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BREAKING THE MYTH OF HANGMAN: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF K.R MEERA'S HANGWOMAN

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ABSTRACT

Hangwoman : Everyone Loves a Good Hanging is a Malayalam novel written by K R Meera. The novel was published as a book by DC Books in 2012. It was translated by J Devika into English. In Malayalam title the novel was named as ' Aarachar'. The novel was originally serialized in Madhyamam Weekly in continuous 53 volumes. The English publisher of the novel was Hamish Hamilton. The novel brought Kerala Sahithya Acadami Award (2013) , Odakkuzhal Award (2013), Vayalar Award(2014), Kendra Sahithya Acadami Award(2015), Muttathu varky Award in 2018. It was short listed for the 2016 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature.

Hangwoman is a story based on the Indian culture of religion and caste. The story was set in Bengal. The protagonist of the story a strong and bold character .She belongs to a family of executioners with long lineage, beginning in the fourth century BC. Feminism is the main theme used in the novel. The story focus on the life of Grudda Mullick's family. Mr. Mullick possessed the job of public executioner. His ancestors also possessed the job of public executioner. In the novel there is a struggle between love and hate. Because Chetna, the protagonist and the male character Sanjiv Kumar Mithra who loves as well as hates each other.

Hangwoman has an important role in feminist study. Because the life of Chetna is an example of a strong lady who have courage and boldness. Feminism works through out the novel. Feminism is not a single system. It has a complex attitude towards society. The background of the story was situated in North India. Kolkatta acity near Hugli river. The author immensely potraited the image of Kolkatta. Kolkatta is a city of myth ,history, colonialism and it was also the center of North India.

INDEX TERMS – Feminism, Patriarchy, Stereotypes, Hangwomen

INTRODUCTION

Hangwomen by K. R Meera is one of the best example of feminist approach . The novel writes in an epic format. The novel covers various aspects like death, life, fear, and love. Here imagination is combined with realistic visuals. The reader can't easily accept the events in the novel. K R Meera's dazzling style of writing is reflected in the novel. The title of the novel is very interesting. It catch the readers attention. The protagonist of the novel Chetna who lives in the reader's mind for a long time. The novel ends with a style of different manner. However the readers confused in the end. Because the final action of the protagonist is very culminative. This action make the readers enthusiasm in a large and increased level.

The book is full of deep philosophical ideas and addresses a number of life's fears, including love, sex, death, fate, and life after death. Kolkata serves as the story's backdrop, and history, myth, and imagination are expertly juxtaposed with reality. This makes the book special and unique. The novel's name alone is intriguing. The idea of a female public executioner is not common in Indian contexts, and south Indian novels have not yet addressed this issue. Despite being written in Malayalam, the book is about a Bengali family and is set in Calcutta. The Malayalam language is essentially completely irrelevant. Written on an epic canvas, this book explores women's roles both inside and outside the home. Meera uses Chetana's story to illustrate how men dominate society and to show Chetana as a formidable force. The South Asian Literary Award has shortlisted Hangwoman. Any theory that aims to achieve this is called feminism.

In society, certain gender roles are stereotyped. The oppression of patriarchy should be contested by women. In certain households, women are compelled to voluntarily isolate themselves, and men objectify and control their bodies. One of them is psychological abuse. She is denied the love, passion, and devotion she desires. In some epics, a woman's sexual freedom is demonstrated by the number and choice of her partners. Women should always stay within the parameters of marriage. Chetana, the protagonist, evaluates the characters in this book. One of the other characters in Hangwoman is Thakuma. She is Chetana's grandmother and Phanisbhusan Grddha Mullick's mother. Thakuma is used in Hangwoman to illustrate Kolkata's history. She is an incredibly strong woman who helps her son with everything. Even after he kills his own brother, she still gives him encouragement.

A FEMINIST ON K. R MEERA 'S HANGWOMAN

K R Meera's maser piece was 'Aarachar'. It was originally serialized in Madhyamam weekly. Aarachar was published in 2012 by DC Books. It deals with the story of a poor middle class family. Once Meera said that writing Hangwoman was not an easy task for her. Because she had to experience each and everything in every cell. The story of Hang woman was set in Bengal ,Kolkatta. The protagonist of the novel is a tenacious women. According to the noted critic M Leelavathi Aarachar is one of the best literary work produced in Malayalam, and follows the legacy of O V Vijayan's classic work Khasakkinte Ithihasam. Hangwoman was short listed for South Asian Literary Award.

Her major themes of works are domestic abuses of women, discrimination, problems relating to patriarchy , individuality and inner consequence of women. Basically she is a feminist. Because feminism has a major role in her novels. As a writer she was successful that she reflect the mirror of the society. Also as a feminist ,she speak of the trauma of writing ,and the rediscovery of her self through words. The secret of Meera's mass success are the drop of universal truth in her books. She was broken away from the traditional Malayalam literary canon. Her stories and novels in Malayalam carrie the mark if struggle to break free from patriarchy . Her voice and focus are fresh. They give a new way to society by considering Hangwoman. it was the ultimate action of rebellion.

Intense poverty is rampant in the world Meera depicts. The murderer Chetna is set to hang has a wife and children who have been pushed to destitution in his absence. The novel often compels the reader to see, in its utter baseness and despair, the human experience of such poverty. Yet, at its core, amidst the atmosphere of deprivation and despair. Hangwoman is predominantly Chetna's story; the story of her growth into a bold lady and into a large awareness of her own identity of her venture into the previously unknown territory of love. It is also the story of her transformation from a quiet, timid, 22-year-old to a professional Hangwoman capable of taking a human being's life. That her 'coming of age' happens at the expense of another's life is a disturbing and intriguing paradox — one of the various such paradoxes that run through the neglected, poverty-stricken world of Nimtala, Calcutta.

K R Meera characterised a patriarchal women in the as the sister of Chetna, named Niharika. She was married in her early years due to the influence of her family and financial background. So due to the compelling influence of the family she refused her love for man. And she married another man. But that marriage was a failure. From her husband she didn't get love and caring and she lead a painful life. Therefore she committed suicide and she was a real victim of the patriarchal society. In Hangwoman, life and death, desire and disgust, bloodlust and just retribution are balanced precariously. These binaries often become conflated and get woven into a tapestry of primal horror. Glib with stories of hangings going back thousands of years, the Grddha Mullicks have a macabre sense of pride, inflated by their gift for killing with perfection. Chetna's Thakuma, her grandmother, is over a hundred years old—unsparing in her cruelty and kindness, like the Furies of Greek mythology. In a heart-rending scene, Chetna accompanies her Thakuma to the body of a young boy, dying of malnutrition, already infested with fleas and maggots. While Chetna struggles to harness her revulsion, her Thakuma remains unshaken as she feeds the wasted frame the dregs of starch. Chetna's mother, in contrast, appears more fragile and tormented by her father—though she, too, reveals a steely interior when a terrible secret regarding her sister-in-law comes out in the open.

Chetna is seen as a symbol of strength and self-respect for women, but in reality, she is just a subject of a research study. Machinations of the men around her. She is thrown into a media storm, and in the middle of it all, she tries. To understand her own awakening sexuality, she questions her own ability to carry out the execution of a condemned man. She watches as her family goes through a series of sad events one after another. She struggles at first, but eventually manages to free herself. She takes charge of her own life, which finally leads to a perfectly executed conclusion. Pardon the phrase. The content is nothing else but the resultant outcome.

There are some stereotypical gender roles in society. Women should challenge the patriarchal oppression. In some families women are forced to voluntary isolation. And women's body is objectified and controlled by men. Psychological abuse is one among them. Kitchens are traditionally considered as women's space. She is regarded as a vehicle for pleasure, domestic and political service. While her need for love, passion and devotion is denied. Sexual freedom for a women, seen in the choice and number of her partners can see in some epics. Women should always within the bounds of matrimony. We should break the barriers of matrimony.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, a feminist analysis of *Hangwoman* reveals the novel as a powerful critique of patriarchy, gender oppression, and the social structures that confine women within predetermined roles. Through the character of Chetna Grddha Mullick, K. R. Meera presents a woman who struggles to assert her individuality in a world controlled by masculine authority, violence, and inherited traditions. The novel goes beyond the story of a female executioner and becomes a symbolic exploration of the psychological, social, and emotional imprisonment faced by women in patriarchal societies.

Chetna's position as the first female hangwoman is deeply ironic. Though her profession appears to challenge traditional gender norms, she is never truly free. Her father exploits her identity for fame and economic survival, the media sensationalizes her body and profession, and society views her not as an individual but as an object of curiosity. Thus, the novel demonstrates that even when women enter spaces traditionally occupied by men, patriarchal systems continue to regulate and control their agency. Chetna's journey exposes how women are often denied autonomy over their own lives, choices, and identities. The novel also highlights the connection between patriarchy and violence. Execution, death, and punishment function as metaphors for the emotional and psychological violence inflicted upon women. Chetna herself becomes both victim and participant within oppressive systems. Her silence, fear, and internal conflict reflect the condition of many women who are trapped within structures of authority they cannot easily escape. The novel suggests that patriarchy survives not only through physical domination but also through emotional manipulation, cultural traditions, and social expectations.

Another important feminist aspect of the novel is its critique of the objectification of women. Chetna's body and personal life are constantly scrutinized by the public and the media. Her suffering becomes entertainment for society. This reflects the broader feminist concern regarding the commodification of women in modern culture. Even her professional identity is transformed into spectacle rather than respected as labour or responsibility. Through this portrayal, Meera exposes how women's experiences are often consumed and exploited by society without genuine understanding or empathy.

Furthermore, the novel questions inherited traditions and caste-based occupations. Chetna belongs to a family of executioners, and her life is shaped by duties imposed upon her by birth. Feminist analysis shows how women suffer doubly under systems of caste and patriarchy, where personal freedom is sacrificed for family honour and social expectations. Chetna's struggle becomes symbolic of every woman attempting to break free from inherited roles and oppressive cultural structures. Ultimately, *Hangwoman* is not merely a story about capital punishment; it is a profound examination of female suffering, resistance, and identity. K. R. Meera transforms Chetna into a symbol of women's silent rebellion against systems that seek to control them. The novel exposes the harsh realities of patriarchal oppression while also emphasizing the inner strength and resilience of women. Therefore, from a feminist perspective, *Hangwoman* stands as a significant literary work that challenges traditional gender ideologies and gives voice to women trapped within oppressive social systems.

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