

CULTURAL IDENTITY IN PERUMAL MURUGAN'S *ONE-PART WOMAN*

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Abstract

Murugan is one of the authors celebrated by Indian readers. He has written twelve novels, and six collections each of short stories and poems, as well as thirteen books of non-fiction relating to language and literature. He has also edited numerous popular collections of fiction and non-fiction. Most of his works have been translated into English by popular translators, including *Seasons of the Palm* and *Current Show*. His other popular works are a memoir, *Pyre*, *Poonachi*, *Seasons of the palm* and *Nizhal Mutrattu Ninaivugal* (2013). Murugan is very popular among the modern readers because he narrates the true picture of his land and people. Through his close experience with farmer and his their life, he creates an intimacy to the reader to understand and becomes intimately familiar with the community's inner life and the challenges that oppose it continually. The objective of the article is to explore the conditions and struggles of women and their start up conversations about caste and female empowerment in order to attain an identity in their society.

Key words: Cultural identity, empowerment, legitimacy,

Introduction

Murugan hails from a small agricultural town in the southern part of India, and he is a popular writer, who writes in Tamil. His characters are mostly villagers living in remote places or in small towns. **One Part Woman** is a Tamil novel written by Indian writer Perumal Murugan titled "Mathorupagan". Initially published by Kalachuvadu Publications in 2010. It was later translated into English by Aniruddhan Vasudevan and published in 2013 in India by Penguin Books and in 2018 in the US by Grove Atlantic. Set during the colonial era in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu in India, it deals with the social stigma that a married couple faces due to their childlessness, and the lengths they go to conceive.

Discussion

Five years after his novel "Maadhorubaagan" (later published in English as "One Part Woman") first appeared, in 2010, Murugan was threatened by conservatives from his own caste in the small town in South India where he lived. The novel is a portrait of a rural childless couple, Kali and Ponna, who love each other but under tremendous social pressure they fail to conceive a child. When the annual chariot festival draws near—a celebration of the half-male, half-female god Maadhorubaagan—Ponna is obliged to participate. This is especially true on the festival's eighteenth night, when all men are considered gods and when childless women are permitted to have sex with young strangers. For Ponna, the night marks perhaps her last chance to become pregnant.

The thought for writing the novel springs inside Murugan on witnessing the pathetic condition and the traumatic experience of the couples around him, who are unable to give birth to a child, The

novel is set in the Tiruchengode town in Tamil Nadu, from which the author hails, and he presents the ultimate details in the book where the Kongu Vellalar Gounder majorly living, The real name of the novel comes from the word Maadhorubaagan, the Tamil name for the male/female type of God Shiva in Hindu mythology. In 2005, Murugan was granted an award by India Foundation for the Arts for discussing the Human expressions which is the root for this novel. In his exploration, he went over a cultural practice that existed in the past to manage childlessness, which he chose to remember for the book. The presence of such a habit has been a subject of dispute. Murugan expressed in a meeting with The Hindu that there was no narrative proof connecting with the custom and that insights concerning it were passed only orally.

Amitava Kumar is a writer and journalist who teaches at Vassar College, in his “How Perumal Murugan Was Resurrected through Writing” He says,

When I started reading the book that first got Murugan into trouble, “One Part Woman,” I immediately recognized the novel as belonging to a genre that we might call “rooted literature.” What Murugan was producing was locally grown, not a canned object sold on a supermarket bookshelf. It is rare to come across a writer who enjoys such intimacy with not just the land but also the customs that govern the lives of the people who live on it. Culture, as a particular mix of religion, superstition, and the calculations of power, and with caste as a crucial determinant, is central to the story that Murugan is telling. The book is so rooted in the soil of tradition that its rebellion against it is all the more unexpected and moving.

The yearly chariot festival, which honors the god Maadhorubaagan, who is half woman and half man, who gives solution to everyone’s problem and sufferings. The celebrations culminate in a carnival on the eighteenth night of the festival, during which time marriage laws are untied and agreeable sexual relations between single men and women is accepted because all males are valued as gods. Although the festival seems to be the answer to Kali and Ponna's problems, it soon poses more of a threat to keep the pair apart than to bring them closer. One Part Woman is a sardonically funny, fable-like, and incredibly moving examination of a love marriage that is stretched by outside expectations and a critique of strict regulations.

The words of the uncle clearly express the pain and the sufferings of the mother who unable to give birth to a baby, In order to comforts those mothers he narrates the condition of his mother with the following words. He says,

“What did you accomplish by getting married? You spread your pallu for a worthless husband, gave birth to so many children, and you are suffering till today. Drop the matter, I don’t need to go through the same hell,” (p.228)

It is clear that in most of his works, Murugan goes into great length to explain the different aspects of this relationship. It is astounding that there is no political opposition to such total caste domination, especially in a dimensional politics state like Tamil Nadu. However, oppressed people have their own strategies for resistance. As a result of urbanization, they have greater opportunities

to work as wage laborers on a daily basis and can even use motorized rigs to travel the nation digging bore wells. In these new domains, where the ancient caste order still exists but is becoming less and less functional, Gounders are compelled to relocate closer to the Chakkilis as an increasing number of them lose their property due to urbanization or intrafamily conflicts. His people, who are all from a typical oral heritage, have long created a meaningful universe centered on local deities to feel safe and protected and to stay on the correct path for both individuals and communities. Consequently, all of his characters' consciousness are shaped by the power of myth. These characters frequently experience stressful reveries in which the lines separating the world of myth and their present reality dissolve. There may be a way out of peril in the mythical dream world, but not in the actual one. His characters, frequently abandoned by their families and left alone in isolated locations during the dead of night, rely on their fervent faith in the beliefs and deities.

Conclusion

The novel looks at how gender essentialism victimizes women in India due to patriarchal traditions and seeks their real identity. They could not survive independently because of various reasons like culture, tradition. Societal practice and etc., Ponna's failure to adapt to a set female identity is a result of the expectation placed on women to do so, which represses their individuality. The novel examines marriage's state and gender roles within it in relation to this. It is almost inevitable to place the blame on the woman when Kali is advised for a second marriage after the couple goes years without having children. Marriage in India, as noted by Murugan, "is not a democratic institution [...] the woman is constantly constrained, while the man has and continues to have a wider space in which to function." The book also explains how patriarchy contributes to women's subjugation.

The novel explores how a community's pathological obsession estranges a loving couple and breaks up their happy marriage. It also depicts life in pre-Independence rural India, focusing in particular on the rigid social hierarchy set by the caste system. The writer has resurrected himself with two rich sequels to *One Part Woman*, titled *A Lonely Harvest* and *Trial by Silence*. The author presents two alternative endings to the events that culminated in the parent novel. *A Lonely Harvest* begins where *One Part Woman* ends.

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