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The Self-Exploration Of Chetna In K.R Meera's Hangwoman: A Feminist Perspective

La Autoexploración De Chetna En El Ahorcado De K.R Meera: Una Perspectiva Feminista

A S Meera¹  , R Jinu²  

¹Research Scholar in English, Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education, Kumaracoil, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India.

²Associate Professor of English, Noorul Islam Centre for Higher Education, Kumaracoil, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India.

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Editor: Dr. William Castillo-González 

Corresponding author: A S Meera 

ABSTRACT

Introduction: the paper portrayed the character of Chetna Gruddha Mallik in K.R Meera's novel Hangwoman. It examined Chetna's determination and willpower, focusing on her fight for freedom and dignity. The study aimed to delve into the different layers of Chetna's character and her journey towards self-awareness from a feminist perspective.

Methods: the analysis involved a close reading of the novel's narrative and character development. It explored how Chetna broke away from the shackles of male domination through her strength and perseverance. The study examined themes of discrimination and disparities that Chetna faced in her struggle to exist in a world that often marginalized women.

Results: the findings revealed that Chetna's struggle was highly inspirational to the readers. Her journey and character portrayal challenged the tyrannical norms of society. By defying strict societal conventions, Chetna emerged as a symbol of female emancipation.

Conclusions: the paper highlighted K.R Meera's remarkable writing style and the significance of Chetna as a character who embodied strength and resilience. Through Chetna, K.R Meera challenged societal norms and presented a powerful narrative of female empowerment and self-awareness.

Keywords: K.R Meera; Hangwoman; Self-exploration; Feminism; Gender Norms; Identity.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el artículo retrata el personaje de Chetna Gruddha Mallik en la novela Hangwoman de K.R Meera. Examinó la determinación y la fuerza de voluntad de Chetna, centrándose en su lucha por la libertad y la dignidad. El estudio pretendía profundizar en las diferentes capas del carácter de Chetna y su viaje hacia la autoconciencia desde una perspectiva feminista.

Métodos: el análisis implicó una lectura detallada de la narrativa de la novela y el desarrollo de los personajes. Exploró cómo Chetna rompió con las cadenas de la dominación masculina gracias a su fuerza y perseverancia. El estudio examinó temas de discriminación y disparidades que Chetna enfrentó en su lucha por existir en un mundo que a menudo marginaba a las mujeres.

Resultados: los hallazgos revelaron que la lucha de Chetna fue muy inspiradora para los lectores. Su viaje y su interpretación de personajes desafiaron las normas tiránicas de la sociedad. Al desafiar las estrictas convenciones sociales, Chetna surgió como un símbolo de la emancipación femenina.

Conclusiones: el artículo destacó el notable estilo de escritura de K.R Meera y la importancia de Chetna como un personaje que encarnaba fuerza y resiliencia. A través de Chetna, K.R Meera desafió las normas sociales y presentó una poderosa narrativa sobre el empoderamiento femenino y la autoconciencia.

Palabras clave: K.R Meera; Ahorcada; Autoexploración; Feminismo; Normas de Género; Identidad.

INTRODUCTION

Hangwoman, a novel by K.R. Meera, is a compelling literary journey that examines masculine dominance and female oppression. Chetna is a powerful character who speaks out against indiscriminate treatment. K.R. Meera expertly describes Chetna's path of sorrow and misery, as well as her final reincarnation. Her character serves as a motivation for disobedience, an embodiment of the tenacious nature that defies accepted norms, and a symbol of women's evolving place in literature and society. This paper directs Chetna's journey of self-realization shedding light on the nodes of gender, tradition and autonomy while also considering the cultural and historical background that shapes her decisions and challenges. Through K.R. Meera's suggestive prose, Chetna's character appears as a character of female empowerment, standing as a testimony to the flexibility and strength of women who challenge social restrictions. On this voyage of literary analysis, the goal is to extract the deep layers of Chetna's character realize the feminist keystones of her voyage and underline the position of identifying the developing role of women in literature and society. K.R. Meera's Hangwoman is not just a novel but a stage that invites us to discover the complications of self-realization and the shifting models of gender identity within modern Indian literature.⁽¹⁾

DEVELOPMENT

K. R Meera

The famous writer K.R. Meera, also known by Kochery Ramachandran Meera, is a well-known and highly stard Indian author known for her impactful and provocative literary works. Meera was born on 25 February, 1970, at Sasthamkotta, in kollam, kerala She has made an impetus mark in the abode of Indian English literature. Her writing focuses mainly on the issues of women. She addressed new woman who are ready to break the chains of tradition and norms prevalent in the society. Before establishing herself as a prominent writer, She worked as a journalist for leading Indian publications and media outlets, contributing to her understanding of societal issues and the human condition.⁽²⁾ Meera's literary journey gained fame with her inspiring novels, short stories, essays, and columns. She is known for her reminiscent storytelling and her ability to challenge intricate themes with a unique viewpoint. Meera's works include an extensive range of themes, including gender, identity, tradition, social standards, and uniqueness. Her narratives often spin around strong, multi-dimensional female characters who antagonize social outlooks and direct the intricacies of life.

Meera outshines in creating multi-dimensional characters with amusing inner lives. Her characters often wrestle with intricate emotions, personal conflicts and social pressures. Many of her works tactic issues from a feminist perspective, inspecting women's rights, self-sufficiency and empowerment. One of the highpoints of her literary career was the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award in 2015 for her work Aarachaar, which was explained into English as Hangwoman, some of her other prominent works include The Gospel of Yudas and Yellow Is the Color of Longing, both of which have received serious approval. Her Contribution to Indian English literature is highly commendable. She voices for the voiceless in the society. Her thought-frustrating narratives continue to engage readers and spark discussions on a wide range of social and cultural issues. Her exploration of gender dynamics, personality and the human experience has coagulated her position as a dominant and renowned author in India.⁽³⁾

K.R. Meera's writing style is categorized by its reminiscent and powerful prose, which magnets readers into the intricacies of the human experience. She is known for her persuasive narrative style, characterized by intense and evocative language. Her writing attracts readers into the difficulties of the human experience, and her aptitude to create rich, multi-dimensional characters and settings adds depth to her storytelling. She uses intense and reminiscent language that paints an amusing and detailed portrait of the settings, characters, and feelings in her tales. Her style is known for its poetic quality, which plunges readers in the world she creates. Her writing often explores into the fights and victories of female protagonists within the artistic and social backgrounds of India. She grows deep into their worries, allowing readers to connect with and know their inspirations and fights. Her works discover a wide range of composite themes, including gender, ritual, uniqueness, social standards and individuality. She gives importance to complex themes which challenge the existing societal norms. The writings are mostly feministic in perspective which covers the areas of women's rights, self-development and freedom. Her characters in Indian context are represented as warriors who fight for their liberty in their societal and family background. K.R Meera's narratives are usually ingrained from Indian

backgrounds, most commonly from Kerala. Her novels are enriched with deep expressions and unremarkable interpretation that brand her tales unique.

Her narrative holds a lot more extensive meaning through her usage of allegory and imagery. She was a genius in storytelling and never failed to keep her audience engrossed throughout her work. Complicated plot and scepticism are some main features of her works which eventually makes her book harder to put down. Her writing often deals with themes which give importance to deep analysis of societal issues with focus on individual's lives affected by patriarchy, tradition and caste. Her narrative renders a distinct explanation of these issues. K.R Meera's writing style is distinguished by its intense and profound characterization. Her expertise in creating honest and relevant characters and to analyse intrinsic themes has made her a revered and reputable author in modern Indian literature. Her narratives test the audience to think about the societal concerns and the human characteristics, at the same time providing an outlook on the world.

Hangwoman

K.R. Meera's, *Hangwoman* is an impressive and inspiring novel set in Kolkata. The fiction infers the life of the Gruddha Mullick family, who have been mutual assassins for more than an era. The novel's appeal, Chetna, is an outlandish and admirable character in poetry of South India. She is a twenty-two years old lady with an impressive figure and a robust will has been grateful to take on the place of hangwoman in order to conveyance on the family's male heredity. Chetna is thus voted as the country's first female assassin. Chetna goals to challenge the dominion of men in civilization. The unethical effect on the public is another topic covered in the book. She makes fun of this by using the persona of CNC channel journalist Sanjeev Kumar Mitra. *Hangwoman* is written in an epic canvas. The book is filled with lots of events and people were majority of the characters are female. The tale opens with Jatindranath Banerjee, who had sexually assaulted and killed a thirteen-year-old girl, having his plea for clemency denied. The protagonist's father, Phanibhushan Gruddha Mullick, is an 88-year-old hangman who has performed 451 hangings and i will be him who executes Jatindranath Banerjee by hanging. If he must execute Mr. Banerjee, the elderly hangman insists that his twenty-two-year-old daughter Chetna be given a government position. It would still be there. Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, a journalist, decides to stand up for Chetana to be chosen as Phanibhushan Gruddha Mullick's successor. After committing the horrible crime of raping and killing a teenage girl, Jatindranath Banerjee is now waiting for his execution sentence. Chetna is now tasked with carrying out the execution, which is extremely unusual for a woman in Indian society. A young grownup woman will now droop the person who sexually battered and slayed a young girl. It is the judgment of God Almighty as well as the court of law ruling. Even then, she was only a doll controlled by her father and the well-known media character Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, asking for her hand in wedding to her father Gruddha Mullick and governing her with his every expression and look.

Even before the birth, Chetna has possessed the skill to tie the knot used for hanging. Before giving delivery, she created a noose out of her mother's umbilical cord and even attempted to create a noose out of her dupatta under pressure and succeeded in doing so.⁽⁴⁾ Gruddha Mullick, who is less aware of the magnificence of women, and Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, who views Chetna only as a sexual object, represent the chauvinistic aspect of masculine nature. He doesn't think highly of his daughter or wife and so Chetna purposefully stays away from Sanjeev Mitra, who ensured her survival by placing a rope around his neck, obstructing her genuine existence. Her femininity can exercise its rejuvenating force from the approach of detachment from others and commitment to her genuine self.⁽⁵⁾ Here, Chetna would choose to be a hangwoman rather than the daughter of a hangman. She transforms from a silent, submissive daughter into the country's first hangwoman. Having known neither tenderness nor grace from the males around her, Chetna is both horrified and drawn to this crass advance as she awakens to her own womanhood.

K.R. Meera claims that *Hangwoman* is a remarkable book enhanced with themes of despair, love, and death. The atmosphere of the book is depressing, and not a single phrase mentions death or sorrow. The narrative of Gruddha Mullick's family provides the reader with a fascinating insight into Kolkata's past. K.R. Meera targets the working class, the Indian traditional system, the attitude of society toward women, and the unprofessional behavior of the modern media with ruthlessness and effectiveness. The author addresses present day problems through television in India and through the paper media while using the character of Sanjeev Kumar Mitra. Chetna's view is the angle through which almost all the characters are looked through.

K.R. Meera has depicted challenges for women in modern India. Even the most basic aspects of Kolkata have been masterfully portrayed by the author. Sonagachi, a fiery red street is portrayed in the book. Meera imagines Trilokyadebi mother of Sanjeev Kumar a sex worker. Phanibhushan murdered Kaki Ma of Chetna after witnessing her in a suspicious situation in Sonagachi Nagar.⁽⁶⁾ The traditional Indian male often desires purity for the females in his family, yet shows no qualms about engaging in frequent promiscuous activities in sites like Sonagachi. In India, women are often valued as deities, but they also face noteworthy domination from men. Meera's intense thoughts has transmuted the story of Chetna to an epic, reliably upholding the theme of women's liberation from the book. The author luminously balances history, fairytale, and pragmatism. The

reader finds it difficult to believe that the events in the book are fictional. Meera not only depicted the journey of Chetna but has crafted a narrative that resonates with the experiences of contemporary India women. The novel can be regarded as a contemporary epic.

The novel's foundation is so captivating that it has remained unexplored until now where Meera portrays her characters so uniquely. She firmly believes that even from the darkest characters, the most thought provoking stories emerge. She has used a woman as the main figure to represent Indian politics and history. The present-day ego, injustice, and violence in the nation are the major themes in her masterpiece. Women emerge from their own ashes to become symbols of strength and power once they realize who they are and what they are capable for. With Chetna, Meera hopes to expose male chauvinism in Indian society and present Chetna the supreme authority in a world where men rule.⁽⁷⁾ *Hangwoman* is more than just a novel with a distinctive plot that celebrates a strong female character; rather, it challenges the subjective perception of history as being centered on men, emphasizes the importance of publishing "her story," and challenges the gender stereotypes. The historical injustices done to women and the narratives aim to correct the elimination of women from the pages of history. Chetna becomes one of the most powerful and bold ladies ever imagined in literary history. She exhibits that nothing is impossible for a woman to accomplish with this.

Characterization of Chetna

Chetna, the main attraction in the novel *Hangwoman* is an intricate and complicated character whose voyage and growth are essential to the tale. Chetna is introduced to the booklovers as the granddaughter of Phanibhushan Gruddha Mullick, a respected assassin in their community. Chetna was a bright student who received honors in her plus two. She needs to stop her studies after plus two because of financial limitations. Her father, Phanibhushan, is an 88-year-old hangman who claims to have performed 451 hangings.⁽⁸⁾ The early life of the leading role is marked by her familiarity with her grandfather and her father. She is announced to the gruesome world of execution from a very young age, which shapes her awareness of life and death.

Chetna rebels against her destiny and started refusing her families orders. She finds instability in her own home. Chetna acts like a stranger in front of her dear and near ones. She even thinks of leaving her parents and to start a new life.⁽⁹⁾ Her father's indulgence even in the minor things make her more rebellious. She has progressed to a new woman who is courageous to break all the chains that destroys her identity. She gained the self-confidence to survive in the world of disparities and discrimination.

She fights against the customs and despotism of the patriarchal society which is male controlled, and which enforce certain roles for women to run through.⁽¹⁰⁾ Her progression from a young girl burdened by a dark family tradition to an autonomous and determined woman is a testament to her flexibility and the strength of her charm.

Gender and Tradition in Hangwoman

Chetna, the dominant charm, aids as a prime example of inspiring gender norms. The novel is powerfully rooted in its earliest and social background, reflecting the social standards and civilizations widespread in the region where the story unfolds. These civilizations include the family's career as assassins, a role conventionally reserved for men. The ancient background provides a lens through which the readers can examine the educational and social standards of the time, which greatly influence the characters' lives. She aims to break away from the conservative roles allocated to women by articulating her craving to become a hangwoman.

Chetna's Journey Of Self-Realization

Chetna's voyage of self-exploration is an enthralling story on her constant search for freedom. In the novel Chetna encircles an atmosphere of internal and external conflicts that resulted for her emancipation. Her foremost aim is to emancipate herself from the repressive family tradition that encloses her to the role of a hang woman, a place which is male oriented. This search of self-sustenance is an important aspect in the establishment of her character.

From the inside, Chetna gets mentally into a flight between her needs and her family's heirloom. This mindset paves way for her voyage of self-discovery. It reroutes her from the uncomfot to the conformity of choosing right in her life. On the outside, she has to handle the depressive society and challenges over her ambitions on the basis of gender standard.⁽¹¹⁾ Such issues add more of hurdles in her way of self dicoverly, highlighting all the obstacles she has to tackle with. She stands like a stubborn woman throughout the novel. Her determination and strength was something unacceptable to the male oriented society in which she lives. She becomes an outcast in the society. Even her own family members started abusing her for minor things but Chetana tries to attain the mental health by neglecting all unwanted activities happening around her.⁽¹²⁾

Moments of attainment and enablement are sprinkled throughout the voyage of Chetna. As she contravenes the outdated gender roles and patriarchal norms that have inhibited her, Chetna attains historic victories that permit her.

Feminism in Hangwoman

Hangwoman's central theme is feminism. Any concept that aims to grant women and those who identify as women complete equality in rights is referred to as feminism. The dominance of men over women is the foundation of feminism. Meera depicts male dominance in Hangwoman on a number of levels. Chetana, the novel's main female protagonist, provides the narrative's stream of consciousness. The psychological anguish of a twenty-two-year-old Chetna, who is made as the first Hangwoman by the nation is portrayed by K.R. Meera. In the postmodern era of today, women are generally aware of their rights. Despite this knowledge, there is a class of women who have not yet reached their full potential. Chetna serves as the judge of the characters in this novel. One of the other characters in the book Hangwoman is Thakuma. She is Chetna's grandma and the mother of Phanibhushan Gruddha Mullick. Thakuma serves as a metaphor for Kolkata's past in Hangwoman. She is a very powerful woman who will always and everywhere stand by her son. She supports him despite the fact that he killed Thakuma's second son, his own brother. She doesn't think Phanibhushan has defects and doesn't feel bad about it. Her desire is for Chetna to hang Jatindranath Banarjee. She doesn't like that Sanjeev Kumar keeps coming to their house and proposing marriage to Chetna. Her role is comparable to Lady Macbeth, the most influential female characters in Shakespeare's plays, despite the fact that she is not cruel. She has a certain "manliness" about her. Despite her belief that "a woman should be willing to bend occasionally if she wants to be stand up straight," With her extensive knowledge of Kolkata's past, Thakuma enchants Chetna with a variety of tales about the city. Meera's own grandma speaks through Thakuma.

K. R. Meera's writings voices the perspective of marginalized women in the Third World. In her works, she explores the concept of justice, emphasizing its intimate and interconnected nature. Meera distinguishes between female justice and mainstream justice, acknowledging that human-implemented justice is influenced by personal experiences and perceptions, resulting in variations. Through symbolic narratives, her literature aims to unveil the blindfold of justice, providing a fresh perspective on crimes and criminals from the point of view of subaltern women. Meera's portrayal of "man" represents a dominant and power-driven attitude, while anyone outside this category is considered a woman. It can be argued that female justice is not merely an ideology presented by women based on their gender, but rather a category inclusive of all non-male individuals. Meera's female characters navigate identity conflicts, love, ego, revenge, power dynamics, invasion and institutionalization, allowing for their experiences to be classified into three categories: the female body, interpersonal relationships and freedom. In the novel Hangwoman, the central character Chetna, takes it upon herself to administer justice by hanging those who embody egotism and power politics. The book also sheds light on the forgotten history of women in a family of hangmen in India. As a hangwoman, Chetna is expected to carry out the state's version of justice, which is influenced by a male-centric culture. Interestingly, her connection to the hangman's role is established even before her birth, as her grandmother recounts how she fashioned a perfect noose from her umbilical cord while still in the womb. However, as the story progresses, Chetna begins to implement a transformative and poetic form of justice. She hangs Sanjeev Kumar Mitra, and through this act, he witnesses a new beginning and experiences a rebirth. In this way, she symbolically tightens the noose around the necks of patriarchy, power politics, the state, culture, capitalism, colonialism and media insensitivity challenging their influence and dominance.⁽⁶⁾

Modern Feminism In Hangwoman

Postmodern feminism, an umbrella term, is an approach to feminist theory that encompasses both postmodern and poststructuralist philosophy.⁽¹³⁾ It embraces deconstructionist techniques that blur boundaries, reject dichotomies, and embrace the existence of multiple realities instead of seeking a single truth. K. R. Meera's Hangwoman can be grouped under the rubric of postmodern feminism where the novelist questions the notion of gender and attacks the dichotomy of femininity and masculinity. A feminist interpretation of Hangwoman from a postmodern perspective can support efforts by feminists to break the gender binary, destroy the sex/gender system, free women from patriarchal notions of femininity, and free them from discrimination and oppression based on their gender. Demolishing the popular reading of texts, K. R. Meera emerges as the renowned writer in Malayalam literature. Her exploration of women's issues has garnered her a distinguished reputation among feminist writers, making her a favorite among both literary scholars and public. Her writing stands out as a token that subverts the authorial figures of patriarchy.

K. R. Meera's novel Hangwoman is the story of the history of an Arachaar (executioner) family, plotted in Kolkata. It tells the story of Chetna Gruddha Mallick, a twenty-two-year-old girl who becomes the first professional hangwoman in India. The novel can be grouped under the rubric of postmodern feminism, where the novelist questions the notion of gender and attacks the dichotomy of femininity and masculinity. A postmodern feminist interpretation of Hangwoman can play a pivotal role in advancing feminist efforts to deconstruct the gender binary system, liberate women from patriarchal conceptions of womanhood and femininity, and ultimately break free from gender-based discrimination and oppression.⁽¹⁴⁾ The word 'hangman' seems to create the image of a man. The word denies the feminine noun and it is considered as a masculine one. Usually,

the job of execution is being undertaken by men. On the contrary, Meera's protagonist is a twenty-two years old Chetna Gruddha Mullick, who dares enough to take up the job of execution. The job of execution demands presence of mind, courage and strength which are supposed to be masculine qualities. Patriarchy imposed too much restriction on women regarding such jobs and portrayed them as incapacitated for those jobs.

Indian society is deeply rooted in a framework of patriarchy, and within the cultural context, the intricate nature of India's patriarchal tradition is a result of society's ambivalent stance towards women. At the same time, she is respected as mother and oppressed as daughter and wife. Society shapes her and makes her fit into the norms put forward by it. Chetna is born as a human being, but the elders construct her identity as a woman. Brought up by the patriarchal giant Phanibhushan Gruddha Mullick, Chetna is restrained from the mainstream and is confined within the four walls of her house. Phanibhushan, Chetna's father, has great concern for her and is so much protective. However, he used to supervise and control her by imposing all his decisions on her. Caught between culturally determined stereotypes of carriers of tradition and continuity, Chetna tries to assert her individuality by transgressing the gender roles. She is taught and trained never to utter a word against her father.

There is a belief that to be feminine is to appear weak, futile, and docile. But Chetna breaks this notion. Any assertion from her part is supposed to diminish her femininity and attractiveness. She is more resolute in her decisions and thus she stands apart from a traditionally constructed woman. She defies the entire construct of history, culture and moral values. Here the novelist attacks the dominant belief that women are less capable by portraying Chetna as the successful performer of the gendered profession of hanging. She became a global symbol of strength and self-respect as a result. Thrown suddenly into the world of celebrity, by performing in her own reality show, Chetna's life shines under the flashes of camera. Being an emerging celebrity, the public get interested to glance at Chetna's private life. Without any embarrassment Sanjeev Kumar Mitra and his channel CNC encroaches into the domestic affairs of Chetna and overpowers and overrules each and every member of the family. In depth experience in the media politics provides the novelist ample insight into the dirty tricks and malicious tactics of the field.

Through Chetna's character, Meera endeavors to raise societal awareness that even the seemingly submissive women can possess a spark of rebellion, portraying her as a new archetype of womanhood. Chetna is made an object of desire at the beginning of the novel itself. The novelist has invested Chetna with the power of a dominant yet destructive gaze to direct at men in the similar way as men gaze at women. Chetna created a critical space where the binary opposition of woman as object and man as subject was continually deconstructed. Meera also shows the linguistic custom of respect and how it shackles women. Women are supposed to respect all the male members of the family irrespective of their age and a violation of it is often considered a grave sin. A Woman is expected not to say words which really irritate men. She must obey his words and must pay due respect to it. Social silence is a part of female identity and subjectivity. There is a traditional belief that silence gives the proper grace to women. Chetna's is the voice of resistance in the novel who by her subversive adaptation of the so called 'andro-centric language' unleashes a violent protest against the patriarchal attitude of the society. Of the three- Sristi, Sthithi, and Samhara - the first two is usually associated with women. But nobody had made a daring attempt to relate samhara with women. Meera succeeded in her attempt to create a character and ascribed her with the third feature which is normally alienable to women. Chetna is a woman who carries out the role of samhara.

CONCLUSION

The study of Hangwoman depicted by K.R Meera discovers the character of Chetna's Gruddha Mullick and her voyage of self-fulfillment through a lens of an activist that unveil the intricate layers of the character and the repercussions of her defiance in both poetry and culture. Chetna, as India's pioneering female hangwoman, emerges as a beacon of female empowerment. Her narrative echoes deeply with the growing roles of women in literature and society, bravely opposing patriarchal norms and gender-based constraints. Meera's passionate literary style transports readers into the vast complexities of human existence, beautifully illustrating the difficulties experienced by individuals such as Chetna. With the symphony of clangs, inner disarray and outside pressures collide in a strong emotional landscape that Meera reveals through her narration. In contemporary poetry, Hangwoman transforms into a rich hanging who learns the delicate dance of self-discovery and the ill-defined ethics of gender identity. Chetna's journey represents her development as well as the larger feminist struggle for emancipation and establishing one's personal identity. Meera's work boldly challenges cultural norms, long-held gender roles, and conventional legacies. Chetna is a character who embodies a journey of self-discovery and pays tribute to the unwavering fortitude and persistence of women who defy conventional norms.

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