

T.C.  
ISTANBUL BEYKENT UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME

**THE EXPLORATION OF WILL, BODY, AND  
RESISTANCE IN THE WORKS OF HAN KANG AND  
INDRA SINHA**  
Master's Thesis

Thesis Prepared By  
**Fatemeh ZOORBAKHS**

İstanbul, 2025

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## **OATH STATEMENT**

This study entitled **“The Exploration of Will, Body, and Resistance in the Works of Han Kang and Indra Sinha”**, which I submitted as a Master’s Thesis, was written by me in accordance with scientific ethics and precedents. I state and confirm with honor that I have obtained all the information in this thesis in accordance with academic and ethical rules, that all the works I have used are cited in the sources and that they are cited wherever they are used in my work, and that I have not violated any patent or copyright rights. 29/08/2025



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### **ABSTRACT**

#### **THE EXPLORATION OF WILL, BODY, AND RESISTANCE IN THE WORKS OF HAN KANG AND INDRA SINHA**

This thesis explores how power structures suppress women's will, leading to bodily harm and resistance, through feminist and ecofeminist close reading and comparative analysis of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. By applying the core frameworks, the study examines how gendered and ecological oppression are intertwined, particularly through the control of females' wills and bodies as well as nature. Drawing on theorists such as Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva, and Rob Nixon, the study highlights how both novels represent resistance through the body, whether through withdrawal, transformation, or protest. The narrative styles, voices, and structures of each text are also analyzed to reveal how storytelling itself becomes a site of resistance. Overall, this thesis argues that literature serves as a powerful space to critique systemic domination and to imagine forms of agency in the face of violence and silencing.

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## ÖZ

### HAN KANG VE INDRA SİNHA'NIN ESERLERİNDE BEDEN, İRADE VE DİRENİŞİN İNCELENMESİ

Bu tez, Han Kang'ın *The Vegetarian* (Vejetaryen) ve Indra Sinha'nın *Animal's People* (Hayvanın İnsanları) eserlerinin feminist ve ekofeminist yaklaşımla yakın okumaları ve karşılaştırmalı analizi yoluyla, güç yapılarının kadınların iradesini nasıl bastırdığını, bunun sonucunda bedensel zararlar ve direnişin nasıl ortaya çıktığını incelemektedir. Temel kuramsal çerçeveler uygulanarak, çalışmada toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı ve ekolojik baskının, özellikle kadınların iradeleri ve bedenleri ile doğa üzerindeki kontrol aracılığıyla nasıl iç içe geçtiği araştırılmaktadır. Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Val Plumwood, Vandana Shiva ve Rob Nixon gibi kuramcılardan yararlanılarak, her iki romanın da geri çekilme, dönüşüm veya protesto yoluyla beden üzerinden direnişin nasıl temsil ettiği vurgulanmaktadır. Ayrıca, her metnin anlatı tarzları, sesleri ve yapıları da analiz edilerek, anlatının kendisinin nasıl bir direniş mekânı haline geldiği ortaya konmaktadır. Genel olarak, bu tez edebiyatın, sistematik tahakkümü eleştirmek ve şiddet ile susturulmaya karşı ajans biçimlerini hayal etmek için güçlü bir alan olduğunu savunmaktadır.

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## GLOSSARY

**Ecofeminism:** A branch of feminism that links the exploitation of women and nature, emphasizing how patriarchal ideologies contribute to both gender and ecological oppression. Key thinkers include Vandana Shiva and Val Plumwood.

**Embodied Resistance:** A form of resistance expressed through the physical body, where the body becomes both the site and means of protest against systemic control, oppression, or violence. It involves lived experiences such as refusal, transformation, or disruption of imposed norms, especially in contexts of gendered, political, or environmental domination.

**Feminism:** A theoretical and political movement advocating for women's rights and equality, focusing on challenging patriarchal systems and gender-based oppression.

**Oppression:** The systematic and institutionalized mistreatment or control of individuals or groups, often based on gender, class, race, or environment.

**Patriarchy:** A social and political system in which men hold dominant power, often resulting in the subjugation and control of women and their bodies.

**Will:** An individual's desire, intention, or determination to act or make choices, often in contrast to external control or societal constraints.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most compelling concerns in contemporary literature is the exploration of the will, body, and resistance, as these elements reveal how individuals confront and challenge oppressive social and political forces. Literature has become a space to explore not only the struggles between personal agency and external control but also the ways of control of personal freedom and rights, with the body becoming both a site of suffering and a medium of resistance. Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* are well-suited for this investigation. Both novels depict characters whose bodies reflect broader systems of power and violence, while their acts of resistance, such as refusal, transformation, or survival, highlight the resilience of the human spirit. Yeong-hye, the central character of *The Vegetarian*, exemplifies the suppression of the will and bodily harm. Yeong-hye's decision to stop eating meat after her dream is rejected and unacceptable to her husband and family. This response reveals how deeply the male-dominated society governs personal decisions, especially those related to the female body. In *Animal's People*, the female characters, such as Nisha, emerge as strong characters who resist both social judgment and environmental injustice by supporting the victims and following their will against both patriarchal and corporate power. These works also offer the dynamic relationship between oppression and resistance, showing how literature exposes the control over individual bodies and wills. By applying feminist and ecofeminist lenses to these narratives, this thesis examines how power structures suppress women's will, leading to bodily harm and resistance as a reaction.

Feminism, the all-time controversial theoretical framework, raises awareness of how male-dominated societies shape women's identities and experiences through systemic control. It critiques patriarchal norms that limit autonomy, particularly about the body and selfhood, and supports equality and agency. The term "feminism" emerged in the late 19th century, and Mary Wollstonecraft is credited as one of its earliest figures, arguing that women are not inherently inferior to men. Feminist theory is especially significant in exploring themes of will, body, and resistance, as it examines how patriarchal structures suppress individual autonomy and politicize the female body. It exposes how personal will is constrained, how bodies are objectified and regulated, and how acts of defiance become expressions of agency. In literature,

feminism helps illuminate characters' experiences of oppression and resistance, making it a fitting theory through which to analyze the complex dynamics of power, harm, and rebellion in *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*.

While ecofeminism is the other theory that links the oppression of women with environmental destruction, arguing that both are due to the patriarchal and hierarchical power systems. Ecofeminism suggests that the devastation of nature and the control over women's bodies and lives follow similar patterns of marginalization and violence. This perspective is particularly relevant to the exploration of will, body, and resistance in literature, since it provides insight that female characters and the natural world are under control, harm, and suppression. In *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*, ecofeminism uncovers how societal and political structures not only limit individual will but also harm both the human body and the environment. According to ecofeminist thinkers, there is a very close relationship between women and Mother Nature, and they both experience violence and injustice. Ecofeminist thinkers believe that male-dominated systems play a significant role in the destruction of nature and environmental problems. This perspective is especially relevant to the exploration of will, body, and resistance, as it reveals how power structures not only suppress personal autonomy but also harm both the human body and the environment.

Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*, published in 2007 and gaining international recognition after its English translation won the 2016 International Booker Prize as well as the Nobel Prize in literature in 2024, presents a haunting exploration of personal rebellion within a rigid, patriarchal Korean society. The novel follows Yeong-hye, an ordinary woman who, after experiencing disturbing dreams, refuses to eat meat, a decision that sparks outrage from her family and society. Through Yeong-hye's transformation and eventual physical decline, the novel examines how a woman's will is suppressed, her body controlled, and her resistance pathologized. It critiques societal expectations of femininity, obedience, and conformity, making *The Vegetarian* a powerful text for analyzing the themes of will, body, and resistance through both feminist and ecofeminist lenses.

Indra Sinha is a British-Indian author known for his novel *Animal's People* (2007), which was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize and won the Commonwealth

Writers' Prize for Europe and South Asia. Born in India and educated in England, Sinha's writing often focuses on themes of social justice, human rights, and environmental responsibility. *Animal's People*, set in the fictional city of Khaufpur, draws on the real-life Bhopal gas tragedy to explore the long-term effects of industrial disasters on marginalized communities. The novel gives voice to those silenced by power systems, central concerns of this thesis. Beyond literature, Sinha has been a committed activist for Bhopal victims since 1993, co-founding the Bhopal Medical Appeal and holding corporations like Dow Chemical accountable for environmental harm. His blending of activism and storytelling deepens the feminist and ecofeminist analysis of the novel.

Chapter One applies feminist and ecofeminist theoretical frameworks, along with insights from relevant thinkers and scholars, to the first book, *The Vegetarian*, focusing on the suppression of women's will within a patriarchal society. In Korean society's strict social rules, women are traditionally taught to be subordinate and expected to follow the roles of wives and mothers. The chapter begins by examining the control exerted over Yeong-hye's body by male figures and societal norms. Her decision to stop eating meat is interpreted as an act of rebellion, symbolizing her refusal to conform to oppressive expectations. Finally, the chapter analyzes how her physical and psychological transformation reflects the deep connection between the female body and nature, revealing ecofeminist themes of shared oppression and resistance.

Chapter Two discusses *Animal's People* through feminist and ecofeminist lenses, focusing on how patriarchal and political power structures contribute to both environmental devastation and the suppression of individual will. The chapter studies the analysis of the social and ecological oppression depicted in the novel's setting. It then highlights how female characters like Nisha, doctor Elli Barber, and Ma. Franci demonstrates agency and resilience despite operating within a male-dominated society. Acts of resistance, both bodily and environmental, are examined as responses to injustice. Finally, the chapter shows how ecofeminism helps connect the shared struggles of women and nature, revealing how both are subjected to harm, yet also serve as forces of resistance.

Chapter Three explores the art of narration of both novels, *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*, focusing on how their narrative styles and techniques convey themes of suppressed will and resistance. It examines the similarities in how both works use storytelling to highlight struggles against control, while also analyzing differences in narrative voice, tone and language style. Additionally, the chapter investigates how the body and environment play crucial roles in shaping each narrative, deepening the understanding of oppression and resistance in both texts.

Through close reading, textual analysis, and the application of theoretical frameworks and scholars, all chapters provide readers with a clear understanding of how societal and political organizations suppress women's will, leading to bodily harm and resistance, as portrayed in *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*. The intertwined control over female bodies and the environment highlights how oppression extends beyond individuals to the natural world. These narratives serve as compelling critiques of systemic violence and marginalization, offering valuable insights into the resilience, agency, and survival of those who confront and challenge oppressive forces.

## **1. SUPPRESSED WILL AND EMBODIED RESISTANCE IN *THE VEGETARIAN***

Suppressing individuals' will, particularly women, has always been a central focus of scholarly research. A key aspect of this topic is the various forms of resistance, especially embodied resistance, which consistently challenge and seek to break the norms and rules of society. Therefore, this chapter examines how patriarchal power structures suppress the will of women, using Yeong-hye's experience in *The Vegetarian* as a case study. This study first explores the control applied over her body by male figures in her family and societal expectations, highlighting how her individuality is restricted. Then, it analyzes her refusal to eat meat and its outcome as an act of rebellion and embodied resistance against these oppressive norms. Finally, the chapter discusses the ecofeminist perspective, emphasizing the interconnection between the female body and nature, and how Yeong-hye's transformation reflects broader themes of shared oppression and resistance.

### **1.1. Power, Patriarchy, and The Female Body**

Women have historically been given less significant positions in male-dominated societies, where their roles have often been confined to submission, subordinate, and silence. Patriarchal systems exert control over nearly every aspect of women's lives, including their dress, behavior, attitudes, eating habits, and personal decisions. This control is clearly reflected in *The Vegetarian*, when Yeong-hye's father commands her, "Don't you understand what your father's telling you? If he tells you to eat, you eat" (Kang, 2015, p.46). This moment underscores how patriarchal authority demands absolute compliance, particularly over women's bodies. In this context, Susan Bordo, a prominent feminist thinker, offers critical insights into the cultural regulation of the female body in her book *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*.

She argues that male-dominated societies shape women's bodies and identities according to their ideals, using tools such as diet, makeup, and fashion, reinforcing the idea that a woman's value is tied to her physical appearance and desirability to men (1993, p.166). This societal pressure is reflected in the novel where Yeong-hye's

husband, Mr. Cheong, criticizes her, saying, “What’s wrong with your lips? Haven’t you done your makeup?” and “Were you really going to go out looking like this? Do your make up again” (Kang, 2015, p.27). Bordo’s argument underscores how women are often denied the right to live as they are; instead, they are expected to conform to beauty standards imposed by patriarchal norms, which is aligned with male preferences and wishes, to gain acceptance and approval. Moreover, Mr. Cheong’s initial impression of his wife further reveals this mindset as Yeong-hye does not meet her husband’s definition of attractiveness., “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” (Kang, 2015, p. 11).

Bordo further explains how patriarchal norms control women's choices, such as what to wear and eat, and impose thinness as a standard of beauty. She discusses this through common cognitive distortions that women experience, such as believing thinness is essential to happiness and that eating certain foods is shameful (1993, pp.57–58). This framework is applicable in Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*. The protagonist’s body becomes a site of control and conflict. Her will and decision to stop eating meat, a rejection of societal norms tied to consumption and femininity, is met with immediate hostility and suppression. Her body, rather than being her own, is treated as a space to be regulated by her husband, family, and the wider patriarchal structure, demonstrating the very mechanisms of bodily control that Susan Bordo critiques. In addition, in a male-dominated culture, there must be a reason for a woman or the second gender’s will that makes sense; otherwise, it will be suppressed. This is evident in Mr. Cheong’s reaction to her vegetarianism, “If it had all been just another instance of a woman giving up meat in order to lose weight then there would have been no need to worry ”(Kang, 2015, p.23). His response suggests that the idea of stopping meat only due to weight loss is acceptable and that is what Bordo offers, thinness, as a mean to control women.

The other significant point which is central to Bodro’s theory is Yeong-hye’s refusal to wear a bra, which symbolizes the rejection of patriarchal control as well as another form of bodily resistance, that disturbs her husband, not because of concern for her well-being, but due to his fear of social embarrassment, “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” (Kang, 2015, p.13). For him, the bra is not a matter of personal comfort but a marker of respectability and social conformity. Later, Yeong-hye reveals that she cannot tolerate the pressure of wearing a bra, which symbolizes the restriction of the patriarchal system. As he states, “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” (Kang, 2015, p. 14). This moment supports the fact that the gendered expectations imposed on women’s bodies, beauty conformation, and the lack of empathy or understanding from men who benefit from these norms, since empathy holds no place in the patriarchal culture.

While Susan Bordo highlights how cultural norms shape women’s bodies through male and societal expectations, Sandra Bartky (1990) deepens the discussion by examining how disciplinary practices internalized by women produce docile, compliant bodies. In the chapter of her book 'Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power,' Bartky believes that women are taught to monitor, shape, and control their bodies not through direct force, but through internalized expectations surrounding appearance, posture, body size, and behavior (p.65). There are two scenes in the novel that express Sandra Bartky’s argument about the internalization of patriarchal norms. The first occurs at a gathering with Mr.Cheong’s boss when Yeong-hye simply states, “I don’t eat it,” referring to meat. (Kang,2015, p.30) Her quiet refusal shocks those at the table, particularly the women, who are accustomed to conforming to societal expectations without question. It emphasizes women’s internalized concept and understanding of proper behavior; a good woman is the one who obeys, eats what is served, and follows the men in her life without any comments or resistance, in South Korea’s strict rules. While the second example appears in the response of Yeong-hye’s sister, In-hye, who insists on eating meat. “You must eat, Yeong-hye,” In-hye admonished (Kang, 2015, p. 44). This textual evidence highlights how even other women, shaped by the same patriarchal standards, often enforce these norms, demonstrating the deeply rooted nature of internalized gender roles.

As Bartky argues, women's identities are often formed under the internalized gaze of male expectations, considering women as objects to be desired or owned. The idea is directly mentioned in the narrative by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law refers to women as "Conventionally an object of desire" (Kang, 2015, p.92). In other words, women's bodies are expected to please men's desires, and this is what a male-dominated society imposes. Similarly, Yeong-hye's husband expresses that, "Yeong-hye's supposed to serve." (Kang, 2015, p. 38) Engaging in sexual intercourse with the protagonist against her will occurs in the context of sexual violence, where her refusal to sleep with her husband is ignored, exemplifying how patriarchal structures suppress a woman's autonomy. Yet, even in this moment of violation, Yeong-hye resists through her body, refusing to conform silently. Besides, Yeong-hye's gradual withdrawal from social life and refusal to fulfill traditional feminine roles, such as cooking good, "meat-based" food, and satisfying her husband's sexual desires, illustrate Bartky's argument as her husband's complain, " Haven't you even ironed my white shirt?" (Kang, 2015, p.18)."In the five years we had been married this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off" (Kang, 2015, p.19).

Building on the discussion of bodily regulation, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity offers a crucial framework to understand how Yeong-hye's resistance challenges not only societal control over the body but also the very construction of gender roles. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1999) argues that gender is not an innate identity but rather a set of roles that we learn and perform repeatedly, shaped by social norms and power structures, "In this sense, gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (p.33). Yeong-hye's rejection of the imposed roles, through her refusal of makeup, social gatherings, and withdrawal from expected behaviors, disrupts these performative acts, revealing the instability of gender norms imposed by patriarchal society. These traditionally assigned roles are not natural but historically

have been constructed by patriarchy and maintained through continuous repetition, as Butler's theory highlights.

There is another critical insight, which is very common in a patriarchal system's norms: the voicelessness of women. Mr. Cheong mentions, "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." (Kang, 2015, p.11). This reflects his preference for a passive partner who not only poses no challenge to his authority but also fits his needs. However, it also raises a deeper question: what causes Yeong-hye's passivity? The novel subtly points to the patriarchal society that silences women and conditions them into submission. This silencing extends beyond Yeong-hye and even her sister, In-hye, who is referred to not by name but as "Ji-woo's mom," reducing her identity to her role as a mother. Her voice, like Yeong-hye's, is symbolically choked. As a result, women in the novel have neither expectations nor demands; they lack both the courage and the right to complain or object, as voices are consistently dismissed.

The forces of violence, power, disrespect, and pressure are deeply tied to women's oppression in *The Vegetarian*. Being slapped by her father and constantly disrespected and downgraded by the male figures around her is what the protagonist experiences. The dominant, authoritative roles assumed by men are reinforced through language and behavior. Mr. Cheong's use of the phrase "Boss around" when recalling his school days reflects the normalization of male dominance from an early age. (Kang, 2015, p.12) In a male-dominated world, the language of violence is accepted and effective. For example, when Yeong-hye resists eating meat, her father orders, "Mr. Cheong and Yeong-ho, the two of you come here to hold her." (Kang, 2015, p.46) The remark "If she eats once, she'll eat it again" reveals a mindset of conditioning and coercion, an effort to reshape women's will to align with patriarchal norms. This moment symbolizes how submission is expected and enforced through physical and emotional pressure. Moreover, Women are also expected not to go against their husbands' wishes, and such a belief reveals what patriarchal structures mean, oppression, and submission as the significant elements. Women are placed under the full control of male figures, and each female functions under male authority. There is no space for women to express personal desires, and any attempt to do so is seen as

rebellion. This is evident when Yeong-hye's mother labels her daughter as "defiant" for asserting her will (Kang, 2015, p. 35).

### **1.2. Refusal and Resistance: Vegetarianism as Rebellion**

Having examined how patriarchal systems seek to suppress, control, and shape women's bodies and wills, this section turns to Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat as a powerful act of rebellion against those very systems. Her decision is not merely a dietary preference; it stands as a radical assertion of selfhood that defies entrenched cultural and familial expectations. In a society where women's conformity is enforced through overt mechanisms of control, violence, and subtle pressures like social norms and shame, Yeong-hye's vegetarianism becomes a symbolic and embodied form of resistance. Yeong-hye's statement, "Your body smells of meat" (Kang, 2015, p.24), powerfully expresses her visceral rejection of meat and what it represents. From a feminist and symbolic perspective, meat becomes not only a dietary substance but a metaphor for violence, dominance, and masculine authority. Rejecting meat, which Carol Adams identifies as a representation of male dominance and power (p.48), she reclaims agency over her own body and directly challenges the patriarchal norms that have sought to define and control her.

According to Carol J. Adams (1990) in her book, *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, consuming meat is closely tied to masculinity, power, and patriarchal structures. She argues that "People with power have always eaten meat. In patriarchal culture, meat is a masculine food and meat eating is a male activity" (p. 48). This connection arises because meat consumption often symbolizes strength, dominance, and control, qualities culturally coded as male. Adams also clarifies that meat-eating societies construct male identity through food choices, with cultural texts reinforcing this connection. This perspective sheds light on *The Vegetarian*, where Yeong-hye's refusal to consume meat becomes a politically charged, subversive act that challenges traditional gender norms and the dominance associated with masculinity, asserting her bodily autonomy in a patriarchal society. However, the consumption of vegetables is closely connected with women, who are treated as second-class citizens in patriarchal societies, as Adams suggests. She also states, "Women, second-class citizens, are more

likely to eat what are considered to be second-class foods in a patriarchal culture: vegetables, fruits, and grains rather than meat.” (1990, p. 48). This concept is illustrated in Han Kang’s work: “My wife spooned up some seaweed soup. She balanced rice and soybean paste on a lettuce leaf, then bundled the wrap into her mouth and chewed it slowly” (2015, p. 23). Also, the moment her brother in law says, “Now, the fact that she didn’t eat meat only vegetables and cereal grains, seemed to fit with the image of that blue-like mark” (Kang, 2015, p. 79) emphasizes that Yeong-hye’s quiet act of eating plant-based food embodies her resistance to dominant gender and cultural norms.

Yeong-hye’s rebellion comes at a significant personal cost. Her physical and psychological deterioration reflects the severe consequences of resisting deeply entrenched norms. For instance, when she is forced to put meat in her mouth, she responds by cutting her wrist, an act that symbolizes the bodily harm inflicted by patriarchal violence. Her husband, Mr. Cheong, describes the brutal control she endures: “My father-in-law mashed the pork to a pulp on my wife’s lips as she struggled in agony” (Kang, 2015, p. 47). The intense suppression, control, and force exerted by the male characters in her life, such as her husband, father, and brother, combined with societal pressure, overwhelm Yeong-hye to the point that she chooses to commit suicide. Her father’s continued emphasis on her eating meat exemplifies this force: “Eat it! Listen to what your father is telling you and eat. Everything I say is for your own good.” (Kang, 2015, p. 46) Simultaneously, her brother shares this forceful attitude, as seen in their mutual reactions: “Just her father and brother’s reaction when they said, ‘What?’ My wife’s father and brother, who were both similarly hot-tempered” (Kang, 2015, p. 45). These harsh reactions illustrate how patriarchal authority in her family is maintained through aggression and coercion rather than understanding, reinforcing Yeong-hye’s oppression and isolation.

Her defiance also extends beyond the domestic sphere and disrupts broader social expectations, as shown during a dinner her husband hosts for his colleagues. In Korean culture, meat-based meals often symbolize social harmony, respect, and conformity. By refusing to participate in this communal ritual, Yeong-hye creates visible discomfort and embarrassment, particularly for Mr. Cheong, who perceives her actions as a direct challenge to his social standing. He observes, “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... Gradually, the other guests learned to ignore her presence... I knew that they wanted to keep a certain distance between us” (Kang, 2015, pp. 32 -33). Her refusal not only undermines patriarchal expectations surrounding the female body and behavior but also exposes the unspoken burden placed on women to maintain male honor in public. In this way, Yeong-hye’s quiet nonconformity unsettles collective norms, revealing how personal acts of autonomy are often politicized in rigid social structures. This scene reveals the discomfort and confusion Yeong-hye’s behavior provokes among the dinner guests. Although the conversation had already shifted toward vegetarianism, the guests struggled to understand why anyone would reject meat, a staple of Korean cuisine and a symbol of social unity. This refusal to offer a socially acceptable justification disrupts the expectations of those around her, marking her act as a quiet but radical defiance of cultural norms. As critics Won-Chung Kim and Pummy Sharma argue, it is this persistent nonconformity and society’s inability to accommodate it that exposes the rigid structures of patriarchy and ultimately contributes to Yeong-hye’s tragic unraveling.

Turning vegetarian is the most drastic decision that Yeong-hye makes, not only in her meat-loving family but also in the cultural expectations of South Korea, a change that is also referred to as “drastic transformation” by her husband (Kang, 2015, p.23). According to Pummy Sharma (2023), “It is important to know here that vegetarianism has been present in the South Korean society in the recent past” (p. 348), suggesting that while the practice exists, it remains unfamiliar and socially unaccepted. Yeong-hye’s rejection of meat is therefore not merely a dietary preference but a site of protest. She also mentions that “By deciding to become a vegetarian, Yeong-hye has posed a challenge to societal norms, as meat eating is a part of South Korean culture” (2023, p. 349). Her decision challenges deeply ingrained norms around food, gender, and social order, positioning vegetarianism as a symbolic and bodily form of rebellion. Xinyi Zhang (2020) similarly argues that in Korean society at that time, a female’s ethical identity is dependent on the part of [her] husband,” and that any attempt to claim independent moral agency results in exclusion from the family structure (p.108). Yet this reading has limitations. While social repression plays a role, Yeong-hye’s

transformation is not only a reaction to her environment; it is also driven by her strange dreams. Her rebellion is both sociopolitical and deeply psychological.

Korean scholar Won-Chung Kim, in his paper “Eating and Suffering in Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian*,” interprets the novel as a critique of Korean society’s rigid social norms, which ultimately uphold male dominance and contribute to the suffering of women. He writes, “Her public announcement, despite the apparent danger that she will be regarded as an insane woman, stems from her conviction that vegetarianism is the only way she can free herself not only from the oppression of animals but also from the male oppression of women. At this intersection, the connection between vegetarianism and feminism becomes evident” (2019, p.7). He notes, “meat in the novel is a symbol of male power and authority” (2019, p.4). Meanwhile, critic Cynthia Zhang (2021) considers Yeong-hye’s vegetarianism as a powerful declaration of bodily autonomy. She argues that Yeong-hye’s dreams, which inspire her refusal to eat meat, represent “The return of the repressed”, unconscious desires and traumas that challenge patriarchal control. Through these dreams, Yeong-hye’s body becomes a site of resistance, making her vegetarianism more than a dietary choice; it is a symbolic reclaiming of self against societal repression (p.259). However, she simultaneously claims that Yeong-hye’s extreme rejection ultimately leads to death, critiquing queer theorists like Lee Edelman by stating, “in the final analysis, death is still death” (p.261). This interpretation, however, is debatable, as the novel’s ending is deliberately ambiguous. Kang does not clearly confirm Yeong-hye’s death, leaving it open-ended and inviting multiple interpretations regarding her fate.

In contrast, there are other scholars who regard Yeong-hye’s decision, refusal to eat meat, as the medical dimension. For instance, Xinyi Zhang reads her vegetarianism as a symptom of mental illness, such as “neurasthenia or paranoia” (2020, p.106). However, accepting this interpretation uncritically overlooks the protagonist’s repeated statement: “I had a dream” (Kang, 2015, p.18) which is a sign of awareness to resist against the patriarchal power that she has tolerated and has long been exposed. In other words, her dream becomes a symbolic expression of rejecting patriarchal control rather than illness.

### **1.3. The Interconnection of the Female Body and Nature: An Ecofeminist Perspective**

Contemporary literature often explores the connection between women's oppression and environmental destruction, which both draw attention to the main role of patriarchy. In this respect, ecofeminism offers a crucial framework for understanding this relationship, arguing that the dominance over women and nature is intertwined. Ecofeminist theorists such as Vandana Shiva highlight the similarities between women and nature, while Val Plumwood contends that patriarchal structures have historically positioned both women and nature as passive, inferior, and controllable. These thinkers challenge the cultural narratives that link masculinity with power, conquest, and control, forces that drive both gender inequality and ecological harm.

Vandana Shiva argues for the essential role of women and nature in maintaining ecological balance. She writes, "Nature and women have historically been the primary food providers in natural farming, based on sustainable flows of fertility from forests and farm animals to croplands" (2016, p.147). In this view, elements of nature, such as forests and trees, are closely linked to femininity, as both symbolize fertility, regeneration, and interconnectedness. This is what Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* contributes because this symbolic connection further reinforces the idea that Yeong-hye's turn toward plant life reflects a return to a feminized natural identity, an act of alignment rather than retreat.

Yeong-hye's desire to become a tree is a central scene that intensifies her identification with nature. She no longer sees herself as human but as a tree. This aspiration to transform into a non-human life form, rooted, voiceless, yet alive, can be read as a radical rejection of patriarchal human identity as she states, "I need to water my body. I don't need this kind of food, sister. I need water" (Kang, 2015, p.154). However, when Yeong-hye's sister, In-hye, asks her, "Do you really think you've turned into a tree?" and "how could a plant talk?" (Kang, 2015, p.159), questions expose society's deep unwillingness to accept non-normative expressions of identity and resistance. From an ecofeminist perspective, this disbelief mirrors how both women and nature are given a voiceless and irrational status under patriarchal systems.

It is important that the protagonist's need for sunlight and photosynthesis is profoundly symbolic and appears repeatedly throughout the novel. She often exposes herself to the sunlight, as shown in the different parts like: "She took off her clothes and exposed herself to the sunlight" (Kang, 2015, p. 91), and "I don't need to eat! All I need is sunlight" (Kang, 2015, p. 159). Even during hospitalization, as the nurse says, "On sunny days she would press herself up against the window, unbutton her hospital gown and bare her breasts to the sun" (Kang, 2015, p. 144). These details contain evidence of her desire to escape from being a human, particularly those tied to male-dominated expectations. Through the ecofeminist theory, sunlight becomes a symbol of purity, peace, and freedom, offering her a connection to nature and a life uncontrolled by social rules. For Yeong-hye, becoming one with nature, including a tree, is the only way to return autonomy.

Notably, Han Kang gives a thought-provoking perception of dependency of power structures on subordinated groups, for instance, women or nature, while this dependency is denied by them as Yeong-hye says to In-hye, "Sister...all the trees of the world are like brothers and sisters" (Kang, 2015, p.150). By growing identification with the natural world, Yeong-hye sees the natural world not as inferior or separated but as a part of a shared family to reinforce a deep sense of ecofeminist vision of kinship and interconnectedness. This perspective aligns with the concept of "dualism" as Plumwood, the feminist theorist, writes, "A dualism, I have argued, results from a certain kind of denied dependency on a subordinated other" (2003, p.41). In other words, a patriarchal society may rely on nature (for food, air, survival) and on women (for care, reproduction), but still treat both as lesser, as passive, controllable, or insignificant. This denial creates a duality (mind/body, man/woman, culture/nature) where one side is superior and the other inferior, even though the dominant side can't exist without the other.

The central character's rejection of meat, bra, sexuality and her human form is a protest against the mechanistic, patriarchal worldview that Vandana Shiva critiques. According to her, patriarchy treats both women and nature as passive resources to be controlled and exploited, entities to be dominated, and used for others' benefit rather than respected as independent beings. "As a masculine and patriarchal project which necessarily entailed the subjugation of both nature and women" (2016, p.57.) In

resisting this, Yeong-hye seeks to reclaim her agency by integrating with nature that is in line with her own terms. "Look sister, I'm doing a bandstand, leaves are growing out of my body, roots are sprouting out of my hands... they delve down into the earth. Endlessly... yes, I spread my legs because I wanted flowers to bloom from my crotch, I spread them wide" (Kang, 2015, p.133).

Eventually, Yeong-hye's journey in *The Vegetarian* uncovers the truth of the high cost of authoritative systems that attempt to dominate both women and nature. Through her physical withdrawal and symbolic identification with a plant-like, tree, she exposes the violence inherent in patriarchal and human-centered structures. Ecofeminist thinker like Plumwood helps illuminate how Yeong-hye's transformation challenges these dualisms, not as a romantic return to nature, but as a radical, painful form of protest. Fighting through her body, where gender, identity, and ecology intersect, reminding us that reclaiming autonomy often comes at the price of social alienation and personal suffering. In this way, Kang's novel highlights a haunting yet powerful meditation on the consequences of challenging oppressive systems that govern both bodies and ecosystems.

## **2. FEMINIST AND ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVES ON OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN *ANIMAL'S PEOPLE***

*Animal's People* by Indra Sinha is the second work analyzed in this research. Indra Sinha is one of those literary writers who provides readers with insights into environmental destruction, which stands as his central focus and concern in *Animal's People*. Furthermore, his narrative shows how women's bodies are affected by environmental and systemic violence. At the same time, it emphasizes how nature and marginalized groups, especially women, are dominated by power structures. Within this context, bodily harm and acts of resistance show up as connected consequences of both gendered and ecological oppression. Therefore, the main purpose of this chapter is to explore these four issues through feminism and ecofeminism views, alongside a brief consideration of postcolonial ecocriticism, which is essential for the first section addressing the oppression of nature, by: first, investigating the power structures that enable environmental exploitation; second, analyzing the control over female characters under patriarchal systems; third, examining how bodily and environmental harm cause acts of resistance; and finally, drawing on ecofeminist perspective to link gendered and ecological struggles.

### **2.1. Power Structures and Environmental Oppression**

Protecting nature should be a fundamental human responsibility, as the environment plays a crucial role in maintaining life, for example, by purifying the air, providing food and resources, and balancing the climate. All individuals are dependent on the environment for survival, medicine, and shelter. However, the author, in *Animal's People*, explores how power structures such as governments, corporations, and political authorities knowingly harm and oppress the environment for their own gain. The imaginary city of Khaufpur represents Bhopal, India, drawing attention to the real-life 1984 Union Carbide gas disaster. The explosion released toxic chemicals into the environment, causing not only physical harm to all locals who were exposed but also long-term pollution and poisoning of the air, water, and soil. Despite the devastating consequences, Khaufpuri political authorities failed or were reluctant to act effectively to bring compensation. This contributes to putting emphasis on how

environmental degradation is not accidental, but rather deeply rooted in systemic greed, corruption, and negligence, which aligns with postcolonial ecocriticism. Sinha's work powerfully highlights corporate irresponsibility and governmental indifference, both of which deny the justice and compensation demanded by women, reflecting the suppression of female will throughout the narrative.

The oppression of the environment is unfolded through several textual evidence, by two main intertwined factors, the exploitative actions of the Amerikan Kampani, and the deliberate indifference of the political authorities of Khaufpur. "Do you suppose anyone can explain why did the Kampani choose this city to make its factory? Why this land?" (Sinha, 2007, p. 32). It is considerable that this question allows the viewer not only to go deeper and find out the novel's critical focus on the purposeful targeting of the society of Khaufpur, but also to hint at the postcolonial ecocriticism, which connects the environmental issues to colonized regions and ongoing forms of oppression.

Postcolonial ecocritic takes up the challenge of bringing together both mentioned issues. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2015) note, "Time magazine and Guha's book are both arguing the need to bring postcolonial and ecological issues together as a means of challenging continuing imperialist modes of social and environmental dominance" (p. 2). This framework helps explain how the novel critiques not just environmental harm, but the deeper colonial and capitalist systems that enable it. Thus, the Kampani's decision to build the factory in Khaufpur cannot occur accidentally; rather, it is a calculated exploitation due to the city's poverty and low literacy levels, as mentioned in the narrative, "most people round here can't read" (Sinha, 2007, p.134). By choosing such a marginalized location, the corporation was sure of the least resistance and accountability. This illustrates how environmental oppression is often based on structural inequalities, where disadvantaged populations bear the main impact of ecological harm for the benefit of more powerful entities like corporations or neocolonizers, in other words.

It is evident that the Amerikan Kampani holds significant power, and this power is used to control and oppress both the innocent people of Khaufpur and its environment. As Zafar, the backbone of Khaufpur seeking justice for the victims of

the factory disaster, explains, “Friends, the Kampani sitting in Amerika has everything on its side, money, powerful friends in the government and military, expensive lawyers, political masseurs, public relations men” (Sinha, 2007, p. 54). As a matter of fact, what these advantages do is to enable the corporation to dominate, equipping it with all the necessary means for control, shielding it from responsibility, and allowing continued exploitation. The narrator’s observation reflects how corporate power extends beyond economics, infiltrating politics, law, and public opinion to serve its interests. This overwhelming influence silences the voices of the oppressed and ensures that justice remains out of reach for victims of environmental destruction. In this way, Sinha critiques the global systems that protect industrial powers while allowing environmental harm and human suffering to go unpunished.

Another important matter is the hidden cooperation and connection between the corporate power, represented by the Amerikan Kampani responsible for the explosion, and the political authorities of Khaufpur. This alliance exposes how power structures collude to suppress justice, which is women's will, prioritize profit over people, which is the common feature of colonizers, and ignore the bodily harm and suffering of marginalized communities, particularly women. The environmental destruction caused by the corporation highlights themes central to postcolonial ecocriticism, emphasizing the ongoing exploitation and degradation. Moreover, the connection between these power structures exemplifies how they enable environmental harm while silencing the voices demanding justice, reflecting a deeper pattern of postcolonial oppression and ecological violence. The assertion of collaboration is supported by multiple pieces of evidence throughout the narrative. As an example, Zafar describes how an Amerikan woman, Elli, appeared in Khaufpur and purchased a building, which the Khaufpur Gazette admired as a charitable act. Local officials, including Zahreel Khan and the Minister for Poison Relief, were involved in “opening this so-called clinic” (Sinha, 2007, p.124). The hypocrisy between the authorities’ claim to support and follow Khaufpuri’s rights while praising the Amerikan representative is undeniable. The behaviour of the Khaufpuri authorities exemplified the well-known notion that actions speak louder than words. However, this facade of benevolence masks deeper collusion, as reflected in the accusation that “The government that is supposed to protect us manipulates the law against us” (Sinha,

2007, p. 274). It reveals the fact that political figures suppress any efforts for justice, and law enforcement officials overlook the environmental destruction by the Amerikan kampani.

Most significantly, there is another key scene that again reveals this collaboration. Zafar states,

"On that night when poisons came from the Kampanis factory, those who weren't then and there killed found themselves in a bad way with fainting, fits, pain, bloods coughed up, can't see, hardly can breathe etc. This thighs-of-fate was a medicine which was helping people get relief. News quickly spread, from all over the city people came to wait in line for injections, but suddenly the treatment was stopped. Some bigwig let slip that the Kampani bosses from Amrika had rung up their best friend the Chief Minister and told him to stop the thighs-of-fate. There was a huge row. Some doctors moved into a shack near the factory and began giving the injections. The police came, wrecked the shack, beat up the doctors. Zafar says that by giving relief this thighs-of-fate somehow also proved that the illnesses could pass to future generations. The Kampani was afraid of this knowledge getting out because it might cost them in a court case, so they had the thighs-of-fate stopped and many were lost who could have been saved" (Sinha, 2007, p.112).

Zafar's statement offers that the Kampani is able to stop a life-saving treatment through a call to the Chief Minister that shows the deep corruption and lack of accountability in postcolonial systems. It also highlights how state violence is used to silence truth and suppress justice, especially when that truth could expose environmental crimes and their long-term consequences.

Bribery, which plays a significant role in maintaining the power of cruel structures in societies in particular, Khaufpur, is seen in the story. The corruption of the power structure is uncovered when Zafar mentions, "How much had the kampani paid you? ,” Won any lotteries recently” (Sinha, 2007, p.268). Moreover, Elli, the Amerikan volunteer doctor who comes to help the victims, says, “Bribes are for politicians, police etcetera” (Sinha, 2007, p. 150). The declarations point to a system where officials may be easily influenced or deliberately inactive, allowing environmental destruction by the Amerikan Kampani to go unchallenged. Regardless

of how many years the Kauafpuri community has struggled for their rights, such corruption ensures that justice is delayed or denied, while corporate interests are safeguarded. Through this, a chance is given to readers to reflect on how systemic bribery is not only a powerful tool but also deepens the environmental and social exploitation of Khaufpur's vulnerable population.

The lack of systematic justice, care, and attention are central themes in *Animal's People*. Through Zafar's confrontation with the court, it is clear from his statement that the legal system failed to make powerful corporations accountable. "For the past eighteen years these Amerikan defendants have not shown up in this court... For the people of this city justice continues to be delayed and denied" (Sinha, 2007, p.52). It refers to how the legal process has become complicit in the oppression of Khaufpur's people. The authorities' failure to seriously prioritize the court case regarding the night of the explosion, along with their refusal to summon the responsible parties to defend themselves in court, serves as a clear mechanism reinforcing systemic irresponsibility and indifference. As also mentioned by Deepak Basumatary (2019), "A number of lives were lost on that tragic night; those who survived lived to tell the tale of horror and experienced the indifference of the government towards the victims who were rendered permanently disabled" (p. 64). Besides, Dr. Elli was frustrated by the indifference of local and national authorities when she wrote a letter to Zahreel Khan and the health ministry regarding help for the sick, but they simply ignored it by not responding" (Sinha, 2007, p. 150). This is the obvious action of systemic disregard for victims' health and well-being. She further asks, "The authorities who don't care? The rich who want to move on?" (Sinha, 2007, p.153), pointing to the social divide and apathy that enable continued suffering. Additionally, the Kampani tends to downplay the ongoing consequences of the disaster, preferring studies that suggest "Things here are normal, that the last effects of the disaster are vanished" (Sinha,2007, p.159). The Kampani's manipulation brings the idea that as if nothing happened and highlights how both local political structures and the corporation attempt to erase responsibility, altering the truth to protect their own interests while ignoring the long-term damage inflicted on the people and environment of Khaufpur.

Consequently, the suppression will of women by the authorities of Khaufpur and environmental destruction by the corporate express the truth that it is a right judgment to blame power structures. The damage is not limited to the moment of the disaster but continues to affect generations, which enables women to seek compensation. As stated by one mother who poured her poisonous milk onto the ground as a result of the explosion, “Our wells are full of poisons. It's in the soil, water, in our blood, it's in our milk. Everything here is poisoned. If you stay here long enough, you will be too” (Sinha, 2007, p.107). The deep infiltration of toxins into the natural and human systems of the city is what brings awareness. It is also repeatedly mentioned by Zafar, “Thousands of people say that their health's been ruined by your poison” (Sinha, 2007, p.69). When considering these voices, the long-term ecological and bodily harm reinforces the novel's focus on the oppression of both the environment and women as members of vulnerable societies like Khaufpur.

## **2.2. Female Characters' Will Under Patriarchal Control**

The struggles of key female characters of the novel, including Nisha, Ma. Franci, as well as Dr. Elli, leaves no question mark in mind that patriarchal systems seek to restrict, judge, and suppress women's will, attempting to control their desires, behaviors, and bodies. Each woman encounters various forms of societal expectation or rejection. As an example, Nisha is judged for her personal choice and suppressed for her pursuit of justice, Ma. Franci is asked to leave Khaufpur, which is against her will, and Dr. Elli faces different challenges as a foreign female doctor in Khaufpur society. All their experiences reflect how women's autonomy is often undermined in male-dominated societies, especially by controlling actions and silencing agency.

In patriarchal norms, women are not often entitled to make decisions independently or express their desires. This is exemplified in Nisha, whose personal choice, being in a relationship with Zafar, is judged through Animal's male perspective, “I used to wonder how Somraj felt about those two. His daughter, a Hindu girl not yet twenty, with a Muslim man twice her age, but whatever Somraj thought about it he kept to himself ”(Sinha, 2007, p. 33). Animal's critique shows that conservative societies examine women's choices, focusing on aspects like age and religious difference, while also hinting at the silent disapproval of her father. Nisha's

suppressed agency is not only depicted through social judgment but also through direct violence. Her effort for justice, “Papa, the Kampani has never turned up to the court, so how can the law reward us? In my lifetime, there's been no sign of it” (Sinha, 2007, p. 34), is absolutely in vain. Inspector Fatlu, a figure of patriarchal authority of Khaufpur, silences her will for justice through physical harm: “Fatlu swings his elbow. She falls to the ground, holding her face. Blood is coming from her mouth. He has hurt Nisha” (Sinha, 2007, p. 312). These moments enable the author to demonstrate the suppression of female voices, both symbolically and violently, reducing women to passive recipients of injustice.

The next significant character is Ma Franci, who is a former French nun and teacher and chooses to remain in Khaufpur after the chemical disaster, driven by her faith to serve the poor and sick. However, her belief that the disaster is divine punishment and her continued devotion are heavily influenced by the teachings of the church and the control of male religious figures. Her refusal to leave Khaufpur is not just a personal choice, but one reinforced by an internalized obedience to religious authority, showing how patriarchal systems can shape and even co-opt women's sense of will under the guise of faith and duty.

The control over her will is by both the religious convictions and the patriarchal religious authority she internalizes. This internalization is associated with what the feminist thinker Bartky argues. She offers psychological oppression, which occurs by “harsh domination over women's self-esteem” by institutions and systems, making individuals internalize the values and beliefs of a dominant system, in this case, patriarchal religion, so deeply that they begin to self-regulate and limit their own freedom without external force (1990, p.22). Her belief that the disaster is God's punishment shows how she has absorbed a worldview where suffering, especially of the marginalized, is justified through divine logic. Rather than challenging the corporate or governmental structures responsible for the disaster, she interprets it through the lens of guilt, sin, and divine will—an interpretation shaped by centuries of male-dominated theology. Women's consciousness is often shaped in ways that lead them to participate in their own subjugation. Ma Franci's will to serve is noble, but it is filtered through a patriarchal frame that ultimately dulls the political edge of her compassion. Instead of resisting injustice, she spiritualizes it.

The presence of Dr. Elli Barber offers a strong example of female will in the face of patriarchal and corporate power structures. Travelling to Khaufpur to provide medical help to the gas victims is the way she illustrates her agency. However, this decision is challenged by her ex-husband, Frank, who also serves as the Kampani's lawyer, first attempting to prevent her from going, then pressuring her to return (Sinha, 2007, p. 322). Elli also faces problems and boycott from male characters within Khaufpur, including Zafar, Somraj, and Animal, despite their roles as central protagonists. Her experiences underscore how women's decisions and contributions are often scrutinized or rejected, even by those ostensibly fighting for justice.

### **2.3. Resistance as a Response to Bodily and Environmental Harm**

Another feature of societies that are controlled by cruel power structures, where irrationality and inequality become bold, is the suppression of individuals' will, in particular, women. As a result of this oppression, resistance emerges as a natural reaction to both bodily and environmental harm. Resistance, which is a serious response to power and patriarchy, suggests an awareness of the individuals. According to Michel Foucault (1990), "Where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 95). This is a very true idea that resistance is a response to suppression or oppression, and it aligns with *Animal's People*, in which characters rise against structures of injustice where fairness gives its place to cruelty.

Analyzing a few victims of the disaster, such as Nisha's father, Ma. Franci and Aliya, is essential to understanding the bodily harm caused by the explosion. The bodily harm to innocent people is a significant aspect that the novel portrays with great effectiveness. Even though Nisha is not a direct physical victim of the chemical disaster, her emotional and psychological impact, along with her close connection to victims like her father, makes her a meaningful example. Nisha's father, Pandit Somraj, once known as the "Voice of Khaufpur" (Sinha, 2007, p.33), suffers from severe lung damage from the toxic exposure, silencing his singing voice and forcing him to abandon his music career, including concerts and his radio show, key parts of his identity. "Every time I start to sing I begin coughing and can't stop" (Sinha, 2007, p.156). The disaster also takes his wife and young son, leaving him emotionally shattered. Ma. Franci is another victim of the chemical disaster. She forgot all

languages except her mother tongue after that night. “Her mind was wiped clean of Hindi, and of Inglis, too” (Sinha, 2007, p.37). She also suffers from madness, which is mentioned in the novel. As referred by Animal, “ Ma in the full ecstatic tide of madness” (Sinha, 2007, p.333).

The young girl, Aliya, who lost her mother on that night of the chemical incident, is one of the most heartbreaking representations of innocence destroyed in *Animal's People*. She is raised by her grandparents, Huriya and Hanif, after the tragedy. Aliya suffers from a persistent cough and fever, later diagnosed as a throat infection caused by exposure to the toxic chemicals. Despite Dr. Elli's efforts to treat her, Aliya ultimately succumbs to her throat infection, highlighting the long-term and deadly health effects still endured by Khaufpur's residents. Her death is not merely a personal loss but the denial of a child's basic right to health and life. As a victim with no role in the disaster, Aliya becomes a symbol of the voiceless, those most vulnerable, yet most severely affected. Her story reveals how environmental harm intersects with bodily suffering, particularly for children, and reinforces the novel's critique of power structures that allow such tragedies to persist without accountability.

There is no doubt that one of the main issues under investigation in Sinha's writing is ecological harm. Sinha consistently discusses the environmental destruction that took place in Khaufpur, highlighting not only the importance of this matter but also the suffering of the Khaufpuris. As also stated by Suresh Feredrick, “Indra Sinha, through this novel, giving voice to the people affected by Bhopal tragedy. “(2019, p.381) The damage did not just end with the explosion but continues to harm the people and the environment. The factory, though abandoned, remains “full of chemicals which as we speak are poisoning the water of thousands more” (Sinha, 2007, p.52). The issue is still clearly ongoing, and this is where ‘Slow violence’ is introduced by Rob Nixon. According to him in his book, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, he defines slow violence as, “A violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.” (2011, p.2). The long-term environmental degradation and its lasting impact on Khaufpuri's people's health align with what he offers. Zafar even mentions that ‘The illness could pass to future generations’ (Sinha, 2007, p. 112), highlighting how deeply this violence is embedded in both nature and the lives of Khaufpuris.

The novel repeatedly links poisoned soil and water to the community's suffering: "Factory has poisoned their water and made them sick" (Sinha, 2007, p. 69). One of the victims, Shambhu, described as "a twice victim of the kampani," suffered both from inhaling gas on the night of the disaster and from drinking contaminated water afterward (Sinha, 2007, p. 147). These examples are clear evidence of the inseparability of body and environment. Nisha's statement, "The poison in Khaufpur's not only in the soil and water, it's in people's hearts" (Sinha, 2007, p. 196), is the depth of trauma that has affected the community's spirit. Through these layered depictions, Indra's narrative claims that resistance appears not just from physical suffering, but also from the psychological and emotional toll of long-term environmental injustice.

The resistance demonstrated by the female characters in response to their suppressed will and bodily harm is a crucial theme in the narrative. Nisha's activism reflects this resistance when she mentions to her father, "we'll have to fight for it on the streets" (Sinha, 2007, p. 34), emphasizing that rights must be actively claimed rather than passively received. Her persistent participation in protests and social efforts is an obvious form of resistance. Similarly, Dr. Elli's initiative in opening a clinic to provide medical aid to the sick represents a clear challenge to corporate negligence and systematic injustice. Her plea to her husband to "get the kampani to clean the factory" (Sinha, 2007, p. 322) further underscores her active opposition to dominant power structures. Lastly, Ma. Franci embodies resistance through her sacrificial actions to help the people during the factory fire that occurred at the end of the story, motivated by a spiritual conviction that it is time to stand against injustice and cruelty, which she refers to as Apokalis or Qayamat (Sinha, 2007, p. 340). Together, these women's acts of resistance illustrate different but interconnected responses to oppression and bodily harm within the narrative.

Fighting for rights while suffering from bodily and environmental harm for over twenty years is a rational form of resistance, especially when women of the society, like Khaufpur, encounter such trouble and feel it has nothing left to lose. This is what Khaufpuris experienced: "We have nothing to lose" (Sinha, 2007, p. 54). Although they continue to resist injustice, which is significant in keeping hope, identity, and dignity, I challenge Ziyad Khalifah Alkhalifah's claim that "The Power of Nothing" means "The Power of Everything". In his paper, he argues that the power

of everything contributes to Khafpuris' success in limiting, challenging, or defeating the power of hegemony (2022, p.233). Of course, this power of nothing is an effective element in motivating Khafpuris to follow resistance; however, the narrative's ending reveals that despite decades of struggle, all the efforts for justice ultimately led to nowhere, as it is also referred by Animal at the end of the narrative: "All things pass, but the poor remain. We are the people of the Apokalis. Tomorrow there will be more of us" (Sinha,2007, p.366). This clearly demonstrates that the injustice is still there, there is no compensation, and the legal case against Kampani is unresolved. The novel ends not with a resolution, as the power structures do not allow justice to happen.

#### **2.4. Ecofeminism: Connecting Gendered and Ecological Struggles**

The environmental crisis, which is the central focus of the author, is a powerful literary work to link with the oppression and struggles of the women of the story, which is what ecofeminism offers. The acts of violence and control are created because the patriarchal power structures simultaneously subjugate women's bodies and exploit the environment. Ecofeminism is particularly relevant in *Animal's People* for understanding the (female) characters' bodily suffering alongside the ongoing environmental destruction caused by the Kampani's toxic negligence in Khaufpur. At the heart of ecofeminist thought is the insight that the domination of women and nature share common roots in hierarchical, patriarchal thinking. Vandana Shiva, a foundational ecofeminist scholar and activist, emphasizes that the oppression of women and the degradation of the environment are connected through a patriarchal worldview that reduces both to objects for exploitation.

"The displacement of women from productive activity by the expansion of development was rooted largely in the manner in which development projects appropriated or destroyed the natural resource base for the production of sustenance and survival. It destroyed women's productivity both by removing land, water and forests from their management and control, as well as through the ecological destruction of soil, water and vegetation systems so that Nature's productivity and renewability were impaired" (2016, p. 43).

This is the exact incident that happened to Khafpuris's women by development projects, in which Shiva means patriarchal power structures. As a result, it leads to systemic violence, where the environment is treated as a resource to be conquered and controlled, just as women's bodies are subjected to social and physical control.

The dependency of the women's oppression on the environment's oppression or vice versa is evident as the double oppression manifests vividly in *Animal's People*. For example, Nisha's endless effort to criticize the Kampani and her role in organizing local resistance reflect an ecofeminist impulse, not only for human justice but also for the restoration of the poisoned environment. As a woman affected by the disaster's long-term consequences, her voice embodies the intersection of gendered suffering and ecological concern, challenging the patriarchal structures that devalue both. On one hand, there are also known and unknown female characters who put up with bodily harm that cannot be regarded separately from the poisoned environment around them. "In that house opposed lived Sahara, one day blood came from her womb, it was cancer, forty six years old she was, died. Nafisa, in her neck had swelling and pain. She could not lift her arm" (Sinha, 2007, p.109). Ma. Franci's madness and forgetfulness of all the languages she has known after the night of the explosion and Aliya's tragic death from a throat infection caused by chemical exposure illustrates how environmental harm directly translates into gendered bodily suffering. The suffering of the environment is inseparable from the suffering of its people, especially women who disproportionately experience the consequences of toxic pollution. Women's health, reproductive capacities, and social roles are particularly vulnerable in such contexts. On the other hand, Aliya's death marks a raw and tragic consequence of environmental violence that the novel does not allow to be spiritualized away. It is a direct indictment of systemic neglect, illustrating that the body and environment are inseparable victims of corporate and governmental abuse. The grief and injustice around Aliya's death underscore ecofeminism's argument that environmental issues are also gendered social issues, especially in communities like Khaufpur.

Another point that is essential to be considered is being aware of the historical and cultural interconnection between women and nature in India, which has made women and nature inseparable throughout history in India. In this respect, Vandana Shiva (2016) also provides another viewpoint and writes, " Women in India are an

intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practise. At one level nature is symbolized as the embodiment of the feminine principle, and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance" (p.83). This perspective reinforces the argument that environmental destruction is not only an ecological concern but also a gendered one. The lives and roles of women, particularly those whose survival is linked to the land, are directly affected when nature is harmed. Therefore, protecting the environment is greater significance, as it also means safeguarding women's agency, identity, and means of survival.

As postcolonial ecofeminist theories advocate, oppressive structures naturally tend to view and treat both women and nature as exploitable or secondary. Therefore, it is not surprising that they become involved in activities concerning this issue. This draws on what Val Plumwood points out,

"The dominant and ancient traditions connecting men with culture and women with nature are also overlain by some more recent and conflicting ones in which unchangeable 'male' essence ('virility') is connected to a nature no longer viewed as reproductive and providing but as 'wild', violent, competitive and sexual (as in the ideas of Victorianism, Darwinism and recent sociobiology), and 'the female' is viewed in contrasting terms as insipid, domestic, asexual and civilising" (2003, p.20).

Her analysis shows how patriarchal ideologies distort both gender and ecological relationships, reinforcing hierarchies that privilege male dominance and rationality over care, emotion, and interdependence. In this respect, the moment Nisha begs Zafar to give up the hunger strike reflects her emotional and relational approach, rooted in care. Zafar's refusal, driven by a belief in rational strategy and sacrificial victory, illustrates how patriarchal ideologies privilege male-coded logic over emotional insight, reinforcing the very hierarchies Plumwood critiques. As Animal narrated what Nisha mentioned to Zafar, "I am begging you, give this up" (Sinha, 2007, p.293).

The long-term destruction of natural resources such as water, air, and soil massively and deadly affects marginalized communities, while this harm is overlooked by dominant power structures. As Nixon observes, " In this book, I have sought to address our inattention to calamities that are slow and long lasting, calamities that

patiently dispense their devastation while remaining outside our flickering attention spans—and outside the purview of a spectacle-driven corporate media” (2011, p. 6). Ecofeminism builds on this insight by emphasizing that women, particularly in many Global South contexts, are primarily responsible for securing water and food, making them especially vulnerable to the effects of slow ecological violence. The ongoing contamination of water and soil illustrated in *Animal’s People*, and the intergenerational suffering it causes, mirrors Nixon’s concept and supports ecofeminist critiques of systemic environmental neglect.

By putting a theory of ecofeminism into practice, the resistance in *Animal’s People* gains high importance because the resistance depicted in the novel interweaves with ecofeminist visions of justice to seek to eliminate both patriarchal and environmental violence by recognizing that environmental justice and gender justice must be followed together. Resistance in *Animal’s People* functions as a dynamic mechanism to reclaim not only physical health or legal rights but also to bring back dignity and agency over both body and nature. The novel’s narrative choice to center marginalized voices, especially women, and to depict their bodily and ecological suffering as connected highlights the urgency of ecofeminist intervention. It calls readers to understand that to address environmental crises, we must also confront gendered power dynamics and vice versa. In this respect, Nisha’s protests, Ma. Franci’s actions and Elli’s medical activism all reflect an ecofeminist ethic of care and justice that crosses the boundaries between human and non-human.

In conclusion, the ecofeminist lens enriches the reading of *Animal’s People* by revealing how the novel’s portrayal of bodily harm, environmental destruction, and resistance are deeply interconnected. The oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are not incidental but structurally linked in patriarchal power systems. The novel’s characters embody the struggles to resist this domination, demanding an integrated justice that encompasses both gendered and ecological concerns.

### **3. NARRATIVITY, SIMILARITIES, AND DIFFERENCES IN *THE VEGETARIAN* AND *ANIMAL'S PEOPLE***

Although these two literary works, *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*, may seem very different at first glance, both in setting and style, the uniqueness, purpose, and similarities provide a comparative analysis. Therefore, this chapter tries to offer such an analysis of the narrative structures and techniques used in both novels, with a particular focus on the way these narratives represent themes of bodily oppression, environmental destruction, and resistance. Both books involve characters whose will is suppressed by power structures such as patriarchy, society, authorities, and oppressive systems, and whose stories are told through distinct narrative strategies that lead to the reader's understanding of resilience. Hence, this chapter begins with the examination of the narrative techniques each author uses, including point of view, ending, literary devices, and narrative effect. While Sinha unfolds the Khaufpur society and what they have been experiencing through the colloquial voice of its protagonist, *The Vegetarian* relies on a multi-perspective narrative that distances Yeong-hye's opinion and world. This contrast is not only stylistic, but it also plays a significant role in how each protagonist's resistance is perceived. Following this, the chapter explores the thematic parallels between the two works, particularly the recurring motif of suppressed will, resistance, and bodily autonomy. In both narratives, the body becomes a site of both control and protest, marked by patriarchal and environmental violence. Yet, the mode of resistance differs: where Animal vocalizes and mobilizes, Yeong-hye intends to refuse, withdraw, and transform. The chapter also considers how differences in narrative voice, tone, language style, and cultural context influence the portrayal of struggle and resistance. Eventually, it addresses the way both novels connect the suffering of the human body to that of the environment and nature, positioning ecofeminist readings as an essential interpretive tool.

#### **3.1. Narrative Styles and Techniques in Both Novels**

Plot, setting, and narration are core elements of any literary work, showing not only the way an author presents their artistic vision but also influencing the way readers engage with the characters and themes to comprehend the writer's message. In

both works, *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang and *Animal's People* by Indra Sinha, the writers construct their narratives through distinctive techniques formed by their cultural backgrounds and thematic concerns. By applying either first-person or third-person narration, each story creates a lens through which the reader experiences the protagonists' struggles. In addition, the endings of both books are ambiguous, unresolved, or open to interpretation, representing broader themes of identity and resistance. Using narrative techniques such as analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flashforward) as defines by Rimmon-Kenan, "An analepsis is a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told. The narration returns, as it were, to a past point in the story" (2002, p. 46), as well as interrupted chronology and shifts in perspective, further contribute to the emotional depth and complexity of both novels. The structural choices are not only technical; they are profoundly connected with the novels' exploration of suppressed will, bodily autonomy, and environmental crisis. Therefore, a close analysis of these narrative elements is essential for understanding how each novel functions not only stylistically and thematically but also to transform a personal or localized experience into a universally resonant story of power, resistance, and survival.

Perhaps one of the most striking narrative features of *The Vegetarian* is the absent voice of the central character, Yeong-hye. The novel is divided into three parts, and each part employs a clear narration that is carried out by three narrators. The first part is narrated by Yeong-hye's husband, Mr. Cheong; the second is told by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law; and finally, the last one is seen through Yeong-hye's sister's eyes. This third-person narrative provides the insight that there is no voice for the protagonist, which can be interpreted as no identity for her. As Gonzalez also mentions, "Each of the three parts that make up *The Vegetarian* presents a different narrative point of view, none of which is the protagonist's" (2019, p.166). Kang tends to make the readers' minds busy with questions, so where is her opinion? Why is there nothing regarding what she wants, how she thinks, and how she sees everybody or everything? By excluding her voice, the writer wisely once more reveals the unimportant position of women's will, body, and identity in the patriarchal Korean society. Moreover, the novel reveals what patriarchy solely desires; that is the reason

eating meat, a masculine habit, and being vegetarian, often a feminine habit, are central concerns that are repeated in the story a lot.

In *Animal's People*, the narrative unfolds through a distinctive first-person voice, narrated by the main character Animal himself. This choice of perspective is both political and personal. The novel is presented as a series of tapes transcribed by a journalist, giving Animal permission and control over how his story is told. His raw and colloquial voice addresses the listener (or reader), making the narrative intimate yet confrontational. Through this technique, Indra Sinha centers the experience of a marginalized person whose deformed body and social status place him on the fringes of society. Unlike *The Vegetarian*, where there is a lack of the protagonist's voice, *Animal's People* foregrounds the narrator's voice, letting him reclaim narrative agency. This first-person point of view highlights how trauma, identity, and resistance are filtered through subjective memory and lived experience. The informal, nonlinear storytelling and code-switching between Hindi and English enhance the authenticity of Animal's voice and reinforce the tension between local and global, powerless and powerful.

The way a story ends significantly influences the reader's emotional and intellectual engagement. In both novels, the events and endings are tied to the narrative structure, especially through the lens of narratology. Gerald Prince's, an American academic and literary theoretician, concepts of the unnarrated, nonnarrated, and disnarrated, which are new in the field of narrative theory, are relevant here, as they highlight the narrative choices concerning what is left unsaid, what is omitted, and what could have happened but did not. Undoubtedly, these techniques form the reader's interpretation, not only throughout the storytelling process but also in the final scenes of the novels. How a novel concludes plays a huge role in fostering a reader's overall understanding of its message, themes, and emotional impact. In both *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*, the endings are intentionally open, unsettling, and reflective of the fragmented realities the characters endure. That is the reason they can be examined through Gerald Prince's narratological framework.

There are unnarrated, nonnarrated, and disnarrated elements in *The Vegetarian*. For instance, In-hye's emotional suffering and the details of her life after discovering

her husband's affair are left untold. This functions as unnarrated. Similarly, while readers learn that In-hye's husband disappears after the affair is exposed, the novel offers no insight into where he goes, how he lives, or what he feels afterward, another clear example of the unnarrated. The nonnarrated aspects include the situation of women in the story, in particular, Yeong-hye. Her inner world is largely inaccessible, particularly in the first section, where she is seen only through the eyes of others. These narrative gaps reflect the silencing effect of societal restrictions and patriarchal pressure, which suppress women's voices and agency. According to Prince in his essay published in the first issue of *Style* in 1988, "The Disnarrated", which means the incidents or events in a story that did not or do not take place but are referred to as if they would or will happen. (1988, p.1). In this way, Yeong-hye's desire to transform into a tree is a strong example of the disnarrated events that never actually occur but are narrated as imagined possibilities. She repeatedly envisions a life free from human constraints, imagining herself as a plant, suggesting a longing to escape her body, her gender role, and society itself. Finally, the protagonist's fate remains ambiguous, which is regarded as an unnarrated ending because the narrative chooses to leave readers with little access to her final thoughts or intentions.

The ending of the story and Animal's emotional experience after the explosion, especially during his childhood and transformation into "Animal," is not narrated. Although he occasionally mentions the pain and humiliation of being treated like a freak or crawling on all fours, the full psychological and emotional trauma of those years is never directly said. These events must have happened; they shaped who he is, but they are skipped or only hinted at, making them clear examples of unnarrated content. In *Animal's People*, nonnarrated elements are visible in the political and legal dimensions of the story that remain outside Animal's direct knowledge. As an example, while the legal case against the Kampani plays a crucial role in the background, the actual courtroom proceedings, government negotiations, and corporate strategies are never fully narrated. Animal, as a marginalized figure, lacks access to these spaces, and the listener or reader only learns about them through second-hand accounts or vague mentions. The disnarrated possible events that are imagined but do not occur are Animal's wishes. What a different life he would have had if he had been born in America when Elli mentions to Animal, "I can assure you

that if you had been born in Amrika, you would not be running around on all fours.” (Sinha, 2007, p.140). If the explosion had happened, he could have stood on his own feet.

Obviously, both novels employ different narrative techniques that are common in the literary world, including literary devices such as symbolism and imagery. In *The Vegetarian*, Kang uses two all-time considerable symbols of patriarchy, such as meat, representing violence and dominance, and the bra, signifying control over women's bodies and appearance, to make the readers aware of the struggles that the main character is involved with in the strict society of Korea. Similarly, the imaginary city of Khaufpur symbolizes Bhopal, the real city that was the victim of environmental injustice in 1984, as well as the oppressed people. The Amerikan Kampani in the story is also a symbol for the Union Carbide, the corporation responsible for the tragedy, thereby underscoring themes of environmental injustice and the exploitation of marginalized communities. Imagery is the other element that enables writers to enrich their writing. Yeong-hye's dream is a powerful use of imagery, allowing readers to visualize blood, raw meat, and animal flesh. As Yeong-hye describes,

"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, bide behind the trees. Crouch down, don't let anybody see. My bloody bands. My bloody mouth. In that barn, what bad 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." (Kang, 2015, pp.19-20).

In contrast, *Animal's People* uses imagery more externally to emphasize the reality of environmental destruction and its human cost. The pollution, physical and emotional struggles of the characters are vivid through detailed descriptions of Animal, like the sights, smells, and sounds of the toxic setting. As Animal recalls, "On that night all sorts of people lost all kinds of things, lives for sure, families, friends, health, jobs, in some cases their wits" (Sinha, 2007, p.37) This immersive imagery enable readers to truly feel and experience the amount of suffering and reality of the story as much as the characters of the story did. In both novels, imagery serves as a narrative device that connects personal suffering to broader themes of systemic violence, whether patriarchal or environmental, highlighting the intimate link between will, body, and resistance.

The narrative techniques employed in *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People* influence the way readers engage with and interpret the stories. According to scholars, narratives' tense leads to the amount of readers' engagement, influence, and perception. For example, a study published in Collabra: Psychology found that the present tense in narratives' written often brings readers about to feel more immersed in the story world, experiencing events alongside the characters. The absence of Yeon-hye's voice, which is narrative distance, compels readers to become observers of her resistance, asking them to question the societal norms that define females' roles and lives. Conversely, *Animal's People* uses a first-person, confessional style that draws readers directly into Animal's world. His informal tone, local dialect, and emotional honesty create intimacy, making the reader a confidant rather than an outsider. This personal narration creates empathy, especially as Animal oscillates between vulnerability and defiance. Ultimately, these narrative choices deepen the emotional impact of each story, urging readers to reflect critically on power, marginalization, and resistance.

### 3.2. Similar Themes of Suppressed Will and Resistance Through Storytelling

Suppressed will and resistance are the common themes that are indicated and explored through storytelling in *The Vegetarian* as well as *Animal's People*. It is obvious that when will or speech is rejected, the body speaks; when official narratives dominate, the oppressed find their own stories, and that is the moment that the tension lies at the heart of both texts. Storytelling, which is the art of conveying ideas, events, and experiences through a story by using characters, settings, and a sequence of actions, in these two narratives, is not only a tool for recounting events but also for exposing and challenging power systems as the suppression of individual's will reveals the presence of force and violence and the action of resistance questions those power structures. The understanding of common themes, such as suppression and resistance, occurs through immersion in the story. As stated by Marie-Laure Ryan, "for a reader to be caught up in a story, the textual world must be accessible through effortless concentration" (2001, p. 96). And to reach that point, Kang and Sinha maintain a thoughtful focus on the text to depict the struggles of the main characters as a result of suppression by patriarchy in *The Vegetarian* and authorities in *Animal's People*, and their physical resistance. Absence, direct narration, or refusing to tell becomes thought-provoking. The important element is that suppressed will or voice do not vanish; they find alternate forms of expression, often outside dominant structures of language or authority. Both authors portray how individuals resist being limited or defined by power systems that attempt to silence them, and how autonomy can emerge even in constrained or unconventional forms. The works display the resistance against imposed institutional control and historical erasure by disrupting chronological narration, questioning narrative authority, or centering marginalized perspectives. In this respect, narrative form itself mirrors the struggle for agency, allowing suppressed will to express itself through body, resistance, or imaginative possibility.

As discussed in the first chapter, Yeong-hye's will to become a vegetarian after her horrible dream comes with a lot of challenges in a meat-eating and patriarchal society of Korea, where the male figures consider it a rebellion. Turning vegetarian and not wearing a bra are suppressed over and over through the story, especially by Yeong-hye's husband, father, and brother. In response, the act of resistance emerges.

The main character's resistance forms include withdrawal from social roles and avoiding meat-based foods, which is the rejection of the violence and control embedded in the patriarchal world. Moreover, her passivity and plant-like life become protest, one that communicates what cannot be spoken. This indirect, non-verbal storytelling is unsettling and powerful, revealing how suppressed will can still find expression through physical refusal.

Although Sinha's narrative presents a protagonist who resists not by withdrawing, but by taking control of the narrative voice, the same act of suppression and resistance is seen and felt. The novel is framed as a series of taped confessions, allowing Animal to directly address the reader in his own language, full of slang, vulgarity, humour, and pain. His narration actively pushes back against institutional voices: governments, journalists, all of whom effort to frame the story of the Bhopal-like disaster in polished, impersonal terms. Animal attempts to provide accurate information about what has occurred and how much pain Khaufpuri residents have been forced to live with without any manipulation by telling his story in a raw, personal voice. Even his disnarrated fantasies, imagining how life would be if he were born in America, or if he could stand upright, become tools of resistance, offering emotional depth to his suffering and challenging the way others see him. Through storytelling, he asserts not only memory but identity and agency.

Ultimately, both protagonists of the stories, Yeong-hye and Animal, resist the power structures that try to control them, Yeong-hye through withdrawal and transformation, Animal through raw self-expression. Though their methods differ, both characters reclaim power through narrative structure itself: what is told, what is withheld, and who has the right to speak. Storytelling becomes a significant medium to express all the truths.

### **3.3. Differences in Narrative Voice, Tone, and Style**

The examination of the difference in narrative voice, tone, and language style, along with focalization, which is introduced by the French literary theorist Gerard Genette in his book *Narrative Discourse an Essay in Method* and will be examined further, and the theme of animality, which are closely tied to them, is central to the

discussion when it comes to *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*. These elements shape the emotional impact of the narratives, affect the reader's access to every character's inner world, and reflect the unique ways in which each protagonist of the story resists control or asserts their identity. Therefore, it is important to analyze each of them in both novels.

The narrative voice in both contexts is one of the aspects that marks a clear and significant difference. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Kang obviously employs a third-person limited voice that is formal, restrained, and emotionally distant. It is worth emphasizing again that Yeong-hye's story is not narrated through her own voice but through the perspectives of those around her, especially male figures, which creates a sense of reinforcement for silencing her. This contrast in voice highlights how each novel presents its protagonist's struggle: one by direct and embodied narration, and the other by absence and suppression. Sinha, on the other hand, chooses a very different narrative strategy. The book is in a simple way of writing with Khaufpur words occasionally, and is narrated in the first person by Animal, whose voice is raw and emotionally charged. As seen from the beginning to the end, his language is filled with slang, sarcasm, and rebellion, drawing readers into his lived experience of suffering, anger, and resistance. Moreover, it is important to recognize that in Sinha's first-person narration, Animal's voice is personal because it is subjective and emotional, with all the necessary descriptions and details to build a close connection between narrator and audience. Thus, this personal voice challenges what Henrik Skov Nielsen (2004) argues about the impersonal voice in his article, *The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction*, where he offers that in literary fiction "one cannot be certain that it is the person referred to as 'I' who speaks or narrates, and therefore that (2) we need to posit an impersonal voice of the narrative. We can observe this phenomenon whenever something is narrated that the 'narrating-I' cannot possibly know, as happens in *Moby Dick*, *The Great Gatsby*, and other fictional narratives" (p.133). According to Nielsen, this happens when the narrating "I" reports events or insights they could not plausibly know, as observed in works like *Moby Dick* or *The Great Gatsby*. However, *Animal's People* presents a clear exception, as the narrator's voice remains grounded in personal experience because Animal is the direct victim of the explosion. Animal narrates only what he sees, feels, and remembers, making the

narrative voice personal undoubtedly. Considering the point that Animal's tapes are narrated by himself is essential in this regard. As Animal stated, " you are reading my words, you are that person. My job is to talk, yours is to listen. So now listen" (Sinha, 2007, pp.13-14). Paying attention to this statement once more helps the readers to be convinced that the narrator's voice, Animal, is personal.

Tone is another important element that is associated with the narrative voice. In the first book, *The Vegetarian*, the tone is often critical and subdued, shaped by male characters' perspectives and the pressure of the patriarchal society that creates an atmosphere of control, repression, and emotional distance. However, the tone is angry, bitter, and aggressive, tied to details and truths, in *Animal's People* because of the catastrophic incident and its irrecoverable damages and consequences. While the atmosphere created by Kang's novel is felt as violence, force, and coldness, it is emotional in *Animal's People* since the reader can easily identify with the story's characters, especially Animal.

It is notable that the language style in *The Vegetarian* is formal, polished, and often indirect, expressing the restraint and social repression in the story. The prose is carefully crafted, using subtle symbolism and descriptive detail to create a clear understanding of social and psychological tensions over women. Unlike the first book, *Animal's People* applies an informal, colloquial, and sometimes gritty language style. Animal, the narrator, uses slang, humor, and expressions, making the narration feel immediate and personal. This style captures the harsh realities of his life and his rebellious, unfiltered perspective.

According to Gerard Genette's framework of focalization, *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People* demonstrate significantly different narrative approaches. In *The Vegetarian*, specific characters like Yeong-hye's husband, brother-in-law, and sister are used by the narrator to show they have internal access to their own thoughts. Each section restricts knowledge to one character at a time, aligning with Genette's concept of "Internal focalization." The narrative is presented through the perspective of a character who knows only what they themselves know. (1980, p.189), but this internal focalization is also variable, limited, and unreliable by considering the protagonist's experience as Yeong-hye's inner world remains inaccessible. However, since Yeong-

hye herself never functions as a focalizer, many scenes in the novel resemble external focalization, which he defines,” in which the hero performs in front of us without our ever being allowed to know his thoughts or feelings” (p. 190). Consequently, the reader observes Yeong-hye from a detached and outsider perspective. This narrative choice reinforces the thematic silencing of the protagonist, as her subjectivity is mediated entirely through others' interpretation. In contrast, *Animal's People* is a clear example of fixed internal focalization. The story is narrated absolutely through Animal's first-person narration, allowing the reader not only to have direct access to his thoughts, emotions, and perceptions but also to fully grasp what is happening. The narrative remains confined to Animal's knowledge and experience, discussing a subjective and embodied point of view. This consistent internal focalization enhances the reader's immersion in Animal's world and emphasizes his resistance and distinct voice. The contrast between these two focalization strategies highlights each novel's thematic concern with voice, power, and narrative control.

There is also an important factor related to narrative voice that differentiates between *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People*: animality, which influences the tone and style in both writings as well. Animality, put simply, refers to the characteristics, qualities, or conditions of being an animal. In literature, it gains a deeper meaning as it explores how association with animals, either physical or symbolic, affects identity and resistance. Sinha uses animality to highlight how humans are dehumanized by being treated or compared like animals, and it is clear in the protagonist's experience of being called “Animal” by children and people on the street: “The orphanage kids started calling me Animal one day” (Sinha, 2007, p.15). As Batalla insightfully claims and notes, “By playing with the name of the main character, Sinha is not only claiming justice and rights for the affected people in Khaufpur – and Bhopal – but also for communities and collectives treated as inferior, such as animals” (2019, p.126). As a matter of fact, one of the reasons that the author applies animality is, on one hand, to give a raw and non-human point of view on suffering, survival, and resistance. On the other hand, to help readers understand the issues and struggles of Animal and the people of Khaufpur. Kenneth Shapiro (2020) claims, “The HAS approach keys in on the presence and influence of nonhuman animals (hereafter, animals) as a way of looking at and understanding the world” (p.799). Shapiro's perspective aligns with

*Animal's People*, where the protagonist's identity as "Animal" becomes a central metaphor for dehumanization. This is while the animality lens is not employed in *The Vegetarian*; instead, the novel focuses more on human bodily transformation, being a plant-like life, which is tied to ecofeminist readings, rather than an identification with animal. In addition, this is an appropriate moment to refer to the novel's title, which was intentionally chosen by the writer. The title, *Animal's People*, is not just the protagonist's name; it also highlights the dehumanized status of Khaufpuris. According to Michael Lundblad, "animality studies" explore how the concept of animality is used to mark and marginalize certain human groups (2009, p.500). In this light, Sinha's title suggests how the affected individuals of the disaster (the "people" of "Animal") are perceived and treated as less than human, animalized, in other words.

### **3.4. The Role of Body and Environment in Shaping Each Narrative**

Undoubtedly, one of the unique aspects of both narratives is how the authors cleverly use the body to highlight it as a site of both suffering and resistance. It is fascinating that the body can simultaneously function in both roles, as a site of suffering and a tool of resistance, and the novels clearly demonstrate it. The protagonist of Kang's story is denied the right to make independent decisions in a patriarchal and social norms, which is Kang's concern. As a result, control is exerted over every part of her life, such as eating habits, lifestyle, and most importantly, her body. While her body initially becomes a site of suffering due to that control, it gradually transforms into a medium of resistance through her refusal to eat meat, wear a bra, have intercourse with her husband, and ultimately her desire to become a tree. As illustrated by Yeong-hye's statement, "I don't eat meat" (Kang, 2015, p.30), and her husband's observation, "but what troubled me more was that she now seemed to be actively avoiding sex" (Kang, 2015, p.24). In Sinha's *Animal's People*, the body is also significant to all the characters, especially Animal's suffering, identity, and resistance, but in a slightly different way. The central character's body, deformed and victimized by the chemical disaster in Khaufpur society, is an evident source of pain, shame, and marginalization. His bent spine and animal-like posture prevent him from being regarded as fully human in the eyes of Khaufpuris. As mentioned by Animal, "The other kids started shouting 'Jaanvar, jungli Jaanvar.', wild Animal" (Sinha, 2007,

p.15). However, Animal embraces it; he reclaims the name “Animal” and builds an identity around his physical condition by accepting and repeatedly introducing himself as Animal: “I’m an animal” (Sinha, 2007, p.87). His damaged body becomes not only a reminder of corporate and governmental neglect but also a form of resistance and protest, for instance, showing up in the court and taking an active part in public protest, challenging dominant definitions of cruelty, injustice, and normality. It is also described by Animal, “The case is supposed to start in court two, Naya Adalat, at ten o’clock. Quarter to ten we are outside, half past ten we’re still waiting. There’s just Nisha, Zafar and me” (Sinha, 2007, p.51).

The environment has a key notion and plays a crucial role in both literary works, functioning both as context and as an active force that powerfully shapes the narrative. By analyzing the first role of the environment, which simply means surrounding conditions, the patriarchal and conformist Korean society in *The Vegetarian* serves as the contextual background that restricts individual freedom, particularly for women, and reinforces traditional gender norms that drive the protagonist’s psychological and physical withdrawal. In *Animal’s People*, the environment as context is illustrated through the depiction of Khaufpur, a polluted and poor city shaped by an industrial disaster and power structures. This setting provides more than just background; it defines the social, political, and physical conditions under which the characters live, particularly those like Animal, whose identity and suffering are truly tied to the environmental catastrophe.

In both *The Vegetarian* and *Animal’s People*, the environment also functions as an active force that determines the characters' lives and struggles. In the book *The Vegetarian*, the rigid, patriarchal social environment of Korea exerts constant pressure on Yeong-hye, enforcing conformity and suppressing her will, turning her body into a conflict zone where societal control is physically imposed. Conversely, in *Animal’s People*, the environment takes on a more literal and catastrophic force through the polluted, toxic city devastated by an industrial disaster. This portrayal includes the critique of the impact on Animal’s physical condition, identity, and community, symbolizing both oppression and the site of resistance. Thus, in both novels, the environment is a dynamic force that directly influences the narrative’s trajectory and the protagonists’ experiences of suffering and defiance.

The physical effects and experiences of characters of each narrative, such as suffering, resistance, and transformation, are visibly shaped by social or physical environments, which is the obvious display of the interconnection between body and environment. In this respect, it is essential to discuss again that social and patriarchal pressure, which is dominant in South Korea, the environment, in other words, define Yeong-hye's body by imposing force, limitation, and restrictions and this force makes Yeong-hye break it by not accepting the imposed roles and her physical transformation desire, and as result, resistance appears as a response and reaction which is the whole argument of this thesis. In fact, her body becomes a site where social pressure is both exerted and resisted, and this is the important issue that the text emphasizes. The connection is even more direct and literal in *Animal's People*. The industrial explosion that poisons and pollutes Khaufpur leaves its mark on both nature and the individual's bodies. The disaster also symbolizes social oppression. Animal's deformed spine, poisoned water, and soil all embody the long-term violence inflicted by the various power structures in Khaufpur. As a result, in both works, the body is not a separate matter from its environment; it is shaped by it, ruined by it, because all characters are victims of their surroundings, and finally, it becomes a medium of resistance against it.

Moreover, from an ecofeminist perspective, the direct connection between environmental harm and bodily oppression gains even more significance. Bodies are not only determined by external forces but also serve as spaces where resistance or suffering is enacted in both narratives. Yeong-hye's rejection of food, sexuality, and human norms parallels her symbolic alignment with nature, her willingness to be a tree, challenging patriarchal worlds as Kang draws attention to transformation. Likewise, female characters of *Animal's People*, who have been examined in the second chapter, as well as Animal's body, all scarred by industrial catastrophe, embody the consequences of systematic and ecological violence. These characters' physical conditions point out the way the destruction of the environment and the subjugation of vulnerable bodies are highly interconnected.

The final point regarding the interconnection of body and environment is physical transformation seen in both works. This physical transformation serves as a strong reflection of internal and external conflict. Yeong-hye's wish to be a plant is

not just metaphorical but linked with emotional repression within the family and society, where norms are unbreakable. However, *Animal's People* presents the transformation in a physical sense. His damage is visible evidence and a record of systemic cruelty and industrial injustice. While Yeong-hye seeks transformation as a way to free herself from the force and unnecessary interference of the patriarchy, society, and family in her life, Animal is forced to live with it as a constant reminder of suffering, yet he recovers it as part of his identity and resistance. In both cases, the body becomes a canvas for the consequences of larger oppressive systems.

The fact that the body and environment not only construct the characters' experiences but also affect the tone, structure, and direction of both texts should be taken into consideration since it is central to the narrative. Kang, in her novel, shifts the storytelling away from a traditional plot into a fragmented structure through the perspective of others by Yeong-hye's bodily refusal and retreat. Her physical examples of resistance assist the tone of the story toward emotional distance, tension, and despair. Similarly, in Sinha's book, Animal's damaged body and the polluted environment drive the narrative. His angry and sarcastic voice forms the tone of the novel and shows his inner suffering. The physical evidence of his condition, like deformity and pain, provides the chance to become a narrative tool that depicts what words alone are unable to completely explain. In this sense, the body becomes a kind of visual language, where, as the saying goes, a picture is worth a thousand words. In both narratives, suffering and resistance are not only told through events but embodied in the characters, enabling the narrative to speak through physicality and voice.

## CONCLUSION

The central claim of this thesis is that how power structures suppress women's will, leading to bodily harm and resistance as a reaction in the selected works of Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*. This argument is explored through a theoretical and literary study of the two narratives, focusing on how setting, characters' struggles, and textual evidence highlight the mechanism of control and coercion imposed on women. In both texts, the body becomes a site where harm and resistance are physically manifested. To examine these dynamics, the thesis applies feminism and ecofeminism as its main theoretical frameworks. The feminist lens revealed the systemic control over female bodies, while ecofeminism highlighted the link between women's oppression and environmental degradation. This study draws on key scholars such as Sandra Lee Bartky, Susan Bordo, Judith Butler, Carol Adams, Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, and Rob Nixon to analyze both gendered and ecological dimensions of oppression.

A feminist reading of *The Vegetarian* reveals Kang's critique of South Korean Patriarchy, where men are central and dominant, as indicated through the protagonist's journey, not only her decision to become a vegetarian, but also her refusal to conform, whether in diet, dress, or gender roles. Rather than simply presenting vegetarianism as a personal choice, Kang aligns Yeong-hye's rejection of meat and femininity with broader feminist and ecofeminist critiques. Her body becomes a site of resistance against male dominance, as theorized by Bodro and Butler, and her transformation into a plant-like state ultimately symbolizes not only a radical withdrawal but also a way to free herself from a violent, patriarchal society. This conclusion reaffirms how the novel illustrates the interconnectedness of gendered oppression and ecological alienation, a key concern of ecofeminist thought.

*Animal's People* is a thought-provoking and emotional narrative that foregrounds environmental devastation and systemic neglect. The novel aligns with feminist and ecofeminist theories through its portrayal of violence and destruction enacted by corporate powers, political authorities, and patriarchal control. Female characters of the story, such as Nisha, Ma Franci, and Dr. Elli, experience various forms of silencing and subjugation, revealing how women's agency is constrained

within Khaufpur, the city of injustice. As examined in this thesis, decisions made for and about these women demonstrate a wider patriarchal order, resonating with Foucault's notion that resistance arises wherever power is exerted.

The resistance shown by the female characters, whether through protests, court appearances, or demands for clean water and medical treatment, illustrates both a fight for justice and a reclaiming of agency. Although their efforts ultimately fall short, their ongoing struggle and unity show strength and determination to keep fighting despite setbacks.. Importantly, the novel's depiction of intertwined gendered suffering and environmental collapse opens space for ecofeminist interpretation, as theorists like Vandana Shiva argue that the exploitation of women and nature share a common root in patriarchal systems, particularly within contexts like India.

The analysis of narrative voice and style showed the way storytelling shapes expressions of resistance. Yeong-hye's muted, fragmented narration reflects the invisibility and silencing of women under patriarchy, whereas Animal's direct, raw first-person account provides an active, vocal resistance that exposes injustice. These differing narrative approaches deepen the reader's understanding of the characters' struggles and defiance.

By comparing the two literary texts, this study illuminated shared themes of suppressed will and resistance, alongside distinct narrative techniques that influence how these themes are conveyed. This comparison reinforces the thesis that oppressive power systems target both gender and environment, producing bodily and ecological harm that sparks diverse forms of protest.

Ultimately, this study reveals that the female body and the natural world function as interconnected sites of control and resistance within patriarchal and systemic power dynamics. Both *The Vegetarian* and *Animal's People* illustrate how dominant structures exert dominance through physical, social, and environmental violence. Resistance, whether through bodily refusal, protest, or transformation, emerges as a response to this oppression, even as justice remains out of reach. Recognizing these entangled struggles enriches both feminist and ecofeminist critique and underscores the urgency of addressing the intersection of gendered and ecological harm in literature and society.

This thesis presents a unique and meaningful contribution to the literary discussion through critical feminist and ecofeminist perspectives. Although *The Vegetarian* has to do with feminism and ecofeminism as examined, *Animal's People* is less frequently associated with such lenses as many readers assume that *Animal's People* merely focuses on environmental crises. However, this study argues that the novel can also have to do with the mentioned theories by considering women's will and suffering, the bodily and environmental harm, and finally the act of resistance, all of which are due to dominant power structures in Khaufpur, including Amerikan Kampani, authorities, and even the male characters of the story. Approaching the novels from this perspective makes both works important representations to be investigated as case that encourages readers to view both of the literary narratives in light of those theoretical frameworks.

The theories of feminism and ecofeminism challenge patriarchal and force-driven societies. They aim not only to bring awareness about the oppression of both women and the environment, as elements of fertility and survival, but also to shift dominant (males') perspectives on the interaction with them. As essential foundations of life, they bring clarity, vitality, and purpose wherever they are present. Therefore, it is time to restore harmony with both women and nature, and to commit to treating and protecting them with the respect and care they truly deserve, as Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* offer valuable insights and views into this necessity through an in-depth study.

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## **SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION**

This study offers valuable insight into how patriarchal and oppressive power structures continue to impact women's autonomy and bodily agency. By analyzing the works of Han Kang and Indra Sinha, the research sheds light on the psychological and physical consequences of societal control over women's will. These findings can contribute to public discussions on gender-based violence, body politics, and the need for more inclusive and empathetic social frameworks.

Through feminist and ecofeminist lenses, the thesis emphasizes the interconnectedness of gender, environment, and resistance. This approach can be useful in educational and activist contexts encouraging deeper understanding of how resistance emerges as a response to injustice or inequality. The study may inspire further conversations and actions toward gender equity and environmental awareness in both academic and social spheres.