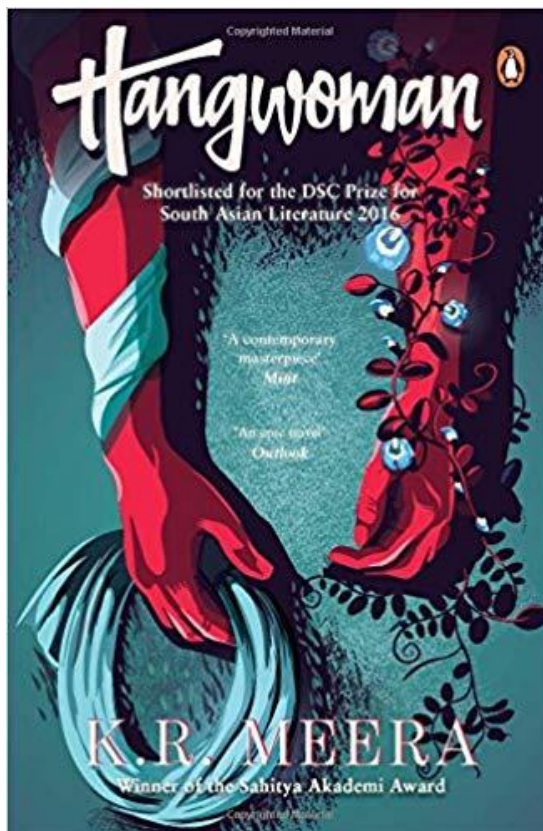


Hang Woman: Everybody Loves a Good Hanging – An Ironic Master Stroke by K R Meera

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Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.com/Hangwoman-K-R-Meera/dp/0143424696>

Abstract

Hang Woman is a bonus for feminist literature as the author K.R. Meera holds on to perceptions of a young lady Chetana Grudha Mullick. The novel is based on India's first hang woman Chetana Grudha Mullick with Bengal as its background. Chetana's rediscovery of herself through her strangling experiences constitutes the life of the novel.

Keywords

Feminism, Fictional novel, typical picturisation of Kolkatta, women empowerment, award winning novel, political sarcasm, the shrill chatter of media, juxtaposition of oral tradition with real, imagined and apocryphal events.

The Novel

“That night I imagined that he was standing on the top of the platform of death; that I had covered his face with the death mask; that I pulled the lever in 727 ways”. The 22-year-old Chetana Grudha Mullick is appointed as the first lady public executioner in the country in the absence of a male member of the family to continue the legacy. The novel is set in Calcutta about a Bengali family. The novel covers various fears of life like love, sex, death, fate, life after death and is full of profound philosophical thoughts. This novel is a perfect juxtaposition of history, myth, imagination and realism. Chetana is going through the historical events of her executioner’s family. There was a female executioner in her family history. She is proud of such female personalities, who gave a setback to male domination in the society.

Chetana Mullick

The novel is progressing through the stream of consciousness of Chetana Grudha Mullick, the main protagonist of this novel. K.R Meera is rooted in main feminist way of story-telling, vividly narrates the mental trauma of Chetana Mullick. Chetana, a strong built woman is a unique and exemplary character in Indian Literature. The root of love is sprout in her mind upon Sanjeevkumar Mitra, a media stunt in CNC channel. She was molested and insulted by Maruti Prasad, who sexually harassed her. Sanjeevkumar Mitra also abused her sexually and tried to make her his media business tool. He started a program on the contractual basis with Phanibhushan Grudha Mullick, namely, ‘Hangwoman’s Diary’. Sanjeevkumar promised her to marry only after the success of his channel program tenured by Chetana. He secretly touches her left boobs and seeks her submission before him for his fulfillment of lust. Chetana for sometimes got trapped in Sanjeevkumar Mitra’s carnal love and she makes up her mind to satisfy his lust. But soon she recovers herself and ignores Sanjeev’s flesh lust. Chetana constantly tries to escape from the self-serving interest of her lover for she is not an instrument in his life. Her father Phanibhushan Grudha Mullick wants to capitalize on Chetana’s sudden public prominence by getting as much as money as he can for her media appearances. The male political as well as social domination entangled women’s freedom. Chetana is being hanged. Her breast has grown hard as stone, when she remembers the pain she felt when Maruti Prasad grabbed them; when Sanjeevkumar wrung them; and the police officer touched them with his baton. She got enraged to kill the male chauvinists.

All the men in Chetana’s life with the exception of her employer Manodha, accepts her as an individual with self-interest and identity. She feels the tightening of an invisible noose of male domination around her neck. Chetana overcomes all marginalization throughout her life with the help of her dazzling imagination. She attained sheer power from her golden history and those women in her lineage, who stoned the vulture hands of their respective ages.

Sonagachi – Flesh Business

This novel is about violence, injustice and ego that prevailed in our country right before and after British rule. A stone’s throw away from where Chetana lives is Sonagachi, one of the city’s most ancient red streets. The whores are considered a mere flesh and an instrument for male lust satisfaction. Like the flesh burning smell coming from Nimtala Ghat, the crematorium near Chetana’s house, Sonagachi also possessed the dissolved smell of burning flesh with heady fragrance of wilting jasmine. The inhuman flesh business there in Sonagachi emotionally charged the freedom of women. They might lose their hope for normal life. They are living bodies who are instantly being hanged. They are denied love. A system of sexual and economic exploitation they cannot resist.

K.R. Meera does not ignore the strength of women in Sonagachi. She narrates the story of some strong women in Sonagachi who considered men as a mere doll before them. Pinkalakesini, a



historic woman in the executioner's lineage of Chetana had enjoyed hanging men especially those abused her for her beauty. She didn't stare while hanging men. She got enjoyment out of this act of hanging men. Ratnamalika another heroic woman took revenge upon her denial. Thus, all the characters in this novel are judged by Chetana.

Thakuma

Thakuma, mother of Phanibhushan Gruddha Mullick and grandmother of Chetana is a very strong woman who supports her son for anything and everything. She encourages him even when he killed his own brother, that is Thakuma's second son. She never finds any fault in punishing those who commit sins. She wants Jatindranath Banerjee to be hanged by Chetana for he did a cruel act of rape of a small girl. She even supports men to visit to Sonagachi. As per her opinion it is purely manhood. She also opined that woman should seek shelter under men and that a woman is nothing without a man. Thakuma is a mouthpiece of a typical old Bengali woman. She is proud of her lineage and always encourages Chetana to perform the execution of Jatindranath Banerjee.

Day vs. Night Whoring

Chetana's self-identity is suppressed by most characters in this novel. She tries to become strong, but her father does not let her to stand by her own leg. Phanibhushan is greedy and he forces Chetana to play as per his rules and forces her to undertake the execution of Jatindranath Banerjee. Phanibhushan is a usual visitor of Sonagachi. But he has killed his brother's wife when he saw her in Sonagachi nagar. Phanibhushan Mullick is a representative of typical Indian men who do not want their females in family to become 'impure'. Even though they might be the usual visitors of Sonagachi, they in daylight blame whores and perform 'moral policing' in public. They might think that night whoring is not a sin. Above all how can we define sin and sinless? The rape a young girl done by Jatindranath Banerjee is absolutely wrong. During the course of the criminal's prison life and he is waiting for the execution some groups so called humanists raised protest to stay the hanging execution. The court had stayed his execution once. The media undertake it as a source of hot news. Debates are conducted widely whether hanging is mandatory or not. Sanjeevkumar Mitra who needs exciting news, has taken it for granted. Sanjeevkumar Mitra utilized the family issues of Phanibhushan's house to make his media prestige to rise. For that he asks such senseless questions to Chetana in front of Jatindranath Banerjee's family. Chetana got shocked hearing his kindless questions. Poverty death in Kolkata seems less important to Sanjeevkumar Mitra in comparison to Hangwoman's diary. K.R Meera ruthlessly and effectively attacks the heinous unprofessional behavior of contemporary media.

Humiliation of Women – Chetana and the River Ganga

Chetana's heart brushes against the cremation center at Nimtala ghat on the banks of River Ganga, which bustles and hisses with sights, sounds and stench of death around every corner. Bustles of hearses echoed at the holy banks of Ganges. The rivers in India are considered as feminine in gender. The Ganges is a holy river, and her abdomen bears all the ashes of human body. Moreover, she has to bear all the sins of this world. The river Ganges is a metaphor of femininity, fated to bear all the sins in her breast and thus she is on the verge of death. We are polluting rivers and thus pave the way for its death. Holy Ganga is flowing with all the pollutants and stench and dirt. Likewise, Chetana bears the stenching experience by the polluting hands of Sanjeevkumar Mitra, Maruthi Prasad and the police officer. The river's lullaby is a consoling rhythm to Chetana. The ripples of Ganges sung the rhythm of life. Its great commotion and explicit beauty guaranteed to provide a visual as well as transcendental feast. Chetana's charming face and innocence truly reminds us glory of a river. The river of silence embodies the elegance of a beautiful girl. The river has century's old

and it carries the ashes of medieval and modern history of India. Chetana is roaming through the fabulous myths and minutiae about hangmen and their rituals, milestones of medieval and modern history and all the rough and tumble of daily life in Kolkata, Chetana is exploring her self-identity and thrives to attain a sort of enlightenment throughout the novel. River Ganges might help her to reach the destination because rivers are holy in their origin and are powerful divine source to make it success.

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