

Chapter 1

Hang Kang and *The Vegetarian*

Context and the Issues

The Vegetarian was written by Hang Kang in 2007 based on Kang's 1997 short story "The Fruit of My Woman." She was born in Gwangju, South Korea and moved to Seoul at the age of ten. She studied Korean Literature at Yonsei University. Her writing has won the Yi Sang Literary Prize, the Today's Young Artist Award, and the Korean Literature Novel Award. *The Vegetarian*, was translated into English by the British translator Deborah Smith and was published in January 2015 in the UK and February 2016 in the US, after which it received international critical acclaim with critics praising Kang's writing style and Smith's translation. In May 2016, it won the 2016 Man Booker International Prize. *The Vegetarian* thus became the first recipient of the award after its reconfiguration in 2015, prior to which it was awarded to an author's body of work rather than a single novel.

The Vegetarian is a collection of three acts: 'The Vegetarian', 'The Mongolian Mark' and 'Flaming Trees'. Through the main character named Yeong-hye, Kang metaphorically presents the hidden ideology of anti-patriarchy. The central character abstains from meat and mate as a metaphorical discourse to abstain from patriarchal domination. In traditional society, patriarchy has come down as a mode of domination. The same legacy is seen in matters of meat and mate. Meat directly symbolizes violence almost similar to violence of males upon females in patriarchal society. In such a society, mating also represents male's superiority over females. The way the modern world takes mating is quite different from the traditional concept of mating. Traditionally this act symbolizes males' power over females. In this way, by connecting patriarchy with meat and mate, Kang tries to reveal how these two aspects

of society support each other. The author finds plant life almost free from domination and violence therefore, she favours plant life in contrast to animal life.

The vegetarian tells the story of Yeong-hye, a married woman who wants to live by herself. One day she sees a series of bloody dreams involving images of animal slaughter. This dream keeps her apart from meat and mate. The bloody dreams encourage her to live plant life. The story in the novel is told in three parts: The Vegetarian, Mongolian Mark, and The Flaming Tree. The first part is narrated by Yeong-hye's husband Mr Cheong in the first person in past tense. The second part is narrated in third person focusing on Yeong-hye's brother-in-law in the past tense and in the third part is also narrated in the third person but focusing on her sister, In-hye mostly using present tense. The story revolves around dreams, food, existence, art and nature.

In the first part, Yeong-hye's husband Mr Cheong takes her to be completely unremarkable in any way. He explains that when he meets her for the first time, he is not even attracted to her and she suits him just fine and he marries her not because of her smartness but of her plainness upon whom he can govern easily. After several years of marriage one day early in the morning, he finds his wife standing in the kitchen anything like, which makes the beginning of the novel. In the morning, Mr Cheong while his wife is depositing all of the meat products in the fridge asks the reasons but she simply says, "...I had a dream" (6). After that day, he fails to feed meat and sleep for mating and he is hapless. Her parents invite both of them for dinner and on the day, father attempts to feed her pork, she does not accept then he asks to other two males, to her husband and brother to hold her arms, father even slaps on cheek and she breaks away and splits the pork, grabs a fruit knife and slits her wrist. The family rushes to a hospital. At the hospital, she goes out naked, there she

finds a bird, catches it, which has 'a predator's bite', and she asks herself, if she has done something wrong. To her such behaviour, Mr Cheong admits to himself that she has become mentally unstable.

In the second part Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, J, a video artist finds her fully naked when he visits her after she got divorced in two years of her vegan life. He imagines a video focusing on her Mongolian mark (birthmark) shaped like a petal. He thought of a love-making scene between two people with their bodies decorated by painted flowers. Yeong-hye agrees to model for him and paints flowers across her body in a rented studio in the area. A boy is hired by her brother-in-law. Yeong-hye and he are involved in a sexual video. To the boy when brother-in-law asks to join in actual sex, but he leaves. Yeong-hye who had become aroused, informs that she has been wet and wanted sex with the boy due to the flower painted on him. Her lust motivates her brother-in-law. He paints flowers on his body with the help of his friend P and visits Yeong-hye. They two engage in real sexual intercourse and the live is recorded with a video camera. The record is discovered the next day by his wife, In-hye. She says that both of them have mental problems and need psychiatrics' treatment. He manages to jump from the balcony but remains undone. Meanwhile, he is accompanied by people and sent to a police cell.

After the previous event, Yeong-hye comes down mentally and physically day by day. There remains only her sister, In-hye, to visit, look after and support her. Her condition declines instead of recovery. She is admitted to a mental hospital at Mount Chukseong, where despite receiving high level treatment for mania, she behaves gradually more plant-like life. Once she escapes the hospital and is found standing in a forest "Soaked with rain as if she herself were one of the glistening trees" (124). In-hye presents herself that she is in depression and instability. She visits and tries to

feed Yeong-hye, but instead of eating, Yeong-hye gives up food altogether. The doctors and nurses tried to feed her through a pipe but she refused to eat anything. To Yeong-hye, the doctor forces to feed rice gruel with pipe but the blood comes and splits to him and nurses, too. In-hye, who is always looking through, embraces Yeong-hye, avoiding all of them from there. Then she takes her away to another hospital.

Review of Literature

Different critics have commented upon this novel, *The Vegetarian* from different critical angles since it was first published in its original form in 2007 and later in English in 2015 by Debora Smith. According to De Standaard der Letteren, it is an “exciting and original” (Letteren, Editorial Rev.). an amazing sort of book with beautiful, unsettling stories about rebellion and taboo, violence and eroticism, and the twisting metamorphosis of the protagonist. It is all about the centre character ‘Yeong-hye’, who chooses a vegan life all of a sudden after her bloody and slaughtering nightmare.

Set in contemporary South Korea, it explores the life of a young married woman, whose decision to give up meat ends up devastating two families (her own, her and her sister In-hye’s). Debora Smith writes in the Hennepin County Library, “It’s a small act of independence, but it interrupts her marriage and sets into motion an increasingly grotesque chain of events at home” (Smith, par.1). Yes, choosing vegan life is not a crime but why it has been so in hye’s family. The problem is not her choice nor her eating habits but the stereotypical view on women by the patriarchal society. Kang’s achievement seems to suggest that this defiant act of vegetarianism of a woman in the patriarchal society can smash her familial life and threaten the order of the society.

The tension in this multi-layered novel is the way in which the author reveals how nature, sex and art crash through this polite society. Violence erupts without warning. It is described almost casually. J tries to jump out of the window when discovered betraying his wife with her sister. At the family meal, Yeong-hye's father beats his daughter and, in front of everyone, brutally tries to force pork into her closed mouth. Yeong-hye slashes her own wrists at the dinner table. She is sent to a psychiatric hospital where medics brutalise her in an agonising description of tubes down noses then blood and vomit appears. A woman is treated not less than an animal which does not have its value of existence. The male members do not play the role which they have to. Upon to this book, Sean Barrs reviews:

For "the vegetarian," being different to the world leads to social isolation and feelings of utter despair. Her husband is utterly useless ... man who simply doesn't deserve a wife. This is no equal partnership, but the wife living to serve the man's needs. It's all about finding the right people, the accepting people in society. And this comes far too late and in far too a meek form to have any lasting effect on her: it came when she was already lost. (Barrs, Par. 3)

The woman who has led her life of her choice has been a big nuisance in her family. It is to show that a woman in patriarchy cannot even eat what she likes and wear what feels her comfortable. The time when she actually needs a husband, leaves her with a divorce paper, the father who had to ask and understand the reasons for not eating meat, forces with a lump of pork. Such activities are the reasons that force her to live and lead her life from vegetarianism to vegan and then to plant-like life.

The writing challenges a strict value system of patriarchal society that demands devotion to the family and the denial of erotic freedom. Mr Cheong had

chosen her who has an insignificant personality. He is gradually horrified to discover her radical spirit which threatens his career and status. She refuses to wear a bra and embarrasses her husband at a business dinner. Emma Saran Webster reports:

In 2012, Lina Esco introduced the phrase “Free the Nipple” ... followed by celebrities like Rihanna, Chelsea-Handler and Miley Cyrus, Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is OK, too." Being topless is what we had to do [to] start a real dialogue about equality, “This is not about being topless; this [is] about equality, it’s about having that choice.” (Webster, Par. 1)

Inspired such celebrity and activity of them with such eccentric behaviour, and exposing her nipples to almost starving herself by eating only plants, provokes her husband to divorce her.

Part two is the sexually-charged relationship between Yeong-hye and her brother in law. This is an exciting and imaginative journey into obsession, lust, art and dreams. Part three is told by Yeong-hye’s sister, In-hye, who becomes the abandoned anorexic’s sole carer. Surprisingly she subtly absorbs her sister’s attraction for self-annihilation. Porochista Khakpour in *The New York Times* reviews, “An ascetic tome this is not: The novel is full of sex of dubious consent, all sorts of force-feeding and purging — essentially sexual assault and eating disorders, but never by name in Han’s universe” (Khakpour, Par. 4). Yeong-hye for and in direction of her family where she could not find a freed-self, before her marriage, followed her father, mother, sister, brother and after her marriage solely to her husband.

This loss of herself among others and living life in and for the direction of others for long duration, from her childhood to adulthood, led her to seek own position which she initiates with her ‘dream’ that symbolically encourages her to

revolt against the life that she is leading. For that, she had to abandon herself from the family, abstaining meat and mate.

Yeong-hye's turn towards vegetarianism as a decision, as does her selfish husband and everyone around her, but Yeong-hye's plant-like turn is only a decision in the most technical sense. Yes, she makes the decision to become a vegetarian, vegan and then plant-like but not because of preference, or political/ethical commitment. James Morrow, author of *Galapagos Regained*, in the 'Community Bookstore' states:

Suffused with a sensibility that evokes the matter-of-fact surrealism of Franz Kafka, featuring a female protagonist as engagingly perverse as Melville's Bartleby, Han Kang's slender but robust novel addresses many vital matters—from the politics of gender to the presumptions of the male gaze, the conundrum of free will to the hegemony of meat—with a dark élan that vegetarians and carnivores alike will find hypnotic, erotic, disquieting, and wise. (Morrow, Par. 3)

Yeong-hye's vegetarianism is vital; for her, vegetarianism is her rebellion to come out of the restricted patriarchal culture and out from the violent misogyny that she has been born into. Becoming a plant is her struggle to attain freedom for which she is ready to accept even death instead of bearing domination and, if she chooses suicide it would be a double injustice so, she cannot do it too.

Like in more Asian countries, South Korean cultures are influenced by male supremacy and Yeong-hye has been shown a victim of it. None of her life is decision, or choice, or freedom, except her desire to become more plant-like, even that is a stretch to say it is a desire. Gregory Leon Miller in the SAGATE writes, "To some degree *The Vegetarian* may be read as a feminist allegory, a tale of what might befall

a woman who rebels against patriarchal oppression” (Miller, Par. 4). For Yeong-hye, a plant-like existence approaches a state of supreme serenity and disaffection from her world – a position where she cannot be read as a sexual being and, in turn, under the hands of a violent culture. Vegetarianism appends the human body and self between what we understand and project onto the outside world as life and death.

Yeong-hye says:

They say my insides have all atrophied, you know.’ In-hye was lost for words. Yeong-hye moved her emaciated face closer to her sister. ‘I’m not an animal anymore, sister,’ she said, first scanning the empty ward as if about to disclose a momentous secret. ‘I don’t need to eat, now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight. (53-54)

Becoming vegetarian is not a choice, but a last option. Yeong-hye does not elect vegetarianism; her family conditioned her for this transformation, her refusal to play this version of humanity. But this is the humanity under which all of us are prescribed. When Yeong-hye recoils at the sight of meat, she sees herself. Yeong-hye turns to vegetarianism and she projects onto the plant's life for the freedom of being non-human, non-woman, non-sexualized. The possibility of existing without violence or domination, of being in the world without the risk of knowing what one is, but just being. Vegetarianism in *The Vegetarian* is not a religious requirement, nor the fancy of first-world privilege, but anti-patriarchy or hierarchy that is plant life where there is no any discriminations and gender biasness.

Organization of the Study

This study has been divided into three chapters. The first chapter introduces the thesis with a brief critical summary of the novel. It reveals the issues and the contexts of the thesis. Basically, it expresses the main objective of the thesis which is

to critically examine the women domination and its resistance in *The Vegetarian*. This chapter also presents a short review of the novel which examines how literary critics have given their views about this novel. It helps the present researcher to pave his way by finding out what critics have already said about the novel and what remains untouched about the idea that this novel conveys. It also helps him to find out the domination, its resistance and radical nature.

The second chapter centres on the theoretical model –feminism. It introduces brief history and waves of feminism, then it introduces and describes radical feminism on which this study is based on. It basically discusses the views of different feminists and women activists on the past and present situation of the women. This chapter outlines in detail causes and effect of patriarchy. This is the main part of the thesis, so it discusses and analyses how Han Kang's novel shows the women violence and its resistance. How the protagonist, Yeong-hye and her sister In-hye have been victim of patriarchy and how they have fought for, it has been shown with the excerpts taking from the novel. The last chapter makes a brief review of the previous chapters and sums up the whole study along with its findings. *The Vegetarian* has been eyed through radical feminist point of view and on the whole, it draws the message of the novel that women can live without men and they can fight against patriarchy by sacrificing their life too. It concludes the arguments and the explanations put forward in previous chapters and also has the notes of recommendation along with the perspectives for future studies.

Chapter 2

The Rise of Radical Nature and Resistance to Patriarchy

The term '*feminism*' describes political, cultural, and economic movements that aim to establish equal rights and legal protections for women. Irigaray, a prominent author in contemporary French feminism and Continental philosophy states, "The goal of feminism is to uncover the absence of a female subject position, the relegation of all things feminine to nature/matter, and, ultimately, the absence of true sexual difference in Western culture" (Irigaray 133). Over time, feminist activists have campaigned for issues such as women's legal rights, especially in regard to contracts, property, and voting; body integrity and autonomy; abortion and reproductive rights, including contraception and prenatal care; protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape; workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against all forms of discrimination women encounter.

It is a complex set of ideologies and theories that at its core seeks to achieve equal social, political, and economic rights for women and men. Finn Mackay writes in his book *Radical Feminism*, "Feminism is not afraid to name the perpetrators of violence against women or gender-based violence by referring to these crimes specifically as male violence against women" (Mackay 11). Yes, feminism strongly opposes the violence and the crimes by men upon the women. This opposition promotes changes in society to end patterns of shapes and understanding to women who have been disadvantaged. So, feminism is to create non-discrimination, which is essential for creating equality to ensure that no one is denied their rights due to factors such as race, gender, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, political or other beliefs, nationality, social origin, class, or wealth status.

It is common to see the word "feminist" used for figures such as Mary

Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony, Emmeline Pankhurst, Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, etc. The terms feminist and feminism were not used in the modern sense until a century after Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 book 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' was published in 1792. Elinor Burkett writes regarding feminism in the website of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Feminism is the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interest" (Elinor, Par. 2). Women were highly encouraged to fight for their rights and they started to call themselves feminist. In 1882, Hubertine Auclert, a leading French feminist and a campaigner for women's suffrage, used the term 'feminist' to describe herself and others working for women's freedom. In 1892, a congress in Paris was described as 'feminist.' This launched a more widespread adoption of the term in the 1890s, with its use appearing in Great Britain and then America beginning about 1894. The term first appeared during the 1870s in France as 'feminism' although there has been some speculation that it may have been used before then. At the time, the word referred to women's freedom or emancipation.

Throughout most of Western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. At the end of the 19th century in France, they were still compelled to cover their heads in public, and, in parts of Germany, a husband still had the right to sell his wife and in Nepal and India before a hundred years ago women had to sacrifice themselves on their husbands' death jumping and burning themselves into the fire or would be killed.

There are many things that women can do and men cannot do. Women believe that a woman is far more powerful and happier than a man. She can live better than a man can. She has more understanding capacity earlier than a man has. She has a more beautiful structure and she can enjoy her body more than a man does.

In short, the movements of Feminism can be divided into four waves. The first wave, occurred in the 19th and early 20th century was mainly concerned with women's right to vote. The second wave, at its height in the 1960s and 1970s, refers to the women's liberation movement for equal legal and social rights. The third wave, begun in the 1990s, refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to, second-wave feminism. The fourth wave of feminism began around 2012/13 which focused on women empowerment. It is the first feminist uprising of the technology age. Explosive as it was, the #MeToo movement encouraging women to share their experiences of harassment and assault, was just the latest feminist social media activism that academics back-dated to 2012.

Radical Feminism

Radical Feminism analyses the structures of power which oppress the female sex. Its central idea is that women as a biological class are globally oppressed by men as a biological class. Adrienne Rich (1976) argues, "In order to live as fully human life, we require not only control of our bodies... we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, and the corporeal ground of our intelligence" (Rich 13). It is believed that male power is constructed and maintained through institutional and cultural practices that aim to support male superiority through the reinforcement of female inferiority. One such manifestation of the patriarchy is gender, which we believe to be a socially constructed hierarchy which functions to repress female autonomy and has no basis in biology. Radical

Feminists also critique all religions and their institutions, and other practices that promote violence against women such as prostitution, pornography and FGM (Female genital mutilation).

The subjugation of women is a social process that has no basis in biology or any other pretext, and thus can and should be challenged and dismantled. The radical feminist, Kelly Weisberg, states “the rule of law is too “patriarchal” and the laws we actually have are both masculine in terms of their intended beneficiary and authorship” (Weisberg 86). Radical Feminists aim at breaking the chain of patriarchy which is under the authorship of male and they take an unequivocal stance on the right to female reproductive justice. They increasingly recognise that females from different oppressed groups experience a combination of oppressions.

Class, race and disability have systematic structural impacts on different women's lives in different toxic combinations. Radical Feminists believe in an autonomous women's movement as the path to women's liberation. They believe in the importance of female only spaces where theory and action are developed from the lived reality of females who have been socialised into womanhood. Jelena Vukoicic writes on her thesis:

Radical feminism represents one of the types of the feminist theory, founded on the attitude that the society is based on the patriarchal grounds, because of which women are marginalized and discriminated against. This theory can be defined as a conflict theory because it is based on the assumption that a society consists of opposed fractions (sexes) whose relations are based on the domination of men over women, as well as the one that a society and different relations within it can be best described by observing these relations and the attitudes

of sexes toward them. (Vukoicic 34)

It considers the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy, which it describes as sexist, as the defining feature of women's oppression. Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider an inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. Radical feminists feel that there is a male-based authority and power structure and that it is responsible for oppression and inequality, and that as long as the system and its values are in place, society will not be able to be reformed in any significant way. Some radical feminists see no alternatives other than the total uprooting and reconstruction of society in order to achieve their goals. Tammy Bruce, former President of the Los Angeles National Organisation of Women ('NOW'), had this to say about the current state of Western culture:

I have seen first-hand how the agendas of feminism... have been consciously used to break down morals and values that the activists saw as obstructions to their achieving, first, cultural acceptance and, ultimately, cultural domination. Where feminism means isolating and demonizing men instead of bringing them with us as partners into our interdependence. (Bruce 33)

Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in all social and economic contexts. Radical feminists view society as fundamentally a patriarchy in which men dominate and oppress women. Radical feminists Alice Echols assert, "Society is a patriarchy in which the class of men are the oppressors of the class of women" (Echols 139). Radical feminists seek to abolish the patriarchy in order to liberate everyone from an unjust society by challenging existing social norms and institutions. This includes

opposing the sexual objectification of women, raising public awareness about such issues as rape and violence against women, and challenging the concept of gender roles.

In conclusion radical feminism is one of the directions of feminist theory, formed on the view that the social system is based on a patriarchal basis, resulting in the marginalization and discrimination against women in all spheres of society. This route starts from the idea of conflict between the sexes as a fundamental social conflict, which classifies this theory as a sociological theory known as the theory of conflict. As feminist theory generally originates from Marxism, which is also the most famous theory of conflict, the comparison of the two theories is one of the best ways to set up a radical feminist theory in the context of theory of conflict. Getting to know the perspectives and objectives of radical feminism, now ahead, I will analyse and interpret the book, *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang from the radical feminist point of view.

Rise of Radicalism Over Exploitation

In this chapter, I hope to offer a new approach for viewing the book, *The Vegetarian* from radical feminism. In the previous chapters, I have given sights of origin, development and waves of feminism and radical feminism with objectives and perspectives. I have particularly picked up radical feminism amongst several feminist theories to apply in my work for women rights and freedom. Actions and thoughts of the characters of the book are matched with objectives and perspectives of radical feminism, so I have chosen this theory to see *The Vegetarian*.

Yeong-hye, a woman of few words is always quiet. She was quiet in her childhood, too because her father is rigid and strict who never let her and her sister go away from his wish and command. He is a retired soldier and he used to use his

command even at his house. Yeong-hye is grown up in the environment where her mother is highly dominated and repressed. She and her sister In-hye could do nothing but to hear and hide themselves from quarrelsome between father and mother. When father used to beat her mother so badly at night two sisters would escape out of home and hid in some corners. Her sister is so loving, caring and understanding who always kept her safe from such situations.

In-hye and Yeong-hye, two sisters are always victimized by her father's chauvinism. The stern and strict father is one and only trouble maker of the family. His dominating behaviour makes all the family members speechless, cowardice and are filled with fear and hatred. The violent behaviour in front of innocent children causes a bad impact towards male figures from childhood memory. She may be loved and cared for in order to keep her alive, but the domination and hard punishment to her and her family members by her father has brought up an unhealthy and worsening look towards male members which raises the feeling of radicalism within her. But unfortunately, such feelings are not revealed because she was hapless.

Yeong-hye has always been the victim of patriarchy. Once, Yeong-hye's husband says her father had whipped her over the calves until she was eighteen years old' (29). The above-mentioned line provokes how her father treated her. He (father) had whipped (beaten badly) her over the calves until she was eighteen years old. She was lashed in such a way is one of the examples of many of his behaviours that he did. She was always repressed and she felt loss of her human identity to live a free and happy life with her interest and demand. He (father) speaks: 'Mr Cheong, Yeong-ho, the two of you come here.' ... "Father, I don't eat meat." ... "Take hold of Yeong-hye's arms, both of you" (39). The father treats her as if he is the one who determines what to do and what not. In front of her husband and all other family members. He

forces her to eat meat and when Yeong-hye says that she does not like to eat, he (father) does not listen to her because he is a male with pride. He hits her so hard that the blood shows through the skin of her cheek. Her breathing is ragged, and it seems that her composure has finally been shattered.

Only father but also her brother forces her to eat meat. Brother says, “Do you have to make such a thing about it in front of Father” (39)? Though she does have no interest but the male figures in the family do not try to think from her side. It shows that they do not care what she wants and likes but their wants have to be fulfilled. The male figure, the brother supports the father whereas the sister In-hye supports her. In-hye, “Father, I beg you, stop this” (39). In-hye entreated him, but he shook her off and thrust the pork at Yeong-hye’s lips.

Yeong-hye, who was already tired of male domination and repression again trapped by her husband, generally people marry to love, enjoy, share, care, and live together, understanding each other but here we do not see so. Yong-hye has been a means of pleasure giving, food cooking, cleaning house and to make ready everything that her husband wants on time. Her husband, Mr. Cheong states:

To be frank, the first time I met her I wasn’t attracted to her. Middling height: bobbed hair neither long nor short: jaundiced, sickly looking skin: somewhat prominent cheekbones: her timid, sallow aspect told me all I needed to know.... The passive personality of this woman in whom I could detect neither freshness nor charm, or anything especially refined, suited me down to the ground...she didn’t get worked up if I happened to be late for one of our meetings. (3)

These lines show that he did not marry her equaling her with him rather he married because she was a passive personality as he said and would not care about him if he

does anything to her.

Yeong-hye, in the novel, speaks very less. Speaking less and remaining silent most of the time has been her habit due to her suppression which she had experienced in her childhood. She has been a woman of few words and her husband takes advantage of it. He adds:

She was a woman of few words. It was rare for her to demand anything of me, and however late I was getting home she never took it upon herself to kick up a fuss. Even when our days off happened to coincide it wouldn't occur to her to suggest we go out somewhere together... More than likely she would spend the time reading, which was practically her only hobby. For some unfathomable reason, reading was something she was able to really immerse herself in-reading books... (4-5)

He focuses more on her dresses: what she wears, what she eats, and her outlook but it does not seem that he tries to find the reasons behind it. He simply asks why? But does not try to realize. What happened? Why this and that? But there we don't see how it came to be dear? The question of what and why asks reason but he does not look at her, care from the way what he has to do. From such behaviour of her husband she becomes a tough woman to understand and she resists it in many ways. She stops being an object to satisfy him. She stops to respond easily. She stops to cook of his interest. She stops him to approach her in her bed. She does not care what he likes, eats, and cares, and so on... Yeong-hye does not speak more but she is fighting for her freedom. She is avoiding her husband, a male from her life which is the sole motto of radical feminism. She is not a mother yet. It is because she does not want herself to be in a weak condition. Radical feminists believe that being a mother is living under

problems which make women weaker to fight against patriarchy.

Bloody Dreams as Effects of Violence, Exploitation and Repression

Yeong-hye grew up in such an environment which itself made her feel isolated from patriarchal society. She had been badly affected by the violence seen and done upon her. Her flying feelings of childhood and teenage were all repressed. The violent behaviour of the father and objectification by her husband made her feel distaste and challenge to patriarchy by abstaining from meat and mate. She bore all the things and behaviour being quiet. Being quiet and bearing all of them definitely was not her intention but her obligation. In the family neither her mother nor her sister, In-hye could resist the established norms and values of patriarchy and she also became so. Without a straight eye to father and his orders were followed. She did her marriage and as already mentioned she comes into another trap of patriarchy.

She spent a long five years with her husband tolerating all sorts of violence, exploitation and she repressed her feelings of hatred, anger, regret, rebel and challenges all caused badly into her psychology and finally revealed as bloody and slaughtering scenes in the form of displacement into her dreams. The blood in her hands in her mouth and in the clothe, the pool of the blood, all over with raw meat:

...a long bamboo stick strung with great blood-red gashes of meat, blood still dripping down. Try to push past but the meat, there's no end to the meat and no exit. Blood in my mouth, blood-soaked clothes sucked onto my skin. ... My clothes are still wet with blood. Hide, hide behind the trees. Crouch down, don't let anybody see. My bloody hands. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what had I done? Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth, felt it squish against my gums, the roof of mouth slick with crimson blood. (12)

The blood and blood everywhere in the dream obviously does not signify positive and good feelings. The colour red of the blood signifies the rebel and revolution against what she has tolerated in her woken life. The blood in hand, mouth, clothes and everywhere means she has been bearing injustice and she is not free rather she is sunk into inhumanity and in the chain of frequent exploitation which are to be rebelled.

Dreams of blood may vary to culture, religion and practices. The most common meaning found about bloody dreams is negative. Dream analyst Pearl Wilson opines, “ Blood in dream could mean that you are being controlled by supernatural forces, like vampires. In folklore, vampires drink the blood of their victims. If you do not believe in the supernatural, these dreams may just be symbolic that terrible things are about to happen” (Wilson, Par. 7). Yeong-hye’s bloody dreams also mean that there is going to be something terrible in her life. It could be the reflection of her suppression and her desire to reveal and revenge all the denominations that she has experienced throughout her life. Her bloody dreams also signify that she is living her life in guilt that she bore the domination in all her life. Sometimes it might indicate not being able to stop thinking about an involvement in some bad situation. She (Yeong-hye) sees a dream, “She was mincing frozen meat...a drop of red blood already blossoming out of the cut... The pool of blood in the barn... I first saw the face reflected there” (19). Eating raw meat in our dream might represent a male figure in our life that has a negative influence on us. The raw meat represents the person that may show animalistic energy. This dream also reveals that we need to follow our instinct and just go with the flow of life at this point. We should not run toward basic life but experience the life as we always wanted.

Eating raw meat also represents our raw or sore feelings about something that has happened in our waking life. Dream of Yeong-hye of raw meat might represent

her animal instincts that she is trying to ignore. To eat raw meat, on the other hand, represents a situation where we have to step over someone else to get what we want. The raw meat might symbolize the hard emotions that we will reveal soon and they will not be accepted very well by other people. Yeong-hye says, "...Someone's trying to bring our spirit down. Violent acts perpetrated by night. A hazy feeling, I can't pin down... intolerable loathing, so long suppressed... brutal feeling. Nothing else remains... Murder or murdered ... Everything is being snuffed out in the pitch-black darkness" (28). Yeong-hye is suffering from the long patriarchal suppression. A lot of confusions and various kinds of thoughts arise in her mentality which reflect her dreams.

Her thoughts are unclear and have distinct boundaries and turn into strangeness and remain only violence. She cannot pin down what actually has happened but something has so long suppressed which might be her identity in the society:

...my hands around someone's throat, throttling them... sticking my finger into their slippery eyeball. ...my fingers flexing to kill. ...my fingers that could squeeze that brightness out...I became a different person... rises up inside me...saliva pooling in my mouth...I have to clamp my hand over my mouth. ...can't even call it now...animal eyes gleaming wild, presence of blood, unearthed skull, again those eyes. Rising up from the pit of my stomach...shuddering awake... (33)

It is she who wants to avoid the distinction between male and female to live a happy life but she is not getting such an environment that haunts her and again in her dream she attacks the patriarchal character to eliminate the gap between. She attacks in the throat and eye means the society has a problem in the speech and look. Speech is

controlled by the throat and looks are controlled by eyes so she attacks them in her dream. She wants to uproot the biasness remaining in society so that she unearthed the skull. She wants to abolish it from society and human history so in her dream her eyes gleam wild, presence of blood. Sigmund Freud writes in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, “There is a valid sexual meaning behind the neurotic child’s intolerance of blood or raw meat” (Freud 360). Yeong-hye’s dream of blood and raw meat also represents the vital meaning in her life that she is not satisfied with her husband and the sexual life with him so that she wants to be abandoned from him and the life woman in the patriarchy.

Abstaining Meat and Mate: Autonomy of Self

The different and awful dreams that Yeong-hye sees affect her mentality and determines to abstain from meat and mate. She avoids meat because meat is the sign of violence that comes from killing some innocent animals. As meat is victim of violence and exploitation that is done upon the weaker ones. She abstains from mate (mating) because she wants autonomy over body. Glenn Collins writes in *The New York Times*, about patriarchy taking reference of a historian, Dr Gerda Lerner, “Patriarchy has gone through many forms, it exists now as an institutionalized pattern of dominance in society” (Collins, Par. 3). Through this reference we can say that patriarchy is cultural and constructed patterns of male supremacy. If we go back to history, it is a fact that only male would engage in hunting and gathering, here in the present society, too male are the killers and hunters. They bring meat at homes and give the family members; this might be given the name of love but it is to make them weak and restrict women within the four corners of the house.

The males kill, hunt, and provide to exploit and scare women. Creating such an environment means easing for domination and exploitation to them. The

protagonist, Yeong-hye avoids eating meat and keeping her from sex to get rid of such domination. She continuously ignores her husband after she had dreams. She, who was quite obedient, became self-oriented from that day. First of all, she totally ignores what her husband was asking. She becomes quite tough after that day. Yeong-hye becomes more self-centred and her interest oriented. She ignores his presence at home and bed. What are you doing standing there? (6) ... Hello? I asked you, what are you doing (7)? ... Why are you standing there like that (7)? She continues to ignore the presence of him and does what her likes are. She damn cares what he thinks about her. When she is frequently asked, after a long silence only she answers with a single sentence "...I had a dream" (8). What he likes and eats, she does not care and she throws the meat out. She stops him bringing meat at home and eating it. Yeong-hye says:

'I threw the eggs out as well...

.... What?

...And I've given up milk too

...Oh, really? ...

...Until when? I suppose

... forever.' (13-14)

She radically opposes sex and eating meat. She simply ignores male and is happy with her interest. In her family, her father and brother want her to talk politely to them and with her husband and not to reject their orders. She does not even care about that. The ignorance of her husband, her family and their request to eat meat and other animal products. As the family and society say to respect and pay regard to male. Time and again her family says to eat meat and they even force and trick her to eat meat but she does not eat. This shows that she is determined to live vegetarian. She avoids meat

and mate together; means she is freeing herself from patriarchy. She avoids her husband from mating saying, “Actually, it’s smell’ ...the smell... the meat smell. Your body smells of meat” (17). Though, her husband had just taken shower. This is what distastes the male in her bed, she totally controls her body.

Yeong-hye rules over her body and clothes. She does not wear a bra and does not care what her husband and other people think of her. Once, when her husband was invited to dinner and she went with him. She was wearing a slightly clinging black blouse; her husband saw that the outline of her nipples was clearly visible through the fabric but she does not care because it is her body and she has rights to do so. Once, her husband says: “...she deliberately continued to avoid sleeping with me-she’d even taken to sleeping in trousers-on the surface we were still a regular couple” (30). It clearly depicts that she wants to save herself and be away from man violence on her body. For the autonomy and self-guard to herself, she does not accept him in her bed. Being self-defensive to protect from violence, other and discarding bras and being comfortable is one of the feminist movements which she follows deliberately.

She follows plant life unconsciously. Once, she took off her clothes and stayed naked outside the hospital, when she was brought there after she slit her wrist with a fruit knife due to father’s enforcement to eat meat. “...sunbeams bathed her face and naked body...it’s hot so ...she smiles faintly...” (52). Being naked and staying in the sun shows her unconscious instinct of becoming a plant, as plants need sunlight for photosynthesis.

She and her husband’s relationship is worsening day by day, the reason is that she is neither ready to sleep and give sexual pleasure nor she does what he says. She is living vegan life and eats accordingly, but one day in the hospital her mother tries to feed her meat soup for herbal medicine:

‘It is herbal medicine...

Just hold your nose and drink it down quickly.’

... ‘I’m not drinking it.

... ‘Is it really herbal medicine?’

... ‘Of course, I just said so.’

... ‘I’m all right.’

... ‘Where are you going?’ ... ‘Bathroom.’ (47)

Though she was tricked meat soup for herbal medicine, it could not be concealed. She finally vomited which revealed the truth that she is opposing meat at all from all sides. According to literary meaning not eating meat means opposing the patriarchy and this abstinence from meat is to fight against patriarchy. Yeong-hye wants to live in her freedom or she does not fear to die if it is not fulfilled. Several times she has said that she wants to live in her own freedom without any disturbance and interference of other people. So, she enjoys solitude where she can do what she wants.

She lives her life without any lamentation after her divorce with her husband. She neither shows her any family problems nor regarding her needs. She is able to do a job and fulfil her requirements for living as an independent woman. A long time after her separation with her husband, her brother-in-law comes to visit her. He finds her naked, at her apartment, she says: It’s just that I enjoy being like this when I’m on my own.’ ... ‘I’ve nothing to offer you to eat...’ ... ‘You know, you don’t have to come and visit me’ (74-75). Her appearance gives him a clue of her lust and her brother-in-law gets it and he asks her to let her body to paint flowers. She accepted his proposal, and worked over to the sheet. Her calm acceptance of all these things made her seem to him something scared. Whether human, animal or plant, she could not be called a person, but then was not exactly some feral creature either-more like a

mysterious being with qualities of both.

Yeong-hye wants to fulfil her long repressed feeling of lust but she wants to change the appearance of her and her sex partner. She has already lived a long life within the patriarchal society where male is dominant and she had to obey them. Here, she is having her body painted with flowers and pose for sex. She likes the painting on her because she has come near to her aim of living plant life in which there is not any biasness and gender inequality and discrimination. She is happy because she has got a beautiful flower painted on her body that has hope of stopping bloody and slaughtering dreams. She feels good because she is living a vegetarian life and close to plant life. She is also getting blooming flowers on her as a painting form. The next day when she was being captured in a film of love and romance making a scene between two bodies. She is aroused during the period and she laughs: ‘Why are you laughing?’ ... ‘Because I’m all wet...’ ... ‘It wasn’t him; it was the flowers...’ The flowers’ (106)? Yeong-hye seduces her brother-in-law to please her. When she says that it’s nothing to do with the relationship then, he gets his body painted with his friend P and goes to her apartment.

Yeong-hye and her brother-in-law spent the night together but they were caught. After painting over his body, the brother-in-law reaches to her bed, she says: ... “I want to swallow you, have you melted into me and flow through my veins” ... “Will the dream stop now” (114-115). She enjoys the sex for the whole night madly forgetting all the worldly things and relationships. Her brother-in-law was nothing but a means of pleasure and it was an avenge to patriarchy that she was using a male to satisfy rather than being used. After the course, in the morning, “...what are you saying? “Bastard!” ... (117-118). He is caught by her wife, In-hye and sent to a police cell.

He is discarded by In-hye. Socially and morally he has been down. In-hye ended their relationship from the same day. He calls sometimes and tries to talk to her for his forgiveness and restoration of the relationship but she replies, “So, there is no need for us to forgive each other. Because I don’t know you” (160). In-hye, though she was not in a happier relationship with him but was hanging out with him, got rid from the day she caught him. She does not depend upon anyone. She is able to live life. She does not compromise in the treatment and she does not abandon her sister Yeong-hye. She visits time and again and pays hospital fees, but she never thinks of her ex-husband.

Yeong-hye gets worse in her condition. She had been abstaining meat and mate but after she took revenge with patriarchy using and destroying his life, she abstains from food too. She does not need food at all and can live with water and sunlight. She has transformed her mentally and physically as a plant that does not need any food like that of an animal. She (Yeong-hye) says:

“Look, sister, I’m doing a handstand; leaves are growing out of my body, roots are sprouting out of my hands ... they delve down into the earth. Endlessly, endlessly... yes, I spread my legs because I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch; I spread wide... (127). ‘Sister ... all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters...’ (144) ... I don’t need to eat anymore. (147) ... ‘I need to water my body...sister I need water.’ (148) ... ‘I don’t need to eat, now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight.’ ‘Soon now, words and thoughts will all disappear. Soon. ‘Very soon. Just a bit longer to wait, sister.’ (154)

Yeong-hye talks surprisingly, as if she has really been a plant. She has been losing her weight to less than 30 kg and has stopped her menstruation. Losing her weight and

she has stopped her menstruation mean she is getting freedom from the chain of problems that she has to face in life. Stopping her menstruation means that she has challenged womanhood that has to be mother. And in patriarchal society being mother means becoming weak. She wants to transform herself and live in the society of equality. She says above that all the trees are like her brothers and sisters because she sees equality and gender neutrality in the plant life.

The sisters finally abandon themselves from their husband and get control over themselves. They are living the divorced life. They have been freed from the males and can make their independent decisions. Yeong-hye is in the process of making herself a plant, the entity of gender neutrality and In-hye is following her sister and helping her. In-hye accepts her situation and takes her away. She does not leave her alone and cares for her. Though, Yeong-hye had a course with her husband. She does not speak anything to her and continues in the journey of her life because she helped her to get rid of him. In this way, the sisters help each-other to fight against patriarchy.

Chapter 3

Living Plant Life for Gender Neutrality

A woman can do everything in order to justice herself. Yeong-hye abstaining meat and mate lives the vegetarian life and later the plant-like life to fight against patriarchal society. For her, the society is always dominating. Under domination she sees a series of bloody dreams and that encourages her to step ahead and fight for freedom. Before I read this novel, I did not know that a woman can go in such extreme situation of life to fight against the discrimination. I really did not know that a woman can sacrifice her life instead of bearing biasness and violence in all her life. This work will be really helpful to those students and people who want to get ideas to apply, analyze and interpret their research using radical feminism. In this work, I have discovered the radical feminist nature of Han Kang's centre character Yeong-hye who goes through different ways to resist patriarchy for the equality and the final step that she has chosen is plant-like life where she finds gender neutrality.

Yeong-hye chooses plant-like life for gender neutrality. 'Gender neutrality is from 'gender-neutralism' or the gender neutrality movement. It is the idea that policies, language, and other social institution avoid discrimination arising from the impression that there are social roles for which one gender is more suited than another. Research shows children who are raised with strict gender stereotypes are at increased risk of mental and physical health problems from adolescence. The same problem is seen to affect Yeong-hye who is raised with strict gender stereotypes. So, she is fighting against the societal belief that prevents her to cross the male supremacy and beliefs of the patriarchy. Throughout the novel she continues the journey of resistance to patriarchy for gender neutrality.

There are no genders and biases in the world of plants. After her dream she

first stops to eat meat as it is of violence. Secondly, she abstains from sex and she lives vegan life. Living such a life, she could not lead it as she wanted due to the frequent interruptions of her family members who smell patriarchy and violence altogether. She lives a vegan life; nobody understands and likes her rather she is tricked meat for vegetables. During the time of her struggle, she is left with divorce paper. In such a situation, she cannot help herself being vegan then, she chooses the life of plants: the world of gender neutrality as one and only option to free her life.

Being a human, it is impossible to live plant life. But it is a work of art that serves meaning with sign, symbol and metaphors and makes the impossible into possible with valuable meanings to learn in the real world. In the book, Yeong-hye chooses the neutral world of the genders, which means she wants the society of no gender-bias or the society that shows gender equality with respect. The neutrality that stops addressing females as inferior beings: women, girls, daughters, wives, and superior beings: males as a son, boy, husband rather than as an equal human being.

Thus, the novelist Kang, through the central character Yeong-hye focuses on gender-bias-free society which emphasis the equal looks to the people of any other gender with no discrimination. The title of the work ‘Abstinence from Meat and Mate for Plant Life: A Resistance to Patriarchy’ has come to be justified that the central character Yeong-hye abstains from meat and mate for plant life resisting patriarchy. While resisting patriarchy to eliminate the distinction between male and female gender Kang has given the special role to Yeong-hye who follows gender neutralism which emphasises on transcending the perspective of gender altogether rather than focusing on the rights of specific genders. Finally, the plant world of Yeong-hye or the neutrality of gender helps the society to consider men and women as an active citizen of a nation, it makes everyone equal with equity.

In this work, I have sighted *The Vegetarian* from the eye of radical feminism and this is not the final and only way to see this amazing and expertly written, book. It can be viewed through various perspectives and eyes of social theories to analyse Han Kang's talent and expertise of writing.

This novel can also be viewed from a culture studies point of view raising Yeong-hye's challenges of wearing bras and clothes, the challenge of the Korean culture that keeps meat as the vital meal and the role of women in everyday life.

The change in the mind/psychology of the centre character all of a sudden and being vegetarian and adopting plant life can be studied with a different perspective. Yeong-hye's hatred for her husband and her brother-in-law's attraction to her. In the family gathering, when Yeong-hye slits her wrist with a fruit knife, she is brought to hospital by her brother-in-law. More than her husband Mr Cheong, brother-in-law shows care and interest to her. When she lives lonely, after she gets divorce paper, brother-in-law goes to meet her where he finds her naked and she does not show any reaction. He proposes to her to let her body for painting. She agrees without any conditions and after painting she shows her lust and they enjoy crazily a whole night sex. Consciously or unconsciously the writer Han Kan shows libido of Yeong-hye and her brother-in-law which can be seen from psychoanalysis point of view.

Yeong-hye and her family is always feared with father, who is the breadwinner of the family. Once, he is Vietnam shoulder and keeps the family under his authority. Her mother is just a housewife, is always silent and does not speak a word against him. In-hye and Yeong-hye live married lives but do not seem happy with their spouses. Yeong-hye's husband Yeong-ho is a businessman who earns well. In-hye's husband J is a video artist and has multiple relationships. Later, Yeong-hye and her sister In-hye both live divorced lives which can be viewed from Marxist point of view.

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