed your wife a glass of warm water when she couldn't keep food down for days her stomach upset. (154)

This shows the dominance of father but he himself is wounded by his action. 'Because of rage or whatever it is, pouring down your face unstoppable. Tears that didn't come when your neighbors buried your parents, who died two days apart' ... (153). He had been so cruel to mother that mother got emotionally isolated all her life. Only when mom goes missing he remembers her. The bases of father's is not his self-image but the image of patriarchal society; on the fact that he is not a woman but in doing so, he becomes depended upon the mother other from whom he claims total independence. He could do nothing without mother, he not only make mom feel loneliness but he himself is not true to his own 'self'. Therefore he is in alienation. Ultimately, the father receives no satisfaction from domination because he solicits recognition from someone he denigrates. For father and her children mother was inconspicuous, she was everywhere and nowhere. She was like air to them breathing in and out. He doesn't see her even as a wife. "Before

you lost sight of your wife on the Seoul station underground platform, she was merely your children's mother to you" (132). Father has taken mom as children; worst than a prostitute; at least the prostitute is paid for the pleasure she gives. Father not only suppressed mother he took her as a non-being which has no feelings, no desires, he reflects:

She was like a steady tree, until you found yourself in a situation where you might not ever see her again- a tree that wouldn't go away unless it was chopped down or pulled out. After your children's mother went missing, you realized that it was your wife who was missing, your wife, who you'd forgotten about for fifty years, was present in your heart. Only after she disappeared did she come to you tangibly, as if you could reach out and touch her. (132)

From the above lines two things are clear; first, how the father took mom in his understanding; second, what the mother had exist image mom has created of herself. Mother taking the role of a mother gets lost in-itself. As Fackenheim writes: - Sartre's Slogan- "existence precedes essence" – may serve to introduce what is most distinctive of existentialism, namely, the idea that no general, non-formal account of what it means to be human can be given, since that meaning is decided in and through existing itself. Existence is "Self-making-in-a situation" (Fackenheim 1961: 37). To the existentialists we have to create our being. We have no pre-given meaning. Mom also creates a picture through her actions. Father left home at his whim, but mom was always there farming, cooking and taking care of the children. He compares her with a tree. In the same way, her younger daughter takes her as kitchen and kitchen not separate from her. Mother has

created an identity of object that makes her feel alienation. Mom through her hard labor made her family able to settle in Seoul. She educated them. Mother had been strength the whole family. Now everyone ignore her she doesn't have anything that could say her own. So, it is clear that she is in alienation. She is unable to gain her 'self.' Kyun-sook shin's *Please Look After Mom*, is an answer to the question, what happens if one lose one's individuality? How the others look? The protagonist of the Novel Park So-nyo grew up in a poor family; married to an extremely poor family; through her effort and support the children get education, settle in Seoul. She lived in isolation, estranged and in alienation in her home town in Chong up before she went missing at the Seoul sub-way station on the way to visit her grown up children to celebrate their (mother's and father's) birth day with her husband.

III. Quest for Selfhood

The research work studies Kyung-sook Shin's *Please Look After Mom* from the perspective of existentialism, mainly from the conceptual framework developed by Martin Heidegger and Jean Paul Sartre. This thesis has attempted to trace out the alienation in the life of Park So-nyo, the protagonist and his family and how they are responsible for their own choice. In the novel, it is the choices of the characters that bring alienation in their lives. The characters enter into the den of Heidegger's 'they' and refuse to face the light of Sartre's being -for-itself.

In the novel we find that alienation is not only the product of modern society but also prevailed in the pre-modern traditional societies, it not specific to any historic period. People in the past also had the feeling of individuality and their failure to be true to their own being brought alienation. Any so called valuable norms will devalue as time pass, and the new value emerges. The traditional value Park So-nyo carried gets lost when her children adopt city lives. The two generations are unable to understand each other through the values they carry. Park So-nyo being a traditional woman, found meaning in being useful to the family. She works through her life for the betterment of the family without reflecting the meaning of being, feels alienation when she found there was nothing which she could call her own. Fulfilling her social role and forgetting her own individuality, left her in alienation. So, instead of feeling at home in her own house and with her own family, she feels alienated. Her choice of sending her children to live in a better world comes to be a curse upon her, one of the causes of alienation.

This research has excavated the way Kyung-sook Shin tries to bring to the light the human situation in the Post war Korea. Park So-nyo is an illiterate woman who had a

dream to be literate and in her anguish send her children to be educated. Her children being educated doesn't make the mother capable to read. All her life she had relied on somebody to read. Only after ignored by her children, she comes to know that there are things which should be achieved individually.

The father (husband) tries to suppress her because he was superior according to the Patriarchal norms. Though he had no contribution in the family, still he is superior in position. He thinks that he can't live with a woman (Park So-nyo) whom he had chosen to marry without looking her, and leaves home at his whim but that can't last more than one or two seasons. Every time he leaves home, he thinks of never returning again but returns. He thinks he doesn't love mother but still lives with her and bears five children. Mom too thinks that she doesn't want to see him again when father comes and leaves home with a fair lady but after some days keeps food for him in a bowl in the warmest place in the house, indirectly welcoming him.

When the children grew up and settled in Seoul began to ignore. The traditional value mom carried had been devalued. Mother who married before her first period but her daughter in her forties was still unmarried; her younger daughter has three children. She has a boyfriend Yubin with whom she already has a relationship of a wife and husband where her mother doesn't let her hand touch to that man whom she loves. The children no longer care about ancestral rites; doesn't like the food prepared by mom which used to be their favorite dishes. They are too busy in their city lives that they can't come to meet their parents; their parents themselves go to celebrate their birthday to their children.

Though mother was ignored by her husband, sister-in-law and her children; though she had a very hard life; she had built some norms for her life. Her philosophy

was to help others, be useful to others and not be a burden to others. First, because she had to do, whether she liked or not; the whole family responsibility was on her shoulder. Later, because she 'willed to'. She feeds the two little girls daily whose grandmother could not feed them because of poverty and old age. She breast feed the son of that man whose mother died during the birth of the son due to malnutrition. Again, the most important is that she names an orphan boy Kyun, the name of her brother in law whom she was not able to take responsibility to send him to school and to this Kyun she has taken responsibility and almost a mother to him.

Park So-nyo left the Seoul station because she forgets where she was going, she had dementia. Dementia is forgetting for some time, not always. Kung-sook Shin has juxtaposed mother's life with her illness. Mother had forgotten herself as an individual but now she comes to know, so forgetting here is remembering her 'self'. The mother then goes to that man, her secret; she meets him who has the same illness of forgetting. When mom asks, 'what is your name?' he replies, 'Park So-nyo'. From there mom moves to see the world which was one of her dream. Now, Park So-nyo is free; she has become what Nietzsche called 'free spirits'. There is no family boundary, no love, and no terror. She is free, free, free at last.

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