

Discriminatory Gender Roles And The Objectification Of Women In Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982

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Abstract

The current study tackles the interconnectedness between discriminatory gender roles and the construction of gender identity in the Korean novel Kim Jiyoung Born 1982 utilizing Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory. The study designates a sequence of social, ethical, physical, and psychological factors that determine gender roles and enhance gender discrimination, showing how patriarchal misogyny, the Confucian system, and gender roles are interconnected. The study draws on various resources to illustrate how gender is conceptualized and how female identity is constructed in patriarchal societies. It exposes the injustice and inequality women endure in the misogynist, patriarchal South Korean society and shows how multiple factors can affect Korean women's lives. The study sheds light on the oppressive gender roles assigned to Korean women by patriarchal cultural standards. It investigates how sexism, misogyny, and the Confucian system intensify gender dichotomy and perpetuate the discriminatory hierarchical structure of Korean society. This investigation is accomplished by applying an analytical feminist critical approach. Adopting such an approach helps allocate the moral, societal, religious, and psychological factors underneath the versatile, multifarious, and dynamic correlation between oppressive gender roles and patriarchal misogyny. The study aims to enhance the perception of the origins of oppression in the patriarchal Korean culture. It proposes the inevitability of deconstructing the male/female dichotomies, establishing complementarity, empowering women to transcend their status quo, recognizing humanity as an integral whole, and representing women as equal to men.

Keywords: Confucianism; Feminism; Gender Identity; Gender Role; Gender Performativity; Masculinity; Maternity; Misogyny; Oppression; Patriarchy.

I- Theoretical Framework:

I. I. Conceptualizing Feminism

In The Dictionary of Feminist Theory, Maggie Humm (1989) argues that it would be "misleading to offer precise definitions of feminism because the process of defining is to enlarge, not to close down, linguistic alternatives" (p.14). Likewise, in Radical Feminism Today, Denise Thompson (2001) defines feminism as "a social enterprise, a moral and political framework concerned with

redressing social wrongs" (p. 7). Moreover, Patti Lather (1992) proposed a definition of feminism as "a social structure that argues the centrality of gender in the shaping of our consciousness, skills, and institutions as well as in the distribution of power and privilege" (p. 91). David Snow et al. (2004) suggested another definition of feminism. They defined the movement as "efforts to challenge and change gender relations that subordinate women to men"(p. 577). Suzan Mendus (2005) envisages feminism as a "collection of

movements and ideologies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, and social rights for women"(p. 291). Furthermore, A. K. Singh (2011) comprehensively defines the term as:

both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Feminist inquiry provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural, and political phenomena. Important topics for feminist theory and politics include the body, class and work, disability, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work, and sexuality (p. 1).

Hence, feminism, in general, can be conceived as a group of ever-renovating movements seeking the universal goal of achieving equality and egalitarianism in all areas of women's rights. It defies the persistently inflicted marginalization, and injustice imposed upon women by discriminatory patriarchal cultural standards. It investigates the oppression and subjugation of women by tyrannical patriarchal systems. Patriarchal societies impose subordinate status on women and implement misogynistic views about them. The institutionalized objectification of women enhances the normalization of female oppression and transforms women into a historically oppressed subaltern group. They are regarded as incompetent, less intelligent instrumental sexual objects whose stereotypical gender roles are confined to recreation and house chores. If women do not adhere to the previously established codes and concepts, reject their stereotypical gender roles, and refuse to assimilate the role of the victim by submitting to the patriarchal code, they are labelled as impaired. Simone De Beauvoir (1949) asserts:

The woman herself recognizes that the universe as a whole is masculine; it is men who shaped it, ruled it, and who still today dominate it; as for her, she does not consider herself responsible for it; it is understood that she is inferior and dependent; she has not learned the lessons of violence, she has never emerged as a subject in front of other members of the group; enclosed in her flesh, in her home, she grasps herself as passive opposite to these human-faced gods who set goals and standards.(The Second Sex, p. 654)

Feminists struggle to break the oppressive patriarchal heritage, which relegated them to a low status in all aspects of life. A variety of movements of feminist ideology and theory have developed over the years. They vary in goals, strategies, and affiliations. They often overlap; some feminists identify with several branches of feminist thought. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, feminism became a substantial force to exterminate women's subjugation. It strived to obliterate the discriminatory treatment of women in all domains, free them from the political, social, economic, and cultural modes of oppression, and restore their autonomy and dignity. Feminism has undergone three distinctive phases of development known as the Feminist Waves. They aimed to interrogate gender inequalities, bring change, and eliminate the imbalanced men-women relationships. These waves have an insightful collision on women and gender studies as there were several agitations for social change. According to William L. O'Neill (1969): "The term woman movement appears in the late nineteenth century to describe all the public activities of women, whether directly related to feminist goals or not"(p. x). Margaret Walters (2005) declares, "In the 20th century, first-wave

feminists had demanded civil and political equality" (p. 137). First Wave Feminism focused on legal rights and women's suffrage: "Women's Rights and Women's Suffrage movements were the crucial determinants in shaping this phase, with their emphasis on social, political and economic reform". Selden (2005) *The Second-Wave Feminism*, on the other hand, was dominant during the late 1960s and early 1970s (p. 117). Its emblematic beginning is "assumed to be 1968, but a change in emphasis can be detected throughout the 1970s from the earlier liberal agenda of equal pay and opportunities to a broader set of political goals" (Gillis et al. 2004, p. 38). It "concentrated on, and gave great prominence to, sexual and family rights for women" (Walters 2005, p. 137), and represents the women's liberation movement. The third phase of feminism began in the mid-1990s and was informed by postcolonial and post-modern thinking. The ultimate aim of a feminist consciousness of this particular phase is to make the experience and insights of women available to the entire world. Third Wave Feminism "transgresses boundaries through deconstructing the presumption of a gender binary or the conventional ways of doing politics." (Gillis et al. 2004, p. 38)

Feminism is a movement to end women's oppression and challenge the patriarchal assumption that sex and gender are binary opposites by defying the stereotypical gender roles and elevating female identity. Gerda Lerner (1986) states, "This coming-into consciousness of women becomes the dialectical force moving them into action to change their condition and to enter a new relationship to a male-dominated society" (*The Creation of Patriarchy*, p.5). In "Patriarchy and Inequality: Towards a Substantive Feminism", Mary Becker (1999) states that,

Human beings, whether men, women, or children, do not flourish when hyper-masculinity is glorified and traditionally feminine qualities (such as care,

caretaking, and valuing relationships) are denigrated. Nor do human beings flourish when all males are pressured to adopt hyper-masculine attributes and repress feminine ones, and all females are pressured to adopt traditionally feminine attributes and repress masculine ones (p. 23).

In conclusion, Feminism is the doctrine that acknowledges women's systemic disadvantage in society, defends women's rights, and advocates women's social, political, and economic equality with men. It is mainly concerned with investigating gender inequality by exploring women's social roles and experiences. It is based on the conviction that women are unjustifiably oppressed, subjugated, and subordinated to men. Feminists struggle to oppose the institutions that hold women back and examine the reasons behind the oppression of women.

I. 2. Exploring the Concept of Gender/ Gender Roles

In *The Oxford English Dictionary*, gender is defined as: "the state of being male or female as expressed by social or cultural distinctions and differences, rather than biological ones; the collective attributes or traits associated with a particular sex, or determined as a result of one's sex". While sex is a biological notion, gender, on the other hand, is a cultural conception that indicates the societal differences assigned to human beings according to their sex. In other words, the terms "sex" and "gender" are not identical identifiers; whereas sex designates biological characteristics distinguishing males and females, gender stands for social and cultural traits of masculine and feminine behaviour. Hence, the dominant culture and socialization process represents the foundation for constructing traditional gender stereotypes, discriminatory gender roles, and gender identity.

In patriarchal societies, "the pervasiveness of gender over all other social categories is demonstrated. Gender is one of the first social categories that [individuals] learn" (Kachel et al. 2016, p. 2). Therefore, awareness of gender stereotypes constructs their "self-concepts in line with the gender stereotypes they have internalized" (Kachel et al. 2016, p. 2). Women's culturally ascribed subservient and inferior status in patriarchal societies lies underneath all aspects of social interaction and is perpetuated by the social system and the economic structure. Accordingly, Feminism aims to investigate the development of social inequalities by exploring how and when gender and other types of differences become entangled in cultural practices and social problems. In *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Gerda Lerner (1986) declares that "it is gender which has been chiefly responsible for fixing women's place in society" (p. 21). This fixed place is materially and culturally constructed. Elucidating the marginalized status of women in patriarchal societies, Dworkin (1974) states that: "Women are oppressed as women, regardless of class or race; some women have access to significant wealth, but that wealth does not signify power; women are to be found everywhere but own or control no appreciable territory; women live with those who oppress them" (p. 23).

The oppression of women is profoundly implanted in all realms of the patriarchal culture. Moreover, the structure of the social and cultural order in patriarchal societies perpetuates the objectification of women. Accordingly, the objectification of women is a profound, persistent, and universal issue; women are subjugated, objectified, colonized, exploited, and oppressed by the capitalist patriarchal system. According to Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies (2014) "the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women that prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones" (p. 28) is universal. The typical binary opposition advantages men at the price of the

marginalization of women. The patriarchal ideology authorizes oppression based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species. Hence, exposing women's oppressive and degenerating status would help better perceive societal injustices and encourage support and commonality.

Patriarchal societies allocate rigid gender roles for men and women, where men enjoy power and authority. In contrast, women are marginalized, objectified, and forced to adhere to the discriminatory gender roles pre-established by patriarchal cultural standards. Gerda Lerner (1986) defines gender as "the cultural definition of behavior defined as appropriate to the sexes in a given society at a given time. Gender is a set of cultural roles. It is a costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance." (*The Creation of Patriarchy*, p.238) On the other hand, Kate Millett (2000) argues that:

Sex role assigns domestic service and attendance upon infants to the female and the rest of human achievement, interest, and ambition to the male. The limited role allotted to the female tends to arrest her at the level of biological experience. Therefore, nearly all that can be described as distinctly human rather than animal activity (in their own way, animals also give birth and care for their young) is largely reserved for the male (p. 26).

The above quotation elucidates the conception of what Gerda Lerner (1986) calls sex-gender system, which "refers to the institutionalized system which allots resources, property, and privileges to persons according to culturally defined gender roles. Thus, it is sex which determines that women should be child-bearers; it is the sex-gender system which assures that they should be child-rearers" (*The Creation of Patriarchy*, p.239).

The tarnished chain of gender archetypes that women strive to obliterate is sturdily locked. These gender archetypes exist due to the patriarchal assumption of the supremacy of one gender over the other in the hierarchal social structure; while men occupy the apex of the hierarchy, women are placed at the bottom. The process of subordinating, oppressing, and excluding women is as long as history. The inferior status to which women are reduced has created a stereotypical image of female inferiority and male superiority. De Beauvoir (1949) states, "No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine" (*The Second Sex*, p. 330). This superior/inferior assumption has exceeded the domestic realm and familial institutions, significantly excluding women and perpetuating absolute male control in the public domain. According to this assumption, "all women [must] subjugate themselves to wiser and superior male figures" (Fox 2002, p. 18). This "social conditioning does contribute to traditional gender roles, and the resulting unfairness is deeply embedded in the structure of human society" (Hurley 2007, p. 98). Hence, gender manoeuvres in all aspects of society and the male/ female experiences are constructs of our social institutions (Andersen & Hysock 2009). Being aware of the harmful consequences of gender discrimination, feminists strive to recognize, defy, and eliminate the inequitable gender roles. Judy El-Bushra (2000) suggests that,

Gender should not be seen as the major axis of social differentiation. Rather, we should understand people's experience of gender differentiation as linked to their experience of other forms of social difference, such as those of age, race, and class. This understanding of people's identities as complex and nuanced

permits closer understanding of power relations in general and the illumination of contradictions and injustices inherited in those relations (p. 61).

I. 3. Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory

Gender Performativity Theory was first introduced by the feminist philosopher Judith Butler in her book *Gender Troubles: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, where she argues that gender is a socially and culturally constructed performance. She proclaims that "gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing" (*Gender Trouble*, p.34). In her book *Undoing Gender*, Judith Butler (2004) defines gender as "the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (p. 43). Butler argues that gender is not fixed or predetermined but is formed with time and the repetitive actions one performs. ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," p. 519) According to this definition, gender is defined by the actions constantly performed. These actions could be either masculine or feminine, and society's cultural standards set these attributions. Judith Butler suggests that people should regard gender as "a corporeal style, an 'act,' as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning" (*Gender Trouble*, p.139). In this respect, society conventionally conceives gender as an identity equivalent to sex and sexuality. Butler argues: "Discrete genders are part of what "humanizes" individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution", p. 464). Hence, gender is neither inherited nor owned; on the contrary, it is an unremitting "performance" of

binary opposition between masculinity and femininity.

Inspired by Butler's theory, many intellectuals have attempted to define gender performativity. In his book *Performativity and Performance*, Andrew Parker (1995) states that gender performativity concerns "the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes" (p. 2). Chris Brickell (2003) suggests that the Gender Performativity Theory "understands gender as a performance or accomplishment achieved in everyday life" ("Performativity or Performance," p. 159). In his essay "Masculinities, Performativity, and Subversion: A Sociological Reappraisal", Brickell (2005) offers a more specific definition of gender performativity. He explained that "performativity involves subsequent repetition or citation of gender norms. This citation takes place under conditions of cultural constraints... which compel some appearances of masculinity and femininity while prohibiting others"(p. 26). Lindsay Wilson elucidates Butler's Gender Performativity Theory as follows:

The theory is that gender and gender roles are elaborate social performances that one puts on in day-to-day life, the hegemonic versions of which underlay popular conceptions of "man"/"masculine" and "woman"/"feminine." If it is, indeed, the case that "woman" and "man" are performed and reinforced in everyday life, then it is not just our own self-conception but others' reaction to our gender performances that shapes gender identification. The constant reduction of women to objects seems to serve as an important mechanism to reinforce the gendering of persons who are or are assumed to be female as "women"- persons who are properly in heterosexual

relationships with persons gendered as "male." Persons gendered as women are also, hegemonically speaking, "supposed" to be feminine and derive self-definition from the way in which they subscribe to feminine norms. Yet those norms frequently relegate them to secondary or submissive roles (Wilson 2015, p. 1).

In "Gender Performativity," Miriam Meyerhoff (2015) propounded that gender performativity is "how we position ourselves as gendered or sexual beings in relation to others is achieved through repetition and enactment of these activities. The fact that our community sees these acts as gendered is what makes them so" (p. 2). Furthermore, in "The Construction of Gender: Judith Butler and Gender Performativity", Li He (2017) conceives gender performativity to be "not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual... the gender is not innate, or what we have, but depends on our behaviour" (p. 684).

In their essay "Spaces that Matter: Gender Performativity and Organizational Space," Melissa Tyler and Laurie Cohen (2010) explicate that "underpinning our performance of gender is the desire to project a coherent and compelling identity, one that is recognized and valorised by others" (p. 179). Moreover, Salih (2007) also proposed a definition for gender performativity in her article "On Judith Butler and Performativity," where she declared that "gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts" (p. 55). Alecia Jackson (2004) describes gender performativity as a "theory of gender that accentuates a process of repetition that produces gendered subjectivity." She stressed that the process of repetition is not "simply a performance by a subject but also a performativity" (p. 675).

Hence, gender performativity is the theory that gender roles are complicated social

routines and daily rituals. Gender performances associate men with masculinity and women with femininity. Gender indemnification is constructed by our self-conception of performativity and the other's reception of and reaction to our gender performances. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) argues, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (*The Second Sex*, p. 330). Women's persistent objectification enhances the mechanisms that reinforce their gendering. Gender performativity forces women to experience the harmful consequences of gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is the disadvantageous treatment of an individual or group based on gender. It is illustrated in women's constrained and subordinate social status and lack of access to their personal and family life. Gender discrimination can occur in both personal and institutional domains. Discrimination against women is interconnected with the patriarchal culture and establishes the hierarchical relationship between males and females. Hence, Gender performativity signifies the interchange between gender discrimination and social identity.

II- Methodology:

The current study investigates the concept of gender identity and the discriminatory gender roles that perpetuate women's objectification in the patriarchal Korean society as represented in Cho Nam-Joo's *Kim Jiyong Born 1982*. Cho Nam-Joo's 2016 novel, *Kim Jiyong Born 1982*, translated by Jamie Chang, is the study's primary source. The research method is analytical-qualitative, where the novel is examined from a feminist critical approach utilizing Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory.

III- Analysis

III. I. Introduction: The Roots of Gender Discrimination and Objectification

Women in patriarchal societies experience a prolonged life of objectification; their

relationship with their male partners is characterized by unconditional sacrifices, which escalate to self-objectification. Self-objectification is worse and more dangerous than external objectification that occurs through a second agent. It results in deep psychological problems and, eventually, leads to extreme destruction of the self, paving the way for the process of external objectification to be efficiently enhanced. Consequently, women become "victims of the conventional sex role stereotype and instrumental tools in perpetuating the division of gender roles" (Hussein 2013, p.114). The subordination of Asian women can be attributed to the patriarchal conviction of "men as the first sex and women as the existence of the other to prove their subjective status" (Zhao 2020, p. 548). Hillary Lips (1979) scrutinizes the cultural images of female weakness and the exclusion of positive images of female strength and power as follows:

The accepted imagery of power and the accepted imagery of femininity in this society are totally incompatible and mutually exclusive. 'Proper' feminine images are filled with powerlessness and weakness, and those feminine images which do incorporate power are portrayed as evil and frightening (p. 7).

Kim Jiyong Born 1982 depicts the objectification of Korean women by the patriarchal discriminatory gender roles. Cho Nam-Joo conveys an intricate feminine experience in a broad context. *Kim Jiyong, Born 1982* is intended by the author as a "public debate." It "ignited a nationwide conversation about gender inequality. ... delivering a major publicity boost" (Alter, 2020). Additionally, Hyun Eun Kim (2019) states that the novel was criticized and accused of presenting "distorted views" of Korean society as it is "highly subjective, and makes negative, sexist

generalizations against men" by presenting the "male characters" as "either actively or passively endorsing a culture of discrimination against women" (p.1).

Although the novel presents an inclusive depiction of an individual woman's devastating predicament, the author illustrates every Korean woman's experience in an oppressive patriarchal society and, accordingly, universalizes the personal suffering of her protagonist. The novel tackles the familial and societal circumstances and exposes the suffering of three generations of women; the protagonist, her mother, and her grandmother. Hence, by "distilling a life into the banal moments that shape female consciousness, the book displays the cultural logic of sexism and the crude transmission of its values from one generation of women to the next" (Huie, 2018). These vast experiences provide the fundamental knowledge for accurately understanding the cultural context by mixing fictional with unique non-fictional techniques; the author adopts a detached perspective and a documentary style by inserting in the novel data from journals, research, governmental statistics, newspaper articles, dispatch, reports, interviews, internet media, and other resources to support the social and historical context connected with Jiyoung's life experience.

The 2010s represents the peak of Korean women strive to eliminate gender discrimination and sexual abuse in domestic and public domains and challenge the established gender roles. The novel has opened the eyes of Korean women to the sex-based discrimination that has always been normalized and taken for granted and inspired the latest wave of Korean feminism, leading to the women's rights protests in 2018. The gender bias depicted in the novel has influenced the MeToo movement in South Korea, showing that many Korean women have undergone similar experiences. "Cho's book uses the story of one woman to reveal the gender inequality in all parts of the South Korean society from the privileging of male children to workplace

discrimination and harassment" (Williams, 2020).

The name of the novel's protagonist, Kim Jiyoung, statistically recognized as the most widespread name for girls born in South Korea in 1982, indicates that the protagonist represents most Korean women and illustrates the agony they endure. The commonness of Jiyoung's name implies that the female protagonist's maltreatment by discriminatory gender roles is typical of most Korean women. The protagonist's name "serves to underscore her every woman quality, alongside the casual sexism she must endure as if to depict a woman so average that she is in constant danger of becoming little more than an anonymous statistic" (Huie, 2018). The author declared that she "thought of Kim Jiyoung's character as a vessel that contains experiences and emotions that are common to every Korean woman." The novel, in this respect, is "a testimony of being a woman in Korea" (Joon-Bong 2017). The author aims at universalizing Kim Jiyoung's experience by emphasizing that her predicament is not regional or financial, but stemming from the discriminatory gender roles imposed on her as a female in a male-dominated society. The novel has made the readers aware of the existence of what Jiyoung's psychiatrist, whose wife sacrificed her promising career as an ophthalmologist due to childcare, has realized as "a world that [he was not] aware of" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 68).

III- 2. The Role of Confucianism in Perpetuating Discriminatory Gender Roles:

In the patriarchal Korean society, gender roles are austere constructed; accordingly, women are forced to embrace and adhere to the predominant codes of behaviour imposed by the patriarchal cultural standards and the Confucian system. Kim Jiyoung Born 1982 examines the institutionalized gender oppression and the discrimination inflicted on Korean women. Oppressive gender roles are "onerous to South

Korean women because of the fundamentally gender-based structure of family relations and duties that have been recycled from the Confucian past and in part manufactured under industrial capitalism" (Kyung-Sup and Min-Young 2010, p. 59). Like many other Asian countries, South Korea endorses Confucianism as a value system. The ideas and beliefs of Confucianism were established by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC). Confucianism is a social and ethical philosophy that establishes social values, institutions, and transcendent ideals. Tu (1996) perceives the Confucian faith as:

the betterment of the human condition through individual effort; commitment to family as the basic unit of society and to family ethics as the foundation of social stability; trust in the intrinsic value of moral education; belief in self-reliance, the work ethic, and mutual aid; and a sense of organic unity with an ever-extending network of relationships all provide rich cultural resources for East Asian democracies to develop their own distinctive features (p. 345).

Helgesen (1998) argues that Confucianism has been identified as a principal foundation of traditional values and appreciated by a majority of Korean people as representing "good old Korean values" (p. 136). Confucianism is a system of norms and values that perpetuates the hierarchical social structure in order to generate discipline and establish harmonious relationships among people. Edwards (1992) states, "Confucianism is established on the belief in the permanence and durability of "authority and hierarchy extending from the household family right up to the emperor, the 'son of heaven'; the family metaphor extends from the household to the community, to the court, to the country" (p.101). In her study titled

"Development, Culture, and Gender in Korea: a Sociological Study of Female Office Employees in Chaebol", Nan-Yeong Park Matthews (2005) explains how Confucianism has been established in the Korean society and exposes to what extent it is influential in all domains of social interactions:

Confucianism has been established as the "ideological basis of a political, social, and economic reorganization designed to promote social cohesion and stability and maintain the class system. As a result, traditional Korean society was closed and relatively stable; the stability was maintained by a hierarchical system that segregated people according to inherited social status, age, sex, and generation (p. 116).

The Confucian system places women in an inferior position to men. It categorizes them as the other brutal sex or class, reinforcing men's superiority and women's inferiority. Confucianism imposes specific gender roles and reinforces gender discrimination:

[The Korean] culture has been strongly influenced by Confucian philosophy, widely known for strict gender segregation and its tradition of male superiority. In Korean traditional culture, the importance accorded to ordering vertical relationships between superiors and subordinates based on Confucian morality and the conservatism of the patriarchal family is widely recognized. (Nan-Yeong Park Matthews 2005, p. 6)

The Confucian Korean society has gone through two dynasties; the Koryo dynasty (918-1392) and the Chosen dynasty (1392-1910). The socio-political Confucian thoughts

played an essential role in forming people's consciousness and supported the oppression of Korean women. The Chosen society glorified the role of man, whether he was a father or a son, "this patrilineal order elevated men to the status of heirs with the symbolic authority to perform ancestor commemoration rituals and to engage in politics outside the household" (Moon 478). Men's superior position allows them to engage in the public sphere and perform gender roles that women cannot due to their inferior status. The subordinate position of women is exposed in the inheritance system; the son inherits almost all the property, whereas the daughter hardly gets anything. Moreover, women are not allowed to own private property. Women are only respected when they marry; however, a woman becomes an outcast if divorced. Moreover, women are not referred to by their names. They are expected to be obedient and submissive. They depend on their husbands financially and socially; accordingly, they lose identity and individuality. (Baik 242-251) Illuminating the political logic behind this state indoctrination, Hei-Sook Kim (1993) states:

The inculcation of Confucian principles was necessary to consolidate the patriarchal monarchy because Confucianism was very effective in institutionalizing individual moral values through its emphasis on the continuity between family and state. There was no moral or practical difference between the administration of the state by a sovereign and that of the family by a father. The sovereign's relationship with his subjects was constantly assimilated through the analogy of a father's relationship with family members, most specifically to his son and wife. These relationships were taken to be the fundamental form of human association in a Confucian society,

i.e., those between sovereign and subjects, between father and son, and between man and wife. (p. 50)

The characters in Kim Jiyoung Born 1982 manifest a social system that subdues individual identity. The novelist has tackled the discriminatory gender roles and the patriarchal misogyny inflicted on the female characters, emphasizing the impact of the Confucian system and the patriarchal cultural heritage. All the characters are victims of an oppressive system, struggling to establish their identity within the world's hierarchy. The novel explores the deforming pressures of society and the social conventions built on female subjugation. It exposes cultural distortions and sexual stereotypes by depicting men and women brought up within the captivity of patriarchal ideology and the Confucian system. If patriarchal authority expellees women and leads to the self-withering acceptance of masculine definitions against which women struggle for independence, Confucianism intensifies their sense of marginality and oppression.

Hence, Confucian ideology and patriarchal cultural standards perpetuate and sustain male supremacy and female subordination; Korean women have suffered from the oppressive, discriminatory gender roles perpetuated by the Confucian system and its implemented social customs and traditions that hinder egalitarianism, prevent justice, and lock them up in an inferior social status. Oppression, marginalization, silence, objectification, and other multitudinous traits underpin this status. South Koreans adopt a negative attitude towards feminism and women's rights, as such notions often conflict with their cultural standards, religious beliefs, and societal traditions. Rosenlee (2006) attributes the oppression and marginalization that Asian women endure to the Confucian system and declares that in their strive for freedom and egalitarianism, Korean feminists "relied on and applied the theories of western feminist scholars" (p. 3). Some Korean women

oppose the established gender roles, defy paternal control, and revolt against the injustice they experienced as a subaltern group. By publishing Kim Jiyoung Born 1982, Cho Nam-Joo elevates female identity by highlighting the value of independence, challenging the patriarchal heritage, and empowering marginalized and subordinated women to have their voices delivered and, eventually, communicate their excruciating experiences. The novel represents a cry in the face of patriarchal authority and the Confucian system that would "subvert the dominant discourse formed by traditional patriarchal voices." (Rahmah et al. 393)

III- 3. Cruelty, Harassment, and Macho Control as Indicators of Masculine Gender Performativity:

In his book *The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy*, Allan Johnson (2014) describes patriarchy as a multifaceted social system compelling men and women to be male-identified, acknowledge and boost male control, and normalize oppression. He declares: "What drives patriarchy as a system - what fuels competition, aggression, and oppression - is a dynamic relationship between control and fear. Patriarchy encourages men to seek security, status, and other rewards through control." (p. 50) Cho Nam-Joo depicts a world of males who practice either physical or verbal abuse as they attempt to assert their power within their culturally constructed masculine gender roles. Their macho performativity is characterized by cruelty. In Kim Jiyoung Born 1982, cruelty represents an omnipresent, important quandary that results in human torment. In her book *Cruelty: Human Evil and the Human Brain*, Kathleen Taylor (2009) defines cruelty as an "unjustified voluntary which intentionally causes suffering to an undeserving victim or victims." (p. 22) In patriarchal societies, men "are liable to treat [women] roughly or instrumentally, as objects." (Pearce 2011, p. 520) As a child, Jiyoung experienced this

masculine cruelty and entrenched prejudice on her first day at school:

Her first obstacle in school life was the "pranks of the boy desk-mate" that many schoolgirls experienced. To Jiyoung, it felt more like harassment or violence than pranks, and there was nothing she could do about it besides run crying to Mother and Eun-Young. They weren't much help. Eun-Young said boys were immature and that Jiyoung should just ignore him, and Mother chided Jiyoung for crying and complaining over a classmate who was just messing around because he wanted to play. (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.18)

In patriarchal societies, men impose on a woman the role of a sex object. Kyungja Jung (2014) argues that contemporary Korean feminists are preoccupied with sexual harassment: "One of the first focal points for activism that consent rated on 'women's issues' in Korea was sexual violence" (p.1). At work, masculine cruelty against women takes the form of evident sexual harassment: "Employers harassed them for "being inappropriately dressed" or "not having the right attitude, "and held their wages ransom." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 31) On the other hand, "customers thought the right to harass young women came with their purchase. The girls stowed away repulsive, frightening experiences with males deep in their hearts without even realizing it." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 31) Kim Jiyoung has endured a traumatizing work interview that represents a powerful illustration of the objectification of women:

The last question came from a middle-aged male trustee who'd been sitting at the end of the table and nodding without a word up until that point.

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

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

“I’ll find a natural way to leave the room. Like going to the toilet or getting research data.”

(Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.50)

Brought up to be submissive to any representative of masculine authority, Kim Jiyoung is incapable of exteriorizing her inner thoughts and feelings; accordingly, her psychological suffering intensifies. In an attempt to release her oppression and humiliation, she fantasizes about a response that would have restored her dignity:

“I would break his fucking arm!”
Jiyoung shouted later at the mirror.

“And you! Your question is sexual harassment! And to ask that during a job interview? Would you ask the same question to male candidates? (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.51)

Harassment and bullying take the form of jokes to which Jiyoung cannot respond. They make her feel like an outcast, alienated by sexism, misogyny, and patriarchal prejudice: "Time, experience, and familiarity with the work and field did nothing to make interactions with them less awkward or close the distance between them and her." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 57) She is entrapped in a state of awkwardness, confusion, and helplessness: "Relentlessly, the jokes kept coming, and Jiyoung could not figure out what the punch line was or what to say in response. If she laughed, they read it as an encouragement to keep going. If she didn't

laugh, they asked her if something was wrong." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 57) The men in such a patriarchal work environment have institutionalized female identity through stylizing and conventionalizing the body. This view of the construction of identity pertains to Judith Butler's definition of gender performativity as "the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self." (Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitutions," p. 519)

III- 4. The Perplexity of Gender Roles and Psychological Insecurity

Cho Nam- Joo investigates the entrenched contradiction of the inner psyche of her female protagonist, depicting her tension, insecurity, schizophrenic vision, and psychological instability. She captures the concomitantly submissive and subversive nature that can co-exist within the same psych, consequently leading to alienation. Jiyoung's disintegrated language highlights her psychological division and lack of power. The novel has recurrent issues of alienation, isolation, self-division, withdrawal, deep unrest, and bewilderment. In Kim Jiyoung Born 1982, Cho Nam- Joo depicts the spiritual crisis and struggles that stem from alienation, loss, and lack of psychological stability. She investigates the interior regions of the human psyche. She portrays the convoluted and contradictory impulses of her protagonist, who submissively surrenders to, assimilates, and performs the ascribed feminine-gender role, showing how the perplexity of gender roles is associated with oppression. Kim Jiyoung's search for her identity is motivated by her urgent need to fit in: "Different social identities confer different responsibilities on Jiyoung. However, the same dilemmas for her remain constant in various aspects, such as working situations, household chores, close relationships, inter-generational communication, and friendship maintenance." (Feng and Talif 2021, p.2749)

Due to her cultural heritage, Kim Jiyoung swings between paradoxical personal traits and contradictory gender roles. She is torn between opposing and conflicting gender-related forces in her psyche; she simultaneously adheres to her gender role as a wife and a mother and strives for autonomy and self-actualization. Kim Jiyoung suffers from the perplexity of gender roles and the sexist, misogynist patriarchal codes. She has been transformed into "a distorted instrumental object, stripped of a unique personality and subjectivity," (Calogero 574) accordingly, her depression boosts. The novel is narrated from a male psychiatrist's point of view to signify that Kim Jiyoung does not even have the right or freedom to narrate her own story. "Jiyoung had a hard time voicing her complaints because she wasn't used to expressing her thoughts." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021 p. 21) The oppressive gender roles obliterated Kim Jiyoung's identity, silenced her voice, and led to her alienation, isolation, and lack of communication. As an escape, she commenced to express herself by switching her identity with other women's identities; "Jiyoung became different people from time to time. Some of them were living, others were dead, all of them women she knew." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.85) Due to this switch, she was perceived as a "mad woman." Jiyoung's abnormal behaviour, nevertheless, is "a kind of a symptom, or a manifestation of "the return of the repressed" which, as the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan explains, reveals Jiyoung's hidden voice and desire, repressed by the oppressive patriarchal society." (Yeong and Hyun 2) However, "Jiyoung becomes a channel through whom other Korean women's voices are delivered. ... [She] speaks on behalf of all Korean women who have been faced with social injustice and gender discrimination for generations at school and work." (Yeong and Hyun 2)

Her odd behavior continued sporadically. She'd send him a text message riddled with cute emoticons she never normally

used or make dishes like ox-bone soup or glass noodles that she neither enjoyed nor was good at. Jiyoung was starting to feel like a stranger to Daehyun. After all this time—the stories they shared, as countless as raindrops, the caresses as soft and gentle as snowflakes, and the beautiful daughter who took after them both—his wife of three years, whom he married after two years of passionate romance, felt like someone else. (Cho Nam-Joo 201, Pp.7-8)

When the couple spent the holidays at Daehyun's parents' house, Jiyoung had to perform the exhausting female gender role of cooking and cleaning; therefore, she was tired. Finally, however, she assimilated her mother's character in order to express her feelings and desire to spend the holidays at her parent's house:

"Mr. Jung, with all due respect, I must say my piece," Jiyoung said in a cool tone, pushing Daehyun aside. "As you know, the holidays are a time for families to gather. But they're not just for your family. They're for my family, too. Everyone's so busy nowadays, and it's hard for my children to get together, too, if not for the holidays. You should at least let our daughter come home when your daughter comes to visit you."

In the end, Daehyun had to cup his hand over Jiyoung's mouth and drag her out.

"She's not well, Father. You've got to believe me, Mom, Father. Suhyun, too. She hasn't been well lately. I'll explain everything later." (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.9)

Although "Daehyun wasn't angry—he was baffled, sad, and scared" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 9), accordingly, he performed his endorsed gender role as a man, shutting his wife up and hindering her freedom of expression. The other family members, however, conceived Jiyoung as either mad or rude because she did not submissively adhere to the dictates of the established gender roles and tolerated patriarchal oppression.

The novel demonstrates how gender roles in patriarchal societies can ruin a woman's identity and rob her autonomy. Conceiving his wife as a subaltern who is incapable of speaking for herself, Daehyun downgrades Jiyoung to an immobilized situation:

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

(Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.9)

Moreover, Daehyun performs his masculine gender role by attempting to construct his wife's subjectivity and directing her responses. His interaction with Jiyoung echoes the ideology of a society that fundamentally compels women to internalize the husbands' construction of their identities and destabilize coherence in feminine identity. Daehyun isolates her from the public sphere, excluding her from an equal position in his social realm in order to assert his patriarchal superiority. The protagonist's psychological disorder is the outcome of the gendered environment and gender consciousness which conceive "the male as the first sex and women as the existence of the other to prove their subjective status." (Zhao 2020, p. 548)

Women are compelled to perform exhausting family duties and carry domestic burdens due to the discriminatory gender roles and the gender-based family relation system, which have been replicated from the Confucian past and consequently processed within industrial capitalism. These factors have caused women to restructure their family responsibilities and relations. The Functional Defamation Movement emerged due to the focus on family structure and relations. This trend triggered Korean women to gain a personal life where their individuality and personal choice are valued. In South Korean society, families have lately faced an institutional threat represented by Ulrich Beck's "second modernity". South Korea and many other East Asian countries have the same social and historical features, such as modernity and second modernity. According to Kyung-Sup and Min-Young (2010), "Individualization without individualism, particularly among women, is a region-wide phenomenon in East Asia. They all put up with different degrees of familial duties and relations that deprive them of their individuality" (Kyung Sup and Min-Young 2010, p. 540-542).

III- 5. Maternity as the Antithesis of Sovereignty:

Like most Korean women, Kim Jiyoung conceptualizes marriage and maternity as transition points. Women are treated as reproduction machines, and maternity is the only means of being accepted by a patriarchal society. Shortly after Kim's marriage to Daehyun, her relatives-in-law started interrogating her about pregnancy. Although the childbearing subject should only concern the married couple, the relatives violated their privacy. When Kim Jiyoung declared that they were not planning on having a child, they accused her of being sterile

. Regardless of Jiyoung's input, elders were convinced she "couldn't get pregnant and

proceeded to investigate. She's too old. ... She's too skinny. ... Her hands are cold. ... She must have bad circulation. ... The zit on her chin is a sign of an unhealthy uterus. ... They concluded the problem was her (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.67).

Daehyun, who sticks to the dictates of the patriarchal cultural heritage, ignores his wife's opinion on the issue and requests a child. Kim Jiyoung puts what she will sacrifice if she has a child in juxtaposition to what her husband will give up: "I'm putting my youth, health, job, colleagues, social networks, career plans, and future on the line" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 69). What her husband will lose seems trifling compared to what she will "I won't get to see my friends as often because I'll have to come home early... And besides, you know, I'll have you and our child. Financial support! As the head of the household. Financial support! That's a huge responsibility" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 69). This quotation demonstrates how the patriarchal Korean society supports the performance of binary opposition between masculinity and femininity and intensifies the dichotomy of gender roles. It illustrates how Kim Jiyoung is forced to denounce her professional ambition and submissively adhere to her assigned stereotypical gender role of femininity and maternity. This gender role is characterized by the actions she must persistently and repeatedly perform as a mother:

Jung Ji-won started daycare a little over twelve months and surprisingly adjusted to the new environment. She was dropped off at 9:30 a.m., had a small snack, had playtime, had lunch, came back before 1 p.m., had a wash, and took a nap. Not counting drop-off and pick-up time, Kim Jiyoung now had approximately three hours to herself. Most of that time was spent doing laundry and the

dishes, tidying up, and making snacks and food for the baby. She hardly had a moment to sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.80).

Cho Nam-Joo's awareness of women's marginalization in the patriarchal social structure, their captivity in the Confucian cultural heritage, and their wasted powers in never-ending household obligations is well illustrated in depicting her female protagonist. Within the patriarchal culture, women are often treated as mere objects whose stereotypical gender role is to provide men with a sense of power, supremacy, and autonomy through performing the assigned feminine gender roles, which entail total physical and emotional submission. Such degenerating concepts constructed a set of prejudiced patriarchal moral principles. According to Emma Griffin (2018): "Good mothers, they agreed, worked tirelessly to ensure a clean, well-ordered home. Their duties involved the wise spending of a husband's meagre wage and the endless rounds of cleaning, cooking, and sewing necessary for the physical well-being of the family" (p. 67). According to the discriminatory gender roles, women are supposed to be domestic vessels whose ultimate function is giving birth and performing domestic household tasks. In Kim Jiyoung Born 1982, the protagonist performs an essential function as she illustrates the objectification of women in patriarchal societies. The novel opens with a portrayal of an average everyday life of a South Korean woman as she instantaneously and competently conducts a series of routine household tasks—catering, cleaning, arranging the living room, pulling out the garbage, and sweeping the carpet. Her adroitness implies that she has been performing these domestic roles for innumerable times. Her ritual performance and the details of her crestfallen life imply the restricted existence of women.

The male characters in the novel adhere to the concept of rugged masculinity embedded in the conventional structure of the patriarchal

system. Their objectification of the female characters illustrates this adherence. They struggle dreadfully to affirm a gendered identity as men, as implied in the patriarchal social norms of sexuality and gender roles. On the other hand, the female characters could not escape the traditional gender role of women, which perceives them as only wives and mothers. The protagonist and other female characters are forced to uphold their inferior status; accordingly, they are transformed into instrumental tools in perpetuating the division of gender roles. Kim Jiyoung illustrates the subordinate status to which women are reduced in patriarchal societies. Isolation, weakness, separateness, and objectification are fundamental traits and attitudes of such status. Accordingly, she is haunted by the dichotomy of gender roles, which leads to her lack of an identifiable sense of the self; her fragmented identity symbolizes the equally fragmented community.

Cho Nam- Joo presents a faithful image of the Korean social and cultural context. Her female protagonist represents a manifestation of a social system that subdues individual identity. She tackles the subordination of women within the confinement of the oppressive patriarchal culture, which hinders their natural human growth. She explores the deforming pressures of society and the social conventions built on female subjugation. The novel focuses on exposing cultural distortions and sexual stereotypes by depicting men and women who are brought up within the captivity of the patriarchal ideology and Confucian system. Women cannot escape their enclosure; the harder they struggle to escape, the more painfully they are trapped. The writer depicts Kim Jiyoung's internal anxiety and illustrates her insecurity within the suffocating cultural surroundings.

III- 6.Discriminatory Gendered Roles as an Asphyxiating Tool:

The fanaticism of the Confucian system and the patriarchal cultural heritage represent an

oppressive asphyxiating entity that thwarts the desires and ambitions of human beings and drives Korean men and women to oppress femininity:

In order to achieve and maintain the subordination of the female, ideologies have been constructed whereby submissions to patriarchy appear in the nature of things. Ordained by the Gods, supported by the priests, and implemented by the law, women came to accept and psychologically internalize compliance as necessary. Violence towards women in all its forms has and still thrives in such an environment (Fox 2002, p. 30).

Aggression and misogyny characterize the masculine gender performativity in the patriarchal environment of the novel. Jiyoung's father is a pure representative of the patriarchal authority within the domestic domain, where "men see their daughters as either their possession or a part of the father-centered domestic structure" (Joon- Bong 2017). When he knew that his daughter had applied for a job, he felt his gender role as the family patriarch was violated. Conditioned by his Confucian heritage and the patriarchal ideology, the father has imposed oppressive gender roles on the female family members. Kim Jiyoung's mother, on the other hand, does her best to support her family; however, her labour is neither recognized nor appreciated by her husband:

Mother did not commute to a job like Father did but was always doing odd jobs on the side that allowed her to make money while doing chores all on her own and looking after three children and an elderly mother-in-law. This was common among mothers in the neighborhood who were more or less in the same situation (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.13).

Women are forced to adopt, absorb, and adhere to the discriminatory gender roles from birth. They are imprisoned in an unbearably small world that obstructs their development as independent human beings. Gender roles are interconnected with the misogynistic patriarchal heritage and perpetuated by the Confucian system. In "Power and Gender in the Chosen Dynasty," Kim Hei-Sook (1993) proposes that the Confucian system could not have been sustained unless the patriarchal institution of the household was preserved by stressing women's virtue, devotion to men (father, spouse, son) and housework (including serving in-laws), and their obligation to bear male children to eternalize the family line and maintain memorial services for predecessors. Females' aspirations, independent endeavors, and efforts to enhance their social standing and individuality were prohibited; submissiveness was considered the loftiest womanly virtue (p. 50).

In the novel, when Kim Jiyoung gets pregnant, the family elders want the baby to be a boy because having a boy is a form of power. After announcing that the baby is a female, the elders utter misogynistic expressions such as "It's okay, the next one will be a boy" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.71). This discriminatory attitude is not confined to the older generation; young women also adopt it. "My first was a girl, so I was nervous until I found out the sex of the second one," "I can hold my head up high around my in-laws now that I have a boy", and "I started getting myself all kinds of expensive food when I found out I was having a boy" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p. 72). The previous quotations illustrate how having a son in a patriarchal society is a form of power; it is a means by which the mother can assert her position. Kim Jiyoung's mother, Oh Misook, also goes through the same experience. Oh Misook was pressured about the gender of her children. Her mother-in-law says to her, "You should have a son. You must have a son. You must have at least two sons"(Cho Nam-Joo 2016, p. 12).In such societies, the

more sons a woman has, the more powerful she is.

As a six-year-old child, Kim Jiyoung was aware of the fact that her brother was receiving special treatment; however, as a result of being locked up in a patriarchal social structure, she normalized this discrimination:

There were times when she had an inkling of a situation not being fair, but she was accustomed to rationalizing things by telling herself that she was a generous older sibling and that she shared with her sister because they were both girls. Jiyoung's mother would praise the girls for taking good care of their brother and not competing for her love. Jiyoung thought it must be the big age gap. The more their mother praised them, the more impossible it became for Jiyoung to complain (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.11).

III. 7. Self-Negation as Sanctuary

In *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett (2000) observes that within the confinements of the patriarchal system, "status, temperament, and role are all value systems with endless psychological ramifications"(p. 26). She asserts that: "Sexual politics obtains consent through the "socialization" of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role, and status. As to status, a pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female". (p. 26) Cho Nam- Joo explores how Korean women are marginalized. She portrays subjugated women who attempt to retain and establish their identity in a world stained by disdain and prejudice. Hence, they are entirely desperate, distracted, worried, and distressed due to being oppressed by their cultural context. Almost all the female characters in the novel are weighed down by an irresistible feeling of subordination and insecurity. They regard

marriage and maternity as a means by which they can establish their position in the patriarchal system as they are subdued by their social position. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) says, "the women who are firmly rooted in society are those who are in subjection to it unless designated for action by divine authority" (*The Second Sex*, p. 122). The novel ricochets Judith Butler's concept of gender as "an identity tenuously constituted in time [. . .] an identity instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" ("Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", *Feminist Theory Reader* p., 462).

Koh Boonsoon, Kim Jiyong's grandmother, sincerely adheres to the discriminatory gender roles in order to establish a happy domestic life; however, she has been transformed into an instrumental object inside her husband's domain. She believed that being a wife and a mother was a means by which she could achieve empowerment and autonomy and assert her position within the hierarchy of the patriarchal social structure. Nevertheless, marriage and maternity enhanced her subjugation. She illustrates Rich's opinion that under patriarchy, "motherhood, as an institution" (Rich 1976, p. 30), has destabilized the opportunity for female progress. Koh Boonsoon adhered to the sanctuary of familial life to conquer the feeling of vulnerability and susceptibility as a female in a male-dominated society. It represented a refuge that provided her with some relief against the hostility and anonymity of her social surroundings. Not only did she surrender in utter submission to the dictates of the patriarchal system represented by her insensitive husband, but she was thankful for her degenerating status:

As people died, young and old, of war, disease, and starvation, Koh Boonsoon worked someone else's

field, peddled someone else's wares, took care of domestic labor at someone else's home, and still managed to run her own home, fighting tooth and nail to raise the four boys. Her husband, a man with a fair complexion and soft hands, never worked a day in his life. Koh Boonsoon did not resent her husband for having neither the ability nor the will to provide for his family. She truly believed he was a decent husband to her for not sleeping around and not hitting her (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.11).

Being thankful for her husband for not performing his gender role, "not hitting" her, emphasizes the male's role in society as ruler, who has "the power to reprimand: the physical chastisement of his wife was regarded as a necessary duty, socially accepted in male circles" (Fox 2002, p. 20). Because, according to prevalent conviction, "a woman belonged to man" (Seth 2006, p. 155), as a submissive subordinate, a husband's dominance includes "the duty to correct or to chastise his wife physically or verbally should he believe it necessary" (Fox 2002, p. 19).

Koh Boonsoon had submissively performed her female gender role as a wife and a mother according to what Michele Barrett (2014) sees as a "sexual division of labour, and accompanying ideologies of the appropriate meaning of labour for men and women" (p. 74). Even though her husband's inconsideration and insensitivity weighed her down, she, ironically, accepted performing a masculine gender role as the bird-winner. Despite her awareness of her husband's exploitation and subjugation of her on both domestic and public levels, she subserviently accepted them to avoid social segregation if she broke the chains of the patriarchal enclosure. Hence, "self-negation is noble in the mind of the servile subject who never experiences her state as degradation and instead finds fulfilment in self-sacrifice" (Huie, 2018). In this context, El-Bushra (2000) argues

that "women who value their relationships with male partners and relations more than their autonomy are suffering from 'false consciousness' about the nature of their oppression" (p. 57).

III- 8. Violating The Stereotypical Gender Roles

Nan-Yeong Park Matthews (2005) states that the Confucian system, "by social actors and institutions, has been the major obstacle to full integration of Korean women into the development process - because it has 'legitimized' and sustained gender inequality and sexual discrimination at work and in society" (p. 309). However, while most of the female characters in Cho Nam- Joo's novel are overwhelmed by distrust, anxiety, and insecurity, one character seems to comprise greater control and authority; Kim Eunsil. Her intrusion into the patriarchal domain precipitates a crisis in the male world she has invaded; she disturbs the patriarchal assumption of male superiority and female inferiority. She does not adhere to the pre-established patriarchal codes and the assigned gender roles. She challenges the patriarchal assumption that women should not have access to everything, including their bodies. She violates conventional patriarchal authority by controlling the men who have tried to gain control over her. In doing so, she destroys the hierarchal structure of power dynamics in the patriarchal domain, assumes a dominant position, and obliterates male expectations:

The men who were around when she started were now team leaders in marketing divisions of bigger companies or had started their own firms, and in any case, were still working, but none of the female colleagues remained in the field. To be accepted as "one of the guys," she was last to leave a company dinner, volunteered to work late and go on business trips, and returned a month after giving

birth. She was proud of herself at first but felt conflicted each time female colleagues and women who worked under her left the company, and these days she felt she had done them wrong (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.56).

The discrimination against South Korean women in the labour market is based on gender, not education or qualifications. Despite their higher educational level, women do not have equal job opportunities and cannot achieve financial independence or meritocracy. The pay gap between men and women proves that Korea has a high rate of gender inequality. In "Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982, and the Labour Market: Overeducation, Gender, Income, and Life Satisfaction. Panel evidence from Korea", Amina Ahmed Lahsen et al (2021) examine the discrimination that South Korean women face in the labor market relating to gender and over education. They argue that women get fewer job chances than men despite their higher educational levels. They discuss the pay gap between genders, proving that Korea has a high gender inequality (Lahsen et al.2021).

Kim Eunsil's work experience is a powerful illustration of the gender discriminatory policies in the Korean labour market. Men get promotions faster than Kim Eunsil and the other female colleagues. To be accepted in this patriarchal environment as one of the "male colleagues," she has to exert more effort than them and volunteer to perform additional roles. She stubbornly strives to achieve sovereignty and autonomy until she finally becomes the manager. As a female manager, she is aware of the psychological needs of her female employees; accordingly, she initiates practical procedures to facilitate their work conditions, such as providing maternity and paternity leave: "She said she'd never forget how proud she felt when she presented a bouquet of flowers as a welcome-back present to one of her team members, who returned from a year-long maternity leave for the first time in the company's history" (Cho

Nam-Joo 2021, p.56). This quotation shows the extent of Kim Eunsil's awareness of women's awkward position as a subaltern group in a male-dominated work environment and her struggle to break discriminatory gender roles. She is aware of the needs of women around her and the suffering they endure in their struggle to reconcile the conflicting and contradictory gender roles imposed on them by patriarchal cultural standards. Kim Eunsil realizes the problems of working mothers and brings attention to them because she is aware of her femininity. She challenged the patriarchal ideology and violated the established rules. She has feminist consciousness. Gerda Lerner (1986) defines feminist consciousness as:

The awareness of women that they belong to a subordinate group; that they have suffered wrongs as a group; that their subordination is not natural but is societally determined; that they must join with other women to remedy these wrongs; and finally, that they must and can provide an alternate vision of the societal organization in which women, as well as men, will enjoy autonomy and self-determination (The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, p. 14).

Kim Eunsil does not adhere to the gender roles established by the patriarchal cultural standards and the Confucian system. Instead, she revolts against the degenerating conditions of women in order to assert her position in a society where women are stereotyped as housewives by invading the work domain and becoming a breadwinner. As a result, she faces work discrimination; however, she asserts her position and defies the discriminatory gender roles:

I've noticed this about new employees over the years. The women take on all the cumbersome, minor tasks without being asked, while the guys never do. It doesn't matter if they're new

or the youngest—they never do anything they're not told to do. But why do women simply take things upon themselves? (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.56).

Kim Eunsil struggles to reject objectification and defy the notion of gender roles. According to Suah Kim (2014)", objectification was socialized in patriarchal and masculinist societies immersed in a power over a hierarchy of male domination" (p. 2). Instead of being controlled by the males in the work environment, she challenges male expectations. She transforms their attitudes concerning femininity and feminine gender roles. She symbolizes not only a conflict of contradictory domestic attitudes but rather a conflict of opposing cultural perspectives:

The team leader, Kim Eunsil, was the only woman among four team leaders. She had a daughter in elementary school and lived with her mother, who took care of all childcare and domestic labor. Some people said Kim Eunsil was awesome, others that she had a heart of stone, and still, others found the arrangement a credit to her husband. "Living with the spouse's parents is harder for the husbands than the wives, they'd say. "Conflict between married men and their in-laws is becoming a societal problem these days. I don't know him, but he must be an obliging person to take in his mother-in-law" (Cho Nam-Joo 2021, p.56).

Kim Eunsil rejects the patriarchal conception of femininity and stereotypical gender roles. She defies the discriminatory patriarchal ideology by violating the established hierarchal structure of the patriarchal work-environment, proving that: "institutions are not monolithic structures: they are constantly being recreated through the struggle of women and men to define their own

ideas of equality and empowerment and create a viable and satisfying life for themselves in the context of- or despite- their social identities" (El-Bushra 2000, p.61).

IV- Conclusion

The current study has investigated how and when gender differences become entangled with societal and cultural problems. Patriarchal societies have established a hierarchal social structure where men are regarded as superior and women as inferior. The study has presented a verification to the notion that women face the maltreatment inflicted by male dominance and the oppressive social forces at work, which hinder positive human interaction and transform human beings into distorted creatures. The study has shown how the characters in Cho Nam-Joo's *Kim Jiyoung Born 1982* manifest a social system that subdues individual identity. It has tackled the discriminatory gender roles and the patriarchal misogyny inflicted on the female characters, emphasizing the impact of the Confucius system and the patriarchal cultural heritage. All the characters are victims of an oppressive system, struggling to establish their identity within the world's hierarchy. The novelist has explored the deforming pressures of society and the social conventions that enhance female subjugation. The novel exposes cultural distortions and sexual stereotypes by depicting men and women who are brought up within the captivity of patriarchal ideology and the Confucian system. If patriarchal authority expellees women and leads to the self-withering acceptance of masculine definitions against which women struggle for independence, Confucianism intensifies their sense of marginality and oppression.

The study has adopted a feminist critical approach in analyzing *Kim Jiyoung Born 1982*, utilizing Judith Butler's Gender Performativity Theory. It has exposed gender repression, subjugated identities, and their correlation with oppressive cultural standards to spotlight how

the male and female characters interrelate and interact with their surroundings. The researcher has investigated how and when gender differences become entangled with societal and cultural problems. Patriarchal societies have established a hierarchal social structure where men were regarded as superior and women as inferior. The study has presented a verification to the notion that women face the maltreatment inflicted on the female gender by male dominance and the oppressive social forces at work, which hinder positive human interaction and transform human beings into distorted creatures.

Through the analysis of the novel, it has been evident that women in the Korean male dominant society suffer from marginalization, oppression, alienation, inequality, and subordination. Although South Korea has changed and improved socially and economically, it still faces discriminatory gender roles. As the research has demonstrated, there is a division of the feminist consciousness; some female characters strive to become autonomous individuals and eliminate gender discrimination, while the majority adhere to their oppressive cultural heritage and disseminate discriminatory gender roles.

Finally, the study has endeavored to investigate several inquiries, such as South Korean women's status, choices, struggles, and challenges under patriarchy and Confucianism in relation to the dynamics of gender relations. It has demonstrated gender repression, subjugated identities, and their correlation with oppressive cultural standards to spotlight how the male and female characters interrelate and interact with their surroundings. Cho Nam- Joo has highlighted women's struggles to assert their identities and transcend their marginalized status. Hence, *Kim Jiyoung Born 1982* questions the possibility of deconstructing the ideology of power and dominance underlying the traditional concepts of gender roles, bridging gender discrimination, eliminating dichotomy, and establishing complementarity.

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