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Infertile Lives: Unpacking The Societal Stigmas And Cultural Burden In Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*

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Abstract :

Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* depicts the lives of a childless couple, exposing the societal stigmas and cultural responsibilities associated with infertility. This study investigates how the novel illustrates the emotional, psychological, and social problems of infertile persons in rural India, underlining how societal expectations, cultural standards, and patriarchal ideals contribute to marginalisation.

Keywords: Infertility, Societal Stigmas, Cultural burden, Patriarchy.

Perumal Murugan was one of the most famous contemporary Tamil writers of South India. He was born in 1966 at Thirucengode, Namakkal. He is a literary scholar and chronicler who write novels in Tamil. He has written half a dozen of novels and four short stories and four poetry anthologies. He was a Tamil professor at Government Arts College in Namakkal. He begins his life history through children's song lyrics, these songs were telecasted in All India Radio. Murugan studied Tamil literature in Erode and Coimbatore, till his doctoral dissertation. His dissertation centered on the works of kongu author R.Shanmuga Sundaram. He made various contributions to research in Tamil Literature. Particularly he riveted on kongu folklore and region.

He has written so far 36 books in the local tongue. His first novel, *Rising Heat (Eru veyil)*, was published in 1991. Some of his most famous novels are *Seasons and palms (2000)* won the Kriyana prize in 2005. *Ponnachi (2017)*, *Current Show(2004)*, *Songs of a Coward (2017)*, *Pookuzhi (2016)*, *Aalndap Patchi (2013)*, *The Goat thief (2017)*, His most famous and controversial novel *Madhorubaagan (2014)* won a crossword award and prestigious ILF Samanvay Bhasha Samman in 2015. In English *Madhorubaagan* was translated by the translator Aniruddhan Vasudevan named as '*One Part Woman*' (2018). Most of his works translated into English by the scholar Anirudhan Vasudevan. The translator beautifully portrays the essence of kongu dialect through the characters in the translated work of this novel.

Perumal Murugan was fame after the controversy of *one part woman* novel. Most of the TV channels and abroad channels also took the interviews with him. On that point he speaks most of the things about his writings and people. Some of the information about Murugan's interview part that was, "writing can't be opened and closed like a faucet', He even talks about Dalit people that, Dalit assertion must to end contradictions in society, glad to see Dalit's asserting them and need better identities than caste for people". There was a feeling in my mind when people protest against me, that ' I loved writing, it was taken away from me".

Perumal Murugan confronted many troubles; later on published he published the novel *one part woman*. The Primary subject in this novel depicts a particular village town of Thirucengode. The storyline of the novel goes in a way that the village people's eventual participation in a chariot fete to honor the god Ardhanareeswarar for one night every year, the local residential area people in the novel, who don't have child even after a wedlock so that they are permitted free relations between men and woman.

After publishing *One Part Woman'* novel in 2014, the local caste people and religious Hindu conservatives turned against Perumal Murugan. His novel depicts their culture and tradition in a wrong path, so that the native people protested against him. The protesters compelled him to contract an, 'unconditional apology' and withdraw all copies of the novel. In January 2015 he announced that, He was giving up writing, even he said on his Facebook page, "The writer Perumal Murugan is dead, as he is no idol, he is not going to revive himself. He likewise has no faith in rebirth as an ordinary teacher, he will live as P.Murugan, leave him alone".

This novel title *One Part Woman* is associated with Lord Shiva. The God and Goddess of the hill in this novel who are variously called Mangaipangan, the half- female god, Madhorubaagan, the mother-father god (Ardhanareeswarar). Moreover, this title represents a Unity of two genders. Without male woman can't survive in this world likewise without woman male can't survive in this world. Another significant representation of this title also provides gender equality. In this society, people of men can't afford any equality to the opposite gender especially feminine gender.

The term 'Social Stigma' coined by the twentieth century sociologist Erving Goffman. Social stigma is the extreme discrimination or disfavour against an individual person in the society. It is normally related to the Gender, race, Intelligence and health. In contemporary society most of the troubles are around with women's quelling and Male's patriarchal society. Most of the problems in the society are centred on women not only if they are associated with that problem but the society accuse them in the forefront. Another dominant feature of stigma is that, segregations of upper and lower back class people in this society. Gender discrimination played a vital role in this concept of social stigmas. It's also known as 'Social disease'. Other specific stigmas often happened in this society till this 21st century. Some of the significant Stigmas are Poverty, Colour discrimination, untouchability, superstitious beliefs and infertility.

The husband and wife are the protagonists of Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*, kaliyannan called Kali and Ponnayi called Ponna. Ponna is the sister of Kali's childhood friend Muthu. They both were infantile Twain; still they are proceeding a felicitous life. But one drastic palpating incident in their life is that, they don't have small fries. It gave them whip palpating in front of the society. This novel portrays how Ponna and Kali were stirred by the societal stigmas. This novel was set in rural south Indian village near Namakkal. This story shifts between past and present times. Ponna Kali is presented a loving twosome. The most sober thing is destructive as their peaceful life goes into vain by social Stigmas.

Kali and Ponna both are loveable couple who leads a happy life in Karattur village. They care about each other like a child, but regrettably they don't have small fries. This infertile condition steers them into the accusation of society. They doesn't think about their condition of being offspring less, but the society remains with them frequently, so that they felt worsening about their circumstance. In Indian

society, people strongly believe their own cultural norms and traditions. If a marital woman doesn't have children, the community charges them as victims or punishable human beings. From the ancient period itself, the society incriminates women as the only reason for the problem of infertility. They never blame the masculine gender for their manliness. Our ancestors inculcated this thought of discrimination from the olden days itself.

Through the infertile trouble Ponna psychologically gets suppressed because of the community and its agony. She wants to control over her menstrual cycle and expected that at least coming months her womb gets filled with baby? The society pushed her into such a pathetic condition. In this situation of Ponna's problem applicable to the literary term 'Pathetic Fallacy'. The term was coined by one of the leading critics of Victorian era, John Ruskin. Pathetic Fallacy sentimentally attacks human emotions to inanimate objects. She often prayed, "God my father, please make sure I do not gain the reputation for being barren" (56). Ponna compared her worsening condition to non human beings like, cow, trees, and birds, in her farming. She saw the calf's new birth with the great excitement and related to her childlessness and felt exasperating about her condition of being infertile. Ponna poured a seed in the neighbourhood cultivated land, but the other people of the society wounded her as a barren woman. According to the community, when she poured the seed in the farming land, it doesn't grow because of her barrenness.

There is nothing worse than a man being isolated in this world. Ponna is isolated by this community for being childless. Even though she is in town, she creates a world for herself and lives she often expresses her feelings to Kali. In the absence of Kali, Ponna expresses her feelings towards pets and plants in her garden. In that world there is nothing but Kali and Ponna and the palms and plants they can raise. The people of the town did not give comfort, as sheep and herds comforted her. Because sheep and goats listened to her voice, she did not boast that she was childless, like the people of Karatur. She shares her free time with animals and plants to express her childless feeling.

Ponna went to attend the Puberty Ceremony of Chellama's daughter (she was like older sister to Kali). There she was reminded as a childless woman. Chellama's brother's wife drags her aside, and said, "If a childless woman did the ritual, would it make the girl barren". This was the belief of many people and society particularly Indian typical villages. Ponna doesn't show any worries outside of the people, she felt inside of her heart and mentally suppressed. The community changed Ponna as a dejected woman through her barrenness.

After the many charges of society, Ponna accepted the anticipations of the people and unveils her tempestuous towards society. She avoided attending any functions, funerals and weddings. She boldly replied to the society that, "I have no children, what function is going to happen in my house tomorrow? Whom am I going to invite with better leaf and nut? Are things so bad that when I die no one would come to carry me? Will they let me just lie here and rot? I don't want to go anywhere. And no one needs to come here either. It is enough if they leave me alone" (66). She accepted to live the reality of societal charges through her community.

In India 'Motherhood' is a divine manifestation of woman's life. The society thinks that, being a Mother of children is a gift from God. Childless women often are stigmatized by her own society of both men and women. Infertility is not only a issue of Health, it does happen because of cultural background and socio-economic politics. Being childless is considered as a cultural problem and religious consequences. People of India, related Motherhood with religious ceremony, especially a male child means they felt like millionaire in this world. In ancient vedas, Mahabharata and Ramayana said that, childlessness is a curse of human being and having a child means they attain a Moksha (salvation). Having a child is a valuable thing in women's life. Motherhood is not only a symbol for their life it is an eternal part of their whole life. Being a woman, they play a two important breakthrough in their life, firstly the society expects them attain puberty and the second one is Motherhood.

Adrienne Rich in her book *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as experience and institution* states that, “Woman’s status a child bearer has been made into a major fact of her life. Terms like 'barren' or childless' have been used to negate any further identity (11). In India after marriage of every couple should get pregnant within six months. After twelve years of marriage Ponna and Kali don't have a child. So that the community blames and criticizes her for being infertile This condition went to the couple into the vain and accusation of society. Kali and Ponna have only a two options before them, whether they adopt a child? Or Ponna should participate in the chariot festival of Madhorubaagan (half female god). The society again blame their plan for adoption of child, so they drop the plan of adoption.

Kali's Mother in law and his Mother made a decision of Ponna's barrenness. They were contriving to yield Ponna in karattur temple eighteenth day grandeur fete. There is a refinement in that village, woman who has no child; once they departed to take part in eighteenth day fete they will be consecrated with an infant through some strange men. Those who participated in the eighteenth day festival they all are known as God. That day alone, this belief and refinement compiled in kongu region.

The eighteenth day fete men are deliberated as a deity because they afforded a child who has ached from infertile problem. Kali's Mother consoles him to send Ponna to take part in that fete, but Kali did not accept his Mother's estimate. Kali didn't grant himself and never imagines about Ponna are there with another man. Muthu has a plan to ingest forth Kali where they are drifting in their childhood. But Kali's psyche is only around with Ponna and her detachment. He doesn't know anything behind the plans of Muthu and their family.

Then Ponna went to participate in eighteenth day fete. Finally she went to the temple through her father's Bullock cart. There is a huge crew in karattur temple. Ponna and her Mother impose the modest stores in that fete. Later she marvelled to see a crew and dramatic events showed by some people. Finally she participated in the final night of the festival.

When Kali came home he appalled because Ponna is not there. Some what his insights tell that Ponna went to eighteenth day. When he yelled, ' You whore! You have cheated me!' he was breathless. 'You will not be happy. You have cheated me, you whore...'(240). Kali can't condense that Ponna went to take part in final night. In this novel Portia tree has significant part in commencing to end of the novel. After knowing the truth of Ponna, He drank more of the arrack and slid down to the ground. He locked above. The branches of the Portia tree had spread across the sky.

Later, Kali goes to the height of her hatred, knowing that Ponna has gone to the festival. This incident is the root cause of the lifelong separation from Kali and Ponna. This community has created a huge divide within the husband-wife who has been in love and affectionate towards one another, despite the nervousness of not having a child through the name of Karattur festival. In time, they may have a child or may not open it, but they may continue to live with the same love with little regret. This incident gives us the impression that this is his wife and what impact it will have on the lives of individuals as they enter society the society which gives the most importance to individual freedom is the civilized, developed and advanced society of the world. The social act of treating childlessness as a personal problem between the husband and wife and treating it as a gross social distress and a great crime is a modern omen.

Conclusion

This community continues to exercise its family honor over the woman's body. Female is not an object, but a fellow human being with blood, muscle, bone and nerve like masculine gender. The functioning society cannot be a civilized society without respecting or understanding the feelings of

woman. They are the one who make decision or rights on their body, not the society and even their husbands. Neither Ponna nor Kali are responsible for the cracks in their lives between them, It is the community that intervened in their personal lives, and the social ills that still exist today, due to untouchability, inequality, feminism, patriarchal thinking, and denial of women's independence.

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