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A GLANCE AT THE PLIGHT OF A MISSING MOTHER: WITH REFERENCE TO KYUN - SOOK SHIN'S *PLEASE LOOK AFTER MOTHER*

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"Literature is the art of discovering something extraordinary about ordinary people, and saying with ordinary words something extraordinary", states Boris Pasternak. Needless to say, the cartouche of literature manifests true shades of human emotions, and presents unto them the grating reality of human experiences. Having bestowed with the fire of genius, the vibrant South Korean novelist, Kyun- sook Shin has exhibited a collage of human tendencies and passions in her praise worthy novel, *Please Look After Mother* (2009).

"A raw tribute to the mysteries of motherhood", accolades 'The New York Times Book Review'. The South Korean writer, Kyun- sook Shin's artistic caliber unfolds itself through the poignant episodes of the novel. She is the first South Korean and first woman to win the Man Asian Literary Prize. She is also the recipient of many such honours such as 'The Manhae Grand Prize for Literature', 'The Dong-in Literature Prize', 'The Isang Literary Prize' and so on. The novel has been received well and has carved a niche in the heart of many readers. Her compendium of works include *A Girl who wrote Loneliness* (1995), *The Train Departs at Seven* (1999), *Violet* (2001), *Yi Jin* (2007), *I'll Be Right There* (2010), *The Court Dancer* (2018) and so on. Chi-Young Kim has translated this wonderful piece of work, though her creativity.

Please Look After Mother depicts the diverse strokes of emotions woven into a tapestry and magnifies the vitality of a missing mother. It unravels the deep hidden feelings of a husband, son and daughters of Park So-nyo, who goes missing in a subway station. The novel is divided into 4 chapters namely, 'Nobody Knows', 'I'm Sorry, Hyung - chol', 'I'm Home', 'Another Women' and the epilogue, 'Rosewood Rosary'. These chapters showcases the nostalgic experiences of the daughter, son, husband and mother. The first chapter, 'Nobody knows' is narrated through the voice of the daughter, Chi-hon and the second chapter, 'I'm Sorry Hyung- chol' is voiced out through the son, Hyung- chol. The father briefs the third chapter, 'I'm Home' and the final chapter is revealed in the mother's voice, Park So-nyo. All these chapters, except the final chapter is narrated in the second and third person. The final chapter is narrated in the first person and the epilogue expresses the tone of the eldest daughter, Chi -hon.

"IT'S BEEN ONE WEEK SINCE Mother went missing' (1), is the opening line of the novel. It proceeds with a steaming discussion among five children, figuring out a way to find mother though fliers, posters and online posts. At the opening, the mother is displayed as a fragile soul, unable to read and figure out pathways, whose life begins and ends within the walls of kitchen. "I don't like or dislike the kitchen. I cooked because I had to. I had to stay in the kitchen so you could all eat and go to school. How could you only do what you like? There are things you have to do whether you like it or not." (63), states mother to her daughter Chi-hon.

Even in the beginning, mother's birthday is celebrated on the birthday of the father. While drafting the fliers, confusion emerges between the children and father regarding the year of mother's birth. When mother insists on sending Kyun, her husband's younger brother to school, her husband beats her and sends her out of the house. The children and husband turn a deaf ear to her suggestions, though her views are right.

In all these situations, not only mother but even her identity is lost. The missing of mother is a symbolic representation of her missing identity.

After experiencing a rough phase during her childhood and as she has been deprived of education, the mother starves from the thirst of knowledge. Hence, she quenches her thirst by making her children educated and especially shows signs of pride when her elder daughter turns to be a writer. Having her life lived through her children, she turns to be a bread winner of her family, after being betrayed by her husband.

The mother is no less than a working woman. She occupies herself with different works such as farming, taking care of animals, making malt, making sausages, kimchi, etc. She pays the tuition fees and school fees of her children by selling malt and selling her middle finger ring. Even the children, finds their mother to be engaged with work always, having no time to spend for herself but being able to relish while cooking and feeding them. The mother identifies herself with the happiness of her children and forgets the fact that she has been living the life of the family members and not hers.

Mother's sacrifices are like the air, though they are experienced, they are not tangible. Even when she suffers from cancer, her children are kept in dark from knowing their mother's health. Her husband never realized and recognized her as his wife until she goes missing. He is even remorseful towards her and has shown constant reluctance in taking her to hospital. His perception towards his wife changes only after she goes missing and it is obvious through the following lines. "After your children's mother went missing, you realized that it was your wife who was missing. Your wife, whom you'd forgotten about for fifty years, was present in your heart. Only after she disappeared did she come to you tangibly, as if you could reach out and touch her" (132).

Throughout the novel, mother's name seldom appears and mostly she is referred either as 'mother' or 'wife'. She is scarcely considered as a soul that envisions a dream, and is often forgotten that she is once a playful child, a lovable daughter, a young woman and a newlywed wife who gave birth to her first child. This is evident through these lines, "That woman disappeared, bit by bit, having forgotten the joy of being born and her childhood and dreams...the woman who, at least when it came to her children, wasn't surprised or thrown off by anything. The woman whose life was marred with sacrifice until the day she went missing. You compare yourself with Mom, but Mom was an entire world unto herself" (254, 255).

"Life is sometimes amazingly fragile, but some lives are frighteningly strong" (212). Proceeding towards the end, the novel renders a magnified image of a mother who turns a new leaf by educating herself. After treading the paths of trials and tribulations, no one but her, could comprehend the miseries of the disowned, hence she surreptitiously serves at an orphanage named Hope House. She grows to an unparalleled height filled with compassion, sympathy and forgiveness, when she pardons the betrayal of her husband and stands up for the education of her husband's brother. In spite of being physically broken, she roams around spreading love and kindness from neighboring kids to cats and dogs.

According to the writer, the character of the mother symbolizes compassion, which has been lost amidst the buzzing noise of mundane life. She has attempted to trace the lost compassion in the hearts of the multitude, through her passionate plot. Kyun-sook Shin elucidates the fact that a mother who devotes all her life caressing the children and husband, also deserves her share of love, affection and care. She strongly stresses the fact that even a mother needs to be supported and consoled and is worthy of a soul mate to empty her emotional outbursts.

The plot is simple yet profound, leaving no stone untouched as the characters move like men with flesh and blood. It is not only penned with passion but also inked with exuberating emotions. The episodes provoke the reader to resonate on their life experiences and facilitates them to discover a similarity between the fictional and factual. The novel would undoubtedly kindle the nerves of compassion and would certainly validate the vitality of motherhood in every household. Nevertheless, it brings into lime light that mothers are a paragon of virtue, to be loved, cared and revered. Thus, as referred by Booklist, this novel is "impressive exploration of family love, poverty, and triumphing over hardship".

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