

Why Does A Woman Suffer?

Depiction of Poona in *One Part Woman*

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Abstract: Starting with a brief introduction about the status of women in India, this paper raises the question of why a woman suffers in *One Part of Woman*. A childless woman is not respected or well treated, particularly in India, and the situation is even worse in villages. The predicament of an Indian woman without a child is worse than that of animals. This paper exposes how a woman, Poona, is oppressed and her fight to integrate into society.

Key Words: patriarchy culture, anguish, marginalized, humiliated, Childlessness, psychological dilemma

INTRODUCTION:

As we know, women play vital roles in human life and nationhood. They comprise half of the world's population. According to a report by the United Nations Secretary General, women account for 50% of human resources, making them the second-largest human resource after men in terms of potential. Women are the key to sustainable development and quality of life in the family. The varieties of roles the women assume in the family are those of wife, leader, administrator, manager of family income, and last but not least, the most important, mother. Nonetheless, they suffer in the world.

As the study involves the identification and analysis of a work of art, the research approach is qualitative and interpretative. The researcher has followed the seventh edition of the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers. By using the research methodology of analysing and summarizing, this paper comes to the conclusion that a woman suffers a lot in the novel.

The key argument of the current research paper, "Why a Woman Suffers," is revealed in Perumal Murugan's novel, "One Part Woman." "One is not born but becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir 301). The citation from Beauvoir clearly demonstrates that civilization is what distinguishes a woman as a woman, and it is also the root cause of her oppression and suffering. Indian patriarchal culture postulates that gender roles are predetermined and preconceived, and women are compelled to fit into the given role. Women are often portrayed as docile, weak, inferior, innocent, seductive, or as mere procreating machines, and they have much less power and rights as compared with their male counterparts. Religion, family, education, and parenting are all social and cultural 'constructions' that reinforce these 'fixed' roles. The same role is found in this novel.

Perumal Murugan is a leading Indian author who declared his writing "dead" in 2015 after he was harassed and attacked by right-wing groups. His novels project the spirit of the



western region of Tamil Nadu, where he was born. Murugan was influenced by Tamilian culture, tradition, and language. His novels deal with caste discrimination, violence, patriarchy culture, and the struggles of marginalized Hindu peasants. *One Part of Woman* The title implies that a woman is limited to playing only one role.

Aniruddhan Vasudevn worked hard to translate *One Part Woman* from Tamil into English. It is set against the backdrop of a rural village in Tamil Nadu. The novel reveals ancient and supposed cultural practises among Tamil Hindus. It is the story of a childless couple who have a strong desire to have a child, woman projects compassion and deals with the suffering, frustration, and anguish of the woman. *One part of a woman* narrates the touching tale of Kali and Ponna, a married couple, who are unable to conceive a child in their ten years of marriage. Ponna is dutiful, a wife who obeys everything unquestioningly, and Kali is of the utmost affectionate nature towards her. Ponna is often excluded and mocked by the community because she is 'barren' and Kali is under pressure to remarry. They leave no stone unturned, and visit every big and small temple, offering prayers. Ponna is suffering because she needs to conceive a baby to fit in with society. It is revealed that patriarchal culture makes a woman wretched. The Indian society exploits Ponna in various ways, and she tries to emancipate from the man-made culture but gets the same result.

Kali and Ponna, despite being a loving and happy couple, are the victims of haunts and backlashes from friends, family, and relatives for their inability to conceive a child. In a patriarchal society, the sole essence of a woman lies in motherhood, and Ponna is also entrapped by this idea, and she is constantly questioned and asked to prove her role. Here we find that people consider only Poonna responsible for her bareness, why not Kali? Because of gender differences, men are always exempt from the patriarchal society's responsibilities.

We find an instance in the novel when Chinnapa Gounder, a fellow village mate, whom Kali decides to sell a cow, since it cannot yield a calf, says "that is how some cows are. No matter what you do, they never get pregnant, just change the cow. "If you say yes, I can fetch you right away." (14)

The remark implies that Ponna is deemed a "cow," and it shows how a woman is humiliated. Actually, it is not medically proven that she is unable to conceive a child, but she is a woman, so she suffers a lot from bareness. Ponna is tortured by Indian society. She is ostracised from society, tagged as 'barren' and asked to 'stay away' from functions as she brings bad luck. Ponna is constantly taunted by neighbours and relatives for her inability to conceive a child, When Kadhiravel's son, came to stay at Ponna's residence and injured himself, his mother screamed at Ponna, "she would know only if she had a child of her own! She had taken such good care that my boy's head is broken, would any mother allow it to happen?" (15).

Childlessness marks each husband and wife, but here we find Ponna suffers more because she is a woman, and patriarchal culture cuts the wings of women in various ways where women are treated as dolls in the hands of men. Women, more than men, are blamed for childlessness, and Ponna is no exception. Ponna perceives herself as having been humiliated throughout the years. "The humiliations she had to endure because of this one problem were infinite" --; she is also visible as having horrific good fortune, despite being tainted, and this



obscures her relationship with others, particularly children. Her husband Kali, on the other hand, does not face much humiliation because he is a man and he makes himself engage in his work -- he keeps busy -- and from time to time alcohol, but the lady's identification and reason are so closely related to motherhood that Ponna appears to be confronted with what everyone perceives as her failure at each flip. She has a strong desire to have her own child to emancipate from the male-dominated world.

The idea of her barren womb keeps on haunting her and is one kind of exploitation by society, but somehow she partially manages to come out of the psychological dilemma when she seems to have found the solution to her problem by invoking local gods and goddesses. Ponna and her husband have to try many trials to appease the local gods and goddesses. Appeasement politics do not work out as they would like.

They invoke the God Murugan and the goddess Pavatha in their own strange ways to appease them, but they don't seem to understand the language of appeasement. They also lit sixty lamps for sixty days and prostrated at the feet of Murugan, pleading for his blessings. Therefore, she and her husband assiduously court their gods in all possible ways, but all their attempts become futile, and Ponna cannot be emancipated from the suffering of a barren woman.

Their childlessness is also interlinked with their status, they belong to the Gounder caste, and their power is assessed by the number of sons. Ponna bears the burden of bringing an heir to inherit their property. There is an instance when Ponna and Pottupatti go to a fair and buy peanuts, and Pottupatti taunts, "You have bought so little. Do you have a child Crying at home? Your husband and you are protecting an inheritance that God knows which wretched dogs will claim later. Why don't you eat what you like? Whom are you being miserly for? "A woman without a husband is the same as inheritance without an heir," they say (52). This taunt hurts Ponna a lot.

Ponna has to face the biggest paradox of her life: the events at the Tiruchengode carnival. She wants to use this attempt to get freedom from all the suffering of an infertile woman. This typical Indian lady is trapped in such a position where only the idea of conceiving a child by a god overpowers all other ideas. The writer criticises the vacant religious practise at the Tiruchengode festival. Even the business of prostitution comes to a halt at the time of this festival. The writer pinches: "That night there was no business in the prostitute's street that was right in front of the temple at the foot of the hill" (98). The men demean their own importance at this festival by gossiping, "Who is going to look at us? "Today, every woman is a prostitute" (ibid.). Ponna makes the besieged men in the crowd look like gods. They would fulfil her yearlong desire of wanting a child that she could not conceive since her marriage with Kali. Her mother forces her to believe that every man is a god that night.

Ponna believes that the men in the crowd are the incarnation of Brahma, Vishnu or Shiva- the three superpowers. She goes to the fair to put her loyalty, honor, and chastity at stake. She, in reality, she falls prey to the conspiracy and irony of circumstances. She finds it very difficult to find the right god in the crowd of gods. She imagines that the man who will press her right shoulder in the crowd is the right person for her. Ponna gets confused about whether to sacrifice her chastity to that stranger or not. She shows her disapproval as if she

were a little bit ready to be one with that person (219). The face of that person reminds her of the face of the boy with whom she fell in love in her childhood. Ponna prays, "Please appear with a new face, one I am not familiar with" (221). She prays more fervently, "Come to me in a form I like" (ibid). Though she enters religion with her devotional gestures to make herself free from all sufferings, the culture and limitations of patriarchy push her back from the individual self to the male-dominated society.

But, even in her wildest dreams, she never imagined being touched by anyone other than Kali. It is something against her moral conscience. He takes her to the north chariot street to concretize and normalise libidinal liaisons with her. He also feeds her with local delicacies. He addresses her as „Selvi“ and serves her food with his own hands, which she gulps down as if it were divine food to bestow her with divine energy. She feels "He has given me a new name so that no one around her gets suspicious" (225). Her shyness cannot last more and she returns his advances. Knowing the role of wife, she utters religiously, "He is my god. My job is to go where he takes me..." "Like a rain-soaked chicken, she huddled in his warmth" (ibid). The law of attraction comes full circle for this coy mistress. She believes that the gods will provide her with endless pleasure and readily agrees to follow the divine act of satisfying her maternal instincts. Ponna feels strongly that her act of copulation with the god would be the exact imitation of the meta-physical dimension of sexuality. Because patriarchy culture is deeply rooted in her mind and body, she is not ready to emancipate herself from the journey of a barren lady.

Society is always gossip crazy and pokes their nose into others' affairs. Society treats Ponna as a victim. 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. But it is not enough to break the chain of exploitation and suffering.

Ponna's mother and her mother-in-law picked the idea of the chariot festival. Both the mothers insisted that should go to the temple and lie with anyone. It is popular 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.

The author intensely explores the patriarchal culture that deeply rooted in the system and how it is forced on individuals and how status, religion, also helps to tighten these roles. Ponna's need to bear a child puts their loving marriage at stake as Kali doesn't want her to participate in the Chariot festival and have intercourse with other man. Because, If Ponna gets pregnant, it will question Kali's 'Masculinity' and his impotency. On the other hand, Ponna's 'Female essence' is often cross examined; she needs to get pregnant in order to prove her female essence and also to give an heir and thereby upholding their status and power. Here we get to know both want to save their image in society.

Conclusion:

Gender identities are socially constructed and if not performed will be criticized severely. The novel exposes how patriarchy oppresses female sexuality; by viewing its only purpose is to bear a child. They are ready to relinquish their personality and fidelity to protect the clans, dynasties and heritage of their husbands. Thus, since then up until now there has been



no change in the attitude of men toward women. Women remain just like a puppet in the hands of male dominance is beyond human imagination. Here we find the suffering, sorrow and painful journey of Poona because she is unable to perform a given role of society. The question will not be resolved until gender discrimination is abolished.

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