

CULTURAL IMPACT AND PSYCHOANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE COUPLE IN PERUMAL MURGUGAN'S BOOK

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Abstract

Culture is depicted in many ways and India is known for its vast culture. Culture is the knowledge and identity of a particular group of people who live in certain place. This culture encompasses the profession which they do, the food they eat, the dress which is worn, the language which is spoken, the God and Goddess who are worshipped, the way they should live and their moral values. This culture has been passed on to generation after generation. Present day people often neglect to follow certain things which they think as superstitious belief. In those days that is not the case, people who denied to follow the cultural rule are humiliated and has been ignored from the society.

Perumal Murugan's One Part Woman gives us a vivid picture of how this cultural belief and moral values followed by the people of Kongunadu affects a childless couple. The novel projects the lives of the protagonists Kali and Ponna who are childless and in love even after twelve years of marriage. The author portrays the emotional sufferings, agony and humiliation caused to them by the society due to their childless stature. How their once beautiful love life has been torn apart for this sole reason alone.

Key Words: Culture, Psychoanalysis, sufferings, unconscious impulses, childless stature, society's impact, chariot festival

Introduction

The word, 'Psychoanalysis' is derived from the Greek word 'soul'+ 'analysis'. Freud developed the psychoanalysis theory which focuses on internal conflicts and unconscious impulses. Internal conflicts and unconscious impulses are caused due to a lot of sufferings that has been undergone by a person. They start doing things without their knowledge like a counter reaction for the treatment which they have undergone by the society.

Murugan depicts the character of the novel through the incidents that occurs around the couple. The protagonists Kali and Ponna are madly in love with each other even after twelve years of married life. Due to certain practises followed by the society in the name of culture their marriage life has been torn apart. Both Kali and Ponna has been humiliated by the society in various ways for this sole reasons alone.

Kali belongs to Gounder's community, their occupation is farming. This community considers son as their sole heir and pass on their property to them. They think that their life is meaningless without a male heir. Ponna just like her mother-in-law, is a strong woman who fights against the societies' cruelty. She gets married to Kali in an early age itself. In spite of their childless stature they both loved each other deeply. Their love for one another has grown so much in twelve years of married life. This love turns as a soothing medicine when they are subjected to the cruelty of the society. The people in the village were very sure that this couple will never have a child, some of their relatives even desired it so they can possess Kali and Ponna's property.

UNCONSCIOUS IMPULSES

There are certain incidents that shows how much of an impact the society has created in this young couple psychologically. People in the village reminds them of their childless stature in every chance they get to an extent were this couple unconsciously starts thinking of it in every single occasion even without a reminder from others. In the beginning of the novel Kali visits his in-laws house after a long time. He lies down under

the tree which he planted when he was newly married to Ponna twelve years ago. Ponna gives Kali some snacks to eat while returning into the house she looks at the tree with a frustrated sigh

“She must have been thinking about how the tree had grown so lush and abundant in twelve years while not even a worm had crawled in her womb. Every wretched thing reminded her of that lack” (One Part Woman: 8)

Ponna after her marriage fought with her father and took a cow which yielded many calf. Whenever it yields a calf Ponna will start crying unknowingly thinking about her childlessness.

‘I don’t have the boon that even this mute creature has been blessed with.’ (One Part Woman: 8)

SOCITIES IMPACT

Some people in the village like Chinnappa Gounder suggests Kali to marry another girl. They blame Ponna for not producing an heir. When Chinnappa Gounder comes to fetch the cow which Kali sells due to not birthing a calf, he says this indirectly within the hearing distance of Ponna itself.

“That is just how some cows are. No matter what you do, they never get pregnant. Just quietly change the cow. If you say yes, I can fetch you one right away.” (One Part Woman: 10)

Ponna gets angry and reacts instantly to his words by hitting the cow with a stick. Like him she also in an indirect way tells him to mind his own business.

“It has no sense of time and place. Shouldn’t it know I was picking up the dung? It keeps stepping on my foot. It’s just come to incur my wrath. Are you trying to get smart with me? I will cut off your tail you wretched creature!” (One Part Woman: 11)

Even though Chinnappa Gounder didn’t return to Kali’s house after that he didn’t leave his suggestion of getting Kali married to another girl. Even her own mother and her mother-in-law thought the same thing. Both the mothers’ plans to make Kali get married to another girl for the sole purpose of producing an heir. This affects Ponna deeply, at time like this it is Kali who consoles her 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)

Some of the young men in his village teased Kali for not having a child. They thought he was useless and tried showing sympathy towards Ponna in their own wicked ways. They wanted to seduce her so they placed bets on who will lure her first and it was all started by Karuppannan. Since he had a fair complexion than others he was so sure that he will seduce her easily. So he started stalking her day and night. Due to this Ponna stopped opening the door at midnight even for Kali if he ever comes from barnyard. One night she tells Kali about this

“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)

Most of the people in the village were cruel to them even the elderly people. Since they were childless, people demanded them to be submissive. They expected them not to react to the cruel ways to which they have been subjected. If the couple reacts they are treated even worse than before and everyone blames the couple without questioning who is at fault. Ponna is a kind woman and the people around her takes advantage of this, at the same time if anything goes wrong they don’t hesitate to blame it on Ponna. These incidents shows that.

Kali’s relatives always had an eye on his property thinking that it will one day belong to them due to his childlessness. So his second uncle’s wife sends her son Kadhirvel to stay with them time to time, just to remind them indirectly that their property can be transferred to her son after their death. This Kadhirvel is a

hyper-active boy who gets injured while playing. As soon as his mother hears this she comes to Ponna's house and fights with her saying.

"She would know only if she had a child of her own! She has taken such good care that my boy's head is broken. Would any mother allow that to happen?

Well, if you know the blessing of having a child, why don't you keep him to yourself? Why send him here?" (One Part Woman: 61 -62)

Even though she reacts immediately she is hurt by the act. Even the elderly took advantage of her kindness and did the same. Pottupatti is a great example for this. Ponna goes to the fair with her once where she buys some things but Pottupatti has no money to do so. Not to show her poverty state to Ponna, and to make her feel better she 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 so miserly for? A woman without husband and an inheritance without an heir are the same, they say." (One Part Woman: 63)

Ponna instantly reacts to her claim by saying:

"You and your husband had no control and you were producing babies even when you were forty five. You divided your land among them. Do any of your sons work the land now? Didn't it go as bad as not having heirs? You don't even have anyone to give you some money to go to the fair. You don't have money to buy yourself some puffed rice. What have you accomplished by bearing children?" (One Part Woman: 63 -64).

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).

This hurt Ponna deeply to an extent were she stopped speaking to Sarasa and avoided her children for some time. There was another situation in which she was reminded of her barren status. There was a man called Thangavel, Ponna helped his wife by carrying seeds to his field because his wife suffered from leg pain. When his field didn't yield properly that year his wife blamed Ponna for it. They believed that her barren state only caused that. Ponna answered their accusation by saying:

"You said you were in severe leg pain and begged me to go. That's why I carried the seeds. Do you think I am obliged to go and work in your field? I might be barren, but nothing I have touched has ever withered. The plant I panted 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... there is nothing I have touched that has not flourished. Anything sowed in a dry land will go waste, no matter who helps in carrying the seeds. If you – wife and husband - has taken better care of the land, maybe it would have all grown" (One Part Woman: 115 - 116).

It was not only Ponna who was taunted, insulted and humiliated by the society, Kali also went through the same problem in various situations to an extent were he isolated himself from other people and started spending time in his barnyard to avoid everyone. There are few situations in the novel where this can be seen. During festival seasons Kali will always spend time with his friends. He will finish his work fast and will run to spend time with them, he can easily adapt to the dance moves which the dancers do. One time everyone teased Murugesan for his dance moves along with Kali, when the teasing became unbearable he turned his rage towards an unsuspecting Kali.

"Dey!" he fumed. 'Work is not about this. Work is about this,' and he made a lewd gesture, lifting two fingers of his left hand and inserting the index finger of his right hand between them. 'Tell me, now, who looks like a doll and works like a corpse?'" (One Part Woman: 82)

Even though no one laughed or reacted in any way after hearing this Kali felt ashamed. He didn't want to stand there with the others anymore so he left the place and stopped going there during festival seasons.

Kali and his friends always go and drink together whenever a fresh set of Muniyannan's arrack arrives. One day Kali along with his friend Subramani went to drink at that time he also insulted Kali by saying

"It is not enough if the water you take in is great, the water you send out should be top-class too." (One Part Woman: 83)

His friends insulted him at every chance they get. They nicknamed him 'the impotent one'. Even though Kali didn't show his emotions like Ponna he was hurt deeply. Due to all this he stopped hanging out with them and started spending his time in barnyard talking to the animals which he possessed. This shows how he isolated himself from the outside world and how he preferred the company of animals over human beings.

Cultural Impact

Murugan through his novel unfolds the impact that this ancient culture causes the people in the society. Nallupayyan uncle is a relative of Kali. He also undergoes the same kind of treatment from the society. Since he is unmarried and has no children his brothers tries to possess his property too saying there is no need for him to have property since he has no heir to pass on it. They go as far as setting up their own wife to seduce uncle Nallupayyan to get a hold of his property. But uncle Nallupayyan escapes their traps even though he was seen as a womaniser by the villagers. There are many situation where he shows that he has more moral values than the villagers. Through this it can be seen how an individual irrespective of their gender has been treated by their own family members. How this culture which has been created by humans affects another human being to an extent where he decides to take his own life.

Unlike uncle Nallupayyan who doesn't care about the opinion of the society Kali and Ponna lets it affect them to a point where they make crucial mistakes which affects their relationship and life. The couple prayed to various deities and offered penances but nothing changed. If someone said about a new deity they prayed to that deity also thinking that at least this God will bless them with a child. They were so desperate for a child to an extent were they never questioned any of these rituals. Even though the couple were very happy in their marriage life without a child, due to the societies' cruelty they wanted one. It is not for their sake that they wanted a baby, rather to stop the cruelty which they have to undergo every day. Thinking that its Ponna's fault for not conceiving a child Kali's mother along with Ponna's mother plans to make Kali get married to another girl for the sole purpose of producing an heir. This act of her own mother hurt Ponna deeply. Even though she desperately wanted a child she was not willing to share her husband with another woman. In these kinds of situations Kali consoles Ponna by saying that they don't need a baby when they love each other very deeply. But Ponna was not satisfied by this.

According to their culture, a childless woman can attend the fourteenth day of the chariot festival in hope of conceiving a child. On that day a childless woman can have physical relationship with any man who attends the festival without any consequences. Because according to their culture the men who attends the festival on that day are Gods and the child who is born out of that relationship is called as 'God given child'. Ponna's family and her mother-in-law wanted her to attend the fourteenth day chariot festival. Kali was against this idea but he didn't show it outwardly, he wanted to see how Ponna reacts when she hears this.

"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." (One Part Woman: 108)

This unexpected answer shocks Kali. He was convinced that all women are evil and they wants to ruin his life. He wants to tell her not to go but he doesn't speak anything. He wants her to understand his thoughts without expressing it. Ponna wanted a child because she wants her husband to be like he was before their marriage. She wants him to come out of his isolation and mingle with everyone in the village without being insulted due to their childless stature. She wants them to be accepted by the society. She wants them to be treated like every other human being in that village. She wants to erase 'the impotent one' nickname which has been given to Kali but all these thoughts backfires on her. Without communicating with one another

both of them thinks that their spouse will understand their thoughts and emotions. This ultimately leads to problems which creates an invisible barrier between them which cannot be erased easily.

Ponna encouraged by her family members and mother-in-law attends the 14th day of chariot festival unknown of their plot. Since the couple didn't discuss about Ponna attending the chariot festival in detail she attends it by thinking that Kali has approved of it. Her mother and brother lies to her by saying that Kali approves it. But Kali never agreed to it. By trying to fix the couple's childless stature by believing and following ancient religious culture the family members together destroyed a beautiful relationship. When Kali finds out that Ponna has went to attend the festival along with the support of the family members he becomes like a man who got possessed. 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....'" (One Part Woman: 239 - 240)

Even though Kali shouts and hurts himself the readers can feel the pain, hurt and betrayal caused to him by the society and his family in the name of culture. He drinks a full bottle of arrack goes to his barnyard kicks his dogs which greets him. He decides to kill himself in the barnyard to get revenge on Ponna.

Conclusion

Ardhanareeswara is the title of this novel in Tamil which represents the idol of Lord Siva who has given his left half of the body to his wife Parvathi to prove that they are both equals. In Tiruchengode there is a temple called Ardhanareeswara on whom the village people has great faith. Ancient religious culture is followed here.

From the beginning of the novel Murugan gives us a vivid picture of the relationship between the couples. After facing so much humiliation from the society they are not ready to let one another go. Their love for each other has only increased rather than decreasing. They desperately need a child more for the sake of community rather than themselves. Their childless stature has impacted them psychologically to an extent were even a small thing unconsciously reminds them of it. Even if they want to overcome the problem by supporting each other the society didn't let them do it. Moreover they were not a strong character like uncle Nallupayyan who didn't care or follow the cultural rules placed by the villagers. He didn't let them bully him, if they tried to corner him he fought back and gave the bullies double the amount of torment which he received. Due to this everyone either ignored him or acted like he didn't exist itself. If Kali and Ponna have followed his footsteps, their relationship might have survived.

They unconsciously let the villagers hurt them. If they had been like uncle Nallupayyan maybe they would have not destroyed what they had. Or if the society has left them alone instead of tormenting them they would have led a lovely peaceful life.

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