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Protagonist's Failure to be Identified as a Radical Feminist in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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Abstract

Generally, this research is based on to show identity crisis of a female in patriarchal society and their revolt against it in Han Kang's popular novel The Vegetarian. This thesis argues how mostly female of today's generation subjugated by patriarchal norms and values through characters; Yeong-hye and In-hye. The patriarchal norms and values restrict female from gaining their own identity however, this generation is ready to fight back against unjust. While fighting against patriarchy few of the female in society go overboard sometimes and lost their quest in midway or end up in tragedy. This research also deals with the characters of above mentioned fate. Yeong-hye and In-hye are two sisters who fight against patriarchal ethos and pathos. In-hye left her cheating husband by divorcing him. On the other hand, Yeong-hye claims her identity by turning into vegan. But if we happen to analyze their journey throughout the novel we can find both of them failed in their respective mission somehow.

Protagonist's Failure to be Identified as a Radical Feminist in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

The Vegetarian (2007) is a three-part novel written by South Korean writer Han Kang. It was translated by famous British translator Deborah Smith who translated this book into English in 2015. After publishing of its English version in January 2015 in UK and February 2016 in US, it received immense international critical acclaim, with critics praising writing style of Kang and spot on translation of Smith. Later in May 2016 Han Kang received prestigious 'Man Booker International Prize' for same book. *The Vegetarian* became first book to receive the award for single novel instead an author's body of work.

The primary objective of the research is to explain the alienness a woman faces in her life after making her own choice in patriarchal society. To support primary objectives, following secondary objectives lead to conclusion;

- a) To describe the Yeong-hye's decision of turning into vegan.
- b) To explain the reasons why she chose to be vegetarian.
- c) To point out the consequences of Yeong-hye's decision and actions.

In this novel; Kang tells a story of a home-maker, Yeong-hye. Novel is set in modern-day Seoul and the major character is also modern-day married woman. One day she decides to turn vegan after a bloody, nightmarish dream about human cruelty leads to devastating consequences that turn her life into misery. After turning into vegan, her husband Mr. Cheong starts to complain about her with her family. Knowing her daughter's choice of new lifestyle, her parents get upset and force her to eat meat. This incident led her to attempt a suicide. Mr. Cheong could not handle the

new lifestyle of Yeong-hye and finally gets divorce. Yeong-hye makes her choice and revolt against all of her family and relatives to continue her choices. At last she suffers heavily because of her choices. This thesis argument that Yeong-hye suffered a failure as her choices make her family relation dysfunctional moreover put her life into risk.

In this three-part drama novella; Yeong-hye the major character's life after turning into vegetarian has been described from the point of view of her husband; Mr. Cheong, brother-in-law and her sister In-hye. After encountering with same type of bloody, nightmarish dream about human cruelty Yeong-hye one day decides to throw out all meat in her house and turn into full vegan. Her husband; Mr. Cheong becomes surprise at first but he thought that she will quit being vegan one day he does not talk or discuss about that matter. But with days and months passes Yeong-hye's nightmare continues and so does her vegan life along with other personal and familial life. The disaster in her family life got more worse when her husband tells all other family member about her vegan life which leads to make her father force to make an attempt to eat meat and hit her brutally.

The main character Yeong-hye is home-maker woman and married to Mr. Cheong. She quits eating meat because of her bloody, nightmarish dream about human cruelty. As a child she was punished by her father hardly than her other siblings. At some point her husband Mr. Cheong rapes her. Even after divorcing with her husband Mr. Cheong and discharged from hospital, her brother-in-law establishes a physical relation with her, while she was taking medicine of mental illness. As a child she was punished heavily by her father and as a grown up married woman she was never loved by husband.

Novel deals with the Yeong-hye's vegetarian life. It tells the story and

characteristics of major characters in various part of novel. Moreover, in three parts of novel three different characters describes their relation to major character Yeong-hye and their jobs and daily lifestyle. In terms of emotional relation of three characters with major character Yeong-hye, PorochistaKhakpourin her riview 'The Vegetarian,' by Han Kang' writes:

Han's novella-in-three-parts zigzags between domestic thriller, transformation parable and arborphiliac meditation, told from the points of view of her lousy husband, who works at an office; her obsessive brother-in-law, who is an artist; and her overburdened older sister, who manages a cosmetics store. These three characters are largely defined by what they do for a living, whereas Yeong-hye stops doing much of anything altogether.(59)

This three part drama novel opens up with the narration of Mr. Cheong, husband of major character Yeong-hye, describing how his wife turned into vegan, changing her lifestyle drastically in first part 'the vegetarian' and how obedient and fit for him before start to resist his command. In Korean society where almost each and every person are omnivorous except those who are sacred Buddhist and quitting meat for a cause or animal rights Yeong-hye's switching into vegan just because of her dream is not something common for her husband.

On the other hand, Yeong-hye's sister In-hye also shares a dysfunctional married life. In-hye is busy working woman who manages so many branches of cosmetics shop. Her husband tries and manages to have a physical relation with his own sister-in-law Yeong-hye. At the moment, Yeong-hye was taking medicine for mental stability. In-hye finds out the sex video of between her husband and sister. After finding the relation between her own sister and husband she divorces her husband. Every other family member of Yeong-hye leaves her but In-hye takes care

of her and admits her to mental hospital for proper treatment. In-hye's life also fails miserably.

Although the novel revolves around Yeong-hye, a modern house-maker married woman and her choices of becoming vegetarian. Even in modern world there are plenty of women who can not do as their wish. Moreover, even in modern days there are plenty of men who want to marry a submissive counterpart. Eileen Battersby in her review 'The Vegetarian review: a South Korean housewife finds we aren't what we eat' writes:

There are hints. In a couple of sentences the narrator makes clear his nature. Dismissive of his wife, describing her as completely unremarkable in every way – “there was no reason for the two of us not to get married” – he at least admits that he has never sought a challenge. He is a bully, uninterested in being tested by beauty or intelligence, and his quiet wife suits him.(64)

Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye's husband, thinks that the quiet and uninteresting natures are the reason for him to marry her. He was interesting in her because she does not meet the label of beauty and intelligence for him. He is such bully that he describes her as completely unremarkable in everyway.

Yeong-hye's husband had chosen her with an insignificant personality. He has a thought that his wife will never protest or raise question to him. Moreover, he might have idea that she will obey his order endlessly and without question. But Yeong-hye's radical spirit threatens his career and status. Julia Pascal in her review 'The Vegetarian by Han Kang, book review: Society stripped to the bone' asserts:

Yeong-hye's husband, a businessman who thought he had chosen a spouse with an insignificant personality. He is gradually horrified to discover her radical spirit which threatens his career and status. Yeong-hye refuses to wear

a bra and embarrasses her husband at a business dinner. This idiosyncratic behaviour, from exposing her nipples to almost starving herself by eating only plants, provokes him to divorce her.(70)

Yeong-hye continues to refuse her husband's order. She even refuses to wear a bra at a business dinner. This incident embarrasses her husband. Moreover, her decision of eating only plants and exposing her nipples provokes him to divorce her. Only her decisions were not responsible for divorce. Her decisions made him embarrass and his introvert and quite wife have changed into a rebellious woman this made him uneasy.

After, her nightmarish dream Yeong-hye emotionally isolates herself. She tries to revolt with something that is unseen. Her decision of turning into vegan left her family relation into chaos. Her parents left her. Her husband divorce and abandons her. Lori Feathers in her review 'Han Kang's "The Vegetarian"' describes:

"Existence precedes essence" is a central tenet of Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy-first a human exists and then she creates her essence, the *Vegetarian's* Heroine, Yeog-hye, gradually sheds her essence emotionally isolating herself. She devolves into something that exists without meaning, like plant or animal, and in doing so she ignores the societal norms that require a suppression of the primal.(84)

Yeong-hye does not only quits eating meat and stops obeying her surroundings she also starts to act abnormal. At some point she stops eating any kind of food. She devolves into something that exists without meaning. To follow her decisions she ignores the societal norms. At this stage, she does not only disobey her family but she also starts to fail her life. This novel does not only tell the sad story of major character Yeong-hye but also shares the ill faith of her.

The major objective of this study is to peer through the window of feminist

prospective although female characters suffer in the face of the adverse situations in their life. The critical review of this very newly published novel is very rare except for a few articles in noted magazines and newspapers. However, the study will organize the chapters on the basis of textual analysis and a survey of the available critical analyses and reviews.

The first chapter of this study introduces the main argument of the thesis. It focuses on the patriarchal domination, suppression of the women along with brief literature review and the outlines of the entire thesis. The theoretical concept of the feminism, the oppression, domination, marginalization of women, unsuccessful attempts of the major characters in the novel against patriarchy and crisis in revolt of women are analyzed in the second chapter as theoretical and textual analysis. Finally, the third or the last chapter sums up the main points of this thesis.

This research aims to show the pathetic condition of the characters, and their suppression, victimization and so on. That is, it unveils the resolution through an appearance of character, action, narration, evidence, symbols, and representation at the intersection of vital current questions of class, gender, and politics. Both primary and secondary resources are used during this study. Library, internet and constructive ideas of teachers and professors are highly materialized during writing this research.

The feminism is perceived as a consequence of the women's movement of the 1960's. It is both intellectual and political movement that searches justice for women in all sectors and spheres of lives. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, John Stuart's *The Subjection of Women*, Marry Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of Rights of Women* and many others find the solutions of women's inequality in society. Their texts contribute a lot to introduce the concept as a theory.

Feminist theory is the denotation of feminism. The main objective of feminist theory is to acknowledge the nature of gender inequality by examining the roles and responsibilities of women in the society. Feminists examine various sectors, castes, race and their experience as the subjects. Feminist criticism prefers breaking the essential images of gender and sex while taking pride in the cultural and gender diversity. Feminism refers to the struggle of women for equal political, economic, and social rights. Feminist critics believe that the entire society and culture are ruled by a patriarchal social norms and values and it should be broken.

The definition of women and roles to be played in society are determined by powerful male not by women themselves. Women are flung into the margin and their voice silenced. Jane Freedman contends in her work *Feminism*, “women’s moral voice has gone unheard for so long because their of making moral judgement is deemed inferior to that of men, whose voice is taken as the norms” (19). Women in the past were busy in household activities so their voice had gone unheard for so long, that’s why the patriarchal voice became the voice for all and mandatory. Later, this process contribute to the male supremacy over female.

Men’s position in the society is at the centre. Men can establish their own identity. They do not need any reference to define themselves. But in the case of women, they are to be connected to men or their husbands for their identity. Women are recognized through their husband’s status and identity. They are taken as other. In this regard, Simon de Beauvoir in her most popular work *The Second Sex* states:

Men are considered essential subjects while women are considered contingent beings. Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning, while women have meaning only in relation to men. Thus, women are defined not just in terms of their differences from men, but in terms of their inadequacy in

comparison to men A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other: she is less than a man: she is a kind of alien in a man's world: she is not a fully developed human being the way a man is. (96)

In patriarchal society, women are taken as the 'other'. They treat women as weak being and sex object. She does not have her own identity. She is identified and defined in relation to men. For example, in the word 'woman', there is 'man' already and 'she' becomes 'she' by adding 'he'. In this way, men always keep superiority and advantage. Women are always constructed as inferior and docile.

Feminism concerns with the marginalization of all women: that is, with their being relegated to a secondary position. Feminists argue that their culture is a patriarchal culture; one is organized in favor of interests of men. Literary critics explain how power imbalances are there in the literary texts. Their goals are to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices, to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature and literary criticism. Feminist critics therefore study sexual, social, and political issues which were once thought to be "outside" the main stream study of literature and literary criticism.

Feminism is a word that evokes different images for people. Many forms of feminism exist to suit many different forms and thought. As with every social movement, feminism encompasses a variety of political tendencies. Feminist ideology can take many different forms. In the 1970's, women started developing a theory which helped to explain their oppression. Pockets of resistance began to organize and challenge patriarchy. By 1980's, however, feminists started disagreeing on particular issues linked to feminism.

For Julia Kristeva, language is of two kinds – semiotic and symbolic. Symbolic means the expression of the words that may have multiple meaning and

Semiotic means the sound, volume, rhythm and the body gesture of the speaker. For her, symbolic is controlled by patriarchy, but semiotic is free. It means like semiotic woman should be free to explore her 'self'. In the boundary of feminine four walls, she cannot find her way out.

Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, Mary Ellmann's writing are more political as they raise the issue of injustice, suppression and exploitation by men over women. Women are compared with the black, Jews, minor groups and the working class where they are oppressed and resisted by bourgeoisie. Although Simon De Beauvoir points out "unlike blacks, women are not a minority, and unlike the proletariat, women are not the product of the history" (138).

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* sets the voice against the patriarchy. Women are taught in a way that they should be happy in sensual and imaginary world. Even in literature too, women's position is regarded as lower class and subordinate one. Commenting on the wrong impression that women should be glamorous, charming and beautiful, Wollstonecraft asserts:

Women are subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which led them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice. (398)

Novels show female as a timid character whereas male as a brave, enthusiastic and active. Such novels give bad impact on females. These novels make women tender and emotionally moving. Women from such fictional texts learn to marry a strong and rich man. They are content in satisfying male's desires and sexual passion. Thus, they remain passive and cannot take strong decision. They cannot exercise their

intellectuality and are trapped in the narrow domestic walls. Such weak and fragile identity of women is created by novels.

Most of the Bible's teachings about women are based upon the foundation laid in Genesis. God created the woman as an "assistant" for the man: However, being an 'assistant' does not mean that the woman was substandard or meek to the man. God created both men and women in His own image, But Adam and Eve, disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden. God gave each of them punishments before ejecting them from the Garden: The punishments on both Adam and Eve were clearly enacted by God Himself. God did not condense women to lower status, nor did he command men to rule severely over their wives. However, in the course of history, it has sometimes been thought that God's punishment of Eve was harsher and suppression of women.

Traditionally, women are considered to be feminine by birth and men are masculine. But these categories are developed by patriarchal society. The gender role shaped in a society is formed in such a way that it makes hierarchy between male and female. So women are confined within private circle and have no approach to public and socio-political sphere. In the fairy tales and stories of the past, women are shown as a very coward and docile character. They need a defender and that role is always played by men. In some fairy tales, women are represented in negative role too like witch, whore, bitches etc. There is also the culture of saying good girl and bad girl in past. Those who obey the patriarchal norms are 'good girls' but those who deny the traditional norms and values are 'bad girls'.

Women were even treated as second grade human being in past decades and centuries. They were oppressed. Society was form such way that every new born baby girl was a second class citizen in society. She was provided less, cared less and discussed less. DewanMahboobHossain, NikNazliNik Ahmad and SitiAlawiahSiraj

asserts on their discussion;

The famous French feminist Simone de Beauvoir mentioned women as the 'second sex' (Elliott 2009). In her masterpiece titled 'The Second Sex', she highlighted the issue of women's oppression. Bamberger (1974) in her anthropological work titled 'The Myth of Matriarchy: Why men rule in Primitive Society', by analysing the pre-historic myths prevailing among three different South American tribes, argued that gender discrimination is a historical phenomenon and 'women are still not free and equal to men..

Women face discrimination in both private and public arenas.(13)

Men used pre-historic myths to control over women first. Women are still not free and equal to men. Even today's world there is somewhat discrimination in both private and public arenas. Woman got their basic rights but they are still not treated as equal as a man.

The research goes on along with female attempts to resist patriarchal norms and values who have been threaten. Every patriarchal society constructs discourses which weaken women identity. However the society imposes power upon women, they accept the challenges and redefine them. This is how the research shows women courage to fight with social injustices over them. The central female characters Yeong-hye and In-hyegrow up in patriarchal society; however it is submissive and passive but In-hye is active working woman. They accept all kinds of challenges and difficulties in the society to establish their voices. They reveal female problems in the society they have been facing for years.

Moreover, this ongoing research tries to find women struggle in order to establish their position in the society because the pre-occupied concept about women manipulates women and throw them into limited society. The research focuses on the

efforts made by women characters of the novel to go against patriarchy and their ultimate failure in doing so due to deeply rooted patriarchal norms and values.

In her popular work *The Second Sex*, Simon de Beauvoir aptly argues that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (295). She elaborates how a boy child is treated differently than a girl child from the beginning although “The world is at first represented in the newborn infant only by immanent sensation.” (296). As a girl child grows she is taught by the behavior of her parents that she is an ‘Other’. The boy on the other hand is given to learn his hardships of independence and told that “more is demanded of boys because they are superior” (299). So right from the beginning they are trained to realize their different roles and responsibilities.

This concept of othering woman is reflected in very first paragraph of the novel. When Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye’s husband describes his wife’s new way of life as vegetarian and remembers what the factors that make him to marry her were:

I’d always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way. To be frank, the first time I met her wasn’t even attracted to her. Middling height’ booped hair neither long nor short; jaundiced, sickly-looking skin; somewhat prominent cheekbones; her timid, sallow aspect told me all I needed to know...And that walk of hers-neither fast nor slow, striding nor mincing. However, if there wasn’t any special attraction, nor did any particular drawbacks present themselves, and therefore there was no reason for the two of us not to get married. 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. (3)

Mr. Cheong had never married Yeong-hye out of love. He married her because she was not more attractive than him in his perspective. Right from the beginning of their

marriage Yeong-hye was objectified by her husband. For him she was below average so there was no reason to not to marry her. He was not enough confidence about himself so he married her thinking she might never ask or question his position and authority. He was sure that Yeong-hye's passive personality will be benefitted to his drawbacks.

From the very beginning, Yeong-hye's marital life was compromised. Her husband married her not because he loved her but because she is reasonably diligent homemaker, attentive spouse. Moreover, she was neither deeply unhappy nor driven by great passions. Daniel Hahn in his review, 'The Vegetarian by Han Kang review – an extraordinary story of family fallout' writes about Mr. Cheong's intention of marrying Yeong-hye:

Yeong-hye is, in her husband's opening words, "completely unremarkable in every way". She is a reasonably diligent homemaker, a reasonably attentive spouse, not deeply unhappy and driven by no great passions. Her husband, Mr Cheong, is a mediocre employee, not greatly ambitious, mildly unenthused by his life but not dramatically so. Time ticks by, and the two of them get on with living their ordinary lives; but their ordinariness, it turns out, is more fragile than they realise.(5)

Moreover, he thinks Yeong-hye is completely unremarkable in every way. Their marriage does not turn them into a family living together rather two strangers living under same roof. Furthermore, their family turns out to be more fragile than they realise. However, it was not Yeong-hye who was not fully into relationship but it was her husband who objectified her from very beginning of their relationship.

Yeong-hye not only turns into vegan but also avoid active sex life with her husband. In Mr. Cheong's memoir Yeong-hye would make first move occasionally

for physical demands. But after turning into hardcore vegan she started to avoid physical relation and she will not participate if Mr. Cheong makes first move. Mr. Cheong remembers what she had said when he questions about her avoiding of sex:

‘Actually...’

‘What?’

‘...it’s the smell.’

‘The smell?’

‘The meat smell. Your body smells of meat.’

‘Didn’t you see me just take a shower? So where’s this smell coming from, hun?’

‘From the same place your sweat comes from,’ she answered, completely in earnest.(16-17)

Yeong-hye’s resistance towards sex is actually her resistance towards meat. She says, she does not want to involve in physical relation because Mr. Cheong’s body produces sweat with the smell of meat he had consumed. Moreover, she answered completely in earnest. However, her husband does not believe and cannot tolerate her explanation and behaviour.

Yeong-hye’s husband, Mr. Cheong describes Yeong-hye’s choices were astonishing when she used to obey his command. Moreover, her duty is to revolve around him. After series of disobey of his command he thinks that his wife is no more astonishing as once she used to be. John William Walker Zeiser discusses about Mr. Cheong’s psychology in his review, ‘The Unsettling Gaze of Han Kang: Examining Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* and *Human Acts*’ as act of resistance of self centred man driven by patriarchal norms:

He wonders, “How on earth could she be so self-centered? I stared at her

lowered eyes, her expression of cool self-possession. The very idea that there should be this other side to her, one where she selfishly did as she pleased, was astonishing. Who would have thought she could be so unreasonable?"...There's the inability for a man to comprehend a woman's interior life that does not revolve around himself ("this other side of her"). The concept of choice in a strictly hierarchical and patriarchal culture ("she selfishly did as she pleased"). Throughout the novel these issues appear over and over as most of those around Yeong-hye find it conceptually impossible to empathize with her.(84)

Whatever Mr. Cheong describes about his wife is driven mindset of strictly hierarchical and patriarchal culture. Instead of accepting her new lifestyle he criticizes it in every possible way. Moreover, he thought Yeong-hye was becoming self-centered by turning herself into vegan but he was the one with self-centered mindset because he never wanted to know the reasons behind Yeong-hye's decision.

Mr. Cheong informs about his wife's latest eating habit to her families. One day, all of her family members gather for a dinner. In dinner everybody forces Yeong-hye to eat meat. However, Yeong-hye remains committed to her decision. She continuously refuses her father and families' request to consume meat. Mr. Cheong discloses the meeting:

'Father, I don't eat meat.'

In an instant, his flat palm cleaved the empty space. My wife cupped her cheek in her hand.

...Jaw clenched, her intent stare facing each one of us down in turn, my wife brandished the knife.

...Blood ribboned out of her wrist. The shock of red splashed over white

china. As her knees buckled and she crumpled to the floor, the knife was wrested from her by In-hye's husband, who until then had sat through the whole thing as an idle spectator.(39-41)

When Yeong-hye refuses to eat meat in family dinner her father strikes her straight to face. He brutally terrorizes the situation. Moreover, like Yeong-hye's husband, her father also did not try to attention her reason to quit meat. At last, situation goes so bad Yeong-hye picks up a knife and slits her wrist with it. She attempts a suicide. Moreover, rather than eating meat and obeying whatever her parents urges, she decides to die.

Yeong-hye's father has always been harsh towards her. He always imposes his norms and values to her. In the family gathering too, he forces her to eat meat when she refuses to eat meat he choses violence to make her whatever he says to do. Yeong-hye's father is truly an agent of patriarchal society with patriarchal norms and values. Jiayang Fan discusses about his controlling nature in his review, 'Han Kang and the Complexity of Translation':

Yeong-hye's decision not to eat meat is received as an appalling rebuke by her entire family, especially her father, a Vietnam War veteran whose violent tendencies suggest the traumas of the battlefield. (More than three hundred thousand Koreans served alongside American soldiers in that conflict.) During a family meal, orchestrated as an intervention of sorts, he attempts to shove a piece of sweet-and-sour pork down his daughter's throat. In response, Yeong-hye slits her wrist as the entire family watches in horror.(24)

Yeong-hye's father tries to shove a piece of meat down her throat instead of swallowing it she vomits. He forces her again and she refuses again but this time he uses physical damage. He hit her so hard she falls to ground. But this time Yeong-hye

resists by slits her wrist as the entire family watches in horror.

Mr. Cheong not only dominates Yeong-hye in her decisions he sometimes sexually abuses her too. Yeong-hye is living a marriage life in which there is no love. Moreover, her husband is such a ruthless person he never listens to her and couple of times he did rape her too. Mr. Cheong did not seek consent of Yeong-hye the moment he raped her. He came from a friendly dinner, felt sexually aroused and raped her just like that. Mr. Cheong never asked what Yeong-hye wants neither he asked for her suggestion before doing something. He never asks for her consent in a physical relation. Mr. Cheong describes the moment of his raping Yeong-hye:

So yes, one night when I returned home late and somewhat inebriated after meal with colleagues, I grabbed hold of my wife and pushed her to the floor. Pinning down her struggling arms and tugging off her trousers, I became unexpectedly aroused. She put up a surprisingly strong resistance and, spitting out vulgar curses all the while, it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully. Once that had happened, she lay there in the dark staring up at the ceiling, her face blank, as though she were a 'comfort woman' dragged in against her will, and I was the Japanese soldier demanding her services.(30)

He forcefully pushed Yeong-hye to the floor tugged her trousers and raped her.

Moreover, he describes this matter he had won the battle against Yeong-hye. While he was raping Yeong-hye, she was just staring up at the ceiling and her face was blank.

He defines that as she was a 'comfort woman' for Japanese soldier.

Yeong-hye had been always objectified and merely treated as human by her husband. For her husband, Mr. Cheong, she was just someone who puts food on the table and keeps the house in good order. The patriarchal pathos and ethos of Mr.

Cheong has made Yeong-hye into a stranger in her own home. Eileen Battersby in her review of the book 'The Vegetarian Review: A South Korean Housewife Finds We Aren't What We Eat' writes:

Yeong-hye is never more than “my wife” in a narrative offered by a cold, detached husband. His tone is as impersonal as a police report. To him she is no more than an annoying possession. It is shocking. But worse is to follow. The young woman grows thin; her husband says she looked like a hospital patient. There is no remorse, no sympathy. He is simply providing information.(24)

Moreover, after turning into vegetarian Yeong-hye grows thin and thinner day by day instead of taking care of her Mr. Cheong, her husband says she looked like a hospital patient. There is no sympathy, apathy or remorse in his narration. Neither he is worried about her condition nor he is happy. He describes her like just another passer by. Instead of remembering his wife's health condition he is simply providing information like a radio anchor reading evening news.

Yeong-hyewants to leave all the worldly tag of siser, daughter, and wife and quest for her identity. She wants to establish herself as an individual who is born and raised like all other individuals. After finding her and her brother-in-law's sextape by her sister In-hye, her brother-in-law tries to commit suicide but she rather goes over the veranda railing naked and tries to make love with sunlight. The portion of her reconciliation with nature has described as:

She thrust her glittering golden breasts over the veranda railing. Her legs were covered with scattered orange petals, and she spread them wide as though she wanted to make love to the sunlight, to the wind. He heard the sounds of the approaching ambulance siren, of screams, sighs, the yells of children, all the

commotion of the alleyway down below. The sound of feet hurrying up the stairs, coming closer.(119)

Yeong-hye forgets all the worldly norms and values and goes naked in the veranda. She forgets all the relation, relatives and surroundings. She is no more a sister, sister-in-law, daughter and wife. Moreover, there is no owner for her body it is herself who can own her and do whatever wants to do. She breaks the chain and norms of society. She slaps hardily to patriarchal belief and norms. The submissive and introvert Yeong-hye has turned into a rebellion.

Yeong-hye's identity is shaped around and by her family. She wants to break that identity given by her family. In a patriarchal society, a female is bound to receive an identity given by family. Moreover, family put limitless expectations on a shoulder of an individual. An individual must forget his/her wishes to please their family.

Nicky Kim in his review, 'The Vegetarian: Spoilers and Analysis' discusses about the Korean claustrophobic family and culture:

Yeong-hye is always framed through someone else, so the reader hardly hears Yeong-hye's thoughts directly. It's almost as if her voice doesn't exist, if it weren't for her family. She is simply defined by her role as a wife, sister-in-law and sister.

What Yeong-hye is doing when she stops eating meat and playing her social role, is claiming back her identity. She is doing something that is outside her requirement and this disrupts other people's lives, and she suffers the consequences. (36)

Yeong-hye's quitting meat is her revolt towards the norms and values created by society. Moreover, she stops being daughter, sister and wife by rejecting her family members' request. She is claiming back her identity by quitting meat and social role.

Yeong-hye chooses radical method to get her identity. Moreover, she does not care about her health and life. Once, In-hyeYeong-hye she is acting harsh towards her because she might die. But the conversation takes unexpected turn and Yeong-hye replies:

In-hye couldn't hold herself back any longer. 'You!' she yelled. 'I'm acting like this because I'm afraid you're going to die!'

Yeong-hye turned her head and stared blankly at In-hye, as though the latter were not her sister but a complete stranger. After a while, the question came.

'Why, is it such a bad thing to die?'(157)

In-hye yells at Yeong-hye and tells she care about her health. But Yeong-hyedoesnot give any importance to her feelings. Moreover, she stared blankly at In-hye, as though she doesnot know her. Furthermore, she reacts like dying is not a big deal at all.

Yeong-hye is no longer a woman pursuing a vegetarian lifestyle. Moreover, she doesnot want to contact with other people. Her vegetarian commitment turns ugly and uglier day by day. Niky Kim interpretesYeong-hye's condition, "No longer is she a woman pursuing a vegetarian lifestyle. She becomes anti-social, suicidal and develops anorexia. Although it is unclear if she is seeking death, the reader can guess that living is no longer a priority. It's almost as if she doesn't want to live if she can't be free" (52).

Yeong-hye develops anti-social, suicidal and anorexia. For her keep living is no longer a priority. Shechooses death rather than bound by patriarchal norms and values. Moreover, she acts so radical that she forgets one can enjoy freedom by living.

Yeong-hye meets her tragic health condition because of commitment. Her radical attitude puts her life in danger. Her family left her, husband divorced her and she ended up in mental hospital because of her silly radical attitude. If she had been

able to control her radical attitude she would possibly been able to enjoy her identity and freedom. But her revolution against patriarchal society fails at the moment when she ended up in mental hospital and risked her life in danger.

On the other hand, Yeong-hye's sister In-hye is a successful businesswoman who runs few cosmetics shops around the city. Unlike Yeong-hye, In-hye was not physically punished by her father. In-hye was active during her young age and she supported her family with emotionally and economically. But she also experienced the domination and subjugation in patriarchal society. She was loved by her father not because she means something to him rather she used to provide her family monetarily. Later she experienced the oppression from her husband. Her husband is an artist who doesnot love her. Like, Yeong-hye's husband Mr. Cheong, In-hye's husband also never loved her truly.

There are lots of sex scenes in the novel. Most of the time sex has taken place because the male characters wanted to have sex. Moreover, male characters do not want to know whether their counterparts are ready to make such relation or not. In another words, they forcefully rapes them. The male characters treat their wives as a sex toy. The sufferings of female under a male dominated society are unimaginable. They were taken as waiter in a restaurant, cook and comfort woman.

Like Yeong-hye, In-hye also suffers from spousal rape. Her husband makes a sexual relation without her consent. He even couldnot realizes why his wife was crying after having sex or being raped by her own husband. He narrates the scene of him raping In-hye:

'What's got into you?' He'd put his hand over her mouth then, so he wouldn't have to hear that nasal voice...With her nipple standing straight and hard in his mouth, he reached down and pulled off her knickers. Every time he wanted

to get the image of the small blue petal to open and close, he shut his eyes and tried to block out his wife's face. When it was all over, she was crying. He couldn't tell what these tears meant—pain, pleasure, passion, disgust, or some inscrutable loneliness that she would have been no more able to explain than he would have been to understand. He didn't know.(81-82)

He puts his hand over her mouth so he wouldn't have to hear nasal voice of In-hye while sex intercourse. He wants to find out the Mongolian mark on In-hye's buttock but he cannot find. In reality he was searching Yeong-hye while having sex with In-hye. In other words he was not emotionally involved in sex with his own wife.

The society is guided by patriarchal thoughts and beliefs. Both men and women are victim of this belief. ThrityUmrigar discusses about the dark side of patriarchal society in her review, 'The Vegetarian' rejects more than just meat':

But this is a deceptive novel, its canvas much larger than the mild social satire that one initially imagines. Kang has bigger issues to raise — the effects of childhood abuse, the damage caused by loveless unions, the patriarchy that victimizes both men and women, and finally, the question of whether women have claim to their own bodies.(25)

The position of women in a patriarchal society has always been as 'other'. Kang also represents the ideas like effects of childhood abuse, the damage caused by loveless unions. Moreover, she raises the issues of the patriarchy that victimizes men and women and the question of whether women have claim to their own bodies.

Moreover, she ended any kind of contact with her husband. Once he had called to ask her if he can meet their only son, Ji-woo, she turned down him immediately after hearing his request. She responds to his calls, 'I don't know you,' she muttered, tightening her grip on the receiver, which she'd hung back in the cradle

but was still cluthing. ‘So there’s no need for us to forgive each other. Because I don’t know you’(159-160). Furthermore, she refuses to know him. She clearly said there is no need for forgiveness because she doesnot know him.

In-hye’s husband is not emotionally involved in relation with her. He has been closely observing the divorce of his sister-in-law because he wanted to make a relation with her. Charles R. Larson discuses about In-hye’s husband’s secret attraction towards his sister-in-law in his review, ‘Review: Han Kang’s “The Vegetarian”’:

The narration takes a sudden shift, moving to the point-of-view of Yeong-hye’s brother-in-law, a video filmmaker. He’s observed Yeong-hye’s recent transformation, including her divorce from her husband and her stay in a psychiatric hospital for several months. Yet, because of his own failed marriage (to Yeong-hye’s sister), he has discovered that he is attracted to her and talks her into modeling for him.(29)

Moreover, after discovering his secret attraction towards Yeong-hye he never tried to shut those feelings down. However, he offers Yeong-hye, a woman who is just suffered through a suicidal attempt, modeling in a video for him. He did not offer Yeong-hye because she was attractive rather he has offered her because he wants to make physical relation with her.

In-hye breaks relation with her husband and starts to live freely. Her new way of living is taking care of her son Ji-woo, her business and visiting her sister occasionally. Even though, she is living happily but sometimes she gets sad when her son asks for his father. Sometimes she laughs in her son’s small behavior but immediately she left blank. This pendulum condition of In-hye unfolds:

The only times when the pain simply, miraculously ceases, are those moments

just after she laughs. Something Ji-woo says or does makes her laugh, and then immediately afterwards she is left blank, empty even of pain. At such times, the sheer fact of her having laughed seems unbelievable, and makes her laugh again. Admittedly, this laughter always seems more manic than happy, but Ji-woo loves to see it all the same.(168)

She is neither fully happy nor sad. She is not feeling this void and pain because of her broken marriage but because of Ji-woo's future. In-hye is concerned that Ji-woo will ask one day about his beloved father. She laughs at Ji-woo's funny activities like maniac because she finds it satirical than funnier.

There is no other family member who cares about Yeong-hye, so it has to be In-hye must take care of her. However, In-hye ended up being helpless because her sister Yeong-hye has no interest in being helped. Eileen Battersby discusses about In-hye's helpless condition, "Han's deliberate prose channels into the heart of the helplessness of trying to help when the afflicted has no interest in being helped. Kindly In-hye is a heartbreaking study of the helpless carer"(Para.17). In-hye does every possible things to keep Yeong-hye safe and sound but she ended heartbreaking like her sister Yeong-hye.

Yeong-hye and In-hye, representatives of feminist revolt in the novel have aggressive perspective towards patriarchal discourse over women's existence. They strongly reject their forces and ignore men's existence. They face a lot of challenges while going against patriarchal dogmatism. Because of established male norms and values, their rebellion action cannot defeat the patriarchal empire rather it becomes castle of sand. Their rebellion nature is engulfed by male power and become helpless and vulnerable. The dream of major characters to change the perspectives of society towards woman gets smashed like a droplet of water in hot iron rod. The objectives of

their lives are shattered due to patriarchy.

Every society is governed by a particular socio-cultural system which has a direct impact upon the lives of the people. Han Kang writes about the patriarchal system of Korea, male heroism and its domination and oppression against women. The novel depicts the extrinsic and intrinsic nature of patriarchy and show the subjugated, stereotyped, and subordinated hopeless condition of women. It pictures the reality of Korean society and also the story of relationship in modern developed Korea. It exhibits the brutal, tyrant, unjust domination and exploitation of Women in the patriarchal structure of the society.

It is based on reason and sensibilities and the exposure of patriarchies' oppressive and dominating ideologies. It also remains as the best example of inhumane treatment to dominate and suppress the voices of women by the tyrant brutalities and arrogances. Yeong-hye and In-hye try to release themselves from the discrimination of patriarchal society and its boundaries. The practice for formation of justifiable convention in society strongly relates to its advocacy in favor of excluded, deprived, ignored, and submissive women. It offers strikes into the conflict between male and female, society and culture which creatively and critically concede the resistance, power struggle, and raising consciousness against the corrupted nature of patriarchy.

The submissive woman, Yeong-hye, is compelled to live with her husband Mr. Cheong. Yeong-hye tries to claim her separate identity by turning into vegan. But she cannot overcome the family bondage and patriarchal ties. Thus female protagonists, even if they attempt to throw away the fetters of patriarchy their efforts may vanish like a drop of water on a hot iron rod and finally they may succumb to the giant male created institution. Yeong-hye and In-hye are example of a failed attempt to break this

iron cage of male chauvinistic society.

Similarly In-hye also fails to enjoy her freedom after divorcing her husband. She gets freedom from her husband but she has left with a kind of unseen void and pain. One could interrogate on the intent of the author for this portrayal of the failure of its two protagonists. So there is space for further researchers to invest in this area.

The novel does not only talk about the individual story of Kang's characters but of all the women in the World, who are doomed to suffer misfortune, tragic death, frustration, marital domestic violence and failures. It reveals that Kang likes to unveil the realities of the than women of this time by arguing contentious and enterprising spirit within the point of gender and representation.

To sum up, the novel successfully expresses the need for a change in the social system to upgrade and uplift feminine instincts. It advocates for feminine potentialities and independence. Kang provokes for the anti-patriarchic pursuance until the condition of women is improved and transformed. The novel eloquently expresses the misrepresented, misinterpreted, deprived, ignored, and stereotyped conditions of women.

Lastly, it is a work of art that depicts Kang's belief in the justifiable society which can be established through the action of resistance and revolting to overthrow the patriarchy and their ideologies responsible for the plight of womankind. Thus the novel is a red mast/flag on the ship of war against the society entangled by different anti-women (for that matter anti-human) ideologies and practices.

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