

The Inherited Noose: Masculinity, Memory, and Intergenerational Trauma in *Hangwoman*

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Abstract

*This paper will analyse the representation of masculinity, memory, and intergenerational trauma in *Hangwoman* by K. R. Meera, and it will place the novel in the larger discourse of marginalised voices, identity formation, and patriarchal inheritance. Although the novel has been interpreted as a feminist text that critiques state violence and gender oppression, this paper will move the discourse in a different direction by examining the neglected aspect of male trauma that is inscribed within the structure of hegemonic masculinity. Through the trope of the executioner’s lineage, the novel reveals how patriarchal systems are not only oppressive to women but also how they condition men to become violent subjects. The inherited occupation of hanging becomes a symbolic and literal noose around male subjectivity. Based on the theories of hegemonic masculinity, trauma theory, and memory studies, this paper contends that the executioner family in ‘*Hangwoman*’ represents a marginalised masculinity that is both empowered through state power and silenced through the weight of patriarchal responsibility. The internalised violence and emotional repression of the father signify how masculinity is understood as a performance rather than an identity. The scaffold serves as a space where the state sanctions the power of masculinity even as it dehumanises the male body that enacts it. Through an examination of the intergenerational transmission of violence and memory, this paper shows how the novel problematizes the binary construction of victimhood and power. Ultimately, ‘*Hangwoman*’ rewrites masculinity as a space of trauma, suggesting that patriarchal legacy serves as a form of psychological imprisonment. Through this re-reading, this paper seeks to contribute to the discourse of marginalised voices by highlighting the silencing of male emotions within the structure of representation.*

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, Intergenerational Trauma, Patriarchal Lineage, Memory, Marginalised Voices.

Hangwoman by K. R. Meera, there is a chilling examination of execution, inheritance, and identity. While the book has been largely examined through the prism of feminism and politics, in the context of Chetna Grddha Mullick, a woman who inherits her family’s trade of being the state executioner, there is an equally interesting story of masculine identity and inherited trauma that exists beneath the surface of this powerful critique of gender oppression. The executioner’s line, which is traditionally male, shows how patriarchy performs masculinity as a strict act that is linked to violence, power, and the

repression of emotions. Within the subtheme of the conference “Marginalised Voices, Identity, and Representation,” this paper will argue that ‘Hangwoman’ presents a critical reading of masculinity as a marginalised voice. Although patriarchy would seem to be a system of privilege for men, it also serves to discipline them into a role that lacks emotional subjectivity. The executioner’s rope is thus symbolic of this contradiction, representing state power as well as a metaphorical noose that strangles male identity.

This paper contends that the novel represents masculinity as a burden rather than dominance. The executioner family, through intergenerational memory, illustrates how violence is naturalised as a masculine duty. The father, as a representation of internalised repression and psychological dislocation, brings to the fore the aspect of male trauma, which is an unexplored area of patriarchal systems. R. W. Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity is an essential tool in grasping the role of masculinity as a dominant cultural ideal. Hegemonic masculinity favours authority, control, the repression of emotions, and physical strength. But this dominance is, according to Connell, relational and hierarchical, subordinating other forms of masculinity and punishing those men who do not live up to the ideal.

In ‘Hangwoman’, the tradition of executioners embodies a hyperbolic expression of hegemonic masculinity: the power of life and death as a representative of the state. But this kind of power is empty. The executioner has to repress fear, guilt, and compassion. Emotions become incompatible with professional obligations. Masculinity is not empowerment but coercive demand.

Trauma theory, especially the idea of trauma as belated and repetitive, as formulated by Cathy Caruth, helps to understand the transmission of violence through generations in the novel. The family of the executioner does not only inherit the trade; they inherit memory. The father’s silence and violence turned inward become a formative element in the construction of identity. The transmission of intergenerational trauma is done through narrative lacunae, emotional absence, and repetitive ritual. The scaffold becomes a place of repetitive memory where past executions come to haunt the present. Masculinity is constructed through inherited silence rather than lived experience.

In ‘Hangwoman’, masculinity is inextricably linked to performance. The executioner has to be a symbol of calmness and power in front of the crowd. The act of hanging becomes a spectacle that is observed, controlled, and recorded. The male body becomes a tool of the state. This performative masculinity leads to a fractured psyche. The father’s identity is reduced to his occupational persona. In the world outside the gallows, he is a non-emotive figure. His silence is not natural but a result of his conditioning. Patriarchy requires him to repress his vulnerability in order to remain powerful.

The “inherited noose” therefore represents the imperatives of masculine identity. One does not choose to be the hangman; one is born into it. Patriarchal legacy makes masculinity a predestination. The novel positions masculinity in relation to state power. The executioner embodies the ultimate exercise of state power. However, the state also positions itself at a distance from violence by transferring it to marginalized bodies. The executioner is both necessary and expendable. This tension indicates the instability of hegemonic masculinity. The executioner is empowered in public but stigmatized in private. His occupation also alienates him from community membership. The paradox in the novel criticizes the state’s dependence on masculine bodies to carry out violence while ignoring their psychological recognition. One of the most important aspects of male trauma in *Hangwoman* is the aspect of emotional erasure. The father’s failure to express fear or remorse is a sign of patriarchal socialization. Repression of emotion becomes a survival tactic.

There is a disconnection in the family dynamics. The daughter inherits not only the occupation but also the emotional numbness. Trauma is passed down not through storytelling but through absence. Memory is preserved as a mood rather than a story. Through the emphasis on emotional repression, the novel defies the notion that men are naturally resilient or immune to violence.

Rather, it presents a vision of masculinity as emotionally fragile but culturally barred from expressing vulnerability. The subtheme of marginalized voices, the executioner family is a socially marginalized lineage. Their closeness to death makes them untouchable. However, their voice is not heard. The intergenerational transfer of trauma subverts the power binary oppositions. The father, although male, is not completely empowered. His identity is defined by inherited violence. Therefore, masculinity is made marginalized in the moral economy of society.

Representation in the novel is a form of exposure. It reveals the unseen emotional toll of patriarchal inheritance. The narrative focuses on the interiority of the executioner. Ultimately, 'Hangwoman' undermines patriarchal power. The tradition of execution is handed down to a female, challenging the male line. This is a commentary on the way in which patriarchal power is performative. The father's power is shown to be weak. His identity is tied to the repetition of ritual rather than belief. The daughter's presence on the scaffold undermines the uniqueness of masculinity. Therefore, the novel subverts the idea of identity as essential. Patriarchal tradition is undermined by its own inflexibility.

Hangwoman is a deeply introspective work on masculinity, memory, and inherited violence. In examining the executioner dynasty through the prism of hegemonic masculinity and trauma studies, this paper has sought to demonstrate that the novel places male trauma as a hitherto neglected aspect of patriarchal structures. The legacy of the noose stands for both state power and mental imprisonment. Masculinity is not a fixed position of dominance but a fraught act of performance, conditioned by silence and repetition.

In the sub-theme of marginalized discourses, the executioner's tale defies the easy construct of male dominance. Patriarchy conditions men to occupy a position that requires the suppression of emotions. The novel, therefore, urges a re-evaluation of identity that resists the binary oppositions of oppressor and oppressed. In laying bare the interior fissures of masculine identity, 'Hangwoman' participates in a larger discourse on representation, trauma, and the politics of inheritance.

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