



Breaking the Stigma of Infertility and Cultural Beliefs Pertaining to *One Part Woman*

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Abstract

This article delves into the poignant narrative of breaking the stigma of infertility, with a special focus on the cultural beliefs of *One Part Woman*, penned by Perumal Murugan. Perumal Murugan is a renowned Indian Author known for exploring tradition and modernity in south India's cultural tapestry. Originally written in Tamil named as *Mathorupagan*, Translated by *Aniruddhan Vasudevan*. Murugan's writings illuminate the persistent societal pressures faced by couples grappling with infertility in an age when modernity coexists with age-old traditions. This exploration ventures into the intersection of gender and infertility, shedding light on the silent struggles faced by women, the custodians of culture and hope. Through the lens of Murugan's perspective, the characters embark on a journey to unveil the courage it takes to break the silence surrounding infertility, challenging patterns of cultural beliefs that have endured for generations. Cultural myth of infertility takes centre stage, unveiling the societal taboos that surround this sensitive issue. Ultimately, it calls for a border acceptance of diverse paths to parenthood, emphasizing that the essence of parental love transcends biological origins, echoing the timeless human quest for family and belonging.

Keywords: Infertility, Cultural beliefs, Societal pressure, Tradition and parenthood.

Introduction

One Part Woman is a Tamil novel written by Indian writer Perumal Murugan titled "*Mathorupagan*". Perumal Murugan is the star of contemporary Tamil literature. An award-winning writer, poet and scholar. *One part woman* Initially published in 2010, it was later translated into English by Aniruddhan Vasudevan. Aniruddhan Vasudevan's idiomatic translation preserves the mood of the original, and serves as a constant linguistic reminder that, as readers in English, we are but visitors to this realistic pre-independence Tamil world. Set during the colonial era in the Southern state of Tamil Nadu in India, it deals with the social stigma that a married couple faces due to their childlessness, and the lengths they go to conceive.

Set against the backdrop of 1940s Tamil Nadu, this novel unravels the heart-wrenching tale of Ponna and Kali, a farming couple whose joy is tainted by their inability to conceive. Ponna, the epitome of a devoted wife in the eyes of Tamil society, and Kali, driven by an intense desire rather than love, grapple with the cruel label of "barren" that society places upon Ponna (Murugan 62). Their childless twelve-year journey is marked by countless temple visits, fervent prayers, and offerings in search of a solution. The narrative masterfully escalates the frenzied religious celebration, all while reflecting the complexities of the society it portrays. Perumal Murugan's profound grasp of Tamil language intricacies lays bare this intricate societal organism. It unveils the subtle dual meanings in men's conversations with Kali, where they assert their masculinity while subtly ridiculing him. Women, confined but empowered by the freedom of speech, use it to assert their dominance over one another. Yet, it's the unrelenting judgment and sharp caste-based prejudices of a patriarchal society that alienate this longing couple, yearning to be just like any other. (web)

In our rapidly evolving world, a persisting and deeply ingrained stigma surrounds infertility, significantly impacting one-part women, whose worth is sometimes unjustly tied to their ability to conceive. Despite the progress in societal norms, the belief in traditional values continues to cast a shadow on these women, placing undue pressure on their self-esteem and emotional well-being. This paradox between traditional beliefs and modern values underscores the complexity of societal expectations around fertility, particularly for one-part women who often bear the brunt of judgment and social scrutiny. The infertility stigma not only isolates many one-part women but also silences their struggles due to fear of judgment, perpetuating their emotional burden. Yet, as we confront this issue in the modern era, it is essential to acknowledge the urgency of change. Initiatives promoting open dialogue and challenging societal expectations, especially concerning one-part women, are crucial to breaking this silence. By offering unwavering support and understanding, we can work towards a future where the worth of one-part women, and all individuals, is not defined by their reproductive capabilities but by their capacity to love, contribute, and thrive in a compassionate and inclusive society. This article delves into the complex web of societal pressure, exploring the traditional norms and cultural expectations.

Infertility: A Journey of Resilience

In a world where individual choices are celebrated and societal norms continue to evolve, there remains an enduring and often unspoken expectation placed upon couples dealing with infertility: the pressure to have children.

Infertility, while presenting unique challenges, is a journey marked by resilience and unwavering determination. For couples seeking to expand their family, the path to parenthood may take unexpected turns, and that's perfectly normal. In today's diverse world, family planning is a deeply personal choice, and infertility is just one part of that journey. It's essential to recognize that many couples, despite facing fertility issues, continue to lead fulfilling lives filled with love, support, and meaningful connections. In the article "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food" Suganya et al. says that "Empathy is the ability to understand and react to the other's emotional suffering" (Suganya et al. 886). Society is gradually evolving to embrace the diversity of family structures and choices, allowing couples to pursue parenthood on their terms. Infertility, though it may present hurdles, does not define the worth or happiness of a couple. It's a testament to the resilience of individuals who navigate this path with courage and grace, contributing to the beautiful tapestry of human experiences.

Cultural Expectations, Gender Roles, and the Infertility Struggle

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, cultural traditions and gender roles have historically woven a narrative around parenthood. However, the journey through this ever-transforming world, these threads of expectation find themselves entangled with the enigma of uncertainty. In the article "Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo", the author Suganya et al. states that "the women are expected to be polite, nurturing and meek in the society" (Suganya et al. 879). Cultural beliefs, deeply embedded in our societies, have often cast women as the primary caregivers and mothers, framing motherhood as a pivotal identity. But within this complex narrative, couples grapple with the intricate dance of uncertainty, especially when facing infertility.

Yet, amidst the dance, a profound shift is occurring. Society is beginning to recognize that fulfilment can emerge from myriad sources. Couples are emerging as trailblazers, not just as parents, but as life partners who uncover joy in their love, support, and shared dreams. The challenge of traditional norms, opens doors to the countless avenues leading to happiness, allowing the kaleidoscope of human experiences to radiate its intricate beauty. In this evolving story, the richness of life's tapestry finds its essence, with each thread telling a story of its own.

Conclusion

In the pages of Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* the story has journeyed through the intricate layers of tradition, societal expectations, and the profound struggles of infertility. This novel, born from the rich tapestry of South India's cultural heritage, invites us to question age-old beliefs and embrace the diversity of human experiences. As the society stands at the intersection of tradition and modernity, it's important to recognize that

the worth of individuals, particularly women, is not bound by their ability to conceive. At the intersection of tradition and modernity, a profound realization emerges: a person's intrinsic value, particularly that of women, should never be tethered to their reproductive capabilities. The article underscores that infertility is not merely a physical challenge but a test of one's resilience and unwavering determination. It unveils a realm where the bonds of love and support transcend the confines of biology, redefining the essence of family and belonging.

Infertility is a journey marked by resilience and unwavering determination, where love and support transcend biological origins. The myth of infertility may cast shadows, but it is our shared humanity that shines brightly, echoing the timeless quest for family and belonging. The article embarks on an extraordinary journey through the multi-layered tapestry of tradition, societal expectations, and the heart-wrenching struggles of infertility. Though infertility may cast shadows of despair, it is within these shadows that the brilliance of our shared humanity shines most resplendently. Through adversity, the ageless pursuit of family and a sense of belonging unites us all, transcending cultural divides and underscoring the boundless capacity for empathy and compassion.

In essence, *One Part Woman* stands as a poignant reflection of life's intricacies, encouraging us to question preconceived notions and embrace the indomitable spirit of the human experience. It is a testament to the enduring strength of the human heart and the unwavering commitment to seek purpose and fulfilment, even amid life's most arduous trials.

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