
**The Humiliations and Societal Pressures of Infertility in Perumal Murugan's
*One Part Woman***

¹**Mrs.P.Sowmya**

Ph.D Research Scholar, & Assistant Professor,
Department of English, RVS College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

²**Dr.K.Nagarathinam**

Research Guide & Head and Associate Professor,
Department of English, RVS College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu.

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Abstract:

The humiliations, Societal Pressures, and cultural toll that infertility takes on a childless couple in Perumal Murugan's novel *One Part Woman* is examined in this article. The tale, which is set in rural Tamil Nadu, depicts the tremendous emotional toll and social pressures that Kali and Ponna endure, as their infertility has serious consequences. This study examines how Murugan uses the couple's predicament to criticize social conformity, traditional gender roles, and the effects of limited personal agency in patriarchal societies by looking at how their infertility causes them to experience the humiliation of social exclusion, internalized shame, marital strain, and difficult ethical decisions.

Keywords: Infertility, Societal pressures, Childlessness, Cultural norms, Social expectations, Marriage, Emotional turmoil.

Introduction:

Infertility can have a significant impact on both individuals and couples on a number of levels. Social shame can result from infertility, particularly in cultures that place a high value on family and having children. As a result, people or couples may avoid social situations where they could be reminded of their difficulties, which can cause feelings of guilt and loneliness. Infertility might be made worse by social and familial expectations of parenthood. Couples may experience pressure to seek particular therapies, criticism, or unsolicited advice, which can cause stress and compromise their privacy. Couples' lives are drastically impacted by the term infertility. The couple is under pressure to demonstrate their abilities by having a kid as soon as they enter into marriage. Unfortunately, social pressures will cause them to experience melancholy, worry, and low self-esteem if they are unable to demonstrate their potential.

Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* provides an engaging analysis of how social, cultural, and religious factors influence infertility in Tamil society. The book reveals the oppressive forces at play in their culture, where reproductive expectations are ingrained, in addition to capturing the emotional and psychological suffering of the main characters, Kali and Ponna. Although Kali and Ponna have a strong, passionate relationship, their infertility causes them to struggle emotionally. Although their love is sincere and powerful, society continuously reminds them of their alleged "incompleteness." But this affection isn't enough to protect them from the grief of childlessness. "Kali adored Ponna," the narrator says, softly describing Kali's love for Ponna. Her laughter relieved him of all his troubles, much like rain. This sentence highlights how deeply he loves her and how she brings him happiness and serenity, highlighting how awful it is that infertility-something out of their control, a cloud over their life.

The couple is subject to increasing pressure and unrelenting criticism from family members and villagers in their rural Tamil society, which places a high importance on parenthood. Because women are frequently blamed for infertility, Ponna, in particular, becomes the subject of gossip and accusations. Ponna is caught in the assumption that motherhood is the only thing that defines a woman in a patriarchal culture, and she is continuously questioned and forced to validate her role. Friends and family often pressure Kali to get married again, which suggests that she is at fault. There is 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" (*One Part Woman*, 14), implying that the 'cow' being Ponna and indirectly asks Kali to remarry. However, Ponna is shunned by society, labeled as "barren," and told to "stay away" from events because she brings misfortune. When Kadhiravel's son visited Ponna's house and hurt himself, his mother yelled at Ponna by saying:

"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). Their standing as members of the Gounder caste, whose authority is determined by the number of boys they have, is also tied to their childlessness. Ponna also experiences pressure to leave their possessions to an heir. There is an instance when Ponna and Pottupatti go to fair and buy peanuts. Pottupatti says,

"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 and inheritance without heir are the same, they say" (52).

Her mother-in-law and her own mother shared this opinion. The two mothers intend to force Kali to wed a different girl in order to have an heir. Ponna is greatly impacted by this, and Kali comforts her during this difficult moment by saying:

"Maama, won't I ever get pregnant?"

Why not, dear? You are only twenty-eight now...women are giving birth right till they are forty and forty-five. We are not that old." (One Part Woman: 14)

Ponna feels humiliated and undeserving due to the pressures of society. She starts to absorb the opinions of the community, thinking that her infertility makes her less valuable as a wife and a woman.

Considering her circumstances, Ponna states, "What kind of a woman am I if I cannot give my husband a child?" This sentence, which emphasizes how society's expectations have influenced her self-perception and made her feel "less than," perfectly expresses her internalized guilt and aggravation. Kali was made fun of by several of the young men in his village for not having a child. They sought to sympathize with Ponna in their own evil ways, believing him to be of little use. Karuppannan initiated their bets on who would entice her first since they wanted to seduce her. He was certain that he could easily woo her because he had a fairer skin than others. Thus, he began to follow her around all day and all night. As a result, even when Kali returned from the farm at midnight, Ponna never unlocked the door. She shares this with Kali one evening.

"Isn't it because I have no children that people look at me this way?' she cried. 'If I had that blessing, would I have to suffer this disgrace? Every dog thinks I am just a stone standing at the street corner that it can rub itself against.'" (One Part Woman: 101)

Even Ponna's neighbour Sarasa whom she considers as her friend and takes care of her children humiliates Ponna in front everyone at a given chance to make her feel better.

"Despite my telling you to come early, you are arriving only now. Did you get delayed in getting your daughters ready?" (One Part Woman: 65).

Ponna was so severely affected by this that she ignored her kids for a while and stopped talking to Sarasa. She was also reminded of her infertility in another circumstance. A guy named Thangavel had a wife who was experiencing leg trouble, so Ponna helped her by bringing seeds to his field. That year, his wife blamed Ponna for his field's unsatisfactory produce. They thought that was the only effect of her infertility.

Perumal Murugan's One Part Woman clearly illustrates how the cultural values and morals of the Kongunadu people affect a childless couple. After twelve years of marriage, Kali and Ponna, the book's protagonists, are still in love and have no kids. The author portrays their emotional suffering, mental torment, and societal shame as a result of not having children. How their once lonely love life has been ruined by this one element alone.

Nothing changed despite the couple's penances and prayers to several deities. They prayed to the new God when someone mentioned him or her in the hopes that he or she might at least bear them a child. Due to their intense desire to become parents, they never

questioned any of these traditions. According to their custom, Childless women can attend the chariot celebration on the fourteenth day in the hopes of becoming pregnant. On that day, any guy who attends the gathering is free to engage in sexual activity with a woman who is childless without fear of consequences. In their tradition, the guys who participate in the celebration on that day are regarded as gods, and the child who results from that union is called a "God-given child." On the fourteenth day, Ponna was invited by her mother-in-law and her family to attend the chariot celebration. Despite his disagreement with this idea, Kali kept it to himself because he wanted to see how Ponna would respond.

"Will you listen to your mother and mine and go on the day when the gods retreat? She murmured, 'If you want me to go for the sake of this wretched child. I will. This was not the answer he had expected.'" (108).

This unexpected response shocks Kali. All women, in his opinion, were evil and intended to ruin his life. He wants to tell her not to go, but he doesn't say anything. Without having to express it aloud, he wants her to understand what's on his mind. Ponna wanted a child because she wanted her husband to become the person he was before they were married. She wants him to come out of his isolation and engage with the people without being ridiculed for not having kids. She's hoping they'll be accepted by society. She wants them to be treated the same way as everyone Village. She wants to stop Kali from being referred to as "the impotent one," but all of these plans backfire.

They both think that if they don't talk to one another, their spouse will understand their ideas and feelings. Ultimately, this leads to problems that create an invisible barrier between them that is hard to break.

Unaware of their strategy, Ponna attends the fourteenth day of the chariot festival with the encouragement of her mother-in-law and family. Since the couple didn't discuss it in depth, Ponna attends the chariot festival, thinking Kali has granted her permission. She is misled by her mother and brother, who say Kali supports it. But Kali never gave her consent. By trying to repair the couple's childless condition by sticking to and believing in traditional religious traditions, the family members collectively destroyed a beautiful relationship. Kali transforms into a man who is possessed when he finds out that Ponna attended the festival with the help of his family.

He continuously says

"His lips murmured, 'She has cheated you, she has cheated you.'

He banged his head against the door. His topknot came undone and rolled down to his nape.

'You whore!' he shouted. 'Have you really gone? Have you gone despite my saying no?' 'All of you have gotten together and cheated me,' he cried.....

'You whore! You have cheated me!' he was breathless. 'You will not be happy. You have cheated me, you whore....'" (239 - 240)

Despite Kali's outbursts and self-harm, the readers are able to feel the pain, hurt, and betrayal that society and his family put on him in the name of culture. He finishes a bottle of arrack and goes to his barnyard, where he kicks his dogs. He decides to kill himself in the barnyard to exact Revenge on Ponna.

Ponna's choice leaves Kali reeling, feeling deceived and devastated. Once based on friendship and affection, their marriage strains under the burden of their situation. This conclusion demonstrates the terrible toll that social pressure takes on people's lives. The book closes on a depressing note, giving readers a profound understanding of how cultural and traditional influences may destroy even the most devoted marriages. Murugan's prose captures this tragic reality: "Love could not survive under the weight of a thousand eyes watching, judging, and condemning."

Conclusion

Perumal Murugan skillfully captures the anguish and hopelessness that people and couples may experience as a result of cultural expectations surrounding childbearing in *One Part Woman*. The tragic ending of the book offers a commentary on the repressive nature of societal conventions, highlighting the severe emotional toll that infertility takes when combined with expectations from family and society. Murugan gives readers a profound contemplation on love, identity, and the cost of acceptance by highlighting the price of adhering to strict social roles through striking words and evocative imagery.

Women can be severely affected by humiliation, particularly if they are under a lot of pressure from society's expectations and criticisms. Rigid cultural norms that link women's worth to particular roles or appearances are frequently the cause of this pain. For example, problems like infertility, divorce, or even unconventional work choices can occasionally result in shame and criticism, making women feel unworthy or inadequate.

This type of humiliation involves more than simply outside criticism; it also involves internalized shame, which can affect how a woman views herself and limit her emotional stability and confidence. She may socially withdraw, doubt her own value, or even change her conduct to avoid more criticism if she feels like she is being watched or criticized, which would compromise her goals and authenticity.

Society has to embrace a more accepting and compassionate viewpoint that respects women for their uniqueness and independence in order to lessen this pain. Women can recover their sense of self-worth and develop resilience against hurtful social judgments by fostering candid discussions, understanding, and support. In the end, a culture that values women's identities and choices promotes not only their well-being but also a more sympathetic and just society for everybody.

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