

## K R Meera's "The Poison of Love": An Essential Feminism

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### Abstract

Love is the universal emotions which reflects in every creature. The poison of love is a story where love became a curse. K R Meera who had a profound influence in writing. Her works was mostly scripted in Malayalam which got translated in English. The present work "The Poison of Love" is actually named as "Meerasadhu" in Malayalam got translated by Ministhy J in English. The present paper tries to analyse the feminine essence enhancing the essentialism feminism perspective. This branch of feminism highlights the feminine emotions. The present paper tries to analyse the sufferings of women to create an identity who are out of masculine norms, withholding their femininity. Love has various dimension but the present paper analyse corrosive love which submerge the life of the protagonist with darkness. The paper tries to analyse femininity as strength and weakness and different emotion of femininity such as love, care, jealousy, rage and revenge is presented in lime light. The life of self-castigation and self-flagellation is portrayed. The present paper tries to analyse the situation women in Vrindhavan who are mostly widows. The journey of life from everything to nothingness that leads to path of redemption and self - sacrifice can be seen in this present paper.

**Keywords:** essentialist feminism, feminine essence, corrosive love, self – flagellation, feminine emotions

### Introduction

Indian English literature had a great influence in world wide. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao gave a great vision in the world of Indian English literature. The writers start to write in English to express themselves and to exhibit Indianess, the native language works got even translated in English so that the world should remark Indian English literature. The main idea of IEL is to express the cultural and traditional values, issues like freedom struggle, nationalism etc and the present modern contemporary word. In present situation IEL mainly focus on the present scenario that happen in the society like discrimination in race, colour, caste, struggles of women and other social issues. Present century the writers tries to open up their bold views and show up their freedom of expression to have a better tomorrow.

Literature overcome several era and one of the prominent period of literature is the contemporary period. Many writer argues that the period commences after 1940's and few argued that the era started by the end of Second World War. Contemporary period can be stated as the writers from the particular period to the present period. Writers in this period have specific quality of writing and style. It is also stated that this period is the extension of Post-Modern literature. The writing in this particular literature mainly focuses on reality, the story which is adapted in the works will be true to sense, will have strong characters which can be relatable, value more to feeling and emotion even strikes the readers. Suman Gupta a professor of Literature and Cultural Studies mentioned about contemporary literature in his book "Contemporary Literature; The Basics" that we probably choose to read contemporary

literature because we expect it to be directly relevant to our lives and our world. We hope to find in it expression and issues which are familiar. We anticipate resonance with our experience, attitudes and concern, as these have developed within our lifetimes and surface in our everyday lives. Of course, reading literary texts from past period (before our time, or the historically defined past) also necessarily call upon our present –day experiences and attitudes.... We feel that literature that is written and appear in our time is more intimately connected with the complexity and messiness of our lives. (2)

The contemporary Indian English literature has four feature that is – multilingual, translational, comparative and internationalist. The characters in the works of this period are commoners rather than the aristocrats. The emphasis more on emotions and focus mainly on inner self. Women gain greater reorganization during this period such as Anita Nair, Jhumpa Lahiri, Sudha Murthy, Kiran Desai, and K. R. Meera etc. Contemporary period influences many writers. One of such writer is K R Meera. She is well known as column – writer in Malayalam. She is the famous novelist, film script writer, short story writer. She started her career as a journalist investigating the sexual hassle towards women in working areas. “Aarachaar” is her masterpiece in Malayalam which is translated to English as “Hangwoman”. She is been a rebellion in writing. Her works mostly reflects feminism. She tries to break the clutches of patriarchal norms. Her works reflect fresh voice with sensitivity and also exhibit reality. Her works mostly reflects the theme of discrimination, individualism, patriarchy, core life of women and tradition. She even reflect the ideology of feminism. She is honoured with many awards including Sahitya Akademi award for her excellence in writing. The novel the poison of love is first writing in Malayalam as Meera Sadhu later translated by Ministhy S an IAS officer from Kerala. She is a writer and exphonic translator and had translated many works.

Feminism is the strongest ideology and movement that aim to define and establish social, political, economical, financial independence and equality to women. It commences as the western ideology later got spread to several parts of the world including India. Charles Fourier is the one who coined the term feminism. This shows that the man defined feminism first later it's got adopted by the female. The main concept of feminism is to attain equal space in society where both men and women enjoy equal freedom. The women face several difficulties in every period of time, according to it the aim of feminism changes but surrounds the betterment of women. The first wave focus on women suffrages, the second wave focus on inequalities, the third wave focus on the enhancement of women and the fourth wave lime lighted the empowerment of women. By the passage of time feminism got modified on keen on to particular issues from that several perspective of feminism got arrived. The four major perspective are eco- feminism, cultural feminism, radical feminism and liberal feminism. The eco feminism concentrate on the degradation of nature and the plight of women. This ideology try to interconnect both women and nature. The liberal feminism which focuses on gender equality, radical feminism focus on the domination of male over women and the suppression of women, cultural feminism focus on the female values and feminity emphasizes the difference between men and woman in terms of biological factors and reproductive capacity. The present paper tries to analyse the study on essentialist feministic perspective which is one branches of these four perspective.

Essentialism feminism is an ideology state that women are men are different both fundamentally and biologically. These feminism focus mainly on the sameness instead of difference. In is ideology woman hood and feminine values are praised. The ideology even state that men and women are fundamentally different and they are unique by their own way.

By the work of Carol Gilligan the term essential feminism got widely spread. The gender studies by Carol creates a new ideology that analyse the women's capacity on its own unless imposed by the patriarchy. This ideology rise up by the second wave of feminism where author argues that gender bias are socially constructed. The women are different by men in psychological aspects too. The essential feminist even noted as man haters who just state that men deals the situation with violence where as women deals the situation more maturely and so women are better to rule the society than men.

## Discussion

The paper tries to frame up the feminine essence with their feministic emotions which are comparatively higher to women than men.

The present paper analyse the novel "The Poison of Love" on essentialism feministic perspective which highlight the feminine essence and feministic phycology. Each chapter from the selected novel start with the description of love. Love is the prominent characteristic of feminine quality, but in this love is the weakness of the protagonist which leads her to handle different phase through sacrifice, jealousy, rage, death and self- castigation. Tulsi the protagonist of the novel who narrate her story as an autobiography. The story reflect travels from present to the past situation and its goes vice versa. The novels commences with the note on love but in a negative way as "Love is like milk. With the passage of time, it sours, splits and becomes poison."(3). Tulsi, an ambitious girls, student of IIT, daughter of Inspector General. She had a greater vision about her life, but all changed by her insane love towards Madhav. Madhav is a famous journalist in Delhi. Madhav is a person who accepts love easily and gave back unconditionally on his view point. But just use the girls in the name of love, as a weapon he made the girls to surrender themselves to him. His life was filled with girls even he mentions about his twenty seven lovers when he wrote to Tulsi. His justification towards love was different as-

I shall never refuse any woman's love. It would devastate her. If my love can make a woman happy, why would I want to deny her? You do not understand, Tulsi. They were all unhappy. They had never been loved. They had been denied love by fathers, husbands or sweethearts. I offered them my love as alms. This body of mine will be eaten up by ants and worms one day. If it can ne use of use to another human being, why should I refuse? But be clear about this- I never desired any of them. I never demanded anything from them either. (17)

The man who named after the great hero and deity in mythology is a demon of modern word. The words clearly states that he is a womanizer but the protagonist felt it rebellious which later changed to affection. Madhav attracts women by his honey coated words which make them fall for him. His words made Meera to fall for him. She felt happy with his presence. She knows that his love will be her weakness- "love weakens humans- makes them fragile and pliable" (61). His distance disturbs her even her marriage was arranged with Vinay her friend the one who introduced Madhav to Meera. His phone calls, letters and his presence made her go crazy on him. His final action to convince Meera to elope with him was to compare him with Vinay and his kisses take of her senses. As she describes his touch to be 'magically spellbinding'. She declares her love to Madhav. Love also state a relation of mother and son where Tulsi wants her son to love her truly rather like her husband's false affection "love me when you grow up. That love should be true. It should be real. Don't betray your mother. Don't cheat her with lies" (72). Nabaneeta is also the one who used by her love she was abandoned by her lover at Kashi and several men abused her, later she reached to Vrindhavan, but her lover

ends there and rise hatred over every men including the deity Krishna. Tulsi's insane love towards Madhav made her to destroy herself and mention love to be poison, a serpent who swallowed its own tail, an acid that corroded the vessel itself, like the demons puthana, who applied poison on her nipples. Tulsi found her love to be corrosive but still she had a greater affection towards Madhav where she was to merge with his even after her death –“Madhav is mine. I love him forever. I will love him with malevolence. I will defeat him with love. I will purify him. Then, at last, I will merge into him” (101).

Women trend to sacrifice, give up the most valuable or important thing for the betterment of others, as a mother sacrifice her body for her child during pregnancy. But sacrifice regards to the protagonist is her family for the sake of love. She left her family for the without concerning her father's pride, bed ridden mother suffering from urinetrine cancer. Her sisters' future. She sacrificed her family for Madhav. She even left her ambitious life, the one who is capable to create pride to the society. She changes herself as a full time home maker which make Madhav life easier. I who had graduated from IIT with record marks, become the handmaiden of Madhav. “I washed his clothes with affection, and ironed them with devotion. I cooked his beloved food with reverences. The places where he stood and sat, I cleaned as if they were scared. I blissfully surrendered to him and he accepted me with compassion” (46). Femininity in this part been her weakness the essence of feminine made her to sacrifice her future for the sake of her love one. “I was not a woman who had merely pretended to love in order to make a living. I had sacrificed everything for love” (87). Sacrifice is seen in different perspective when femininity turns to her strength where she poisoned her children, the mother who did not want her child to suffer in the society, who did not want her sons to be the future Madhav, who did not want her children to be the part of her castigated life, she turns to a puthana where she poisoned her breast. It was the biggest sacrifices that a woman can even do. Her words of pain as “We cannot give up, my children. We have to defeat your father. We have to leave him before he can abandon us. We have to purify your father with the pain of separation too” (91). She even sacrifices her loved one to other. Tulsi even left Madhav for Bhama as even she was pregnant with his child. She renounce her beauty but saving , her family and surrender herself to Madhav, the lord Krishna in Vrindhavan and starts to lead the life of widow even her husband is alive.

The essentialist feminism highlights motherhood as it is the most precious stage of a women's life where a new life is form a women. Is the other form of humankind with creates a special relation and bond between mother and the child. The protagonist Tulsi is also a mother for two children Unni and Kanna. A minor character of Tulsi's mother who was bed ridden but instead of her situation she wants her children to be settled in a better position for that she even holded up her death. “My mother's uterine cancer had progressed to the third stage. She was hurrying to offer her three daughter- Tulsi, Tamara and Mallika at the feet of three suitable bridegroom” (15). Tulsi' mother knows that after her death her children will not be taken care properly. This attitude shows her nurture towards her daughters. Even Madhav's mother also played a minor role, where she take care of her daughter in law during pregnancy. She was a great mother who rise her son with his father. Her struggle she faces as a widow and a mother praises her motherhood. “She was a simple woman. She spoke with great pride about Madhav's father. He had died when she was pregnant. She had given birth as a widow” (69). Tulsi even enjoyed her first pregnancy when she was conceived with Unni. Even her feeling were shared to her elder son Unni.

I constantly chattered with Unni as I worked in the kitchen. I spoke about my life. My dreams. My foolishness....as he lay on his back, moving his little feet and hands, I had looked up my baby pleadingly....He sobbed when he heard that he had a cleft in his chin, just like Madhav. Yet when I looked at his face, I saw my own” (72)

Tulsi being a lovable mother instead she poisoned her two children in order to protect them from the selfish society. Her affection towards her children shown when she carries the dead bodies of her children. Being a mother it is hard for her to imagine to kill her child but she did as she did not want her son to face the troubles as she has faced.

“I lay down with Unni and Kanna, hugging them to my chest. I think I must have wept. I told them about a lot of things. About those days of things. About the world, about life. About those days when I had carried them inside me. About their father. About the unending love I had for Madhav. My dead children. Their bodies slowly cooled, resting against the warmth of mine. Kanna was sucking his thumb even then. Blood dripped from his mouth, rolling down his chubby hand. I kissed my baby son again. (90-91)

The emotion of longing for something is desire. Tulsi even had different desires as the story moves on. Her first strongest wish is to marry Madhav and she fulfilled it. Her love was perpetual towards Madhav even being a Meera sadhu she wish to have Madhav’s presence. Love along with lust was also her desire to purify herself and him too.

I wanted to see Madhav again it was unbelievable how my body was aroused by his presence. For twelve years, we had not touched each other. I fantasized about making love once more. I would remove my stinking sari and old underclothes, and stand in front of him- all skin and bones. I would scratch my shaven head hideously, shamelessly reveal my pathetic drooping of breast, my wretch thighs shorn of any fat, my bent back and bowed back, my calloused, dirty feet with the toenails digging in. I would teach him the meaning of beauty. With love, I would purify him too. (24-25)

She always set her heart on Madhav which make her realise womanhood and his touch melts her like better. She always yearn for his presence. When Madhav was busy with his work and other affairs she long for him- I need his love. I ached for the caress of his soft palm. I craved the sound of his sweet nothings in my ear. My body desired his touch. I yearned for him with my entire being; with all of a woman’s longing” (72). Desire is the common emotion of femininity where she loses her strength but in certain circumstances the desire of woman gain her the strength to choose her life.

The common emotion of femininity is jealousy, the emotion of losing the one who is more important in their life or in a relationship. This emotion is comparatively higher for women than men. This is commonly a biological difference among human being. The story gave the reference of Radha and Krishna in terms of jealousy as “The Lord abandoned Radha because of her jealousy” (47) Madhav is the one who loves every one without any discrimination. Love is common to all even for his wife and for his other lovers. Even he has twenty seven lovers but according to Madhav they are just lovers but are no intimate with him. All his lies got shattered when one of his lover’s lily came home rushing and show her compassion towards Madhav. The emotion of Tulsi was expressed by her words that “jealousy was indeed irrelevant. Even on the day when Lily Varghese can half running with her American bag” (48). Madhav who act smart always and handle every situation cunningly. Even when Madhav visited lily after she left the house but later it was known to Tulsi by lily as- “He had come to

my hotel room. He fell at my feet and begged for forgiveness. He washed my feet with tears” (51). These words of Lily shatters her that her love one is owned by many other woman. Lily, the twenty sixth lover of Madhav, a journalist, she also feels the same emotion when Madhav tries to convince her after her visit to Tulsi, they made love together but at the same time he called Tulsi to know her well-being. This incident made Lily depressed and made him out of her life. Madhav can be considered as a womanizer according to readers but no one of his lovers hated him.

Feminity not only consist of love and empathy but hate is also their strong emotion. In certain situation hatred defines a women. Nadaneeta who shows her hatred towards god who changed her destiny. She did not want Krishna to be praised. Thief, brute- all women are the same to Krishna. He will steal any women’s clothes, eat anyone’s butter... I am telling you, do not worship him! Beat him off if he comes near you.’(66). Sisters of Tulsi, Tamara and Mallika who are angry with Tulsi because her love towards Madhav she eloped without concerning her sisters life. Mallika dream of becoming an IAS officer got shattered as she got married to the first available doctor. Tamara, who is the topper of all India Entrance Examination got married to a business man eighteen year senior to her. The words of Tamara towards Tulsi – “I do not want to see you. You destroy your life as well as ours” (60). These words of hatred by Tamara made Tulsi dumbstruck by realizing her fault. Tulsi wanted her husband to be suffered by seeing her plight, she wants him to realize that he is the cause for her pathetic situation. The words of hatred by Tulsi towards Madhav as- “my hatred for Madhav was all consuming. I wished to smash him into smithereens and yet I also wished that he would live on. I wanted his beating heart – so that I could corrode it myself” (54). The emotion of hatred does not weakness a women. Every emotion defines the nature of women. In the present emotion the person found themselves guilty for their action by facing the hatred from others.

The protagonist who knows her weakness in her decide to punish herself. She tries to hurt her in several ways. Being a married woman with tonsure and went to Mathura which is known as the city of widow. Tulsi mention herself as a widow and named as Meera sadhu. Every day she spends her day with Krishna bajan and punish herself with several activities, burn her feet walking bare foot in summer. The widows are given two and half rupees and some milk, ten gram of rice and dal. The place where they stay are even miserable with narrow area and filled with several women. Meera enjoys all her plight that she gave herself. The priest tries to molest her but she surrender herself but burst out with laughter. Her laughter symbolizes that, an IIT topper who spoil everything for her love and be in such kind of situation. Even her prayers was to hurt her- “I needed wounds. To hurt myself more grievously, I needed more wounds” (77). Her death was by monkeys who bite he dogs but at that situation too she laughed – “the monkeys came rushing in. I fought bitterly with them. They surrounded me like ants. They bit me like dogs. Blood flowed from my neck and arms and legs. I laughed as if tickled”(101), these words of Tulsi shows that she was such frustrated by her life due to a patriarchal norms and by that she enjoyed even her death.

The men always wanted women to be easily applicable thing. The feminity are true which they only surrender them to their beloved but in case of men it’s different. Madhav who represents the masculine community. He attracts women with his chasm and words, even his first look mesmerises Tulsi- “Madhav’s large eyes, framed by long eyelashes, had searched mine for something ineffable. Though he did not look into my eyes again for the rest of that meeting, choosing instead to indulge in polite talk, he made me acutely aware of my womanhood” (13). He praises women by their abilities. At the beginning of their relationship it was quite smooth,

he called her Radha and he explained different ways which women gets pleasure. He initiated that he always want to see happy faces of women- "I like to see women laugh,' he said. 'I hate women who do not laugh'. I detest tears" (45). He always states that women need to be pampered all the time "see... women are like this. They want to be cosseted all the time." (47). His statement is partly right about the feminine attitude but the women hates false indulging from their loved one. A minor character who played the role of pandit tries to seduce Tulsi as he feels his wife to be old and being a man he is still capable to satisfy women. This thought of men made women to be a sexual object. A women who bare all the practice of men in order for the sake of society or her feminine value stops her-"You can stay in my home, if you wish. That means with all the facilities. See, my wife is old. As for me, I am not ageing at all ... I still have enough youth to satisfy a women like you" (52). Madhav who like women who are very much talented in their own field, they fall for his sweet coated words and they lose everything. Tulsi was the topper in IIT, Lily was a famous journalist Bhama was a talented dancer, one of lover was an actress, a famous anchor and so on; the women had only one choice that is Madhav whereas all those women were his choice. He thought that it is normal for man to have affairs where as a women stick to one – "No man can ever confine himself to a single woman. That's the way men are built" (86). His words even defame the man who loves a single women throughout his life and also we can note that women sticks to their lovers once they decide to be committed and will never change their mind till the end, this feminine value enhance the view on women's love that last even after their death.

## Conclusion

The present paper analyse the masculine norms by which the protagonist suffered a lot. Tulsi who keep up all her feminine values achieve failures throughout her life. Love been her weakness which made her to lose everything. Her femininity is her strength by which she tries to purify her husband by hurting herself. The essential feministic perspective explain the same where the feminity and feministic emotion be the strength of a women. The women with femininity shows the strength and weakness on the same situation. The emotion of feminine are much stronger than that of a man which can create a drastic difference in life or in a society.

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