



Women's Oppression Under Patriarchy: A Feminist Reading of Han Kang's Novel *The Vegetarian*

¹Huzaiifa Shakeel -Email- huzaiifashakeel844@gmail.com

²Taha Salim -Email- tahasaleem11a@gmail.com

³Muhammad Diljan -Email: mdiljan2015@gmail.com

¹BS English, Government Degree College Batkhela, University of Malakand.

²BS English, Government Degree College Batkhela, University of Malakand.

³BS English, Government Degree College Batkhela, University of Malakand.

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Corresponding Authors*:

Abstract

This research study explores the various forms of oppression against women in patriarchal society through the character of Yeong-hye in the novel *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang. The study examines the issue through the lens and framework of feminism. The research is qualitative, and the data collected from the novel is analysed through close reading techniques. The researchers aim to find out about various forms of unjust and cruel treatment against women in patriarchal and male-dominant societies. The researchers find out different kinds of oppression against women, such as subjugation, objectification, social inequality, domestic violence, abuse, the male gaze, and psychological, physical, and mental control, Marital rape, and sexual assaults, etc. This study helps to bring awareness to male members of society to consider females as their equal partners and treat them with kindness and affection.

Key Words: Oppression, Patriarchal Society, Feminism, Violence, Male Gaze, Marital Rape.



INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a noble ideology that opposes the ignoble idea of sex discrimination. Initially, gender roles were divided based on the ability to bear and nurture offspring and maintain food availability during the time period. For thousands of years, there were no disagreements over the distinction; nevertheless, it was subsequently disputed, sometimes gently and sometimes passionately. This might be because males took their duties more seriously, diminishing or entirely negating female roles during the course of life. Men's physical strength, capacity to hunt (in contemporary times, money-making talents), and lack of child-bearing responsibilities made them haughty toward women. Under this backdrop, we can witness the rise of patriarchal society, in which males formed and controlled all social conventions, leaving women as passive participants throughout. Feminism has a dual purpose. The first is to get rights that women do not have owing to gender imbalance, and the second is to settle scores with 'foot soldiers of patriarchy.' In pursuing multiple goals, they may encourage one while holding back the other, and vice versa. This is why some feminist discourse now crosses the line from sexism to assaults on males, with a strong emphasis on personal conduct, ranging from how they speak to how they sit in public transportation. Gender antagonism was implicit in feminism initially, but it was aimed at institutions rather than people. The development of radical feminism unleashed a surge of feminine rage against men's collection of individual misdeeds. Andrea Dworkin and Marilyn French portrayed ordinary men as patriarchy's ruthless foot soldiers (Ranjan., 2019).

Chaman Nahal, in his article "Feminism in English Fiction," defines feminism as "a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome." There is a dependence syndrome, whether it is the husband, father, community, religious, or ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead an everyday life, my idea of feminism materializes" (Nahal, Chaman., 1990, p. 77). "Feminism refers to a 'wide range of political movements, ideologies, and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes.'" (Raina., 2020).

The term "patriarchy" originally referred to the rule of the father, or patriarch, within a male-dominated family structure. This family included women, younger men, children, slaves, and domestic servants, all under the authority of the dominant male. Today, the term is more broadly used to describe systems of male domination and the power relations that keep women subordinate in various ways (Bhasin., 2006: Zaib, 2022). Women's subordination and subjugation describe the oppression that women experience and face in most societies due to patriarchy, as well as their lower status, which includes their inability to access resources and make decisions. The inferior standing of women in relation to men is referred to as subordination. Different factors fuel women's subjugation and subordination, such as discrimination, helplessness, low confidence, and self-esteem. Therefore, women's subordination is a phrase used to explain a power structure in which men control women. While feminists argue it in different contexts and for other purposes, women's subordination is a basic component of all forms of dominance (Sultana, 2011; Zaib et al., 2025).

The Vegetarian by Han Kang highlights the issue of female oppression in patriarchal society. The story of Yeong-hye reflects how oppression of females, when left unchecked, can drive a woman to reject and quit everything even life itself to get rid of the male-



dominant society and attain autonomy, freedom, and identity. The author portrays Yeong-hye as a woman who silently resists the oppression of males over females. In the beginning, Mr. Cheong states that the reason behind loving Yeong-hye is not her freshness or refined personality, but in actuality, her passive personality. By passive personality, he means that she is an obedient wife and easy to control and dominate. Later in the novel, when Yeong-hye stops eating meat after disturbing dreams, her personal choice is not respected. Instead of supporting her, she is forced to cook meat and leave her so-called vegetarian diet, and also her husband sees her attitude as a threat to the social and gender norms around him. Mr. Cheong also scolds her for not wearing a bra, saying he would prefer her to wear a thickly padded bra to save face, and also doubts her for her oversensitivity, showing how female bodies are expected to serve male pride and social approval.

This study analyses the oppression of women in a patriarchal society using the novel of Han Kang, *The Vegetarian*, discussing the experiences of the main character, Yeong-hye, in her life and how she was oppressed, discriminated, and objectified by her society. The study examines the issue of women fighting under the male domination in the novel, and the psychological, social, and physical consequences of the patriarchal oppression. Through feminist analysis of the Yeong-hye character, this study will further expand the knowledge on gender inequality and the bias that women are subjected to in a patriarchal society. The results will help to expand more general debates concerning the experience of females in the conditions of patriarchy and promote a more humane attitude towards women, which implies the need to have equality in social, political, and religious aspects of life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism is a movement and ideology that seeks to establish and defend equal social, political, cultural, and economic rights for women. It opposes the systemic domination of women by men and works to eliminate discrimination, marginalization, and gender-based inequalities. Feminism does not claim that women are superior to men, nor does it advocate hatred toward men; instead, it aims at achieving equity and justice between the sexes. Feminism is also portrayed as a response to systemic oppression rooted in patriarchy. The article refers to Debra Jackson's view that "feminism was born as a response to oppression," highlighting that women's social roles have been shaped historically by male-dominated structures (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022, p. 6). The authors highlight that feminism has historical roots in ancient Greece, with philosophers like Plato recognizing women's equal capacities (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022, p. 8). Over time, feminism has evolved through four waves each addressing different aspects of gender inequality. The first wave (1840s–1920s) focused on legal rights such as suffrage and property rights. The second wave (1960s–1980s) emphasized reproductive rights, workplace equality, and protection from violence. The third wave (1990s–2000s) addressed intersectionality, identity, and inclusion of marginalized voices. The fourth wave (2010s–present) uses digital activism to challenge patriarchy and promote body positivity, trans-inclusion, and resistance to sexual violence (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022, pp. 9–12).

Sultana (2011) presents a detailed and critical examination of the structural and ideological systems perpetuating gender inequality. Drawing on diverse feminist perspectives, Sultana says that patriarchy is not merely a social order but a historically constructed system designed to privilege men materially, culturally, and politically. The paper identifies patriarchy as "the main obstacle to women's advancement and



development," emphasizing its pervasive control over both public and private spheres of life (p. 1).

Patriarchy is a commonly used phrase in everyday speech. The word alludes to "male domination," "male prejudice (against women)," or simply "male power." However, since the early twentieth century, feminist writers have begun to use the term patriarchy to describe a notion created by males against women. Feminist writers have studied and produced several ideas to understand women's subjugation to males. Patriarchy inevitably advantages males over women, leaving women with little or no claims to the society's material, sexual, and intellectual resources. That is, in a patriarchal culture, women must battle to obtain an education, own property, or make decisions about marriage and other elements of life. For males, these resources are a matter of right, and they may make decisions that influence their lives (University of Mumbai).

In patriarchal societies, males are sexual subjects, whereas women are sexual objects; women's sexuality exists to pleasure males. Women's urges for sex are frequently linked to whether or not they have had sex. Because patriarchal heterosexuality is "male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered," it displays and teaches broader patriarchal principles: men's wants and experiences are essential and count, much as "having sex" is characterized by male pleasure and climax. In patriarchal culture, women and men are both visible and invisible under different situations. Women are often overlooked for their accomplishments, such as raising healthy children or generating innovative ideas in business meetings. Conversely, men become prominent when their behavior is socially unacceptable and may raise concerns about the appropriateness of male privilege (Becker, 1999). Patriarchy is not the only hierarchical system that increases the power of some while limiting the life chances of others; it coexists with white supremacy, whether legally enforced or informal; various unjust and inhumane economic systems, including capitalism; and imperialism and colonialism, including the past 500 years of exploitation primarily by Europe and its offshoots, such as the United States (Jensen, 2021).

Patriarchy, a notion about sex differences that institutionalizes male supremacy throughout a society, is not new. Though many people believe that humans have always lived under male domination, such systems only became popular a few thousand years ago, with the creation of agriculture and a significant shift in humans' connection with the greater living world. Historian Gerda Lerner claims that patriarchy arose when "men discovered how to turn 'difference' into dominance" and "laid the ideological foundation for all systems of hierarchy, inequality, and exploitation" (Lerner, 1997, p. 133). Patriarchy has several forms depending on time and location, but it gives males most of the power in societal institutions and limits women's access to that authority. However, Lerner emphasizes that "it does not imply that women are either totally powerless or completely deprived of rights, influence, and resources" (Lerner, 1986, p. 239). The world is complex, yet we can recognize patterns that help us comprehend it.

According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "oppression is the power of authority, which is unjust and cruel," demonstrating a setting of unfair treatment through authority. Deutsch (2006) defines oppression as "repeated experience, widespread and systemic injustice, for example, slavery, apartheid, lack of the right to vote, or violence (Deutsch, 2006, p. 10). From the above definitions, he concluded that women's oppression is "an unjust act toward individuals, especially and particularly females, in order to compel and force them to do something in a cruel way, where women are denied freedom, rights, and



equality, leading to psychological distress and depression. Women's oppression is a multidimensional and historically rooted issue from ancient times to the present day. This paper argues that "females have been claimed as males' property." Females were also forced to obey their husbands from the Roman and Greek eras, and their autonomy was denied, too. This reflects a pattern where women are oppressed and dominated in both aspects of life—public and private (Widyastuti, 2018, p. 1).

Astuti and Kistanto (2021) explore entrenched patriarchal systems and their oppressive effects on women, effectively capturing the layered and multidimensional nature of women's oppression within a male-dominated cultural context. The article claims that this oppression is not only physical but also existential, based on Simone de Beauvoir's theory, which describes how women are reduced to the status of the Other, defined exclusively in reference to males, and denied subjectivity. Astuti and Kistanto argue that in patriarchal societies (Indian), women have long been subjected to systemic oppression that is deeply rooted in cultural, social, and familial structures. The researchers also assert, "Oppression is the name of social injustice" and is perpetuated through institutions and norms that sustain male dominance, positioning women in a "secondary and inferior position in various forms, including forced domesticity, limited autonomy, and denial of emotions and physical agency" (p. 1).

Patra (2024) explores the intersection of female oppression, consumerism, and environmental exploitation. With the help of food, nature, and their relationship to women. She tries to criticise the patriarchal and capitalist systems in *The Vegetarian*, written by Han Kang. She symbolises the female body as a site of conflict and claims that Kang's novel challenges societal expectations. She also argues that societal expectations force and compel women into a commodity and treat them as a product to be bought and sold. Her finding helps to understand how rejecting societal norms can empower women to regain their autonomy and challenge the set oppressive patriarchal pattern. Moreover, she stresses the parallels between the exploitation of women and nature, highlighting the utmost need for a more respectful and balanced approach towards both (Patra P, 2024).

Bica (2023), in his study, aims to develop an allegorical reading of the vegetarian. From a female perspective, the vegetarian explores various issues such as patriarchal norms, objectification, oppression, and domestic violence against women. Drawing on Brian McHale's theory of postmodernism, Baker defines allegory as a structure where "the literal reference...is missing and must be supplied by the reader; only the metaphorical frame is given" (McHale, 2004, p. 141, as cited in Bica, 2023, p. 49). The novel's central metaphor of highs and the desire for transformation from animal to plant reflects her escapism from the patriarchal and societal control and domains. June's highest metamorphosis works as literary and symbolic rebellion, expressing keen passion for freedom from the shackles of patriarchy at any possible cost, even the cost of her life. Bica opens the article and says, "Her process of animal-to-plant transformation is then, in fact, one of female liberation and independence" (p. 56).

Kim (2019), highlights the sufferings depicted in the novel. He jots down that vegetarianism is a novel that thoroughly investigates what brings suffering and what role Carno phallogocentric thinking can bring in such suffering. In the novel, suffering becomes a psychological, physical, and spiritual effect of dietary resistance to patriarchal Korean society (p. 2). Kim (2019) claims that the vegetarian offers a challenge to male-dominant precepts through showing resistance to meat eating and portraying suffering as a core



reason for the disintegration between Young's high previous identity and her subsequent rebirth as an ethical being. The novel is not confined only to Yeong-hye's severe sufferings but also tells us about other members of society. Yeong-hye's experience also helps us to understand precisely what contributes to suffering. The study also highlights how Yeong-hye's sufferings capture our attention and tell us about the suffering of other beings to be lessened. The implications of becoming a vegetarian and rejecting meat-eating reach far beyond the novel.

Through the feminist framework of Drusilla Cornell, Ingrid Mae H. De Jesus offered a philosophical reading of Han Kang's novel in his paper "Female Body in Literature: The Vegetarian. The study highlighted how equating femininity with the body and irrationality reinforces restrictive gender norms and controls women through a patriarchal system. Yeong-hye's choice to become a vegetarian was seen as a radical act of resistance and bodily autonomy against the set patriarchal norms. As De Jesus stated, Yeong-hye's transformation symbolises the feminine, challenged conventional perception of womanhood, and also brought liberation to others. This aligned with Coral's call to "reimagine and symbolize the feminine within sexual differences." Cornell (1995, p. 85) stressed the body's power as a site of oppression and a tool for feminist emancipation (Jesus, 2023).

Bose (2017) reflects an ecofeminist review of Han Kang's fiction, dealing with the insights of symbolic relations between the life of a plant and the subjectivity of a female. The researcher explores how Kang's leading characters, trapped in oppressive male-dominant patterns, undergo a metaphorical and literal transformation by aligning with vegetal life as an act of resistance. Savitri (2016) using Luce Irigaray's postmodern feminist framework, it critically examines how Yeong-hye challenges patriarchal operation through bodily autonomy and symbolic resistance. The article interprets madness agency and stresses the significance of bodily resistance under postmodern feminist discourse. In the paper "Revolt, Resilience, and Remarkable Ardour in the Novel 'The Vegetarian,'" Dr. Nasreen Banu and M. Jamadar draw feminist-vegetarian connections and explore Yeong-hye's decision to become a vegetarian as a radical act of resistance against patriarchal and societal dominance. The researchers argue that Yeong-hye's decision to not consume meat aligns with her rejection of being objectified and consumed by a male-dominated system. They also claim that the transformation is a struggle for bodily autonomy and agency in patriarchal society (Banu & Jamadar, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The study is qualitative in nature. Data were collected qualitatively. It does not include any numerical data. Qualitative research is a study that looks at real-world situations in depth. In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research attempts to explain or provide specifics about a scenario, occurrence, or problem. It answers how and why rather than how many and how much. The qualitative method concerns questions that cannot be answered with numerical data. One of the most important characteristics of qualitative research is its ability to describe complex elements of human behavior that are difficult to quantify. Qualitative research critically assesses human experiences, attitudes, and behaviors, explaining how, why, and what people are thinking, feeling, and experiencing at any given time (Tenny et al., 2021).



Close Reading Technique

The close reading technique was used for this study to investigate and evaluate the text. The researchers read and reread the text to analyze each word, phrase, and clause of the text *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang. The participants of the present research read the text and examined the context of the text to illustrate the main points and find out the implicit meaning of the author.

Data Collection

Data for the present study were collected from different sources to answer the question raised by the researchers. The primary data for the research were collected from the text of Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* (2007). The researchers read the novel with utmost care and underlined the main points related to female oppression in patriarchal society. The secondary data for the research were taken from different sources like articles, journals, research papers, and some authentic websites. The data were collected through close reading techniques to understand the text clearly.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted in the study is the theory of feminism. "Feminism is the extension of women's collective consciousness to understand gender inequality and put forward ways to neutralize discrimination, violence, oppression, and stereotypes in order to achieve equality and rights and opportunities along with the opposite gender."

"I do not wish [women] to have power over men, but over themselves" (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

Maggie Humm categorized the development and evolution of modern Western feminist movements into three "waves." All three feminist waves address various parts of the same feminist movement.

The first wave feminist movement began in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. During this period, women led suffragette campaigns and advocated for equal voting rights and access to parliament (Wollstonecraft, 1792). The second-wave feminist movement emerged in the 1960s, and it was linked with a wide range of intellectuals who advocated for equal legal and social rights for women. During this time, numerous significant literary works were published, advocating for women's freedom from masculine-coded language and intellectual systems. Second-wave feminism was based on the struggles of first-wave feminism and specific movements such as the civil rights movement. The Equal Pay Act of 1963, Wade in 1973, and other Supreme Court decisions were among the main successes of the second wave. Four distinct varieties of feminism emerged: mainstream/liberal, radical, cultural, and psychoanalytic feminism. All of the following varieties of feminism are concerned with minimising gender discrimination, male-dominated places, equality, oppression, patriarchy, liberty, female essence, and women's subjection.

The third-wave feminist movement was a continuation and response to the perceived shortcomings of second-wave feminism. This movement originated in the 1990s and expanded into postcolonial feminism, ecofeminism, and gender studies. Feminist philosophers affiliated with this movement campaigned for women's social justice. Similarly, literary experts feel that the fourth wave of feminism began in 2012 and is related to technology such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other forms of social networking. Campaigns such as the "Every Sexism Project" and the "Me Too Movement" are associated with it (Raina, 2020).



DATA ANALYSIS

The novel *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang deals with various issues. However, one of them is various forms of oppression against women in patriarchal settings, such as prejudice, abuse, objectification, domestic violence, sexual assaults, and marital rape against women. The novel's leading character, Yeong-hye, tries to overcome the dominance and control of male figures and show resistance and opposition to the male-dominated norms and settings to gain and attain her freedom and liberty, particularly from her husband, her father, and her brother-in-law. All the collected data are analyzed and explained through the lens of feminism with the help of close reading techniques to explore the various forms of oppression in the novel. Some portions of the text are analyzed below.

At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator, Mr. Cheong, devalues and dehumanizes his wife while featuring her as an ordinary woman, passing comments on her physical body, like her average height, short hair, and yellowish skin, judging her on her appearance instead of seeing her as a full person or human being. He calls her timid and sallow, and these features actually make him easygoing and happy, and he thinks she is easy to control. He states, *"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"* (Han, 2007, p.5). This passage reflects the overall patriarchal mindset regarding women and leads to thinking and considering them as non-human entities. It also exposes the judgmental attitude of male members of the society and their preference to marry an easy woman to control and subjugate her.

As we move a little forward in the novel, Yeong-hye Husband comes more explicitly and shows his deep patriarchal mindset and expresses a clear preference for Yeong-hye's submissive nature, stating, *"The passive personality of this woman, in whom I could detect neither freshness nor charm nor anything especially refined, suited me down to the ground."* (Han, 2007, p.5) His word reflects how patriarchy conditions males to seek females not as equal partners but as passive companions who can easily be controlled, and by refuting Yeong-hye's freshness, charm, and refinement The narrator, Mr. Cheong, devalues the individuality, reducing her merely to an object, a docile figure whose silence and lack of resistance make her desirable. The phrase suited me down to the ground highlights how Yeong-hye's passivity serves Mr. Cheong's convenience and ego, reinforcing the oppressive gender norms that celebrate and enjoy female submissiveness while questioning and challenging women's rights to express their individuality, identity, agency, and emotional complexity. This reflects how patriarchal structures not only silence women but actually reward their erasure and control them.

Further in the novel, the author portrays that in patriarchal society, women's bodies are not treated as their own but as something to be shaped for men's desire and society's expectations, as in the novel, when Mr. Cheung says, *"The only respect in which my wife was at all unusual was that she didn't like wearing a bra."* (Han, 2007, p.6) This statement clearly shows that men in patriarchal settings do not respect women's liberty and freedom of their choices. Instead, they see such choices as strange or improper and demand societal conformity from them. Mr. Cheong even admits, *"I would have preferred her to go around wearing one that was thickly padded."* (Han, 2007, p.6) While this statement highlights that he does not support her, he tries to protect his own image in front of others. Which shows



how women are judged for merely their dressing and are expected to follow rules not for their own comfort but to please society and defend a man's reputation.

Another form of oppression against women in patriarchal settings is that male figures of the society often try to control and interfere in females' personal choices using the tactics of guilt and pressure. As in the novel we witness, Mr. Cheong states, *"I tried reproaching her, lecturing her... She tried to justify herself by saying that she couldn't stand wearing a bra... Nevertheless... I began to have doubts about this hypersensitivity of hers."* (Han, 2007, p.7) highlights that male members of the society don't bother to understand the likes and dislikes but, instead, try to control and scold them for not showing the expected and accepted behavior and attitude. This reveals that women's comfort is not prioritized and is less valued than societal conformity and norms. When one (female) tries to justify herself or her choice, then she is seen with suspicion and not taken seriously. It shows how female discomfort is ignored and labeled as their weaknesses and overreactions in the male-dominant society. While instead of respecting their bodily autonomy, the power dynamics of the society question their truth and try to bring them back to their desired track. In short, this passage reflects the idea of how patriarchy controls and manipulates women to let go of their choices and stay silent and dumb to their needs.

Another oppressive nature of patriarchy is that females are often expected to always be sexually available to male members of the society, especially to their husbands, with or without their consent. While those females who show resistance, set boundaries, or withdraw themselves from the set pattern are considered rebellious and not sound mentally, this act often leads to violence—sexual and domestic both. Another curse of male-dominant society is that it snatches the ownership of women's bodies and often considers them as property, and often rape and assaults them while pleasing the perception that they are created for entertainment purposes and to satisfy males. As in the novel, Mr. Cheong argues about Yeong-hye, *"But what troubled me more was that she now seemed to be actively avoiding sex. In the past, she'd generally been willing to comply with my physical demands... But now... if my hand so much as brushed her shoulder, she would calmly move away"* (Han, 2007, p.14). From these lines we can easily get the idea that Mr. Cheong was not upset because of her changed behavior and attitude but worried about his sexual desire and passion that Yeong-hye set boundaries and exceeded the set pattern of patriarchy that a woman should and ought to be available to her man anytime and all the time. The passage further implicitly reflects the unwilling nature of Yeong-hye towards sexual activities, while the phrase "physical demands" highlights Mr. Cheong's nature towards intimacy as his lonely right, not something to be equally and mutually shared between husband and wife.

As we discussed in our earlier passage, females in patriarchal societies are expected to show conformity and obey males whether they want to or not. This type of oppression is so widely present in our societies that we often misguide and blackmail women and oppressed parts of society through various manipulation tricks and tactics, such as food, clothing, body shaming, lack of education, exposure, and experience, etc., and consciously try to use them for our personal interests and favors. Like, for instance, Mr. Cheong tells Yeong-hye in the novel, *"Well then, that means you need to eat some meat. That's why you don't have any energy anymore, right? You didn't used to be like this, after all"* (Han, 2007, p.14). This statement shows that Mr. Cheong still misses and craves Yeong-hye's obedient and subservient nature and tries to bring her back to her previous state of conformity



through manipulation and different tactical techniques, such as flattering her and reminding her of her old state of obedience instead of understanding her conditions. The phrase "You didn't used to be like this, after all" implicitly highlights that Mr. Cheong sees her decision to avoid eating meat as a symbol of rebellion, independence, and also a threat to himself and patriarchal dynamics as well.

Familial systems in our societies are mostly dominated by male members of the family, and females are expected to obey and follow the orders as soon as possible, even without questioning them. This brutal truth of our family system is that even female members of the family are dominated by all the male figures of the family, regardless of age. As in the novel when Yeong-hye's father yells and screams, "*Enough!* my father-in-law yelled. 'You, Yeong-hye! After all I told you, your own father!'" (Han, 2007, p.29). This scene portrays how male members of the family consider themselves as the absolute captains and believe that their orders should and must obeyed immediately in a fraction of a second without any delay or questions. Her father thanks her as the same and prevails over the traditional family concepts under the influence of patriarchy and reveals his violent face and patriarchal society as well, while beating and slapping Yeong-hye for not obeying her orders. The same is the case in male-dominant society, which moves with the perception that women are their personal workers and slaves, having no right to take benefits from them and beat them when they show resistance or try to seek liberty and freedom from this male-structured society. Another curse in the male portion of the society is that they do not bother to value and respect the decision and choice of the deprived portion of the society and treat them in an inhumane way, which leads to violence domestic, social, institutional, sexual, etc.

In male-structured society, females are not given the chances to show their true potential and confidence. They are even deprived of the right to attain the basic and primary levels of education and awareness. Mostly in patriarchal settings, women are trained instead of educated and taught that their core and primary duty is to stay loyal and obedient to the male members of the society, particularly to their husbands and fathers. They are totally sidelined by the male members and raised in a way that they unconsciously start to believe and think questioning their men is one of the gravest sins before God and the only purpose of their existence is to please and satisfy men through their physical desires and subservience. In a scene from the novel, we see Yeong-hye's mother dictate and even force her to let go of her resistance towards the patriarchy and set pattern of the society; for instance, we witness, "*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... 'Hurry up and eat them'*" (Han, 2007, p.29). This scene from the novel reflects their stunted and curbed mindsets and low confidence level, so even when one of them shows resistance and tries to regain liberty, freedom, and true ownership, The deprived and oppressed portion of the society itself thinks she is awkward and weird and is compelled to bring her back to the conformity of norms and expectations they forcefully enjoy. This type of oppression is disguised in form and widely present in our societies and often misinterpreted as a blessing from God.

Another deeply embedded form of oppression against women in patriarchal patterns, especially within marriages, is marital rape and assault. In our societies, it is considered normal because men consider women as their property and deal with them as



products, while women themselves believe it as so. Male members of the society largely take its benefits and believe that they are "entitled" to sex from their wives with or without their will, and this sort of mentality often leads to sexual violence and assaults against women. As in the novel, Mr. Cheong narrates even without a pinch of hesitation. He says, *"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... it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully"* (Han, 2007, p.25). In this scene, we see Yeong-hye's struggle and resistance against her husband, and her efforts were completely dismissed, reflecting the barbarous thirst for sex in the male members of the society and also highlighting how male desires for sex override female consent. In the novel, there are various scenes of sexual violence against women, highlighting the issue of subjugation and oppression, especially in the form of sexual assaults. From this scene we can get the idea of how casually the patriarchal system silences and normalizes, especially in the private spaces and places. Like Yeong-hye, millions of women suffer from the same kind of oppression while the patriarchy does not recognize it as wrong and instead sees it as man's right.

Another oppressive nature of patriarchy is that women in patriarchal settings often carry emotional and psychological burdens of life by themselves, while men remain distant, detached, and sometimes unaccountable to them as well. The patriarchal system encourages and backs men to remain indifferent to women's struggles and sufferings—whether mental or physical—and often considers this as a symbol of weakness, not as a shared responsibility. Instead of seeking care and offering an understanding hand to their psychological and emotional distresses, patriarchal figures focus on their own comfort, image, reputation, and peace of mind. As a result, women often go isolated in their sufferings and traumas, while for the escape, they sometimes undergo mental illnesses and attempt suicide as well. While men show a lack of responsibility for both their psychological and physical labor and escape the blame too. As we see in the novel, Mr. Cheong (Yeong-hye's husband) tries to get rid of his responsibilities and escape from the blame as well. There are two separate occasions in the novel where Mr. Cheong's actions reflect his lack of responsibility, such as, *"This strange situation had nothing to do with me."* (Han, 2007, p.16). and the other, *"I packed my mother-in-law off in a taxi... I had absolutely no idea how I was going to sort this mess out. Only one thing was clear, and that was that this whole affair was bound to cause me no end of trouble."* (Han, 2007, p.38) These lines and passages vividly show Yeong-hye's husband's complete lack of empathy and sympathy for her emotional and psychological conditions while considering the situation something strange and inconvenient to him instead of showing responsibility and care toward his wife. The phrase *"this whole affair was bound to cause me no end of trouble"* highlights his primary concern, not his wife but all his social life and reputation.

Male gaze and objectification are other illnesses deeply rooted in patriarchal societies, leading to female oppression and subjugation. Women are often judged and seen on how well they fulfill men's expectations and valued not because of their behavior but merely for their appearance. In a male-dominated society, a woman's worth is often tied to how beautiful and desirable she is to the male gaze. It often leads to the objectification of women, who are seen only as a commodity or product. In patriarchy, women are widely objectified and consumed while not valued as individuals of the society having identity and agency. In the novel, this harmful dynamic is seen in the scene of Yeong-hye's brother-



in-law, who says, *"It was only when he was introduced to her sister that he realized what it was his new wife was missing... Everything about her sister pleased him... her single-lidded eyes; the way she spoke, so blunt as to be almost uncouth... her drab clothes; her androgynously protruding cheekbones"* (Han, 2007, p.48). Here in this passage, instead of considering Yeong-hye and her sister's behaviours and general attitude towards people and life, her brother-in-law starts appreciating their physical features and speaks about his sexual desires for Yeong-hye instead of his own wife. This scene reflects a patriarchal mindset where women's bodies are not respected but consumed by the gaze and objectified within the boundaries of marriage and family.

CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the issue of female oppression in patriarchal society as seen in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* with references to the experiences of a woman, Yeong-hye. Research findings showed different patterns of oppression, such as subjugation, objectification, domestic violence, marital rape, sexual assault, male gaze, and psychological control, through close reading and feminist analysis. Findings show how patriarchal systems effectively deprive women of their autonomy over their bodies, their choices and identities. The way Yeong-hye changes into a passive, obedient wife and a vegetarian symbolises an extreme confrontation of males, which eventually results in her total elimination of the oppressive systems. The study presents the functioning of patriarchy in several different ways: through familial authority, matrimonial entitlement, social conformity, and even through the complicity of even the oppressed women themselves, who reinforce the standards. The study can add to the knowledge of how ingrained patriarchal attitudes make violence and the dehumanisation of women a normal state of things and relegate their consent, comfort, and agency. Such results highlight the necessity of societal change in favour of gender equality and the respect for the autonomy of the female body. By highlighting these oppressive trends, this research paper demands greater awareness of men to appreciate women as equals who have a right to compassion, empathy, and dignity instead of domination and oppression, and therefore achieve a fairer and more equal society.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present study discusses the various forms of oppression against women in patriarchal societies through a feminist lens. Other researchers came to analyse the impacts and effects of oppression against women in patriarchal society while using or applying a new framework and context to the study. The primary purpose behind this study is to bring awareness to the people, especially the men, to get an idea and know about the untold and unspoken one-river condition of females in male-dominated societies and to understand their condition, situation, and demands with attentive ears. Moreover, this research will also guide other researchers to get ideas and authentic data on the same topic, dealing with different frameworks.

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