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The Labour of Marriage: Care, Gender and Refusal in Jeo Baby's *The Great Indian Kitchen* and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* Across Kerala and South Korea

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Abstract

There are many social institutions that regulate labour. Of the various kinds of labour, "care labour" is regulated especially by the institution of marriage. This makes it particularly gendered, with its effects tipping unfavourably against women. Many cultural texts have engaged with this aspect of marriage and offered searing critiques of the inherently unequal and oppressive nature of the institution. This article examines two diverse texts from very different cultures, the Malayalam-language film The Great Indian Kitchen by Jeo Baby and the Nobel Prize winner Han Kang's celebrated South Korean novel, The Vegetarian. These texts are read as instances of the rage and despair that women from both places feel with regard to the ways in which the institution of marriage regulates care labour and the consequent erasure of women's work, aspirations, sexuality and autonomy. This article reads the two texts in the context of women's articulation of resentment toward heterosexual institutions such as marriage in South Korea, as expressed through radical movements such as the 4B movement, and a nascent trend in Kerala, where young women are increasingly resisting or deferring marriage. In both texts, women's autonomy and agency are subjected to various forms of control and suppression, prompting responses that range from anger and

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defiance to what isperceived as 'madness'. The article situates these representations within the broader context of demographic shifts in both societies, where women are choosing to marry later or not marry at all, thereby influencing fertility rates and reshaping traditional social structures. This article focuses on the anxieties generated by, and the questioning of, the uncomplaining and incessant care labour expected within marriage.

Keywords: Care labour; South Korea; Kerala; Marriage; Violence.

Introduction

There are many social institutions that regulate labour. Of the various kinds of labour, 'care labour' is regulated especially by the institution of marriage. This makes it a particularly gendered act. Cultural texts have engaged with this aspect of marriage and often offered searing critiques of the inherently unequal and oppressive nature of the institution.

This article takes up two such works that have compelled us to look at the violent underpinnings of care labour that hold the institution of marriage afloat. The 2024 Nobel Prize winner Han Kang's novel *The Vegetarian* and Jeo Baby's Malayalam film *The Great Indian Kitchen*, though they might at first sight seem very dissim ilar. Setting that aside, the fact is that both these works expose the element of control, regulation and oppression experienced by women when it comes to their autonomy and agency in terms of their labour, sexuality, everyday choices, including the right to employment or even dietary choices. Sometimes, this invasion happens even into women's sanity itself. While the nameless protagonist in *The Great Indian Kitchen* ends her role on a dramatic and angry note, the woman protagonist in *The Vegetarian* dissolves into 'madness', convinced that she has transformed into a tree.

Both South Korea and Kerala, despite the unlikely nature of the categories being compared, were primarily feudal, hierarchy-bound and agricultural economies that were held together by a tight social and familial order, caste in the case of Kerala and family and kinship in the case of South Korea. By the 1980s, both societies experienced far-reaching transformations – economically and socio-culturally. South Korea moved ahead in an aggressive industrialized direction led by state-sponsored capitalism. The private corporation and the South Korean State became almost indistinguishable from each other. This was accompanied by the gradual dissolution of the old kinship-based, rural-oriented family structure by an urbanized, nuclear family with a strong focus on individuation. Simultaneously, Kerala, which has seen a different developmental path from other Indian states, saw an expansion of state-led investment in human capital and an expansion of welfare measures accompanied by increasing foreign remittances and migration. This was preceded by progressive legislation changing land-ownership patterns, distributing the land to the tiller. This led to far-reaching changes, loosening the earlier large, community-oriented society into a more individual-focused nuclear

family system.

In both cases, these changes have had a significant impact on the gendered dynamics of the respective societies. The nineties decade saw these changes consolidating further, creating new kinds of gender-based anxieties especially challenging traditional notions of masculinities – where men were seen as the providers and protectors. With women joining the workforce and being educated, their expectations of marriage also began to change. The idea that marriage could be a life-long vocation fell out of circulation to be replaced by women who sought in marriage, love, partnership, companionship and sexual fulfilment. These expectations were not easily accepted as they destabilized the civilizational legacy of manliness in these societies. The anger and frustration that resulted from these unfulfilled aspirations is one of the important reasons for women's rage, mental health challenges, psychosomatic illnesses, criminal conduct and finally, perhaps, a descent into "madness".

By the twenty-first century, these socio-cultural and economic changes began to be recorded and reflected and artistically represented in art, dance, theatre, literature and cinema. As an indicative example, one can think of *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Cho), an iconic South Korean novel about a woman, published in 2016. It became a massive international bestseller and sparked a major feminist movement across East Asia. The book explores everyday sexism and the female experience in South Korea through a matter-of-fact look at the life of an ordinary young mother. As the character Kim Jiyoung navigates the expectations of a highly patriarchal society, the heavy burden of her domestic and professional life leads to an alarming mental decline, during which she begins taking on the voices of other women.

A representational example from Malayalam would be the film *How Old Are You?* (starring the actor Manju Warrier, in her iconic comeback role) (Andrrews). This is widely considered a highly empowering and feminist film. It centres on themes of female agency, ageism, and reclaiming identity by following a woman who shakes off traditional domestic constraints to pursue her own ambitions and passions. The movie famously addresses the core feminist question: "Who decides the expiry date of a woman's dream?" Through the protagonist's journey, the film tackles the motherhood trap and challenges the assumption that a woman's identity must completely vanish into her roles as a wife and mother. It also breaks the narrative that women in their thirties are "past their prime", celebrating a woman's maturity and experience. The protagonist is seen to reclaim her voice, find support in female friendships, and become a grassroots activist in her own right, shifting the importance of her never-satisfied husband into a secondary role. Thusly, one understands that the two texts the article has taken for comparison are hardly stand -alone texts from these two spaces.

The Great Indian Kitchen captures the anger that young women are increasingly feeling with regard to this aspect in Kerala. The backlash is felt in stray social media discussions expressing dismay and outrage at young women resisting

marriage. Whereas in South Korea, the much more clearly articulated 4B movement is evidence of this dissatisfaction.

Another similarity that can be drawn with these two very different societies is that both spaces are grappling with important demographic shifts that have resulted in an increase in the proportion of the aging population, late marriage, fewer children per couple and so on. Of course, this is part of a larger phenomenon worldwide.

The article examines the larger context of South Korea and Kerala, through social changes and feminist articulations, in the next subsection, especially concentrating on the institution of marriage.

Changing Worlds in South Korea and Kerala: Challenges from Women

There is growing anxiety in some parts of the world regarding the demographic changes that the world is experiencing, especially the declining birth rates (Winter and Teitelbaum). There is a complex set of economic and social reasons that account for this. For instance, family planning policies, increased education for women, improved child health services, lifestyle factors leading to decreased fertility in humans, delayed marriages, socio-economic factors like rising prices for everyday living, changing societal norms towards family size etc (Westoff 99-104); (Robey, Rutstein and Morris 60-67). But, it is pertinent to note that in many instances, women and specifically feminism are held responsible for the diminishing number of births (Offen 648-676).

Regulation of women's fertility is not a new development, but the South Korean government pinned a large part of the responsibility for the declining birth rate on women's refusal to marry and reproduce. Women's fertility was mapped using National Birth Maps (Hwang), and each municipality was assigned pink dots to indicate the numbers of women of child-bearing age. The South Korean state, like some other states, has taken a pro-natalist turn by announcing initiatives and policies to encourage couples to have more children; for instance, the government announced material inducements and schemes such as housing facilities for newly-weds (India Today Information Desk). South Korean feminists have been quick to grasp the consequences of such policies for the lives, bodies and choices of women (Lee and Jeong 633-644).

A dip in fertility rates is not limited to some parts of the world, but is actually a global phenomenon that is in great measure a consequence of the increasing autonomy available to women as a result of education, contraception and better health services. While this indicates better prospects for gender equality, it also suggests the possibility of reduced pressure on a planet crumbling under the weight of humanity. However, in the "growth"-driven development paradigm that frames us, we find that politicians, economists, and media commentators portray this trend as a 'demographic crisis' with allegedly disastrous consequences – compromised economic growth, increased health costs to support the elderly, or the disadvantage of being outnumbered by opposing ethnic or political groups.

At the same time, if we look at the contemporary politics in South Korea, women's presence in democratic protests is noted by many. For instance, writing about the protests that demanded the impeachment of South Korea's president, Yoon Suk Yeol, who attempted to impose martial law, observers have noted that:

> . . . the most visible demographic group at the impeachment protests is women in their 20s and 30s. Many are…discontented with Yoon's anti-feminist stance, as well as the gender-based violence that is widespread across South Korean society. (Kyong and Chang)
>
> This radical assertion is mostly spearheaded by young feminists who have grown up in an economy characterized by precarity, violence and everyday misogyny that went largely unnoticed and unaddressed by the more conventional demands for inclusion in the government processes and policy making and constitutional equality. (Lee and Jeong 633).

In countries such as South Korea, feminists have made radical calls to women to stay away from the corset (Kuhn) or join the 4B movement (Lee and Jeong). In Korean, the four words begin with 'B': *bisekseu, bichulsan, biyeonae* and *bihon* (Newkey-Burden), and thus the 4B movement. The former rejects debilitating beauty standards and the latter has the core beliefs of "no sex, no childbirth, no dating and no marriage with men" (Newkey-Burden).

In India too, surprisingly, the possibility of a similar demographic transition has created some amount of anxiety, resulting in at least two Chief Ministers of southern states asking people to have more children (Mukul); (PTI) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat urging Indians to have at least three children (Livemint). These arguments have been punctured on the basis of statistical studies (Bajaj and Nandy). As a response, many feminists have criticized the deployment of women's bodies as merely baby-producing machines (Bajaj and Nandy); (NDTV).

Kerala, in India, is one of the regions that are experiencing the kind of demographic transition described above. The demographic transition is not as dramatic as in South Korea but the decadal growth of population seems to be undergoing a change towards a smaller population. The factors that are pointed out are migration and decreasing fertility rates.

"Educated women" refusing marriage is still a fledgling feminist response and has not taken the shape of a "movement" in Kerala. But it has produced a plethora of outrage through public-sphere discussions (Niravath); (Kerala News); (Krishna); (Parvathy). These angry outbursts may be read as responses to articulate young women of Kerala who no longer think of marriage as the safest option to secure their future.

The researchers wish to compare these societies and these situations through two representations – one a novel *The Vegetarian* and another, a film, *The Great Indian Kitchen* that depicts a specific form of South Korean and Kerala patriarchies. We will be using the framework of gendered "care labour" to read these texts. But,

before we do so, we will be examining the epistemological journey of the concept of 'care labour' in the following subsection.

Placing "Care Labour" in Scholarship

Marxist feminists are important in theorising what is now known as "care labour." While Marxian analysis is important in bringing out "labour" as a category of analysis, Marxist feminists directed their critique at these studies which hardly "saw" women or their labour (especially household labour) as important in social analysis at all. For instance:

> The political economy of household labour has been a topic of major concern for feminist Marxists. Underlying the concern is the search for a material basis for the oppression of women in capitalist society, which assumes that Marxism has attributed the oppression of women to ideological factors, especially to the persistence of pre-capitalist ideologies. It is claimed that in opposition to this conception feminist Marxism has "discovered" the basis of female oppression in the persistence of household labour conducted by women as an integral part of the process of production. (Menon 30)

The concept of "reproductive labour" was introduced with heavy conceptual work done by these groups of feminists, especially in the 1970s in Europe (Vogel). They have traced the "women's question" in Marxian thinking as an absence but also acknowledged Engels (Engels). Feminist thinkers (Rowbotham) acknowledge earlier Marxist feminists like Alexandra Kollontai (Kollontai 1405-1412).

The centering of domestic labour (done within households as well as paid labour) was also important in analyzing the central concept of Marxism – capitalism itself. While paid and unpaid housework are done mostly by women, they have different meanings, including meanings of class and caste in places like India. Indian feminists, influenced by Marxist theories, have often focused on the underpaid domestic labour of women workers (Neetha 35-38); (Sen and Sengupta). Empirical work around household labour itself is limited (Dhull 537-554). Feminists argued that capitalism rests on the unrecorded and often unpaid or underpaid domestic labour of women and saw its exploitative nature quite clearly.

The term "unpaid care work," increasingly used by feminists and international organisations, is one framework to see the labour that families generate and which usually falls on women. It is defined by the International Labour Organization as follows:

Care work consists of two overlapping activities: direct, personal and relational care activities, such as feeding a baby or nursing an ill partner; and indirect care activities, such as cooking and cleaning. Unpaid care work is care work provided without a monetary reward by unpaid carers. Unpaid care is considered as work and is thus a crucial dimension of the world of work (Addati, Cattaneo and Esquivel xxvii).

The researchers are aware of the critique of the term that has been widely adopted by international non-governmental organisations operating within a governmentality framework – a usage that seems to have gained prominence in the context of the state's retreat from its welfare obligations. Conceptualizing household work and care activities undertaken to sustain and reproduce society as "labour" invokes the relational nature of these activities. Seeing it as relational suggests that there are others who benefit from and exploit this labour. Whereas the use of the term "care work" seems to sanitize and take the political sting out of the unfair and exploitative nature of this work.

Therefore, this article opts for the term "care labour," drawing primarily on Marxian analytical traditions while also acknowledging contributions from "the difference school" of Carol Gilligan who popularized the term "care" (Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*; *Reply*). The conceptual tensions between these frameworks warrant more sustained engagement than is possible within the scope of this paper.

Yet the researchers are aware of a group of feminists who do not want to bring the monetary into all discussions of care. Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, *In a Different Voice; Reply* 324-333) comes from the difference school of thinking that draws from feminist psychoanalysis. According to her, although care work is exploitative within patriarchal structures, it should not be reduced solely to that dimension. She feels care work is important for all humans and it might be better for men also to participate in this so that it humanises them in the competitive and individualistic societies produced in capitalism. She speaks about the violence that arises when care is unidirectional and calls for the caring of the carer – which completes the care circle. She has been dismissed as a supporter of essentialist ideas about women, such as the notion that womanhood is "naturally" drawn towards care (Tronto). This critique is unfair because she herself is quite aware of the constructed nature of gender. But, she firmly stands with the "difference" theories of gender and argues for a recognition of care work which might not only be a monetary recognition.

In a connected vein, the problem with the concept of reproductive labour sometimes is that it is understood to be "unproductive labour" – which means there is a centrality given to the "productive" in the Marxian imagination. This opens up and also limits the question to remuneration in wages, often for domestic labour. While the 1970s Marxist feminists in the West did make an important move in trying to bring household labour of women into the ambit of wage labour, we need to also understand that not all labour (including paid labour) can actually be reduced to wages. In India recently, a film star-turned-politician, Kamal Haasan, announced that his party, if elected, would institute wages for housework (The Indian Express).

Indian feminists have definitely had their say in looking at household labour. One of the initial Indian feminist articulations on housework was a talk given at the First Indian National Women's Studies Conference, held in Bombay at S.N.D.T. Women's University in 1980 (Krishna Raj and Patel 16). They declared that housework is ". . . women's unenumerated and unremunerated activities . . ." (Krishna

Raj and Patel 16). Indian feminists have used quantitative studies on care labour performed by women, especially "time-use surveys," to measure the time spent in household labour (Hirway 67–92).

The article, now, examines the texts under consideration, *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *The Vegetarian*, looked at through the lens of "care labour" of women, especially wives.

From "Madness" to Rage: Representations of Women's Care Labour

The Great Indian Kitchen received critical acclaim and won the Kerala State Film Award for Best Film, Best Screenplay award for Baby and Best Sound Designer award for Tony Babu (Kerala State Film Awards). The author of *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang, famously won the 2024 Nobel Prize in Literature for "her intense poetic prose that confronts historical traumas and exposes the fragility of human life" (Press Release, The Nobel Prize).

The Vegetarian is a three-part novel set-in contemporary Seoul that follows Yeong-hye, a part-time graphic artist and homemaker whose seemingly "irrational" decision to stop eating meat becomes the narrative's central rupture. Her refusal stems from a descent into what others deem "madness," as she increasingly identifies with the stillness of a tree. Her work has been described as 'an acute study of human behaviour, carefully cataloguing the subtleties of violence and the oddness of things we deem "natural"' (Pendharkar). The novel itself should be seen in the context of other books that are becoming popular in South Korea, like Cho Nam-joo's debut novel, *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982* (Nam-Joo, 2020), which "portrays everyday sexism in South Korea" (James). In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, the central incident is the female protagonist walking out of her matrimonial home in uncontrollable rage, throwing a bucket full of dirty sink water on her husband and his father, almost like Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (Ibsen).

These are almost incomparable texts at one level, yet eminently comparable when viewed through the framework of gender and care labour. Working within a transnational feminist perspective, the comparison between South Korea (a sovereign nation-state) and Kerala (a state within the federal Indian union) is itself, we suggest, an important methodological intervention. We suggest that feminist comparative studies stand to gain much by moving away from the constrictive framing foisted by the category of the nation-state. Engaging with the socio-cultural trends in the two distinct locations that this paper works with offers us the possibility to discern patterns of patriarchal regulations on the one hand and feminist responses on the other, as expressed through cinema and literary texts.

1. The "Insane" and the "Filthy": Representing Women Caught in Labours of Care

Food is a recurring image in *The Great Indian Kitchen*, sometimes as tasty and flavourful, but mostly as labour. In fact, it brings out frontally the violence in care labour. The scenes that remain in any viewer's mind, underlined by the film through

repetition, are often scenes of women's labour. The representation of space in the movie visually evokes disgust around the kitchen and the dining table.

The height of that disgust is produced in a particular scene around the kitchen sink. The kitchen sink is a place where one often sees the unnamed woman protagonist. She is always left to clean up after everyone else. She touches the dirty, leftover food (consumed by men, who do not enter the kitchen at all). The space under the sink is visually built up as a particularly dirty area. The woman is already shown to be scooping the leftovers into a broken bucket, doubling as a trash-can, repeatedly in *The Great Indian Kitchen*. This difficult and disgust-evoking labour is further magnified when the sink starts to leak. The ugliness is further compounded visually by another broken bucket she then has to place under the sink to collect the dirty water to prevent the kitchen from flooding. The husband always "forgets" to call the plumber, and from his perspective, this is not a "serious" issue because he never deals with this filthy labour. The film captures this "forgetfulness" as an instance of gendered violence that the woman is subjected to. In doing so, the film seems to be acknowledging what the feminists often refer to as the "mental load" that women carry of unfinished tasks – the never-ending laundry-list of things to do, people to call, bills to be paid, garbage to be thrown out etc.

One evening, the female protagonist's husband's cousin and his wife descend unannounced, their sudden arrival fracturing the quiet domestic rhythm. As the protagonist bustles to prepare tea, the cousin declares his preference for black tea, only for his wife to ask for milk tea. She brews both with care – yet he scoffs at her efforts saying that mere water and leaves lack the punch of cardamom and cinnamon, that ought to have been added, thereby belittling her labour as routine, unthinking and non-creative. He volunteers to cook the chicken while proclaiming, "Tonight, the men seize the stove!" – insisting the women retreat to idle rest while the men, unlike the women, use their culinary skills with elan.

Very significantly, the film does not show the "cooking" by men at all. We can assume that the cousin's boisterous nature would have made it into a fun-filled evening for the men. But, the recurring motif of the film, the filth of leftover and half-eaten food, fills the screen immediately afterwards, as the film moves to focus on the labour that is left for the woman to clean up.

The Great Indian Kitchen, we argue, is a feminist film because it hints at the female solidarities that the female protagonist turns to – the domestic worker, Usha, and her mother-in-law. The film, though, glosses over the class inequalities between the female protagonist and the domestic worker – perhaps to focus on women's solidarities rather than differences.

Unlike in The Great Indian Kitchen, Yeong-hye's care labour is not described in detail in the novel *The Vegetarian*. Here, care work is the absent presence. It is, in fact, a narrative of a woman who fails in her "duties" spectacularly. It is the slow unravelling of a woman into madness that is described. Care work comes in the narration as what she ought to have done, but has failed. The perspective of the first

part of the text is that of the wronged husband, the succeeding part that of the lustful brother-in-law and the final part, that of her half-sympathetic sister. The first part of the narrative, even though it unfolds through Yeong-hye's husband's perspective, is interrupted by the "mad" musings of Yeong-hye where the language flows out in broken phrases evoking the surreal state which she is experiencing. The second part, again, is from a male perspective – that of Yeong-hye's brother-in-law who looks at her madness as artistic sensibility, and thus desires her. The brother-in-law begins a sexual relationship with Yeong-hye, who appears before him in contrast to his own domesticated wife, In-hye. The third part of the novel is from In-hye's perspective, where she sees Yeong-hye with some sympathy but also helpless anger. She mirrors her sister who collapses under patriarchal pressures whereas In-hye survives by erasing her own self. It is through the sister's eyes that one sees the weight of the care labour that sustains a household otherwise taken for granted.

The violence of care work comes into the narrative in a subtle way. For instance, in the opening scene of the narrative, the husband discovers his wife standing near the fridge with dishevelled hair at night. The next day, he wakes up and discovers she had not woken him up (a labour she usually does, we realize). He also discovers the kitchen floor in disarray (again, an extraordinary event, because she might have kept everything perfectly neat before). In this well-oiled household, the husband is not only woken up but also served an array of tasty food, largely meats. His freshly laundered and ironed clothes would be handed to him as he leaves for work. He is the recipient of a great deal of attention, labour and care. Yet, he notices her only when the machine breaks down. The clockwork nature of the labour that comforted his daily life became evident to him only when it was abruptly discontinued. While there is no respite from the drudgery and filth of the daily grind of household labour in *The Great Indian Kitchen*, in the South Korean novel it is the sudden stoppage of this labour that draws it into the spotlight.

2. The Labour behind the Ordinary: Violence of "Arranged" Sex in Matrimony

The near-tyranny of the regime of sexual intimacy within the institution of marriage is often accompanied by overt physical violence and rape, as well as subtle psychological violence expressed varyingly as dissatisfaction, disinterest and distance. Feminists have seen sex within marriage, for many women, as labour. Both texts address this aspect powerfully and yet they do so differently.

The Vegetarian, in the part of the narrative in the voice of Cheong, describing his wife, begins as follows:

> Before my wife turned vegetarian, I'd always thought of her as completely unremarkable in every way. To be frank, the first time I met her I wasn't even attracted to her. Middling height, bobbed hair neither long nor short; jaundiced, sickly-looking skin; somewhat prominent cheekbones; her timid, sallow aspect told me all I needed to know. As she came up to the table where I was waiting, I couldn't help but notice her shoes – the plainest black shoes imaginable. And that walk of hers – neither fast nor slow, striding nor mincing. (Kang 1)

In the description of the perfect "ordinariness" of his wife, her absolute "non-special" nature is a deep cruelty. The absolute "taken-for-grantedness" that the woman faces in the marriage is what is exposed through this description. Cheong chooses her for her "unremarkable" nature, for he sees himself as such, and though his desire is hardly for this "ordinariness," he prefers it in a wife. Also, he never loses a chance to make her feel that he sees nothing interesting in her. He leaves the house, daily, without an exchange of words with his wife, only to return around midnight. While at home on holidays, he is relieved to see his wife whiling away her time reading "boring" books leaving him alone to watch TV. There is no expression of intimacy or affection that he ever displays towards her. In fact, he does not "see" her till she becomes "extraordinary" in her descent into madness. It is only towards the end of the book that he understands that he has probably lost her to insanity when, to his horror, he discovers her naked in a public place. He finally manages to squeak out a term of endearment for his wife and addresses her as "darling" and perhaps touches her tenderly.

Han Kang compels us to see sex within a loveless marriage as a chore that the wife begins to avoid. The thought of flesh and meat gradually begins to fill her with rage – cooking or eating meat on the one hand and the carnality of sex with her husband on the other hand, both fill her with repulsion. She begins to avoid eating meat – strange in the largely meat-eating South Korean society where women express their love for their families through elaborate meat dishes. Simultaneously, she also begins to avoid sex with her husband – strange within a marriage for a wife to do so. Mirroring the very violent rape scene, there is another scene where the woman who has suddenly turned vegetarian is force-fed meat by her whole family (with cries of "What will Mr. Cheong think?"). Han Kang juxtaposes the rape that the wife is subjected to by the husband with the force-feeding of meat by her whole family, thereby forcing us to consider women's autonomy and agency, especially with regard to the basic bodily functions such as eating and intercourse. This juxtaposition is unlikely and yet very effective and evokes in the reader dread and terror, despite the gentle prose in which it is written and the setting of a fairly humdrum domestic space. It is perhaps this that makes the reader think about the violence that is inherent in institutions such as marriage and the imminent possibilities of rage and madness that the cover of love and care carries within it.

One of the most remarkable scenes in *The Great Indian Kitchen* is the contorted face of the woman, under the man, moving rhythmically, often after the camera cuts from the filth of cleaning the kitchen. We get the idea that sex is not just labour, but disgusting labour, quite similar to kitchen work, for the woman. In one such scene, the wife shyly, but quite firmly, demands pleasure, saying that sex is painful for her when done without foreplay. She, with some hesitation, but also, perhaps, immense courage, asks her husband for "foreplay" before penetration. He is angered by what he regards as sexual assertion and mocks her by saying: "You seem to know everything about all these things?" Then he says even more cruelly: "If I have to engage in foreplay, I should be attracted to you, which I am not!"

3. Different Representations of Resistance

Both texts are different representations of women's resistance – to the absolute violence they seem to be experiencing within the normalcy of matrimony. In Han Kang's novel, the wife turning into a vegetarian is clearly a rejection of being a "good wife" – the one who cooks – an endless variety of meat, more specifically – cleans, and never questions anything, while submitting to sex on demand. She spectacularly plays out her self-sacrifice (or is it self-erasure?) by transforming into an actual sacrificial animal – images that keep recurring to her in her "dream." Her descent into madness is her idea that she is a "tree" – a vegetarian. What she rejects is the "fleshy" bounds of her matrimony – food and sex – the bookends of a happy marriage.

In *The Great Indian Kitchen*, resistance is more hopeful. It erupts in the lava of the female protagonist's anger, providing pleasure to the viewer who celebrates with her the drenching of her patriarchal life with the absolute filth of her labour. She walks away, simply saying, enough is enough. We see her later, as a dance teacher, working with her body sensually, something she had to suppress in her self-sacrificing role as a wife.

Conclusion

This article examined two representations from two very different cultures – one from South Korea and another from the southern state of Kerala in India. Apparently very different, the texts were examined from the vantage point of transnational feminism that seeks to sidestep the nation-state as an analytical category and of gendered care labour that allowed a conversation between these two diverse texts. What we heard in this dialogue were the rage and despair that women felt with regard to the ways in which the institution of marriage regulates care labour and the consequent erasure of women's work, aspirations, sexuality and autonomy.

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