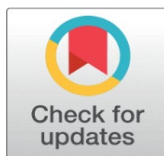
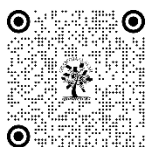


PERUMAL MURUGAN'S ONE PART WOMAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF VIOLENCE VIA RELIGIOUS RITUALS

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the idea that religion is a vehicle for patriarchy. It succeeds in giving religion the right to use violence against those who refuse to believe. Such a restrictive environment is the beginning of our ongoing enslavement because ethics have the ability to justify acts of violence resulting from religious convictions. The study looks into how Ponna, the main female heroine, gets sucked into a violent cycle while being promised a life of parental joy that goes beyond even the most heinous acts of violence and transforms her into a "complete woman." In the end, the narrative tries to show how she ends herself in "a theatre of the absurd," where maintaining hope appears to be an idealistic reality in this absurdist bandwagon world.

Keywords: Biological Essentialism, Religious Violence, Religious Ethics

One Part Woman by Perumal Murugan is the book being examined closely by critics. The novel's study suggests that Ponna, the main female character, becomes enmeshed in the complex web of religious ethics and patriarchal conventions. The deeper socio religious failing that drives the main character Ponna to psychological and sexual violence at the Tiruchengode carnival and local temples is presented in the story along with her bogus religious practices. The main conflict in the book is on the lives of Ponna and her husband Kali, who have been married for a decade and have never had a problem. The Portia tree that Kali's in-laws planted is a fertility symbol that points to Ponna's barren womb, which hasn't produced a child despite a bothersome twelve-year wait after their marriage. "She must have been thinking about how the tree had grown so lush and abundant in twelve years while not even a worm crawled in her womb" (*Woman* 8).

She is a victim of "Biological essentialism," a theory in which women are oppressed and repressed for not having children because they are forced to live with a fixed sense of who they are as women. Upon being married, she becomes even more envious of the cows she has, which she brought from her father's house "It delivered seven or eight calves, populating Kali's barn with its offspring" (9). She illustrates her plight by drawing a comparison between herself and the "mute creature" cow, who is more skilled at bringing young calves into Kali's barn. Similar to this, Ponna confides in one

of the women about her situation. "The plant I planted is flowering now, the tree I planted is bearing fruit, the calf I brought has grown and birthed many of its own, and the egg that I helped incubate has hatched a beautiful chick" (116). The thought of her unborn child haunts her constantly, but she manages to escape the psychological maze to some extent when she believes she has found the answer by calling on the local gods and goddesses. Prior to arriving at the ultimate destination, the Tiruchengode festival, Ponna and her spouse must take numerous steps to please the local deities. Their hopes for them are not realized by the politics of appeasement. They make weird invocations to the gods Murugan and Pavatha in an attempt to placate them, but they don't appear to understand the meaning of appeasement. They also knelt at Murugan's feet and begged for his blessings while lighting sixty lamps for sixty days. "The entire castor seed yield from that year became the oil in those lamps" (23). Ponna, with a lump in her throat states that "seeking a life, we have pawned our lives" (56).

She must go through the whole rigmarole of pointless rituals in order to obtain her desired goal. As a result, she and her spouse diligently pursue their gods through every avenue. This paper's main goal is to critically examine the events during the Tiruchengode carnival, where Ponna, the main female character, is forced to confront the greatest contradiction of her life. This ordinary Indian woman is trapped in a situation where her only thought is to have a kid through divine intervention. The author criticizes the meaningless religious rituals observed during the Tiruchengode festival. During this festival, not even the prostitutes' street business is thriving. The writer remarks: "That night there was no business in the prostitutes' street that was right in front of the temple at the foot of the hill" (98). The men at this festival belittle their own importance by saying "Who is going to look at us? Today, every woman is a prostitute" (98). She views the troubled men in the throng as gods who will grant her long-standing want to have a child, which she has been unable to conceive since she married Kali. That night, her mother tells her that every man is a deity, enlightening her about the existence of celestial forces. Here, a couple quotes are appropriate from Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish* "Religion thus can be construed as a patriarchy-infested, disciplinary institution that operates on the underside of the law. It reinforces and multiplies the asymmetry of power and undermines the limits that are traced around the law" (222-23).

Ponna will never forget the men who are dancing with sticks at the "Tiruchengode" carnival and who want to touch her. She will stop at nothing to satisfy her unsatisfied parental desires. She is plagued by the unfulfilled want, which appears more important and substantial than the desires that have previously been granted. It is believed that celestial creatures, including the three gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva and their consorts, remain in Tiruchengode on the fourteenth day of the festival. What more is there to expect from this festival for a lady like Ponna? She firmly believes in these superpowers and believes that this is a location where miraculous marvels occur. When the gods return to the hills on the fourteenth day, Ponna, her brother Muthu, and her husband decide to visit Tiruchengode. They embarked on the voyage with a strong religious conviction. "They carried on as if the dust was nothing but holy ash smearing itself on them" (151). She is certain that she is moving in the direction of the spiritual kingdom.

Ponna has arrived in a city so packed with people that it appears to be an ocean of faces. She is attempting to familiarize herself with the unexpected faces surrounding her. In her heart, Ponna believes that the guys in the throng are the three superpowers—Vishnu, Shiva, or Brahma. She attends the fair in order to risk her chastity, honor, and loyalty. These are all characteristics of her personality that will soon become obsolete. In actuality, she succumbs to the irony and conspiracy of events.

Ponna finds it extremely difficult to choose the correct god from the multitude of gods. She believes that the man in the throng who will initiate the action of pushing her right shoulder might be the one she needs. Ponna is undecided about giving up her virginity to that stranger. She expresses her disgust in a way that suggests she's almost ready to be one with them (219). That person's look makes her think of the boy she first fell in love with when she was younger. Ponna offers up prayers. "Please appear with a new face, one I am not familiar with (221). She prays more fervently "Come to me with a form I like" (67). As she joins the religious sphere, patriarchy casts a critical eye on her acts of devotion, driving her deeper into a pit of distrust and lust. Ponna enjoys the aesthetics of the crowded environment. Theater acts and dancers that move sensually and seductively to the beat of the drums captivate her.

The Oyilattam dancers, a group of twenty guys, draw her attention because they move with vigor and demonstrate that they are skilled performers. Ponna wants to join this group of energetic dancers since they perform such amazing acrobatics while they dance. "Looking at the dancers, she wondered if men were really such beautiful creatures." (37). She is confronted by a man with messy hair and a dhoti. She believes it to be her god. His "permanent grin" greets her, but it cannot provide her with the everlasting joy that draws her to this religiously significant carnival. She is aware that he is trying to get close to her. However, she had never, not even in her wildest dreams, considered being touched by

someone other than Kali. She feels that it goes against her moral compass. He brings her to North Chariot Street in order to formalize and establish a sexual relationship with her.

Additionally, he feeds her regional specialties. She gallops as though it were the divine meal that will give her divine energy, and he calls her "Selvi" and serves her food with his own hands. She feels "He has given me a new name so that no one around her gets suspicious" (225). She realizes that her lack of confidence is unsustainable and returns his advances. "He is my god," she says fervently. My role is to follow him wherever he leads. She curled up in his warmth like a sodden bird. For this sly mistress, the law of attraction comes full circle. Ponna is convinced that the act of copulation she would do with the deity would be a perfect replication of the metaphysical aspect of sexuality. According to Zizek "The becoming cultural of sexuality is thus not becoming cultural of nature, but the attempt to domesticate a properly unnatural excess of the meta-physical sexual passion" (50). She sort of sacrifices her virginity on the altar of a custom that is mistakenly believed to have religious justification.

The book also discusses how patriarchy, in collusion with religion, justifies violence against Ponna, the main female character. A critical analysis of the book reveals how a patriarchal society enforces demands on women that are immoral because they benefit the community in which the woman lives. Her psychological patriarchal setup is what forces her to sacrifice her own dignity on the altar of mother feelings. Ponna's desire to become a mother is encouraged by society, which is obviously patriarchal in its values and genders the desire for ancestry.

Ponna must deal with coercion in her marriage as well as in the alleged supernatural connection she experiences at the Tiruchengode festival. She is sexually exploited both at home and at the location of religious significance as a result of her act of hoping against hope. Ponna's feminist side is never able to speak up since she will stop at nothing to satisfy her maternal desires. Ironically, though, she is unable to conceive even after completing the last test in Tiruchengode.

Ponna is sexually exploited as a result of her mother and brother's lofty declarations and repeated promises; this exploitation is divine in origin, but it isn't so divine that it can satisfy her maternal desires. The base kind of lust boiling within these so-called gods can only satisfy their libidinal needs, and Ponna's can only be realised during the fair in Tiruchengode the next year, which would be conducted with the same passion and religiosity. Overall, the "drama of false appearances" is her phantasized metaphysical domain (*Agitating the Frame*: 67). Neither Indian feminist thought nor Western feminist theory address this particular form of violence. Rational patriarchal ideals justify the irrational brutality against Ponna. Her life spirals down a path of violence that isn't the same as physical violence. Considering the talks that came before, it is evident that Perumal expertly depicts in this book the subtleties of violence that patriarchal ideology has normalized.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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