

**Memory, Trauma, and Desire: The depiction of the unspoken Past in Han Kang's novel  
“ The Vegetarian”**

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**Abstract**

This research paper is aimed to explore the intricate relationship between trauma, memory and desire in Han Kang's 2007 novel "The Vegetarian". It focuses on how the unspoken past is reconstructed and conveyed through the fragmented narrative structure of the novel. Yeong-hye: the protagonist of the novel, undergoes a radical transformation in the course of the narrative. She is an iconoclast who rejects societal norms and embraces vegetarianism. This acts as both a symptom and a manifestation of unprocessed trauma and suppressed memories. This research investigates how Yeong-hye's rejection of flesh and food signifies a larger denial of psychological and bodily suffering which is tied to a traumatic past. The novel reflects a deeper individual and societal struggle with repression. The paper employs trauma theory. It employs the concepts particularly proposed by scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Dori Laub to analyze the silences and gaps in the narrative. These suggestive gaps function as sites of unarticulated trauma. This study, through a close reading of the text, also engages with the portrayal of desire in the novel. Both the existential and sexual desires are identified as a driving force that shapes the interaction of the characters with the past. The work interests to explore how Han Kang's novel uses the disruption of memory and the unspoken Past to reflect the emotional and psychological scars which are left by collective as well as personal histories.

**Keywords:** trauma, memory, repression, desire, the vegetarian, Han Kang.

**Introduction**

**Trauma, Memory, and Desire: The Depiction of the Unspoken Past**

Han Kang's (2007) novel titled "The Vegetarian", translated into English by Deborah Smith (2015), explores the complex relationship between trauma, memory, and desire. The nuanced portrayal of repression and the silencing of personal history is presented in detail. Through the character of Yeong-hye, the author constructs a narrative that engages with the emotional and psychological effects of an unspoken past. The protagonist, in the course of narrative rejects

meat and, at the end, her entire former life. This paper examines how the text intricately weaves the myriad mechanisms of trauma and its apparent effects on the body. The narrative also portrays the role of desire as both an escape from past and a response to repressed reflections and memories. The rather peculiar and abrupt decision of Yeong-hye to become a vegetarian is initially presented as a personal choice. As the story progresses, it soon becomes clear that this act is actually an unconscious response to a much deeper and heavier unarticulated trauma. The transformation of Yeong-hye is not merely dietary in nature but it symbolizes the larger rupture in her relationship with her own history. The rejection of flesh in both literal as well as metaphorical sense, embodies a retreat from past events that cannot be articulated. As Yeong-hye's brother-in-law asserts, "She had become someone else entirely. The change was as though the person who had once been Yeong-hye had been swallowed up by some vast and unfathomable darkness" (Kang, 2015, p. 115). This darkness signifies a trauma which is so gigantic to be verbalized. It is the glimpse of the past that resists memory as well as narration. Trauma, in the context of this narrative, is deeply embedded in the concept of repression of memory. In her seminal work titled, "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History" (1996), the theorist Cathy Caruth suggests that trauma involves an event that cannot be easily integrated into the memory system. The traumatized memory system results in repeated intrusive symptoms that often defy the coherence of a narrative. The refusal of the protagonist to engage with meat disrupts the act of nourishment itself in a symbolic way. It highlights her inability to incorporate and systematically process the traumatic events that have shaped her life in a big way. As the novel progresses, it becomes obvious that her actions are deeply rooted in a history she cannot bear to confront. It is the history that involves a sexual trauma that she subconsciously keeps buried in her psyche. The fragmented structure of the novel "The Vegetarian" perfectly mirrors the fractured nature of the memory of Yeong-hye. The narration of the novel is articulated from the perspectives of three different characters; Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, her husband and her sister. The narrative technique itself increases the distance between the truth and the understanding of the characters about the truth. The fragmentation portrayed in the novel illustrates many insightful points. It not only shows the fragmented memories of Yeong-hye but also the fragmented nature of trauma. Additionally, the expression of trauma in the narrative is also deeply influenced by this fragmentation. In his 1992 article "Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle," Dori Laub argues that trauma often manifests in "speechless testimony." It is the manifestation of a silence that occurs because the past event are elusive and does not yield to language or understanding. Throughout the novel, Yeong-hye's silence becomes the epitome of this speechless testimony. It is a silent and elusive testimony that is witnessed only in the disjointed perceptions of the people around her. Desire also plays a prominent role in the narrative. It is manifested as both a symptom of trauma and a strategy for escaping it subconsciously. Yeong-hye desires to erase her past by the rejection of her societal norms and even her body. It can be understood as a subtle way of expressing a form of control over her trauma. Yeong-hye's brother-in-law is obsessed with her body. His erotic fixation on her "delicate" nakedness in particular, can be seen as a juxtaposition to his desires with her own withdrawal from physicality (Kang, 2015, p. 133). His desire to possess her body is framed as perhaps a distorted response to her own trauma. His sexual obsession with her shows his failure to understand her inner world. Throughout, her inner reality and her unarticulated desires remains hidden behind the walls of her sickening silence. The narrative of the author also emphasizes the important relationship between trauma and the body. It is a theme

which is central to trauma theory. In the novel “The Vegetarian”, the body becomes a site of expression for the repressed memories. The extreme bodily choices of Yeong-hye reflect her desperate attempt to regain control over a past. The past has implicitly taken her body as hostage. Her withdrawal from the material world is an attempt to silence the trauma. It represents her unexhausted struggle to escape the invasive desires that others project onto her. Han Kang’s masterpiece novel “The Vegetarian” explores the complex relationships between trauma, memory and desire. Through the rejection of her own history and body of the protagonist, Han Kang presents a narrative that both engages with the silencing of trauma. It shows how repression shapes both the individual experience as well as collective histories. Driven by her unspoken memories, the transformation of Yeong-hye illustrates how trauma can be embodied in silence and desire. Trauma, though implicitly, reveals the limits of language in confronting the past.

### **Literature Review**

In contemporary literature, memory and trauma are interconnected themes. They are often interwoven and portray the fractured experiences of characters who struggle to reconcile and reconstruct their pasts. The works of towering figures on trauma such as Cathy Caruth emphasizes that traumatic experiences disrupt the continuity of memory and coherence of time. “It often leaves the victim in a perpetual state of re-experiencing the trauma” (Caruth, 1996). This disjunction is especially significant in those literary works which prominently feature repressed memories. In these fiction works, characters struggle either to access the causes or even the fundamental nature of their trauma. In Han Kang's novel “The Vegetarian”, the protagonist’s rejection of eating meat becomes an external manifestation of her implicit internal trauma. This perpetuated trauma serves to reveal the complexities of the repression of memory. As the novel unfolds through the fragmented perspectives of multiple unreliable narrators the reader gradually uncovers the traumatic past of Yeong-hye. This shifting narrative structure mirrors the often inaccessible and fragmented nature of repressed memories. It is one of the central tenets of trauma theory. The themes of repressed trauma and memory in the novel “The Vegetarian” seem to align with the works of Michael Rothberg (2009). He famously argues that trauma shapes the collective memory and also affects the psyches of individuals. The protagonist’s withdrawal from society is not just a personal choice. It is the reflection of the collective societal traumas that often remain unsorted, unarticulated and unresolved. The relationship between the body and desire is a recurring and prominent motif in modern and postmodern literature. It is particularly significant in those works which explore bodily transformation as an unconscious response to repressed desires or universalized trauma. The psychoanalytic theories proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan are crucial for comprehending these perplexed dynamics. Freud’s ideas of bodily symptoms and subconsciously repressed desires (Freud, 1920) are exemplified in Yeong-hye’s body. The protagonist’s body, in the course of novel, becomes the site of her psychological breakdown. Lacan’s concept of the “mirror stage” (Lacan, 1977) also informs the analysis as to how Yeong-hye’s physical transformation reflects her unconscious struggle with the construction of self and identity. Her transformation from a normal woman to an iconoclast can be seen as both a reassertion of unarticulated desire and a revolt against repression. Previous studies such as those conducted by Elizabeth Wright (1998) on Lacanian psychoanalysis suggest that, Yeong-hye’s body becomes a vehicle for her repressed desires. Prominent amongst her desires is the

relentless desire to escape the roles that the hegemonic society has unduly imposed upon her. Wright proposes that in literature, bodies often serve as symbols for repressed psychic states. This argument is relevant to understanding Yeong-hye's drastic and often arbitrary physical changes. The abrupt metamorphosis of her body parallels her unruly psychological state. Her trauma is queerly expressed through physicality because it couldn't be verbalized easily. The portrayal of bodily transformation in the novel "The Vegetarian" can also be compared to the works of Susan J. Brison (2002). He critically explores how the body and the trauma are often intimately linked in the construction or deconstruction of identity. Brison argues that traumatic events can distort the self-perception or the body image of an individual. Yeong-hye's rejection of food and her growing fixation for bodily purity signals her repressed implicit desires which are both psychological and sexual in nature. In literature, the unspoken past often refers to trauma(s) that, due to any reason, remain unarticulated, unacknowledged or suppressed, whether individual or societal. Derrida (1996) and Agamben (2002) argue that silence is not merely the absence of speech. It is, on the contrary, a complex act that contributes to the formation of identity and memory. The refusal of Yeong-hye to speak about her past is a form of above-mentioned silence. In this peculiar silence, the collective and personal histories of trauma largely remain concealed. This silence is also a form of indirect response to the unwillingness of others to confront the painful past. The unspoken past in the novel, "The Vegetarian" can be understood through the framework of cultural trauma. The term "cultural trauma" was coined by Jeffrey Alexander in 2004. It denotes the often unconscious collective memory of a society that cannot openly address the horrors of its past. In Korea, where the setting of Han Kang's narrative is set, there is a long history of repression. This collective memory stems from the Korean War and its dire aftermaths. Yeong-hye's personal trauma, though individual in nature, reflects the broader national history of amnesia and suppression. This cultural trauma is passed down through generations. In the novel, it manifests in the inability of the characters to confront the past. It is much like the way Yeong-hye herself distances herself from her traumatic memories. Literary scholar Marianne Hirsch (2012) expanded on this idea of inter-generational trauma. She famously argues that trauma can be inherited through narratives and cultural practices. In the case of the novel "The Vegetarian", the failure of the family members to understand the transformation of Yeong-hye reflects this inter-generational silence. It is suggestive of how the trauma of the previous generation remains unresolved and unarticulated but affects those who come after. Many scholars have critically analyzed "The Vegetarian" with a particular focus on memory, trauma and desire. For instance, Daniel J. Lee (2016) explores the symbolic significance of Yeong-hye's rejection of meat. He suggests that it serves as a metaphor for the repression of personal and historical trauma. Lee's analysis connects Yeong-hye's abstinence from meat to larger cultural gestures of denial. It positions the novel as a critique of a society that either refuses to or is reluctant to engage with its painful history. Jung H. Lee (2018) further elaborates how the body becomes a site of memory in the novel "The Vegetarian". He states that the novel portrays abrupt bodily transformation as a response to painful psychic trauma. This argument connects to the psychoanalytic view that trauma is manifested in the body when it cannot be verbally processed. Yeong-hye's rejection of food and her growing fixation for bodily purity shows her implicit desires which are both psychological and sexual in nature. A study conducted by Hye-Young Kim in 2015 examines the psychological implications of Yeong-hye's trauma. The study investigates the ways in which the family members of Yeong-hye attempt to control her actions

and her body. Kim argues that “The Vegetarian” critiques the hegemonic control of patriarchal society over women’s bodies in Korean society. It is concluded from the study that Yeong-hye’s bodily revolt is an act of resistance against familial as well as societal norms.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the novel “The Vegetarian” by Han Kang, the themes of trauma, memory, and desire are woven in the narrative. These intricately connected themes explore the complexities of the human psyche. The novel revolves around the life of the protagonist; Yeong-hye. The protagonist’s abrupt decision to renounce meat becomes a central action. Through this action, the novel delves into the repressed memories and traumas that shape her desires and identity. The novel shows how these past experiences, particularly the unconscious and unarticulated trauma, inform the present desires and actions of an individual. This theoretical framework examines the interconnection between trauma, memory, and desire in the novel “The Vegetarian”. It draws from the literary, psychological, and philosophical perspectives to unearth the depths of human experience which reflects in the text. As defined by Maurice Halbwachs, memory is not just an individual process but also a social one. He suggests that collective memory influences how different individuals experience and recall these personal experiences (Halbwachs, 1992). In “The Vegetarian”, Yeong-hye’s actions and behaviors are heavily influenced by a past. Her past, in turn, is shaped by varied familial and cultural expectations. Her rejection of meat is an ambivalent revolt. This rebellion is explicitly against the societal norms. It is also deeply personal and is abysmally tied to unresolved memories of her silenced trauma. Yeong-hye’s trauma remains as much unarticulated as her past is repressed. As the narrative unfolds, memory surfaces through her dreams, actions, and bodily transformations. It reveals a complex interplay between what is remembered and what is suppressed on preconscious level. The trauma of Yeong-hye is deeply linked to her memories of psychological and physical violence. These memories shape her worldview. In psychological terms, trauma often leads to dissociation. It is one of the coping mechanisms that helps individuals to cope with unbearable experiences. It detaches the individuals from their emotions and painful memories (Van der Kolk, 2014). Yeong-hye’s refusal to eat meat becomes a metaphorical act of separating herself from the violent world of which she was once a part. Her trauma is manifested physically when she transforms from a passive, conventional woman into someone with iconoclastic mindset. She gradually withdraws from reality and refuse to conform to the expectations of her society and family. The desire of Yeong-hye to cut ties with the world of carnivores symbolizes her attempt to sever ties with the trauma of her past. Even though, her trauma is never explicitly realized or directly addressed. As Yeong-hye abdicates her apparent reality, the narrative exposes the unspoken nature of trauma. It also shows how the traumas shapes the desires in unpredictable and unconscious ways. In the novel, repression and trauma portrayed are not only psychological in nature but also deeply connected to familial and cultural expectations. These external pressures contribute to the formation of desires. The desires formed due to external pressures are often fragile and incongruent with the true self of an individual. Yeong-hye’s decision to become a vegetarian may seem irrational to her family. But for her, it becomes a powerful statement of liberty and self-protection. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), desire is not just a simple longing for something. It is, quite contrary, a force that operates on the level of the unconscious. It can shape and disrupt the social existence of an individual. In “The Vegetarian”, the puerile desire of Yeong-hye to reject

societal expectations is driven by a need to protect herself from the trauma of her past. It is also an act to reclaim control and agency over her body and her actions. The trauma of Yeong-hye brings the tension between individual autonomy and the inflicted desires to the forefront. The obsession of her brother-in-law with her body highlights the dissonance between individual desires and the way they are perceived by others. Her brother-in-law is particularly obsessed with her transformation into a “different” person in the course of novel. His desire to possess her body can be understood as an expression of patriarchal control. Female agency is often silenced and reduced to the object of male desire in the powerful male-dominated society. Yeong-hye’s response to these external desires is one of extreme withdrawal. She increasingly retires herself from human contact and engages in a form of self-erasure. At the core of the novel lies a tension between desire and trauma. The relationship between them is ambiguous as one is both a response to the other and a form of coping. Yeong-hye’s isolation, her rejection of meat and her bodily transformation are all forms of coping mechanisms. They also point to her deep and unconscious desire for escape from the traumas that have shaped her life. The actions of Yeong-hye are influenced by what was unarticulated in her past. They were the traumas that were not directly confronted. They manifest in her physical transformation and her rejection of societal norms. The novel explores the idea that trauma is not just an individual experience. Trauma is something that affects the mind as well as the body in often or unacknowledged hidden ways. The theoretical framework surrounding trauma, memory, and desire in the novel “The Vegetarian” is underscored in the present study. It is realized and understood by the notion of repressed memories that reoccur and resurface through actions and bodily experiences. As Cathy Caruth (1995) suggests, trauma is often manifested in ways that are beyond verbal articulation. Trauma reveal itself in the body as well as in subconscious desires. The body of Yeong-hye becomes a canvas for her un verbalized memories. Her transformation shows the depths of her trauma and her relentless desire to break free from the chains of her past. In the course of narrative, the protagonist undergoes various physical and psychological changes. These changes demonstrate the unspoken nature of her trauma and her complex relationship with desire.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Yeong-hye’s Transformation: The Trauma of the Body**

The novel authored by Han Kang titled “The Vegetarian” (2007) offers a nuanced narrative that intersects the themes of trauma, memory and desire. The novel intertwines these themes in the physical and psychological transformation of Yeong-hye, the protagonist. Through her abrupt and puerile decision to abandon meat, she attempts to dissociate from her past. It is an act of confronting and attempting to erase the trauma which is the unconscious part of her existence. In this study, we try to establish how Han Kang uses these themes to depict the unspoken past of the protagonist as well as of the society. The novel highlights the relationship between societal pressures, individual memory and the psychological manifestations of trauma.

### **Memory and Trauma: Uncovering the Layers**

As a mechanism for survival, memory is intricately connected to trauma. This queer nexus is particularly apparent in the context of post-traumatic experiences. As a novel “The Vegetarian” provides a deep exploration of how the mind processes and represses the traumatic events and memories. The refusal of Yeong-hye to consume meat is not just a dietary choice but it is a

profound rejection of her unconscious traumatic past. The novel begins with Yeong-hye's defiance of societal norms. She suddenly decides to abandon consuming meat. The choice seems arbitrary at first, but as the narrative unfolds, it becomes clear that her transformation is unconsciously linked to past trauma. In the first part of the novel, titled "The Vegetarian," the narrator, describes Yeong-hye's decision to abandon meat as a "mysterious and inexplicable act". However, it is soon revealed that this act is unconscious, deep and psychological in nature. It is tied to her subconscious rejection of the violence which is associated with her past. The portrayal of memory in the novel reveals that Yeong-hye's refusal to eat meat is symbolic. It is an attempt to erase the trauma of her childhood. This traumatic past is rooted in an abusive family where physical violence and emotional neglect are evident. The oppressive environment of family left indelible scars on her psyche. The first-person narrative in "The Vegetarian" offers a closer look at how trauma and memory often work in tandem. Yeong-hye's husband reflects on her abrupt transformation and noted that, "She stopped eating meat one day without any explanation. It was an abrupt decision, but it seemed like she had always been that way." (Kang, 2007, p. 11). This line hints at Yeong-hye's subtle repression of the traumatic past memories. The refusal of her body to accept meat is emblematic of various memories and factors. It symbolize the rejection of the violent memories of her childhood and the oppression she felt in her home. Her trauma is not directly confronted. It is instead, manifested through her physical transformation and her seemingly irrational actions. Research on trauma suggest that repression plays a crucial role in how individuals cope with painful memories. According to Caruth (1996), trauma is often experienced as a gap in memory. It is realized in a moment where the traumatic event cannot be integrated in an individual's sense of self. The refusal of Yeong-hye to consume meat can be understood as the unconscious way of refusing to integrate the violence of her past in her present self. The act of rejecting meat serves two functions. It is both a memory of her trauma and an attempt to avoid confronting it directly.

### **The Unspoken Past: Silence and Repression**

Throughout the course of the novel "The Vegetarian", the unarticulated past is depicted as a silent force that governs the actions and relationships of individuals. Yeong-hye's decision to stop eating meat is met with resistance by her family. No one, oddly enough, directly discover or address the reasons behind her behavior. The silence around Yeong-hye's decision is symbolic of the larger familial and cultural silences that often accompany trauma. In many ways, the un verbalized past is not just Yeong-hye's own. It is also the past of her family and the society at large. This silence is a defense mechanism to avoid confronting the traumatic and painful realities of the past. Yeong-hye's transformation is not articulated in terms of a conscious rejection of her history. It is, rather, articulated as a dissociation and psychological rupture from her immediate surroundings. Her brother-in-law, who becomes obsessed with her, reflects on Yeong-hye's behavior: "Her body, however, was not just an object to be possessed. It was a place where no one could touch her without breaking her into pieces." (Kang, 2007, p. 82). This statement shows the tension between Yeong-hye's emotional fragmentation and her bodily autonomy which is caused by her trauma. Her body is marked by the violence and repression of the past. It, in symbolic way, becomes a space of resistance to the world that seeks to dominate it. Psychologists argue that trauma is often not verbalized. As illustrated in the work of Van der Kolk (2014), trauma often remains unconscious and manifest itself in the body. In this sense, Yeong-hye's rejection of meat serves as a response to the trauma of her past. Her

queer decision can be interpreted as a way to reclaim control over her body. Her decision represents a conscious act of distance from the violent past that has shaped her. This, in a way, reflects the trauma theory proposed by Freud (1917). He asserted that repressed memories can emerge in the form of somatic symptoms. These are often hidden and operate without the conscious awareness of the individual.

### **Desire and the Desire for Autonomy**

The theme of desire in novel "The Vegetarian" plays a crucial role in the depiction of the unarticulated past. The desire of Yeong-hye to break free from societal expectations manifest itself in her desire to escape from the violent memories. These memories are subtle and elusive in nature and haunts her consistently. Desire, in this case, is not simply a longing for some external thing. It is a deep-seated need for autonomy and emancipation from the past. Yeong-hye's transformation into a vegetarian shows her desire to escape the oppressive forces that govern her life. These oppressive forces are the expectations of her family, the desires of her husband and the societal pressures. These factors dictate her role as a woman. The second part of the novel is narrated by Yeong-hye's brother-in-law. Here, the focus shifts from Yeong-hye's dietary choice to her increasingly erratic behavior. The sexually obsessed brother-in-law of hers sees her body as a site of repressed desire. However, his desire for Yeong-hye is framed in a different context. His desire is primarily motivated by power and control rather than by understanding or mutual consent. He describes her as "an abandoned garden, a place where no one dared to tread." (Kang, 2007, p. 100). This metaphor of an abandoned garden shows the isolation that Yeong-hye feels from the rest of the world. Her body, once constrained by the external expectations, has become a space of personal revolt and silent yearning for liberty.

The concept of desire in "The Vegetarian" is complex and multifaceted. It is not merely sexual or romantic in nature. It is, on the contrary, deeply connected to the desire for autonomy and self-determination of the protagonist. Yeong-hye's refusal to comply with societal norms illustrates a deeper and more fundamental desire to reject the constraints placed upon her by the time itself. Desire in the novel, as discussed by Berlant (2008), is not just the pursuit of external objects. It is a longing for the self autonomy and integrity. This is especially evident in desire of Yeong-hye to transform her body and mind. She yearns for a space outside of conventional societal expectations where she can establish her own identity. She seeks a space which is free from the traumatic histories imposed upon her.

### **The Intersection of Memory, Trauma, and Desire**

The interplay between trauma, memory, and desire is central to understand the deep rooted psychological complexity of Yeong-hye's character. Her memories are affected by trauma and create a peculiar dissonance. It is a dilemma between her desires for autonomy and the external forces trying to shape her psyche. Throughout the novel, Yeong-hye's body functions as a site where these trauma, memory, and desire intersect in a painful yet transformative way. As the mental state of Yeong-hye deteriorates, her desires grow more extreme. It culminates in her complete withdrawal from the society. The final parts of the novel potrays how the trauma has shaped the desires of the protagonist. In a moment of pain and acute psychosis, Yeong-hye is described as stating: "I am a tree now. I want to be a tree, to sink my roots into the earth, to feel nothing and be nothing." (Kang, 2007, p. 186). This statement symbolizes the culmination of Yeong-hye's desire to escape her past. The image of the tree can be interpreted as her



unconscious desire to shed her human form. She wants to retreat into a state of non-existence where she is no longer subject to violence or pain of her history. At the core of Yeong-hye's transformation lies the subconscious desire to escape from the cyclical nature of memory and trauma. Her desire to become a tree and withdraw from the human world can be seen as a metaphor. It is a metaphor for the ultimate rejection of her traumatic past and the culmination of her desire to erase the imprint of her painful memory. This desire is ultimately not entirely liberating. It reflects a tragic attempt of the protagonist to control the past which is so deeply entrenched that it cannot be erased. The work of Judith Herman (1992) on trauma emphasizes that individuals may at some point seek to repress traumatic memories. However, these repressed memories inevitably reiterate in some form, and the struggle for control is eternal and ongoing. In the case of Yeong-hye, the desire for escape only deepens her alienation from both her past and the present. Through the fusion and masterful incorporation of trauma and desire, the novel "The Vegetarian" illustrates how memory and unarticulated past works. It reveals how they function in both destructive as well as redemptive ways. Additionally, how they influence the actions of the characters and create a narrative of emotional rupture and tension. Yeong-hye's psychological and physical withdrawal from the world is emblematic of various memories and diverse factors. It is not a mere response to her memories but rather a complex negotiation between identity, trauma, and the ongoing desire to find peace in a world which is marked by violence and suppression. This layering of internal conflict shows the broader cultural and psychological trauma that forever lingers beneath the surface. It is the examination of how individuals are shaped and reshaped by the traumas that remain unsaid.

## **Conclusion**

Han Kang's masterpiece novel "The Vegetarian" explores the interplay between trauma, memory and desire. The novel utilizes the theme of the unarticulated past as a central point around which the narrative of the novel unfolds. Through the central character of Yeong-hye: the protagonist, the novel delves deeper into the psychological scars which are left by personal as well as collective trauma. It also illustrates how the repressed desires and the un verbalized memories are embodied and represented in the character. The silence that surrounds her queer decision to abdicate consuming meat becomes a metaphor. It symbolizes the unspeakable and the traumatic past. In the novel, the silence functions as a potent narrative device. It reveals the emotional complexity and the psychological fragility of the characters. It also mirrors the societal and familial forces that stimulates the process of repression and shaping trauma. Recent scholarly discussions of the novel "The Vegetarian" have emphasized the role of trauma in the formation of individual as well as the collective identities. Scholars like Yoon (2019) and Song (2021) argue that the physical transformation of Yeong-hye symbolizes various things simultaneously. It is, broadly, an attempt to reclaim agency over a mind and the body that have been controlled, objectified by external forces. The trauma that the protagonist experiences is not only personal in nature. It is also a reflection of the tumultuous history of Korea, from its violent colonial past to the ongoing political repression and the legacy of war. The disintegration of the emotional and psychological state of Yeong-hye is a clear manifestation. It shows how unsorted and unresolved collective trauma, both at a societal and individual level, manifests in profound ways. These traumas often make the individuals incapable of confronting their painful and traumatic past directly. This observation aligns with Freudian theories of repression. In Freudian perspective the trauma; whether historical, familial or psychological

emerges unconsciously and indirectly. It emerges through the body as well as through behaviors, as seen in Yeong-hye's abstention from meat and her subsequent mental collapse. The novel "The Vegetarian" also illuminates the tension between desire and repression. This is most obvious particularly in the attempts of the characters to suppress or control their desires. Yeong-hye's rejection of conventional desires embodied in her sexuality, her refusal of meat and social norms becomes a form of resistance. It is also an attempt to subvert and escape the pressures of her past. Her behavior reveals the intricate ways in which desire can be both destructive as well as liberatory. It highlights the conflict between the internal desires of the self and the external expectations inflicted by the society. As noted by scholars like Lee (2020), Yeong-hye's rejection of traditional feminine roles and social expectations is highly suggestive and ambiguous. It can be read as an expression of desire for liberty and a response to the violence instilled in her history. In essence, the novel stimulates the readers to confront the complexity of memory as it is intertwined with desire, trauma and identity. Through the journey of Yeong-hye, the writer: Han Kang provides a poignant meditation on how the past. The narrative suggests that even though often left suppressed or unspoken, the past is never fully absent. The unarticulated always remain. It is deeply embedded in the psyche, in the body and in the very fabric of interpersonal relationships. By refusing to directly articulate about the traumatic events of the past that have shaped her, Yeong-hye describes the ways in which trauma manifests in unconscious, subtle and often invisible ways. It manifests both in the private lives of individuals and in the broader cultural and historical narrative. The novel challenges us to reconsider how memory operates within the constraints of narrative and in language itself. It suggests that sometimes, the most profound and deep truths can only be expressed in silence. Thus, novel "The Vegetarian" stands as a powerful exploration of the personal and the political narratives and memories. It also invites the ongoing conversations about how the memory, trauma and desire shape the contours of identity. Han Kang's narrative serves as an invitation to explore the deeper complexities of human existence. It challenges the reader to reflect on the unresolved traumas that reside in our own histories.

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