

The Invisible Cage: A Cross-Cultural Feminist Reading of Anita
Nair's Ladies Coupé and Cho Nam-Joo's Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that.

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2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material that has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
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Approval

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Abstract

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” Simone de Beauvoir’s iconic words provide the foundation for this study, which explores how womanhood is constructed, contested, and stuck in an invisible cage in patriarchal societies. Through a comparative analysis of Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe* (2001) and Cho Nam-Joo’s *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* (2016), this research paper investigates how women’s identities are shaped by cultural expectations and systemic gender inequality in India and South Korea. The protagonist Akhila’s symbolic train journey in a ladies’ coupe highlights women’s personal narratives as acts of resistance against domestic confinement. Kim Ji-Young’s fragmented self becomes a mirror of South Korea’s entrenched misogyny and its impact on female subjectivity. By engaging with the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak, this paper argues that both texts illuminate the daily, silent battles of women and their responsibility to others. This represents the invisible cage. Additionally, their strategies of resistance include storytelling, self-awareness, and defiance of prescribed roles. Despite the cultural differences, these works reveal extremely similar patterns of patriarchal oppression. It emphasizes the universality of feminist concerns and the necessity of cross-cultural solidarity in the struggle for women’s agency and identity.

Keywords: Inequality, Invisible cage, Patriarchy, Identity, Cross-cultural, Womanhood, Construct, Contest.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Human life has always been intertwined with stories, featuring themes of struggle, survival, and change. Women have been fighting against patriarchy for a very long time. It is an old struggle. Women have been struggling since ancient times. The already existing patriarchal system compels political, social, and cultural participation. It has managed women's roles, responsibilities, and identities. Most of the time, it has restricted their freedom and stopped them from taking part in society equally. Women's lives are characterized by silence, patience, and sacrifice due to patriarchy. Nonetheless, women have displayed powerful acts of resistance and creativity within it. Women don't just suffer; they also transform, becoming different. Patriarchy is one of the most powerful systems that shapes the lives of women across the world. Women have traditionally been relegated to the roles of daughter, wife, and mother in society. Through family and society, individual identities are often constructed and controlled. Women attaining education and jobs does not eliminate gender inequality. It continues to limit women and silence their voices. We can call this condition an invisible cage, which imposed a particular responsibility. The cage signifies the constraints imposed by society and its people. Feminist literature uses this invisible cage theme quite extensively in the modern-day age. Feminist authors' writings often reflect the entrapment of women in these roles. However, they also show how women reject, oppose, and resist choices forced upon them. Literature has long been a useful instrument for every woman to question patriarchy. A woman can express her hidden struggles by using literature. It gives a voice to the person to express herself without any doubt. Especially the comparative feminist readings of texts across cultures made these struggles noticeable. Both countries have some unique cultures and

different histories. But the patterns of oppression of women are often almost similar. As both authors show, women face problems and barriers almost everywhere, and these obstacles are created by patriarchy. No matter what the location is. At the same time, literature globally demonstrates that women use similar forms of resistance.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In most societies, women are constrained by patriarchal norms, and cultural expectations negatively impact their freedom, identity, and individuality. These limitations create a cage, which can be called an invisible cage, where the voice of women is silenced, and choices are restricted. Women's literature has often reflected the social realities of their time. In this context, women's literature often brings women's sufferings, agony, and sorrows to light. The safest place for a person is her home, where she lives with her family. But that place can become a cage, and the family members can be the key holders. It can be anyone. It can be father, spouse, sometimes brother, or son. It is not every man, but it is always men. Or it can be the so-called patriarchal society that sets the rules and dominates women. Sometimes it can be a different mother, grandmother, or sister who can also dominate because they have become part of the patriarchy. A psychological barrier and a cage made of words are like a barrier for them. Although one can be free from a visible cage. But one cannot be free from an invisible cage, nor can one break it. You cannot tolerate it, nor can you reject it in any way. In India, a lot of writers write about the struggles of women. Indian literature has been doing this for a long time. In India, there are prominent writers like Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande who wrote amazing feminist novels like *Cry, the Peacock*, and *The long silence*. They set the stage for contemporary voices with their words. If I look more

specifically, writers like Anita Nair continue this tradition. Just the same, South Korean literature is also taking up women's issues concerning inequality in work, the domestic sphere, and mental health. Many novelists write novels about it, but Cho Nam-Joo's *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* makes a massive change. Nevertheless, very few studies explore the combination of Indian and South Korean literature. And specifically from a feminist point of view. Both regions have different histories and unique cultures. But in one place, they are the same. That place is where both cultures experience a patriarchal pressure. Where inequality permeates, and they feel trapped like a cage. There is no visibility of women's problems, as well as their marginalization, in the two societies. Because of this, a comparative study is necessary. In other words, this paper analyses the two novels *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, to understand how women confront an invisible cage, and how feminist theory may add to these understandings.

1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study

Feminist literary criticism has increasingly focused on how women are experiencing oppression and suppression. Women have been historically constrained in their roles in India by family, society, and tradition. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001) depicts women engaged in their familial and social responsibilities. Living with her own family, the protagonist Akhila is still lost in her own life. The protagonist, Akhila, is the representative of the contemporary Indian woman who struggles to be free while fulfilling family obligations. Nair presents the silent daily struggles faced by women. And the varied ways in which they resist through stories of six women travelling in a train compartment. In South Korea, faster modernization and economic development are happening. And it has reinforced patriarchal complexes. In the book *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*

(2016), written by Cho Nam-Joo, the reality of the lives of women is unraveled. It depicts workplace discrimination, motherhood, and mental health. Kim Ji-young embodies the experiences of many South Korean women. The women whose identities have been formalized and constrained by society. The novel's fragmented narration and the struggles of the protagonist shine a light on the gender inequality in contemporary South Korea. This research is justified by the need for a feminist analysis across cultures. The research examines how women view and address the patriarchal oppression of their respective cultures. Also, it highlights the universal oppression experienced by women across the world. And evaluates regional differences in women's resistance to and oppositional strategies employed against patriarchal subordination. This research acts as a contribution to feminist literary criticism by showing how literature can represent resistance and empowerment.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Chokroborty Spivak will form the theoretical base of the study. These theorists equip us to understand the limitations and representations of women's lives, identities, and agency in literature. The experiences of Akhila in *Ladies Coupé* and Kim Ji-Young in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* are particularly useful in illustrating their ideas. The feminist use of theory allows us to see that literature not only reflects the oppression that women face but also how they resist, along with the strategies they use to reclaim autonomy.

1.3.1 Simone de Beauvoir and the “Making” of Womanhood

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is a foundational text in the area of feminist thought. Simone de Beauvoir is famously quoted that ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman (Beauvoir 273). This indicates that womanhood is not natural or inherent but a social construction. Beauvoir notes that the patriarchal connotations of defining women as the “Other” were Napoleon's words and not an accident. The expectations of women to perform housework and care giving restricts their freedom of self (132-137). Beauvoir's theory in this study provides a framework for understanding how Akhila and Kim Ji-Young become products of society. Akhila leads a life that is greatly constrained by familial obligation, societal pressure to marry and work, as well as cultural ideas that femininity demands. She feels trapped, as if her life is in a cage, a cage that enables her but also binds her. Likewise, in South Korea, there is Kim Ji-Young, who endures structural oppression due to motherhood, domestic work, and profession. Her relationships with men and family roles define her rather than her individual self. Beauvoir's theory demonstrates how women internalize these social norms over the years. The characters' struggles show that becoming a woman is not just about making up, but it is also something we internalize. This in turn shapes our thoughts, behavior, and sense of self. Using Beauvoir, this study notes that women experiencing oppression is not only something others impose on them. It becomes an already existing condition that makes them doubt themselves and get anxious. In the case of Kim Ji-Young, it even made her mentally ill. Moreover, the main characters' moments of resistance, Akhila's train journey, and Ji-Young's increasing realization of injustice illustrate the possibility of women adapting or rejecting these constructed identities.

1.3.2 Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

The concept of gender performativity, introduced by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990), expands feminist theory. Butler believes that gender is not a fixed identity but a repetitive act that we perform according to a set of codes. Society dictates what men and women should think, say, and do. When individuals carry out these roles again and again, they start to internalize the norms, thereby creating the illusion of a stable gender identity. In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila is portrayed as the ideal Indian woman in speech, behavior, and thought, a submissive, family-oriented, and socially compliant individual. But she pushes against all of that through her journey. As Akhila interacts with other women in the train compartment, hearing their stories and thinking of her own wants, she begins to question the repetitive scripts that are foisted on her. This story shows that gender's naturalness itself is not something we accept but can resist, disrupt, or perform otherwise. Just like *Kim Ji-young, Born 1982*'s protagonist Ji-young has no agency over her life. She is discriminated against at work, getting passed over for promotions or judged for being pregnant. At home, he should live like a devoted wife and mother. This theory explains how Ji-Young is controlled by these repetitive performances, which cause her to continuously be in an invisible cage. But Ji-Young is aware of social injustices, the impact of others' performances, and of herself. Thus, there is room to subvert these performances. The reading of Butler's novels illustrates how women negotiate, resist, and sometimes unknowingly accept societal expectations. Such performances highlight not only the performances but our gender identities as well.

1.3.3 Gayatri Spivak's subaltern voice

Gayatri Spivak's book *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) describes how women and other marginalized sectors are silenced by the powerful. Spivak states that even when women speak, their information is mediated, ignored, and interpreted in the service of the ruling classes. The term "subaltern" refers to those outside, displaced from, or lacking access to structures of power whose historical experience is seldom represented in dominant discourse either by their own agency or by outside intellectuals. Akhila and Kim Ji Young are both subalterns. Although Akhila is well educated, aware of the life around her, and even liberated, she cannot choose her life. This is due to social and family conditioning. The tales and recollections of other women in the train, along with hers, unveil the quiet oppression women face in India. Kim Ji-young also represents the struggle of ordinary Korean women who are left voiceless against societal oppression and institutional injustice. Despite the subjectivity of her tale, it reflects the common story of innumerable women whose voices escape the domestic space as well as the professional sphere. The novels enable women, in particular, to speak in an indirect fashion, according to Spivak. The narrative structures employed by Akhila and Ji-Young show how women manage to narrate their experiences through literature when they cannot in real life. This study uses Spivak to show how women's voices resist erasure and highlight the presence of alternative spaces for dialogue, solidarity, and awareness.

1.4 Objectives

1.4.1 General Objectives

The general objective of this study is to explore how women's struggles against patriarchy and societal expectations are represented in Indian and South Korean literature, using feminist theory to analyze patterns of oppression and resistance.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine how *Ladies Coupe* and *Kim Ji Young Born 1982* portray women's search for identity and freedom
2. To analyze the social and cultural conditions shaping women's lives in India and South Korea.
3. To study the role of silence, storytelling, and personal agency in women's resistance
4. To demonstrate how a cross-cultural feminist reading can reveal similarities and differences in patriarchal oppression.

1.5 Literature Review

Previous research on *Ladies Coupé* often emphasizes women's resistance to domestic duties and their search for autonomy. Akhila's journey is analyzed as a metaphor for self-discovery, and the stories of other women highlight collective struggles. Studies on *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, focus on gender inequality, workplace discrimination, and the psychological toll of societal pressure. Kim Ji-Young has been widely recognized as a symbol of South Korean

women's everyday oppression. However, there is a notable gap in comparative studies between Indian and South Korean feminist literature. Few scholars have examined these texts together to explore shared themes of silence, identity, and resistance. Additionally, cross-cultural feminist theory has rarely been applied in a framework that considers the nuances of both societies.

Simone de Beauvoir and the Making of Womanhood

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is one of the most important books in feminist theory. She explains that women are not born with a fixed role but are shaped into it by society. Her statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 273), shows how social rules and traditions decide how a woman should live. Beauvoir also divides her work into two parts, which are "Facts and Myths" and "Lived Experience." The first part explains how men have created myths about women, such as women being naturally weak or dependent. The second part studies how women live with these myths in their daily lives. She also points out, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (162). This shows how women's realities are often defined by male perspectives, not by women themselves. This theory is very useful for understanding both *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*. Akhila in *Ladies Coupé* feels pressure to live as a dutiful daughter and sister. One moment, while Akhila wanted to go on a solo trip, her sister wanted to stop her. She said, "I don't know what Narayan Anna and Narsi Anna will say when they know of you going away suddenly, and all by yourself too..." It shows Akhila, a middle-aged woman who earns money, but is not even allowed to go on a trip; this is how patriarchy works (Nair 07). While the protagonist Ji-Young in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, faces

constant restrictions in her work and family life. “Ji Young's mother would praise the girls for taking good care of their brother and not competing for her love (Joo 11). Also, at her workplace, after giving her best effort at her job, she did not get any promotion. “But the two male colleagues who started at the same time as Ji Young were assigned to the planning team” (66). This shows what kind of discrimination she faced. Another thing is that the gender pay gap in Korea is the highest among the OECD countries. “According to 2014 data, women working in Korea earn only 63 percent of what men earn” (68). Both characters show that women’s identities are not free but are made by cultural rules. Beauvoir helps us see how the novels portray women struggling to find their own voices beyond the roles given to them.

Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* changes the way we think about gender. She argues that gender is not something natural or fixed but something that people perform again and again through behavior, actions, and language. She writes, “gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time” (Butler 179), meaning that gender exists only because society makes people repeat certain rules. Butler also notes, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performativity constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results” (34). This means that gender does not exist first and then gets expressed, but rather gender itself is created by repeated acts. Butler’s theory helps us see that women are not simply born into gender roles but are trained to perform them. In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila's mother said that “A woman is not meant to take on a man’s role”(Nair 14). In *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, Ji-Young performs the roles of student, worker, wife, and mother, each shaped by cultural expectations. For example, one day a

cruel guy disturbed Ji Young. It was not her fault but her father scolded her badly he said, “Why is your cram school so far away? Why do you talk to strangers? Why your skirt so short?” “Ji Young grew up being told to be cautious, to dress conservatively, to be ladylike”. According to her parents it's Ji young's responsibility to avoid bad people and wrong time and dangerous people” (Joo 35). However, both characters also show resistance when they question or refuse these roles. Akhila says, All I am trying to do is convince myself that a woman can live alone” (Nair 21). Also Ji Young unconsciously says to her husband, “Ji Young is having a hard time. Raising a toddler is emotionally draining.” So both of the protagonists already started the first phase of their resistance. “Butler’s idea of gender as performance helps explain how women may resist by breaking away from these repeated acts, proving that gender is socially constructed, not natural.

Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern Voice

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* is a very influential text in postcolonial feminist studies. She writes, “If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak 83). This line is one of the most influential in postcolonial feminist studies. Spivak argues that women in marginalized positions, especially in postcolonial societies, are often silenced by both patriarchy and larger power systems. She famously states, “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with women as a pious item. Representation has not withered away.”(283). This means that even when women try to express themselves, society often refuses to hear them. Spivak’s idea is very important for reading both *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*. Akhila in *Ladies Coupé* struggles to speak openly about her wishes and is silenced by her family’s expectations. Ji-Young in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, also tries to explain her pain but

is dismissed as “overreacting” or “mentally unstable.” These silences show how women’s voices are often denied in both Indian and Korean societies. Spivak helps us see how the novels give space to these silenced voices, turning personal struggles into powerful narratives of resistance.

Workplace Discrimination in South Korea

A news article published by *BBC* on 23 October 2019, shows how feminist film reignites tensions in South Korea. The reporter Seo Ji Eun reports that many South Korean women lose jobs or face discrimination during pregnancy. According to the survey, one in four women faces workplace problems after becoming pregnant (Eun). This reflects how women are punished for natural roles like motherhood. Ji-Young’s story in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, shows this reality in fiction, where she struggles to balance work and family life but is treated unfairly because of her gender. The article gives us real evidence that Ji-Young’s experiences are not only fictional but also a reflection of Korean society. This helps the study connect literature with real-life struggles and shows how discrimination continues to limit women’s independence.

Marriage and the Loss of Women’s Work Identity

Nam Kyung-don’s report in *The Korea Herald* provides important statistics about women leaving jobs after marriage. The article says that from 2019 to 2023, more than 1.3 million South Korean women quit their jobs because of marriage (Kyung-don). Family duties and cultural expectations were the main reasons. This connects to *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, where Ji-Young is forced to give up her career to take care of her family. The data proves that this is not just an individual problem but a common social pattern in Korea. By comparing this report with Ji-

Young's story, we can see how deeply culture shapes women's life choices. It also shows how marriage, instead of being a personal decision, often becomes a turning point where women lose their professional identity. Another article published by BBC, a woman, Jang Yun-hwa, said she doesn't want to get married or have a baby because she will lose her career and job (Maybin).

Maternal Depression and the Invisible Burden

According to the report *Maternal Depression: Implications for Systems Serving Mother and Child*, written by Sontag-Padilla et al, maternal depression has serious effects on mothers and families. When maternal remains are left untreated, it negatively affects women's health and family relationships. The report explains that depression leads to loss of income, health problems, and economic problems (Sontag-Padilla et al. 5). Children of depressed mothers are deeply affected, and they also suffer from mental breakdown. Such children do not perform well in school. They also face many health issues. This research links closely with Kim Ji Young, Born 1982, as Ji Young is suffering from depression because of constant pressure. When she acts like her mother, she says, "I knew there was a little nip in the air these past few mornings, and today's baengno! White morning dew on fields of gooold, on baengno when the nights grow cooold" here she is reciting a traditional poem and older women used to say these things to their husband (Joo 03). Likewise, the protagonist Akhila in *Ladies Coupé*, while describing Akhila, the author says, "Akhila is that sort of woman. She does what is expected of her; she dreams about the rest" (Nair 01). So both the protagonists face an invisible burden as a result, Kim Ji Young starts acting like other people, and Akhila, 45 years old working woman who never bought train tickets (01).

Cross-Cultural Feminist Perspectives

Although India and South Korea have stark geographical and cultural differences, the novels exhibit a commonality in patriarchal oppression across strata. Gender expectations limit women's lives at home and in society, as made clear by both texts. The novels in comparison highlight the universality of certain feminist concerns like the negotiation of duty and desire, silence and speech, conformity and self-expression. By putting these texts side by side, the author of the study grounds local experiences in a global context of women's oppression and resistance. Thus, issues across cultures are shown to be relevant here (Nair 269-276; Nam-Joo 93-97).

Theoretical Integration

Feminist theory informs the interpretation of both novels. Simone de Beauvoir claims that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" as a result of the structures made by man. These structures shape the lives of Akhila and Ji-Young in the sense that they live in a certain way because of society. They have gender roles that they must fulfill, and to not do so is against the norm (Beauvoir 273). Poststructuralist Judith Butler, through her theory of gender performativity, was able to explain the way how repetitive actions affect patriarchy. They also allow for the subversion through conscious or unconscious acts (Butler 33-45). Gayatri Spivak suggests how the two protagonists fail to speak for themselves due to systems that silence them (Spivak 66-90). Theories facilitate a deeper reading of how both novels represent women negotiating and resisting patriarchal constraint.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research methods, primarily comparative literary analysis. The primary texts are *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*. Secondary sources include feminist theoretical texts, Newspaper articles, surveys, and scholarly articles on gender issues in India and South Korea. The methodology includes:

- A close reading of both novels to analyze the characters' development, struggle, battle, patriarchal norms, and thematic pattern.
- A proper thematic analysis of concepts, for example, silence, responsibility, identity, resistance, and agency.
- The application of feminist theories (Beauvoir, Butler, Spivak) to analyze and interpret the struggles and societal pressures faced by the characters in the chosen novels.
- Cross-cultural comparison aims to identify both the shared and different experiences of women under patriarchy.

This method helps to achieve a comprehensive understanding of both texts and supports the study's aim of highlighting cross-cultural similarities and differences in women's oppression and resistance.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research is limited to two novels: *Ladies Coupé* (India) and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* (South Korea). It focuses on the themes of patriarchy, silence, identity, and women's

resistance. Also focuses on the silent battle of women in daily life. This research does not cover the entire spectrum of feminist literature in India or South Korea. But instead uses these two novels as case studies to explore broader cultural and societal patterns. A limitation is that the novels belong to different historical and cultural contexts, which may present challenges in direct comparison. Nevertheless, this difference is valuable as it highlights how patriarchal oppression manifests in both similar and distinct ways across cultures.

Chapter 2

Patriarchy, Culture, and Womanhood

2.1: Patriarchal Structures in India and South Korea

From the beginning of history, there has been patriarchy all over the world. Patriarchy works in every society, but in different forms. In some societies, it is visible, and in some societies, it is invisible. The root of patriarchy is very deep. Patriarchy holds a major portion in every single era. This is especially faced by women of every society. In all, patriarchy remains strong and working invisibly. India and South Korea, both are two different countries, and their culture is also different. One is in South Asia, and the other is in East Asia. Both countries have different societies and environments. In a patriarchal society, they define women as caregivers, and they have to maintain all the family rules and religious values. Majorly, it is the family who trained their daughter to be a perfect wife. Also, both cultures have developed patriarchal norms that place women in subordinate positions. These structures decide how women are expected to behave, speak, and even dream. As Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 273). This means that society, not biology, decides what it means to be a woman. In both India and South Korea, this becoming is shaped by systems that control women’s sexuality, labor, and voice.

In the Indian context, patriarchy is closely tied to religion, caste, and family hierarchy. Families teach their girls three things from childhood, which are obedience, modesty, and sacrifice.

Also, it is a belief that the ultimate goal is marriage. Moreover, a woman's worth is frequently measured by her ability to serve her husband and family. Even in educated, urban settings, women face restrictions everywhere, for example, in freedom of movement, decision-making, and economic independence. The protagonist of *Ladies Coupe* Akhila the writer describes to her that "She does what is expected of her"(Nair 01). Another thing is when Akhila met five other women, one of them named Janki she faced a situation when Janki got married, her aunt told her that, " He is your husband and you must accept whatever he does" (25). Patriarchy in India works like women who live at home and listen to her family members. There is a cultural proverb, such as "A woman's place is in her home," which reflects how deeply these beliefs are rooted in people's minds. Beauvoir's idea that women are made into the "Other" helps explain this situation brilliantly. According to her idea, men are seen as the main subject, while women are positioned as the secondary one, the dependent, and the defined. The patriarchal system ensures that this imbalance continues by presenting it as natural or divine. And people still believe this idea.

On the other hand, the South Korean society shares similar patriarchal patterns rooted in its Confucian heritage. Confucian ideals are traditional ideals. It promotes the values of filial piety, male dominance, and female modesty. Women were expected to follow the three obediences for centuries. In the novel *Kim Ji Young Born 1982*, the protagonist's sister named Eunyoung wants to become television producer but her family pressurizes her to become a teacher according to them, "there is no better job for women than a school teacher" (Joo 37). And women have to be obedient to everyone. Firstly, obedience to their father before marriage, secondly, to their husband after marriage, and lastly, to their son in widowhood. Although this is a postmodern era, modern South Korea has transformed rapidly into a globalized, technologically advanced society. But

gender inequality remains a part of everyday life. A lot of reports and articles show how women face unwanted situations where their gender becomes an obstacle. Another part of the novel says about a survey that, “Only 29.6 percent of new employees at 100 companies were women, and it was mentioned as a big improvement” For instance, reports show that one in four Korean women face workplace discrimination related to pregnancy or childbirth (Eun). Moreover, over 1.3 million South Korean women quit their jobs after marriage between 2019 and 2023 (Kyung-don). As a result, many women remain hesitant to become mothers even today. Still, in the postmodern era, women feel like they are in a cage. These numbers reflect how women’s professional and personal lives are still controlled by traditional gender expectations.

Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity sheds light on these cultural behaviors. Butler argues that gender is not something one is, but something one does repeatedly, according to social rules and expectations. She writes, “Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time” (Butler 179). This suggests that people perform gender roles so frequently that they appear natural. India and South Korea are different places, and history is different, but in terms of patriarchy, they are the same. In both places, women are trained from early childhood to perform femininity through speech, clothing, and conduct in ways that please the patriarchal gaze. Akhila from Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupé*, her mother gives her a definition of a good wife, she says that, “no good wife could serve two masters”. “A good wife always listened to her husband”. “There is no such thing as an equal marriage” (Nair 14). It is the patriarchal society that made her mother’s mind like that; she is saying wrong to Akhila. It is like passing the same thing. And Kim Ji-Young from Cho Nam-Joo’s *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, she faces discrimination from childhood, like her grandmother always told her mother that “you should have a son, you must have a son.”(Joo 12).

Once her grandmother scolded her, “How dare you try to take something that belongs to my precious grandson!”(11). So everything started from their childhood. Both represent how women internalize and perform these gender scripts until they begin to question them. It is society that makes a script for women as if they are performers, and they have to follow everything in the script. Akhila, the protagonist of *Ladies Coupe*, as the 45-year-old unmarried elder daughter, becomes the financial provider, yet is denied emotional freedom. Kim Ji-Young, as a mother and employee, performs the perfect daughter-in-law and worker, but her breakdown reveals the emotional burden of these expectations. Butler’s theory helps explain how these women’s identities are constructed not by choice but by repetition of patriarchal norms.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak brilliantly brings out something different in her analysis, and she adds a different layer to this analysis. In *Can the Subaltern Speak*, she argues that women, especially those from marginalized social positions, are often silenced within dominant cultural and political discourses. She writes, “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with women as a pious item” (Spivak 283). The meaning is that even when women try to express themselves, their voices are filtered through systems of power that decide which voices matter. In both India and South Korea, women who speak out against gender norms or their rights are often criticized or dismissed as ungrateful, too emotional, or mentally unstable. For example, Ji-Young’s voice is pathologized by her husband and psychiatrist. On the other hand, Akhila’s independence is seen as selfishness. Both of the women are trying to speak, but unfortunately, society categorizes them. Spivak’s theory shows how the patriarchal society silenced women by making their struggles invisible. Both tries there are Economic and social modernization, but stereotypes are still there, and invisible cages are there. Instead, there are new

contradictions. Women today are encouraged to have an education while maintaining the traditional roles of caregivers or homemakers. In India, people judge those women who work outside by saying that they do not do their household duties properly. In South Korea, a woman who works and cares for her family is called the perfect woman. According to the feminist scholar, this situation is called the double burden. Because women are expected to work both outside and inside while maintaining all the traditional rules.

Despite these similarities, the two countries also show some unique cultural forms of patriarchy. In India, the caste system and religious customs increase gender inequality. In South Korea, a culture of competition and beauty standards adds new layers of pressure. The Korean beauty standard is another level of stereotype. With all the burden they have to look beautiful, their face shapes their weight; everything has to be under control. Yet, both contexts reveal how patriarchy functions through control over women's time, bodies, emotions, and voices. In both *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, patriarchy is not portrayed as a visible enemy but as an invisible system that quietly governs daily life. It hides behind love, duty, responsibility, and tradition. Beauvoir, Butler, and Spivak together all of them provide a strong framework to understand this system. Beauvoir exposes how women are made into the other, Butler explains how gender is performed and repeated, and Spivak reveals how voices from below are suppressed. Together, these theories show that patriarchy functions not just through violence or law but through ideology, culture, and everyday practice. It teaches that women should limit their dreams and desires. Also, if a woman steps out of that limitation, she should be punished.

2.2 Marriage, Motherhood, and the Burden of Responsibility

Marriage and motherhood are often viewed as evidence of fulfillment and success for women in patriarchal societies. Yet, behind the ideal images of marriage and motherhood lie heavy expectations, emotional sacrifices, and silent struggles. If a woman is married, having kids, and perfectly maintains all her duties without thinking of her own well-being. That means she is a perfect woman. In both Indian and South Korean contexts, marriage acts like a social contract more than a personal bonding. It also defines women's duties, responsibilities, and identity. As Beauvoir says, "Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (Beauvoir 415). With this line, it is perfectly understandable that marriage is not always a personal choice; it is something that women do to follow, and sometimes they are forced to follow society's obligation. In both Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* and Cho Nam-Joo's *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, women were trapped within these expectations. In *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila trapped in responsibility, Janki Devi trapped in marriage, Margaret and Prava Devi are dominated by their husband, Sheela trapped in a prescribed role she is youngest of all the women in the ladies coupe but she try to be a good daughter, and Marikulanthu is trapped in expendability. She is a poor woman in a high-caste, male-dominated world. It is an invisible cage where people try to justify their control over women by giving them names which are love, sacrifice, duty, and responsibility.

In Indian society, marriage is the name of fulfillment. It is more than the well-being of a woman. Women are expected to marry young, be dutiful to their husbands, and prioritize family over personal vision. A lot of women work their own and try to stand on their own; they are educated and bring in their own income. But still, they are struggling to balance their independence

with traditional gender expectations. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* shows six women including Akhila, whose lives are deeply influenced by such expectations, and those six women represent all the other women across the world. Akhila's mother, after her husband's death, sacrifices her identity. And she is teaching Akhila that service to the family is the first duty for a female child (Nair 57). Another passenger, Margaret, teaches chemistry but puts up with the cruelty of her husband since divorce would involve social stigma (Nair 96-100). These stories portray exactly how marriage becomes a site of emotional and social confinement. Women are taught that patience equates with virtue and silence with respect. This is what Beauvoir characterizes as immanence—a state where women's lives revolve around repetition, care, and passivity. And men enjoy transcendence, the power to act and create freely.

In South Korean society, marriage and having children are the most important aspects of a woman's life. No matter what she wants, it is the societal rule to get married and have kids. There is a traditional and cultural ideal of the good wife and wise mother, which is (hyeon-mo-yang-cheo) in Korean. This ideal continues to bear much influence on the modern woman's life. Kim Ji-Young, the protagonist of *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, decides to quit her job at a prestigious advertising company after childbirth, not out of free choice, but due to the unbearable situation and pressures of the workplace. Her mother-in-law is cruel to her, and she wants her to manage the household just like a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. Her husband is caring, but somehow he never understands her pressure and what she is going through. After her childbirth, she quit her job and her career, but her husband remains at work. He takes it for granted that childcare and domestic work are female work and it's her job to do all things. Women like Ji-Young are the actors of society. Society is a drama floor, and they make a script and want every woman to work

according to that. A woman's part is caregivers and a perfect wife, and a wise mother. Butler will remind us of this when she says, "the repeated stylization of the body" produces gender norms which seem natural yet are constructed in quality (Butler 43). Ji-Young's postpartum depression and eventual breakdown are symbolic of an uprising against this continuous performance.

Motherhood is a blessing for all women. But when a woman enters motherhood, her body changes hormonally and physically. The feeling is completely different for a woman. It is a celebratory and joyful moment because it is not easy to carry a child for over nine months and give birth to them. In *Ladies Coupé*, Sheela's grandmother's story reflects how women's entire worth depends on a woman's is as a mother or as a caregiver. They are not seen individually with their own dreams or personal choices but as extensions of family duty. Similarly, in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, Ji-Young's identity starts to disappear when she becomes a mother. Her postpartum depression is not only a medical condition but also a symptom of societal neglect and gender inequality. According to a report by RAND Corporation, untreated maternal depression may cause harm to both mothers and children and lead to emotional distress, economic strain, and social isolation (Sontag-Padilla et al. 4). Ji-Young is the face of all women. Her postpartum depression symbolises that invisible cage most women face. Most women in the world are overworked, underappreciated, and expected to stay silent about their pain. They never get any sympathy or empathy. Instead of that, they are told to be grateful for their roles. They define women's value based on their service to others and mask emotional suffering with the face of duty and love. Beauvoir argues that society forces women into roles that seem natural but are actually constructed to maintain male dominance. Butler explains how these roles are reiterated through social

performance, while Spivak illustrates how often women's attempts at resistance are muted. These combined theories expose the hidden cost of ideal womanhood: the quiet loss of individuality, freedom, and mental peace. This is what literature does in both India and South Korea. *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* are acts of rebellion against this quietness. They reveal how personal experiences are shaped by social power and responsibility. Through stories, the women reclaim the right to speak, to feel, and to exist above the burden of responsibility.

2.3 Employment, Identity, and the Female Body as Social Property

If we look at history, when it comes to equality, there are a lot of errors. There are many traditional South Asian and East Asian contexts, where they stop women's progress when it comes to jobs. Also, according to a social order, women's entry into the public environment, especially in the job sector, has been seen both as a sign of progress and as a disruption to social order. As Simone de Beauvoir says in his book *The Second Sex*, "man is the Subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other" (Beauvoir 16). It shows that women are defined only by their relation to men, not by their own. If we look at the professional setting of both novels, this theoretical perspective is true. Here, working women are constantly reminded that their labor is not completely their own. In *Ladies Coupé*, Akhila's job as an income tax clerk enables her to earn a living. But making money does not free her from the moral expectations of her family or society. The main point is not only that society her family members expect that she should never think of their own. On the surface, she is independent, but actually, she is not; she is psychologically trapped by her family members.

Similarly, in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, Cho Nam-Joo shows an elaborate description of how contemporary South Korean women are discriminated against by the system in the workplace. Ji-Young, like many educated women, enters the job sector with ambitions. Instead of getting respect and equality, she receives inequality and sexism. For example, the quick promotions of her male colleagues, dismissal of her opinions, and presumptions about her potential as secondary to her inevitable role as wife and mother. When she becomes pregnant, the company assumes that she will resign, and actually, she does. This reflects how the professional world treats women's bodies as temporary participants in male-dominated institutions. This behavior makes women more scared of their lives and decisions. Ji-Young's experiences expose the fact that even in modern societies, a woman's identity remains tied to patriarchal control over her body and choices.

The female body thus becomes a site of negotiation between autonomy and subjugation in both cultural settings. In *Ladies Coupé*, Margaret, one of the fellow passengers, embodies this struggle as a teacher. Her intellectual capability contrasts with her abusive marriage. Despite being professionally competent, her husband's control over her daily life reduces her to a possession. This dictates that education or employment does not automatically translate to liberation. Similarly, in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, the education and urban lifestyle of the protagonist cannot save her from the everyday sexism of her society. It is not her personal decision to quit her job. But after childbirth, it was a forced decision that she made in the name of adjustment to a culture that considers caregiving to be the responsibility of women.

2.4 Maternal Depression, Domestic Conflicts, and Invisible Cages

Motherhood is always celebrated as the highest form of feminine fulfillment. It can also become one of the most powerful instruments of patriarchal control. Both *Ladies Coupé* by Anita Nair and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-Joo, expose how domestic life and motherhood can become invisible prisons that isolate women emotionally, psychologically, and socially. These novels show that maternal depression and domestic conflict are not just issues of the individual or of medicine but rather deeply political conditions rooted in structures that exact self-sacrifice from women while withholding recognition, freedom, or rest. Through the stories of Akhila and Ji-Young, both writers present domestic spaces as sites of mental breakdown and quiet resistance.

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, gives a warning to all women that motherhood can trap women within a circle of immanence, where they are valued only as biological or emotional beings, not as independent individuals (Beauvoir 467-473). Both these novels carry this idea. Akhila in *Ladies Coupé* is not a mother, but her character is like a mother figure. She has been made to live like one, caring for her siblings, supporting her mother, and fulfilling all their desires. Also, their definition of a perfect woman is taking emotional and economic responsibilities. Her life is all about work for family, not selfhood. The absence of marriage or children does not free her; rather, she becomes a surrogate mother to her family, performing endless duties without recognition. The worst part is that her family is not thinking of her because when she wanted to go for a solo trip, they tried to stop her (Nair 07). The domestic space has become her invisible cage, a site where care turns into pressure. Her train journey represents a

moment of escape from her family's suffocation. It symbolizes her search for an identity outside of familial obligations.

In *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*, motherhood is represented as a blessing and a burden at the same time. Ji-Young's mental depression after childbirth reflects the emotional breakdown of millions of women. The author, Cho Nam-Joo, presents this breakdown not as an individual problem but as a feature of social injustice. Ji-Young's postpartum depression started with being isolated at home, where she was undervalued as a mother and invisible as a woman. Her husband means well; still, that kind of support is insufficient. He cannot stop the inequality with his support. Judith Butler's concept of normative gender performance explains this situation brilliantly. Ji-Young feels compelled to play the role of a perfect mother, smiling through exhaustion and hiding frustration. She feels very happy to become a mother, but at the same time, loses herself and feels trapped (Butler 179). When Ji-Young breaks down and starts to speak as other women, the breakdown is also a collapse. This is protesting that the pressure of performing ideal motherhood results in a psychological breakdown.

Akhila and Ji-Young are manifestations of different articulations of the same invisible confinement. The husband of Ji-Young is kind, educated, and sympathetic, but his sympathy never materializes into action. He reaps the benefits of a patriarchal system in which he can remain emotionally passive while his wife shoulders all responsibility for domestic labor. Ji-Young's depression reflects not only personal exhaustion but also a social failure to distribute care equitably. The cost of Ji-Young's double shift is carried by her body and mind, leading to a

breakdown of her psyche. Her depression thus becomes an act of truth-telling, a forced confession made by a body that can no longer bear the weight of silence.

Both Nair and Cho use the metaphor of the invisible cage to show how very closely linked mental health is with patriarchy. The cage is made not of walls but of expectations, judgments, and obligations. While women are praised for endurance, condemnation awaits them for expression. Depression, here, therefore, is a symptom as much as a form of protest. When Ji-Young loses her sense of self and speaks in the voices of other women, she gives voice symbolically to the suffering of generations. Akhila, as her story unfolds, can listen to the hidden stories of other women, each one a confession about how they are also living in the invisible cage. These shared narratives are a sisterhood of empathy and resistance, suggesting that storytelling itself may be a healing act. Despite the cultural differences between India and South Korea, both novels bring into focus the universal pattern of how patriarchy maintains its control through domestic life. Both Akhila and Ji-Young's experiences spring a glimmer of hope as well. Akhila's decision to travel alone and Ji-Young's eventual sessions of therapy bespoke small but sure steps toward self-awareness. These do not stop or break the cycle of patriarchy but expose its psychological consequences, inviting readers to question what normal family life really demands from women. And what is the actual right of the woman?

2.5 Cross-Cultural Feminist Dialogues and Solidarity

Feminism is a broad term, and we can find it everywhere, no matter what the time and place. The term is rooted in history from the beginning. In spite of the place difference, women

are together through struggle. There are invisible bonds that are the struggle bond between women. The struggle and judgment every woman faces in their life. Women have undergone legal, emotional, and social domination. But they all have one common wish and desire, which is freedom, and this made a universal bond between them. This bond can be called a sisterhood bond. Feminist consciousness and cross-cultural unity appear in both *Ladies Coupé* by Anita Nair and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* by Cho Nam-Joo. Although both of them are set in different contexts, India and South Korea. These novels disclose how women are confronting similar systems of inequality and reclaim their voices by sharing their experiences of pain, storytelling, and resistance. This section explores how these two narratives contribute to a global feminist dialogue that transcends national and linguistic boundaries.

The subject of this dialogue is the non-cultured nature of patriarchy that works through similar mechanisms of control. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* As Spivak states, women of post-colonial societies undergo a double silence, oppressed by both the colonizer and the native patriarchy (Spivak 285). Akhila in *Ladies Coupé* and Ji-Young in *Kim Ji-Young (Born 1982)* exist in the space of double subordination. Their families, workplaces, and societies marginalize their voices. However, the juxtaposition of their experiences documents the continuous struggles of women all over Asia. Both women troll the cultural narrative and expectation that they will find meaning through serving others. The act of speaking up from a place of hurt and confusion is already a feminist act that switches silence for speech. It changes a private suffering into a political one.

The two authors appear collaboratively aligned on the idea that, Simone de Beauvoir famously argued, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 283). The act of becoming in the two novels forces a questioning and rejection of womanhood. In India, Akhila’s transformation from obedient daughter to independent traveler represents a symbolic redefinition of identity.

When she talks with other women in the ladies’ compartment, it is reminiscent of the early feminists who formed small groups of women to raise consciousness by sharing experiences. Like Ji-Young’s breakdown and therapy sessions initiate a dialogue between personal and political. Through the voice of her character, she forces her husband and society to recognize the daily violence that they cannot see, a violence that is considered madness. These narratives reveal how the feminist awakening occurs when women begin to interpret parts of their private lives as in some way linked to a larger social problem that connects women everywhere.

The two novels are tightly linked with storytelling, an act that functions as a feminist device. In *Ladies Coupé*, the train compartment becomes a symbolic safe space in which women recount their lives without any fear. The confrontation and survival become a testimony and relative memory to collective memory. Likewise, Cho Nam-Joo constructs *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* as a documentary narrative that combines fiction with actual statistics and social data on gender discrimination in South Korea. The mix of personal and public voice turns Ji-Young’s story into a social document, which extends the feminist slogan that the personal is political. The way both authors tell stories helps women (and their life realities) speak and voice. In other words, they do not merely represent women but rather create a platform for real-life experiences to be shared.

By establishing a literary dialogue across languages and cultures, both texts can become part of an expansive feminist archive.

The feeling that Akhila and Ji-Young share demonstrates how women connect not just through living together, but also through feelings like emotional loneliness, frustration, and quiet rebellion. Both characters embody this commitment in their own ways. Akhila's quest for freedom is a radical journey for her in her culture. Ji-Young's mental break reflects the hidden realities of many women trapped under social circumstances. Even though both these women take very different actions, they are feminists and inspire recognition and empathy across borders. Their struggles show that solidarity is not a product of geography but rather the outcome of a quest for selfhood in patriarchal worlds.

The novels engage with the contemporary feminists' debates on globalization and identity. Our data shows that South Korea and India have different traditions, but the tension between modernity and patriarchy exists in both countries. Shouldn't the encouragement to study and work also include doing that at a later stage in life, especially when a woman has a family to care for? As evidenced by both tales, this paradox creates a conflict of feeling. Akhila and Ji-Young's lives suggest that the arrival of modernity not only does not dislodge patriarchal values but also produces new forms of control. The two authors, however, by exposing these contradictions, enter into the wider conversation about how feminism must be adjusted to be applicable in various localities while still maintaining a shared ethical vision of equality and dignity.

Ladies Coupé and *Kim Ji-Young Born 1982* show us more generally that literature can also be a connection to feminist solidarity. Through translating stories and reading them, women of various nations can find mirrors of themselves in articles written thousands of miles apart. Women's writing that circulates globally seeks to displace the center from an emphasis on the Western feminist voice to on Asian feminist voices at the Centre of things. Here, solidarity is not imposed but binds people who feel for each other like family members. As women in both texts retrieve their voices, they also regain a human right that they share, the right to carve out the terms of their lives.

Chapter 3

Psychological Barriers in *Ladies Coupé*

3.1 Akhila's Train Journey as a Metaphor of Escape and Self-Discovery

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001) opens with Akhila, a forty-five-year-old unmarried woman on a train from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. The act of travelling symbolizes a pilgrimage, a getaway, a step towards autonomy after a long time spent with overpowering patriarchal control. The train, crisscrossing the Indian landscape, becomes not just a location but a metaphor as well for Akhila's inner movement from confinement to freedom. In the novel there is a conversation between Akhila and Prava Devi when Prava Devi asks, "Are you happy?" Akhila said, "Is Anyone happy?" Then Prava Devi answered "It depends on what you define happiness to be" (Nair 21). This shows Akhila already started to speak about her inner thoughts And Prava Devi beautifully answered it, which is the turning point where Akhila started to think about her happiness. The close space of the ladies' compartment signifies both society's confinement of women as well as a chance to create a different space where women can talk freely, away from men. At one point Akhila says, "All I am trying to do is convince myself that a woman can live alone" (21). Nair weaves a story of awakening through Akhila's journey. This underscores the argument by Simone de Beauvoir, who said, "one is not born, but one becomes a woman" (Beauvoir 283). This shows how Akhila goes through the process of self-discovery to know who she really is beyond being a daughter, sister, and provider.

Akhila's life before the journey bears testimony to how the patriarchy controls all women. After the death of her father, the eldest daughter is compelled to take care of her family. Despite her family relying on her salary, she has no power of decision-making on her own. My mother often reminds me that a woman needs a man to feel whole. She was partly right, for the most part wrong. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity helps us understand this situation well. Akhila performs the expected roles of obedience, sacrifice, and silence because these acts are repeated through generations of women. According to Butler, gender is created through the repetition of acts. In other words, gender is both performed and constituted. Due to societal constraints, Akhila's identity assumes the representation of the 'lost daughter' like a cookie-cutter shape. On the train, she steps out of this performance for the first time and begins to question her sense of self.

The train's symbolic power comes from its motion and the ephemerality of travel. In the ladies'coupé, Akhila meets five other women: Janaki, Margaret, Prabha Devi, Sheela, and Marikolanthu, each with her story of pain, compromise, and resistance. These tales serve to reflect various forms of womanhood that exist in India. The train is a safe space for women to share their stories without fear of getting shamed.

Firstly, Janki Devi started to tell her story, she said "First, there was my father and my brothers; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son. "Waiting to take off from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that, we look down upon women who are strong and who can cope by themselves. Do you understand what I am saying?" (22-23). Janki never talked about this before but the place became a place to speak where she started to tell her story. The second woman is

Sheela. She was once badly touched by her friend's father at that point she felt awkward. In the novel it says, "Naazar was her friend's father and her father's friend. His daughter Hassina was her classmate. One Sunday afternoon, when Sheela went to their house, rushing in from heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lips, Naazar had reached forward and wiped it with his forefinger. The touch of his finger tingled on her skin a long time" (66). That person is like her father figure and she is not safe with him. And those incidents gave her trauma that she started losing herself. But Sheela's grandmother is a very strong human being that gives Sheela strength to live for herself. She said, "The only person you need to please is yourself" (67). This is a very strong word that came from her grandmother. This line not only gives courage to Sheela also all the women in the coupe. The words especially touched the protagonist Akhila because she spent most of the time she spent her life thinking about others. And doing for others. In Gayatri Spivak's 1980 essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* This moment gets conceptualised as a moment when "the subaltern speaks". According to Spivak, "if, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (Spivak 287). We can say that Akhila's talks on the train are an attempt to break this silence. As each new story is told in the coupé, patriarchal narratives get challenged, and through the stories of others, Akhila finds bits of herself.

The movement from Bangalore, i.e., a city of modernity and work, to Kanyakumari, the southern tip of India, symbolizing ends and beginnings, echoes Akhila's internal journey. The straightness of the train may signify her movement from repression to realization. Initially, she is made to feel guilty for wanting to be independent, which is a feeling given to her by her mother and her brothers. Her mother and her brothers make her feel that any desire on the part of the

female is selfish. As she listens to the stories of these women, she starts to see that, like her, all women suffer in different ways under patriarchy, whether it be through marriage, motherhood, or social expectation. This group sharing helps Akhila see that her suffering is not due to personal weakness but part of a social pattern. The train moves in relation to her moving to a conscious being rather than only being one who suffers passively.

Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Feminism, Gender Difference, Woman as “Other” is an essential work. Women have always been defined as “the Other”, a category defined only in relation to men. Akhila’s life exemplifies this notion. Her mother tells her to live for others; her workplace prevents her from being promoted because she is unmarried; her family sees her as a caretaker only. Going on this trip alone is already an act of rebellion against this Otherness. This journey is a reclamation of subjectivity; she begins to view herself as a person with other desires. So, Nair’s story transforms the train journey into a modern feminist pilgrimage, which is not towards the sacred site but towards the sacredness of the self.

The dialogues Akhila overhears in the coupé play an important part in her awakening. For example, stories of Margaret poisoning her abusive husband and Marikolanthu's experience of sexual violence and survival reveal that domesticity masks deep wounds. Many stories show how homes that are often idealized as the women’s safe space are actually the ones imprisoning them. Akhila realizes that silence only deepens her suffering. Seeing the courage of the other women, she resolved to stop being a shadow in her own life. Recounting those stories together is an act of solidarity and resistance, a feminist space for healing. Spivak’s theory of subaltern silence is relevant to this. Though the women in the novel *Ladies' Coupé* are not literally voiceless, they live

in a society that refuses to hear them. The narrative they weave in the coupé, thus, is an act of reclaiming subjectivity. When Akhila listens to these voices, she starts revising her own story, in that she moves from a listener to a speaker. Nair demonstrates that liberation begins, not with rebellion, but with the recognition of pain and the articulation of that pain. Another important moment in the novel is Akhila's decision to meet her former lover, Hari, at the end. Some critics have read it as a romantic closure, but it can also be read as a test of independence. She sees him as an equal, not a man's woman wishing to be completed by him, nor as a dependent woman. This is when she is reborn as a conscious person who recognizes that love and independence can only coexist when women do not allow society to control them.

3.2 Women's Stories as Collective Resistance against Patriarchy

In *Ladies Coupé*, narrative is crucial as a survival and resistance strategy. The train compartment, for Anita Nair, becomes a symbolic place where women discover the courage to express experiences they are unable to voice in their day-to-day lives. The women's narratives in the coupé are defiant of the silence of patriarchy. The female characters Akhila, Janaki, Margaret, Prabha Devi, Sheela, and Marikolanthu are from different social classes, different religions, and also different generations, but they all share a connection in their experience of gender inequality. Margaret here is a Chemistry teacher, her educational background is strong but still she faces the power of patriarchy. Her husband dominates her as a result, she feels like living in a cage. He shows his superiority by his words, "What's the point in working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. so you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn't suit you. Cut it off. You'll look nicer with your hair in a blunt bob" (Nair 105). But Margaret here started to

take revenge. And this is a silent revenge because she is a Chemistry teacher and she knows what kind of food will make people fat. She says, "I thought my cooking would have a sense of purpose now" (132). This story gives Akhila a different sense that silence is the best revenge and a woman's life cannot be defined by a man. What they say is at once personal and political. It goes against the social order, which has determined a woman's worth through her relationship with a man. Nair weaves a collective female consciousness that challenges the belief that a woman's identities should strictly be wife, mother, or caretaker, through these narratives.

At the start, Akhila is a woman who bears the sign of silence. She had to fulfill separate duties to her father, her own family, and finally her brother's family, which controlled her life. Since long she has been living for others and never herself. As she steps into the ladies' compartment, she is not merely taking a journey but a journey towards awareness. The other women's stories make her realize that she is not alone in her suffering. In each story, a different face of the same patriarchal system that confines women is visible. An example of this is when Janaki feels trapped as a wife; she cannot question. Even though my husband loves me, I never lived for myself, she admits (Nair 25-29). Her story represents the silent suffering of all those women who may be loved but not duly respected as equals. Akhila sees her own problem in Janaki's plight. Like Janaki, she too had to mould her life according to social expectations.

Margaret's account adds yet another layer to this collective resistance story. She is a Chemistry teacher and represents a woman with education and intelligence. Despite being a self-made woman, her marriage to a man who feels insecure about her success destroys her completely to the extent that she becomes a non-entity. When Margaret deliberately started feeding her

husband fatty food, she did it to make him lazy and reliant on her. So, this symbolic act indicates rebellion. Nair reveals an attitude of rebellion through subtle but silent refusal rather than loud protest. Margaret's narrative illustrates that resistance can involve many things, such as physically escaping situations, or emotionally and psychologically enabling themselves (Nair 96-100).

Prabha Devi's Story unfolds another face of oppression, the pressure of perfection. She may live nicely as a housewife and have money and luxuries, but is spiritually empty. Her tale reveals that material comfort cannot compensate for freedom. As she learns how to swim, she first experiences what it is like to do something for herself. Swimming started to develop a metaphor for liberation, a breaking of boundaries. Moreover, Akhila and the reader understand that any act of self-assertion, no matter how small, can destabilize patriarchy (168). Like Sheela's, though told through a younger lens, shows us how we internalize gender bias from childhood. She learns that women's pain gets passed along as she realizes her grandmother suffers in the same way that she does. Through Sheela, Nair showcases how patriarchal conditioning starts as soon as they are born and how women perceive themselves and others (62). The story of Marikolanthu is probably the most tragic yet the most potent act of resistance in the novel. As a Dalit woman who had suffered sexual violence, her voice embodies the intersection of gender, class, and caste oppression. After being raped, her silence and later motherhood without a husband refuse to adhere to social morality and patriarchal norms that define purity (211). Here, Spivak's notion of the subaltern woman comes in handy. The woman who suffers but is unable to speak and express herself because society does not hear her. Yet, through storytelling, Marikolanthu speaks. When she tells her pain, she breaks the silence of women's exploitation. Akhila's understanding of courage and bravery transforms through the liberating story of her. It teaches that speaking truth, even about shame, is an act of reclaiming one's identity.

The compartment for women thus refers to a safe space that encourages the formation of a community. They contribute to examining personal narratives as political stories, which is a feminist notion. When they listen to one another, they feel powerful and seen. Inside the coupe, a confessional space is created from which the social status assigned by class, age, and caste is erased. They exist, for a moment, outside the categorizations and definitions we ascribe to women. By the conclusion of the novel, Akhila isn't the same woman who boarded the train anymore. She hears stories that teach her that freedom is not always about escaping society, but knowing one's own worth in that society. Storytelling becomes her education. Having charisma gives her a fresh perspective on her life. She no longer sees failure or loneliness. Instead, she chooses what she will be. The women's stories help her break free from her invisible cage. When Akhila takes the plunge and pursues her desires, she takes along all the voices that have shaped her as she carries them along. Her transformation shows that women's solidarity and storytelling can help end centuries of silence.

Women's power and resistance get redefined through just talking in the work of Anita Nair. *Policing Womanhood*, that urgent crisis novel, shows us that feminist liberation does not necessarily occur in large revolutions, but rather in smaller ones laced with exchanges of experience and feelings. Through shared storytelling, the women in *Ladies Coupé* change what it is to be a woman in a man's world. Their words transmute anguish into understanding, embarrassment into resilience, and silence into connectivity. The coupe begins to function as a moving metaphor for a world that is changing. Women, even in their separate compartments, begin to speak, resist, and redefine.

3.3 Marriage, Sacrifice, and Struggle for Autonomy

The Institution of Marriage in *Ladies' Coupé* remains one of the strongest symbols for the patriarchal ordering of society that hampers the freedom of women. Anita Nair portrays the institution of marriage not as a symbol of lovers but as an institution that requires the subservience, sacrifice, and silence of women. Through the lives of Akhila and the other women who share the train compartment, the book challenges the notion that marriage can ever emancipate women and that men and women can ever achieve equality through marriage. Each woman in *Ladies Coupé* reveals that marriage, which is ironically the culmination of the woman's life, is nothing but a prison of the heart and mind. Anita Nair's opinion about marriage is similar to that of Simone de Beauvoir, who declares in *The Second Sex* that "marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society" (Beauvoir 502). This "destiny" is established on subservience and not freedom. The women of *Ladies Coupé* portray that the institution of marriage can convert love into duty and individuality into silence.

Akhila's life is perfect. There is a line that says, "Where is the moth? Why aren't your wings folded? Why don't you pretend that you and the wood are one? Why aren't you hiding yourself among the curtains?" Akhila spent a huge portion of life for others (Nair 04). This shows how patriarchy forces women into sacrifice and invisibility. Being the elder sister, she is compelled to be the breadwinner of the family following her father's death. Her teenage years are spent earning for her family so that her siblings can be comfortable, thereby sacrificing her own desires. She is made invisible by society because she is unmarried and incomplete. Akhila says to her friend Katherine that "A few years ago, when I still wanted to be someone's wife, I would have agreed to marry anyone, even an uncle, Akhila had said, only half in jest" (16). Here she is trapped in a dilemma. Once her mother told her that "there is no such thing as an equal marriage" and "It is

best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband” (14). Being unmarried makes a woman invisible in society, making it a riddle whether a woman can be unmarried and still be happy becomes the pivotal question of the novel, which is actually a question many women ask when they are supposed to be independent and free and are made to choose between their freedom and society’s approval and acceptance.

Janaki, one of the females in the coupé, symbolizes the typical married woman. Janaki is married to a loving husband and has a family, enjoying happiness and security, but she is also empty inside. She is tied to her domestic chores of taking care of her husband and family. Janaki declares that she ‘never questioned her own needs, ever,’ since she was brought up to be a good wife who doesn’t complain. Janaki’s case portrays how females tend to accept patriarchal values to the extent that sacrificing oneself is normal. Janaki also reveals how her husband ‘values her as a child,’ meaning that he protects her, loves her, but doesn’t treat her as his equal. However, Janaki's character, portrayed by Nair, unveiled how marriage childizes the female by treating her as a dependent. Janaki's acceptance of her life also symbolizes how women are conditioned by society to the extent that they stop dreaming of anything else after marriage. By portraying Janaki's case, the author questions whether females can compensate for their loss of self by enjoying happiness and companionship (Nair 25-30).

On the contrary, Margaret Shanti’s married life reveals a situation where a woman can suffer from emotional violence in a seemingly respectable domestic setup. Margaret, an educated woman, a school teacher, marries Ebenezer, who is jealous of her knowledge and attitude. Ebenezer becomes cruel to Margaret, criticizing her, dominating her, trying to make her

diminutive. Margaret surrounds her body with meaning through her actions, proving that educated women are not safe from patriarchal domination. Margaret's decision to secretly feed her fattening food to make her obese and helpless is her defiance by stealth. This action of hers might look foolish, but its significance is that she asserts her authority in a situation where she cannot challenge it openly. Nair, through Margaret Shanti, is explaining Judith Butler's concept of resistance within a system (96-100).

Prabha Devi's experience of marriage offers another angle to the conversation. Prabha Devi is leading a life immersed in luxuries, but is emotionally imprisoned. Her husband looks to her to be perfect, to appear beautiful, to keep everything perfect in the house, and to never complain about anything. Everything in Prabha's life seems perfect to the outside observer, but to her, everything feels like puppetry. It is only when Prabha discovers the skill to swim that she feels the sensation of freedom for the very first time in her life. Water symbolizes freedom in Prabha's experience because it is fluid, boundary-less, and free. Nair develops the metaphor to convey the message that freedom starts when one starts to express oneself in the smallest manner. Prabha's experience, when she makes the realization that her value doesn't lie in what her husband thinks of her, comes across as the birth of the experience of womanhood within the walls of imprisonment. Prabha's experience actually connects with what Beauvoir declares, "To emancipate women would mean to remit the need to confine her to the relation in which she exists to man" (Beauvoir 813-820). Marikolanthu's experience extends this critical approach into more social and moral realms with the role of marriage itself. As a lower caste woman who is a single mother because she was raped, she is beyond the boundaries of the marriage social institution. Society condemns her not because she is raped, which is violence she did not deserve, but because

she did not conform to the social role assigned to wives. Marikolanthu's status as a single mother is stigmatized because she is not fulfilling her expected role as a woman according to the social role assigned to wives. Yet, she defies such shame. She brings up her son with grit and independence. In the process, she challenges the social role assigned to wives. She challenges society's perception that the value of women lies within marriage. Defying society is a radical sort of freedom. The concept developed by Gayatri Spivak regarding the 'subaltern woman' is even more apt at this point. Spivak the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow because her double erasure is affected by both patriarchy and class machinations: her speech is robbed from her by both patriarchy and class oppression or politics (Spivak 287). By giving Marikolanthu her speech, Nair gives 'the subaltern woman' life. Akhila's interactions with these women lead her to change the way she thinks about marriage, freedom, and happiness. Each woman teaches her a variation of her own response to her question. Janaki teaches her the comforts as well as the price of submission. Margaret teaches her the pain as well as the hidden power of defiance. Prabha teaches her the hidden happiness of finding herself. And Marikolanthu teaches her the strength of defiance against social norms. Through the interaction, Akhila learns that happiness is not associated with marriage or freedom but rather self-respect. Through their stories, Akhila learns that women cannot live their lives according to one single ideal version. They have to formulate their own. Akhila learning the strength of defiance against her desires is her transformation from silence to action. It is a reclamation of autonomy, something that patriarchal society had attempted to steal. Through marriage, Anita Nair raises the issue of emotional costs involved in gender inequality. Nair's women are not victims but survivors who bargain with power in ways that suit them best. Through Nair's portrayal of different women's experiences, she shows that women's acts of resistance might not be the same. They could be open, some might be whispers, and some

could be endured with their eyes open. Yet all these are important because women's existence becomes relevant in marriage alone. Nair presents women in *Ladies Coupé* who live in invisible bars and teach everyone that freedom starts with challenging the rules set on how to live their lives.

3.4 Storytelling as Empowerment, Narrative Techniques in *Ladies Coupé*

In "*Ladies Coupé*," Anita Nair masterfully examines how women take back control of their body and their desires in a way that is a crucial aspect of their act of resistance against the patriarchal setup. These women's narratives in the coupé help understand that freedom is about body freedom only; it is also about an awakening within. "Akhila, the protagonist of the story, considers her desire to be something to be ashamed of. A pleasure reserved only for men. She is a middle-aged woman who has lived her whole life without being married. Restraint, force of habit, morality of a decent woman- these qualities have been the essence of her life. However, her chance encounter with the women in the coupé helped her redefine her understanding of her desire as a driving element of life. It is a human desire that is completely normal to every human being, regardless of whether they are female or male. "

This is how Akhila undergoes the process of self-realization, which Simone de Beauvoir terms "the liberation from immanence" (Beauvoir 330-335), a situation in which women are reduced to a passive existence determined by another or others. Right from childhood, Akhila has always been the earning member of the family, letting go of her own pleasure in order to meet the social demands imposed upon her through certain conditioning and social necessities. Repressing her sex and individuality, Akhila has all along remained within the "subaltern silence," as it were,

a term that comes from the writings of Gayatri Spivak, in which the inner voice of the woman remains interred by the systems and structures of morality and patriarchy. There is a massive change that happens when all women start to share their stories. They started to think that they are an individual personality. They can relate with each other in how they dared to counter or submit to the expectations about being women/girls/wives/mothers/wives-to-be or whatever corresponding feminine categories apply to them within their temporarily immediate circumstances. This effect of the confessions has been the construction of a cumulative mirror, forcing Akhila to reconsider all her decisions and filling in the difference between denial through self-denial and realization through self-realization. Nair translocates the space of the coupé from being the personal to that of the confessional space, within which the woman/women, through their voices, reproduce what was interred within the feminine.

Every woman in the coupe has a role to play in the resurgence of female desire and power. Margaret is a chemistry teacher who equalizes the power dynamic in her marriage. She manipulates the diet and lifestyle patterns of her husband to make her house a site of rebellion. She doesn't portray Margaret as a submissive wife but only as a less conspicuous revolutionary who converts knowledge into power. Similarly, Janaki, who earlier took pride in being a submissive wife, soon realizes the implications of being codependent and how this has led to the loss of her. She begins to express her unhappiness and comes to understand the differentiation between comfort and happiness. These can well illustrate the construct of Judith Butler's *Gender Performativity* (*Gender Trouble* 1990). The final act of touching Hari, a man she once loved, is a kind of rebirth for Akhila. The act is non-carnal. It is an existential act because, for the first time, she possesses her body, unmediated by family, religion, or society. At this stage, Akhila becomes

a kind of transcendent being. According to de Beauvoir, one who defines her essence through action rather than confirmation. This act is neither condemned nor idealized in the text, and it is exalted for its existential nature. As Sushila Singh, a literary critic, aptly puts it, "sexuality is a metaphor for liberty, the final frontier dividing woman from her own self." Through Akhila, Nair criticizes cultural hypocrisy, with male desire revered and female pleasure vilified. Nevertheless, sexual liberty is shown to be a part and parcel of women's emotional-intellectual liberty. "The liberty that Akhila finally wrests from life, when she goes for a lone swim in the sea, is a mighty metaphor for re-birth, with 'the sea, infinite and unbounded, a huge fluidness encompassing every possibility of life.' With no obligations to family or moral constraints to hold her back, Akhila's body is her land, and her desire is a statement of her presence. The final picture of Akhila, taking a lone swim, culminates her interior transformation. The invisible cage is cracked, and a woman is born to decree life on her own terms.

3.5 The Eco-Social Impact of Women on Their Family and Survival

It is within the coupé of the train where Anita Nair locates the characters of her novel *Ladies Coupé*. A very ordinary place transformed into a metaphorical construct for women's unity and understanding, the coupé gradually stops being an ordinary compartment of the train and turns into a symbolic mini-world for the lives of women - the confinement and the liberation. Six very diverse women from varied backgrounds sit inside the coupé. Also burdened by patriarchal experiences yet understanding and tolerant of each other's needs and experiences, the six sit inside the coupé. The coupé is a world where they can express their pain and their thoughts. It's not like

the other world, where society generally suppresses them. The coupé is a temporary haven for the six where stories replace silence, and empathy replaces judgment.

In a patriarchal society, society imagines that women are rivals among themselves because they are struggling for recognition, love, or survival in a male-dominated setting. Nair contradicts this trend by providing a setting where “telling stories becomes a form of communal therapy.” Every female in the coupé gives their life stories. They convert their suffering into power. Margaret’s admission of reclaiming power in her marriage, Janaki’s realization about their emotional dependence, Sheela’s empathy towards their grandmother who is dying, Prabha Devi’s enlightenment from swimming, and “Marikolanthu’s traumatic experience about sexual abuse” all become “moments in a communal female past.” In all, six females along with Akhila come from various classes, religious affiliations, and era-specific settings. They all come through their emotions and their knives. No two females are similar in this story, making it rich in exploring Nair’s feminist ideology. The coupé is a transition space from the “old and new” settings as well. In literature, trains represent transformations or change. For Akhila, it represents a certain changeover from dependency towards self-definitions. In the coupé, she actually moves forward in space but “emotively breaks away from a stationary life engagingly lived all along.” The coupé is literally and metaphorically a setting of rebirth, where silence is displaced by “telling stories” leading towards transformations.

Ladies' Coupé establishes itself metaphorically as the tempo of feminist awakening in a train compartment. The compartment symbolizes an arena in which the collective voice of women surges as one voice calling out for survival and hope. Embodied in collective unity and storytelling,

Nair succeeds in portraying a world in which women rally and heal each other as they transmute private suffering into public potency. It may be pertinent here to consider whether the final image of Akhila swimming in the sea echoes back in recognition within the compartment because, while the compartment only initiated Akhila's journey, the process itself is indicative of freedom gained. Along with this, they provide the full meaning of this metaphorical journey of conversion from closure to openness, from silence to speech, and subjugation to self. We all recognize that Nair's compartment is not the end point in the train journey. It is instead the origin of this new feminist awakening.

Chapter 4

The Invisible Cage in *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982*.

4.1 The Burden of Everyday Misogyny in South Korea

South Korea, when we hear the name of this country, we always think of a well-known country with a first-class technology system that can beat most of the country by the terms of technology. But in terms of equality, we cannot call it a well-known country. There are a lot of gender inequalities in terms of the family and workplace. The famous novel *Kim Ji Young, Born 1982*, shows how inequality affects a woman from childhood to adulthood. The word Misogyny does not always mean something related to violence. Sometimes it means psychological burden, societal norms, everyday taunts, and people's expectations that a woman should act a certain way. The people did not yell at them or say bad words or beat them. They use some sweet or innocent words to trigger or insult them. It feels like a sweet bitterness to them; they cannot say anything in return, and they cannot tolerate that. As a result, women feel like they are helpless and they are in a cage where they have to live alone. In the novel *Kim Ji-Young born 1982*, the writer brilliantly shows that misogyny is part of the system of society and shows how it became a part. It actually started from her childhood. She always faces favoritism. She saw that no one treated a girl child and a boy child the same. They treat boy children better than girl children. Ji-Young's family always prefers her brother over her and her sister. Also, her grandmother says this openly in front of her that if she were a boy. Also her grandmother told her mother that they need a boy to have

their back. Also a lot of doing for example talking about not eating the formula because she is saving formula for her grandson. Calling her brother the precious one (Joo 10-12). This kind of thing shows her that you are less important, your brother is the important one because he is a man. “If there were two umbrellas, the girls shared, if there were two blankets, the girls shared. If there were two treats, the girls shared. It didn’t occur to the child Ji Young that her brother was receiving special treatment” (11). So here we can see the gender inequality even a child cannot escape from. This kind of behavior affects psychologically. As a result they are mentally traumatized and it harms their self-esteem. Patriarchy actually started from the family. Since the child girl children sacrifice more than the boys.

When Ji-Young gets older, she sees another misogyny which is public misogyny. Such as the teacher's behavior toward a female student and commenting on and dress. “One time, a female student who was held up at school gate for wearing sneakers protested that it was unfair to allow T-shirts and sneakers to male students only. The student discipline teacher explained that it was because boys were more physically active” (28). Men's behavior on public transport such as buses or on the street. She faces a lot of harassment, awkward behavior, touching, and bad staring. All the bad things she faces which hurt them mentally. “A male student approached her”. He says “You always sit in front of me”. “You always fucking smile when you pass me the handouts. Always flirting with your hows and goodbyes and now you treat me like a predator?” (35). What Ji Young does with the boy is a common and basic metric and manners. If we are giving something to anyone we give it with a smile on our face. And if we know somebody we say hi to them. But this normal behaviour became flirty for that guy as a result he started disturbing her. But when she tells these things to her father he did not console her instead he blames her. And his tone was so

cruel as if a guy is harassing her it is her fault. This is another mental betrayal that she receives from her father. “It’s your fault not noticing and avoiding” (35). Ji Young started blaming herself and stopped smiling. But one day she called to thank that woman who helped her, that time the woman declared, “It’s not your fault.” and “There are far more great guys out there” (36). Because of that word Ji Young felt little courage otherwise she would have lived in fear for longer. The author is trying to show that a woman suddenly cannot fall into depression. It has its long journey that she faced from her childhood. Kim Ji Young here is not only one woman, she is representing millions of women in the world who are facing the same situation. Kim Ji Young has limited freedom. She cannot do whatever she wants to do. Her school life was also gender biased. Teachers always scold girls for their behavior. They expect girls to behave well and quietly. But if a boy did not behave well they took it very normally. Also if a girl is studying that means they have to be a topper or a perfect scorer. But at the end they say that a woman means motherhood and marriage. Ji-Young heard the same thing that she should be perfect as a wife, as a mother and supportive towards her husband. According to theorists, sociologists and feminist schools are the pathway of gender equality. Because children spend most of their time here. If children get educated they will be aware about their rights and they will maintain it when they grow up (Karam). Moving on to University life but it remains the same. Kim Ji Young’s grades were good in middle school and high school. So she was determined to have good grades and a scholarship in college. “Even after perfect attendance, handling all the assignments on time and studying hard she only averaged 2.0 in her first semester” (Joo 43). There is no improvement in her situation. Ji-Young's classmates insult her and behave inappropriately. They question everything. For example her capabilities, her appearance and making fun of her because she is a woman (43-48).

Another sight of misogyny is her workplace. Ji Young is so capable and brilliant. So she deserves one of the best positions at the workplace but everyday misogyny takes place. She faces the Ji-Young faces unfair and cruel treatment every time Ji-Young. When she saw a pregnant woman asking for maternity leave but her boss did not give that as a result, the woman had to resign. But her boss grumbled, “This is why we don’t hire women.” And she replied, “Women don’t stay because you make it impossible for us to stay” (52). After hearing this, Ji Young started to think about herself and what if the same thing happens with her. And the words came from the women are absolutely correct. This has become a regular news in Korea. “Even pregnant women cannot get rid of them. Many women even lose their jobs after childbirth. According to the BBC news a lot of women were forced to leave their job and took the promotion because they took maternity leave (Mackenzie).

Misogyny is everywhere and Ji Young faces it every day. Starting from childhood to after marriage she did not get rid of it. This kind of misogyny is invisible. People give normal, or harmless behavior. But it seems like they are dominating with sweet words. Ji-Young’s father told her to not come late where her brother does not have any restriction. It’s like her father is protecting her. But he never asks why men are dangerous in the first place. This shows the hiding misogyny. Another thing is women started to internalize misogyny. People did so wrong with Ji-Young but at the end of the day instead of the system she blames herself. She thinks she is wrong. She is the one who should change or act differently. And she tries to be silent or ignore their comments. She tries to be a good daughter at first by obeying her father’s rule. Also she tries to be a good wife, good daughter in law and a good mother. Because society expects that from her. Media and culture also play a big role here. In South Korean society, women are always described as a good mother,

an obedient wife or any kind of beauty object. There is a Korean beauty standard that women have to be fair skinned, thin and soft spoken to be a good mother and wife. Ji Young tries to match this standard. She never thinks of her own. She just tries to make people happy.

The small act of sexism can change a woman's entire life. The small act of people can shape a child's entire life. In their mind there is always something that they are nothing. They are not important. Men are the superior she was born to support them and be their good wife. The sexism maximum girl child faces from childhood to adulthood even after her marriage. The same thing happens to the protagonist here. She is continuously facing it. She feels she is alone and it's her job to be a good mother and wife. She just quits her job and takes care of her daughter. Kim Ji Young represents every woman who faces the silent misogyny. So misogyny is not always rape or violence sometimes words.

4.2 Workplace Discrimination and the Cost of Motherhood

Kim Ji-Young, is a bright student. As a result she deserves a good career and a good post. Eventually she got that but other people did not let her win in career. She faces huge discrimination in her job and people mock and criticize her. Not only her but also all the female workers. There is a survey report that shows that, "among recruiting managers of fifty large corporations, 44 percent of respondents chose that they 'would rather hire male to female candidates with equivalent qualifications' and none chose "would hire women over men" (Joo 51). They say she is a woman who does not have the capability to work here. In *Kim Ji Young Born 1982* the writer very cunningly criticizes all the workplace. The South Korean workplace is based on principles that

women will help men. And men are the main and permanent character for the company. Women are the temporary ones; they treat women as temporary ones. Because they think women will quit their job when they get married or have a baby. The country is a developing country in terms of technology and other things but they miss the main thing. Women are just sidelined and portrayed as the weak point. In South Korea there is a strong tradition of gender differences. In Ji-young's motherhood there is no support from anyone. Her husband tries to support but he also comes from the same category. At first he thinks of his own happiness then tries to help her. Her motherhood is just like a punishment. In motherhood girls need support both mentally and physically. Here we can see how racism plays a role in terms of hiring, promotions and workplace culture. And motherhood works as a penalty in the workplace.

Over her career Ji-young has gone through a lot. She has seen a lot of things like discrimination. Most Firms treated men as their permanent members. Also the long term investment for the company. And women are temporary and short term investments. They did not even ask women, just assumed that women cannot be the permanent member. Women like Ji-young face questions about their marriage and pregnancy and childcare in their interviews. But nobody asks men these same questions. The company invests less in the women training and promotion side. Because they assume that women will depart to have children. During this cycle women face a lot discrimination. For example, receiving lower roles and lack of commitment. There is a term called glass ceiling. It is used by many feminist scholars. Because it is working as an invisible barrier. Ji-Young always deals with gender-based actions. Sometimes she has to do her male colleagues' work like preparing documents or any other difficult job. But people do not see how hard she is working. Yet they underestimate her saying she is weak. The company gives

men the leading position. And women get the supporting position where she will obey men. The writer shows the discrimination in everyday action. When women get pregnant they face twice discrimination. Pregnancy is working like a career ending tool for women. Ji-Young saw that a lot of his female co-workers quit after giving birth. They say that they cannot manage both work and kids. Companies do not give mothers flexibility in working hours or childcare facilities. The phrase motherhood penalty works here. Instead of praising them, the company gives them a penalty.

Motherhood is always called fulfillment. This is a belief that women learn from childhood. And a woman must become a mother to be the perfect one. But instead of fulfillment motherhood turns into a burden. When Ji-young became pregnant her coworker behaved weirdly with her. They behave like she should leave as soon as possible. They become so selfish and show that she will be unable to do her work. She cannot handle the workload. As a result she lost her professional identity. But Ji-young feels more pressure to quit after giving birth. Every time husbands and family think that a woman's main job is caring for the child. A child is a mother's responsibility and mother is the one who knows the best for the child. A child needs her mother to grow up well. But nobody thinks about the mother like what exactly she is going through. How depressed she is. In terms of men it is different. How men at work are rewarded for parenting and called the perfect one that he becomes a father. When a man becomes a father, people congratulate him. But when a woman became a mother it was not a happy memory for them. There are a lot of changes happening in their body, their mood swings. But nobody cares about that.

Postpartum depression is the worst thing of all. Ji Young is having that depression. She faces huge mental pressure that she became like this. She acts as if she is another woman. Sometimes she behaves like her mother, sometimes a friend, all her personality shifted. She did not realize when she acted like that. Discrimination in every place makes her silent. Workplace discrimination also makes women silent. When Ji Young tries to speak up, people always make her silent. As a result she never took a stand for herself. First her grandmother, then her father, then her colleague and her in-laws. Every situation is against her which makes her more confused and silent. She is still capable but she had to quit her job and her career. The cost of motherhood is her career. Because of her motherhood she faces all kinds of problems. Motherhood was meant to be the happiest journey but it became a burden.

4.3 Postpartum Depression and the Fragmentation of self

“Ji Young was suffering from postpartum depression when she heard about her colleague's death” (05). Postpartum depression is when a woman falls into depression after giving birth. It is a psychological traumatic situation. Many women lost their own identity because of this disorder. This is a huge term and it is increasing day by day. This is a very painful and hard experience. *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* shows the emotional breakdown of Ji Young. The breakdown happens after her motherhood. Which occurs after motherhood. It is a form of suffering. This suffering shows that motherhood is not always happy. And it does not bring happiness at all. There are a lot of hormonal changes happening in a woman's body after giving birth. As a result, they feel stress and consciousness about their body. Moreover, a new responsibility was added. This situation and suffering happens when nobody is there to console them. Also when the family and social

environment is opposite. Post-partum depression is a result of the past depression, trauma, helplessness, loneliness, inequality, discrimination. Ji Young faced discrimination from childhood when her family first did this. Then her teacher after that her colleagues and now in law. Her mentality is already weak. Because of the behavior she has been through. After that she gives birth to a child now she has to do all kinds of household work. For example, cooking, cleaning, and raising the baby, feeding. It is like day care and night care. All this happens with the protagonist Ji Young as a result she is suffering from postpartum depression. Her husband sometimes helps her but still she has to do 95% work like it is only her responsibility.

The novel starts with showing her illnesses and her abnormal behavior (Joo 03). It is like her husband is tense about her behavior (04). Also shows how Ji-Young's emotional world gives her suffocation. Every day she is doing the same thing. It feels like her duty is repetitive and endless. Her family and society feels that she should feel happy. Because she does not have to do an outside job or earn money. She should be grateful because all she does is sit alone in her house and just do so-called household work. Which is so easy according to them. But because of this she feels like she is worthless and invisible. She lost her personality which makes her feel tired. She feels constant pressure from society that she should be happy. She feels guilty because she cannot be happy because of her daughter. And every mother thinks that. As a result, mothers became silent about their health and illness. As a result, it became worse. Statistics show that 50% of women globally face postpartum depression. If we see internationally in Canada 1 in 6 new mothers faced this depression. In the UK 1 in 8, in Australia 1 in 5. Also 80% of new mothers suffering from "Baby Blues" like anxiety and mood swings (Carberg).

The writer Cho Nam Joo presents a fractured identity of the protagonist. She presents it strongly and brilliantly. Also show the process of how Ji Young loses her identity. And the sense about herself she forgets who she is and behaves like a new person. At first she was an independent woman. She has a job. She has other identities as well like she was a daughter, a friend, a worker. But now everything has changed. Her only identity is now mother. She just quit her career. Her husband has his job and career. He leaves for his job daily and meets his co-workers and friends. But Ji Young stays home alone. Basically she is disconnected from the world. She feels the pressure of being alone and not having a job. She cannot express how she feels and became silent. Her silent behavior leads her to depression. Depression makes her disconnected from her own self as well.

There is a lot of theory of the unconscious mind. People have three kinds of minds. Conscious mind, subconscious mind and unconscious mind. The conscious mind is like we know what we are doing. An unconscious mind is the feeling of the thought we repressed in our mind. In unconscious mind Ji-Young started to talk in the voice of other women. She speaks as if she is her mother, her friend or some random woman. This is very strange behavior by her. This behavior shows that her psychological barriers just collapse. Her body is no longer her own body; it's like a site of trauma now. Many feminist theorists believe that depressed girls act like them who they think are the same victim as them. So they unconsciously acted like them. Her mind is behaving like else and she has no longer control over her body.

4.4 Kim Ji-Young: A Voice of the Silenced Subaltern Everywoman

Kim Ji Young listens to what some workers say about her “I wish I could live off my husband’s pay check ... bum around and get coffee... mom roaches got it real cushy... no way I’m marrying a korean woman” (Joo 91). This caused her final mental breakdown. Then she starts to think that she is a burden and says, “people call me mom-roach”. This is a turning point of the protagonist. Kim Ji-Young is not just one name. There are millions of names hiding behind this name. This name represents every woman who faced depression and trauma. The name personifies the struggle and tears of countless women across the world. And represents the woman who became silent because of the behavior of people. These women get silenced in homes, workplaces, and relationships. Many feminist theorists say the word ‘subaltern’; it means those people whose voices have been silenced and those who do not have the power to speak. Because her society and family does not let Ji-Young's society make her silent. They did not let her talk and took a stand. So never express her pain, anger or desires. So technically she does not have power to talk as a result, she becomes a subaltern. This section will show how she becomes a universal figure for every woman in the world.

Ji Young faces a lot of traumatic situations in her life. Throughout her life, Ji-Young is taught that she should stay quiet. And she has to maintain and accept everything. When she took anything from her brother her grandmother told her not to do that because her brother is the precious one. When she faces harassment her father told her to ignore it and scold her as if it is her fault. She always faces discrimination and they say it is normal. At last when she became a mother and felt depressed, nobody supported her. They told her to stay strong and focus on her child.

Every situation makes her voice silent. That is why she is acting as a subaltern. Ji-Young's character is a silent and simple character. A thirty three year old woman who leads a typical life. is the silenced woman because her experiences are typical. She does not have any special or unique ability that makes her character strong and different from others. Everything in her life is common such as her school, work, marriage, motherhood. But within this ordinary ability there is something new. It is not only one voice, it has become a collective voice because most of the women in South Korea can relate to them. This novel brings out their struggle. Ji-Young! It is just a common name in South Korea. But this ordinary name becomes an Everywoman. They intentionally choose this. It's like every woman who lives in Korea can relate to it. Because of this novel a massive movement happens in South Korea. According to BBC news, MeToo started in South Korea. Also, Korean women started defying the Korean beauty standards. Women came forward and started to tell their struggle story. Not only Korea, it started globally. According to the South Korean publisher Minumsa, the book became a bestseller in Japan, China and Taiwan. Also the publishing rights have been sold to 17 countries including the UK, US, France, and Spain (Kim).

After publishing this book women found an inner strength. They just need somebody who will speak for them and the writer Cho Nam Joo did that. It is like a collective thing all women came together and spoke up against the patriarchy. The writer wrote down the novel into six chapters. Each chapter unfolds a new story and inner struggle. When she starts speaking in the voices of other women, it is standing for every voice. As a result women get courage to stand up and speak. So the subaltern regained their power. The society's behavior towards Ji-Young's shows how society uses shame, politeness, and moral duty to control women. If a woman complains this is not right. They have to be quiet. And women need to accept injustice quietly. This is an

emotional harm. The writer successfully criticized this term in the novel. The story also connects with global feminist ideas. Not only Korean Women, almost every woman across the world started thinking and supporting. The main part is that every woman's suffering is silent. And this is a common term for every woman. In almost every culture they characterised women's behavior and she said how a woman should behave. It started in ancient times and is still there. Kim Ji Young became the voice of every woman who cannot speak. This gives a voice and strength.

4.5 Documentary Style and Collective Female Identity Narrative Strategies

Kim Ji Young Born 1982 is not just a simple novel, it is a silent protest. This is a documentary because it is not entirely fictional. The writer uses various surveys and reports to show the discrimination. The character is fictional but the experiences she has been going through is the real struggle. Most of the women face this pressure. This can be considered a documentary because the author uses real life cases. She also uses survey data, statistics and other facts to build this story. This novel can be called partly fictional and partly well researched. The protagonist's experiences are not anything new or something different or unique. It's the problem that most women face at least once but remain silent. Because nobody is speaking about it, so at least someone needs to speak up. It is a common social problem. This section will discuss how the documentary style makes the novel feminist novel.

In fictional text there is something new or unique. A protagonist with extraordinary abilities. Also in fiction people never think twice. It is basically for entertainment purposes. In fiction there can be a new world or science fiction. Because of the documentary style, it creates a link between Ji-Young's experience and knowledge. Whenever the narrator faces discrimination or inequality she adds the real data. Such as harassment, the struggle of employment. And how society expects Korean women to work or act. The suffering of Ji-Young is not a personal problem now. So every woman who faced problems has become the evidence of national problems. This strategy connects with everything like the social sciences. In literary and feminist studies it creates a mark. People can read everything about Ji-Young's daily life. Because of this movement it is clear that patriarchy is not a personal issue, it is a global issue. The overall environment is under the patriarchy. So the environment needs to change. Another narrative story is calm and composed. The tone is very simple and minimalistic and matter of fact. There is no violence only psychological trauma. When a woman suffers that time the society forgets to see the truth. Society always downplays women's suffering. Because of the word choice the reader can feel the pain and heaviness while reading. Ji-Young's story is kind of like a case study. In this story people can see every possible reality. Through this, readers can realize the heavy truth. They can see how discrimination, silence, pressure of motherhood, and lack of equality affects women. Not just one woman, millions of women. This also includes other women stories who are related to her. Her mother, sister, classmates and office worker as well. In her mind Ji young speaks for them and she takes a stand for them. She just mixed her identities and she is carrying other women's pain. The novel suggests that women carry each other's pain. Because their histories are connected. In the end the use of the husband and the psychiatrist is very important. Because, men are understanding

and trying to explain a woman's condition is significant here. Because men need to understand and go through the experience of what women feel.

In conclusion, the novel became unique and powerful because of the style and tone. The documentary style creates a perfect tone and environment that the readers can feel that struggle. The best part is they reacted as well and it became a movement. The narrative uncovered the truth very well. Without any violence and using any abusive language silently it shows the truth. And readers felt the reality globally and that is why this novel is the international best-selling novel.

Chapter 5

Comparative Cross-Cultural Feminist Reading

5.1 Patriarchal Structure in *Ladies Coupe* and *Kim Ji Young Born 1982*

Both India and South Korea have had patriarchy since the beginning. But across time the structure became different. And the impact is very significant on the lives of women. Two novels *Ladies Coupé* and *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* written in different contexts. But they are together in terms of invisible cage or silent battle. It shows how women in different settings face similar situations. Same issue and situation when both the countries value, tradition, and social conditions are different. Even in history both the countries have totally different histories. A country in East Asia and South Asia. Everything is different but in terms of patriarchy both are the same. If I compare these two novels I can see that patriarchy is not a regional issue. It is a global issue. And it impacted on the social and global system. In India, girls are often venerated as Goddesses. They talk about girl power, women empowerment. But when it's real time to support them they just back off. India has a very rich culture if we look at histories there is a lot of tradition, hierarchy. Patriarchy in India is seen in history as well. And it is linked with family hierarchy, religious tradition, and caste norms. Also the expectation of female obedience. Women born and brought up with this system. As a result they are socialized to accept decisions taken by male authority. In childhood father then brother after marriage husband and in older age son. This male authority they have always seen from their childhood. According to them the main purpose of women's life is getting married and becoming a mother. Anita Nair explains this through Akhila. She bears the

load of supporting her family, after her father's death. But she does not get any honor in return. Even still her brother will decide where she will go (Nair 07). The Indian patriarchy system confines women to unpaid domestic work and emotional sacrifice.

South Korea has a strict patriarchal system. It is influenced by Confucianism. They always value male power. That everything will be decided by a man. They consider women as the weak one so they never give equality. The expectation is always like when a girl grows up she has to get married and serve her husband and in-laws. In modern times men are giving more respect, opportunity and freedom to women. But as men are the part of patriarchy so in their mind they did not think that girls are equal. Still they have this traditional thinking. So they failed to accept equality. They still have a different way of thinking. That is why they remain traditional beliefs in offices, classrooms, and homes. Korean Women Experience Discrimination in Education, Workplace, and Motherhood or Family Life. In terms of technological progress they are one of the best but their society still restricts women's independence.

The patriarchy pressure is similar in both countries. They trained their daughter to be a perfect woman. For example, a supportive wife, a selfless mother, and an obedient daughter. Sacrificing for family is mandatory for every woman. They have to sacrifice their habit, dreams, desire, and happiness. And they are trained to do that if they do it selflessly that means she is perfect. But if not then they call her selfish. Another main thing is silent girls are taught to be silent. Silent is one of those traditional rules. Women remain silent if they try to speak, which means they are not respecting their traditional values. Respecting one's own dreams and desires and speaking for their rights means she is selfish, bad or mad or she does not know how to respect

the so-called patriarchal values. The protagonists did everything to fit into the patriarchy rule they serve selflessly but they did not get anything good in return. Even their family members made them shut so they became silent. But at last they found themselves after so much pain. It's not that someone helped them to do that, for Akhila she started to value herself and Ji Young started to speak for herself and other women as well. The key differences in Indian patriarchy is in the traditional and cultural values. It's like patriarchy is in history. But in South Korea patriarchy is in more professional places. In the job sector the male people always refuse to work under women. Both countries suffer from the system every time but differently. Though the system is different and traditions are different, facing problems and pressure and struggle is rooted in the system. Every time women are pushed emotionally by society by saying harsh and dominating words. So they are trapped in economic, psychological and physical cages.

In conclusion, after reading both the novels the readers can understand that patriarchy is everywhere but forms are different. Day by day this new rule is added for pressuring women. Both in South Korea and India the patriarchy form will never change. It is still doing its work silently. As a result, the structure of women suffering also changes.

5.2 Various Cultures of the Invisible Cage

Both novels have the invisible cage. But it is in different forms. Invisible cage is a metaphor, which shows how women are trapped in a place named after tradition or rule. It also shows how patriarchy restricted women in society. Women have to go through a lot of restrictions in society. And the restrictions are not visible, it is invisible. But it worked very actively. It shows

how we restrict women in society. All these restrictions are not always visible. Cage is a kinda similar concept that every era and region has but the quality of the cage is different. Because every region has its own tradition. Based on their culture and tradition the cage changed. This section will explain about various invisible cages that women are in.

Anita Nairs *Ladies Coupe* is best for an Indian family. The protagonist Akhila was born and brought up in India. Akhila took her family's responsibility after her father's death. And this responsibility is acting like an invisible cage. At first it was ok and beautiful to see that a girl is taking care of her family. But as years passed it is clear that nobody cares about her even though her mother did not take care of her. Whenever Akhila thought about her marriage and settling down she faced more problems. Her family and society will think that she is selfish, that is the main concern. The writer shows an invisible cage in Indian culture. For example, the Indian tradition, values, self-sacrifice, respect everything. She wrote about six women including Akhila. When the story unfolds it is shown that all of them are in invisible cages. A woman whose whole life is about what her father, husband and son will say. An educated woman whose husband insults her in front of others. A rich woman who also depends on her husband. A woman who is told to stay home. A woman who should not travel alone. It is the woman's responsibility to keep the family's honor. This stops women from doing something for themselves and doing what others want.

Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982 also has an invisible cage. Though the text is very modern, it is equally powerful. It shows how a woman is discriminated against in the family, in the workspace in an educational place. The protagonist Kim Ji Young leads a very pressured life from her

childhood. And it got worse after her motherhood. Not only had she just quit her job she had to quit her identities as well. She just forgot that she is an individual person. She just fell into postpartum depression. And it's getting worse when she acts like another person. Society's new rule and expectation is that a woman has to be all-rounder. A perfect scorer, a perfect student, perfect worker, a perfect mother. It is like all in one. And the protagonist tries to maintain all this as a result she is trapped into the invisible cage. Even if she succeeds in maintaining all these still society demeans her because of her gender. So here she faced psychological, emotional, and social cage.

The patriarchy made this cage and they openly discuss this. They give it a new term which is perfection. In India, they openly discuss this in the name of tradition and culture. And women had to follow that because they made their mind like this. As a result women pass this across generations. As an East Asian country South Korea has their own tradition. They are very modern in language, technology and economics. But they forgot a major part, which is the women. In South Korea they did not openly discuss it. But they prove it by their actions. Both cages are the same. They pressured women. There was an economic crisis in Asia in 1997 at that time women faced the most problems. A report shows that in South Korea 86.2% female workers are forced to resign voluntarily (Kim & Voos195). Whatever the capability is they will look down. This creates an invisible cage for them and women trapped in it.

5.3 Women Stay Adamant through Storytelling and Resistance

Both the novels are written by women and perfectly know what they want to prove by the story. Some women start protests, throw activism and some remain silent. But another great way is writing. Writing can help people achieve the desired thing. Here both the female writers are adamant in their goal. They choose the storytelling path as their protest. The patriarchy gets interrupted when women start to share their lives. Here two women rise up the story of millions of women. The protagonists are not alone. They are representing all the women who are trapped and who are fighting a silent battle. In *Ladies Coupé*, the storytelling is central. The protagonist Akhila meets five women on a train. Through their story telling she understands every woman is facing the same pressure but the structure is different. It's not only narratives, it's their buried distress. Their story tells that their scream is silent.

Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982 is a psychological fiction. Its story type is documentary. The writer uses real-life statistics, news reports, and data analysis. All the examples she used that all women can relate to. Not only one generation but all the generations can relate. In the novel Ji Young finally started to speak for herself she says, She started to speak for herself. She says, “Don’t I deserve a 1500 won cup of coffee? (Joo 92). It is like recognising herself her worth that she deserves better things. She deserves the same coffee that the other working persons are drinking. And the same facilities. After being silent and dominated by other people, she finally speaks with frustration and says to her husband, “I suffered deathly pain having our child. My

routine, my career, my dreams, my entire life, myself—I gave it all up to raise our child. And I have become a vermin. What do I do now?”(92)

In *Ladies Coupe*, storytelling is the turning point. Each woman’s story has its own revenge side. At first they all endure all the pain and oppression. But in the end every woman has their own terms. It shows how they find their worth and fight against patriarchy. After listening to all their stories Akhila became stronger psychologically. And started living on her own. Each woman there in the ladies coupe supports each other's choices and respects it. Also their story says how they can do better. It started from the first story “A Certain Age” to the last story “Sister to the Real Thing”. Each and every story teaches a lesson about life and shows self-worth. Also, storytelling and silent revenge is like a nonviolent protest against patriarchy. Because it shapes their minds that after this train journey they will remember this story. And this will help them in future to fight against patriarchy. All of them found themselves and they knew that they were not alone. Both writers took all the responsibility for the symbolic protest. They perfectly did their resistance. Also a lot of feminist added their theories brilliantly. Firstly, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) added a lot of feminist thought. Secondly, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) argued about gender identity, Gayatri Spivak’s essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) talks about the voice of women. All this book is about the perfect rights of women and a peaceful resistance.

5.4 The Burden of Responsibility gets heavy in Motherhood

Because of the system and the rules made by the patriarchy, motherhood became so difficult. Women are now scared of being mothers. In both novels motherhood became the main

one of the common themes. Motherhood is a very heavy word for women because at that time women had to go through a lot. A common theme in both these novels, and it became one of the heaviest weights on women. In India, motherhood is tied to culture and tradition. Motherhood should be a happy moment for all women but women are scared of it. When a woman became a mother they had to go through a lot of responsibility. Sometimes their body gave up but still she had to do it all alone. As a result they lost their individual personality. Nobody is there to take care of them or help them. According to the BBC news, Korean women do not want to marry or have children. Also they lost interest in relationships. And the number is increasing day by day. So the country's population rate is going down. According to a Korean working woman named Jang Yun-hwa "I don't want the physical pain of childbirth. And it would be detrimental to my career" (Maybin). Because of the postpartum shock they are traumatized now. And they do not want to get married or have a baby. Motherhood has now become a burden.

5.5 The Universal Cage: Importance of Feminist Solidarity

Cage is everywhere, some women try to break it, and some remain silent. If we look at the real life example we can see the cage. At first people give restrictions to the girls that they should behave politely. Starting from the dressing. They even choose the color code pink for girls and blue for boys. Girls cannot have a car, ball as their playing material. Also the occupation or subject choice. There are very few people who ask their girl children what they want. Also there is an expected age for marriages. If a girl did not get married within thirty years people started to taunt her. Their back talk started about how a woman can survive without a man. The girls face age

shaming and body shaming. This creates a thought that a girl should be married within the expected age. After thirty the girl becomes older then nobody will marry them this is a stereotype thought. Invisible cage is the limitation that every girl faces. After marriage they will not stop. Society will start talking about having babies. They never will think about the girl if she is ready or not because it's her body. And we can see this all over the world. There is news in China that a pregnant woman was in a critical condition and vaginal delivery would be very risky for her. When she requested a C-section, the doctor asked her in-laws about that. But her in-laws denied. She could not bear the pain and she killed herself. After that a new Chinese law started that a woman can take decisions about her body. The internet broke about why a girl did not have the right to her own body (Allen).

Conclusion

Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982 suggests a deeper study of cross-cultural comparisons with India, a country from south Asia. It shows that patriarchy still shapes women's lives in invisible ways. The structure of gender inequality is similar across various social, economic, and cultural contexts. Even though the location is different. Women are confined within an "invisible cage", or a collection of expectations, rules, roles and pressures. Which define them and limit their choices from girlhood to adulthood. The life of Kim Ji-Young is the life of millions of women who suffer everyday misogyny, workplace discrimination, emotional suppression, and the burden of motherhood. Societal fears become evident through her personal crisis. It depicts how society prefers not to know that women are human beings. Women are under constant pressure to give up their goals and dreams for their families, their husbands, and their children. The woman has a fragmented self. Because intense emotional and social pressure creates distance between her own identity and her assigned roles. This book demonstrates how silence may be a survival tool. Kim Ji-Young acts as a medium, helping other women find their voices while showcasing shared pain. This idea is supported by the author's documentary style which incorporates reports and statistics from the news and actual life. It makes one fictional character an embodiment of every woman who cannot resist. When comparing South Korea with India, the thesis shows that patriarchy takes different cultural forms but has the same goal: to control women's mobility, work, sexuality and identity. Women in the two cultures face similar restrictions, such as violence against them, son preference, workplace discrimination and glorification of motherhood. Still, storytelling and sisterhood, along with everyday acts of resistance, show women's struggle continues in other ways. Sharing stories like Kim Ji-Young's is an act of courage. It ends the silence and brings into light

the hidden system that society wishes to normalize. In both cultures, motherhood emerges as one of the most effective methods of patriarchal control. It is often expected from women to provide support and care unconditionally. When society places such romantic views on motherhood, it makes the struggles that mothers face less important and invisible. Kim Ji-young's story shows how this weight can tear down women. Even so, the global reaction to the novel shows that many mothers around the world see themselves in her, proving that the cage is universal.

In the end, the argument is that feminist solidarity matters. Nearly all women face the same struggles, notwithstanding the geographical boundaries. Finding something in common will give you strength. Women who support one another in speaking up against structures of oppression will serve to break the 'universal cage' they are shut in. Literature plays a powerful role in this process. As stories like *Kim Ji-Young, Born 1982* make women visible and give language to their pain, they remind society that silence is not acceptance. With the help of storytelling, women are reclaiming their voices. The invisible cage is not something that is natural. It is a manmade system. And almost all the women across the world are in this invisible cage.

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