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**Subverting Patriarchal Narratives
Scripting Social Change through the Representations of
Yeong-hye and Jiyoung**

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List of Acronyms

OECD Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

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My thesis journey runs like a montage of memories in my mind - a tapestry of my deepest connections, invigorating perspectives, hardest conversations, and bellyaching laughter.

To my supervisor, Shyamika, your unwavering support reinforced faith when I needed it the most!

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Abstract

This study focuses on the representation of the protagonists in *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-Joo to understand the experience of women under patriarchy. The study is important because it seeks to understand the effect of non-dominant representation through feminist fictions, by weaving together the theories of representation, patriarchy, and feminist standpoint. The questions addressed through this research seeks to understand how dominant narrative influence the representation of women in media, and how can media, especially feminist fictions in this case, contributes to shifting these narratives through non-dominant representations. The main findings of the study show the narrative framing of the protagonists uncovers the gendered and patriarchal contexts they are situated within, and as a result their roles as wife and mother leaves them tormented and subjected to oppression. The study also shows that women face the effects of patriarchy differently based on their social context and the dominant narrative about social norms that time, and yet, both the characters experience a sense of loss of identity by virtue of being forced on with multiple identities to meet the family, society, and state expectations as a woman. Hence the demonstrates that learning from the life experience of the protagonists in the said feminist fictions through standpoint theory can help portray a version of reality not perceived by the dominant narrative, thus shifting narratives that oppress women.

Relevance to Development Studies

This topic relevant to Development Studies insofar to understand how gender norms are constructed by the media and how representation in media can shift these norms. This research offers discourse on representation of women and patriarchy by learning from the everyday realities of women, represented in feminist fictions. This aspect of seeking suppressed knowledge through standpoint epistemological approach weaves in the component of politics of representation to challenge these dominant patriarchal narratives. The feminist fictions become an instrumental tool in amplifying the experiences of the marginalised, and to critically reflect on power relations, gender hierarches, and cultural norms, thereby reimagine realities.

Keywords

Representation, patriarchy, fiction, media, South Korea, women, *The Vegetarian*, Kim Jiyoung.

1 Gender Inequality, Patriarchy & Media Representation of Women

*"It was nothing but sheer obscenity for a wife to go against her husband's wishes as mine had."
Yeong-hye's husband, in *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019)*

*"Financial support! As the head of the household... That's a huge responsibility."
Kim Jiyoung's husband, in *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021)*

These two excerpts taken from two prominent South Korean feminist fictions, *The Vegetarian* (2019) and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (2021), bring out the central issue this research paper will aim to explore – the dominant narratives¹ of women depicted as wives and mothers (Elfving-Hwang, 2010) in male dominant societies, and the associated dominant representations in media as shown in the words the protagonists' husbands by underscoring gender roles embedded within the text. Using these impressionable quotes at the starting point of this research paper helps navigate main cornerstones the research aims to explore.

1.1 Introduction: Rising Inequality Shadowed by Accelerating Development

Patriarchy has no one form, nor is it grounded to one location (Walby, 1989). With widening gender inequality all around the world, patriarchal norms are hailed as one of the highly contributing reasons for sustaining gender discrimination (Delgado, 2023) and oppression of women. In this research, the paper looks at South Korea as an example for post-colonial and post-conflict country to rising to a stance of a global power, while the rapid development process has relied heavily on a gendered system leading to inherent gender inequalities (Lee, 2014) within homes and private spheres. Put another way, the gendered process of development in South Korea, rests on the unseen and undervalued multi-layered work of women (Choi, 1998). In current context, this is enforced through the suppression of labor market in tune with state's intervention in women's reproductivity and childbearing as the primary role (Lee, 2014) strikes at the very core of gender asymmetry in the Korean society (Choe, 2006).

As it stands, South Korea ranks 105 out of 146 countries in the Gender Inequality Index, falling from 99 in 2022, marking a regression in its gender equality efforts (World Economic Forum, 2023) and the Ministry for Employment and Labor recognizes that South Korea has a long road ahead to go in terms of improving gender equal conditions (Yang, 2021). While South Korea has made immense progress with development projects, traditional values and patriarchy continue to determine the way of life within the Korean society (Jackson, Liu and Woo, 2009). Existing scholarship from South Korea also highlights that patriarchy has always been present in the region (Moon, 2012), and has been molded over the years through years of colonialism, war, and authoritarian rule (Jeong, 2011; Jooyeon, 2014).

¹ According to Kim (2008), the dominant narrative is decided by whichever social group wins the contestation gets to sustain or challenge narratives and representation.

Rooted in male dominated perceptions, traditional values of Confucianism² (Jackson, Lui, and Woo, 2009), and military and patriarchal hegemony forming the founding pillars of South Korea's socio-political construction (Kim and Choi, 1998), the focus of the study is intricately woven with the reliance of media³ in sustaining the narratives to keep patriarchy functioning (Kim, 2008). Given that about half the population identify as women, the issue of gender inequality, as alarming as it may be deemed, is not prioritized within the country. In 2022, the now President made strong remarks for abolishing the Ministry of Gender Equality (Moon, 2022) by denying any existence of structural inequality in the region. Along with rising gender pay gaps, women also face hate crimes, sexual harassment, and digital crimes (Ahn, 2022; Moon, 2022). To this extent, the fight from the Korean feminist movement calls it a fierce gender battle, where the debate around the beliefs on gender norms can trigger serious source of conflict amongst people (Moon, 2022).

Resultantly, the feminist movement is not without any backlashes. After the launch of the Escape the Corset movement in 2019 to break the beauty standards on women, and the success #MeToo movement in 2017 in ousting several ministers and elites as perpetrators of sexual harassment, men have been attacking feminists for on ground misandry, leaving the country polarized on the issue of gender equality. To this extent, the word "femi" is used in a derogatory way for feminists, celebrities, and activist who fight for ending gender discrimination, further causing oppression of voices and censoring conversations on gender-based issues (Ahn, 2022).

With dominant media producing certain image of a society confronting to the dominant discourse for men and women (Kim, 1998), the focus is always rooted on preservation of family, centering women's representation as wives and mothers (Kim, 2008). The role of media (Pak, 2018; Benson and Hallin, 2007) in framing gender norms in a certain way to fit the larger patriarchal discourse is critical to understand the forces in reproducing the narratives and thereby, causing representational or symbolic violence on women's portrayal (Bräuchler and Budka, 2022), and as a result the socio-cultural and political implications for women (Robinson, 2001; Bräuchler and Budka, 2022).

1.2 Background and Context

This chapter will elaborate on the current gender inequality scenario as enunciated by Confucian values and patriarchal norms enforced at different levels (Choe, 2006), along with the role of media in sustaining such narratives of gender roles (Kim, 2008). Drawing from these insights, the first section of the chapter attempts to make a comprehensive understanding of the historical and contemporary forces that have marginalized Korean women in the development process (Lee, 2014). Through this, the following section of the

² According to Jackson, Liu and Woo (2009), Confucian values in South Korea primarily functions on male centered hierarchies and lineage, and in the context of women, the values "command obedience to men" and procreation, preferably, of male children. This curbs individual freedom and autonomy of women and denies any form of expression. While in the current capitalist context, the values are not blatantly imposed but the very foundation of nuclear families and women as caretakers and mothers, stems from these values.

³ For the purpose of the research, media is understood as an instrument that enables and mediates communication between people, shaping the understanding of the world (Bräuchler and Budka, 2022), and thus, allowing for an all-encompassing definition to analyse the influence of media on the social norms and in shaping the everyday life through cultural conceptions and communication of ideas, values, and beliefs (Bräuchler and Budka, 2022).

chapter will argue that dominant knowledge around gender and development is informed through these values, that are sustained and reproduced by the dominant media. Herein, the connection between gender, development, and media will clarify the interconnectedness in knowledge thus produced based on power relations and gender hierarchies.

The Korean history is riddled with years of colonial and military imprints, neglecting an immense gendered legacy, that is being reshaped to fit the androcentric needs of capitalism and patriarchal hegemony⁴ (Kim and Choi, 1998). A reading of feminist history signals that the Japanese imperialism from 1910-1945 and the partition directed by US and USSR in 1945 mark two significant junctures in navigating the pre-independence Korean women's (Kim and Choi, 1998) that laid the groundwork for all ensuing movements. The nationalist movement called for liberating women as mother, the following New Women's Movement called for emancipation of women from patriarchal household (Moon, 2012; Kim and Choi, 1998). The dominant narrative around this time, demonstrates the representation of women based on the reproduction value, and for "rebuilding" the nation following the years of war (Han and Ling, 1998; Moon, 2012).

For one, the larger perception in South Korea remains even today that women should become mothers, give up their career to take care of the family, while the husband is responsible for financially running the family (Alfarini and Tetty, 2012). Though the perceptions about marriage are shifting with the rising divorce rates and the growing movements for women liberty, autonomy, and individuality, the rising numbers of remarriage (Rowan, 2019) indicates that any deviation in the norms still happens within the larger confines of the dominant narratives (Kim, 2008). The concept of family and roles of members within the family helps understand how gender roles are defined within the family, in understanding who makes decisions and who are required to take on the division of production and reproduction (Han and Ling, 1998; Lee, 2014). Resultantly, this helps define identities and the norms prescribed for these identities. In the case of South Korea, when former President Park Chung-Lee regime inscribed gendered division of labor within the state development context (Lee, 2014) by bringing together nationalism with militarism, it laid down norms of hierarchy between the parents and children, between husbands and wives, and state and women. Consequently, the reconfiguration of relationships between gender in the Korean society, a traditional notion of women came to be relied on for the development of the nation by increasing the social status and privilege of men (Lee, 2014).

In the Gender Inequality Index, South Korea ranks 114 in terms of economic participation and opportunity (World Economic Forum, 2023). Indicators like health and survival show as high as 46%, and gender pay gap at a staggering 31%. As a result of this curated "state-market-family" strategy of growth post the Korean war, drawing its inspiration from Confucian characterization along with the complementary welfare development (Song, 2019) regime, creates a shift in the cultural and social landscape as well. Locating this through history places significance with the accompanying ideological discourse that reflect the intentions of these development strategies (Lee, 2014).

Liberal feminists have argued that the rapid development in South Korea has in fact further marginalized women through exploitation in markets by capitalist elites who manipulate the wages and accessibility of work for women (Park, 1993). The contestation between women being part of the modernization process on one hand, and the notion of women as the nation's birth givers on the other hand, functions on the fine lines of promoting nuclear families for modernization while manipulating the role of women in enabling this (Lee, 2014). As a result, the society needs women to keep capitalism functioning, concurrently, the patriarchal dependencies on women to manage the household

⁴ Hall (1997) defines hegemony as a form of power where the leadership of a particular group dominates over the others, commanding consent, while appearing to be natural.

for the benefit of men, doubly subjugating women in public and private spheres (Walby, 1989).

1.2.1 Portrayal of women in media

With increasing reliance on media for the everyday life, South Korea's gender inequality and patriarchy can be understood through the influence of narratives portrayed in the media. Portrayal of women in dominant media⁵ and persisting gender inequality and experience of women's lives under patriarchy cannot be separated from the socio-political and historical contexts of gender norms that define the roles of women and men in the Korean society (Kim, 2012). For one, looking at the narrative patterns and structures of soap operas, cinemas, and advertisements, they predominantly attract female audience by showcasing "female skills" and image of a "good wife" in caring for familial matters fitting within a patriarchal capitalist narrative (Kim, 2012). In a country where the daily leisurely activity is to consume media, such portrayals have lasting effect on the way viewers understand about themselves and their place in this world. As Kim (2008) points out, popular media such as cinema (Lee, 2019), magazines (Jooyeon, 2014), newspapers (Kim, 2008), TV dramas (Kim, 2006), and social media (Chouliaraki, 2021), are not typically home to counter-hegemonic discourse or non-dominant representations. The effects of such curated representations are what Chouliaraki (2010) refers to as the cultural domination of one group over another, causing a symbolic violence⁶ on the oppressed and marginalized voices (Hall, 1997; Chouliaraki, 2004).

Representation of women in media always touches on sexuality in understanding the equal relationship between women and men (Kim, 2008). In the case of South Korea, the portrayal of women in media is built on the notion of portraying women as wives and mothers, and thereby, reduces women to a sole duty based on reproductive capacity (Elfvig-Hwang, 2010). At the same time, the existing academic literature on the hegemonic role⁷ of mass media indicates that any representations that challenges women's autonomy often gets considered as a threat the very ideology and foundation of the patriarchal society, conceived through male perceived idea of sexuality and female autonomy. And where media representations strayed from this dominant ideology, it was largely confined within patriarchal structures, reinforcing the foundations with adapting times (Kim, 2008).

Resultantly, studies have demonstrated that representations of gender in media often functions to impose dominant ideology (Kim, 2008) derived from dominant knowledge. To further understand the impact of this knowledge created, produced, and circulated through popular media, we need to also understand this aspect in two levels. One, from the side of the media. Looking at the context of South Korea in terms of gender inequality and patriarchal state set up helps identify that media elites (Jooyeon, 2014) control meaning and therefore hold the power to generate knowledge about social conduct (Hall, 1997) and dominant discourse (Jooyeon, 2014). This phenomenon is better understood through reading this with the concept of manufacturing consent (Herman and Chomsky, 2010) arguing for media being an instrument of the elites in representing narratives their benefit,

⁵ An apparatus for state's ideological implementation (Bennett, 2005).

⁶ According to Chouliaraki (2010), symbolic power is understood based on the "*relationship between discourse and society*" and through that, the relationship between the micropolitics of everyday within the texts working in the micropolitics of ideologies and power relations.

⁷ According to Hall (1997), hegemonic role refers to certain conditions where certain social groups exert social dominance over the others.

and as a result media-state relations can have either positive or negative impact on the social and political outcomes (Robinson, 2001; Kim, 2007).

Two, from the other side of the audience who already come in contact with the media with pre-existing knowledge about their social world, which we will refer to as situated knowledge (Harding, 1991) based on the socio-political, material-ideological contexts they come from (Kim, 2012). This situated knowledge of the audience plays a huge role in the way the information and knowledge flows and is accepted or rejected through popular media. And it is the effect of the situated knowledge that audience will make their own meanings as viewers (Harding, 1991; Kim, 2012). Therefore, a subversive understanding of certain dominant narratives portrayed in the media by the viewers occurs from resisting those narratives, however this opens the discussion for questions like who will accept the narratives as it, and who will reject it and how does the knowledge they consume, albeit accept or reject, influence their everyday life.

1.2.2 Research Objective and Questions

The main objective of this research is to understand how media represents women in a patriarchal society and identify how feminist fictions can demonstrate non-dominant representations for social change, through the lives of the protagonists in the South Korean literary fictions, *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021). Understanding the representation of women in media, along with the lived experiences of women in South Korea elevates the critical need in finding oppressed voices and to learn from the perspectives of these oppressed voices in ensuring social change, and gender justice.

To navigate through the analysis, the paper will understand the nature of media influence in sustaining the patriarchal narratives derived from dominant forms of knowledge about patriarchy and dominant representation of women as mothers and wives in South Korea. Essentially, this study will examine the portrayal of the protagonists from both the books to seek the experience of the everyday life of women under patriarchy, and to achieve this objective, the paper seeks the following questions:

1.2.2.1 Research Questions

How can feminist fictions contribute to shifting dominant narratives through non-dominant representations?

The paper will answer these sub-questions in line with the above:

1. How do *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021) frame the representation of the protagonists?
2. How does the categorization of the protagonists generate insight about patriarchal norms within its context?
3. How does the focalization of the narration depict the social norms within which the protagonist is represented?
4. In what ways do these representations generate non-dominant knowledge and subvert gender norms and patriarchy in South Korea?

2 Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

The first section of this chapter will illustrate the theoretical, first, situating it with feminist research, by weaving together standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991) with frameworks from politics of representation (Gledhill, 1997; Hall, 1997) and theorizing patriarchy (Walby, 1989).

The second section of the paper will elucidate the methodological perspectives and data collection methods in operationalizing the theory with the analysis. Equipping this line of research within this paper helps bring together feminist research with politics of media representation to probe the question who gets to decide what gets portrayed in the media, and where do suppressed voices go. Simultaneously, weaving in the theory of patriarchy helps demonstrate that social practices informed by male perceptions that often ignore the other side of the story.

2.1 Theorizing A Feminist Framework for Unravelling the Representation of Women's Lives under Patriarchy in South Korea

Criticizing conventional scientific research for its audacious nature of placing itself as the one true storyteller of knowledge forms the root of standpoint feminist theory (Harding, 1991), and adopting this perspective allows seeking different forms of knowledge vested in the life experiences of women represented in different forms, that often ignored by the dominant research, paves the guiding light for this research paper.

2.1.1 Feminist Standpoint Epistemology

The research paper will operationalize feminist standpoint epistemology by Sandra Harding (1991) to seek knowledge from the lives of the protagonists in the two said books about the effect women's life under patriarchy in South Korea. Simply put, standpoint epistemology refers to seeking knowledge from the standpoint or perspective of a historically and socially oppressed group (Harding, 1991).

To elucidate in context of the research, on one hand, standpoint epistemology allows for criticizing dominant knowledge production that inherently oppresses the voice and expression of some social groups, especially women (Harding, 1991) as the traditional scientific methods of research are inherently affected by different forms of social inequalities and gender hierarchies (Jaggar, 2008). On the other, situating in standpoint epistemology allows the paper to critically engage with grounding in women's experiences that can mark as an indicator for reality (McClish and Bacon, 2002), and voicing out experiences that are not considered important from a male perspective (Harding, 1991).

Originally developed by Dorothy Smith in 1974 and Nancy Hartsock in 1983, and finally officially formulated by Harding (1991), the standpoint epistemology has been criticized and modified over time, yet, had paved the way for critical research in voicing subjugated experiences that generate as much valid knowledge (McClish and Bacon, 2002) about the life around us.

At this point, the paper cannot go without mentioning the critiques to feminist standpoint theory (Jaggar, 2015) that scrutinized the theory for unifying “women” as a single category and ignoring the sub-categories and hierarchies within women as a group, and most critical of all, the theory was claimed to be another “white woman’s” privilege of speaking on behalf of all women. However, in acknowledging this criticism, this research paper recognizes that standpoint epistemology of the protagonists in a country that is built on gender hierarchy and represented as such in media (Kim 2008) as a starting point for researching the distinctive problems often not visible or ignored by the dominant group (Jaggar, 2008). Without this common collective identity of “women” (McClish and Bacon, 2002), critical analysis of multiple standpoints of women who live under patriarchy that vary with age, race, and class (Jaggar, 2015) cannot be undertaken.

2.1.1.1 “Strong-Objectivity” of the “Protagonists” standpoints

Essentially, learning from the standpoint of the protagonists, this research paper offers an objective position within the social relations in South Korea to articulate the knowledge vested in their experience (Harding, 2013; Jaggar, 2008). The concept of “strong objectivity” laid out by Harding (2013) calls for the acknowledgement that all human beliefs, values, and traditions have a social location (Harding, 2013). Consequently, the notion of “strong objectivity” also criticizes the hegemony of traditional androcentric knowledge and upholds the validity of “less partial” knowledge by marginalized groups (McClish and Bacon, 2002; Jaggar, 2015).

The theory of “strong objectivity” has been previously used to analyze protagonists across different fictional works (Jaggar, 2008). In demonstrating the successful methodological application of feminist epistemology stand-point in rhetoric studies, McClish and Bacon (2002) analyses the protagonist in Jane Austin’s *Persuasion* (cite) in understanding the life experiences of those historically oppressed and marginalized (McClish and Bacon, 2002). In demonstrating different strategies of resistance of women in patriarchal marriages, Zia, Jadoon and Ali (2021) argue that feminist standpoint epistemology provides a framework to learn from the lives of the protagonists in *The House of Clay and Water* (2017 – citation) and *Nobody Killed Her* (2017 – citation) offering insights about different forms of resistance to oppressive systems as part of the protagonists representation of their everyday life (Zia, Jadoon and Ali, 2021). The book, *Feminist Theory and Pop Culture* (Trier-Bieniek, 2020), argues that understanding culture, especially popular culture⁸ unveils the narratives of different forms of representation, and allows for bearing importance to experiences of all groups of people. Consequently, this brings forth suppressed voices of women and helps critically engage with discourses that continue to marginalize them (Trier-Bieniek, 2020).

However, such an application of research framework is not employed for analyzing the protagonists in this research. Analyzing the standpoint of the protagonists, demonstrates the power relations (Harding, 1991) within which they live their ordinary everyday lives. Rooted in the historic and social contexts of the time, the standpoint theory recognizes the epistemic authority⁹ of women based on the social location of political, social, and economic oppression, and at the same time, being discredited as knowers (Jaggar, 2015). Therefore, the

⁸ Form of media that circulates to masses and is consumed widely and quickly (Trier-Bieniek, 2020).

⁹ Harding (1991) theorises that social groups historically on the margins have different experience of the reality that does not fit within the narrative of the dominant groups. This additional perspective of reality gives them an advantage as knowers based on the social, political, and cultural locations they determine their life (Jaggar, 2015).

theory places reliance on certain knowledge claims when the research begins with addressing the questions of the marginalized, challenges the ruling elites and institutions, and gives credibility to diverse forms of “knowers” based on their social locations (Jagger, 2015).

2.1.2 Politics of Representation

Stuart Hall’s (1997) definition of representation creates a foundation for the paper to position the influence of media not just in producing, and sustaining meanings and narratives from dominant ideology, but in also creating a space for negotiating of meanings by marginalized groups, thereby creating a process of “re-presenting” ideas of what something could stand for (Hall, 1997).

He defines representation as “*production of meaning through language*” where “*representation is the vehicle of the media...for what it wishes to communicate to the masses*” (Hall, 1997). Through this, he argues that meanings cannot be fixed and keeps changing based on the culture and the language, signs, and symbols used within. As a result, the analysis will help probe the power relations vested in the process of creating and negotiating meanings, and conferring them on the masses (Hall, 1997). A constructionist approach¹⁰ here questions on the process of who produces the meaning, what is the meaning produced, and how the meaning is understood (Hall, 1997).

2.1.2.1 Representation of Women in Fiction

Genre theory by Christine Gledhill (1997) helps steer this theory on politics of representation into the depths of analyzing on the role of fiction in constructing portraying non-dominant representations of women and facilitating social change. She argues, it is critical for social science research on fiction to better understand what provides for the fictional world to enter one’s social world, and what potential fiction holds in changing the social world once there (Gledhill, 1997). Paying close attention to the aesthetic form and emotional effect of fiction is one way of grasping the influence of fiction on the everyday life (Gledhill, 1997), and in this research, the paper pays close attention to the lived experience of the protagonists to bring out this very link between fiction and knowledge about the everyday.

Furthermore, genre theory also posits to analyze a genre in three categories of the making, the text, and the reception (Gledhill, 1997), which ties in perfectly with the constructionist approach by Hall (1997) for analyzing a media piece. While Gledhill’s (1997) initially genre theory came to deconstruct the influence of soap operas on women, the arguments about audience interconnectedness with the fictional work, along with notions that certain genres invoke certain expectations and emotions from the audience based on certain conventional frames within which the genre theory functions (Gledhill, 1997), applies very well, in this case to the two literary fictions as well. For one, both the books immediately sparked solidarity with women readers building that instant interconnectedness; and two, the label as “feminist fiction” from South Korea evokes certain expectations when considering the socio-political contexts of the highly gendered state.

Analyzing the protagonists’ life using the standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991), and analyzing the influence of fiction in the social life of the reads through the genre theory

¹⁰ Hall (1997) formulated a social constructionist approach to understand representation. It breaks down signs based on cultural codes of the society and how these signs create a discourse about within the society. Particularly, it recognizes what is presented as the truth and who embodies it through symbolic functions (Hall, 1997).

(Gledhill, 1997) points at the very tension between realism and cultural verisimilitude. According to this concept, realism can be understood as what the readers know to be real within the bounds of a fictional narrative. On the other hand, verisimilitude refers to what the dominant group believes to be true despite what may be the truth or not (Gledhill, 1997), and represents as such. To enable a process of social change, the imposition of a certain dominant truth gets contested by the quest for new “realism” or new “truth” through oppositional representations (Gledhill, 1997). This continuous process of a seeking new meanings within the generic verisimilitude draws from discourses to give recognition for marginally suppressed voices (Harding, 1991; Gledhill, 1997). In reading this with media facilitating and sustaining dominant narratives, genre theory offers an insight of how fiction can work within the conventions of the genre to engage in social change by representing versions not considered by the dominant narratives.

Gender and genre have been a critical debate in understanding different aspects of representation through the work of feminist and female authors (Perry, 1993). With mainstream genres, the theory has helped understand the verisimilitude with the popular genres like thriller, science fiction, and romance (Longhurst, 2012) that engages in certain amount of pleasure. However, women authors producing feminist fiction engage with different narrative techniques to expose structures and stereotypes that keeps alive the dominant narrative, and such authors always tend to face criticism because of changing the “old ways” of life (Greene, 1990). As a result, the paper seeks to understand the influence of literary feminist fictions in enabling social change.

2.1.3 Theorizing Patriarchy

Patriarchy is, in many ways, the central vein running through this research paper and to better understand this age-old concept, the paper draws from the theory laid down by Sylvia Walby (1989). This paper takes from Walby’s (1989) definition of patriarchy, “*system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women*”. At a very basic level, Walby (1989) breaks patriarchy relations in a society into six basic categories:

1. Modes of household production: The difference between paid labor and unpaid labor, and more particularly, the focus on who bears the brunt of unpaid labor and for the benefit of whom points to the direction of women being exploited for the benefit of men (Walby, 1989). Read in conjuncture with the social norm of expecting women to be wives and mothers in South Korea (Elfvig-Hwang, 2010) indicates the functioning of the household falls on the shoulders of the women.
2. Paid work: Focuses on gender division of labor which uses exclusion strategies such as preventing women’s access to equal work and segregation strategies such as pay difference between the genders (Walby, 1989). In the current capitalistic society of South Korea, women get paid less, have unequal accessibility to work, and are unable to find work after maternity leave (Alfarini and Tetty, 2012), indicating the patriarchal relations upon which the Korean development functions on.
3. State: Walby (1989) highlights that, patriarchal states often pose to be on the side of women but fail to undertake any initiative to address the inequalities. For instance, the abolition of the Ministry of Gender Equity in South Korea strikes at the very core of representing a patriarchal state (Ahn, 2022). Additionally, the efforts to decriminalize abortion only in 2021 and state sponsored family planning initiatives demonstrates the state’s perception of women’s reproductive value higher the value of the mind (Elfvig-Hwang, 2010).

4. Male violence: The threat of male authority over women makes this category a hallmark of patriarchy (Walby, 1989). Focused on why men resort to violence, and how they resort to violence (Walby, 1989) offers insight into the use of male violence to subjugate women for their benefit. With high intimate partner violence and sexual violence against women (Se-jin, 2022), South Korea's story is rampant with misogyny and gender discrimination in public and private spheres.
5. Sexuality: Sexuality is another hallmark of patriarchy that has been historically a contested topic between men and women. Especially in the case of South Korea, men are affixed an active sexuality while women are affixed a passive sexuality (Kim, 2008). Critically, who gets to determine this nature, who gets to control it, and from the perspective of whose understanding of sexuality, contributes to how sexuality operationalized patriarchal contexts (Walby, 1989).
6. Culture: Culture refers to shared values (Hall, 1997) of a society, and notions of masculinity and femininity is of interest to this paper, as it explores the traditional values and social norms that define certain cultural practices between men and women (Walby, 1989). The everyday of the South Korean individuals is guided by patriarchal values grounded in traditional Confucian norms and gendered way of life (Jackson, Liu and Woo, 2009), and this shared cultural code of the society determines what it is to be a woman.

This theory also poses that these six categories may influence or overlap each other but can also exist autonomously (Walby, 1989). The six broad categories also operationalize on patriarchy to show it can manifest in more than one way and rejects one overarching notion of patriarchy (Walby, 1989; Alfarini and Tetty, 2012) Applying the theory to the research paper will demonstrate the different patriarchal implications on the protagonists within the said feminist fictions in this research.

Walby (1989) draws on Harding's theory (1991) in connecting her work with standpoint epistemology to the extent of questioning dominant knowledge construction driven by male perception. While Harding (1991) argues that traditional scientific methods of knowledge production is not free of preconceived notions and gender biases based on social locations, power relations, and hierarchies in the society, Walby's (1989) argument points to the fact that all androcentric knowledge production itself puts knowledge as a patriarchal construction (Walby, 1989; Harding, 1991).

Where women's voices are systemically marginalized (Harding, 1991) through male dominated societies, Walby's (1989) theory has been widely used to analyze various forms of patriarchal representations in tune with Harding's (2013) "strong objectivity" to understand the lives of various characters framed within different forms of patriarchal context (Alfarini and Tetty, 2012; Ramadhan, 2019; Zia, Jadoon and Ali, 2021; and Naufina, 2021). Thus, establishing a successful theoretical framework for social science research to navigate within the larger global problem of patriarchy.

Furthermore, this will also allow the paper to draw a link between the pervasive role of media on the audience to demonstrate how certain forms of media cater to producing and sustaining patriarchy, while at the same time, also acknowledge the knowledge vested in alternative forms of representation that is not conflicting to the dominant patriarchal order and gender norms.

2.2 Methodological Perspectives

This section illustrates the methodological perspectives this paper will employ in conducting the research. In prescribing to a feminist epistemological methodology, the research warrants

exploring conditions from which the knowledge is generated (Jagger, 2015). Applying this to the case at hand, the research seeks for knowledge about women's roles, lives, and bodies, that systematically contribute to their marginalization. Then, it allows for challenging the "ways of life" prescribed on the society by the ruling elites through dominant narratives and dominant representation. Next, it offers credibility to the knowledge of the lived experience of the protagonists, the women within the context who are subjugated within public and private spheres. Finally, it generates an approach to look at my place, critically and reflexively, as a researcher, my socially situated knowledge and how that can influence the research (Jagger, 2015).

To arrive at this methodology, the paper drew insights from existing scholarship on both the books. While the literature shows distinctive feminist (Kim, 2020; Yoon, 2021; Casey, 2021; Mustak, 2023); and media analysis (Alfarini and Tetty, 2012; Mah and Kim, 2022) have been conducted with both the books for its significance of patriarchal representations, a feminist epistemological research using tools of media analysis for seeking suppressed knowledge from the everyday lives of the protagonists remains largely absent (Harding, 1991). This very direction is what the research paper is trying to forge.

For *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019), the academic and cultural debate about the role of the translators and particularly, the work of Deborah Smith in translating the Korean version of the book sparked one part of the objective of performing a media analysis on the English version that has been the center of the debate (Yoon, 2021). For *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021), the media analysis of all the versions of the book covers from original Korean version to covers from across different languages (Mah and Kim, 2022) highlights the cultural significance of this book in terms of its reception with a wider international audience and sparked the other part of the objective of analyzing this book.

The analysis so derived using the media tools (explained in the section below) will then juxtapose with the categories of patriarchy (Walby, 1989) within the protagonists' contexts, and thereby, seeking knowledge from the standpoint of the protagonists (Harding, 1991) about the lived experiences of women under patriarchy. Weaving it with the social and cultural context of South Korea and influence of media in representing gender, the paper will argue that media, in this case feminist fictions (Hall, 1997).

2.2.1 Strategies for Analysis: Genre Theory with Framing, Focalization, & Categorization

Equipping a constructionist approach (Hall, 1997) in formulating the methodology using genre theory (Gledhill, 1997) to analyze the literary fictions - *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021) generates three stages of analysis - the intentions of the authors, the textual representation, and the reception of the books. For the first stage, the paper will draw from the author's intentions in writing the story and seeking meaning from the messages they aimed to present to the readers. Second, for understanding the text itself, the paper will use media tools such as:

- *framing* (Meijer, 1993; Zarkov 1997) to understand the deconstruction of the framing techniques used to narrate the story. Framing of any narrative has the power to change perceptions, and therefore, analyzing through framing will be demonstrated what is explicit and implicit about the narrative of the event. The protagonists in the feminist fictions get framed through the narrative patterns elevating the social situation they story is represented within.
- *focalization* (Meijer, 1993; Zarkov 1997, Chouliaraki, 2004) to understand the perspective in which the narratives are told. Haring (1991) explains about the social

knowledge of people based on location, and focalization aims to uncover this very perception to elevate the underlying social and gender norms.

- *categorization* (Leudar et al., 2004) to understand the actions of the protagonists and the people around to deconstruct the “us” and “them” in the narrative. The protagonists in the feminist fictions get categorized as “the others” and the research analysis will seek to understand what contributes to this categorization and how this notion can help generate knowledge about their lives.

In the third stage, the research will also analyze the reception of the books at the time of its publication, and the resultant impact thereof, to demonstrate the influence power a feminist fiction can hold over social transformation.

2.2.2 Methods of Data Collection

To conduct this feminist media research, the paper will draw from multiple sources of secondary data while weaving in the existing scholarship where relevant.

2.2.2.1 *Feminist Fictions: The Vegetarian and Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*

Secondary data has been drawn from the English version of the published literary feminist fictions *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang (2019) and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-Joo (2021) to perform a media analysis using the tools listed in the above section. Both these books hold a critical significance in South Korea’s cultural, social, and political history in elevating the suffering of women, and portraying a version of women’s life not often shown in the media or spoken about. The research paper is limited to these two books due to inaccessibility of Korean books with language barrier. Primarily also because *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) is the first Korean book to win the Man Booker Prize in 2016, and *Kim Jiyoung* (Cho, 2021) is the first book to offer a close to reality representation of women’s life under patriarchy, the research sees it equally important to analyze both representations in order to offer two versions of epistemological perspectives (Harding, 1991; Jaggar, 2015) arising from the same context.

In employing textual representation within patriarchal context, the analysis will take from the life experience of the protagonists to the extent of conversations, actions, and narrator point of view, that strike at the very core of patriarchal manifestation within the texts. For *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019), the research draws only from part one of the book, narrated from the perspective of the husband. The part two and three are narrated from the perspectives of the protagonist’s brother-in-law and sister. However, as the research aims to analyze the representations of the protagonist through the lens of the dominant representations and narratives of women as mothers and wives, part one of the book strikes at the very foundation of this presentation, thus making it most relevant to this research paper. For *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021), different sections of the entire book portraying motherhood and culture around this notion is drawn from to analyze the protagonist’s experience within these narratives.

2.2.2.2 *Qualitative Secondary Online Research: Interviews and Articles about the author & data about gender inequality in South Korea*

Secondary qualitative data has been drawn from already published online interviews with the author regarding the process of writing and the intentions behind the message they seek to

convey with the books, articles, and book review by Korean and international media sites. These data sources offer insights into analyzing the first and third stage of the books mentioned above, especially to ground the knowledge thus sought from the books with the socio-political context of South Korea and the problem of gender inequality. The paper also draws from various news channels in Korea and globally, and published reports from international organizations on gender inequality.

2.2.2.3 Published Academic Scholarship

Qualitative information drawn from existing scholarship on media representation, patriarchy, and feminist research conducted in South Korea in general, and about the feminist fictions in particular helps lay the background of the issue of patriarchy (Walby, 1989) and media representation (Gledhill, 1997) in South Korea.

2.2.3 Why fiction in the realm of visual media?

Feminist researchers and development practitioners have long addressed patriarchy as a global system of discrimination that requires both localised and generalised solutions; yet this has not been expanded to literary explorations of the global problem (Casey, 2021). Han Kang in an interview mentions the higher number of women in the Korean literary sphere despite being a conservative society where feminism is a taboo word (Patrick, 2019) sparked the historic significance of women writing for resistance. Throughout the women's movement in Korea, writing in magazines and essays fueled narratives for social changes where authors constantly wrote about challenging patriarchal discourses and sexual liberation of women (Shin and Chang, 2011).

Why fiction matters in the world of visual media can be answered in two parts – one, in a country with male dominated spheres in public and private spheres, literature, especially fiction remains a space for women to amplify their voice that is otherwise systematically and structurally suppressed. Two, the present dominant discourse of about the Korean identity focuses on a fraternal discourse of masculine dominance over female subjects (Choi, 1998) and this applies to dominant representations as well. Taking from Mulvey (2009, cited in Moe, 2015), a certain representation of women in visual media catered to the aesthetics of the male gaze, and as a result subjugating other non-aesthetic portrayal. Therefore, this creates a need for alternative and subversive initiatives to challenge the dominant narratives to represent the experiences of women.

It is noteworthy to mention that South Korea's popular culture known to the world in the form of dramas, music, and movies (Truong, 2014), further bears witness to the impact of visual media on the knowledge produced through the media. In this realm of visual media, the paper draws from the argument of Chouliaraki (2021) on platforms functioning purely on algorithms give voices to those who already have a voice, therefore, further suppression the voiceless. As a result, literary fiction that works outside the structural confines of platform/dominant media holds the potential to demonstrate alternate representations that can challenge and transform dominant narratives. For this reason, the paper argues that analyzing women's lives in literary fiction is a powerful way to influence the audience on cultural and social contexts of the world (Meijer, 1993; Hall, 1997) and that there is power in textual medium to become a discourse upon being continuously represented a certain way to create a material reality between the text and our everyday (Meijer, 1993).

2.2.4 Scope and Limitation

The Vegetarian (Kang, 2019) and *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021) are both available in over fifteen languages across the world. This research paper only analyses the current English version. The paper recognizes that the representations of the protagonists may not be read or understood the same way in the original Korean language, or as read and understood in different languages based on the cultural context of that region. Given the recognition within the paper of the broad ambit of patriarchal manifestations from around the world (Walby, 1989), the analysis from this paper is also bound to the extent of my understanding of the topics herein, coming from my social place as an individual and a researcher, and the knowledge from the research thus conducted here.

Additionally, the analysis of the research limits to only secondary sources of data taken from the books itself and published online articles. As a result, the paper recognizes the limitation of missing out the “real voice” and perception of the readers through primary research. Further budget issues, and logistical issues of flying to Korea from Europe narrowed the scope of the research to this demonstrated extent.

Above all, the analysis of two books limits the generalization experiences, however, it still is a credible source of knowledge about the “other side of reality” (Walby, 1989; Harding, 1991) that gets suppressed in keeping alive dominant narratives.

2.2.5 Positionality

Interested in pursuing research on media representation and gender relations, this research paper seeks to understand the issue of gender inequality in South Korea and the resultant media representation thereof. I am cautious of my own in interpreting the topics based on my preconceived notions, and yet, in my active resistance against patriarchy through my own life as an individual and as an academic, this research allows me to reflect on my place in this world, and as a “knower” based on my social location, essentially, grounding in the application of my “strong objectivity” (Harding, 2013). Therefore, I see this research paper as a minor contribution to the discourse of women and media from Asia.

3 *The Vegetarian*: Traversing Yeong-hye's sufferings through symbolic and narrative frames

In seeking to analyze the experiences of Yeong-hye from *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) this chapter will answer the sub-questions 1, 2 and 3 – to breakdown the *framing* of the protagonists to understand the narrative techniques employed, to understand the patriarchal context within which Yeong-hye is represented through *categorization* and learn from the perspectives (*focalization*) influenced from the world view embedded in the narrators' telling of the story.

Originally published as three novellas – *The Vegetarian*, *Mongolian Mark*, and *Flaming Trees* - between 2004 and 2005, *The Vegetarian* is a compilation of the three stories. A decade after its publication in Korean, the English translated version by Deborah Smith won the Man Booker Prize in 2016, putting the book on a global platform (The Booker Prize, 2023) and gaining readers from over fifteen different languages. Reviews laud Kang and Smith for bringing Korean literature closer to the Western literature (Yun, 2017), paving the way to seek the question on the representation of the protagonist and the knowledge it produces about women's life under patriarchy in South Korean.

3.1 How did the author envision the story of Yeong-hye?

"When I write fiction, I put a lot of emphasis on the senses. I want to convey vivid senses like hearing and touch, including visual images. I infuse these sensations into my sentences like an electric current."
- Han Kang (*The Booker Prizes*, 2023)

The Vegetarian (Kang, 2019) showcases the story of a woman named Yeong-hye who gives up eating meat because of certain dreams of blood and death (Annexure 1.9). A more nuanced reading of the narrative reveals the layers through which the protagonist is forced to confront the reality of her actions which breaks her marriage, pushes her family away, and triggers a chain dangerous event that portray control and subordination of women in a male dominated society. It represents Yeong-hye's struggle of living under a strict patriarchal family and the consequence of deviating from the norms imposed on her as a wife and daughter.

Symbolically, the dreams (Annexure 1.9) of Yeong-hye represent her confronting the human violence she commits as a meat-eater, while at the same time, the narrative placement of these dreams draws the analysis to represent the confrontation of her own traumas of oppression and violence that she faces as a woman within the patriarchal bounds of the story. Interestingly, Yeong-hye, never speaks to the audience from her perspective, and hence the readers are forced to face with her reality by feeling and sensing what she may be going through. *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) is narrated from the point of view of the protagonist's husband, brother-in-law, and sister, where the readers learn about Yeong-hye through the misunderstandings, objectifying, and hatred the narrators garner towards her (The Booker Prize, 2023).

The author's intention to make the readers pause and reflect, not just at the violence that Yeong-hye faces, but also at the violence the readers may have committed in their life (Kim,

2020) elevates the significance of the intrusive effect of fiction over our social life (Gledhill, 1997). The symbolic reading of the rejection of her identity as a non-vegetarian further represents her fierce rejection of the oppression and control, she faces. Understanding her experience through the feminist standpoint epistemology (Harding, 1991) grounds this sensation of her experience in the reality of the world, explores the nature of her misery and pain through the placement of her social location in a patriarchal Korean family, where the duty of the woman is to be a dutiful wife (Elfving-Hwang, 2010; Choi, 1998).

Consequently, on the question of patriarchy, the author notes that the book is “*not an indictment of Korean patriarchy*” but rather elevates the issues of human violence and sufferings, and the impossibility of others understanding (Patrick, 2019). Despite the author’s intentions not representing a narrative of patriarchal family, the analysis derives at this understanding in reading with Walby’s (1989) theory of patriarchy, and the concept of “strong objectivity” (Harding, 1991) gives Yeong-hye the epistemic advantage of being a “knower” as a woman confined within the context of male domination and control. And to that effect, Kang notes that Yeong-hye is, “*trying to root herself into this extreme and bizarre sanity by uprooting herself from the surface of the world.*” (Patrick, 2019).

3.1.1 Place of the translator in passing the knowledge as indented by the author

Deborah Smith, a British translator, instrumental for securing *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2023) the Man Booker Prize in 2016, was met with a lot of academic and media criticism for her nature of translation. While one side of the argument called the translation itself a feminist work, the other side of the argument criticized her for the non-confronting to the literal translation of the Korean text, thereby claiming to dilute the credibility of the original story (Yoon, 2021).

Smith’s translation uses a process of equipping techniques of emphasis, omission, and repetition through which she elevates the patriarchal manifestations within the story, which, according to critiques was not how Kang originally wrote it in Korean (Yoon, 2021). However, Kang supports Smith’s work as subtle and delicate (Patrick, 2019) highlighting Smith’s role as a translator was nothing short of carrying the same message the author wrote for the audience. As a result of Smith way of translation, the story deconstructs the gendered system within which the life of Yeong-hye operates. Where literal translation would have further suppressed the voice of Yeong-hye’s experience under patriarchal setting, this paper positions that a feminist translation by Smith focuses on situating the social position of Yeong-hye (Harding, 1991) offers representations ignored from male perspective.

3.2 Analyzing the Representation of Yeong-hye: A run-of-the mill woman’s story to self-determination and resistance of male control

As noted in the methodology, the media analysis of Yeong-hye’s representation is taken from part 1 of the book, *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019). Narrated from the perspective of her husband, Mr. Cheong, Yeong-hye is presented to the readers as a run-of-the mill woman who speaks very little and does not command intellectual leanings (Annexure 1.1). The journey of her story begins with her giving up meat, and as a result Mr. Cheong is portrayed getting angered by his wife deviating from her duties.

Through the narration, the readers only get a glimpse of Yeong-hye's world through the dreams (Annexure 1.9), which read in and as itself, does not provide any connotation. However, read with her internal suffering she faces for years being subjected to physical violence by her father (Annexure 1.8) and the sexual violence by her husband (Annexure 1.7), along with the consequences of her choice of becoming vegetarian symbolically portrays the conflux between her rejection to human oppression through patriarchal norms and the violence she commits as a human. Mr. Cheong emphasizes the patriarchal nature of Yeong-hye's father, and in as much, empathizing with him when he apologizes to his son-in-law (Annexure 1.7). This framing of her father as a patriarchal man and her husband as one through the analysis of his narration demonstrates their family structure, sets the tone for understanding the sufferings Yeong-hye faces, and subsequently, also unravel the meaning behind the symbolic dreams (Annexure 1.9).

First when she gives up meat, and second, when she chooses to end her life (Annexure 1.8) portrays her act of "resistance" as a madwoman – a common trope for women for deviating from social norms (Wagner-Lawlor, 2013).

3.2.1 *Framing Yeong-hye as an ordinary wife to a mad woman*

The book starts off with the husband acknowledging his wife, the protagonist, as someone "*unremarkable in every way*" (Annexure 1.1). The narrative demonstrates his preference for middle course life as a sole reason for marrying Yeong-hye, who was a "*woman of few words*" (Annexure 1.1). The analysis deepened with his ideals as a patriarchal man showcases his perception of his wife to be someone would not oppose or challenge his ways of life, and as someone who would ensure all his needs are timely catered to. The analysis of Yeong-hye's life through his expression of their married life represents Yeong-hye as a dutiful wife, who rarely "complained" and only came out of her room to cook food for them (Annexure 1.1).

Understood in conjuncture with patriarchal context in South Korea, the point of view of the husband's narration about himself, his wife, and their life together represents the life of an average Korean couple. When Yeong-hye imposes the vegetarian diet in her house, and refuses to even store meat, eggs or milk in her fridge (Annexure 1.3), he thinks she is self-centered and selfish (Annexure 1.4). In a carnivorous society where women are expected to serve meat to their husbands to ensure they live a long and healthy life (Kim, 2020), Yeong-hye's refusal to conform to these norms makes her a deviant of these imposed social norms (Annexure 1.4).

*"It was nothing but sheer obscenity for a wife to go on against her husband's wishes
as mine had done."
- Mr. Cheong (Annexure 1.4)*

As a result, the analysis shows her framing shifting from an ordinary and unremarkable person (Annexure 1.1) to a mad woman (Annexure 1.4), who defies her husband. This implies the social context in which women are not expected to challenge the wishes of their husband and the male domination as the foundation of the family. Illustrating the patriarchal household production (Walby, 1989) within this context further strengthens the analysis of Yeong-hye's life experiences as a woman and a wife, and the duties of household labor conferred on her because of. While Yeong-hye's sufferings and her torment because of her dreams become apparent to the husband, he is not pushed to understand her side of the story, nor seek professional help. This identifies with the notion that perspectives not within the dominant narrative get ignored by the dominant group (Harding, 1991).

Mr. Cheong's patriarchal behavior further gets uncovered when he complains about her "behavior" with to parents. His understanding of Yeong-hye's father as a military man with strong ideals and strictly patriarchal in his ways of life (Annexure 1.8), further shows the context within which Yeong-hye is subjected to control and domination from her father and husband. When the family gathers to "talk sense" into her about turning vegetarian (Annexure 1.8), Yeong-hye is force fed meat by her parents, and her father uses physical force to strike her face to feed her meat.

"Listen to what your father's telling you and eat!"
- Jiyoung's father (Annexure 1.8)

The father's use of violence to assert his power over his daughter shows that social context of the family placed within a traditional systems and structures that positions men over women (Annexure 1.8). His words, coupled with the actions of the husband, and her mother, indicates that Yeong-hye's ordinary only when she quietly satisfies her duties as a wife, and does not challenge the ways of life. When she does transgress from these norms, she experiences the consequence through male subordination and physical violence, a cornerstone to patriarchal manifestation (Walby, 1989) ignored from dominant narratives (Kim, 2012). The analysis also identifies the power relations between the husband and her family, where she has no autonomy, voice, or identity.

Yeong-hye slits her wrist in response to her parents force feeding her and her husband standing by their side, can be understood as a reaction to the accumulation of years of suffering and subjugation through her father and husband's control, pushing her beyond the edge where she no longer wants to resist the oppressive system but rather put an end to it all together (Annexure 1.8). As a result of this incident, the family cuts all their ties with her, the husband ends her marriage with her, and she is admitted to a hospital for recovering from her wounds. The narrative frame of this part of the book ends with Yeong-hye sitting in the hospital, traversing the journey of from an ordinary wife to a mad woman, but the layered analysis identifies the inherent misogyny and gender discrimination she faces by virtue of being confined with the role of a dutiful wife in her patriarchal context.

3.2.2 Insight into fragments of Yeong-hye life, *focalized* through the husband's perspective

Given that the readers never hear from Yeong-hye in this part of the story, her character is largely understood through the fragments in which her husband's perspective of their everyday is narrated. This section will understand his world view embedded in the narrative framing to demonstrate the ideologies of her husband as a patriarchal man, and the impositions on his wife through his male perception of female agency (Walby, 1989).

"... after all, hadn't women traditionally been expected to be demure and restrained?"
Mr. Cheong (Annexure 1.5)

For one, the analysis denotes that he considers himself superior to her, as a man, and as a husband. This representant of his dominance over her mind and body, striking at the very essence of sexuality and cultural relations in a patriarchal context (Walby, 1989) is evident across two examples illustrated below: In one, her behavior of not wearing a bra demonstrates his worldview about female sexuality, sexual agency, and the female body. His perception derived from a world where he is part of the dominant social group that imposes gendered norms on women, is particularly heightened with his remark of wanting to save

face with his acquittance because his wife does not wear a bra (Annexure 1.2). The analysis makes it clear that he believes women are expected to conduct themselves the way their husbands desire them to and showcases the very notion that he has the right to command his wife on what to wear takes away all her autonomy and individuality (Walby, 1989).

In the other example drawn for the analysis, Yeong-hye stops having sex with her husband because his body and his smell reminded her of meat and the nightmares of blood and murders (Annexure 1.9). However, in the quest for satisfying his “manly” needs, he sexually assaults his wife, disregarding her body and state of mind. He also notes the ease in “*doing it*” often after the first time (Annexure 1.7). The analysis brings out the nuance to his perception of women and women’s bodies when he comparison Yeong-hye to the comfort women¹¹ under Japanese colonialism when he sexually assaults her. Through this, the analysis also elevates his position on multiple levels, as a husband over his wife, as a man over a woman, and as symbolism of the patriarchal husband to that of a Japanese colonizer, implicating racial, sexual and gender oppression (Annexure 1.7).

3.2.3 *Categorizing Yeong-hye as “the other” for rejecting meat, indicating a clear “us” vs “them”*

For unravelling Yeong-hye’s world and her experience, where she is confronted with certain cultural and social norms dictating the ways of life, this section seeks to demonstrate Yeong-hye categorization as “*the other*” through the deconstruction of the carnivorous food culture of South Korea that is often read in lines with a masculine culture (Kim, 2020). Analyzed with concept of the sexual politics of meat by Carol J Adams (2018), the notion of carnivorous culture becomes important in understanding how deviating from it results in threatening the very foundation of the society (Kim, 2020).

At her husband’s office dinner, Yeong-hye doesn’t eat anything but rice and vegetables. Rounds of different types of meat gets served but she sits and watches everyone eat instead. The reactions of the people around her demonstrate the consequence of a person deviating from the norm (Annexure 1.5). To this extent, the husband’s colleagues believe that giving up meat is against the way of human nature, and being vegetarian is not natural to the Korean society (Annexure 1.5). As a result of this, Yeong-hye is categorically pushed to the group of “the other” (Leudar et al., 2004).

The notion that people who give up meat are not of the sound mind further deepens the analysis in implying that Yeong-hye is also not of a sound mind for volunteering to give up meat (Annexure 1.5), represents their social context where a rational Korean individual would not choose to give up eating meat. Expanding on this analysis, the incident where Yeong-hye’s parents force feed her meat (Annexure 1.8) also highlights how her parents categorically pushed her to the group of “the other” in their actions of cutting all ties with her despite seeing the suffering she is visibly going through.

Through the narrative framing of this part of the novel, the analysis portrays her husband seeing her as “the other” as well. He is a man who expects his wife to cook for him, forces his wife to wear a bra and make up, ignores his wife’s suffering as she is tormented from eating eat meat, is invisible of her pain and reason for being, forces himself sexually on her as he desires, and complains to her family when she does not listen to him anymore. In focusing on what he is being denied by virtue of Yeong-hye’s refusal to conform to social norms, he feels like he is the real victim here and wonders how any man can live with a woman like that. In this aspect, Yeong-hye becomes “the other” even in his eyes.

¹¹ Thousands of Korean women forced into sexual slavery for the Japanese soldiers during the colonization and war in Korea (Soh, 1996).

Combining the different media analysis tools helps understand that Yeong-hye's simple act of not wanting to eat meat is met with such fierce reaction from the husband and her family. The analysis further unravels the reasoning for such fierce reactions to the South Korean social and cultural norms dictating family structures and roles. While Yeong-hye's life is filled with suffering in silence, the effect of such family structure is not visible to the male members of the family. Despite her developing eating disorder and mental health issues, the family does not put her needs as equal as the needs of the husband, nor suffering as equal to the husband's "suffering" of not being able to eat meat, once again pointing to the essence of patriarchal manifestation in domestic spheres.

3.3 The reception of the book and the influence on readers

Though reviews of book call it "dark" and terrifying", it exemplifies the beauty in writing by the author who crafts everyday ordinary moments with such intensity and encourages the readers to probe the readers to share in her pursuit of the questions of human actions that cause violence and suffering (Wertheimer, 2016). Currently, hailed as one of the international cult bestsellers, *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) received a movie adaptation made soon after and shown at Sundance Film Festival in 2010 (Alter, 2016) further grounding its presence on the media international platform.

Reception theory by Watkins and Emerson (2000) helps understand the response of the book in engaging with the audience's reaction, identifying representational of elements of sexual violence and male dominance, debate about women's autonomy, and the impact of its time of publication when marital rape was not criminalized (Watkins and Emerson, 2000; Yoon, 2021). However, adultery and abortion remained criminalized until 2015 and 2019 respectively, showing the context of the state's perception and over women's bodies. While the author believes that the Korean society has a long way to go before ensuring gender equality and squashing patriarchy, small changes are happening around her (Yoon, 2021).

Building on this analysis with the genre theory (Gledhill, 1997) concepts of verisimilitude and realism elevates the need to understand the Yeong-hye's experience as a woman who rejects violence from within, and as a result, portrays a resistance to the norms confirmed on her to stay true to herself. Verisimilitude points to the narrative that the dominant group in Yeong-hye's context wishes to sustain (Gledhill, 1997), i.e., the narrative of male domination over women. However, the battle for the "new realism" here is to acknowledge the other side to this narrative (Gledhill, 1997) ignored or not considered by the dominant narrative, thereby, challenging the ways of women's portrayal in media.

4 *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982*: Narrative Framing and Breaking the Fourth Wall in Portraying the Life of a Korean Woman

In seeking to analyze the experiences of Kim Jiyoung from *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021), this chapter will answer the sub-questions 1, 2 and 3 – to breakdown the *framing* of the protagonists to understand the narrative techniques employed, the understand the patriarchal context within which the repristinating of Kim Jiyoung is *categorized*, and learn from the perspectives (*focalization*) of the narrator’s world view embedded in telling of the story.

Originally published in 2016, the book *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-Joo (2021) is hailed as one of the cultural sensations in South Korea and around the world (Hu, 2020). The first book to address the issues of misogyny and sexism directly and critically within the Korean society, it impels the need to perform a media analysis to understand its significance on the representation of women. Various academic literature available on this book offers different accounts of feminist and media interpretations: a gender-based analysis (Alfarini and Tetty, 2012) combining the theory of gender inequality by Sylvia Walby (1990) illustrates that the life experience of Kim Jiyoung as a woman affects household production, unequal paid work, the patriarchal state enforcement of norms, male violence within the family, male perception of sexuality as superior, and cultural imbalance (Alfarini and Tetty, 2012). And as a result of which, we witness her change in personality as she experiences depression and loss of identity.

4.1 How did the author envision the story of Kim Jiyoung?

“I wanted to leave a true account of what life was like for women living in Korea at this time.”
– Cho Nam-Joo (White, 2020)

Angered by the media portrayal of women, the author, Cho Nam-Joo was inspired to write this feminist novel combining real life facts on gender inequalities in South Korea through the life of the protagonist in the book, Kim Jiyoung (Hu, 2020). Consequently, thus came to life a force of literary fiction that is considered to have boosted the feminist movement in South Korea (Hu, 2020; White 2020). Through reading several published online interviews (Hu, 2020; Hong, 2020; and White 2020) with the author, the underlying message to her audience is to let women know they are not alone in their everyday suffering. But most of all, the book hopes to encourage women to make informed decisions about their life after fully understanding the context that restricts and oppresses their choices and individuality (Hu, 2020). Having lived through the Korean society that prefers men over women, and boys over girls, the story of the protagonist in the book is in many ways inspired by the experience of the author and the women in her life (White, 2020).

The Korean version was translated to English by Jamie Chang, a professor at Ewha Woman’s University in Seoul. In offering the symbolic importance of the book to women’s representation life that is often left out by dominant narratives, she critically remarks the

portrayal of a panoramic view of women's current plight (Hu, 2020) elevates the importance of analyzing the book in context of development.

4.2 Analyzing the representation of Kim Jiyoung: The story of a collective of Korean Women

At the root of it all, the story is about systemic gender discrimination rampant across South Korea as represented through the everyday experience of Kim Jiyoung, and the horrors of her existence by virtue of being a woman (Hong, 2020). Through the portrayal of the protagonist, the author frames the narrative of Kim Jiyoung's life as a "*collective of Korean women, as a daughter, mother, sister, and wife*" (White, 2020) and yet, without an apparent villain in the story, the protagonist remains tormented. The story depicts her as the caretaker of her child, the household, and her husband, leaving little time to care for herself. She quits her marketing job upon having her daughter and is suffering from post-partum depression, with no support from her family or her husband's family. This image of the collective women of Korea demonstrates that every woman goes through some form of discrimination in their life in being a woman in a patriarchal society.

Through flashback series, the story then follows the life of Jiyoung starting from childhood to marriage, and the gender discrimination she faces along the way. Once the readers go through the journey of Jiyoung's life from her perspective, her psychiatrist speaks to the audience demonstrating that the representation of her life was his meeting notes from conversations with Jiyoung and her husband. Therefore, allowing a multi-perspective analysis of the issue of patriarchy from a person experiencing it firsthand, and from a perspective who is on the dominant side. Additionally, the author speaks to the audience directly at places with statistical facts about gender inequality in South Korea, further imposing on the extent of the problem by blurring the lines between fiction and reality. These three perspectives offer a meta framing technique.

4.2.1 Reality of a guilty exhausted mother versus the image of a noble mother: The framing of Jiyoung as every Korean woman

The story starts by introducing Jiyoung as a woman in her thirties, a mother of an infant girl child, and a wife (Annexure 2.1). She gets "possessed" by people in her life, her mother, and her late friend from college. Both these possessions come at a time when Jiyoung is suffering from post-natal depression and is harboring the task of household production (Walby, 1989) in caring for her child, herself, her husband, and the household. The "possessed" voices duly tell her husband that Jiyoung is tired, and unable to manage the domestic chores on her own (Cho, 2021). Her husband takes her to a psychiatrist for her "abnormal behavior", and thus unfurls Jiyoung's story. This preface to the story lays the foundation to the layers of complex issues Jiyoung faces, read together with the socio-political context of South Korea, weaves the analysis to show the effect of dominant narratives imposed on women causing the women to suffer in silence, ultimately, losing their own individual identity as a person because of adhering to all other forced identities.

Equipping structural framing techniques, the book illustrates Jiyoung's life across different structures represented through childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and marriage infused with stories of misogyny and gender discrimination throughout her life (Annexure 1). Additionally, weaving in real-life facts, the author of the book breaks the fourth wall to communicate with the audience, and this framing of reality within the

representation of the protagonist's experience offers a meta narrative framing to interpret the larger context Jiyoung is part of. In conjuncture with the image of a noble mother as one of the essential roles of women in Korea as foundations for strong family structure (Elfving-Hwang, 2010), the analysis draws from Jiyoung's experience as a mother in understanding her standpoint (Harding, 1991) as a woman confronted with patriarchal societal norms (Walby, 1989). The analysis takes the meta narrative of the author as the starting point to understand the contextual issues within which Jiyoung is represented: –

In 2014, around the time Kim Jiyoung left the company, one in five married women in Korea quit their job because of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth, childcare, or the education of their young children.
- Author (Annexure 2.10).

When it came to Jiyoung's own time as a new mother, she is confronted with this same dilemma, to quit her job or not. The difficulty of sustaining a job for years, coupled with the impossibility of finding a new job after a long maternity absence, elevates the fundamental issue of accessibility to equal employment opportunities of women in South Korea. Cited as the worst place for a working woman, South Korea ranks part of the lowest ranks of OECD countries with over 30% difference in pay between men and women (Annexure 2.9). Yet, in the end, she decided that it has to be her to give up her career because for one, her pay was way lesser than her husband's, and for the other: –

"It was more common for husbands to work and wives to raise the children and run the home."
- Jiyoung (Annexure 2.10).

The attitude of the husband also elevates the analysis of the effect of sustaining these dominant narratives of patriarchy within Jiyoung's household. When Jiyoung gets visibly upset about having to give up her career for the sake of the baby, while her husband gets to "help out" with the domestic duties, poses two key issues of women in this context. The issue resonates the preference for men at workforce, and especially men who have completed their military service because companies need to compensate for their "lost time" serving for the country (Annexure 2.6). While the concept of lost time as a disadvantage does not apply to men, women, who are neither allowed to join military (Kim, 2008), nor get equal employment opportunities to being with (Annexure 2.10), are at a double disadvantage, with the expectations of motherhood. The analysis implicates the double standards in portraying mothers as noble while the reality of the treatment of women shows the gendered structures they are entwined with, leaving them marginalized in public and private spheres (Walby, 1989).

"People who pop a painkiller at the smallest hint of a migraine, or who need anaesthetic cream to remove a mole, demand that women giving birth should gladly endure the pain, exhaustion, and mortal fear."
- Jiyoung (Annexure 2.11)

Post childbirth, Jiyoung finds herself always exhausted mentally and physically, and having no time for herself between laundry, cooking, cleaning, and feeding her baby. She recalls seeing portrayals of mothers as noble on TV and feels guilty about always feeling exhausted and achy instead of enjoying the title of "noble" mother conferred on her by the society. The analysis shows the superimposition of Jiyoung's reality with the reality of the world, a

metanarrative framing to emphasize the widening gap of women leaving their jobs to be wives (Choi, 1998). The analysis shows that the burden of the unpaid household always and inevitably falls on women in a patriarchal context in South Korea. The framing of the noble mothers, an image of which created from Jiyoung's childhood, all culminates to this moment where she goes through the experience herself (Annexure 2.11), and yet feels diminished at the face of her invisible suffering and disappearing identity.

4.2.2 Layers of focalization perspectives through the male psychiatrist's notes captured in conversations with Jiyoung

This analysis draws heavily from Jiyoung's perspective structurally relayed through the book, however, in the end, the readers understand that Jiyoung's perspective is in fact the notes of the psychiatrist (Annexure 2.8) who treats Jiyoung for her post-natal depression. The perspective of the psychiatrist, a middle-aged man who has only learnt about the effects of patriarchy seeing his wife also go through similar suffering, and additionally, through the perspective of the author of the book helps elevate the analysis to offer a female perspective, a male perspective, and an "outsider" perspective.

Starting with understanding Jiyoung's perspective, her context and understanding of herself as an individual, and as a woman in her society is shaped from her worldview that puts men over women, boys over girls. She faces misogyny and gender discrimination within her house and in public spheres. This has profound impact on her upbringing, and how she sees the world around her. During her childhood, her grandmother was a fierce enforcer of patriarchal norms within the family (Annexure 2.2), making her reflect at a young age about the sacrifices she makes for her brother are not because she is a younger sister but because she is a girl in a family that prefers boys. In school, she understands soon that boys and girls have different rules where girls were forced to dress a certain way (Annexure 2.4) when the boys went without any rules, demonstrating objectification of female bodies right from a young age. Once again teaching her that the society around her also prefers boys over girls. As an adult, she faces sexual harassment when working with male colleagues and is also expected to carry out menial tasks like serving food and clearing dishes of her team because she is a woman (Annexure 2.8). These experiences shape the view of her place in her society.

Additionally, driven by the values and beliefs of her family and friends, Jiyoung is forced down a path of disadvantages, and the juncture of quitting on job she likes, for the sake of her family, shows the pinnacle of patriarchal household (Annexure 2.10). Read together with the world she comes from where her mother informs her about giving up her dream to send her brothers to college (Annexure 2.3), her sister's life choice of going to teaching school because it fits better for working mothers (Annexure 2.5).

All these experiences situate her in a gendered system of South Korea, that finally pushes her into exhaustion, despite trying to always fit into the dominant narrative of women as good daughters who helped at home, and as good wives who took care of the homes. Consequently, she sees stay at home mothers in a new light making her ponder on why the "*glorified job*" of household care is not given any monetary value but seen as "*bumming about*" at home (Annexure 2.12). The analysis highlights that the effect of gender discrimination is vastly different amongst women even within her context, that it takes one's experience to truly understand the extent of it (Harding, 1991).

In the last chapter of the book, the psychiatrist speaks to the, paving the way to analyze his worldview as a psychiatrist who "sympathizes" with Jiyoung's. His position as a doctor in this very gendered Korean society puts him at a place to be able to understand Jiyoung's plight in learning from his female patients and his very own wife, however, his worldview as

a patriarchal man himself becomes evident with his remark about it being natural for men to not be aware of the problems women face because men are not the primary caregiver in childbirth and childcare (Annexure 2.13). This very perspective from the psychiatrist hints at his worldview also shaped by the dominant narratives about men and women through dominant knowledge and media.

To further deepen the analysis, the perspective of the author is understood. The juxtaposition of gendered data offers a lens to understand the social location in which Jiyoung is confined to operate within, and to elevate the reality of the issue despite being confined within the conventions of feminist fictional genre. The author is former television scriptwriter, a mother of an infant child, and above all a woman in the Korean society – these layers of her identity intersect with the kind of knowledge she has gained in her life (Harding, 201), in her understanding of the complex issues of media representation and patriarchy, that is enriched with real her life experiences, and data from the verified and government sources. Through the author’s message to the audience, she makes the audience reflect on themselves, the society they live in, and the gendered productions within their world. This technique also allows for “breaking the fourth wall” a term used to denote the intentional storytelling technique where the author ignores the characters and communicates with the audience. Further showcasing how feminist fiction can intrude the social life of the reader by self-consciously elevating stories that are often untold.

4.2.3 Categories that bind Jiyoung into lifelong suffering as “the other”

To highlight a patriarchal culture that guides the way people perceive about the society, a system of shared values is created through representation (Hall, 1997). This shared value essentially creates the image of “us” based on the identification of the self, and thereby creating an image of “the other” who do not fit this image. In this case, the analysis points to Jiyoung being categorized as “them” or “the other” (Leudar et.al., 2004) across different phases of her life. One such occurs when Jiyoung is merely a child, and her mother sneaks her baby formula that is meant for her baby brother. When she gets caught by the grandmother, she gets reprimanded at for consuming what is meant only for her “precious” brother (Annexure 2.2).

Analyzing the voice of her grandmother, shows she is a patriarchal woman who prefers boys over girls. As Jiyoung’s mother has two daughters and then a son, the son gets preferential treatment right from his birth (Annexure 2.1). While the grandmother words hint at Jiyoung evidently taking something that is not hers, what is implicit is the gendered structures that denote what is hers and what is not. Rooted in traditional patriarchal structure, Jiyoung realizes there is an order at home that starts from her father, brother, grandmother, mother, and the sisters. This incident teaches her early on that her brother will be treated a certain way only because she is a girl. With Jiyoung’s own analysis, it is clear that the grandmother’s body language and her tone imply certain anger and disappointment. But above all, the action of her mother sneaking the formula to her and not making her an equal portion teaches her that she does something wrong. These two actions combined represents a patriarchal family structure she needs to adhere too (Annexure 2.1).

The construction of “the other” often roots in sexuality, especially in a country like South Korea, male perceptions of sexuality dominate the narrative and infringes on the sexual agency of women, and often sets forth a structure of systemic violence like sexual harassment that runs intricately with the way men perceive and treat women (Walby, 1989). Jiyoung is no exception to experiencing this. When Jiyoung goes for an interview with a toy company, she is called into the room with two other female candidates and male interviewers. One of the questions posed during the interview seeps in perceptions of male sexuality (Annexure 2.7).

“You’re at a meeting with a client company. The client gets, you know, handsy. Squeezing your shoulder, grazing your thigh. You know what I mean? Yeah? How will you handle that situation? Let’s start with Ms. Kim Jiyoung.”
- Interviewer (Annexure 2.7)

The analysis points to the context of high rate of sexual harassment of women at workplace in South Korea, making it appear “normal” to the male colleagues who are part of the problem. The perception of the interviewer here indicates his categorization of the women as “the other”, stemming from his belief of male sexuality over female sexuality, in a patriarchal context (Walby, 1989). The also analysis indicates that the male interviewers are aware of their superior social position they hold not just as interviewers but as male middle management employees, a position most women in Korea were not able to reach.

When Jiyoung gets her first job with a marketing company (Annexure 2.8), she is confronted with expectations as a woman in making coffee for everyone, taking her team’s food orders, serving them and clearing them out once done. The analysis helps understand the expectations placed on young women to “take care” of her team members and only on fulfilling these expectations, does she get accepted as part of the team. This very nature personifies how a patriarchal workplace influences the behaviors and attitudes towards women (Walby, 1989). This inevitable places Jiyoung as “*the other*” in her office where she is expected to carry “care taking” unpaid labor in addition to her job requirements.

Combining the tools of analysis, the narrative framing of Jiyoung helps identify her experience with every woman within a patriarchal setting, where misogyny and gender discrimination seeps to the everyday within the public and private spheres (Walby, 1989). However, it is these very roles Jiyoung is expected to comply as a daughter, woman, wife, and mother that places her at an epistemic advantage (Harding, 1991) of knowing the realities of being conferred these identities in the traditional patriarchal context. A representation of which is often missing within the narratives of popular media which disregards these experiences Jiyoung embodies.

4.3 The reception of the book

The launch of the book came at the time of the rising #MeToo movement in South Korea and a week after the murder of a young woman for hate crime in Seoul, resulting in a “*fierce sexism battle in South Korea*” between feminist and “anti-feminist” (Ahn, 2022). A member of the Justice Party “gifted” the book to the President of South Korea in the parliament in 2017 (Shin, 2017) further elevating its political significance. Additionally, The Ministry of Employment and Labor recognizes the book for its representation of the gender gap within the country and in acknowledging the country’s immense task ahead in addressing gender discrimination (Yang, 2021).

Currently, with the decision of abolishment of the Ministry of Gender Equality in response to outcry as calling out men as sex criminals (Mackenzie, 2022) and using this as a façade to further ignore the obligations of the state, shows the significance of the book’s position in mobilizing public opinion. As a result, shifting the focus to understanding the experience of women living under patriarchy helps deconstruct the complex gendered asymmetric structures. Read in line with verisimilitude and realism concepts (Gledhill, 1997), the act of representing women’s life ignored in dominant media, and in representing alternative versions such as Kim Jiyoung’s showcases the negotiation for new “realism” enables the fiction to produce social change. To further deepen the analysis, the paper brings in the concept of “reception theory” (Watkins and Emerson, 2000) to understand how the audience engage with the book and the reactions to these engagements.

In this context, women activists, celebrities, and authors who support the book are reported to face constant online bullying by certain groups of people calling themselves “anti-feminist” who believe the book offers nothing but distorted views and generalizes sexist remarks against men (Hyung, 2019). The on-going cyber bullying of women who support the book itself personifies the fundamental issue the book seeks to convey to the readers. The book is a stark reminder that learning from everyday life of women can unearth the pain the “collective pain” and for the purpose of overcoming the pain, the world needs to hear from such everyday voices (Hu, 2020). Bringing together the life experience of a character with the real-life truth that many million women face today, the novel is a resistance and calling for better life for women everywhere (Clark, 2020).

5 Learning from the correlations and divergence in patriarchal experiences and representations of Yeong-hye and Kim Jiyoung

In answering the 4th sub-question, this chapter will identify and analyze the representations of the protagonists to lay out the experiences of women's life under patriarchy in South Korea. Through this, the knowledge thus understood from the experience of the protagonists' lives contributes to suppressed knowledge (Harding, 1991), holding the potential to shift dominant narrative (Meijer, 1993; Hall, 1997) and to recognize the perspective ignored from the androcentric knowledge production in a patriarchal context (Walby, 1989).

5.1 Subverting narratives through non-dominant representation

To orchestrate this comprehensive understanding and linking the findings from the media analysis in the above chapter to the theoretical framework, this section will first establish the correlations in their representation, that will pave the way to deconstruct the divergences. In doing so, this chapter displays the notion that women's experiences are all unique and vastly different based on their time in history, the place in the society, and the structure of the family of that time. This very dynamic offers the protagonists an epistemic advantage as a knower and through the concept of "strong objectivity", the paper analyses the story within the historic, social and political background (Harding, 2013) of South Korea to demonstrate the power relations that determine their everyday life influenced by values and culture of the dominant group, men, in this context.

5.1.1 What Yeong-hye and Kim Jiyoung share in their experience and representation?

Primarily, both the authors intended to connect with the audience through the text to encourage the readers to pause and reflect not only on the lives of the protagonists but also on their own lives, the violence they may have caused and the violence they may have experienced. As a result, the authors' work reflects their attention to the aesthetic form and emotional effect the books might have on the audience (Gledhill, 1997) to understand the painful suffering of the everyday life of the protagonists.

In reading with the categories of patriarchy (Walby, 1989), the analysis probes the cause of the suffering to deconstruct the social context, cultural narratives, and power relations affecting the private and public spheres of the protagonists. In the case of Yeong-hye, the very nature of the expectation confronted on her as a wife and the deviation from these expectations fall within the categories of patriarchal relations of household production, male violence, patriarchal relations in sexual relations, and cultural norms (Walby, 1989). In the case of Kim Jiyoung, the portrayal of her life from childhood to motherhood shows the culmination of expectations on girls that transform to women in becoming wives and mothers. As a result, her representation falls with the categories of patriarchal relations in household production, in paid work, in state, in sexual relations, and cultural norms (Walby, 1989).

Essentially, grounding the cause of their suffering within the socio-political and historic context of the South Korea, exposes the effect of women's life as wives and mothers in a patriarchal context of male domination. Especially, in a society where the dominant narratives inform the media representations, the portrayal of the protagonists is a stark reminder that there is more than one side to a story and in seeking this knowledge, can help change narratives (Meijer, 1993).

5.1.2 What sets Yeong-hye's and Jiyoung's experiences and representations apart?

The fundamental of standpoint theory recognizes that that every perspective and experience from which the woman's standpoint arises is diverse because of the difference in knowledge produced at different historic junctures (Harding, 1991), that is shaped by different social, cultural and political narratives in the media and in real life. To this effect, this section will examine how the representations of the protagonists differ.

In learning about Yeong-hye's experience, the audience never hears from her perspective which elevates the complex dynamics of actually understanding her experience. Yet, the analysis of symbolic frames with the narrative framing of the husband offers an understanding that he is a patriarchal man, and therefore, makes the readers visualize and image her experience through senses of how he treats her and sees her. Additionally, the author's intentions of not specifically portraying the story of Korean patriarchy, implies it through the shadows of how the family members respond and treat Yeong-hye, further symbolically resonates the way patriarchy manifests in the everyday life of women.

Unlike Yeong-hye's experience, Jiyoung's story is told with the very intention of representing the life of a woman faced with misogyny all her life, and how this represents the life of millions of women in Korea, and worldwide. The narrative differences also highlight the author's significant impact in representing Jiyoung's life with real life data about gender inequality in South Korea. This fundamental difference of how the representations are made in both the books offering different dynamics in the woman's standpoint (Harding, 1991), and in how flexible patriarchy is in imposing domination on women (Walby, 1989).

The analysis of the representations of both the protagonist offers a deviation from what is portrayed in the dominant media. Where women's representations continue to glorify and romanticize motherhood in the media, the experience of Yeong-hye and Jiyoung offers insight into understanding what it means to bear the brunt of these romanticized roles, and its underlying power imbalances that forces women to domestic sphere on one hand and denies equal employment opportunities and benefits on the hand, making such representations political (Marshment, 1997).

5.1.3 Fiction enabling social change and transforming narratives

This section explores the analysis of the feminist fictions through genre theory (Gledhill, 1997) to understand its role in enabling social change. Identifying the elements of the theory begins with labelling the feminist fictional genre within which the authors position their story and is advertised to the audience. The impact of feminist fiction on the readers and the society is largely cited for pledging allegiance for the cause of women and gender justice movements (Elfvig-Hwang, 2010). With the feminist fictions herein, they were not an overnight success. *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019) was locally popular but only a decade after, was it translated and won the Man Booker Prize, did the critical reading of the book in academics and literate began to develop. Kim Jiyoung's author did not envision her book to

reach the world, she merely wanted to leave evidence of what is happening and hoped it would find a few homes (White, 2020). However, the story struck a chord with the audience in South Korea and world-wide, putting it under the microscope by media and academics alike, for the relevance to the current status of women.

In understanding the influence of feminist fictions on the audience, the analysis of the fictional conventions helps portray the knowledge about the world (Gledhill, 1997). Such as the concept of female agency as is portrayed with both Yeong-hye and Jiyoung, exploring the critical impact of patriarchy on women for breaking down the gender roles and male assertion of dominance in public and private spheres, the act of resistance on both their parts – Yeong-hye in giving up meat and wanting to give up her life, and Jiyoung in her “abnormal behavior” of episodes of “possession” – all represent the protagonists’ rejecting their structural inequalities of their everyday life. In such sense, the two books become political to the effect of invokes a “representational experience” by diving into the functions of ideologies that throws light into structures of oppression (Elfving-Hwang, 2010).

Read together with the analysis from the previous chapter drawn from textual analysis further shows how the protagonists are both framed to be an ordinary woman within a contextual setting where women are expected to carry out certain roles for the benefit of the male members of the family (Walby, 1989), and in conforming to these roles, they lose themselves internally as who they are as a person, a representation which is often left out from the dominant narratives of women as mothers and wives. However, while superficially touching on the mad woman trope in feminist fiction, the two books shift the mad woman narrative subconsciously with the readers to probe on the context that leads to the insanity, thereby transgressing away from the generic madwoman trope to one of a resistance against patriarchy. Studies in cognitive sciences argue that fictional realm and the social realm both run on the simulation of imagination, and therefore consciousness comes into play when reading fiction in as much as one’s interaction in the social world. This is primarily because the imagination allows for empathy and conscious thinking of what it would be like to be in another person’s world (Oatley, 2016).

Especially when weaving in epistemological claims (Harding 1991) of the protagonists, a necessary intervention of narrative techniques supports these claims. In the case of *The Vegetarian* (Kang, 2019), the symbolic frames are essential in understanding the mental struggle Yeong-hye is riddled with, that pushes her to give up her humanity, parallelly placed with the narrative of the husband. This makes the readers ponder on the depth of the suffering and the depth of human violence influenced through layers of everyday life. In the case of *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho, 2021), the author’s intervention with real life data where Jiyoung’s life corresponds to these data makes Jiyoung part of the data as well. As a result, Jiyoung is placed within this larger gendered structure as she navigates her life through different stages. Such claims also bear on the consciousness of the readers, positioning as a tool to reimagine the future based on evaluating the history and politics of the land (Elfving-Hwang, 2010).

Through the representation of the protagonists, the paper amplifies the diversity in women’s experiences rooted in their location (Harding, 1991), in providing alternative narratives left out from the media (Hall, 1997), and create visions for the future without these structural and systemic violence (Elfving-Hwang, 2010). The paper argues that dominant representation in an androcentric patriarchal society is itself a form of patriarchy (Walby, 1989), and for challenging these structures, academic research needs to seek into various alternative forms of representations as a continuous and engaging process in transforming narratives.

6 Conclusion: Beyond Representations, Into Development

Both Yeong-hye and Kim Jiyoung are framed as ordinary women losing their identity in living their everyday life. Through this narrative framing of the protagonists, the research paper explores the underlying issues of patriarchy and gender roles they are conferred upon, embodied in subordination to male members within the public and private spheres (Walby, 1989). Read together with the message of the authors in conveying the essence of human suffering (Kim, 2020), and the issue of misogyny in the everyday life of women (White 2020), the analysis of the books situates within South Korea's gendered systems where, despite rapid modernization, women continue to be marginalized through history (Kim and Choi, 1998).

Right from the dominant narrative about women playing the noble role of rebuilding the nation through reproduction during the post-conflict development process (Moon, 2012), to the manipulation of the image of the role of wives in sustaining the current capitalistic nuclear families by curtailing the job opportunities (Song, 2019), representation strategies have played a critical role in suppressing women's voices. As a result, this paper seeks the experience of the protagonists for its non-dominant representation and its impact thereof. While Yeong-hye's representation shows her categorization as "the other" because of her digression from social norms as a wife and as a meat eater in a carnivorous society, Jiyoung's categorization of "the other" happens right from her birth, and she experiences different stages of her life, she realizes more evidently that she is the "them" in a male dominated society that is the "us".

Thus, the representation of the protagonists, and the socio-political backdrop of South Korea's gender discrimination brings out the different perspectives in which patriarchy manifests and affects women based on their historic context and the way the characters perceive their social norms based on the knowledge produced around them (Harding, 1991). Despite this, the protagonists feel a sense of loss of identity through suffering invisibly, and this demonstrates the effect of media representations of responsible domestic responsibilities and motherhood on the lives of the protagonist (Harding, 1991).

"She's even imposed this ridiculous diet on me."
- Yeong-hye's husband (Annexure 1.6)

"Think of this as an opportunity to start a new chapter. I'll help you out."
- Jiyoung's husband (Annexure 2.8)

At the juncture, the paper draws from the protagonists' husbands in demonstrating the way women are expected to be, in conjuncture with the dominant narratives of "good wife" and "noble mother". Yeong-hye's husband's words imply that he is not only angered by her giving up meat for herself, but for also not cooking and serving meat for him, an essential duty of his wife (Annexure 1.6). Jiyoung's husband's words on the other hand are meant to be words of comfort to his pregnant wife who is required to quit her job and becoming a stay-at-home mother. His words clearly demonstrate that this role is meant to be borne by women where men can merely help out but not be part of (Annexure 2.8). These two quotes embody the fundamental issue of women, patriarchy, and representation in South Korea.

Learning from the experience of the protagonist offers their standpoint (Harding, 1991) about the effect of patriarchy (Walby, 1989) through the everyday life. As a result, the representation non-conforming to dominant narratives as noble mothers or dutiful wives

shows the side of reality that is not shown or spoken about in the media. Where such conversations arise, a debate between different social groups ends up in with increased digital bullying of those on the side of women (Ahn, 2022) and as a result, further implicate the male dominance and consequence of deviating from the norm. For these reasons, stories of Yeong-hye and Jiyoung are widely recognized for its similarities of the readers in certain aspects of their life, thereby creating a process of engaging women's experiences and challenging the current narrative discourse for a "new realism" that subverts and displaces the current "generic verisimilitude" (Gledhill, 1997) functioning on the power relations of female subordination and in representation.

Where on one hand women fear speaking up about gender issues in fear of being attacked physically or online (Ahn, 2033), this paper elevates the importance of seeking alternative knowledge through non-dominant representations in media to amplify historically marginalized voices that can leverage social transformation through the process of shifting the narratives of traditional gender roles. As a result, knowledge sought from the standpoints of the protagonists' experiences paves the way to engage with new angles of knowledge historically suppressed (Walby, 1989; Harding, 1991) and above all, bring out the powerful influence of fiction in transforming understanding about complex issues (Gledhill, 1997).

*"It's only natural men remain unaware (about patriarchy) ...because men are not
the same main players in childbirth and childcare."
- Jiyoung's psychiatrist (Annexure 2.13)*

Appendices

Annexure 1 – Original Text taken from Part 1 of *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang (2019)

Annexure. 1.1 -- About Yeong-hye, Mr. Cheong and their relationship:

Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way. To be frank, the first time I met her I wasn't even 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. As she came up to the table where I was waiting, I couldn't help but notice her shoes—the plainest black shoes imaginable. 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 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. There was no need to affect intellectual leanings in order to win her over, or to worry that she might be comparing me to the preening men who pose in fashion catalogues, and she didn't get worked up if I happened to be late for one of our meetings.

I've always inclined toward the middle course in life. At school I chose to boss around those who were two or three years my junior, and with whom I could act the ringleader, rather than take my chances with those my own age, and later I chose which college to apply to based on my chances of obtaining a scholarship large enough for my needs. Ultimately, I settled for a job where I would be provided with a decent monthly salary in return for diligently carrying out my allotted tasks, at a company whose small size meant they would value my unremarkable skills. And so it was only natural that I would marry the most run-of-the-mill woman in the world. As for women who were pretty, intelligent, strikingly sensual, the daughters of rich families—they would only have served to disrupt my carefully ordered existence.

In keeping with my expectations, she made for a completely ordinary wife who went about things without any distasteful frivolousness. Every morning she got up at six a.m. to prepare rice and soup, and usually a bit of fish. From adolescence she'd contributed to her family's income through the odd bit of part-time work. She ended up with a job as an assistant instructor at the computer graphics college she'd attended for a year, and was subcontracted by a comics publisher to work on the words for their speech bubbles, which she could do from home.

She was a woman of few words. It was rare for her to demand anything of me, and however late I was in 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. While I idled the afternoon away, TV remote in hand, she would shut herself up in her room. 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 that looked so dull I couldn't even bring myself to so much as take a look inside the covers. Only at mealtimes would she open the door and silently emerge to prepare the food. To be sure, that kind of wife, and that kind of lifestyle,

did mean that I was unlikely to find my days particularly stimulating. On the other hand, if I'd had one of those wives whose phones ring on and off all day long with calls from friends or co-workers, or whose nagging periodically leads to screaming rows with their husbands, I would have been grateful when she finally wore herself out.

Annexure. 1.2 – Ideologies of the bra:

The only respect in which my wife was at all unusual was that she didn't like wearing a bra. When I was a young man barely out of adolescence, and my wife and I were dating, I happened to put my hand on her back only to find that I couldn't feel a bra strap under her sweater, and when I realized what this meant I became quite aroused. In order to judge whether she might possibly have been trying to tell me something, I spent a minute or two looking at her through new eyes, studying her attitude. The outcome of my studies was that she wasn't, in fact, trying to send any kind of signal. So if not, was it laziness, or just a sheer lack of concern? I couldn't get my head around it. It wasn't as though she had shapely breasts which might suit the "no-bra look." I would have preferred her to go around wearing one that was thickly padded, so that I could save face in front of my acquaintances.

Even in the summer, when I managed to persuade her to wear one for a while, she'd have it unhooked barely a minute after leaving the house. The undone hook would be clearly visible under her thin, light-colored tops, but she wasn't remotely concerned. I tried reproaching her, lecturing her to layer up with a vest instead of a bra in that sultry heat. She tried to justify herself by saying that she couldn't stand wearing a bra because of the way it squeezed her breasts, and that I'd never worn one myself so I couldn't understand how constricting it felt. Nevertheless, considering I knew for a fact that there were plenty of other women who, unlike her, didn't have anything particularly against bras, I began to have doubts about this hypersensitivity of hers.

In all other respects, the course of our married life ran smoothly. We were approaching the five-year mark, and since we were never madly in love to begin with we were able to avoid falling into that stage of weariness and boredom that can otherwise turn married life into a trial. The only thing was, because we'd decided to put off trying for children until we'd managed to secure a place of our own, which had only happened last autumn, I sometimes wondered whether I would ever get to hear the reassuring sound of a child gurgling "dada," and meaning me. Until a certain day last February, when I came across my wife standing in the kitchen at daybreak in just her nightclothes, I had never considered the possibility that our life together might undergo such an appalling change.

Annexure.1.3 – The dream and a clean fridge:

For the few moments immediately after I opened my eyes the next morning, when reality had yet to assume its usual concreteness, I lay with the quilt wrapped about me, absentmindedly assessing the quality of the winter sunshine as it filtered into the room through the white curtain. In the middle of this fit of abstraction I happened to glance at the wall clock and jumped up the instant I saw the time, kicked the door open and hurried out of the room. My wife was in front of the fridge.

"Are you crazy? Why didn't you wake me up? What time is..."

Something squashed under my foot, stopping me in mid-sentence. I couldn't believe my eyes.

She was crouching, still wearing her nightclothes, her dishevelled, tangled hair a shapeless mass around her face. Around her, the kitchen floor was covered with plastic bags and airtight containers, scattered all over so that there was nowhere I could put my feet without treading on them. Beef for shabu-shabu, belly pork, two sides of black beef shin, some squid in a vacuum-packed bag, sliced eel that my mother-in-law had sent us from the countryside ages ago, dried croaker tied with yellow string, unopened packs of frozen dumplings and endless bundles of unidentified stuff dragged from the depths of the fridge. There was a rustling sound; my wife was busy putting the things around her one by one into black rubbish bags. Eventually I lost control. Massaging her reddened wrist, she spoke in the same ordinary, calm tone of voice she'd used before.

"I had a dream."

Those words again. Her expression as she looked at me was perfectly composed. Just then my mobile rang.

"Damn it!"

I started to fumble through the pockets of my coat, which I'd tossed onto the living room sofa the previous evening. Finally, in the last inside pocket, my fingers closed around my recalcitrant phone.

"I'm sorry. Something's come up, an urgent family matter, so...I'm very sorry. I'll be there as quickly as possible. No, I'm going to leave right now. It's just...no, I couldn't possibly have you do that. Please wait just a little longer. I'm very sorry. Yes, I really can't talk right now..."

I flipped my phone shut and dashed into the bathroom, where I shaved so hurriedly that I cut myself in two places.

"Haven't you even ironed my white shirt?"

There was no answer. I splashed water on myself and rummaged in the laundry basket, searching for yesterday's shirt. Luckily it wasn't too creased. Not once did my wife bother to peer out from the kitchen in the time it took me to get ready, slinging my tie around my neck like a scarf, pulling on my socks, and getting my notebook and wallet together. In the five years we'd been married, this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off.

"You're insane! You've completely lost it."

I crammed my feet into my recently purchased shoes, which were too narrow and pinched uncomfortably, threw open the front door and ran out. I checked whether the elevator was going to go all the way up to the top floor, and then dashed down three flights of stairs. Only after I'd managed to jump on the underground train as it was just about to leave did I have time to take in my appearance, reflected in the dark carriage window. I ran my fingers through my hair, did up my tie, and attempted to smooth out the creases in my shirt. My wife's unnaturally serene face, her incongruously firm voice, surfaced in my mind.

I had a dream—she'd said that twice now. Beyond the window, in the dark tunnel, her face flitted by—her face, but unfamiliar, as though I were seeing it for the first time. However, as I had thirty minutes in which to concoct an excuse for my client that would justify my lateness, as well as putting together a draft proposal for today's meeting, there was no time for mulling over the strange behavior of my even-stranger wife.

Annexure. 1.4 – Emotions behind vegetarian food:

On the dining table my wife had laid out lettuce and soybean paste, plain seaweed soup without the usual beef or clams, and kimchi.

"What the hell? So all because of some ridiculous dream, you've gone and chucked out all the meat? Worth how much?"

I got up from my chair and opened the freezer. It was practically empty—nothing but miso powder, chilli powder, frozen fresh chillies, and a pack of minced garlic.

“Just make me some fried eggs. I’m really tired today. I didn’t even get to have a proper lunch.”

“I threw the eggs out as well.”

“What?”

“And I’ve given up milk too.”

“This is unbelievable. You’re telling me not to eat meat?”

“I couldn’t let those things stay in the fridge. It wouldn’t be right.”

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?

“So you’re saying that from now on, there’ll be no meat in this house?”

“Well, after all, you usually only eat breakfast at home. And I suppose you often have meat with your lunch and dinner, so...it’s not as if you’ll die if you go without meat just for one meal.”

Her reply was so methodical, it was as if she thought that this ridiculous decision of hers was something completely rational and appropriate.

“Oh good, so that’s me sorted then. And what about you? You’re claiming that you’re not going to eat meat at all from now on?” She nodded. *“Oh, really? Until when?”*

“I suppose...forever.”

I was lost for words, though at the same time I was aware that choosing a vegetarian diet wasn’t quite so rare as it had been in the past. People turn vegetarian for all sorts of reasons: to try and alter their genetic predisposition toward certain allergies, for example, or else because it’s seen as more environmentally friendly not to eat meat. Of course, Buddhist priests who have taken certain vows are morally obliged not to participate in the destruction of life, but surely not even impressionable young girls take it quite that far. As far as I was concerned, the only reasonable grounds for altering one’s eating habits were the desire to lose weight, an attempt to alleviate certain physical ailments, being possessed by an evil spirit, or having your sleep disturbed by indigestion. In any other case, it was nothing but sheer obstinacy for a wife to go against her husband’s wishes as mine had done.

Annexure. 1.5 – Getting ready: Officer dinner with colleagues:

Mr. Cheong gets invited to an office dinner with Yeong-hye. When they get ready to go, he tells her, *“Were you really going to go out looking like this? ... Do your makeup again.”* And she complies.

She doesn’t have any dress shoes to wear, only sneakers, after throwing away everything made with leather.

“I need this evening to go well. You know it’s the first-time boss has invited me to one of these dinners.”

On the way to dinner, she sits quietly without saying a word, and he convinces himself that *“this wouldn’t be a problem... after all, hadn’t women traditionally been expected to be demure and restrained?”* (Page 25-26)

Annexure. 1.6 – Office dinner:

“What’s wrong with your lips? Haven’t you done your makeup?”

I took my shoes off again and dragged my flustered wife, who’d already put on her coat, into the front room.

“Were you really going to go out looking like this?” The two of us were reflected in the dressing table mirror. *“Do your makeup again.”*

She gently shrugged off my hand, opened her compact and patted the powder puff over her face. The powder made her face somewhat blurry, covering it in motes. The rich coral lipstick she always used to wear, and without which her lips were ashen, went some way to alleviating her sickly pallor. I was reassured.

“We’re late. Come on, hurry up.”

I opened the front door and hurried her out, staring impatiently as she fumbled with her dark blue sneakers. They didn’t go with her black trench coat, but it couldn’t be helped. She had no smart shoes left, having thrown out anything made from leather.

As soon as the car engine started I switched on the radio to listen to the traffic bulletin, paying particular attention to any mention of issues near the Korean-Chinese restaurant that the boss had reserved. Once I’d made sure it wouldn’t be quicker to go by another route, I fastened my seat belt and released the handbrake. My wife spent a minute fussing with her coat, and finally managed to fasten her seat belt after a couple of failed attempts.

“I need this evening to go well. You know it’s the first time the boss has invited me to one of these dinners.”

We only just managed to get to the restaurant in time, and even then only because I’d gone flat out on the main road. The two-story building, fronted by a spacious car park, was clearly a sophisticated establishment.

The cold of late winter was stubbornly lingering, and my wife looked chilly as she stood in the car park dressed in only a thin spring coat. She hadn’t said a single word on the way here, but I convinced myself that this wouldn’t be a problem. There’s nothing wrong with keeping quiet; after all, hadn’t women traditionally been expected to be demure and restrained?

My boss, the managing director and the executive director had already arrived, along with their wives. The section chief and his wife turned up a few minutes after us, completing the party. There were nods and smiles all around as we exchanged greetings, took off our coats and hung them up. My boss’s wife, an imposing woman with finely plucked eyebrows and a large jade necklace clacking at her throat, escorted my wife and me over to the dining table, already laid for what promised to be a lavish meal, and sat down at the head of the table. The others all seemed quite at ease, like regulars. I took my seat, careful not to be seen to gawp at the ornate ceiling, which was as elaborately decorated as the eaves of a traditional building. My gaze was arrested by the sight of goldfish swimming lazily in a glass bowl, and I turned to address my wife, but what I saw there brought me up short.

She was wearing a slightly clinging black blouse, and to my utter mortification I saw that the outline of her nipples was clearly visible through the fabric. Without a doubt, she’d come out without a bra. When the other guests surreptitiously craned their necks, no doubt wanting to be sure that they really were seeing what they thought they were, the eyes of the executive director’s wife met mine. Feigning composure, I registered the curiosity, astonishment, and contempt that were revealed in turn in her eyes.

I could feel my cheeks flushing. All too conscious of my wife, sitting there hollow-eyed and making no attempt to join in with the other women’s exchange of pleasantries, I controlled myself and decided that the best thing to do, the only thing to do, was to act natural and pretend that there was nothing untoward.

“Did you have any problems finding the place?” my boss’s wife asked me.

“No, no, I’ve been past here once or twice before. In fact, I’d been thinking of coming here myself.”

“Ah, I see...yes, the garden has turned out quite well, hasn’t it? You ought to try coming in the daytime; you can see the flower beds through that window over there.”

But by the time the food began to be served, the strain of maintaining a casual facade, which I had just about managed so far, was bringing me close to breaking point.

The first thing placed in front of us was an exquisite dish of mung-bean jelly, dressed with thin slivers of green-pea jelly, mushrooms and beef. Up until then my wife had merely sat and observed the scene in silence, but just as the waiter was on the point of ladling some onto her plate, she finally opened her mouth.

“I won’t eat it.”

She’d spoken very quietly, but the other guests all instantly stopped what they were doing, directing glances of surprise and wonder at her emaciated body.

“I don’t eat meat,” she said, slightly louder this time.

“My word, so you’re one of those ‘vegetarians,’ are you?” my boss asked. *“Well, I knew that some people in other countries are strict vegetarians, of course. And even here, you know, it does seem that attitudes are beginning to change a little. Now and then there’ll be someone claiming that eating meat is bad...after all, I suppose giving up meat in order to live a long life isn’t all that unreasonable, is it?”*

“But surely it isn’t possible to live without eating meat?” his wife asked with a smile.

The waiter whisked nine plates away, leaving my wife’s still-gleaming plate on the table. The conversation naturally continued on the topic of vegetarianism.

“Do you remember those mummified human remains they discovered recently? Five hundred thousand years old, apparently, and even back then humans were hunting for meat—they could tell that from the skeletons. Meat eating is a fundamental human instinct, which means vegetarianism goes against human nature, right? It just isn’t natural.”

“People mainly used to turn vegetarian because they subscribed to a certain ideology...I’ve been to various doctors myself, to have some tests done and see if there was anything in particular I ought to be avoiding, but everywhere I went I was told something different...in any case, the idea of a special diet always made me feel uncomfortable. It seems to me that one shouldn’t be too narrow-minded when it comes to food.”

“People who arbitrarily cut out this or that food, even though they’re not actually allergic to anything—that’s what I would call narrow-minded,” the executive director’s wife chimed in; she had been sneaking sideways glances at my wife’s breasts for some time now. *“A balanced diet goes hand in hand with a balanced mind, don’t you think?”* And now she loosed her arrow directly at my wife. *“Was there some special reason for your becoming a vegetarian? Health reasons, for example...or religious, perhaps?”*

“No.” Her cool reply proved that she was completely oblivious to how delicate the situation had become. All of a sudden, a shiver ran through me—because I had a gut feeling that I knew what she was about to say next.

“I had a dream.”

I hurriedly spoke over her.

“For a long time my wife used to suffer from gastroenteritis, which was so acute that it disturbed her sleep, you see. A dietitian advised her to give up meat, and her symptoms got a lot better after that.”

Only then did the others nod in understanding.

“Well, I must say, I’m glad I’ve still never sat down with a proper vegetarian. I’d hate to share a meal with someone who considers eating meat repulsive, just because that’s how they themselves personally feel...don’t you agree?”

“Imagine you were snatching up a wriggling baby octopus with your chopsticks and chomping it to death—and the woman across from you glared like you were some kind of animal. That must be how it feels to sit down and eat with a vegetarian!”

The group broke out into laughter, and I was conscious of each and every separate laugh. Needless to say, my wife didn't so much as crack a smile. By now, everyone was busy making sure that their mouths were fully occupied with eating, so that it wouldn't be up to them to try and fill the awkward silences that were now peppering the conversation. It was clear that they were all uncomfortable.

The next dish was fried chicken in a chili and garlic sauce, and after that was raw tuna. My wife sat there immobile while everyone else tucked in, her nipples resembling a pair of acorns as they pushed against the fabric of her blouse. Her gaze roamed intently over the rapidly working mouths of the other guests, delving into every nook and cranny as though intending to soak up every little detail.

By the time the twelve magnificent courses were over, my wife had eaten nothing but salad and kimchi, and a little bit of squash porridge. She hadn't even touched the sticky-rice porridge, as they had used a special recipe involving beef stock to give it a rich, luxurious taste. Gradually, the other guests learned to ignore her presence and the conversation started to flow again. Now and then, perhaps out of pity, they made an effort to include me, but in my heart of hearts I knew that they wanted to keep a certain distance between us.

When fruit was brought out for dessert my wife ate one small slice of apple and a single orange segment.

"You're not hungry? But, my goodness, you've barely eaten anything!" There was something flamboyant about the friendly, sociable tone in which my boss's wife expressed her concern. But the demure, apologetic smile that was the only reasonable response never came, and without even having the grace to look embarrassed, my wife simply stared baldly at my boss's wife. That stare appalled everyone present. Did she not even recognize the situation for what it was? Was it possible that she hadn't grasped the status of the elegant middle-aged woman facing her? What shadowy recesses lurked in her mind, what secrets I'd never suspected? In that moment, she was utterly unknowable.

Annexure. 1.7 – Male Dominance and Sexual Violence:

I didn't know what I could do, exactly, but I knew that I had to do something.

That was the dilemma which tormented me as I drove home. My wife, on the other hand, appeared entirely unperturbed, seemingly unaware of how disgraceful her behavior had been. She just sat there resting her head against the sloping car window, apparently on the point of dozing off. Naturally, I got angry. Did she want to see her husband get fired? What the hell did she think she was doing?

But I had a feeling that none of it would make the slightest bit of difference. Neither rage nor persuasion would succeed in moving her, and I would be unable to take matters into my own hands.

After washing and putting on her nightclothes she disappeared into her own room rather than getting ready to sleep in the living room as we usually did. I was left pacing up and down when I heard the phone ring: my mother-in-law.

"How is everything with you? I hadn't heard a thing for such a long time..."

"I'm sorry about that. It's just that I've been so busy lately...is my father-in-law in good health?"

"Oh, nothing ever changes with us. Are things going well at work?"

I hesitated. *"I'm fine. But as for my wife..."*

"What about Yeong-hye, what's the matter?" Her voice was laced with worry. She had never seemed to show much of an interest in her second daughter, but I suppose one's children are one's children, after all.

“The thing is, she’s stopped eating meat.”

“What did you say?”

“She’s stopped eating any kind of meat at all, even fish—all she lives on is vegetables. It’s been several months now.”

“What kind of talk is this? Surely you can always just tell her not to follow this diet.”

“Oh, I’ve told her, all right, but she still goes ahead and defies me. And what’s more, she’s even imposed this ridiculous diet on me—I can’t remember the last time I tasted meat in this house.”

My mother-in-law was lost for words, and I used her speechlessness as an opportunity to turn the screw a little tighter. *“She’s become very weak. I’m not sure exactly how serious it is...”*

“I can’t have this. Is Yeong-hye there? Pass her the phone.”

“She’s gone to bed now. I’ll tell her to call tomorrow morning.”

“No, leave it. I’ll call. How can that child be so defiant? Oh, you must be ashamed of her!”

After hanging up I riffled through my notebook and dialed my sister-in-law In-hye’s number.”

Contrary to what I’d hoped, my mother- and sister-in-law’s efforts at persuasion had not the slightest influence on my wife’s eating habits. At the weekend, the phone rang and my wife picked up.

“Yeong-hye,” my father-in-law bellowed, “are you still not eating meat?” He’d never used a telephone in his life, and I could hear his excited shouts emerging from the receiver. “What d’you think you’re playing at, hey? Acting like this at your age, what on earth must Mr. Cheong think?” My wife stood there in perfect silence, holding the receiver to her ear. “Why don’t you answer? Can you hear me?”

A pan of soup was boiling on the stove, so my wife put the receiver down on the table without a word and disappeared into the kitchen. I stood there for a few moments listening to my father-in-law raging impotently, unaware that there was no one on the other end, then took pity on him and picked up the receiver.

“I’m sorry, Father-in-law.”

“No, I’m the one who’s ashamed.”

It shocked me to hear this patriarchal man apologize—in the five years I’d known him, I’d never once heard such words pass his lips. Shame and empathy just didn’t suit him. He never tired of boasting about having received the Order of Military Merit for serving in Vietnam, and not only was his voice extremely loud, it was the voice of a man with strongly fixed ideas. *I myself, in Vietnam...seven Vietcong...* as his son-in-law, I was only too familiar with the beginning of his monologue. According to my wife, he had whipped her over the calves until she was eighteen years old.

“In any case, you’re coming up next month so let’s sit her down and have it out then.”

The family get-together scheduled for the second Sunday this coming June was clearly going to be a very big deal. Even if no one said it openly, it was plain to see that they were all getting ready to give my wife a dressing-down.

Whether or not my wife was actually aware of any of this, she never seemed in the least bit perturbed. Aside from the fact that she deliberately continued to avoid sleeping with me—she’d even taken to sleeping in trousers—on the surface we were still a regular married couple. The only thing that had changed was that in the early hours of the morning, when I groped for my alarm clock, turned it off and sat up, she would be lying there ramrod straight, her eyes gazing upward in the darkness. After the meal at the restaurant, other people in the company had been noticeably cool toward me, but once the project I’d pushed through

began to yield some far-from-negligible profits, all that unpleasantness appeared to have been entirely forgotten.

I sometimes told myself that even though the woman I was living with was a little odd, nothing particularly bad would come of it. I thought I could get by perfectly well just thinking of her as a stranger, or no, as a sister, or even a maid, someone who puts food on the table and keeps the house in good order. But it was no easy thing for a man in the prime of his life, for whom married life had always gone entirely without a hitch, to have his physical needs go unsatisfied for such a long period of time. So yes, one night when I returned home late and somewhat inebriated after a 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. As soon as I finished, she rolled over and buried her face in the quilt. I went to have a shower, and by the time I returned to bed she was lying there with her eyes closed as if nothing had happened, or as though everything had somehow sorted itself out during the time I’d spent washing myself.

After this first time, it was easier for me to do it again, but each time, I would be seized by strange, ominous premonitions. I was thick-skinned by nature, and certainly wasn’t in the habit of entertaining outlandish notions, but the darkness and silence of the living room would strike a chill through me all the same. The following morning, sitting with my wife at the breakfast table—her lips pressed firmly closed as per usual, clearly not paying the slightest bit of attention to anything I might be saying—I would be unable to conceal a feeling of abhorrence when I looked across at her. I couldn’t stand the way her expression, which made it seem as though she were a woman of bitter experience, who had suffered many hardships, niggled at my conscience.

Annexure. 1.8 – Visit to the protagonist’s sister’s house:

The sunny south-facing apartment was on the seventeenth floor. True, the view out east was obscured by other buildings, but to the rear the mountains were visible in the distance.

“Now you’ve forgotten all your worries,” my father-in-law pronounced, taking up his spoon and chopsticks. *“Completely seized the moment!”*

Even before she got married, my sister-in-law In-hye had managed to secure an apartment with the income she received from managing a cosmetics store. Leading up to her pregnancy, the store had expanded to three times its original size, and after the birth she insisted on stopping by—only at night, and just for a short while—to make sure that everything was running smoothly in her absence. As soon as my nephew Ji-woo turned three and went to a nursery, she’d apparently started spending all day in the shop again.

I envied her husband. He was an art college graduate who liked to pose as an artist, yet didn’t contribute a single penny to their household finances. True, he had some property that he’d inherited, but he didn’t bring in a salary—in fact, his activities were limited to sitting around and not doing an awful lot of anything. Now that In-hye had rolled up her sleeves and gone back to work, her husband was free to spend his whole life messing about with “art,” without a single worry to trouble his comfortable existence. Not only that, but In-hye was also a skilled cook, just as my wife used to be. Seeing the lunch table she had swiftly set made me feel a sudden pang of hunger. Taking in her nicely filled-out figure, big, double-lidded eyes,

and demure manner of speaking, I sorely regretted the many things it seemed I'd ended up losing somehow or other, to have left me in my current plight.

Neither complimenting the house nor thanking her sister for taking the trouble to prepare the food, my wife sat quietly eating rice and kimchi. Those were the only things she touched. Mayonnaise contained egg, so that was another thing off the menu for her—she didn't so much as stick her chopsticks into the mouth-watering salad.

Her face was blanched, a result of protracted insomnia. A stranger coming across her in the street would have assumed she was a hospital patient. A little earlier, pretty much as soon as we'd both come in through the front door, she'd been summoned to the master bedroom; after a while, my sister-in-law was the first to emerge, and judging from her baffled expression I guessed that my wife had come out without a bra. Sure enough, when I looked closely I could see her light-brown nipples showing through like smudges on the cotton.

"How much was the deposit here?"

"Really? We went to look at the real estate site yesterday; this apartment had already gone up to around fifty million won. Because next year they will have completed the underground line extension, you see?"

"My brother-in-law certainly has a good head for this kind of thing."

"What did I do? It was all down to my wife."

While our polite, amiable conversation carried on in intermittent bursts, the children seemed unable to sit still, hitting each other and making an almighty racket, pausing only to stuff their mouths with food.

"Sister-in-law," I asked, *"did you prepare all this food yourself?"*

She gave me a half smile.

"Well, I've been doing it bit by bit since the day before yesterday. And those, the seasoned oysters, I went to the market expressly to get because I know Yeong-hye likes them...and she hasn't even touched them."

I held my breath. Here it comes, I thought.

"Enough!" my father-in-law yelled. *"You, Yeong-hye! After all I told you, your own father!"*

This outburst was followed by In-hye's roundly rebuking my wife. *"Do you truly intend to go on like this? Human beings need certain nutrients...if you intend to follow a vegetarian diet you should sit down and draw up a proper, well-balanced meal plan. Just look at your face!"*

So far my wife's brother Yeong-ho was keeping his own counsel, so his wife decided to have her say instead. *"When I saw her I thought she was a different person. I'd heard about it from my husband, but I never would have guessed that going vegetarian could damage your body like that."*

My mother-in-law brought in dishes of stir-fried beef, sweet and sour pork, steamed chicken, and octopus noodles, arranging them on the table in front of my wife.

"This whole vegetarian business stops right now," she said. *"This one, and this, and this—hurry up and eat them. How could you have got into this wretched state when there's not a thing in the world you can't eat?"*

"Well, what are you waiting for? Come on, eat up," my father-in-law boomed.

"You must eat, Yeong-hye," In-hye admonished. *"You'll have more energy if you do. Everyone needs a certain amount of energy while they're alive. Even priests who enter the temple don't take their austerities too far—they might be celibate, but they're still able to live active lives."*

The children were staring wide-eyed at my wife. She turned her blank gaze on her family, as if she couldn't fathom the reason for all this sudden fuss.

A strained silence ensued. I surveyed in turn my father-in-law's swarthy cheeks; my mother-in-law's face, so full of wrinkles I couldn't believe it had once been that of a young woman, her eyes filled with worry; In-hye's anxiously raised eyebrows; her husband's affected attitude of being no more than a casual bystander; the passive but seemingly displeased expressions of Yeong-ho and his wife. I expected my wife to say something in her own defense, but the sole, silent answer she made to all those glaring faces was to set the pair of chopsticks she had picked up back down on the table.

A small flurry of unease ran through the assembled family. This time, my mother-in-law picked up some sweet and sour pork with her chopsticks and thrust it right up in front of my wife's mouth, saying, "*Here. Come on, hurry up and eat.*" Mouth closed, my wife stared at her mother as though entirely ignorant of the rules of etiquette. "*Open your mouth right now. You don't like it? Well, try this instead, then.*" She tried the same thing with stir-fried beef, and when my wife kept her mouth shut just as before, set the beef down and picked up some dressed oysters. "*Haven't you liked these since you were little? You used to want to eat them all the time*"

"*Yes, I remember that too,*" In-hye chimed in, backing up her mother by making it seem as though my wife's not eating oysters were the ultimate big deal. "*I always think of you when I see oysters, Yeong-hye.*"

As the chopsticks holding the dressed oysters gradually neared my wife's averted mouth, she twisted away violently.

"*Eat it quickly! My arm hurts...*"

My mother-in-law's arm was actually trembling. Eventually, my wife stood up.

"*I won't eat it.*"

For the first time in a long while, her speech was clear and distinct.

"*What?*" my wife's father and brother, who were both similarly hot tempered, yelled in concert. Yeong-ho's wife quickly grabbed her husband's arm.

"*My heart will pack in if this goes on any longer!*" my father-in-law shouted at Yeong-hye. "*Don't you understand what your father's telling you? If he tells you to eat, you eat!*"

I expected an answer from my wife along the lines of "*I'm sorry, Father, but I just can't eat it,*" but all she said was "*I do not eat meat*"—clearly enunciated, and seemingly not the least bit apologetic.

My mother-in-law gathered up the chopsticks with an attitude of despair. Her old woman's face seemed on the brink of crumpling into tears, tears that would explode from her eyes and then course down her wrinkled cheeks in silence. My father-in-law took up a pair of chopsticks. He used them to pick up a piece of sweet and sour pork and stood tall in front of my wife, who turned away.

My father-in-law stooped slightly as he thrust the pork at my wife's face, a lifetime's rigid discipline unable to disguise his advanced age.

"*Eat it! Listen to what your father's telling you and eat. Everything I say is for your own good. So why act like this if it makes you ill?*"

The fatherly affection that was almost choking the old man made a powerful impression on me, and I was moved to tears in spite of myself. Probably everyone gathered there felt the same. With one hand my wife pushed away his chopsticks, which were shaking silently in empty space.

"*Father, I don't eat meat.*"

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

“*Father!*” In-hye cried out, grabbing his arm. His lips twitched as though his agitation had not yet passed off. I’d known of his incredibly violent temperament for some time, but it was the first time I’d directly witnessed him striking someone.

“*Mr. Cheong, Yeong-ho, the two of you come here.*”

I approached my wife hesitantly. He’d hit her so hard that the blood showed through the skin of her cheek. Her breathing was ragged, and it seemed that her composure had finally been shattered. “*Take hold of Yeong-hye’s arms, both of you.*”

“*What?*”

“*If she eats it once, she’ll eat it again. It’s preposterous, everyone eats meat!*”

Yeong-ho stood up, looking as though he were finding this whole episode distasteful.

“*Sister, would you please just eat? Or after all, it would be simple enough just to pretend. Do you have to make such a thing about it in front of Father?*”

“*What kind of talk is that?*” my father-in-law yelled. “*Grab her arms, quickly. You too, Mr. Cheong.*”

“*Father, why are you doing this?*” In-hye took hold of her father’s right arm.

Having thrown down the chopsticks, he now picked up a piece of pork with his fingers and approached my wife. She was hesitantly backing away when her brother seized her and sat her down.

“*Sister, just behave, okay? Just eat what he gives you.*”

“*Father, I beg you, stop this,*” In-hye entreated him, but he shook her off and thrust the pork at my wife’s lips. A moaning sound came from her tightly closed mouth. She was unable to say even a single word in case, when she opened her mouth to speak, the meat found its way in.

“*Father!*” Yeong-ho shouted, apparently wanting to dissuade him, though he himself didn’t release his grip on my wife.

“*Mm-mm...mm!*”

My father-in-law mashed the pork to a pulp on my wife’s lips as she struggled in agony. Though he parted her lips with his strong fingers, he could do nothing about her clenched teeth.

Eventually he flew into a passion again and struck her in the face once more.

“*Father!*”

Though In-hye sprang at him and held him by the waist, in the instant that the force of the slap had knocked my wife’s mouth open he’d managed to jam the pork in. As soon as the strength in Yeong-ho’s arms was visibly exhausted, my wife growled and spat out the meat. An animal cry of distress burst from her lips.

“*Get away!*”

At first, she drew up her shoulders and seemed about to flee in the direction of the front door, but then she turned back and picked up the fruit knife that had been lying on the dining table.

“*Yeong-hye?*” My mother-in-law’s voice, which seemed about to break, drew a trembling line through the brutal silence. The children burst into noisy sobbing, unable to suppress it any longer.

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

“*Stop her...*”

“*Stay back!*”

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.

“*What are you doing? Somebody fetch a towel, at least!*” Every inch the special forces graduate, he stopped the bleeding with practiced skill, and picked my wife up in his arms. “*Quickly, go down and start the engine!*”

I groped for my shoes. The ones I’d picked up weren’t a pair, so I had to swap them before I was able to open the front door and go out.

Annexure 1.9 – Yeong-hye’s Dreams

Dream 01:

Dark woods. No people. The sharp-pointed leaves on the trees, my torn feet. This place, almost remembered, but I’m lost now. Frightened. Cold. Across the frozen ravine, a red barn-like building. Straw matting flapping limp across the door. Roll it up and I’m inside, it’s inside. 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.

Somehow a way out. Running, running through the valley, then suddenly the woods open out. Trees thick with leaves, springtime’s green light. Families picnicking, little children running about, and that smell, that delicious smell. Almost painfully vivid. The babbling stream, people spreading out rush mats to sit on, snacking on kimbap. Barbecuing meat, the sounds of singing and happy laughter.

But the fear. My clothes 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 “door. Roll it up and I’m inside, it’s inside. 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.

Somehow a way out. Running, running through the valley, then suddenly the woods open out. Trees thick with leaves, springtime’s green light. Families picnicking, little children running about, and that smell, that delicious smell. Almost painfully vivid. The babbling stream, people spreading out rush mats to sit on, snacking on kimbap. Barbecuing meat, the sounds of singing and happy laughter.

But the fear. My clothes 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 my mouth, slick with crimson blood.

Chewing on something that felt so real, but couldn’t have been, it couldn’t. My face, the look in my eyes...my face, undoubtedly, but never seen before. Or no, not mine but so familiar...nothing makes sense. Familiar and yet not...that vivid, strange, horribly uncanny feeling.

Dream 02:

The morning before I had the dream, I was mincing frozen meat—remember? You got angry.

“Damn it, what the hell are you doing squirming like that? You’ve never been squeamish before.”

If you knew how hard I’ve always worked to keep my nerves in check. Other people just get a bit flustered, but for me everything gets confused, speeds up. Quick, quicker. The hand holding the knife was working so quickly, I felt heat prickle the back of my neck. My hand, the chopping board, the meat, and then the knife, slicing cold into my finger.

A drop of red blood already blossoming out of the cut. Rounder than round. Sticking the finger in my mouth calmed me. The scarlet color, and now the taste, sweetness masking something else, left me strangely pacified.

Later that day, when you sat down to a meal of bulgogi, you spat out the second mouthful and picked out something glittering.

“What the hell is this?” you yelled. “A chip off the knife?”

I gazed vacantly at your distorted face as you raged.

“Just think what would have happened if I’d swallowed it! I was this close to dying!”

“Why didn’t this agitate me like it should have done? Instead, I became even calmer. A cool hand on my forehead. Suddenly, everything around me began to slide away, as though pulled back on an ebbing tide. The dining table, you, all the kitchen furniture. I was alone, the only thing remaining in all of infinite space.

Dawn of the next day. The pool of blood in the barn...I first saw the face reflected there.

Dream 03:

Dreams of murder.

Murderer or murdered....hazy distinctions, boundaries wearing thin. Familiarity bleeds into strangeness, certainty becomes impossible. Only the violence is vivid enough to stick. A sound, the elasticity of the instant when the metal struck the victim’s head...the shadow that crumpled and fell gleams cold in the darkness.

They come to me now more times than I can count. Dreams overlaid with dreams, a palimpsest of horror. Violent acts perpetrated by night. A hazy feeling I can’t pin down...but remembered as blood-chillingly definite.

Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed. Loathing I’ve always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off.

That shuddering, sordid, gruesome, brutal feeling. Nothing else remains. Murderer or murdered, experience too vivid to not be real. Determined, disillusioned. Lukewarm, like slightly cooled blood.

Everything starts to feel unfamiliar. As if I’ve come up to the back of something. Shut up behind a door without a handle. Perhaps I’m only now coming face-to-face with the thing that has always been here. It’s dark. Everything is being snuffed out in the pitch-black darkness.

Dream 04:

Dreams of my hands around someone’s throat, throttling them, grabbing the swinging ends of their long hair and hacking it all off, sticking my finger into their slippery eyeball. Those drawn-out waking hours, a pigeon’s dull colors in the street and my resolve falters, my fingers flexing to kill. Next door’s cat, its bright tormenting eyes, my fingers that could squeeze that brightness out. My trembling legs, the cold sweat on my brow. I become a different person, a different person rises up inside me, devours me, those hours...

Saliva pooling in my mouth. The butcher’s shop, and I have to clamp my hand over my mouth. Along the length of my tongue to my lips, slick with saliva. Leaking out between my lips, trickling down.

—
If only I could sleep. If I could shrug off consciousness for even just an hour. The house is cold on all these nights, more nights than I can count, when I wake up and pace about in bare feet. Chill like rice or soup that has been left to go cold. Nothing is visible outside the black window. The dark front door rattles now and then, but no one comes to knock on the door or anything like that. By the time I come back to bed and put my hand under the quilt, all the warmth is gone.

—
Sleeping in five-minute snatches. Slipping out of fuzzy consciousness, it’s back—the dream. Can’t even call it that now. Animal eyes gleaming wild, presence of blood, unearthed skull, again those eyes. Rising up from the pit of my stomach. Shuddering awake, my hands, need to see my hands. Breathe. My fingernails still soft, my teeth still gentle.

Can only trust my breasts now. I like my breasts, nothing can be killed by them. Hand, foot, tongue, gaze, all weapons from which nothing is safe. But not my breasts. With my round breasts, I'm okay. Still okay. So why do they keep on shrinking? Not even round anymore. Why? Why am I changing like this? Why are my edges all sharpening—what I am going to gouge?

Dream 05:

...the dog that sank its teeth into my leg is chained up to Father's motorcycle. With its singed tail bandaged to my calf wound, a traditional remedy Mother insisted on, I go out and stand at the main gate. I am nine years old, and the summer heat is stifling. The sun has gone down, and still the sweat is running off me. The dog, too, is panting, its red tongue lolling. A white, handsome-looking dog, bigger even than me. Up until it bit the big man's daughter, everyone in the village always thought it could do no wrong.

While Father ties the dog to the tree and scorches it with a lamp, he says it isn't to be flogged. He says he heard somewhere that driving a dog to keep running until the point of death is considered a milder punishment. The motorcycle engine starts, and Father begins to drive in a circle. The dog runs along behind. Two laps, three laps, they circle around. Without moving a muscle I stand just inside the gate watching Whitey, eyes rolling and gasping for breath, gradually exhaust himself. Every time his gleaming eyes meet my own I glare even more fiercely.

Bad dog, you'd bite me?

Once it has gone five laps, the dog is frothing at the mouth. Blood drips from its throat, which is being choked with the rope. Constantly groaning through its damaged throat, the dog is dragged along the ground. At six laps, the dog vomits blackish-red blood, trickling from its mouth and open throat. As blood and froth mix together, I stand stiffly upright and stare at those two glittering eyes. Seven laps, and while waiting for the dog to come into view, Father looks behind and sees that it is in fact dangling limply from the motorcycle. I look at the dog's four juddering legs, its raised eyelids, the blood and water in its dead eyes.

That evening there was a feast at our house. All the middle-aged men from the market alleyways came, everyone my father considered worth knowing. The saying goes that for a wound caused by a dog bite to heal you have to eat that same dog, and I did scoop up a mouthful for myself. No, in fact I ate an entire bowlful with rice. The smell of burnt flesh, which the perilla seeds couldn't wholly mask, pricked my nose. I remember the two eyes that had watched me, while the dog was made to run on, while he vomited blood mixed with froth, and how later they had seemed to appear, flickering, on the surface of the soup. But I don't care. I really didn't care.

Annexure 2.1: About Jiyoung

Kim Jiyoung is thirty-three years old, or thirty-four in Korean age. She got married three years ago and had a daughter last year. She rents a small apartment on the outskirts of Seoul with her husband Jung Daehyun, thirty-six, and daughter Jung Jiwon. Daehyun works at a mid-size IT company, and Jiyoung used to work at a small marketing agency, which she left a few weeks before her due date. Daehyun usually comes home from work around midnight and goes into the office at least once on weekends. Daehyun's parents live in Busan, and Jiyoung's parents run a restaurant, making Jiyoung her daughter's sole caretaker. Just after Jiwon turned one in the summer, she started daycare as a half-day infant. She spends her mornings at a converted ground-floor apartment daycare center in the same apartment complex where she lives.

Jiyoung's abnormal behavior was first detected on September 8. Daehyun remembers the exact date because it was the morning of *baengno* ("white dew"), the first night of autumn when the temperature drops below dew point.

Daehyun visited the psychiatrist alone to discuss Jiyoung's symptoms and treatment options. He told his wife, who didn't seem to be aware of her condition, that he had booked a therapy session for her since she hadn't been sleeping well and seemed stressed. Jiyoung thanked him, saying that she had indeed been feeling blue and enervated, and that she suspected maternity blues.

Annexure 2.2 -- Baby formula incident:

Jiyoung's earliest childhood memory is of sneaking her brother's formula. She must have been six or seven then. It was just formula, but it was so tasty she would sit by her mother when she was making it for her brother, lick her finger, and pick up the little bits that spilled on the floor. Her mother would sometimes lean Jiyoung's head back, tell her to open wide, and pour a spoonful of that rich, sweet, nutty powder in her mouth. The formula would mix with her saliva, melt into a sticky mass, then turn soft as caramel, before sliding down the back of her throat and leaving a strange feeling in her mouth that wasn't quite dry or bitter.

Koh Boonsoon, Jiyoung's grandmother who lived with them, detested the very idea of Jiyoung eating her brother's formula. If her grandmother ever caught her getting a spoonful of it, she would smack her on the back so hard powder exploded from her mouth and nose. Kim Eunyoung, Jiyoung's big sister, never ate formula after the one time she was admonished by their grandmother.

"You don't like formula?"

"I do."

"So why don't you eat it?"

"It stinks."

"What?"

"I don't want their stinking formula. No way."

Jiyoung couldn't understand what she meant by that, but she understood how she felt. Their grandmother wasn't scolding them just because they were too old for formula or because she was worried there wouldn't be enough formula for the baby. The combination of her tone, expression, angle of head tilt, position of shoulders, and her breathing sent them a message that was hard to summarize in one sentence, but, if Jiyoung tried anyway, it went

something like this: *How dare you try to take something that belongs to my precious grandson!* Her grandson and his things were valuable and to be cherished; she wasn't going to let just anybody touch them, and Jiyoung ranked below this "anybody." Eunyoung probably had the same impression.

It was a given that fresh rice hot out of the cooker was served in the order of father, brother, and grandmother, and that perfect pieces of tofu, dumplings, and patties were the brother's while the girls ate the ones that fell apart. The brother had chopsticks, socks, long underwear, and school and lunch bags that matched, while the girls made do with whatever was available. If there were two umbrellas, the girls shared. If there were two blankets, the girls shared. If there were two treats, the girls shared. It didn't occur to the child Jiyoung that her brother was receiving special treatment, and so she wasn't even jealous. That's how it had always been. There were times when she had an inkling of a situation not being fair, but she was accustomed to rationalizing things by telling herself that she was being a generous older sibling and that she shared with her sister because they were both girls. Jiyoung's mother would praise the girls for taking good care of their brother and not competing for her love. Jiyoung thought it must be the big age gap. The more their mother praised, the more impossible it became for Jiyoung to complain.

Annexure 2.3 -- Ji-Young's elementary school experience:

When Kim Jiyoung was in elementary school, her mother was reading a one-line comment her homeroom teacher had made on her journal assignment and said, "I wanted to be a teacher, too."

Jiyoung burst into laughter. She found the idea outrageous because she'd thought until then that mothers could only be mothers.

"It's true. In elementary, I got the best grades out of all five of us. I was better than your eldest uncle."

"So why didn't you become a teacher?"

"I had to work to send my brothers to school. That's how it was with everyone. All women lived like that back then."

"Why don't you become a teacher now?"

"Now I have to work to send you kids to school. That's how it is with everyone. All mothers live like this these days."

Her life choices, being Kim Jiyoung's mother—Oh Misook was regretting them. Jiyoung felt she was a rock, small but heavy and unyielding, holding down her mother's long skirt train. This made her sad. Her mother saw this and warmly swept back her daughter's unkempt hair.

Annexure 2.4 -- Middle school experience:

Kim Jiyoung attended a middle school that was a fifteen-minute walk from home. Her elder sister, Kim Eunyoung, attended the same school, which was still an all-girls' school when Eunyoung started there.

Even up until the 1990s, the sex ratio imbalance at birth was a serious issue in Korea. In 1982, the year Jiyoung was born, 106.8 boys were born to 100 girls, and the male birth ratio gradually increased, ending up with 116.5 boys born to 100 girls in 1990. The natural sex ratio at birth is thought to be between 103 and 107 boys to 100 girls. The number of male students was already large and obviously increasing, but there weren't enough schools to accommodate them. Coed schools already had about twice as many boys' classes as girls', but the high male-to-female ratio was a problem, and it didn't make sense for students to be

assigned to girls' schools and boys' schools far away when there were schools closer to home. The school became coed the year Jiyoung entered, and all other schools in the area followed within a few years.

It was a typical school—small, run-down, public. The school field was so small that the 100-meter sprint track had to be drawn in a diagonal line across it, and plaster constantly crumbled off the building walls. The school dress code was strict, especially for girls. According to Eunyoung, it became stricter when the school went coed. The skirt had to be long enough to cover the knees and roomy enough to hide the contours of the hips and thighs. As the thin, white fabric of the summer blouse was rather sheer, a round-neck undershirt was mandatory. No spaghetti straps, no T-shirts, no colors, no lace, and wearing just a bra underneath was absolutely not allowed. In the summer, girls had to wear tights with white socks, and just black tights in the winter. No sheer black tights, and no socks allowed. No sneakers, only dress shoes. Walking around in just tights and dress shoes in the middle of winter, Jiyoung's feet got so cold that she wanted to cry.

For boys, the trouser legs could not be too tight or too loose, but everything else was generally overlooked. Boys wore undershirts, white T-shirts and sometimes gray or black T-shirts. When it got hot, the boys undid a few shirt buttons and walked around with just their T-shirts on during lunch or in between classes. They were allowed to wear dress shoes, sneakers, soccer cleats, and running shoes.

One time, a female student who was held up at the school gate for wearing sneakers protested it was unfair to allow T-shirts and sneakers to male students only. The student discipline teacher explained that it was because boys were more physically active.

"Boys can't sit still for the ten minutes between classes. They run outside to play soccer, basketball, baseball, or even *malttukbakgi*. You can't expect kids like that to button their shirts all the way to the top and wear dress shoes."

"You think girls don't play sports because they don't want to? We can't play because it's uncomfortable to play wearing skirts, tights, and dress shoes! When I was in elementary school, I went outside every break to play red rover, hopscotch, and skip rope."

As punishment for the dress-code violation and backtalk, the female student had to do laps of squat walk around the school field. The teacher told her to hold the hem of her skirt together so as not to reveal her underwear, but the girl refused. Her underwear showed each time she took a step in squat position. The teacher stopped her after one lap. Another student called down to the teachers' office for dress-code violation asked her why she didn't hold her hem together.

"I wanted the teacher to see with his own eyes just how uncomfortable this outfit is."

The official dress code did not change, but, at some point, the prefects and teachers started to overlook girls wearing T-shirts and sneakers.

Annexure 2.5 -- Learning from sister's life choices:

The Korean financial crisis of 1997 hit Kim Jiyoung's household. The civil service, known to be the most secure work, was subjected to waves of restructuring. Jiyoung's father, a low-level civil servant who believed downsizing and early retirement only applied to the financial sector and large corporations, was asked to quit. The general consensus among his colleagues was to stick it out no matter what, and he agreed with them. But he was nervous. He didn't make a lot of money, but the fact that he was raising a family was his biggest source of pride. He was a good worker—steadfast, conscientious, always a perfectionist, and a model employee—who found himself at a loss and visibly shaken to realize his livelihood was under threat.

Kim Eunyoung was, coincidentally, in the twelfth grade at the time. Unaffected by the tense mood around the house, she kept her grades up. Her practice test results did not improve dramatically, but rose steadily and brought about entrance exam scores she was happy with. The mother cautiously suggested that her first-born daughter attend a teacher training college outside of Seoul. This suggestion came after a great deal of deliberation on her part. The older generation was being laid off and the younger generation wasn't able to find jobs. Her husband's job, once thought to be completely secure until retirement, faced an uncertain future, there were two other children, and the economy was worsening. For the sake of Eunyoung's future and for the financial stability of the family, the mother wanted her to attend a university that would lead to a high probability of securing stable work. Besides, teacher training colleges had cheaper tuition. But this was after the civil service and education became popular, and the exam score cut-off for teacher training colleges had skyrocketed. Eunyoung had her pick of schools in Seoul, but not the city's teacher training colleges.

Eunyoung, whose dream was to become a television producer, chose journalism as her major and was already looking at previous years' essay test material from the schools she was thinking about. When her mother brought up the idea of teacher training college, Eunyoung said no in a heartbeat.

"I don't want to be a teacher. I already have something I want to do. And why do I have to leave home and attend university so far away?"

"Think ahead. There's no better job for women than a schoolteacher."

"What's so great about being a schoolteacher?"

"You get off work early. You have school vacations. It's easy to take time off. There's nothing like teaching for working moms."

"Sure. It's a great job for working parents. Then isn't it a great job for everyone? Why specifically women? Do women raise children alone? Are you going to suggest teaching to your son, too? You're going to send him to a teacher training college, too?"

Growing up, the sisters were never once told by their parents to meet a nice man and marry well, to grow up to be a good mother and a good cook. They'd done quite a lot of chores around the house since they were young, but they thought of it as helping out their busy parents and taking care of themselves, not learning how to be good women. When they were a bit older, the lectures they received from their parents fell under two main themes: a) habits and attitude (sit up straight, keep your desk organized, don't read in the dark, pack your schoolbags ahead of time, be polite to your elders); b) study hard.

Gone were the days when parents thought girls didn't have to get good grades or receive the same education as boys. It had long since been the norm for girls, like boys, to put on a uniform, carry a backpack, and attend school. Girls thought about what they would like to do when they grew up, just as boys did; they planned their careers and competed to achieve their goals. This was a time of widespread social support for women's ambitions. In 1999, the year Kim Eunyoung turned twenty, new legislation against gender discrimination was introduced, and in 2001, the year Kim Jiyoung turned twenty, the Ministry of Gender Equality was formed.² But in certain pivotal moments in women's lives, the "woman" stigma reared its head to obscure their vision, stay their hands, and hold them back. The mixed signals were confusing and disconcerting.

"Besides, I don't know if I'm going to get married, or if I'm going to have children. Or maybe I'll die before I get to do any of that. Why do I have to deny myself something I want right now to prepare for a future that may or may not come?"

The mother looked up at the world on the wall. On the map with tattered corners were a few green and blue heart-shaped stickers. It was the elder sister's idea to put stickers on the countries they wanted to see. Kim Jiyoung chose the more familiar countries such as the

USA, Japan, and China, while Eunyoung chose northern European countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Finland. When asked why she picked those places, Eunyoung said she wanted to go someplace with few Koreans. The mother knew what the stickers meant. “You’re right,” said the mother. “I’m sorry I brought it up. You’re going to ace that essay test!”

The mother was turning to leave when Eunyoung called, “Mom, is it because the tuition is cheap? The relative job security? Because I can start bringing home a paycheck right after graduation? Because Father’s job isn’t a sure thing these days, and I have two younger siblings?”

“That’s a big part of it. That’s half the reason. The other half is ... I thought a schoolteacher was a really great job in many ways. But now I think you’re right.”

The mother answered her honestly, and Eunyoung had nothing to say to that.

Eunyoung started looking into material on elementary-school education, consulted the school careers adviser several times, checked out a teacher training college outside Seoul, and brought back an application. The mother was against it this time. She knew better than anyone what it was like to give up on one’s dreams for the sake of the family, having made that sacrifice herself. She hardly ever saw her brothers—a sacrifice made without truly understanding the consequences, or even having the choice to refuse, created regret and resentment that was as deep as it was slow to heal, and the bitterness broke up the family.

Eunyoung insisted that wasn’t it. She said she’d been more into the idea of becoming a television producer without really knowing what it entailed. That, in fact, ever since she was little, she’d enjoyed reading to her younger siblings, helping them with homework, and doing crafts and drawing with them—schoolteacher suited her better.

“Like you said, Mom, it’s a great job. You get off work early, there’s school vacations, job stability. Besides, I get to teach things to little children who’re as innocent and lively as fresh leaves! How cool is that? Although I’m sure I’ll be yelling at them a lot of the time.”

Eunyoung applied to the teacher training college she visited, and was accepted. She got a spot in the dormitory as well. On move-in day, the mother laid out a few essential dorm items and offered advice that fell on the deaf ears of her twenty-year-old daughter bursting with excitement she could hardly contain. The mother came home that day, put her head down on Eunyoung’s empty desk and cried for a long time. *She’s still a child. I shouldn’t have made her leave home so soon. I should have let her attend the school she really wanted. I shouldn’t have forced her to be like me.* Jiyong couldn’t tell if the mother felt sorry for her daughter or for her younger self, but she offered her words of consolation.

“She really wanted to go to the teacher training college. She slept with the school brochure. Look—it’s falling apart.”

Only after flipping through the brochure with the dog-eared parts worn down and starting to tear did the mother stop her tears.

“You’re right.”

“You still don’t know her, after raising her for twenty years? You think she’d ever do something she didn’t want to? She made the decision because she really wanted it. So don’t be sad.”

The mother left the room with a load lifted off her chest. Jiyong, now alone in the room, felt strange and empty and so elated that she felt she could fly, at least up to the ceiling. She’d never had her own room before. She thought she should get rid of her sister’s desk immediately and get a bed. She’d always wanted a bed.

Eunyoung’s entering college was a good thing for the whole family.

Annexure 2.6 – Job search and interview:

Hyejin told Jiyoung about a girl who graduated a few years ago. She was top of her class for all four years, scored high on foreign language exams, had a spectacular CV including awards, internships, certificates, and student club and volunteer activities. There was one company that she had her eye on, but she found out belatedly that the department received a request for eligible candidates and had selected four male students for interviews (she found out through one of the male students who failed the interview and bellyached about it). The female student filed a strongly worded complaint to her major adviser, asking for the recommendation criteria, and said she would go public with this matter unless she was given a legitimate reason for not being chosen as a candidate. The issue traveled up the chain of command all the way to the department head, throughout which she was given a string of unacceptable reasons: the company seemed to imply a preference for male students; it's recompense for the years they lost serving in the military; they are future heads of households. The most demoralizing answer came from the department head himself: "Companies find smart women taxing. Like now—you're being very taxing, you know?"

What do you want from us? The dumb girls are too dumb, the smart girls are too smart, and the average girls are too unexceptional?

The female student thought it was pointless to carry on with the complaint, and was hired through the company's open recruitment at the end of that year.

"Wow, that's great! So is she still working there?"

"No, she quit after six months or something."

She had looked around the office one day and realized that there were no women above a certain pay grade. She spotted a pregnant woman in the company dining hall and asked the people at her table how long the company's maternity leave was, and none of the five, including one department head, knew the answer because none of them had ever seen an employee go on maternity leave. She couldn't picture herself at the company ten years down the road and resigned after some thought. Her boss grumbled, "This is why we don't hire women." She replied, "Women don't stay because you make it impossible for us to stay."

The percentage of female employees who use maternity leave has increased from 20 percent in 2003 to more than half in 2009, and four out of ten still work without maternity leave.¹¹ Of course, there are many women who have already left their jobs due to marriage, pregnancy, or childbirth, and have not been included in the statistical sample of maternity leave. The percentage of female managers has also increased steadily but slowly from 10.22 percent in 2006 to 18.37 percent in 2014, but it's not even two out of ten yet.

Annexure 2.7 – Interview experience:

Jiyoung wanted to work at a food company, but applied to all companies above a certain size. She did not hear back from any of the forty-three she applied to. She then applied to eighteen smaller but stable places with consistent growth, and did not hear back from them, either. Hyejin sometimes made it to the aptitude test or interview round, but was not offered a position in the end. The two women started applying to every company that was hiring. Jiyoung sent in a cover letter with the wrong company name in it, and passed the application round for the very first time.

Only after Jiyoung was asked to come in for an interview did she look into what the company was about. It was a toy, stationery, and household accessories company that had recently undergone huge growth after negotiating a deal with celebrity agencies to print celebrity caricatures on products. Plush toys, planners, coffee mugs, and other unexceptional items were being sold for a huge profit. *A company that steals pocket money from fan boys and girls?* Jiyoung

felt conflicted. She wasn't sure if she wanted the job, but grew fonder of the company as the interview date drew nearer, and in the end sincerely wanted the job.

The night before the interview, Jiyoung practiced her interview skills with her sister late into the night. It was after 1 a.m. when she put on a thick layer of moisturizing cream and went to bed. She lay awake, blinking up at the ceiling, unable to even toss and turn lest the face cream get on her bedding. She dropped off before dawn and dreamed several dreams without endings. She woke up unbelievably tired, and her makeup didn't come out right. On the way to the interview location, she fell asleep on the bus and missed her stop. She still had plenty of time, but hopped in a cab to avoid being lost and anxious right before an important task. The old cab driver with a flawless comb-over glanced at Jiyoung in the rear-view mirror and asked if she was on her way to an interview. She gave him a monosyllabic "yes."

"I never take women for my first customer of the day. But I'm giving you a ride because I could tell you were going to an interview."

Giving me a ride? Jiyoung thought for a moment whether he meant she was getting a ride for free, then figured out what he meant. *Am I supposed to thank the on-duty driver for graciously letting me pay him for his services?* Jiyoung didn't know where to even begin, nor did she want to start an argument that would go nowhere, so she leaned back and closed her eyes.

The three candidates entered the interview room one after the other. The other two were also women of Jiyoung's age. All three had a bob that came down to just below the ears, and wore pink lipstick and a dark gray suit. The interviewers looked over the CVs and cover letters and asked the candidates about their education, posed follow-up questions on lines in their CVs that caught the interviewers' eyes, then moved on to questions about the company, the future of the field, and marketing strategies. They were all pretty standard questions the three of them could answer without difficulty. The last question came from a middle-aged male trustee who'd been sitting at the end of the table and nodding without a word up until that point.

"You're at a meeting with a client company. The client gets, you know, handsy. Squeezing your shoulder, grazing your thigh. You know what I mean? Yeah? How will you handle that situation? Let's start with Ms. Kim Jiyoung."

Jiyoung didn't want to panic like an idiot or lose points by being too firm, so she shot for the middle.

"I'll find a natural way to leave the room. Like going to the toilet or getting research data."

The second interviewee asserted that it was clearly sexual harassment and that she would tell him to stop right away. If he didn't, she would press charges. The male trustee raised an eyebrow and wrote something down, which made Jiyoung flinch.

"I would check my outfit and attitude," said the final interviewee, who had had the longest to think of an answer, "to see if there were any problems with it, and fix anything that may have induced the inappropriate behavior in the client."

The second interviewee heaved an audible, baffled sigh. Jiyoung was chagrined by the answer, but regret set in as she thought the third woman's answer probably got the most points, and hated herself for thinking that.

A few days later, Jiyoung received an email informing her that she did not pass the interview. Was it because of her answer to the final question? Regret and curiosity lingered for days until she called the HR department and asked. The person in charge said the answer to one question does not determine whether a candidate passes or fails, that it has more to do with whether they have good compatibility with the interviewers, and that perhaps it wasn't meant to be—a by-the-book but comforting answer. Now more relaxed, Jiyoung asked if the other two who interviewed with her had passed. She wasn't holding a grudge or anything, she just wanted to know for future reference, and the HR person balked.

“Honestly, I’m so desperate right now.”

The other two hadn’t passed either, came the reply. “I see.” Jiyoung felt dejected. *If I was going to fail anyway, I should have just spoken up.*

Annexure 2.8 -- Jiyoung’s experience as an employed woman:

Kim Jiyoung went out to lunch wearing her company ID on a lanyard. Others seemed to be walking around with the IDs dangling at their chests because it was a bother to keep taking it out and putting it away, but Jiyoung did it on purpose. At midday in a busy neighborhood packed with office buildings, Jiyoung often came across people wearing lanyards with thick straps bearing their company name and a clear plastic case holding their IDs attached to the end, swinging. That was the dream: walking with a group of people also wearing lanyard IDs, holding their purse and phone in the same hand, chatting about the lunch menu.

Jiyoung’s company was a fairly large one in the industry, with about fifty employees. The closer to management, the greater the percentage of male employees, but on the whole the office had more women than men. The coworkers were adequately self-sufficient and practical, and the office atmosphere was good. But the workload was considerable and there was no overtime. There were four new employees including Jiyoung—two female, two male. Straight out of college and never having taken time off in her life so far, Jiyoung was a newbie and literally “the youngest.”

Jiyoung made everyone in her team coffee every morning according to each member’s taste, set the table every time they went out to eat, went around with a notepad and took everyone’s request when they had to order in takeaways, and cleared their dishes when they were done. It was the team newbie’s responsibility to go through news articles each morning, find everything related to the company’s marketing clients, do a simple analysis and turn in a report. One day, her team leader went through her report and called her into the conference room.

The team leader, Kim Eunsil, was the only woman among four team leaders. She had a daughter in elementary school, and lived with her mother who took care of all childcare and domestic labor. Some people said Kim Eunsil was awesome, others that she had a heart of stone, and still others found the arrangement a credit to her husband. “Living with the spouse’s parents is harder for the husbands than the wives,” they’d say. “Conflict between married men and their in-laws is becoming a societal problem these days. I don’t know him but he must be an obliging person to take in his mother-in-law.”

Jiyoung thought about her own mother, who had lived with her mother-in-law for seventeen years. The grandmother looked after the youngest when the mother went out on hairdresser house calls, but didn’t take on any childcare labor such as feeding, bathing, or putting the three siblings to bed. She hardly did other domestic chores. She ate food the mother cooked, wore clothes the mother washed, and slept in the room the mother cleaned. But no one praised the mother for being obliging.

Team leader Kim Eunsil complimented Jiyoung on her report: “I’ve been following your progress. You have a good eye for selecting articles, and your analysis is relevant. Keep up the good work.”

Jiyoung received her first thumbs-up on her first task at her first job. Jiyoung could see this becoming such a great source of strength each time she hit a roadblock in her career to come. A little satisfied, a little proud, but not too obviously gleeful about it, Jiyoung thanked her.

“You don’t have to make my coffee from now on,” the team leader continued with a smile.

“Or set my silverware when we go out to eat, or clear my plates.”

“I apologize if I came on too strong.”

“No need to apologize. It’s just not your job, Jiyoung. I’ve noticed this about new employees over the years. The women take on all the cumbersome, minor tasks without being asked, while guys never do. Doesn’t matter if they’re new or the youngest—they never do anything they’re not told to do. But why do women simply take things upon themselves?”

At a business lunch at an upmarket Korean restaurant, the head of the client company said to Jiyoung, who ordered soybean paste sauce with rice, “A young person with a taste for soybean paste sauce! I didn’t know you were a *doenjangnyeo*, too, Ms. Kim! Ha ha!”

Doenjangnyeo, or “bean paste woman,” was a popular Korean portmanteau word among a host of other misogynistic new terms that ended with *nyeo*—woman. Jiyoung had no way of telling if he meant to be funny, or if he was making fun of her, or if he even knew what that word meant. The head laughed, so his staff had to laugh, and since the client was laughing, Jiyoung and a senior member of staff also present smiled awkwardly and changed the subject. So it went.

And then there was the business dinner with the marketing team of a mid-size company. Jiyoung and the team leader oversaw the company’s anniversary event from the planning stages to execution and press release distribution, and the client’s marketing division invited Jiyoung and the team as a thank you for a job well done. In the cab on the way to the barbecue restaurant in a university area where the client marketing team had already started without them, Kim Eunsil enunciated every syllable, “I. Really. Don’t. Want. To. Go.”

“If they’re so grateful, why not send money or presents? Don’t they know how awkward it is for us to be in a situation like that? Eat and drink with them as a ‘thank you for the hard work?’ Don’t they know we can see right through it? That they want to treat us like servants one last time? God, I hate this. But just one last meal, and that’s it.”

The client company’s marketing division consisted of the male division head in his fifties, the male assistant divisional manager in his forties, the male section manager in his thirties, and the three female staff in their twenties. Three people from Jiyoung’s company came: the team leader Eunsil, Jiyoung, and Jiyoung’s male colleague who helped during the event. The head of the division must have already had a few, for he was red in the face and expressed too much enthusiasm at Jiyoung’s entrance. The section manager sitting next to him picked up his beer glass and silverware and got to his feet, gesturing Jiyoung to come and sit next to the division head, who guffawed heartily and complimented “Mr. Han” on his ability to “read my mind!” Jiyoung felt uneasy and humiliated; sitting next to him was the last thing she wanted to do. She repeatedly insisted she eat with her colleagues, but “Mr. Han” and the assistant divisional manager herded her toward the seat next to the division head. Her male colleague, one of the three who entered the company at the same time she did, couldn’t do much for her besides watch nervously. Jiyoung was already seated next to the division head by the time Kim Eunsil arrived on the scene after stopping by the ladies’ room first. Jiyoung drank several glasses of beer the division head forced on her.

The division head, newly appointed just three months before after climbing the ladder in the product development division, gave her an unstoppable slew of advice “coming from experience,” including backhanded compliments like, “You have a nice jawline and attractive nose—just get your eyelids done and you’re golden.” He asked if she had a boyfriend, and whipped out filth like, “No fun scoring when there’s no goalie!” and, “Once women pop, they can’t stop!” He wouldn’t stop making her drink. “I’ve passed my limit, it won’t be safe getting home, I’m done,” she said. “Why so concerned when there’s all these guys to escort you home?” *You people are my biggest concern*, she thought to herself as she furtively emptied her glass in the other empty cups and bowls at the table.

A little after midnight, the division head topped up her glass and tottered as he rose to his feet. He hired himself a chauffeur over the phone, speaking so loudly the sound bounced off the restaurant walls, and said to his crew, “My daughter attends the university right here. She was studying late at the library and wants me to come and pick her up because she’s scared to go home by herself. Apologies all round, but I have to go. Miss Kim Jiyoung, finish that beer!”

At that, a frail bit of hope inside Jiyoung crumpled. *In a few years, that precious daughter of yours will find herself exactly where I am now. Unless people like you stop treating me this way.* The alcohol suddenly caught up with her, so she texted her boyfriend to come and pick her up, but there was no answer.

Things quieted down after the division head left. People talked in small groups, a few went out for a smoke, and the one female member of the marketing team took off without a word. Some suggested it was time for a second wave, but Kim Eunsil firmly put her foot down and delivered the three of them safely from the restaurant. Kim Eunsil left first in a cab saying her mother was sick, and Jiyoung and her male colleague drank coffee from a can under the parasol outside a convenience store. Jiyoung was the one who suggested it, thinking cold canned coffee would sober her up a bit, but leaving the uncomfortable business dinner relaxed her so much she kept falling asleep. In the end, she passed out on the ramen soup-spattered plastic picnic table, and would not get up no matter how much her colleague kicked her under the table and yelled at her.

The boyfriend chose that moment to call her. She was already fast asleep and the colleague picked up to tell him to come and get her, but that was the mistake.

“Hi, I work with Jiyoung.”

“Where is she?”

“She’s sleeping, so I picked up.”

“Sleeping? What the hell? Who are you?”

“No! No! That’s not what it sounds like! She had too much—”

“Put her on the damn phone!”

Jiyoung made it home safely on her boyfriend’s back, but their relationship didn’t.

Annexure 2.9 -- Selection for planning team:

The company was putting together a planning team. The dynamic so far had been to find clients through sales pitches and do the clients’ bidding, but now the time had come for the company to plan ad campaigns and recruit clients to work with. This was to become a long-term project, not a one-time thing. The company had reached an impasse where the limitations of a marketing agency left them in the position of hired help passively waiting around for work to come. The planning team, if not immediately successful, could establish a more proactive position with the clients, thus generating a steadier revenue stream and greater growth. Most people in the office were intrigued by this new venture, and Jiyoung was no exception. She let Kim Eunsil, who was to lead this new team, know that she was interested in joining the planning team.

“Yeah, you’ll be good at it,” came the positive response, but she didn’t make the team in the end. Three people from middle-management section managers known for their competence and the two male colleagues who started at the same time as Jiyoung were assigned to the planning team. The company treated the planning team like an elite squad, which made Jiyoung and the other, female employee who started with her, Kang Hyesu, feel robbed. Since the beginning, the two of them had established a good reputation at work. The older members openly joked that they hired the two men and two women at the same time with

the same criteria and yet the two guys had a steeper learning curve ahead of them. The guys weren't bad at their jobs, but they did handle the easier clients.

The four of them had been very close, and had never encountered any unpleasantness in spite of their very different personalities, but an odd rift had formed among them since the two guys moved to the planning team. The group chat, which had buzzed constantly throughout the working day, went quiet. Their brief, secret coffee breaks together, lunch rendezvous, and regular bar nights also came to an end. When they ran into each other in the hall, they tried not to make eye contact and acknowledged each other with awkward nods. Kang Hyesu, the eldest of the four, had finally had enough and organized a bar night.

They drank pretty late into the night, but no one was drunk. Their bar nights had been casual meet-ups full of dumb jokes, whining about work, and giggling and gossiping about members of their respective teams, but the mood that evening was very serious from the start, thanks to Kang Hyesu opening up about her brief office romance.

"It's finished now. For God's sake don't ask me who it was, don't make assumptions, and don't mention this to anyone. I'm dying inside these days. Console me."

In her mind, Jiyoung flipped through the Rolodex of single guys in the office until the thought that he may not necessarily be single brought on a sudden migraine. The two guys chugged their beer. One of them opened up about his worries over his younger brother who had graduated last year and had not been able to find a job. He was still paying off his student loans, and wasn't sure his younger brother, who had an even bigger amount to pay off, would ever be out of debt.

"Is it confession night?" the other asked, scratching his head. "I'll go. Honestly, I don't think I belong on the planning team."

Jiyoung discovered a lot of things that night. The planning team was hand-picked by the head of the company himself. The competent middle-management section managers were chosen because the planning team needed a strong foundation, and the men were picked because the planning team was a long-term project. The head of the company knew that the nature and intensity of the marketing agency job made it difficult to maintain a decent work-life balance, especially if childcare came into play, and therefore he did not think of female employees as prospective long-term colleagues. He had no intention of giving employees better hours and benefits, either. He found it more cost-efficient to invest in employees who would last in this work environment than to make the environment more accommodating. That was the reasoning behind giving the more high-maintenance clients to Jiyoung and Kang Hyesu. It wasn't their competence; management didn't want to tire out the prospective long-term male colleagues from the start.

Jiyoung was standing in the middle of a labyrinth. Conscientiously and calmly, she was searching for a way out that didn't exist to begin with. Baffled and ready to give up, she was told to try, try again; to walk through walls if it came to that. Revenue drives a businessman, and you can't blame someone for wanting maximum output with minimum input. But is it right to prioritize short-term efficiency and balance sheets? Who'll be the last ones standing in a world with these priorities, and will they be happy?

She also learned that the guys were paid better from the very start, but that information stirred very little in Jiyoung, who'd filled the day's quota of shock and disappointment. She wasn't confident she could follow the upper-management and senior members' lead and trust that working hard was the answer, but when morning came and the alcohol had worn off, she found herself heading to the office as if out of habit. She handled the tasks she was given as usual. But her drive and faith had undoubtedly been weakened.

The gender pay gap in Korea is the highest among the OECD countries. According to 2014 data, women working in Korea earn only 63 percent of what men earn; the OECD average

percentage is 84. Korea was also ranked as the worst country in which to be a working woman, receiving the lowest scores among the nations surveyed on the glass-ceiling index by the British magazine *The Economist*.

Annexure 2.10 -- Childcare and aspirations:

One weekend morning, the couple went for a walk in the nearby arboretum. A mysterious white grass covered the arboretum grounds. Daehyun asked if there was such a thing as white grass, and Jiyoung said it looked like a kind of herb. They walked across a meadow, treading softly on the thick grass. In the middle of the meadow, they came across a round, green thing about the size of a child's head sticking out of the earth. They went closer and saw that it was a radish. A large, shiny radish was half buried in the ground. Jiyoung reached down, grabbed the radish and pulled. Out came a sleek radish with hardly any dirt on it.

"Isn't that a re-enactment of that children's story about a radish?" Daehyun said and laughed. "What a strange dream."

Jiyoung had the worst morning sickness—the merest gulp of air mid-yawn could make her retch—until the very end of her pregnancy. She was more or less fine apart from that. No complications, swelling, or dizziness, but she had indigestion, constipation that made her feel bloated, and the occasional shooting pain in her lower back. She was easily exhausted and, worst of all, very drowsy.

For safety reasons, the company allowed pregnant employees to push their work hours back by half an hour. When she announced her pregnancy at work, one of her male colleagues exclaimed, "Lucky you! You get to come to work late!"

Lucky me, I get to retch all the time, am unable to eat or shit properly, and I'm always tired, sleepy, and sore all over, Jiyoung wanted to say but held it in. She was disappointed by his insensitive remarks, which showed no concern for all the discomforts and pains of pregnancy, but she couldn't expect someone who wasn't her husband or family to understand that.

When Jiyoung fell quiet, the other male colleague chided, "But she goes home thirty minutes late. She has to work the same amount in the end."

"Yah! As if anyone in this office gets to go home on time! She's just getting thirty minutes for free!"

Jiyoung, out of anger, said she had no intention of coming in half an hour late. That she would be keeping the same hours as everyone else. That she didn't intend to get a single minute for free. She wished she hadn't spoken so rashly as she came into the office an hour ahead of everyone else to protect her pregnant self from the rush-hour metro hell. She wondered if she was setting a bad precedent for the younger women in the office. She couldn't win: exercising all the rights and utilizing the benefits made her a freeloader, and fighting tooth and nail to avoid the accusation made things harder for colleagues in a similar situation.

When she took the underground during the day for a meeting or took a half-day for a doctor's appointment, people often gave up their seats for her, but not during rush hour. Squeezing her side to manage the splitting pain, she told herself that people did care—they were just too tired to act on it. But she was honestly hurt when people gave her an uncomfortable or dirty look just for standing in front of them.

On the tube home from the office one day, slightly later than usual, there were no empty seats and hardly any free handles to hold onto in the carriage. She managed to grab a free handle near the doors when a woman who looked fifty-something glanced at her belly and asked her how far along she was. She smiled awkwardly and mumbled something so as to not draw attention to herself. The woman asked if she was on her way home from work. Jiyoung nodded and looked away.

“I’ll bet your sides are starting to hurt, huh? Knees and ankles, too? I sprained my ankle last week on a hike. It hurts even now, I’m not putting any weight on it. Otherwise I’d have given you my seat. Gosh, I wish someone would give up their seat for you. Hang in there, mama.”

The woman looked around for someone to shoo off their seat, making everyone uneasy, but not as uneasy as Jiyoung. She said over and over that she was fine, that she didn’t need to sit, but the woman wouldn’t hear of it. Jiyoung was about to get away from her when the girl in a university jacket sitting next to the woman jumped to her feet agitatedly.

As she knocked into Jiyoung’s shoulder and pushed past her, she said loud enough for Jiyoung to hear, “About to pop and still taking the tube to go make money—clearly can’t afford a kid.”

Tears fell from Jiyoung’s eyes. That’s what I am: someone who still goes to make money. By taking the tube. When I’m about to pop. Tears too heavy to hide or cover up kept on coming. She hopped off the train at the next stop. She sat on a bench on the platform and cried and cried, and then came out through the turnstiles. She was far from home and in an area she’d never been to, but she left the station. She found a queue of cabs on the rank, and got into the first one. She could have caught the next train home and cried in the tube carriage where she didn’t know anyone, but she panicked and got off. She chose to take a cab. She wanted to.

The obstetrician with a belly slightly bigger than Jiyoung’s smiled warmly and informed her to “buy pink baby clothes.” The couple didn’t have a preference, but they knew the family elders were expecting a boy, and a small sense of dread came over them to think of the stressful situations that might occur the moment the parents found out it was a girl. Jiyoung’s mother said, “It’s okay, the next one will be a boy.” Daehyun’s mother said, “I don’t mind.” Jiyoung very much minded what they’d said.

It wasn’t just the older generation. Women of Jiyoung’s age shamelessly said things like: “My first was a girl, so I was nervous until I found out the sex of the second one”; “I can hold my head up high around my in-laws now that I have a boy”; or, “I started getting myself all kinds of expensive food when I found out I was having a boy.” Jiyoung wanted to say she could hold her head up high, too. That she was eating everything she was craving, but she held back so as not to sound bitter.

As the due date closed in, Jiyoung debated back and forth between maternity leave and quitting work altogether. The sensible course was to take as long a maternity leave as possible and weigh her options in the meantime, even if the best idea turned out to be quitting, but, from the company and her colleagues’ point of view, that wasn’t ideal.

The couple discussed this matter very thoroughly. On a large sheet of paper, they wrote down three scenarios: going straight back to work, going back to work after a year of maternity leave, and not going back to work at all. For each scenario, they discussed who would be in charge of childcare, how much it would cost, and other pros and cons. As long as they both worked, the only option would be to send the child to Daehyun’s parents in Busan, or get a live-in nanny.

The Busan option wasn’t feasible. The parents said they would gladly raise her, but they were both elderly and his mother had recently had surgery on her back. The couple was reluctant to get a live-in nanny. She would not just take care of the child, but share in their everyday routine, household things and time with the family. *It’s hard enough finding someone who’s good with childcare—would it be possible to find a stranger who would get along with us, too? Even if we found someone suitable, the cost would be considerable. And how long would the nanny be with us? What would be the appropriate age for a child to go to school, go to after-school activities and get her own dinner? And how many close calls, nerve-racking situations and moments of guilt would we have to live through until then?*

In the end, they concluded that one of them had to be a stay-at-home parent, and that one person, of course, was Jiyoung. Daehyun's job was more stable and brought in more money, but, apart from that, it was more common for husbands to work and wives to raise the children and run the home.

The fact that Jiyoung saw this coming did not make her feel any less depressed. Daehyun patted her on her slouched back.

"We'll get a sitter once in a while when our baby's bigger, and send her to daycare, too," he said. "You can use that time to study and look for other work. Think of this as an opportunity to start a new chapter. I'll help you out."

Jiyoung knew that Daehyun was being sincerely supportive, but she still couldn't hold back her anger.

"Help out? What is it with you and 'helping out?' You're going to 'help out' with chores. 'Help out' with raising our baby. 'Help out' with finding me a new job. Isn't this your house, too? Your home? Your child? And if I work, don't *you* spend my pay, too? Why do you keep saying 'help out' like you're volunteering to pitch in on someone else's work?"

Jiyoung felt bad about jumping down his throat after the two of them had done a good job of making a tough decision together. She apologized to her stunned, stuttering husband, and he said, "No worries."

Jiyoung didn't cry when she told the head of the company that she was quitting, or when team leader Kim Eunsil said she hoped to work with her again in the future. She didn't cry as she brought her things back from the office a little at a time every day, or at the farewell party, or on her final commute home. The day after she left, she made Daehyun warm milk and saw him off, crawled back into bed and woke up around nine. *I should get myself toast on the way to the tube station. I'll get biji soup for lunch at the Jeonju Diner. Maybe catch a movie before I head home if I get off work early? I have to stop by the bank to withdraw the matured savings account.* Then it suddenly hit her that she didn't have an office to go to anymore. Her daily routine would be different from now on, and, until she got used to it, predicting and planning would be impossible. That's when the tears came.

The marketing agency was her first workplace. Her first step into the working world. People said that the professional world was a jungle and that the friends you make after college aren't real friends, but that wasn't necessarily true. Things were more absurd than sensible, and the company was a place where one reaped far less than one sowed, but, being an individual who did not belong to any group, Jiyoung realized that the company had been a fortress for her. There were more good colleagues than bad. She got on better with them than she did with her college friends, perhaps due to similar interests and tastes. The job did not pay well or make a big splash in society, nor did it make something one could see or touch, but it had brought her joy. It afforded her a sense of accomplishment when she completed tasks and climbed the ladder, and gave her a sense of reward knowing she was managing her own life with the money she earned. But that was all over now. That's how it turned out, even though she wasn't incompetent or lazy. Just as putting the care of your child in another's hands doesn't mean you don't love your child, quitting and looking after your child doesn't mean you have no passion for your career.

In 2014, around the time Kim Jiyoung left the company, one in five married women in Korea quit their job because of marriage, pregnancy, childbirth and childcare, or the education of their young children. The workforce participation rate of Korean women decreases significantly before and after childbirth. Its percentage starts at 63.8 for women aged between twenty and twenty-nine, drops to 58 percent for women aged thirty to thirty-nine, and increases again to 66.7 percent for women over forty.

Annexure 2.11 - Conversation from a new mother to the protagonist's mother:

Jiyoung's mother couldn't help her recover from the pregnancy because she was busy with the porridge shop. Business was not what it used to be since a wider selection of restaurants moved into the commercial building, and reducing the number of workers to lessen costs meant the mother had to put in extra hours. Still, the shop brought in enough to support the younger brother, who was opting to prolong his education. The mother brought Jiyoung leftovers from the porridge shop whenever she could.

"I'm so proud of my skin-and-bones little girl. Having a baby of her own, breastfeeding, and raising it without my help. That's the almighty power of maternal love."

"What was it like when you were raising us? Wasn't it tough? Didn't you regret having so many? Were you almighty, too?"

"Ugh. Don't even get me started. Your sister was loud from the very start. She cried so hard day and night that I was always running to the hospital to see if there was something wrong with her. I had three, your father never changed a single diaper, and your grandmother took three meals a day at home like clockwork. I had so much to do, I was falling asleep all the time, aches and pains all over—it was hell."

Why didn't Jiyoung's mother ever speak up? No one had shared this in detail with Jiyoung—not her mother, relatives, older friends, or even friends her own age who'd had children. The babies on television or in movies were all pretty and cute, and mothers were always portrayed as beautiful and noble. Jiyoung was responsible and equal to the task of raising her child well, but she didn't want to hear people tell her how proud they were of her or how noble she was. These comments made her feel guilty about being exhausted.

The year Jiyoung married, a documentary on natural births aired on television. This was followed by multiple publications on the subject, and the sudden widespread popularity of natural births, the crux being minimal medical intervention and a natural birthing experience in which mother and baby make their own decisions. But delivery has to do with the safety of two lives. Jiyoung chose to give birth in a hospital with the help of experts because she had decided it was the safer way, and believed the birthing plan was a decision based on the parents' values and circumstances, not something to make a value judgment on. However, a significant number of media outlets reported on the possible adverse effects of medical treatment and medication on newborns—their causal relationship speculative—to arouse guilt and fear. People who pop a painkiller at the smallest hint of a migraine, or who need anaesthetic cream to remove a mole, demand that women giving birth should gladly endure the pain, exhaustion, and mortal fear. As if that's maternal love. This idea of "maternal love" is spreading like religious dogma. Accept Maternal Love as your Lord and Savior, for the Kingdom is near!

"Thank you for bringing us food every time, Ma. I would have starved to death without you." Jiyoung only said "thank you." There was nothing else she could say to her mother after all this time.

Annexure 2.12 -- Post baby birth:

Jiwon, a baby girl, was born at four in the morning. The baby was so sweet Jiyoung cried even more than she did during her labor. But Jiwon cried day and night until she was picked up, and Jiyoung had to do chores, go to the toilet, and take naps while holding the infant. Breastfeeding every two hours and therefore unable to sleep for more than two hours at a time, she cleaned the house more thoroughly than before, washed the baby's clothes and fabrics, fed herself well so she would produce enough milk, and cried far more than she'd ever cried in her life. Above all, she hurt all over.

She couldn't move her wrists at all. One Saturday morning, she left the baby with Daehyun and went to the nearby orthopedist's clinic she'd visited when she hurt her ankle. The old man said her wrists were inflamed, but it wasn't serious. Was she in a line of work that was hard on the wrists? She said she gave birth not long ago.

"All your joints become weak after you give birth," he nodded as if to say, *That explains it*. "I can't prescribe anything too strong if you're breastfeeding. Do you have time to come to physical therapy?"

Jiyoung shook her head.

"Try to rest your wrists. No other solution."

"I can't," Jiyoung sighed quietly. "I have to look after the baby, do the washing and the cleaning ..."

The doctor chuckled to himself. "Back in the day, women used clubs to do the laundry, lit fires to boil baby clothes, and crawled around to do the sweeping and mopping. Don't you have a washing machine for laundry and vacuum cleaner for cleaning? Women these days—what have you got to whine about?"

Dirty laundry doesn't march into the machine by itself, Jiyoung thought. The clothes don't wash themselves with detergent and water, march back out when they're done, and hang themselves on clotheslines. The vacuum doesn't roll around with a wet and dry rag, wipe the floor, and wash and dry the rags for you. Have you ever even operated a washing machine or a vacuum cleaner?

The doctor checked Jiyoung's previous records, said he'd prescribe drugs that are safe for breastfeeding and clicked the computer mouse a few times. *Back in the day, physicians had to go through filing cabinets to find records and write notes and prescriptions by hand. Back in the day, office clerks had to run around the office with paper reports to track down their bosses for their approval. Back in the day, farmers planted by hand and harvested with sickles. What do these people have to whine about these days?* No one is insensitive enough to say that. Every field has its technological advances and evolves in the direction that reduces the amount of physical labor required, but people are particularly reluctant to admit that the same is true for domestic labor. Since she became a full-time housewife, she often noticed that there was a polarized attitude regarding domestic labor. Some demeaned it as "bumming around at home," while others glorified it as "work that sustains life," but none tried to calculate its monetary value. Probably because the moment you put a price on something, someone has to pay

Annexure 2.13 – Endnote from psychiatrist:

This is my rough summary of Kim Jiyoung's life so far, based on Jiyoung and her husband Jung Daehyun's accounts. The patient comes in for 45-minute sessions twice a week, and while her symptoms have decreased in frequency, they have yet to disappear. In order to alleviate her depression and insomnia, I have prescribed her a set of antidepressants and sleeping pills.

I suspected dissociative disorder (which I had only previously encountered through case studies) when I first heard Daehyun's description of Jiyoung's symptoms, but I concluded, based on my initial session with Jiyoung, that she had a typical case of postnatal depression that progressed to childcare depression. However, as the treatment continued, my conviction in this diagnosis started to fade. That isn't to say that she is guarded or antagonistic. She does not complain about the suffering and injustice of her current reality, nor does she keep revisiting childhood traumas. She doesn't open up without encouragement, but once she gets going, she unearths long-buried memories on her own and describes them articulately in a calm, logical manner. Looking at the moments and scenes in Kim Jiyoung's life that she chose to share in our sessions, I realize that I may have diagnosed her hastily. I'm not saying I was wrong, only that I've come to realize there is a world that I wasn't aware of.

If I were an average male in his forties, I would have gone through my entire life without this awareness. Only by following the medical career of my wife (she was a better student than I when we were in medical school together) who made compromise after compromise—from going after a tenure position as a professor of ophthalmology, to contract doctor, to giving up on her career entirely—was I enlightened as to what it means to live as a woman, especially as a mother, in Korea. Frankly, it's only natural that men remain unaware unless they encounter special circumstances as I have, because men are not the main players in childbirth and childcare.

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