



## **AMELIORATING LIVES IN CHO NAM- JOO'S NOVEL *KIM JIYOUNG, BORN 1982 (2016)***

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### **Abstract**

This research is an analysis of the novel entitled *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 (2016)* by Cho Nam-Joo. This research reveals the amelioration of lives by South Korean women who live in patriarchal society. This research uses qualitative method and feminist theory to find out how South Korean women try their best to get a better life. The result of this research finds out that South Korean women who are portrayed in female characters of the novel *Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 (2016)* by Cho Nam-Joo struggle a lot to make their live and other women's lives around them to be better. The result also shows that they struggle against gender inequality in household, education, and workplace, which means in their whole life, women still get discrimination. The result shows that gender inequality happen because of the culture, society, and also the economy and education. Despite all of the difficulties and rejection they experience, the female characters in women there still try to make a better life for themselves.

**Key words:** Ameliorate, gender inequality, struggle

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The discussion about inequality between men and women becomes the important topic that needs to be talked because it often happens in society these days. There are many cases that are caused by gender inequality in this modern era. According to Zhu & Chang (2019), gender inequality refers to the inequality that often happens between men and women which causes unequal and different treatment, especially for women. Gender inequality gives impacts to people's life, because there are differences of treatment, opportunities and rights in many aspects, such as social, education, and economy that make some people cannot enjoy their life. From the statement above can be concluded that gender inequality can cause negative impacts to some people, and gives advantages to

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the other. Gender inequality happens around the world. Even in the developed countries. One of the developed countries that has a wide gender gap between men and women is South Korea. According to Bicker (2022), South Korea is one of the developed countries that has the worst women's rights. Almost of 90% of South Korean men do not support feminism. They tend to refuse feminist movement that have been done by South Korean women for a long time.

South Korean women that dedicate their life to fight for women's right have a rough time due to the rage from South Korean men. Bicker (2022) also states that there are many South Korean women who have been struggling to stand aimed at the amelioration of their lives. Amelioration itself refers to the process to make a bad situation become better. Amelioration can appear because of the trigger of women's awareness after they experience inequality and discrimination from men and society. South Korean women fight to ameliorate their life in the middle of the patriarchal culture. They do not only fight for their own life, but also the life of the other women. According to Jenkins (2016), in the society where women get discrimination and oppressed, there are the concern and awareness from the women itself to change life. The concept of amelioration is used in this situation, so the women can solve their problem and get a better life even in the patriarchal culture.

According to Manne (2017), women tend to face the hostility because there is the enforcement of patriarchal norms. It means that women can be treated as the object of patriarchy, and they struggle to get out from that situation. In the process of amelioration, there are many efforts that women should do, because the power of men and women in society are different. In South Korea, for example, women have faced a hard processes to improve their lives and help each other. According to Na- Yoon (2020), due to gender inequality that cause discriminations for women, South Korean women become braver and enterprising to be increasingly more visible in society. It can be proved from their achievements, for example in education where many women get highest grades, in workplace where many of them get higher position, and in politics where they can be leaders. According to Hines and Song (2021), South Korean women who try to ameliorate their lives and get their right often get unimaginable consequences when they reveal their face and speak up about gender inequality in South Korea.

In South Korean society, people believe that men should be more powerful than women, so women need to accept the belief because it is a social culture that has lived in South Korea for a long time. This cultural root is also known as Confucian traditions. The concept of Confucian ideals or Confucianism is defined by Van (2020) as the system of ethics, social philosophy, educational philosophy, statesmanship, and political philosophy taught by Confucius and his followers, with the aim of building love for humanity, ancestor worship, reverence for parents, and harmony in thought and conduct. Confucian ideals are largely rooted since the Joseon Dynasty. It resulted in the system of marriage where. The result is that husbands often have full control over not only inheritance matter, but also the right to grant divorce. Confucianism also creates the roles of every member of a family. The husband has a role as the bread-winner

for the family, while the wife need to stay at home, maintain the household and raise the children. The Confucian traditions create gender inequality toward women in South Korea. According to Evans (2017), gender inequality refers to the social phenomenon or social inequalities where women usually treated differently than men.

After many years, many people have more concern about gender inequality in South Korea, especially the women. There has been more awareness from women to change the situation to be better for them, even though the process to get the rights is not easy, but they try their best, and do not want to accept the unfair treatment around them that happen for many years. They make a good progress that leads to less inequality to women. The unequal treatments that women get makes them try hard to get equality. According to the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (2017), there are many cases that relate to the issue of women, such as the marriage that harms the women, discrimination in workplace, discrimination in household, and violence.

This study focuses to examine the female characters's effort to ameliorate their lives against gender inequality that happen for many years in South Korea, which also portray the life of most South Korean women. It is important to know Korean women's struggle to get their right in a country where women do not have chances as men have, even they have similar degrees or skills which often more talented than men.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

The analysis of the novel Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 (2016) by Cho Nam-Joo uses qualitative research method to help finding the data that relate with the research. This method helps the researcher to get better understanding of the meaning in literary works through the quotations from the source of data. Based on Denzin and Lincoln (2009), qualitative research focuses to interpret the natural setting of a phenomena to find the meanings that people brings in such of that settings. This method uses qualitative data, such as documents, interviews, conversations, observations and quotations from literary works.

This analysis using feminist theory and qualitative research method as the strategy to reveal the deep and implicit meanings of the novel. The researcher chooses to analyse this novel from feminist's perspective because the researcher want to prove that women are strong against patriarchy around them even though they face many conflicts which lead them struggle for their life.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Research Finding**

The results found that in this novel, the female characters have the awareness of gender inequality. This awareness triggers them to do something to change the situation to get a better life. They ameliorate their life by doing the resistance, such as help each other when they get the treatment because of gender

inequality, get the education and shape a better mindset, take the responsibility to solve the problems. These are seems like small things, but if women do it persistently, they can change their life gradually. The final result of this study shows that women can change their life by themselves because they have self-worth and awareness to take small steps everyday. Even they cannot feel the result of their efforts, but their children can feel it, because small things can change life.

## 2. Discussion

The issue of gender inequality in the novel Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 (2016) by Cho Nam- Joo can be seen in Jiyoung parents' household. Jiyoung's grandma treat Jiyoung and her sister differently than their brother. It can be seen in the quotations below:

*“Koh Boonsoon, Jiyoung’s grandmother who lived with them, detested the very idea of Jiyoung eating her brother’s formula. If her grandmother ever caught her getting a spoonful of it, she would smack her on the back so hard powder exploded from her mouth and nose. Kim Eunyoung, Jiyoung’s big sister, never ate formula after the one time she was admonished by their grandmother.”* (Chapter 2, page 8)

This quotation shows that Jiyoung and Eunyoung did not have the same chance as their brother to get formula. She was just six years old at that time, so it is normal to a kid to like formula. Her mother actually let her taste her brother's formula, but her grandma did not. It is because she was afraid that there is not enough formula for the brother. Her grandma really loves her brother since South Korean society thinks sons in the family are the pride. That's why when Jiyoung's brother was born, her grandma is very excited and make sure he gets everything. She also can do anything to her grandchild, without thinking about Jiyoung and her sister.

The issue of gender inequality also appears in workplace. Gender inequality can lead to sexual harrasment. It also makes women get paid less than men. The case of sexual harrasment can be seen in this quotation:

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

*“You’re at a meeting with a client company. The client gets, you know, handsy. Squeezing your shoulder, grazing your thigh. You know what I mean? Yeah? How will you handle that situation? Let’s start with Ms. Kim Jiyoung.”* (Chapter 4, page 50)

The quotation above shows the case where Jiyoung went to an interview for a job. But the question does not relate with the job itself. The question degrades women and tends to be a sexual harassment. This question can appear because of many similar cases happen toward women in workplace. Even though Jiyoung does not start work there yet, but she get that question which means she needs to



prepare if something like this happen when she works there. It also shows that workplace is not a safe place for women. The companies do not try to find the way to stop the sexual harrasment, because keeping a good relationship with the client is more important for the company, and it will have a huge impact for the company. Meanwhile women often considered as an object and weak. Many leaders and staffs of the companies are men, and they think that the company is more important than female workers. When the trustee asks about something like this, it means that he and the other men at the company also could do that thing, because he has that mindset and does not hesitate to ask a sensitive question to the woman that just he meets for the first time. The other form of gender inequality that female get is about a project at work. Female workers cannot get a long-term project because the leader think that they do not have much

time to work and they will quit the job earlier than male workers because they need to take care of their family, their children, and they also will be a mother, so it will not be efective if women join a long-term project.

In other place, such as schools, discrimination also happens to women. A school is an educational institution that is used to provide learning environment for students. Even though this is the place for the students to get education and feel safe, but there are still many problems that happen there, such as discriminations toward female students. The cases can be seen in the quotation:

*“The school dress code was strict, especially for girls. According to Eunyoung, it became stricter when the school went coed. The skirt had to be long enough to cover the knees and roomy enough to hide the contours of the hips and thighs. As the thin, white fabric of the summer blouse was rather sheer, a round-neck undershirt was mandatory. No spaghetti straps, no T-shirts, no colors, no lace, and wearing just a bra underneath was absolutely not allowed. In the summer, girls had to wear tights with white socks, and just black tights in the winter. No sheer black tights, and no socks allowed. No sneakers, only dress shoes. Walking around in just tights and dress shoes in the middle of winter, Jiyoun’s feet got so cold that she wanted to cry.” (Chapter 3, page 24)*

Gender inequality can be seen on how male and female students have different rules of wearing uniforms. According to DeMitchell (2020), there is the different rules of uniform between male and female students. Female students needs to be a well-mannered, wear proper uniforms, so they can hide the contours of the hips and thighs. The society still believe that if women wearing tight clothes, it will easier to them to get sexual harrasment, so they need to be careful with the way they act and the way they dress up. The rules of the uniform are unfair for female students, because it sometimes do not fit the condition and the seasons. It shows that since they were a kid, women have many rules to be obeyed, even though they know it is not in accordance with what they want. The female students also want to feel comfortable, but they need to accept the rules, because when they do the protest, their teachers will not hear them. The society often asks women to take care of their action, but they forget to take similar action and implement to

men. Even, the place called school which should be a place to learn can be unsafe and unfair for women.

The injustice that the female characters get from men and society in the novel Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 (2016) by Cho Nam-Joo happen repeatedly and for a long time. It triggers them to change their situations and get their rights. In this novel, the female characters do not do big changes, but they try as hard as they can to change the situation gradually. The way to resist gender inequality that female do in this novel is taking care to the other women. It looks simple, but when women take care of each other, it means there is the awareness toward the issue of gender inequality. The evidences can be seen in the quotation:

*“She looked desperately out of the window when the bus pulled up at her stop, but her father wasn’t there. The male student was standing one step behind her, and the bus door opened. She was afraid to get off, but couldn’t keep going to a strange neighborhood late at night. Please don’t follow me please, please, she prayed to herself as she stepped off the bus onto the deserted street, and the male student got off as well. They were the only two around, and the broken streetlight made the bus stop even darker. Jiyoung froze where she stood. The male student approached her.” (Chapter 3, page 31)*

From the quotation above can be seen that the woman also help Jiyoung to be calm and change her mindset. Jinyoung may be feel trauma and also blame herself because of what happen to her, but the woman says the comfort advise to Jiyoung, because she is older than Jiyoung, so she knows the world more than Jiyoung does. It shows how a good words from other people can help the other to heal from the trauma. So, it is very important to women to care to the other women who experience the discriminations or harassment, because it can make them feel worthy again.

The other way to ameliorate women’s lives is getting education. It can be seen in the quotation:

*“Growing up, the sisters were never once told by their parents to meet a nice man and marry well, to grow up to be a good mother and a good cook. They’d done quite a lot of chores around the house since they were young, but they thought of it as helping out their busy parents and taking care of themselves, not learning how to be good women. When they were a bit older, the lectures they received from their parents fell under two main themes: a) habits and attitude (sit up straight, keep your desk organized, don’t read in the dark, pack your schoolbags ahead of time, be polite to your elders); b) study hard.” (Chapter 3, page 34)*

Jiyoung’s parents, especially her mother has a very smart mindset. She does not ask their children to get marry. Usually, the parents who lack of education will force their children to get marry at the young age, especially the daughter, so,

they do not need to worry about their financial. But Jiyoung's mother never ask their daughters to do that. She allows them to go to university even though they have financial problem. She does not want their daughters to feel what she feel and lose their dream.

Women in this novel also do the protest to get a better life. It can be seen in the quotation:

*“You think girls don't play sports because they don't want to? We can't play because it's uncomfortable to play wearing skirts, tights, and dress shoes! When I was in elementary school, I went outside every break to play red rover, hopscotch, and skip rope.”*

*As punishment for the dress-code violation and backtalk, the female student had to do laps of squat walk around the school field. The teacher told her to hold the hem of her skirt together so as not to reveal her underwear, but the girl refused. Her underwear showed each time she took a step in squat position. The teacher stopped her after one lap. Another student called down to the teachers' office for dress-code violation asked her why she didn't hold her hem together.*

*“I wanted the teacher to see with his own eyes just how uncomfortable this outfit is.”*

*The official dress code did not change, but, at some point, the prefects and teachers started to overlook girls wearing T-shirts and sneakers.” (Chapter 3, page 25)*

The quotation above reflects how one of the female students who get discrimination in the rules of wearing uniform purposely wear sneakers shoes to school. She becomes the symbol on how female students also want to have more comfortable uniform to school like the male students do. She even do the protest to the teacher, which means she is brave to get her right. The other female students also break the rules and get the punishment. But the more they get the punishment, the more they show to the teacher that they want to break the rules because they are feeling uncomfortable with the uniform. Even though it seems not work at that time, but as time passed, the teachers start to overlooked what the female students wear.

## **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **1. Conclusion**

In the novel Kim Jiyoung, Born 1982 (2016) by Cho Nam-Joo, it can be concluded that there is a struggle of the women that happens because of gender inequality in society. Women that live in a society that embraces the patriarchy tend to get discriminations, because there is unequal position between men and women, which men are more powerful than women. The study found out that this situation makes women easily get oppression, discrimination, sexual harassment, and end up

they need to struggle in their life. Gender inequality is everywhere. It can appear in the very first place where we live such as households, then it also happen in public spaces, such as schools and workplace. Gender inequality appears because of influenced by social culture, the history of the environment, and lack of education. It also start from the household, because it is the first place where people learn about life. When the parents embrace the patriarchy, then the children will see how their father treat their mother and their daughter, so they can learn the same thing as they parents did. This situation then create their personality and how they act to other people in other places. Then it will create gender inequality in society.

## 2. Suggestion

Based on the findings and the conclusions from this study, the researcher would like to provide some suggestions for the future studies. It is important to understand the struggle of women, even they just do small things. The researcher also hope this research can be useful for the other people who interested to analyze the amelioration of women in patriarchal culture.

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