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## **Analysis of How a Woman is Subordinated in the Web of Culture and Customs in Perumal Murugan's '*One Part Woman*'**

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### **Abstract:**

The idea of feminism is that all genders should have equal rights and opportunities. Feminism seeks to have the same benefits of all the resources that are otherwise easily obtainable for men. The novel talks about a childless husband and wife namely Kali and Ponna. The couple begins their life with happiness and hopes, but their inability to give birth to a child drains their happiness. This article analysis how a woman is subordinated in the web of culture and customs and fails to reclaim her position. Ponna is seen has a barren woman by the society and she is also insulted and ignored by them. Ponna is subordinated as the culture and customs turn against her and name her as a barren woman. She becomes the victim and faces unbearable religious brutality.

**Keywords:** feminism, subordination of women, religious brutality.

Perumal Murugan is one of the prolific writers of India who emerged from Tamil Nadu. He is a writer and orator in Tamil literature who works in Government arts and Science College in Tamil Nadu. He has gained huge admiration for his works that include poems, short stories and fiction. He writes fundamentally in Tamil and many of his works are translated into English. His fictions *One Part Woman* and *The Story of a Goat* are longlisted for National Book award for translated literature. His novel *One Part Woman* received the dignified ILF Samanvay Bhasha Samman for writing in Indian languages and also won translation prize from India's National academy of letters. His works show that he is against social orders based on race and casteism. *One Part Woman* was translated into English by Aniruddhan Vasudevan.

The idea of feminism is that all genders should have equal rights and opportunities. The chief aim of feminism movement is to pursue equality and justice for women in every spare of life and to create equal opportunities. Feminism seeks to have the same benefits of all the resources that are otherwise easily obtainable for men. The basic idea behind the feminist movement is that since the origin of human civilization women have been submissive and have been provided with secondary social positions compared

with men. This article is going to analysis how a woman is subordinated in the web of culture and customs and fails to reclaim her position.

The novel talks about a childless husband and wife namely Kali and Ponna. The novel is set in the interior village of Tamilnadu called Tiruchengodu during the British period. The couple begins their life with happiness and hopes, but their inability to give birth to a child drains their happiness. The couple are unable to conceive and the family is much anxious about their childlessness. The social order exhausted all their hopes and dreams about their life. The couple try every possible way to have a child. They do thousands of offerings and prayers to various temples and even walk around a mountain believing to attain parenthood.

Ponna is seen as a barren woman by the society and she is also insulted and ignored by them. While the community excludes Ponna for not attaining her motherhood, the male counterpart is encouraged to have a second marriage. For a woman, the only and the unique element of life is to attain her motherhood. She is considered worthless when she fails to attain motherhood. Ponna is also trapped in such a web of culture and customs formed by friends and family relatives. They encourage Kali to get a second marriage, specifying it is only Ponna's fault. She even accepts to intake bitter medicines, advised by her mother-in-law, to come out of her childlessness. She is compared with a cow which is unable to yield a calf: "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" (Murugan14). Ponna is named as bad luck and is persistently ridiculed by her surroundings. The novel has an instance when the son of Kadhiravel gets injured, his mother blames Ponna in a regrettable manner: "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?"( Murugan 15).

The couple are guided to participate in a local temple festival after having faced the criticism of the society for their twelve years of childlessness. The couple is advised to follow an extraordinary plan to participate in a fourteen days chariot festival in a local temple. During the festival, all men are viewed as God. The rules of wedding are relaxed so that consensual sex between unmarried men and women is permitted. The concept devastate life of the couple as Ponna screams " if you want me to go for the sake of this wretched child, i will"(86). The family and the relatives create too much pressure on the women for she has to bear so that their child has to fall heir to their properties. The novel ends as Ponna visits the festival. This visit brings falsity to the affection and love of the couple.

Ponna is subordinated as the culture and customs turn against her and name her as a barren woman. She becomes the victim and faces unbearable religious brutality. She becomes the victim of intolerable superstitious beliefs. Simone De Beauvoir states: "individuals are not to be blamed for the failure of marriage" (497). The novel explores the subordination of women under

the shadow of religious practices and superstitious beliefs. While couple suffers from the opinion and criticism of the society, the woman is victimized as the husband is advised to have a second marriage. This shows the gender hierarchy constructed by the social order. This social cultural construction affects the individual. As oppressed individuals due to this social order, women are not able to attain their own potential. As an academician, the researcher seeks a social transformation where society changes this prejudice towards women. Social norms, culture, tradition, language and customs should not reflect the belief that one is superior to another.

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