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## Crisis of Religious Rituals and Social Norms in Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*

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### ABSTRACT

*One Part Woman* is situated in the Konku area, near Tiruchengode, a Taluq headquarters in Tamil Nadu's Salem district. The novel's setting is woven around the predicament of a young couple, Kali and Ponna, who had been childless for over twelve years. Despite the fact that they are extremely loving and compassionate, they are unable to have a kid of their own, and hence their attempts are worthless. Ponna's mother and mother-in-law, who are illiterate and superstitious, counsel her to have physical relationship with another man in the name of god on the occasion of the chariot festival honouring Lord Siva, who appears in the shape of Ardhanarishwara, who is half female and half male. As a result, anyone may sleep with anyone since on that day, every macho man is a god. So, if a woman is childless and wants to have a kid of her own, she can mate with any male she does not know since that man is revered and worshipped as a god on that specific day. Ponna's excursion to the chariot festival brings the story to a close. His concern, devotion, and affection for his wife are inexplicable. Not only for him, but for anybody, such a proposition will be excruciatingly painful; the concept of sharing one's wife with someone else for any reason is unthinkable, and it is death.

**Keywords:** Superstitions, social taboos, restrictions, childlessness/barrenness, chastity of woman, contradiction, politics.

In India, banning books, films/movies at the state, national, and international levels; taking legal action against certain portions of books and dialogues or scenes in movies; issuing "pattwas"

(Orders) against writers and directors; and threatening journalists, cartoonists, and right to information act (RTI) activists are not uncommon. Furthermore, the practise of banning books and

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assassinating authors is nothing new. This type of situation emerged in 1910, when Subramania Bharathi's short narrative *Aaril Oru Pangu* was banned, making it the first short story in the Tamil language.

Following that, anytime there are objections from some parts who do not wish to be questioned in any manner regarding subjects such as religion, caste, and information relating to unlawful actions, the book banning culture has been in vogue in India since 1910. This cynical mentality of torturing authors, banning books, issuing pattwas, intimidating social activists, and assassinating journalists is not unique to India; it is found all across the world. Later, in 1988, Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was banned on the grounds that it was blasphemous and offended Muslim religious sensitivities. In 1995, the same writer's *The Moor's Last Sigh* was similarly banned, with the accusation that it was aimed at Balasaheb Thackeray, the founder of the right-wing movement.

One of the characters in the novel was also considered to be named after India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. This was the situation with Taslima Nasrin's *Dwikhandito*, which was published in 2003 and was translated into English as *Lajja*. The West Bengal government considered Nasrin's work as promoting communal strife in the state, mistaking that it dealt with communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims during Bangladesh's independence struggle, in which India intervened on Bangladesh's behalf against Pakistan (1971).

In 1997, a Kerala lawyer named Sabu Thomas filed a lawsuit against Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things*, stating that Chapter 21 included obscene images that were offensive to Indian women's modesty. However, the list of such novels is not limited to these examples; it is extensive. As a result of various limits and spatial constraints, it is not feasible to go into every account that occurred earlier in depth. Now is the moment for Perumal

Murugan's Madhorubhagan, which Aniruddhan Vasudevan has translated into English as *One Part Woman*.

Murugan (1966---), novelist, scholar, and controversial writer (of course, he is not a contentious writer who is manufactured to be controversial by the so-called guardians of Hindu religious beliefs), writes books in Tamil, his native tongue. Murugan is the author of six novels, four collections of short stories, and four poetry anthologies. *Seasons of the Palm*, *Current Show*, and *One Part Woman* are the three novels that have been translated into English. They went on to win the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Translation Award for him (2016).

When the novel *One Part Woman* was first released in 2010, it sparked little controversy; nevertheless, after it was translated into English in 2013, and especially when right-wing political forces came to power at the national level in 2014, it became a hot topic. Aniruddhan Vasudevan (Tr), a fine scholar, performer, writer, translator, and social activist who graduated in anthropology from the University of Texas, Austin, is equally significant in crafting this book so as to merit with a prestigious award – Sahitya Akademi Translation Award, in addition to high imaginary power and creativity as evidenced by the unprecedented success of the novel *One Part Woman*.

The novel's writing and translation quality are complementary to one another, and they worked together like hands in glove to make the novel popular among literary circles, book readers, and the world's elite, those who savour and cherish the treasure of global literature. In actuality, the intercourse between a man and a woman outside of marriage depicted in the novel is only part of the tale; it is simply one piece of information thought to have occurred in 1930, and no one knew if it was true or not.

Murugan, the writer, has brought it to the stage as a stock to be added to his out-of-the-box thinking portfolio. He had no idea the issue would become

so contentious. However, it was converted into a political issue by a political organisation seeking political mileage only on the premise of Indian women's chastity, modesty, and dignity. As a writer and individual, you should have the right to live in peace and express yourself freely without harming the sentiments of others. It is a constitutional privilege that every person is entitled to. The writer was only exercising his constitutional freedom, but certain so-called Hinduthva organisations mistook it for serving their own vested interests.

Nothing, in fact, is taken seriously from the perspective of an Indian woman and her faithfulness, as such organisations believe, which has caused the writer to put a post on his Facebook page that reads like a suicide note. "It is written by P Murugan on behalf of Perumal Murugan, and he is not a god. "As a result, he will not be resurrected. Only P Murugan, a teacher, will live in the future..., Perumal Murugan, the author, is dead and will no longer publish." In addition to this, the writer has also discussed superstitions, middle-class woes, common man's understanding ability, social customs that once prevailed, farming culture and how a farmer shows his love for farming, and people's nagging at barren land.

For example, Nallayan is well-known in the novel as a wayward individual who does whatever he wants regardless of social ties. He begins to live with a lady who is not his wife ... Shouldn't a dried-up woman just shut up and sit around when I bring her home? She began to express her desire for a *taali* around her neck and a kid to live with me! I bought her jewellery and other trinkets and treated her like a princess. But it appears that none of this was enough for her. She was looking for a *taali*. At first, I assumed the yearning would pass quickly. She wouldn't let me touch her unless I tied a *taali* around her neck first.

That's why I smacked her, handed her the sari she was wearing, and chased her away (88). Indian Express, on the other hand, describes the work as: An evocative story about a childless couple that reminds us of the beauty of writing in Indian

languages... This is a tale with many dimensions; connections that are finely developed, honest and compelling dialogues and characters... Perumal Murugan has a particular voice; it is the voice of writing in Indian languages, rich with unerringly sketched characters, conversations, and settings that are extremely vivid.

As the story nears its sad yet redeeming end, the reader feels the misery of the characters trapped in a fate. It's because a brilliant writer has skillfully pulled us into the lives of people we've never met. Hinduthva believers should remember their holy scriptures, the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharath*, and *Bhagvat Geeta*, when debating the writings of creative individuals, believing that certain writers' words degrade the modesty and chastity of Indian women.

Writing is an art form, and no form of art should be prohibited. There is no joy or amusement in life if there is no art. Entertainment, pleasure, creativity, and wisdom are all obtained from art and imagination, respectively. It is not for the purpose of art that art is created; it is for the enjoyment and education of the public. Ponna is pushed to sleep with another man by her mother and mother-in-law in order to have a child of her own, and her family's purpose is: "The goal was to beget a kid, and she was willing to do everything to reach that goal," according to Murugan's writing (43). She isn't happy about it, since she adores her husband: "They might be together forever."

Despite the fact that they have been married for almost twelve years, they still spend all of their time together as if they were married yesterday or today. This is more than enough to see how much they care for each other. However, she is compelled to have sex with another man due to the circumstances. It is inevitable for a woman to do so because she is the one who carries on her husband's lineage by producing a male kid. Otherwise, society would look down on her and regard her as unlucky. She's also been compared to an animal that doesn't have her own calves on occasion.

*The Mahabharata*, an epic narrative, begins with the account of King Shanthanu and his wife Ganga. Shantanu and Ganga had a son, Prince Gangeya. Ganga agrees to marry Shanthanu on the condition that she be free to do anything she wants. It is a narrative that every Indian knows. After the birth of Gangeya, Ganga abandons Shantanu because he fails to keep the promise he made to his wife. Following that, he marries Sathyavati, who bears him two sons, Vichitra Veera and Chitranga, both of whom are killed in a conflict before they may have children. As a result, Shantanu's kingdom finds itself in a perilous heirless predicament.

Vyaasa, the son of Sathyavathi and the Rishi Parashara, has arrived. Gangeya was unable to marry during his lifetime because he promised his stepmother Sathyavathi that if his father Shanthanu retired or died, he would not marry and instead make her offspring the new rulers of the realm. To maintain the Bharata clan, Queen Sathyavati calls her son Vyasa and begs him to bless the spouses of her slain sons with offspring, with Bhishma's consent (Gangeya becomes Bhishma by swearing the firm pledge that he would not marry).

How can the book of Murugan be designated as a book to be prohibited, saying that it has degraded the character of the Indian lady, yet the *Mahabharata* is regarded to have no flaws? In both cases, the situation is the same. There in the *Mahabharata*, Sathyavathi took advantage of a chance, with her step-permission, son's to protect her husband's dynasty by inviting her son Vyasa, who was born to her from a pre-marital relationship with Rishi Parasara, to bless her two deceased sons' wives with children; here in the book of Murugan, Ponna is also asked and forced to have sex with someone she doesn't know in order to save the family of her husband Kali.

Ponna is willing to do it with her husband's approval. "I'll do it if you're okay with it," she tells her husband Kali. (117). She is not thinking about

her personality or character at this point. Her true motivation is to shield her husband from public humiliation and the nagging of others who criticise them for not having children.

The status of women is the same whether it is the period of the *Mahabharata* or the twenty-first century. They are willing to give up their personalities and faithfulness in order to maintain their husbands' clans, dynasties, and inheritance. As a result, there has been no shift in men's attitudes about women since then. Woman continues to be treated as a puppet in patriarchal culture, where male domination is unimaginable. Society stigmatises women who are willing to sacrifice their soul, heart, and body for the sake of their spouses, rather than applauding them.

Murugan's writings have so addressed both the condition of women in the twenty-first century and the customs that formerly existed in a specific location. Instead of seeing Murugan's *One Part Woman* via a narrow lens, it should be examined through the lens of art, creativity, and imagination. Otherwise, art in any form would perish, and constitutionally guaranteed liberties will be jeopardised

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