

ONE PART WOMAN: A REVIEW

Dr. Anuradha Nongmaithem

Assistant Professor in English

National Institute of Technology Agartala

Jirania, Brajala, West Tripura , 799046

The novel *One Part Woman* (2014) by Perumal Murugan is an overwhelming story of a passionately loving couple Kali and Ponnayi. It deals with a saga of atrocities and difficult journey without a child in this orthodox patriarchal society. Mr. Murugan dared to touch some prohibited aspect of the long lost tradition in interior south India. It deals with the raw aspect of vulnerable condition of the woman who fails to give birth to a baby, after twelve years of marriage. Apart from the controversies that surround the novel, lies a beautiful love story of two people who devoted themselves to love and were affected by the people that surround them. How the society became a means of unhappiness in their happy married life.

The plight of an Indian woman without a child is worse than a dog. Ponnayi after twelve years of marriage is not able to conceive, is a serious question for all her near and dear ones. A woman after marriage lives a life of tension and dilemma until a baby comes their way. The love between the Kali and Ponnayi is intense and they have a sexually satisfied life. The surrounding intruded their happy life. External forces and socially constructed norms are the reasons that created conflict between the couple. A want of a child to make a complete family life is a genuine desire for any normal couple. But things become an issue if that is the only reason left for a good life. A constant reminder to a woman that she cannot give birth to a baby can at times be quite exasperating. They have done all the pujas and penance to fulfill their only wish to have a child. They have left no stone unturned to make their dream come true. The plight of Ponnayi is the plight of so many other women in India and across the world. A childless woman is not respected and treated well especially in India and worse is the situation in village. In *The Joy Of Motherhood* by Buchi Emecheta, the protagonist Nnu Ego even married twice to have her highly price son, even at the cost of not liking the man she married. Ego was over burden with the fact that she was not able to birth to a baby boy and with the guilty that she will bring down her family name. In maximum cases with childless couples, women are made to feel that they are responsible for not having a child. Even in the *One Part Woman*, the protagonist made to believed that she is responsible for the childless marriage.

The concept that it could be Kali who is responsible for not having the child is brushed off by the family as well as the society. The writer has a sly suggestion that Kali might be the reason behind the couple not having a child. The suggestion became obvious by letting Ponnayi go for the Temple Chariot festival where for that particular night women were allowed to conjugate with any men whom they see god-like feelings in them. The situation why Ponnayi was allowed to go by her family was well explained in an article; “Why Perumal Murugan’s “One Part Woman” Is Significant To The Debate On Freedom Of Expression In India” by N Kalyan Raman dated 13 January 2015,

“...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 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”. (Raman 1)

Thus, Ponnayi going to the temple festival was the only option left for them for since they live in the interior village with no access to the modern world and advancement with medical science. They are not aware of IVF process to conceive, medical treatment was not exposed to them. Temple festival can be equated with the process of buying a donor egg from someone else in medical terms and it is not considered as betrayal like sleeping with another man as in the case of Ponnayi. According to me it's the lack of exposure to the modern advancement and education that the lovely couple had to face and in forcing Ponnayi to go it in order to have a child and have the bliss of motherhood.

The opening and the closing lines of the novel have a special connection with Kali.

The Portia tree was dense with foliage. If you looked closely, you could see the yellow trumpet-like flowers with their flared mouths, and the drooping, fading red ones with their inviting smiles. Portia flowers always grow more beautiful as they fade. (1)

For, Kali there is a special connection with the huge Portia tree; it has been his constant companion. He has seen the best days of his marriage as well as his worse phases of his marriage. When the novel opens the tree has a sensuous relation with Kali, he finds everything so beautiful and lovely about the tree. But, when Ponna went to the temple festival and he felt that she had betrayed him, he was devastated and he could not feel connected with the Portia tree. He tries to find solace under the Portia tree:

...Under the Portia tree, the cattle were munching on fodder. He sat on the rock under the tree. He drank some more of the arrack. When he yelled, 'You whore! You have cheated me, you whore...'

He slid down to the ground. The rope running from the corn stacks pressed against his back. He looked above. The branches of the portia tree had spread themselves across the sky. (240)

Ponnayi has done everything in her capability to have a child. I being a woman even got irritated to an extent Ponnayi was going through. The number of rigorous penance, pujas, and the amount of bitter things she had to gulf in just to have a baby. I could connect with Ponnayi at one point. I too had gone through certain process in order to have a child in spite the fact that I don't have any medical issues and my doctor assure me that I will conceive. The kind of pressure a woman feels whether educated or not the constant fear of if I am not able to conceive can be life threatening. Ponnayi even compare her pathetic situation with the cow she brought home after her wedding

"... she had fought with her father and had taken a cow from. It delivered seven or eight calves, populating Kali's barn with its offspring. She had once cried out loud, 'don't have the boon that even this mute creature has been blessed with'. (8)

The pathetic situation of our society is that once the woman is not able to give birth they start looking for another bride who can give birth. And the society also leaves no stone unturned to see that the couples suffer from their taunt and comment. These two incidents from the novel,

1) He shouted from where he stood, 'Do you have children?' Kali went pale...' (19)

2) Get married again'. Kali had to smile it away and vanish into the crowd' (19), are few of the instances. People love to talk at the expense of other people's emotions. To ask a couple who were in desperate need to have baby, whether they had baby every time they meet is not advisable. But ours is a society where, "It seemed that people who had children could do anything they wanted- that only they had such rights" (64). Thus, the novel open up few questions, Can't a couple stay happy without having a baby. Is woman happiness limited only in having a child? Identity of a woman is still limited to the capacity to give birth. The core existence of women from generation is to carry on the family line. Medically condition women who cannot give birth are not spare by the society. They remain the main target of topic in all family and social gatherings. The writer is able to bring life to that particular locale vividly to the readers. *One Part Woman* is a wonderful novel, taking us through the journey of a childless couple in pursue to have a child unfolding different facet of human emotions.

REFERENCE

1) Mugugan,Perumal. *One Part Woman*.Trans.Aniruddhan Vasudevan. Tamil Nadu:Penguin Books, 2013.Print.

2) <http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/why-perumal-murugans-one-part-woman-significant-debate-freedom-expression-india>