

The Pseudo Space of Women in Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*

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One Part Woman is a fine work of Perumal Murugan. It revolves round the impact of society, value of the godly structures, unbounded love of a couple and people's atrocities. The author handles each character in a unique way. He expresses the love of couples through the twist of the story. The story is sensual and it deeply pictures the ignorance and the superstitious beliefs in the society. In this world, women do not bear a child in her womb on her own volition but becomes victimized. This paper analyses how the society treats a woman, Ponna to beget child in a nefarious way.

Keywords: superstitious beliefs, conservative society, compulsive non-space, pseudo- space

Modern India is experiencing an emerging trend in which women are the victims everywhere. They are always under the struggle for their identity, class, caste and educational status. Though they have enough talents, they undergo some kind of difficulties physically, mentally and economically. Perumal Murugan is a prolific writer in Tamil literature. Being an Indian, he observes the intensions of the people to always depend on traditions and culture. The simple story set about a century ago, with a powerful undertow centres on a couple, Kali and Ponna living in a small farming community in the Kongu region, Tamil Nadu in South India. They are giving more importance to cultural aspects and irrespctive beliefs. They cannot identify whether their beliefs are true or bad, unconsciously they believe.

One Part Woman is a translated work by Aniruddhan Vasudevan. The original work is in Tamil titled, *Madhorubhagan* was published in 2010. It is a fictional account of a poor childless couple, who wants to conceive, takes part in a chariot festival one night where she has the option of a secretive communal sex with anybody in the night. The author explores the despotic situation of the couple and narcotic issues that spoil their life.

It is the story of the childless couple with a strong desire of having a child. Though they feel dejected in the hands of their relatives and the society, they did possess all the potentiality for conceiving a child. The society yelled and anatomizes them. The author clearly depicts women as always going to temple to ask many questions to God. They pray and sit under the tree and tie a prayer knot to trees and another in their hands. This shows their belief in god and their piety. Ponna prays to god for her

motherhood. Her husband Kali concentrates on his work and enjoys with his friends. His uncle Nallayan advises him a lot, but there is no improvement in Kali and he worries for his wife Ponna.

Society is always gossip crazy and poke their nose into other's affair. Society treats Ponna as a victimized. Many of them advised her and were also advised by the physician. She listens to everyone's advice and tips patiently. When she is irritated too much, she shouts at all, especially Kali. Her mother and mother-in-law chose the idea of the chariot festival. Both the mothers insisted that should go to the temple and lie with anyone. It is a temple ritual that allows a woman to beget a child by entering into sexual union with a stranger. The child born of this union is called samipillai or god's child, since the stranger is perceived as a representative of god.

There are many idols in the temple, each one capable of giving a specific boon. One of them is the Ardhanareeswarar, an idol of Shiva who has given the left part of his body to his consort, Parvathi. Murugan was captivated after encountering several men in the region past the age of 50 who were called Ardhanari (Half-woman) or Samipillai (god-given child). On probing further he finds out that till as recently as 50 years ago, on a particular evening of the annual chariot festival in the temple of Ardhanareeswara, childless women would come alone to the area that was alive with festival revelries. Each woman was free to couple with a male stranger of her choice, who was considered an incarnation of god. If the woman got pregnant, the child was considered a gift from god and accepted as such by the family, including her husband.

Kali and Ponna are enjoying their married life. On account of that they have done various poojas for their parenthood. In ancient times, people believed whatever adversity that happens at home, was because of the curses of god or that of the dead ones. Kali's mother enraged a female deity Pavatha who curses their family. For that Kali and Ponna offer prayers and offer some poojas for curing the barrenness. Ponna weeps to appease her every monthly cycle because she expects every month. Not only Ponna, but also the people who are around her house. They come and suggest her to be with her husband. Kali's sexual potency is the subject of sly and open taunts, while every slip or argument Ponna has with another is turned on her using her childlessness as an indication of her character or capabilities.

The two mothers are discussing Ponna's barren womb. The two of them convey their stories about the chariot festival. Ponna heard everything and was concerned about Kali's mind and love. The mothers believe that it is a hereditary curse and it could be ameliorated only through the temple festival. Every year, on the fourteenth day of the chariot festival to the androgynous deity on the hill, the rules of all marital contracts are relaxed. Any man is allowed to lie with any woman – a tradition acknowledged as being a socially and divinely sanctioned method of conceiving should a husband be sterile. The two mothers suggest to Ponna, that the only solution for the infertility is to take the festival route. The couple hears this charge and both of them were in hallowed and burst through tears.

Kali emits his emotions through drinking alcohol with his friends. Ponna is delicate in following this process. People encourage her to this operation. Ponna hesitates and was reluctant to lie with someone else. While she is searching, a guy approaches her, prompts her. The author implements the details imaginatively to bring the terrain and people alive, giving them dignity and legitimacy. Through the story, the author realises that people have beliefs about god abundantly and innocently. He directs one to observe it objectively with open eyes and not to victimize women at any cause or for any subjective reason.

One Part Woman is a sharp, rooted and a passionate novel that, as the blurb says, “lays bare with unsparing clarity a relationship caught between the dictates of social convention and the tug of personal anxieties”(Mangayarkarasi 57). The tradition of seeking pregnancy by an anonymous person in the name of god seems to have died out decades ago. They are the original victims. The author handles myriad complexities with an enviable sophistication, creating an evocative and haunting work.

The novel is actually sensitive in its approach toward gender, sexuality but also humane in its treatment of childless couples. It is an emotional work about people driven by personal desires and losses; it also unsettles the reader with its frankness and reveals about simplistic ideas and progressiveness. The society in which the book is set is semi -urban middle class who suffer under caste suppression, domineering customs and unconscious belief in rituals. The real obstruction to progress is the society which hurts people with gossips after every failure. Ponna faces all the difficulties in her life. Though all women have feelings and emotions, people cannot understand her or accept her identity.

The constructed space for women in a married life seems to offer freedom of choice. The space which is promised is pretentious. The sense of equality symbolised by the mythical god figure, *One Part Woman*, soon dries up in real married life. The novel is centred on the conflict between Ponna and Kali who are childless. The conflict is brought by everyone else in the society. The couple themselves do not have any rub or pain over being childless for more than twelve years. “Other than the lack of a child they could call their own, there was nothing else missing in their lives. He fulfilled every wish of hers, perhaps because he had married her out of love”. (28)

One Part Woman is like any drama which is a tragedy. It is a tragedy with the fifth act missing. Kali is furious that Ponna has gone to the chariot festival. He feels cheated. No one knows, what happens to Ponna after she returns to Kali. No one knows if she conceives after the event at the final day of the festival. Though the novel seems to offer an open-ended conclusion to the narrative, the discourse offered is quite definite. The pointed narrative provides the real identity of the women in the historical past. Women are considered as objects of pleasure and as objects of production. For Kali, Ponna is his only hope for conjugal pleasure. He has no one else, nor does he want to have some one else other than Ponna. Ponna equally considers Kali in a similar vein. They are in possession of each other. Everyone in the society except Kali's uncle Nallayan is villainous ushering a tragedy. Both Ponna and Kali do not want to take the festival route to get a child. Both of them were victims of the society's plot. The anti life forces

are always stronger than the protagonists in a tragedy. The negative forces consider women as profitable as cattles that breed and plants that multiply and yield. The children are considered as products, capitals for generating wealth. No one cares to see that love is for more significant to life than having children without love for anyone. A sense of the real pathos involved in the story could be seen in these lines, “the humiliations she had had to suffer because of this one problem were endless. She could not even go to their fields during sowing season for fear that others would broach the topic. So she would lock herself inside the house. Couldn’t he understand these things?”(113).

The tragedy is imposed from outside. There is no tragic flaw inherent in Kali or Ponna. No one senses the larger tragedy of the society in constructing a solution on a non- problem. Childlessness is not a problem. If child bearing is natural, so is childlessness. Both are natural and time immemorial. The real problem is the problem of the pseudo space offered to women as one equal with men symbolically. In actual life women enjoy no space other than as pleasure objects and as machines of production. The nicety of praises given to women hides the compulsive non- space that is offered. *One Part Woman* is definitely a discourse on the still prevailing socio-religious constructs that are still inimical to the progress and well being of general humanity.

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