

# North Korean Culture and Society in the Works of Blaine Harden, Hyeonseo Lee and Yeonmi Park

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## Abstract

The prominent goal of this paper is to examine North Korean culture and society in the select works of Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14*, Hyeonseo Lee's *The Girl with Seven Names*, and Yeonmi Park's *In Order to Live*. The research explores how these works highlight the challenges of escaping tyranny and assimilating into a new culture while offering information on the evolution of culture and identities through cultural study. The personal accounts of North Korean defectors offer priceless insights into life under a repressive system as well as the difficulties experienced by those who manage to flee such inhumane conditions. This evaluates how the protagonists, Yeonmi Park, Hyeonseo Lee, and Shin Dong Hyuk depict the challenges and victories of their journeys. This research reveals the unheard voices and untold tales of the sufferings endured by the brave individuals in a brutal regime, who have crossed borders which serves as a limelight for other nations who are unaware of North Korea.

**Keywords:** classes, cultural shift, juche, identity, songbun, struggle

## 1. Introduction

This study affords powerful visions into North Korean culture and the struggles faced by individuals within this closed society. It shows the numerous facets of North Korean culture, the complications related to the natives' escape and survival and the individual experiences of the author. "A culture is a configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society" (Linton, 2010, p.32). The writers discuss how the North Korean government has a widespread impact through propaganda, censorship, and stringent information control. The North Korean government propagandises the people from a young age and dictates ideals and beliefs that differ from those of other countries.

## 2. Literature Review

The selected works are interpreted and evaluated by researchers, scholars, and reviewers by reading the text and applying literary theories. Some of them are as follows:

The reviewer, Catlin has analysed the psychological trauma of prisoners in *Escape from Camp 14*. She wrote this after she met Crystal Green, who works for children. These children have suffered from cruelty and crossed into the United States. This made her read the book and review it. She finds it interesting and hard to analyse. The book tells the true story of a prisoner, Shin who does not get emotional connections with other persons. The only rule known is the regulation of the camp. The survival to get food is the driving force behind his life. After he arrives in the West and gets freedom he lacks emotional development which serves as the barrier to live in the normal society. She opines that "he reaches the West and freedom, his lack of emotional development remains a fence around his ability to interact in the world" (Catlin, 2013).

The researcher, Ralli, compares Shin to the concept of the empathy of Aristotle. Shin was raised in a restricted environment that excluded human interactions. He speaks about the story of a child who lacks outside knowledge of the city. "When he was in the camp — depending upon [his mother] for all his meals, stealing her food, enduring her beatings — he saw her as competition for survival" (Harden, 2013, p.22). He defines the Aristotelian concept of empathy by choosing this book. It is suggested that "...in extreme cases the absence

of empathy leads to the incapability of association, and an individual who lacks a minimal sense of empathy becomes an apolis” (Ralli, 2018).

The reviewer, Craig, gives a nutshell of *The Girl with Seven Names* and appreciates the work too. He states that “*The Girl with Seven Names* is a must-read for anyone with an interest in the Korean Peninsula. However, the second section, covering Lee’s travels in China, is an all-too-common story. There is a level of tension as Lee brushes up close against refugees who are either forcefully repatriated or exploited in the sex trade, and many events are a personal culmination of geopolitical forces that will demand contemplation from the thoughtful reader” (Craig, 2016).

The researcher, Izmi, analyses the book, *In Order to Live* for her thesis. Her target is to reveal the difficulties of surviving in dangerous human trafficking. She discussed two major problems in her research. “The first problem is how Park and her mother survive human trafficking as described throughout the novel, and the second problem is what the author’s worldview is presented in the novel” (Izmi, 2023). She adopts Genetic Structuralism for a better understanding of the relationship between the text and the background. The researcher opines that Park wants to “raise awareness of the issue of North Korean women’s trafficking that still exists today. She also voiced the voices of North Korean citizens to reach the freedom of life who are currently unable to voice their voices” (Izmi, 2023).

In the article, Divakaran shows the psychological trauma in North Korea. He investigates the terrible experience of Yeonmi Park’s memoir, *In Order to Live*. It tells about the journey to freedom from the oppressive Communist Regime. It also explains how the author recovers from psychological injuries. This article employs a literary theory of trauma. This paper attempts to establish that traumatic experience significantly impacts the construction of the victim’s identity, and the victim will be able to heal the psychic wounds inflicted by trauma by communicating the inexplicable phenomenon called trauma through literary narratives” (Divakaran, 2023).

The above-said literature reviews of the select works analysed and interpreted psychoanalytically which are connected with emotions. This particular research is contrarily analysed through cultural studies which give more information about North Korean history, people, and culture which is fresh to some extent.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study uses textual analysis as its main research method, using a qualitative research strategy. “Qualitative researchers use different sources of data to understand the topic they are studying. These data sources include interview transcripts, videos of social interactions, notes, verbal reports” (Packer, 2010, p.165). The researchers use primary and secondary sources in a descriptive text form to provide a complex picture of North Korean culture and society, the difficulties that defectors encounter, and the transformational process they go through.

### 4. History of North Korea

North Korea’s history has complicated political, social, and economic developments throughout the period. When the Second World War came to an end in 1945, Japan colonised Korea. The Korean people suffered from tyranny, forced labour, and cultural repression during the colonisation. Korea was split into two occupation zones along the 38th parallel, with the Soviet Union holding the north and the United States occupying the south. The division laid the groundwork for the separation of North and South Korea. The Korean War started in 1950, when Kim Il-sung’s North Korea invaded South Korea with assistance from the Soviet Union and China. The Korean Peninsula was effectively divided along the same 38th parallel during the war, which lasted until 1953, when an armistice was reached. Since no formal treaty was signed; the Korean Peninsula is still split today.

### 6. North Korean Literature

North Korean culture, political ideology, and governmental control strongly influence North Korean literature. The majority of the literature are created in North Korea is used to advance state ideology and uphold the legitimacy of the leadership. The government regulates the writing and publishing that takes place in the country. The use of state-approved narratives and ideologies is expected from the writers. Anything that differs from the accepted narrative is repressed or censored. “North Korea’s subsequent literary tradition was shaped and controlled by the State” (Jin-Sung, 2014, p.89). To secure their adherence to the government, the writers frequently need to go through political indoctrination. Government criticism or dissension is not accepted. The researcher has chosen the following three books to depict the conditions and culture of North Korean society.

#### 6.1 *Escape from Camp 14*

Blaine Harden is an accomplished writer and journalist who is well known for his perceptive and thought-provoking writings. *Escape from Camp 14: One Man’s Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West*, one of his celebrated books, tells the dramatic and compelling tale of Shin Dong-hyuk, the only known individual to have been born and raised in a North Korean political prison camp and successfully escaped to the free world. “*Escape from Camp 14* is the story of Shin Dong-hyuk, the only known inmate in North Korea’s “total control” political prison camps to have escaped and made it to the West” (Seth, 2023).

Harden was born on March 25, 1952, Seattle, Washington, USA. He has an outstanding career as a writer, working for esteemed newspapers like The Washington Post and The New York Times, where he focuses on a broad spectrum of different international issues, cultures, and conflicts. His considerable knowledge in covering foreign politics and violations of human rights gives him the ability to create fascinating narratives that shed light on some of the most crucial problems facing the world.

The rules, behaviour, and culture in the North Korean prison camp vary from the external countries. Shin Dong-hyuk has come across unspeakable agony in the political camp. The prisoners are subjected to torture. Harden's detailed research and interviews with Shin Dong-hyuk provide rare and horrifying conditions in the camp. The book recounts Shin's incredible escape while also recounting the difficulties he attempts to face in the outside world because he knows nothing about the other culture. Harden has contributed to literature by exposing the reality of North Korea's political prison system and the oppression of people. The story of one man's amazing journey to freedom is not only compelling and startling but also serves as a window into the unending human rights violations in North Korea. Harden's work has made a significant contribution to bringing attention to the situation of North Korean political prisoners and has been crucial in promoting justice and human rights in the area. *Escape from Camp 14* is a brilliant example of Harden's dedication to investigative journalism and human rights advocacy. He distinguishes his career as a journalist and writer by writing captivating that shed light on essential aspects of North Korean society.

### 6.2 *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story*

Hyeonseo Lee is a novelist and defector from North Korea who is notable for her fascinating memoir, *The Girl with Seven Names: A North Korean Defector's Story*. Her life story is an inspiring monument of bravery and resourcefulness. She was born in North Korea in 1980 and was raised in a place where there was a lot of secrecy, tight government control, and little access to outside information. After a daring escape across the freezing Yalu River into China when she was just a teenager, she decided to leave North Korea. In China, she sets out on a risky trip that lasted more than ten years, posing as different people from different cultures while avoiding capture and repatriation to North Korea.

In *The Girl with Seven Names*, Lee, the protagonist describes her extraordinary journey and how she adopts seven distinct identities to help her get through the challenging and terrifying world of human trafficking and illegal border crossings. Her autobiography delivers a rare and personal glimpse into the challenging realities of life in North Korea as well as the struggles endured by North Korean defectors in China. Her desire to find her family in North Korea and then free them in South Korea remains a recurring motif in her story throughout her journey. Her experience is not only a testimonial to the strength of family ties across time and a personal account of survival but also presents the cruelties of North Korea.

### 6.3 *In Order to Live*

Yeonmi Park is an endowed author and human rights advocate who is famous for her memoir, *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*. She was born on October 4, 1993, in North Korea and is an appropriate example of adaptability, bravery, and the strength of the human spirit. The reality of surviving in the totalitarian systems in the world is reflected in her early years. She was raised in a world where access to knowledge is strictly regulated and there were no fundamental liberties. She and her family went through terrifying hardships due to acute poverty and hunger. Her path to freedom started when at the age of 13. She and her mother risked everything to cross the border into China, starting a chain of events that would change their lives forever in different cultures.

Park's terrifying escape from North Korea and her following challenges as a defector is chronicled in the book *In Order to Live*. Her book is a heart-breaking and shocking account of the atrocities and violations of human rights she saw in North Korea, as well as the perils she encountered when trying to find safety in China and eventually South Korea. Park has maintained an unflinching commitment to obtaining independence for herself and her family throughout her quest, which is both inspiring and humbling.

Park's book not only enlightens readers on North Korea's secretive culture but also urges action on the part of the international community to alleviate the country's enduring human rights issue. She has become a well-known defender of human rights and North Korean refugees because of her story, which has enthralled people all over the world. She continues to spread awareness of the predicament of North Koreans and the requirement for international assistance through her writing, public speaking engagements, and advocacy efforts. Her inspiring tale serves as a tribute to the strength of optimism and the adaptability of the human spirit in the face of adversity, making her a powerful advocate for liberty and human rights. In an interview, she said, "I hope this book will shine a light on the darkest place in the world. We don't feel like human beings: people don't feel that they can connect with North Koreans, that we're so different" (Preston, 2018).

## 7. Cultural Studies

The research adopts cultural studies to analyse the works. "Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field in which perspectives from different disciplines can be selectively drawn on to examine the relations of culture and power" (Barker, 2008, p.7). The cultural study supports exploring the multifaceted back-and-forth between specific experiences and the large socio-cultural contexts in *Escape from Camp 14*, *The Girl with Seven Names*, and *In Order to Live*. These three books offer personal accounts of escape from North Korea, shedding light on the details of life within an authoritarian organisation, the challenges of adaptation to a different culture, and the struggle of human life. "Cultural studies often concern itself with the agency at the level of the practices of everyday life, and approaches such research from a standpoint of radical contextualism" (Grossberg, 2010, p.112). Interdisciplinary areas like literary theory and cultural studies look at and analyse literature, media, art, and culture from numerous angles. They offer approaches and frameworks for comprehending the complexity of texts, cultural artefacts, and social interactions. These disciplines seek to elucidate the underlying ideologies, meanings, and power structures that influence both the production and consumption of cultural objects.

Many academicians contributed to the development of cultural studies in the 1960s. Raymond Williams, Stuart Hill, Richard Hoggart, and

C.P. Thompson, are regarded as the primary founders of the field. "A critical moment" at the beginning of cultural studies as a field was when Richard Hoggart used the term in 1964 in founding the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Birmingham (Dworkin, 1997, p.116). Particularly, Stuart Hall is recognised as being the most significant figure in cultural studies.

Cultural studies can be used as a tool for examining the North Korean administration in a variety of ways. While conventional political and economic assessments are crucial, a society's cultural makeup can also shed light on the dynamics and behaviour of the regime. To keep the population under control, the North Korean government uses a lot of propaganda. Examining North Korea's propagandist culture, which encompasses its media, music, and art, can reveal how the government upholds its hold on power and encourages its populace's devotion. Information is subject to strict censorship, and exposure to outside influences is restricted. Studies of culture can shed light on how censorship affects the general public and how the state upholds a closed information environment. "Due to widespread media control, some analysts have characterized North Koreans as censors" (Kang, 2007, p.219). Therefore, the researcher aims to investigate how dominant groups in society gain and keep control over less powerful groups, as well as how these groups respond.

## 8. Discussion

This study starts to discuss the ideas of Shin Dong-hyuk who was born and raised in a North Korean Prison camp. His childhood, escape and horrific history from camp are recounted in Harden's *Escape from Camp 14*. The book offers an intriguing prism that examines North Korean society and its effects on people. He had never imagined living in the outer world in his dreams. He does not know China, South Korea, or the United States. He is not aware of mercy, kindness, or love. Even loving his mother and brother is beyond his prison culture. He views his mother as a rival for food while in camp. If there is no more food, the mother beats her son with a hoe out of rage. Jang Hye Gyung is her name. After arriving in the United States, he learns what a familial tie is. Like other prisoners, he has never loved his mother. To quote:

Many years later, after she was dead and he was living in the United States. He would tell me that he loved his mother. But that was in retrospect. That was after he had learned that a civilized child should love his mother. When he was in the camp depending upon her for all his meals, stealing her food, enduring her beatings-he saw her competition for survival (Harden, 2013, p.22).

Shin learns from his teachers at school that North Korea is a sovereign nation. They exclude details regarding the geography, neighbours, and history of North Korea. He never interacts with any classmates who were not born in the camp. Without resistance from kids who might know something outside the prison, teachers mould the minds and values of their students. Shin first learns about the caste system when he is nine years old. One day, the instructor instructs the pupils to gather coal that was spilled while loading. Children of the guards yell at Shin and his classmates. They attack them with rocks. Many of them have started bleeding and are unconscious. According to their custom, Bowiwon children can throw stones at the likes. It is clearly stated in:

Three broad classes were created with fifty-one subgroups: at the top, members of the core class could obtain jobs in government, the Korean Workers' Party, officer ranks in the military services... The next level was the wavering or neutral class, which included soldiers, technicians and teachers. At the bottom was a hostile class, whose members were suspected of opposing the government. They included former property owners, relatives of Koreans who fled to South Korea, Christians and those who worked for the Japanese colonial government that controlled the Korean Peninsula before World War II. Their descendants now work in mines and factories. They are not allowed into universities (Harden, 2013, p.43).

The new prisoner arrived from Pyongyang. Park Yong Chul is the man's name. He knows high officials in the North Korean administration and has lived abroad. One day, Park asked Shin, "Sir, where is your home?" "My home?" Shin said. "My home is here" (Harden, 2013, p.114). Shin was born and raised in custody, thus he does not know the outside world. Park asked Shin about Pyongyang. Shin's query left Park speechless. He carefully explains that Pyongyang is the capital of North Korea and the city where all the influential people live. It is situated roughly fifty miles south of Camp 14. He claimed to have grown up in a sizable, comfortable flat in Pyongyang and to have followed the elites of North Korea's privileged educational path, including studies in East Germany and the Soviet Union. Shin learns about the outside culture for the first time. "He patiently attempted to explain what life was like outside Camp 14 and outside North Korea" (Harden, 2013, p.115). At first, Shin finds it difficult to understand. Later on, he tries to believe how the world works outside. This is explained through:

As they walked the factory floor, Park told that the grant country next door to Korea was called China. Its people were rapidly getting rich. He said that in the south there was another Korea. In South Korea, he said, everyone was already rich. Park explained the concept of money. He told Shin about the existence of television, computers and mobile phones. He explained that the world was round (Harden, 2013, p.116).

Shin's desire to leave the camp grows as he hears more and more of the outside stories. He calls for a society in which he or another regular person may enter a restaurant, order rice and meat, and leave satisfied. For the first time, Shin fantasises about leaving with Park. In the camp 14, betrayal is frequent. It is a must for survival. Shin makes his first choice of his own free will. He requests not to spill the beans. He escapes Camp 14 one fine day by bouncing the electric fence with Park. Unfortunately, the high voltage causes Park to pass away. Shin flees by crawling over Park's lifeless body. He has arrived at the nearby village. The people on the street pass him by. He experiences alienation. He spends his days outdoors. He gains knowledge about how the world functions and how people interact with

one another and thus experiences cultural shock. After arriving in China, Shin finds work on a pig farm. The past tense of a lifetime of slavery has abruptly changed. For the first time outside of the camp, he now fills his stomach three times daily.

The first foreigners that ethnic Korean defectors typically encounter upon entering China are those who share their language, diet, and cultural beliefs. The Ministry of Unification constructed Hanawon, which is Korean for "House of Unity," in 1999 to help North Korean defectors learn how to fit in with the capitalist culture of the South. "In her book *Nothing To Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*, journalist Barbara Demick describes Hanawon as a cross between a trade school and a halfway house and describes its purpose as teaching North Koreans how to live on their own in South Korea" (Wikipedia contributors, 2023).

Shin gets papers proving his South Korean identity, along with photo identification. He is currently much more interested in lessons that teach him how to utilise the Internet because he was not taught anything in Camp 14. North Korean education is not useful for life in South Korea. With the aid of brokers in South Korea, many defectors can leave North Korea. Brokers eagerly await the graduation of defectors from the settlement centre so they can start receiving government stipends. "Compared to other defectors, he was a fast learner and highly adaptable to culture shock," said Lee Yong Koo, a team leader there" (Harden, 2013, p.115).

Human rights experts outside of South Korea have started to pay attention to Shin. A tour of Japan and the United States is then extended to him. He speaks with Google and presents at Columbia University and the University of California, Berkeley. He devours North Korean news from South Korean publications and the internet. He compromises his capacity to adapt to a new life.

The second book to be discussed is Hyeonseo Lee's *The Girl with Seven Names* offers a thorough cultural examination of North Korea and the difficulties North Korean defectors encounter. In her work, Lee provides a distinctive viewpoint on the cultural, social, and divergent cultures of South Korea and China. Lee grew up and was brought up in North Korea. She decides at a young age to cross the Yalu River into China to look for her family. She spends some time in China. Lee has adopted numerous identities throughout the years (thus the seven aliases) to elude Chinese officials hunting for North Korean defectors. While working in China, she encounters numerous difficulties and always lives in terror of being caught. She finally succeeds in arriving in South Korea, where she seeks asylum and starts the process of adjusting to a new culture and society.

Despite its socialist utopian intentions, North Korea maintains a rigid, state-enforced class structure. Lee notes that South Korea and China have comparable social classes. In those nations, social status is determined on different grounds, but the class structure is still in place. This can be clearly explained in:

Songbun is a caste system that operates in North Korea. A family is classified as loyal, wavering or hostile, depending on what the father's family was doing at the time just before, during and after the founding of the state in 1948. If your grandfather was descended from workers and peasants and fought on the right side in the Korean War, your family would be considered as loyal. If, however, your ancestors included landlords, or officials who worked for the Japanese during the colonial occupation, or anyone who has fled to South Korea during the Korean War, your family would be categorised as hostile...The irony was that the new communist state had created a social hierarchy more elaborate and stratified than anything seen in the time of the feudal emperors (Lee, 2016, p.6).

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK, is the official name for North Korea, and Juche ideology is the official state ideology of that country. "Socialism of Our Country is a Socialism of Our Style as Embodied by the Juche Idea" (Shin, 2006, p.91). It is often translated as "self-reliance" (Cumings, 1997, p.207). Juche is the foundation of North Korean political, economic, and cultural values. By framing North Korea as a protector of Korean sovereignty against external dangers, primarily the United States and South Korea, it encourages an anti-imperialist posture. These alleged threats are described as imperialist forces attempting to weaken North Korea's independence. It also applies to the economy, where it fosters domestic industry growth and self-sufficiency. To produce the majority of its goods domestically, North Korea has followed an economic autarky program. It has a big impact on North Korean education, art, and culture. Loyalty to the state, respect for authority, and the battle for independence are all themes that frequently appear in cultural productions.

The Juche ideology has a huge impact on the political and cultural environment of North Korea, affecting Lee and other North Koreans as well. She describes how, like all North Korean citizens, she received early indoctrination emphasising the value of independence and allegiance to the government. Isolationism is fostered by this. Lee's testimony illustrates how this isolationism limits North Koreans' access to information about the outside world and exacerbates their cultural isolation. Lee explained in her TED talk in February 2013, "When I was young, I thought my country was the best on the planet" (Wikipedia Contributors, 2024). The main plot of Lee's North Korean escapes and her subsequent lives in China and South Korea emphasises her struggle to rid herself of Juche's beliefs. The book also demonstrates how Lee starts to doubt the indoctrination as she adjusts to life outside of North Korea. She was given false information that was spread to defend the regime's actions.

Lee confronts significant cultural shifts along the way and runs into several issues that are specific to other cultures. She was raised in North Korea, a very oppressive and distant nation. She found a very different culture when she crossed the border into China. Chinese culture is more open and market-oriented than North Korean culture, which is marked by rigorous government control, propaganda, and a culture of collectivism. She has to overcome a huge cultural barrier: language. Even though she is fluent in Mandarin Chinese, communication in China is difficult despite her knowledge of Korean. To live and fit into her new environment, she has studied Mandarin.

She experiences an identity dilemma as she assumes various identities while running. Each name presents its own set of difficulties because she must learn to adopt new mannerisms and customs to blend in and avert suspicion.

After making it to South Korea, Lee encountered further cultural difficulties. She must adjust to living in a contemporary, democratic society with different norms, expectations, and customs. She gains an important understanding of how to navigate South Korean culture, including its employment opportunities, educational system, and social relationships. Her escape and subsequent travels cause her to be apart from her family for a prolonged time. As she adjusts to her new cultural circumstances as a result of this separation, she faces emotional struggles and longs for her North Korean roots. North Korean defectors in South Korea frequently experience prejudice and discrimination from members of the community who see them as outsiders or potential security hazards. Lee has learned to live with and fight against these preconceptions.

Lee struggles with moral decisions including her allegiance to her family, her country, and her self-survival. Her decisions become even more difficult as a result of the intricate relationships between these challenges and social and cultural standards. *The Girl with Seven Names* vividly illustrates cultural shifts that have a significant impact on a person's life. It also illuminates how adaptable and resilient the human spirit is when faced with difficulties related to navigating numerous cultures and identities.

The third book picked for research is *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*. Yeonmi Park covers the songbun system as part of her personal experiences growing up in North Korea. In North Korea, the populace is divided into many classes according to their perceived devotion to the regime, family background, and political history through the songbun system. A person's eligibility for several rights and opportunities in North Korean society, such as housing, jobs, and education, is determined by this system. "Songbun affects access to educational and employment opportunities and it particularly determines whether a person is eligible to join North Korea's ruling party, the Workers' Party" (Hunter, 1999, p.11).

Table 1. Categories in the Songbun system

1. Core Class (Loyal) (Enemy)	2. Wavering Class (Middle)	3. Hostile Class
Devoted to the government	Neither supporters nor detractors	Against the government
Government officials Defectors		Normal households

The above table 1 shows that people are categorised as classes in society. Park and her family are classified as members of the hostile class under the Songbun system due to her father's involvement in illegal trading, which severely limited their opportunities and subjected them to surveillance and harassment by the authorities. As a result, they face discrimination and hardship, which play a significant role in their decision to flee North Korea in search of a better life in China and eventually South Korea.

Park and her mother encounter an entirely new cultural environment after escaping to China. They face the difficulties of being undocumented immigrants, which include exploitation, linguistic and cultural hurdles, and a persistent worry of being found out and sent back to North Korea. Her cultural identity changes as she changes from a North Korean defector to a South Korean citizen and worldwide human activist. She talks about the difficulties of forming one's identity, such as learning a new language, getting an education, and comprehending South Korean culture while keeping one's North Korean ancestry. The book also emphasises the value of cultural sensitivity and empathy in tackling the issue of human rights around the world. Her journey carries on when she relocates to South Korea, a country that is culturally different from North Korea. She encounters culture shock as she adjusts to the sophisticated and modern way of life in South Korea, where individualism and freedom are valued highly. She discusses her attempts to adjust to her new cultural environment.

It becomes apparent that the North Korean regime heavily employs specific techniques to maintain power. Park describes how the dictatorship is concerned with preventing any information from foreign sources that could be used to sway people's opinions in a particular direction. The administration is free to choose what and how to distribute information, to identify the enemy, to portray the outside world, and even North Korea itself while the country is isolated. North Koreans cannot risk saying or even thinking anything because they are constantly being watched. North Koreans cannot risk saying or even thinking anything because they are constantly being watched. To quote:

Instead of scary fairy tales, we had stories set in filthy and disgusting place called South Korea, where homeless children went barefoot and begged in the streets. It never occurred to me until after I arrived in Seoul that those books were really describing life in North Korea. But we couldn't see past the propaganda (Park, 2016, p.46).

**9. Conclusion**

Defectors face a significant cultural adjustment once they leave the system. They face difficulties in adjusting to a new way of life as they struggle with concerns of identity, language, and cultural standards. These stories highlight the significance of fostering worldwide conversation and action on North Korea's human rights problems in a global context. These defectors contribute to the overarching objective of bettering North Koreans' lives and advancing the cause of human rights all over the world by talking about their experiences

and pushing for change. Thus, the research concludes by analysing and showcasing North Korean life and society through cultural studies which broadens the comprehension for the non-natives who know a little.

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#### Author's Contribution

**Preethi N R** conceptualized and developed the arguments presented in the article and wrote the manuscript and **Dr. Revathi P** contributed to the literature review, validation of the arguments presented, provided critical insights and ensured the overall clarity of the paper. Besides, **Dr. S. Subash** contributed to the development of the literature review. In addition, **Dr. A Anne Dorathy** contributed to interpretation, edition and revision of the paper. Furthermore, **Dr. Prakash A.** contributed to the edit and revision of the paper.

We, authors, discussed the research findings, contributed to the interpretation of the results, reviews and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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#### Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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