



Mapping Social Conflicts Landscape in Perumal Murugan's One Part Woman

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ABSTRACT

Perumal Murugan is a renowned and beloved Tamil writer. He penned twelve novels in same language. One Part Woman is one of his literary classic works. His writing style is so captivating that readers finish it with no time. His themes are truthful and focus on the society of which he was a native once. This research article focuses on the social conflicts existed in the novel. He describes this conflicts through the main characters of the novel: Kali and Ponna. These conflicts have so impacted the life of these characters that their life is completely shattered due to it. The research paper concentrate this aspects to know the details of and factors responsible for the destruction of the life of these characters. The social conflicts may include the beliefs, customs and superstitions of the society which are harmful in one way or other. The happiness of life depends on the inner self of human beings and individuals will to remain free. This research article enumerates the events in the novel which are best examples of social conflicts. It also provides some remedial changes to bring out change in the society concerned with these issues. One Part Woman centers around the impact of society, value of religious things, endless love of a couple and people obscenity. In the novel Kali and Ponna become the victims of superstitious beliefs and customs and suffer for their survival. The happiness of an individual depends not on his or her will absolutely but it is influenced by the societal norms. Perumal Murugan beautifully weaves the emotional drama that draws its sustenance from typical prominent flaws of a society. A dramatic

story of two lives fallen apart because of no fault of theirs. The novel also examines how patriarchal customs in India force women into victims of gender identity. Women are expected to conform a fixed female identity as a mother, as a wife, etc. The research article provide some suggestions to eradicate caste based discrimination, religious conflicts and gender inequality.

KEY WORDS

Perumal Murugan, One Part Woman, Social Conflicts, Feminism, Gender.

INTRODUCTION

Perumal Murugan (1966) is a writer, scholar and literary chronicler who writes in Tamil. He belongs to Thiruchengodu, a small town in Namakkal district, Tamilnadu. Apart from writing novels, he has six collections of short stories, six anthologies of poetry and many of the non-fiction books on his credit. Ten of his novels have been translated into English. His notable work is “Maadhorubaagan” in Tamil (2010) which is translated by Anirudhan Vasudevan as *One Part Woman* (2013). This novel dealt with the ancient culture and community of the Kongunadu region. This novel was awarded Sahitya Akademy Translation Prize in 2016. *One Part Woman* is an English translation of “Maadhorubaagan”. It means half male and half female God in the same body or Ardhnarishwar.

One Part Woman is the story of Ponna and Kali, a farming couple, whose happiness is spoiled by their inability to have a child. Ponna, a female protagonist, is considered by society as a barren woman. She is insulted and excluded by the community at various societal stages. Twelve years of childlessness are accompanied by thousands of temple visits, prayers offerings and other religious rituals. It deals with the themes of ritual and tradition and the power these elements have in societies. The novel explores how a community’s obsession separates a loving couple and break up their happy married life. At the end of story, Kali felling left and lonely., commits suicide by hanging himself on the very same Portia tree that Ponna and he rested and play under.

Social Conflict

Karl Marx is considered as the father of social conflict theory. When two or more people collide verbally or physically with each other, there is a conflict and a social environment becomes a social conflict. In a single sentence, “Social conflict is the struggle between groups in society where they fight to win or improve their values”. Social conflict is distinguished in three types- Overt Social conflict, Objective social conflict and subjective social conflict. Social conflicts are caused by many reasons such as- Different lifestyle of people belonging to other social group, socio-economic reasons, unfair entry to resources and certain activities; different understanding among individuals of the rules of behavior etc. Social conflict affect the structure and function of society. In *One Part Woman*, Murugan portrays the contemporary issues that causes social conflict such as caste injustice, gender identity, religious violence, etc.

Caste Issues

The caste injustices are prevalent in Indian society since time immemorial. It has brought legion of losses to human society and community. The issue of caste is observed in *One Part Woman* in various incidences in the novel. The temple centered nature of the society and economy lead to the formation of the groups, classes and castes under the direction of the temple. *One Part Woman* portrays life in pro-independence rural India, focusing in specific rigid social grading set by the caste system. This novel highlights the stratification of Indian society with caste system which is carried out through the concept of untouchability.

The couple in the novel puts lots of efforts and follow various routes to have a child. They even prepare themselves to adopt a child from the caste they don’t belong to. Ponna doesn’t ready to adopt a child from other caste. She sternly objected this idea of Kali. They want to follow other alternatives for having baby. As they were suggested various rituals of their caste to appease God by the surrounding people. Kali is upset

with all that. He does not allow Ponna to participate in the eighteenth day ritual at Karattur, because he is afraid of her participation with an untouchable. The caste issue appears in the novel through this episode.

Gender Identity

The typical Indian women face legion of problems and undergo various forms of struggles in their life. They don't live their own thoughts and dreams. They are supposed to follow husband after marriage and son in old age. Dependency becomes her lot in the life. Women are more suppressed by their surroundings to live because they lead a life depending on others. The society forces them to do things which are accepted by the societal norms. In Indian culture, most of the women are suppressed by their traditional and cultural views and practices. The society dominates the woman who has no children. If the couple is childless, female folk are more prone to accuse than the male folk by the family and the society.

The society in which the novel is set in semi-urban middle class who suffer gender discrimination, suppression, dominating customs and unconscious beliefs in rituals. The obstruction to progress in the society which hurts people with gossips after every failure. Ponna faces all the difficulties in her life. Though all women have feelings and emotions. People cannot understand her or accept her identity.

It is strange that whenever a couple faces the problem for being childless. The man is recommended for a second marriage. Almost naturally throwing the blame on the woman. Here too there is constant pressure on Kali to find another woman to continue the progeny. The novel questions the place and role of women in Indian society. For a society, that pretend to value the equality of man and woman. Worshiping a deity such as Maadhorubaagan. Who is one half man and half woman. It is indeed surprising that Indian woman are valued not for who they are but for their ability to attain motherhood and their commitment to the family members. Woman can experience social conflicts related to traditional gender roles, stereotypes and cultural expectations. Conflicts may arise in areas such as work-life balance, reproductive rights and the struggle for equal opportunities. Additionally issues like domestic violence, harassment and lack of representation can contribute to social conflicts for women.

Religious Violence

It refers to violence which are motivated by religious dogmas and beliefs. It may be in various forms such as attack on individual or on group of people on religious ground for breaking religious norms. It appears in the novel and throughs light onto hypocrisy, a situation in which someone pretender to believe something that they do not really believe.

Ponna is hurt at being left out of fertility rituals. Kali shames at being considered as important by his friends and relatives. After that childless couple finally decides to search the reason for their infertility. By the help of an astrologer they understand the curses on family and they have believe that the astrologer might offer them a solution. But it is the beginning of their misery. A superstitious belief in the novel is that "To receive something from a woman in white is like receiving something from the goddess herself." Ponna does not conceive after six months of her marriage. Which arise doubt of her pregnancy to Kali's mother. So her mother in law decides to give her treatment to bear a child. Her mother in law uses many bitter shoots and neem leaves to prepare the medicine. Some unwise things are questioned in this novel that influence social conflicts.

The society always gossips crazy things and meddle their nose into the private life and personal matters of others. Kali and Ponna enjoy their married life. But having no offspring after the lapse of twelve years, it gradually becomes an unhappy one. They are suggested to observe some religious rituals to have at least one for continuing the generation. They are recommended to attend eighteenth day religious ceremony existed in their caste since ancient time. Kali objected to this ritual to follow. Ponna's mother and mother-in-law convince her and she is sent to the festival without Kali's knowledge. It is natural for the traditional ritual-bound society

to accept its woman with another man for a while, for one night. As the mythical hold of the ritual practice helps sustain the ritual and encourages woman to participate in it. By giving some other, man purely false, divine and mythological form, she can agree for a divine union as per the primitive belief. Superstitious religious beliefs are considered as part of Indian culture and their causes social conflicts in India. Particularly in rural areas people follow these kinds of beliefs. This beliefs are practice to raise or maintain family status. This lead them to the wrong path. Even new people are ready to do anything for their betterment.

CONCLUSION

Social conflicts in various forms affect human life greatly. The society has conflicts mostly against women. Due to these women always struggle for their identity, dignity, reputation and gender equality. As they face domestic violence, reproductive rights, independence etc., addressing these challenges involves promoting awareness, changing social norms and advocating for policies that support gender equality and overall development. Primarily caste is a cultural or ideological system, a traditional way of life. Today caste reforms the social thoughts and shape the living patterns. Caste reforms are essential in modern day time for fostering equality and social justice and thereby doing development of the society. To build a more equitable society, addressing caste based prejudices and discrimination and promoting inclusivity are very much needed. There is a need to promote awareness about harmful effects of caste based prejudices and discrimination. Religious reforms are urgent needs of the time. Reforms in his sphere make prevent objectionable incidents in future and may save life of people. Social reforms may contribute to improve the life of common folks who are chained by the social customs to live the life without dignity. Perumal Murugan through his writing *One Part Woman* wants to abolish societal conflicts to form egalitarian society.

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