

Self-Exploration and Emotional Transformation in The Poison of Love: A Feminist Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 15 Nov 2024	<p>"The Poison of Love" by K.R. Meera is a deep exploration of love, obsession, cultural identity, and feminist themes within the framework of Indian society. Through the captivating journey of protagonist Tulsi, Meera skillfully navigates the complexities of womanhood, societal expectations, and patriarchal norms. The novel challenges conventional ideas of love and gender roles, offering fresh perspectives and ideas into the intricacies of human emotions and relationships. Meera's portrayal of Tulsi as a strong, complex character resists traditional stereotypes and patriarchal norms, highlighting the resilience and agency of women in the face of adversity. Tulsi's journey serves as a powerful critique of societal expectations and the restrictive nature of gender roles, illustrating the terrible consequences of love when it becomes twisted into obsession. Moreover, Meera skillfully combines feminism and themes of cultural identity, examining the relationships between individual autonomy, social restrictions, and personal freedom. Through Tulsi's experiences, Meera highlights the difficulties women encounter in negotiating local customs and conventions while also emphasizing the value of resistance and unity in opposing patriarchal systems. "The Poison of Love" is a compelling narrative that sparks significant discussions about empowerment, love, and identity, offering a heartbreaking reflection on the complexities of womanhood and the enduring strength of solidarity and resistance in the face of oppression.</p> <p>Keywords: K.R. Meera, Cultural Identity, The poison of Love, Feminist themes, Love and Obsession, Womanhood.</p>
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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, people have been drawn to the idea of love in all of its manifestations: literature. The notion's gravity changed over time as well. While some characters stuck with ourselves, others were quickly forgotten. While making compromises with the "inevitable," some of them made people cry on the inside, frequently leading readers to believe they could have made better decisions. Through her portrayal of female characters in "The Poison of Love," K. R. Meera offers a fresh perspective on the theme of love, challenging conventional notions and introducing innovative insights. The novel serves as compelling evidence of Meera's originality in her exploration of love and her unique perspective on the intricacies of human emotions. K.R. Meera's novel "The Poison of Love" skillfully combines the issue of cultural identity and feminist exploration, offering an insightful commentary on the complexities of womanhood within the context of Indian society. Through the lens of protagonist Tulsi's journey, Meera explores into the intricacies of love, obsession, and tragedy, while simultaneously dissecting the layers of patriarchal norms and societal expectations that shape the experiences of women. Through Tulsi's search for love and happiness, Meera explores the limitations that society norms and conventional gender roles impose on women. In this study, it is examined that Meera's

novel's subtle treatment of feminist ideas and cultural identity, exploring how the protagonist's journey both confronts and reflects larger societal forces. As Tulsi grapples with her desires and societal expectations, Meera navigates the complexities of love, often blurring the lines between devotion and self-destruction. Through Tulsi's experiences, Meera offers a critique of the ways in which cultural norms can restrict women's empowerment and maintain toxic relationship dynamics.

Furthermore, it is examined that Meera's subversion of patriarchal tropes and stereotypes through her portrayal of female characters. In "The Poison of Love," Meera challenges traditional narratives surrounding women's roles and behaviors, presenting complex, multifaceted characters who resist easy categorization. Through their actions and interactions, Meera highlights the strength, resilience, and solidarity of women, even in the face of oppressive societal structures.

The analysis will delve into the role of solidarity and resistance in Meera's feminist narrative. As Tulsi navigates the complexities of her relationships and cultural identity, she finds moments of connection and support with other women, underscoring the importance of collective action in challenging patriarchal norms. Through these themes, Meera offers a powerful critique of the ways in which women navigate and resist societal constraints, ultimately regaining their power and creating their own freedom. K.R. Meera invites readers to explore the complex layers of cultural identity and feminist discourse in "The Poison of Love," which offers a compelling examination of womanhood, love, and resistance within the framework of Indian civilization. The rich texture of Meera's story will be revealed via in-depth study, offering significant perspectives into the complex experiences of women and the enduring power that lies within struggle and unity.

1.1 K.R MEERA

K R Meera, or Kochery Ramachandran Meera, is a prominent Indian author known for her compelling storytelling and exploration of complex themes such as love, loss, gender dynamics, and societal norms. Born on February 19, 1970, in Sasthamkotta, Kerala. Before establishing herself as a prominent writer, Meera pursued a career in journalism. She worked as a journalist for leading Indian publications and media outlets, contributing to her understanding of societal issues and the human condition. Meera's literary journey gained prominence with her thought-provoking novels, short stories, essays, and columns. She is known for her evocative storytelling and her ability to tackle complex themes with a unique perspective. Meera frequently explores in her writing the complexities of interpersonal relationships and the difficulties people, especially women, have negotiating society expectations. Her art has a solid foundation in Kerala's cultural environment, taking inspiration from its customs, scenery, and interpersonal relationships. Meera excels in creating multi-dimensional characters with rich inner lives. Her characters often grapple with complex emotions, personal conflicts and societal pressures. Many of her works approach issues from a feminist perspective, examining women's rights, autonomy and empowerment. One of Meera's most acclaimed novels is "Aarachaar", which explores the lives of a family of executioners through generations. The novel received widespread critical acclaim and won several literary awards, establishing Meera as a significant voice in contemporary Indian literature. Her work is distinguished by rich vocabulary, stunning imagery, and a deep understanding of human emotions. Meera has received several honours and awards for her contributions to literature, including the Kendra Sahitya Academy Award in 2015. "Aarachaar," which was translated into English as "Hangwoman." In addition to "Hangwoman," some of her other notable works include "The Gospel of Yudas" and "Yellow Is the Colour of Longing," both of which have received critical acclaim. K.R. Meera's literary contributions have left an indelible mark on Indian literature. Her thought-provoking narratives continue to engage readers and spark discussions on a wide range of social and cultural

issues. Her exploration of gender dynamics, individuality and the human experience has solidified her position as an influential and celebrated author in India [1].

1.2 K.R MEERA STYLE OF WRITING

The way that women's identities are portrayed in K. R. Meera's writing is admirable, and her approach is outstanding and honest. She is unique among male writers who frequently ignore political and social issues since she is willing to speak out about them and fight for justice. Women have a responsibility to react and effectively express their viewpoints as a marginalized group, even in the face of criticism over their right to do so [2]. K. R. Meera's writing style is characterized by its beautiful imagery, expressive language, and deep examination of human emotions and relationships. She has a special talent for drawing readers into Kerala, India's vibrant cultural environment and bringing to life the sights, sounds, and textures of the area. She uses vivid and descriptive language that paints a rich and detailed picture of the settings, characters, and emotions in her narratives. Her prose is known for its lyrical quality, which immerses readers in the world she creates. Her writing often delves into the struggles and triumphs of female protagonists within the cultural and societal contexts of India. She develops deep into their psyches, allowing readers to connect with and understand their motivations and struggles. Her works explore a wide range of complex themes, including gender, tradition, identity, societal norms and individuality. She approaches these themes with depth and nuance, often challenging established norms and offering a unique perspective on these subjects. Many of her works are approached from a feminist perspective, focusing on women's rights, autonomy and empowerment. Meera's writing sheds light on the struggles and triumphs of female protagonists within the cultural and societal contexts of India. Her narratives are deeply rooted in the societal and cultural contexts of Kerala and India. She presents a realistic portrayal of the complexities of Indian society, its traditions and the challenges faced by individuals, particularly women, in navigating these intricacies. Meera's writing is often filled with powerful imagery that helps convey the emotional depth of her narratives [3].

Her use of metaphor and symbolism adds layers of meaning to her storytelling. She has a gift for storytelling that captivates readers and keeps them engaged throughout her works. Her narratives are often marked by intricate plots and a sense of suspense, making her books difficult to put down. Her writing often contains a critical examination of societal issues, including the impact of tradition, caste and patriarchy on individuals' lives. Her narratives offer a unique commentary on these issues. K.R. Meera's writing style is characterized by its depth and emotional resonance. Her ability to create realistic and relatable characters and to explore complex themes with nuance has made her a highly respected and influential author in contemporary Indian literature. Her narratives challenge readers to think deeply about societal issues and the human condition while providing a unique perspective on the world

1.3 THE POISON OF LOVE

"The Poison of Love" by K. R. Meera is a deeply compelling and emotionally charged novel that explores into the complexities of love, obsession, and tragedy. The story follows Tulsi, the protagonist, as she negotiates the turbulent world of romantic relationships while dealing with personal challenges and cultural expectations against the lush backdrop of Kerala, India. The central theme of the story is Tulsi's unwavering quest for love, which quickly turns into an all-consuming fixation. The depth of Tulsi's feelings and the extent she will go to in order to own and control the object of her passion are both explored in the book. As Tulsi's infatuation grows, it starts to negatively impact everyone around her as well as her own life, with dire consequences.

Thulasi, a brilliant IIT student, whose life takes a complicated turn when she becomes involved with Madhavan, introduced to her by her colleague Vinayan. Thulasi and Madhavan develop a close relationship, speaking to each other every day. However, when Thulasi's mother falls seriously ill with cancer, she wishes to see her daughters married before she passes away. Thulasi, upon hearing this,

informs Madhavan that she plans to marry Vinayan, causing Madhavan to react with anger, revealing his love for her and his extensive history of twenty-seven ex-lovers. Madhavan's admission shocks Thulasi, who feels overwhelmed by the revelation. Despite his pursuit, Thulasi remains firm in her decision to marry Vinayan, causing Madhavan to confront the consequences of his past actions and the impact they have on their relationship. Thulasi, eagerly anticipating sharing her feelings with Vinayan, is taken aback when he responds with disinterest and formality. This unexpected coldness leads her to recognize the warmth and romance in Madhavan's behavior. Choosing to marry Madhavan, they embark on a loving life together in Delhi, with Madhavan caring for Thulasi like a child. However, their bliss is shattered when Lilly, Madhavan's twenty-sixth lover, arrives at their home, triggering shock and betrayal in Thulasi. Despite Madhavan's attempts to reassure her, Thulasi's trust is shaken. Over time, the growing emotional distance between them leads to a sense of isolation and separation, symbolized by a metaphorical "wall of mirror" that divides them.

Despite the birth of their children, Thulasi finds herself stuck in a loveless marriage as Madhavan gets more and more entangled with other women. Thulasi regrets marrying Madhavan since she was disappointed by his dishonesty and misses her relationship with Vinayan. When she finds out about his most recent affair, Thulasi, unable to go back to Madhavan, takes her kids and elopes to her old home. Thulasi hesitantly consents when Madhavan declares his wish for a divorce and presents his new partner, understanding that their marriage is hopeless. Thulasi kills her children in a heartbreaking act of desperation because she fears they would suffer without a father. Following their divorce, Thulasi asks for one last intimate moment with Madhavan, capping their turbulent relationship. Madhavan then leaves her home. As their dead children lie in the adjacent room, a terrifying scene plays out, acting as a sobering reminder of the terrible results of Madhavan's infidelity. Thulasi, decides to become a Meerasadhu in Brindhavan as a lover of Lord Krishna after her tragic marriage life with Madhavan. She wanted to serve Lord Krishna and lead a peaceful life. However, she encounters Madhavan in Brindhavan, who came looking for her. Thulasi avoids him due to the painful experiences she had with him. She shaves her head and becomes a maai in Brindhavan to serve Lord Krishna and the old woman. After some time, she sees Vinayan in Brindhavan, who advises her to go back to Madhavan. However, Thulasi refuses and continues to lead a life of monk in the temple. Thulasi didn't hate Madhavan but defeated him with love. Madhavan realizes the value of Thulasi in his life and calls her back, but she rejects it and leads a life in Brindhavan. She lives in the third floor of that temple and ends her life within her room [4].

K.R Meera's novels have a theme of feminism, and her lady characters get abused physically and mentally. Thulasi's life was tragic due to the selfishness of Madhavan, who represents the patriarchal society. Thulasi's life, education, knowledge, ambition was all a dream. "The Poison of Love" is a haunting and thought-provoking tale that lingers in the mind long after the final page is turned. Meera explores the darker sides of love and desire with an unwavering honesty and emotional depth in her writing. Through Tulsi's journey, the book explores into issues of control, power, and the destructiveness of uncontrolled desire. One of the novel's most compelling aspects is its exploration of gender dynamics and societal expectations.

2. LITERATURE SURVEY

The study conducted by Harishma (2023) [5] of K.R. Meera's "The Poison of Love" explores the complicated interplay between emotions and feminine identity in the story. The study examines how love—traditionally viewed as a feminine attribute—becomes a harmful force for the heroine, Tulsi, using the prism of fundamental feminism. The study focuses on Tulsi's path through self-caused rage, jealousy, sacrifice, and ultimately anger as she struggles with the destructive power of love. Author looks at how Tulsi's femininity both strengthens and weakens her, causing her to make self-destructive decisions as well as moments of self-sacrifice for the sake of her loved ones. The paper also explores how Tulsi is subjected to expectations and conventions that compound her problems. Through this

research, it highlights the novel's complex representation of femininity, showing it as a source of both strength and fragility, ultimately highlighting the profound influence of feminine emotions on both the lives of individuals and society as a whole.

The feminist fictions of K.R. Meera are examined by Rekha (2022) [6], who provides insight into how the author depicts women's battles for economic, social, political, and home space in a society where men predominate. Meera portrays strong, independent female characters that effectively negotiate the complexity of cultural expectations and conventions via her gripping stories. Rekha draws attention to Meera's focus on freedom and equality for her female protagonists, challenging readers to consider their moral obligation and societal response. The study highlights Meera's skill in breaking conventional ideas of love and relationships, as demonstrated in "The Poison of Love," where the toxic nature of patriarchal customs is revealed through Tulsi's complicated relationship with Madhav. Meera explains how her characters, like Tulsi, express their agency and carve out space for themselves in the face of adversity by making comparisons with historical heroines like Mirabai. The study honors Meera's skillful storytelling, presenting her books as arenas of ideological conflict from which heroic women emerge by claiming their identities and creating space in society.

Seba Susan (2022) [7] analysis of "The Poison of Love" by K.R. Meera provides a fascinating viewpoint on the relationship between Madhav and Tulsi, making comparisons to the legend of Radha and Krishna. Susan clarifies the intricacies of relationships and their effects on the female characters by exploring the ideas of toxic and divine love. The research effectively looks at how Tulsi, like Radha, gets caught up in Madhav's toxic, divine loves and ends being neglected and going through emotional agony. Susan scrutinizes Madhav's behaviors, bringing attention to their destructive nature and the negative impact they have on Tulsi. Susan adds depth to the conversation by bringing up modern ideas like the idea of toxic love and providing a complex perspective of the motivations and experiences of the individuals. Overall, Susan's interpretation of the myth offers a provocative rereading that emphasizes Meera's story's enduring importance in examining the complex nature of interpersonal relationships and the effects of toxic desire.

The study by Rekha (2022) [8] of K. R. Meera's works, specifically "The Poison of Love," highlights the widespread impact of patriarchy on society and emphasizes the necessity of women's protection and acknowledgement. The study highlights Meera's feminist attitude by using the characters of Madhav and Tulsi to illustrate the negative aspects of patriarchal culture. With a nod to the sixteenth-century poet Mirabai, Meera skillfully crafts Tulsi's complex connection with Madhav, highlighting the harsh reality of violent partnerships and the determination of her female characters. It emphasizes how Meera shows women who, in spite of opposition, utilize their rights, break free from patriarchal constraints, and make open spaces for themselves in society. With her strong female characters, Meera subverts patriarchal systems and emphasizes how crucial the freedom of women is to the fight against power politics.

The collection of novels by Minna Sabu (2020) [9] illustrates the predicament of women who experience fear and lack of freedom in both their families and in society at large. The term, 'Denial of Female Subjectivity,' accurately captures the way in which women are frequently objectified for men's pleasure and deprived of autonomy and authority over their life. These stories show women's difficulties and denials, emphasizing how patriarchal authority that rejects their subjectivity prevents women from exercising their right to free will and make decisions. The author highlights the value of women regaining their agency and leading fulfilling lives through these narratives. Moreover, the study's lesson emphasizes how unrestricted love can have negative effects, as demonstrated in K.R. Meera's "The Poison of Love," where Thulasi's obsession with a cheating journalist causes her to disregard her own goals and suffer under social pressures. In-depth exploration of women's struggles in a patriarchal culture, where they are frequently objectified and oppressed, is done in Meera's work, which highlights the need for social change and women's ability to live freely and honestly.

The way that K.R. Meera depicts Indian women in her writings is analyzed by Athira M. (2018) [10], and it provides insightful information about how feminism and post-colonialism interact. By placing Meera's writing in the perspective of post-colonial feminist theory, author draws attention to the complex examination of gender hierarchies and power relations that Meera's stories include. The addition of spirituality, especially in the form of Lord Krishna symbolism, gives Meera's portrayal of female characters and their hardships depth. In "Meerasadhu," Thulasi is one of the characters that Meera uses to challenge idealized ideas and reveal the brutal realities of women who live with uncaring partners. Athira highlights how Thulasi's resolute acts demonstrate how powerfully motherhood may be portrayed as a weapon for empowerment and autonomy. In addition, Athira skillfully expresses Meera's portrayal of post-colonial women, who reject social conventions and claim their independence in the face of difficulty. In general, this study provides an engaging examination of Meera's treatment of Indian women, highlighting their resilience and persistence in the face of restrictive systems.

Parvathy Suresh (2018) [11] examines K. R. Meera's "The Poison of Love," she talks about how the story shows the harmful effects of emotionally abusive relationships. Suresh says that Meera is really good at showing how women feel trapped and powerless in these relationships, especially through the characters Tulsi and Madhav. Meera tells the story by switching back and forth between past and present, which helps us understand Tulsi's happiness at first and then her disappointment later on. It also mentions how Meera compares Tulsi's situation to Mirabai's story, where she breaks free from her unhappy marriage by becoming a Meera Sadhu in Vrindavan. Even though Tulsi tries to leave Madhav and still has feelings for him, author says the book doesn't make her out to be just a victim. Instead, it shows the complicated nature of abusive relationships. Through Madhav and Tulsi's characters, Meera shows us the bigger picture of how society sees men and women, and how women like Tulsi have to deal with these difficult situations. It ends by saying that Meera's book makes think about life's complexities and the struggles faced by women like Tulsi, making it a really interesting and thought-provoking story.

3. OBJECTIVES

- Examine the character of Thulasi in "The Poison of Love" and analyze how she embodies feminist themes of independence and empowerment.
- To understand how cultural identity influences the characters' experiences and choices
- To explore the portrayal of love, obsession, and tragedy and their impact on the protagonist's journey.
- To critically evaluate the representation of women's experiences and agency in "The Poison of Love" through the lens of feminist literary criticism.

4. RESEARCH GAP

The comprehensive reviews of "The Poison of Love" by K.R. Meera by a number of writers provide valuable perspectives on how patriarchal oppression, the complexity of interpersonal relationships in Indian society, and the representation of feminine identity are all explored in this work. However, despite the variety of interpretations, it seems that there is still a research gap when it comes to the analysis of the novel's themes' wider socio-cultural implications. Studies that have already been done provide information into the characters' unique experiences as well as the feminist implication of the story, but little research has been done on how these themes relate to larger society dynamics and cultural norms. More specifically, as Meera's work illustrates, more research is required to fully understand the social structures and norms that support toxic relationships and restrict the freedom of women. Additionally, a comparative analysis of Meera's portrayal of Indian women with other works of modern feminist writing may shed additional light on the particular difficulties that Indian women face. Future studies could thus fill this research gap by analyzing the novel's thematic components in terms

of a larger socio-cultural framework, providing a more comprehensive understanding of its applicability and consequences for modern Indian culture.

5. TULSI'S CHARECTERIZATION IN "THE POISON OF LOVE"

In "The Poison of Love" by K.R. Meera, Thulasi, the central character, is intricately characterized, embodying a complex blend of strength, vulnerability, and defiance. Throughout her journey, the author explores the depths of human emotions and the intricacies of relationships, shedding light on Thulasi's internal conflicts and external challenges. Thulasi is portrayed as a woman who defies societal norms and expectations, particularly regarding marriage and womanhood. Despite growing up in a conservative environment, she possesses a fierce sense of independence and refuses to conform to traditional roles. Her refusal to adhere to societal conventions is evident in her decision to pursue a relationship with an unsuitable partner, leading to her eventual ostracization from her community.

Tulsi is an IIT graduate who elopes with Madhav, the man of her dreams, only to realize that she has made a grave mistake. Tulsi's character is marked by her impulsive and irrational decisions, particularly in matters of love and sacrifice. She is deeply in love with Madhav, but her love for him blinds her to his true nature, and she is willing to sacrifice everything, including her family and her own happiness, for him. Even after leaving Madhav and returning to her father's house, Tulsi remains dependent on him, failing to take charge of her own life or seek employment. Despite the toxicity of her relationship, Thulasi's defiance is not merely an act of rebellion; it is a manifestation of her desire for autonomy and self-realization. Throughout the story, she grapples with her own identity and struggles to break free from the shackles of societal expectations. The novel portrays Thulasi's character in a critical light, highlighting the negative consequences of her actions. Her decision to kill her children in order to teach Madhav a lesson is particularly shocking and highlights the destructive nature of her love for him.

Despite her vulnerability and desperation, Thulasi remains unable to break free from the hold that her lover has over her. Through Thulasi's character, Meera delves into the complexities of human relationships and the power dynamics inherent within them. In essence, Thulasi's character in "The Poison of Love" is a poignant exploration of feminist themes of autonomy, self-realization, and empowerment. She is a complex and multifaceted character, marked by her impulsive and irrational decisions, her dependence on others, and the societal pressures that shape her actions. Through her journey, readers are confronted with the harsh realities of societal expectations and the enduring struggle for personal freedom and fulfillment. Thulasi's resilience in the face of adversity serves as a powerful reminder of the strong spirit of women fighting for autonomy and self-determination.

6. CULTURAL IDENTITY AND FEMINISM

In "The Poison of Love" by K.R. Meera, cultural identity plays a significant role in shaping the protagonist's experiences and influencing the narrative. Thulasi's cultural background is strongly influenced by her actions, choices, and the societal pressures she faces. Meera portrays Thulasi as a woman who rejects societal norms and expectations, particularly regarding marriage and womanhood. This defiance stems from her cultural identity, as she comes from a conservative background where traditional roles and expectations are heavily enforced. Thulasi's rebellion against these norms highlights the clash between her cultural identity and her personal desires for freedom and empowerment. The protagonist, is a Malayali who falls in love with Madhav who is not from her culture. Thulasi's decision to elope with Madhav, despite knowing it goes against societal expectations, is a clear example of how cultural pressures can drive individuals to make unconventional choices, highlighting the challenges that can arise when both from different cultural backgrounds come together. This difference becomes a source of tension and conflict in their relationships.

Cultural norms and traditions also influence the other characters' actions and choices in the novel. For example, Tulsi's parents are portrayed as being "medieval and ignorant" for marrying off their daughters out of fear that they too would elope like their sister. Also, Thulasi's eventual return to her

father's house, seeking refuge and protection highlights the societal pressure and expectations that shape Tulsi's decisions, particularly in relation to marriage and family. The intersections between cultural identity and feminist themes are evident in Thulasi's struggles throughout the novel. As a woman navigating a patriarchal society deeply rooted in cultural traditions, Thulasi faces numerous challenges in proving her power and pursuing her own path. Her rejection against cultural norms can be seen as a feminist act of resistance, as she strives to break free from the constraints imposed by her culture and create her own identity. Thulasi's journey of self-discovery in "The Poison of Love" is deeply interconnected with her cultural background, illustrating the complex interplay between cultural identity and feminist struggles. As she navigates her quest for personal freedom, she confronts the challenges imposed by societal norms and traditions, including the struggle for domestic, social, political, and economic space.

The novel also explores the complex relationship between love, sacrifice, and cultural identity. Tulsi's decision to kill her children as an act of sacrifice and revenge is a drastic and horrifying decision that highlights the challenges that women face in navigating cultural norms and traditions. The novel also explores the consequences of Tulsi's actions, including the lack of police investigation and the absence of justice for the crime. Moreover, cultural identity is a significant theme in "The Poison of Love," influencing the characters' actions and choices and intersecting with feminist themes. The novel explores the challenges that women face in navigating cultural norms and traditions, highlighting the complex relationship between love, sacrifice, and cultural identity.

7. LOVE, OBSESSION AND TRAGEDY IN PROTAGONIST'S JOURNEY.

The Poison of Love by K.R. Meera is a novel that explores the complexities of love, obsession, and tragedy in the context of the protagonist's cultural identity, societal expectations, and gender roles. Tulsi, the protagonist, is an intelligent and capable woman who falls in love with Madhav, a charming and eloquent journalist. However, their love story takes a dark turn when Madhav reveals his history of having 27 previous girlfriends and his belief in offering love as alms to women who have been denied it. Tulsi, is deeply rooted in her cultural identity as a woman from Kerala. Her perception of love is heavily influenced by societal norms and traditional values, which often dictate that a woman's ultimate fulfillment lies in her role as a devoted wife and mother. However, Tulsi's experience of love deviates from these norms as she becomes intensely obsessed with her lover, Madhav.

Being the daughter of an IPS officer and a graduate of IIT, Tulsi's family has high expectations for her. Madhav, on the other hand, is a journalist who challenges societal norms and expectations. The subtle parallels the author draws between Madhav and the deity he is named after, Krishna, highlight the complexities of love and devotion in Indian culture. Societal expectations and gender roles contribute to the tragic elements of the narrative. Tulsi's experiences mirror those of many women in toxic relationships, and her story captures the helpless and trapped emotions of women in patriarchal environments. Tulsi's obsession with Madhav crosses the boundaries of societal expectations, leading her to sacrifice her own well-being and dignity in pursuit of his love. Despite Madhav's indifference and neglect, Tulsi remains constant in her devotion, unable to break free from the toxic cycle of longing and despair. The consequences of Tulsi's decision to elope with Madhav are disastrous, both for her and her family [12]

The protagonist's pursuit of love intersects with her sense of cultural belonging and personal agency. Tulsi's intense love and desire for Madhav fill her with guilt and angry, and she is represented as a smart and capable woman who makes her own decisions. However, her love for Madhav also has the element of curiosity and the excitement of being the woman who finally makes him settle down, capturing the way women have been conditioned to understand and receive love in a system where infidelity for a man is charming and attractive. As a woman, she is expected to be gentle and self-sacrificing, putting the needs and desires of her partner above her own. This dynamic leaves Tulsi vulnerable to exploitation and emotional manipulation. On one hand, Tulsi yearns for the traditional comforts of marriage and

domesticity, seeking validation through her relationship with Madhav. On the other hand, she grapples with her own desires and aspirations, torn between the expectations placed upon her and her longing for autonomy and fulfillment.

Tulsi's journey is marked by tragedy as she becomes captured in a web of love and obsession that consumes her entirely. Her inability to break free from societal constraints and gendered expectations leads to her downfall, underscoring the destructive power of love when it becomes twisted into obsession. Through Tulsi's story, K R Meera explores the complex interplay between love, cultural identity, and personal agency, revealing the profound and often devastating consequences of societal norms and gender roles.

8. LENS OF FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

The protagonist, Tulsi, is a complex character whose life story is marked by a toxic relationship with her husband, Madhav. The novel opens with Tulsi in Vrindavan, having left her husband and taken her children with her. The narrative then moves back and forth in time, exploring Tulsi's past and her gradual realization of the oppressive nature of her marriage. Meera challenges preconceptions and stereotypes associated with patriarchy through Tulsi and other female characters. Tulsi challenges the idea that women are naturally dependent and passive with her strong passion and strong will. Meera presents the diversity of female experiences while emphasizing the strength and resilience of women in the face of hardship.

From a feminist perspective, the novel challenges patriarchal norms and stereotypes in several ways. Firstly, Tulsi's experiences mirror those of many women trapped in abusive relationships, highlighting the crushing weight of gender roles and expectations. There are moments of solidarity and empathy among female characters. Meera emphasizes the importance of female bonds in navigating the restrictive systems of patriarchy, suggesting that collective resistance is essential for women to reclaim their agency and autonomy. Moreover, the novel challenges traditional gender roles by depicting Madhav as a serial cheater who reduces women's sexuality to something for his pleasure, while Tulsi is portrayed as a woman who seeks autonomy and control over her life. Tulsi's decision to leave her husband and take her children with her is a powerful act of resistance against the patriarchal norms that seek to confine her.

Tulsi finds support and community among the widows in Vrindavan. This solidarity is a form of resistance against the marginalization and exclusion that women often face in patriarchal societies. Her decision to leave her husband and start a new is a testament to her strength and resilience. Her journey from a life of imprisonment to freedom and self-determination is a powerful affirmation of women's capacity for power and resilience. *The Poison of Love* by K.R. Meera is a rich and complex novel that offers a powerful critique of patriarchal norms and structures. Through its portrayal of Tulsi's experiences and agency, the novel challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes, challenges stereotypes associated with patriarchy, and explores the themes of solidarity and resistance. As such, it is a valuable contribution to feminist literary criticism.

CONCLUSION

"*The Poison of Love*" is a profound exploration of love, obsession, cultural identity, and feminist themes within the context of Indian society. Through the lens of protagonist Tulsi's journey, Meera skillfully navigates the complexities of womanhood, societal expectations, and patriarchal norms. The novel challenges conventional notions of love and gender roles, offering fresh perspectives and insights into the intricacies of human emotions and relationships. Meera's portrayal of Tulsi as a strong, complex character resists traditional stereotypes and patriarchal norms, highlighting the resilience and agency of women in the face of adversity. Tulsi's journey serves as a powerful critique of societal expectations and the restrictive nature of gender roles, illustrating the terrible consequences of love when it becomes twisted into obsession. In addition, Meera deftly combines feminism and themes of cultural identity,

examining the relationships between individual autonomy, social restrictions, and personal freedom. Through Tulsi's experiences, Meera highlights the difficulties women encounter in negotiating local customs and conventions while also highlighting the value of resistance and unity in opposing patriarchal systems. "The Poison of Love" is a powerful example of Meera's writing talent and her capacity to inspire significant discussions about empowerment, love, and identity from audience. The novel provides a heartbreaking reflection on the intricacies of women and the enduring strength of solidarity and resistance in the face of oppression through its diverse tapestry of characters and ideas.

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