

# Female Body as the ‘Other’: Rituals and Biotechnical approach using Perumal Murugan’s *One Part Woman* and *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women*

Azeena Parveen A<sup>1</sup>, Vineeth Radhakrishnan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur – Kelambakkam Road, Chennai – 600127, Tamil Nadu, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur – Kelambakkam Road, Chennai – 600127, Tamil Nadu, India

Correspondence: Vineeth Radhakrishnan, Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur – Kelambakkam Road, Chennai – 600127, Tamil Nadu, India.

Received: January 1, 2023

Accepted: February 20, 2023

Online Published: February 22, 2023

doi:10.11114/smc.v11i2.5941

URL: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i2.5941>

## Abstract

The article attempts to show how women’s identities are restricted to the female body, and its procreative function and also highlights the dangerous rituals such as female infanticide. With a focus on the societal demands placed on the female body, this study aims to focus on how much society intrudes into a person's private life. The article also offers a thorough examination using the novel *One Part Woman* (2018) and the movie *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003) of how the objectification of women has entered our culture and become embedded in our way of thinking, causing us to view the female body as an inanimate object that must adhere to predefined gender stereotypes. It investigates how infertility is linked with the curse and performance of rituals takes place.

Infertility is no longer viewed as a problem owing to advances in biotechnology, which have been particularly focused on the reproductive area. However, cultural customs and beliefs disregard the medical approach, while many harsh rituals are conducted in the hope of causing fertility. The research paper focuses on how cultural behaviours and rituals prevent women from using a medical anthropology perspective. The study piece illustrates the sinister rituals that are practised and how women are objectified by using *One Part Woman* (2018) and *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003).

**Keywords:** female body, sexuality, cultural beliefs, rituals, biomedicine, biocapitalism

## 1. Introduction

An individual's behaviour is often influenced by cultural practises that have produced a set of beliefs that are coercively enforced. With the help of these concepts, gender norms are created, and social and cultural standards are established based on an individual's sexual orientation. When it comes to distributing power, sexuality assumes the position of the decisive factor. “Motherhood, in a word, serves critical cultural functions in India’s hierarchical society – stratified by gender, caste, and class – that are masked by psychological or sentimental discourses...Indian women are keenly aware that their reproductive capacities are an important source of power” (Riessman, 2000, p.112). It shows how motherhood is associated with pride and power culturally. The way that cultural beliefs are structured separates men and women while ignoring the homosexual part and viewing it as a sin. Because women are viewed as the ‘other’ in Indian rituals and cultural concepts, men are regarded as superior to them.

## 2. Methodology

This paper aims to explore how cultural norms are used to mould the female body and how this limits the development of biotechnology. Furthermore, it examines how history is being redefined from the perspective of those who have experienced trauma, such as Ponna in *One Part Woman* (2018) and Kalki from *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003), whose experiences accord with the trauma theory put forward by Cathy Caruth. In her prose “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History” (1991) Cathy Caruth argues “Through the notion of trauma...we can understand that a rethinking of reference is not aimed at eliminating history, but at resituating it in our understanding, that is, of precisely permitting *history* to arise where *immediate understanding* may not” (Cathy, 1991, p. 182). As Cathy

Caruth has noted, cultural beliefs and practises can aid in understanding the past through trauma. The trauma that Kalki experiences in *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003), in which her emotions are ignored and she is forced to have unemotional sex with several men, without her will, illustrates the predetermined opine of women in the male-centred society. Additionally, the tradition of female infanticide that is depicted in the film has its roots in trauma.

Whereas Ponna in *One Part Woman* (2018) highlights the traditional values rooted in history through the rituals she performs to bear a child. Since Ponna and her husband Kali have been without a child for twelve years, Ponna was being accused of infertility and was forced to engage in many rituals as a result. Some of those rites were potentially fatal or dangerous, such as going around a rock in a mountain that may kill Ponna. She was subjected to trauma as a result of the elders' suggestions, which drove her to the point where she became pregnant, illustrating the harmful customs that were upheld in the name of 'culture'. Belief systems fix the notion that women are only complete when they give birth to a child. That was something Kalki and Ponna both had to do. When Kalki's family found out she was expecting a child, they rejoiced; this demonstrates that only a child can fulfil and honour a woman. Ponna, who was unable to live up to social norms and expectations, is suffering from anguish since she is childless. The fact that Ponna was the only one being questioned and Kali was made out to be the victim of Ponna's infertility is indicative of the rigid gender roles. Judith Butler's theory contends that gender and sexuality are performed and not fixed. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" (1990) in which Butler says, "to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to a historical idea of 'woman,' to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to a historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project" (quoted in Case, 1990, p.273). It demonstrates how the sources chosen reflect culture's restrictive idea of the human body. This societal view of the human body is in contrast to what Butler suggests. She opines that the concept of gender should be determined depending on the performance of an individual. But in both Ponna and Kalki's case, it is intended to be contained solely within the framework established by society.

The focus of the paper is on how these customs, cultural traditions, and beliefs operate as an obstacle to the biotechnology that has made everything possible. Artificial insemination, surrogacy, and other byproducts of biotechnology have all helped people deal with the trauma caused by infertility. However, this paper establishes the argument that these developments were sparked by cultural practises by using the lives of Kalki and Ponna as examples. Despite not being sent to the hospital, Kalki is tortured and her body is exploited, and Ponna was forced to follow rites instructed by the elders rather than receiving medical attention for her pregnancy problem. The paper uses the theory of Biocapitalism to also show the anxiety created by the biotechnology. Biomedicine has fallen out of favour as a result of biocapitalism, which has unease among numerous cultural facets. Biotechnology development is also constrained by biocapitalism. Older people, in the southern part of India, who strongly adhere to these cultural ideals are expressing their uneasiness towards biotechnology because they believe it renders the body impure. Thus, by merging theories like trauma theory, Judith Butler's Performative Acts and Gender Constitution, and biocapitalism, the study focuses on and discusses how the female body is seen to be the "Other" and the constraint towards biotechnology established by the cultural practises.

### 3. Women as 'Other'

Women are considered inferior societal members when there is gender inequality in the community. "The very concept of 'woman', is a male concept: woman is always 'other' because the male is the 'seer': he is the subject and she the object – the meaning of what it is to be a woman is given by men" (Beauvoir, 2018). In a patriarchal society, women are expected to look no further than what is demanded of them. The majority of people maintain the view that women are born to take care of domestic responsibilities, satisfy the sexual demands of men, and bear children. Although numerous steps have been taken to empower women and break free from the male-defined vision of the world, they still work very hard to compete on an equal platform with men in a variety of fields. Women's conditions have improved more recently than in the past, yet they have not entirely shifted. The patriarchal society is blind to the struggles of the women community because of the improved position of women. Even though the financial situation of women has changed as more women choose to work to meet their necessities, they are still bound by the social norms that require them to prioritise the needs of society first.

#### 3.1 Image of Body

The sexual needs of their male partners are expected of them as a duty by certain males who view women as objects of sexual fulfilment. The women's feelings or emotions, however, are completely wiped off as a result of being forced to do so, making them lifeless objects. Immanuel Kant discusses such bodily abuse that reduces a person to an object in his writings. He opines, "sexual love makes of the loved person an Object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry" (Kant, 1963, p.163). The objectification of a woman's body is shown in Manish Jha's 2003 film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women*. A woman is sold by her father to marry five sons in exchange for five lakh rupees in the dystopian hamlet setting of the movie since there are no

women in the community due to female infanticide. The film begins by revealing the repressed libidinal impulses of the men. A man dresses up as woman for a stage performance in the movie because of the lack of women as the result of female infanticide. The female body is entirely fetishized and shown as an object of pleasure. The character is introduced with a disclaimer to the audience on the stage, "Innocent and virginal Princess Pinky will step onto this stage to electrify you. Before she strike you like a bolt of lightning hold on to your pyjamas. In the last show many people dropped their pajamas." (Jha, 2003, 00:06:46 – 00:07:16). In such a social attitude, an innocent girl Kalki gets trapped and torn apart violently for her body. Her 'husbands' use her as an object to vent their concupiscence. Without even taking her opinion into account, they take turns. They shamelessly discuss,

Alright brothers, today is the first of the month and the month is December. The first day of our married life right? We are five, Kalki is one. So we will have to divide the dates. Since I am the eldest brother I will do the inauguration. Why do you laugh? So, Thursday is mine. Friday goes to Sailesh.

No...no...I observe a fast on Friday.

Okay then Friday goes to Brijesh. And Saturday to Sailesh. All right?

Yes, this is fine.

And Sunday to Lokesh. Monday to Sooraj. That's it.

The only problem is there are still two remaining days in a week. And we have paid so much money. It would be doing an injustice to her if she has to sleep alone.

Big brother since you are the eldest you take the extra two days.

Idiots! Have you ever thought of your father? What haven't I done for you? After your mother died...I have been both your father and mother. But you have no kindness, no love for me? Not concerned about your father at all! I gave five hundred thousand and five cows so you would get married. And you.

What is it that you want? (Jha, 2003, 00:38:10-00:40:17).

Nobody in the family bothers to inquire about her needs, and her emotional requirements are not taken into account. The family's youngest son, in contrast to the others, respects and loves her. As she develops a sense of disgust with her men who try to own her body, except the youngest brother for whom Kalki eventually falls. "Whenever we go to sleep with her, she lies like a corpse" (Jha, 2003, 00:56:41-45 ) worries the brothers and their father a lot. When Kalki does not reciprocate with her husbands in bed except the one she loves, infuriates the brothers. The entire family executes his murder and covers it up. Frightened Kalki decided to run out of the house. Once when she reported the immoral behaviour of her father-in-law to her father, Kalki's father visits her and receives another lakh from the father-in-law since he believes it is improper for his daughter to have sex with another person without being paid. This demonstrates how her body is seen as a sexual object. Her father before leaving the house proudly shows off himself and what he has earned by selling his daughter to a bunch of lustful men, he says, "Don't worry. Everything will be fine. And stop crying like a child. I've spoken to your father-in-law. The Bastard was sleeping with you without paying me a penny" (Jha, 2003, 01:03:59-01:04:17). As a result, she was beaten and tortured by her 'husbands'. "How dare you write to your father? ...that my father sleeps with you? So, we have to pay a hundred thousand rupees to your father?! I'll break your hands? Tell me shall I break your hand? Your father is a pimp! He took one hundred thousand." (Jha, 2003, 01:05:38-01:06:02 ). This demonstrates how she was humiliated and less regarded as a living being. For them, she is just perceived as an object to fulfill their bodily requirements. Because her father sold her body for five lakhs, the men in the movie either eschew or don't care about Kalki's emotional side. Women are thought to have two main goals in life: to have sexual pleasure and have children. When her father visited her after receiving the letter from Kalki, he did not even inquire about her health; instead, he only wished her luck in becoming a mother. "Alright my child. I'll take your leave. Sit, sit. No need to get up. Sit. May you prosper and with god's blessings become the mother of a hundred sons" (Jha, 2003, 01:04:55-01:05:08).

Being forced to have sex with each family member causes the main character, Kalki, distress. She is startled when, on the day of her wedding, her father-in-law takes advantage of her for his sexual pleasure. Kalki believes that her father won't be able to help her with this either, so she makes an effort to seek the assistance of the young servant Raghu. She opens up to Raghu, "I want to go. I want to go away from here. Please take me away from here. Take me away from here. But, where? Anywhere, just take me away from here Raghu. I cannot live here anymore, I want to go my home Raghu, to my home. I want to go to my home" (Jha, 2003, 01:06:06-01:06:39).

Her expression as she prepares to leave the house reveals her emotional exhaustion and sexual exploitation; the home had felt like a prison to her and every moment had caused her to suffer. As Kalki tries to escape the horrific situation, she is thrashed and imprisoned in the cowshed.

Every night through the window in the cow shed, other neighbourhood men access her for their sex requirements. As retaliation for Raghu's death, who was murdered by Kalki's family as he assisted Kalki in escaping, Kalki is used by a number of men throughout the film. Later, it was discovered to be a caste issue where Kalki is used as the prey. This act demonstrates how the female body is thoroughly objectified when Raghu's family broke through the cowshed window and raped her one by one.

Wait. We've got our revenge. I'm Raghu's uncle. Because of you he was killed.

You take your turn. Go...go... You mad man! Come on let's go...(Jha, 2003, 01:10:12-01:11:25)

...enough! We will not tolerate this anymore. For centuries we have suffered silently. Not anymore. We want our revenge now. We want revenge even if it costs me my life. We need all your support. We want revenge. Revenge! We want revenge. Revenge! (Jha, 2003, 01:13:48-01:14:14)

...Kalki has become impure in our eyes. She ran away from our house and that too with a boy from the low caste (Jha, 2003, 01:14:40-57).

Kalki is shown lying on the ground like a corpse after being assaulted by numerous guys, which contributes to the film's murky atmosphere. Men continue to come for sex and use her body like a piece of meat even if she is starved. The way that society treats her cruelly is a reflection of how it perceives women as objects.

The value of motherhood and the respect it brings to women influence how they are regarded. When Kalki becomes pregnant in the film, she is carried back from the cowshed and treated with dignity befitting a queen. However, even under such circumstances, controversy arises over who assumes the fatherly position. In Kalki's life, every decision is taken by a third person, and not even the chance for an opinion is granted.

Congratulations! Kalki is pregnant. Her horoscope says she will give birth to a beautiful baby boy. Come on everybody. Celebrate. So, whose name do I fill in as the father of the boy?

Mine...mine.

Hey what do you mean? I am the boy's father.

Have you lost it? I'm the father of the child. Your sperm must be floating in the toilet bowl.

Your brain is in your arse! I'll thrash you mercilessly.

Stop talking non-sense. Who slept with her the first night? So, I'm the father of the boy.

No more arguments on that! Congratulations on being the father of a boy" (Manish Jha, 2003, 01:19:45-01:20:38).

The baby is also claimed by Raghu's family, which sparks a commotion throughout the entire hamlet. Despite being entirely focused on a woman, the riot prevents her from speaking out. Since Kalki is a mother, she is suddenly praised despite not being respected or treated well.

#### 4. Cultural Beliefs

When a lady is a widow, she is not permitted to attend pleasant events like baby showers because even her presence is regarded as a bad omen. A girl's puberty is honoured in a way that signals to the community that she is prepared for marriage. Many cultural standards surround menstruation, such as the fact that a woman is not permitted to enter the kitchen while having her period. They are given a private space with a bed, a plate, a glass, a pillow, and a blanket in which they are not permitted to move. All of these items utilised by them are either thrown away or burnt after the menstrual cycle has ended. Menstruation is seen as a taboo, preventing them from entering the temple, denying their participation in the auspicious occasion, and so on. *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), Malayalam film directed by Jeo Baby, depicts these conventions. The movie focuses on the bride and the treatment she gets from the family.

It is about a bride and how a woman is treated in the patriarchal family are the main subjects of the movie. She is forced to labour all day, taking care of her family, and she is only permitted to eat when they do. It demonstrates how society's patriarchal structure works. For instance, in the course of the movie, when a ritual is planned as her husband and father-in-law prepare to embark on the Sabarimala pilgrimage, she gets her period. Her presence annoys the pilgrims, for them she is impure. And therefore, they take bath after consuming the food she prepared.

##### 4.1 Infertility and Blame

The majority of individuals in the biased society consider that a woman's role in the world is entirely fulfilled when she gives birth to a child. A child is regarded as the one who completes a family. The marital life of a couple suffers if they are unable to have children. In a situation where a man and woman are involved, the woman is typically held responsible for infertility because it is believed that the bodies of women are machines for bearing children. Most often, childlessness is

related to women. If a woman doesn't become pregnant after marriage, she is held accountable and labelled as unsuitable to be a woman. The idea that giving birth is a woman's primary function traumatises newlywed women. Women are generally responsible for passing on built-in traditional values and ideas. Women are required to observe certain rites both before and after marriage.

In India, people, especially in rural areas, always inquire about family planning when they come across a married woman. After a few months of marriage, a newlywed couple is expected to announce news about their pregnancy, and if it is delayed the questioning continues. "Married women who remain childless in India are invisible in social research, but they are highly visible in their families and communities. From the standpoint of women leading lives in a country where status depends on motherhood, the meaning of childlessness is profound" (Riessman, 2000, p.112). Motherhood is regarded as a woman's ultimate accomplishment in Indian culture. A woman gains respect and value when she becomes a mother. Her reputation among the family members is built on this. As stated in the article, she will have the ability to dominate the family if she becomes the mother-in-law. "The normative social biography for an Indian woman mandates childbearing after marriage. Motherhood is her sacred duty—a value enshrined in religious laws for Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and Christians alike. Bearing and rearing children are central to a woman's power and well-being, and reproduction brings in its stead concrete benefits over the life course...For families with significant property or wealth, sexual reproduction allows for social reproduction – the orderly transfer of privilege through inheritance to the next generation" (Riessman, 2000, p.112). The motherhood status raises the bar for women. And since a woman is traditionally expected to bear children, she is held responsible if a couple is unable to conceive. They lead women to believe that they are to blame for not getting pregnant, as though all men are potent enough to have children. She begins to doubt her ability to have children due to the pressure from society. 'Involuntary childlessness' in Indian families leads to women being blamed for infertility. "One of the few studies in India of women who visit an infertility clinic reveals considerable self-blame: "There is something wrong with me" was a common statement" (Riessman, 2000, p.112). Women who are childless are doubly jeopardized, just like divorced women.

### 5. Biotechnology and the Anxiety It Created

Numerous technologies have been developed to make infertility and the problems it causes lighter. In the field of biotechnology, methods like artificial insemination, in vitro fertilisation, embryo freezing, and surrogacy have evolved. In the previous two decades, technology has grown like a mammoth, enabling everything. Technology as a whole has reduced human effort and is now regarded as a blessing. The development of technology has altered how people think about work power according to Marx.

If Marx's proletariat class was the revolutionary force of the industrial age due to the centralizing powers of the capitalist mode of production, immaterial labor for Hardt and Negri is following a similar path in that immaterial labor, as a social mode of productive human creativity, is the basis for current and future forms of resistance, though in a less uniform manner from what Marx and Engels envisioned (Pierce, 2013, p.18).

Biotechnology helps in reproduction by establishing techniques as such surrogacy, artificial insemination etc., which also values homosexual couples' emotion towards having a child. Which is not valued by any cultural beliefs or tradition.

The advancement in technology has evolved into the term 'Biocapitalism' as it controls the reproductive sector through amendments. Many critics saw biocapitalism as an 'exploitation of life' as it has materialized the living in itself. The term, Biocapitalism first appeared in academic writing, and it has since been embraced by feminists and science and technology researchers. Anthropologist Kaushik Sunder Rajan in his work *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (2006), focuses on how capitalism has changed as a result of the introduction of new biotechnologies in fields based on genomic research. Genetic Modification, which allowed scientists to cut and join DNA particles in the laboratory and evaluate the capabilities of single gene for the first time, is widely viewed as a crucial innovation in the emergence of biocapitalism. However, Rajan did not add the reproductive biotechnologies in the sphere of biocapitalism, as he disregards in vitro fertilisation (IVF), a science that made it possible to remove eggs from the womb, fertilise them elsewhere, and then transfer them back into the womb. A market for surrogacy was also made possible because of this biotechnology. He also ignores the contribution that IVF made to the growth of biotechnology, this attracted more attention from his feminist colleagues at the time as reproduction was always associated with women. Many feminist intellectuals developed the concept of biocapital's cognitive capacity and proposed a fresh, comprehensive conceptual meaning.

In book-length studies by Catherine Waldby and Robert Mitchell (2006), Debora Spar (2006), Sarah Franklin (2007, 2013), Melinda Cooper (2008), Donna Dickenson (2008), Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby (2014), and Kalindivora (2015), to name the most influential, the reproductive dimensions of biocapitalism are not only foregrounded; they are mined (Weinbaum, 2019, p. 41).

In a lecture titled, "The Afterlife of Slavery: Human Reproduction in Biocapitalism" (2017)

I study in my work is what I would call the modern at the scheme or more specifically the slave atmosphere this is my name for historically entrenched thought system that informs and enables us to put it more succinctly subtends contemporary reproductive practices in the context of their global commodification, the creation of global markets around reproductive practices technology commodities...what makes it possible to offer for sale reproductive labour...Gender reproductive bodies need to have been said in a place and naturalized in order to make the contemporary market in human life and in vivo labor thinkable and because it's thinkable materialized alone what makes it a concrete reality (University of Washington Department of Philosophy, 2017, April 7).

The body and human existence themselves serve as the foundation of capitalism today. By enticing the body to behave in a certain way and making it polluted, a slave atmosphere is produced. Biocapitalism is deemed hazardous by those who take these factors into account. Because biocapitalism also controls emotions, many nations view it as hazardous.

### 5.1 Infertility and Biotechnologies

Biotechnology has established several techniques such as artificial insemination, embryo transplantation, etc., which have reduced the infertility issue. The article entitled, "Body, Biomedicine: How Some Feminist Concerns Dragged Reproduction to the Center of Social Theory" (2001) portrays the feminists' support for stratified reproduction,

Reproductive normalization is a hard-won achievement, often closed to some constituencies through mechanisms of state and market, cultural branding, and ritualized fears. Yet ironically and dialectically, experiences with nonnormative, pathologized reproduction can also provide the material for self-reflection and mobilization of new social and political identities (Rapp, 2001, p.469).

Homosexual couples overcome infertility through such technologies which gained recognition for bio-medicinal growth. The idea that their body is constructed of inorganic materials has made people anxious. However, natural medicine is a part of Indian culture, and natural resources are central to all of its traditional ideas.

## 6. Rethinking History Through the Trauma Behind Rituals: Restriction to Biotechnical Approach

Cultural behaviours that cause trauma, obscure the history of the traumatised. Due to rigid ideas about their roles and meeting familial expectations, women who are forced into trauma become rebellious and reinterpret history. Both *One Part Woman* (2018) and *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003) concentrate on the traumatic lives of both Ponna and Kalki in a way that re-evaluates history through cultural ideas and elevates the voices of the silenced. Each suppression exposes many issues, such as female infanticide, infertility, and caste concerns, which expose terrible historical practises. "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, ... history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas', then traumatic histories of subordinate groups have to be acknowledged on their terms and considered in relation to traumatic histories of people in socially dominant positions" (Craps, 2010, p.53).

These cultural practises reject the idea provided by science, it prevents the advancement of biomedical, particularly when fertility is taken into account. The research study analyses *One Part Woman* (2018), an English translation of Perumal Murugan's Tamil book *Madhorubagan* (2010), to examine how cultural beliefs act as a barrier to biomedical which helps in overcoming childlessness. Aniruddhan Vasudevan translated it as 'One Part Woman' in the English language. In the book, *One Part Woman* (2018), a young childless couple named Kali and Ponna's lovely built marriage is depicted as being destroyed by the laws of tradition, cultural customs, and expectations.

The central character of this book's plot is a married couple who is devastated by the fact that, despite being married for twelve years, they have never had children. In the eyes of society, this childlessness may leave a void in the family, but this fact does not prevent them from sharing love and care with one another. The married couple, Kali and Ponna, are compelled to uphold the cultural ideal of the holistic family and suffer tremendously as a result of not meeting the criteria for a family because they do not have a child.

Ponna suffers pain constantly since she is held responsible by society for her inability to have children, while Kali is considered the victim of his wife's infertility. Every time the couple meets someone, the first question they encounter is about their pregnancy; some are asked politely, but the majority of them are meant to belittle her. Everyone advised Kali to wed a new woman with whom he could procreate his heir, and thus negotiations for his second marriage began. She was upset when this was brought up, one such instance occurred when Chellapa Goundar paid them a visit. He says to Kali, "It is fate mapillai. 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" (Murugan, 2018, p.10)

It is absurd to suggest that a second marriage may be the remedy to childlessness. The emotional side of the marriage, the relationship they have built through time, and the affection they share are never taken into account by society. Just because the couple is unable to conceive a child, the suggestion of second marriage happens. This idea of second marriage is more convincingly refuted in a passage of the novel.

If the only way to beat this reputation for impotence was to marry again, what would happen if that failed too? Should he ruin the lives of two women? And could Ponna bear his bringing in another woman? She was in the habit of pulling a long face for two days if she saw him even talking to another woman. If he married again, she wouldn't stay. To make things worse, what if the second wife did get pregnant? That would be the end for Ponna. She wanted to believe she was the most important person in his life. (Murugan, 2018, p.83)

Ponna does not want to give any chance for another woman to share her husband, she is restless, "She had been to every astrologer in the area who picked cards using a parrot. They all predicted good tidings. Not even once was a bad card drawn...if she mentioned that she'd been married for over ten years, they would say, "You will get it late, but you will get it for sure" (Murugan, 2018, p.14). Ponna became indignant at the happenings around her, but she was unable to verbally express it. Every time, she begs Kali with tears in her eyes, "Maama, won't I ever get pregnant?" (Murugan, 2018, p.14) and it melts his heart. She visited numerous fortune tellers and astrologers concerning her pregnancy, but no one claimed her to be infertile. The couple tries to find a panacea through religion.

One of the rites recommended by Kali's mother was to go see Kallipalayam Nadar. They roll beads, and according to the rule it follows, if there is still one unpaired bead, it is a favourable indication; however, if everything is clubbed, it is unsettling. But Kali and Ponna consistently were favoured by the unpaired bead, so Nadar warned them that they were cursed. "There is some curse that you have inherited. Everything will be all right if we find out that is and make offerings for appeasement" (Murugan, 2018, p.18). Kali's mother believed that an incident involving his grandfather was the cause of the curse, so she remembered it. She lit sixty candles while requesting that they travel to the Tiruchengode Murugan Temple. "Seeking redemption from this curse, Kali and Ponna scaled the hill. For sixty days, they lit the sixty lamps and cast themselves at the feet of Murugan, pleading for his blessings" (Murugan, 2018, p.20).

Even still, she was unable to conceive despite being compelled to visit numerous temples and participate in numerous rituals. The 'curse of Pavatha', which affects their entire community, is another misfortune that Kali's grandmother mentioned. Pavatha is a young tribal girl who was killed after being taken advantage of by four men and was thought to be the Goddess. The rumour going around the community is that it was her curse that prevented any girl children from being born and rendered men impotent. After hearing this curse, Ponna family and Kali proceeded to the temple to make their offerings to Pavatha by preparing Pongal and purchasing new clothing. Even though Kali's family was cursed, Ponna was obliged to carry out all the rites. Kali's mother would give her neem juice if she slightly missed her menstrual cycle this shows how the body is cared for naturally.

In the matter of offering prayers, Kali and Ponna left no stone unturned. They did not discriminate between small and big temples. They promised an offering to every god they encountered. For the forest gods, it was a goat sacrifice. For the temple gods, it was pongal. For some gods, the promises even doubled. If a child were indeed born, the rest of their lives would be spent in fulfilling these promises. (Murugan, 2018, p.42)

Ponna was informed of a dangerous ritual by an elderly woman, Kali and Ponna decided to carry it out. It was about walking around a rock at the Pandeewara Temple, where even the slightest slip or diversion could result in death. Despite Kali's objections, Ponna opted to accomplish that risking her life. She insisted, "Maama I will walk around now. If something happens to me, don't let it affect you for long. Marry another woman. At least let her be blessed with a child" (Murugan, 2018, p.47). She would have done everything to give birth to avoid the strain of society. Despite Kali's denial, she still put her life in danger to become pregnant, displaying her confidence and daring. Kali was an exception for them because he wasn't held responsible; insults persisted wherever she went. "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?" (Murugan, 2018, p.53). Everyone was hesitant to entrust their child with Ponna because they believed that since she did not have a child, she would not know how to take care of them.

Parents of both Kali and Ponna proposed the darkest ritual that no woman would ever dare perform. Ponna's family was about to lose it because sexuality is typically linked with women. Every year, the village of Kali holds a fourteen-day celebration, the final day of which is thought to be a day on which all the males who attend the festival are claimed to satisfy the demands of women who participate and are thus regarded as gods. Women who remain childless after marriage are sent to the festival to engage in sexual relations with any festival-goers. The family of Ponna and Kali insisted her by saying;

You have done all the prayers you could do, you have even walked around the barren rock that one in a thousand people take on...this is not something a mother should talk about with her son. But I have dared to speak...the fourth day, when the gods come down, and the fourteenth day, when they go back up the hill, are very important. But since I attained puberty, I have not attended the event of the fourteenth day. They wouldn't send me. You know why. You have gone for it with and without my knowledge. This year, we need to send Ponna there. And you must agree to this. (Murugan, 2018, p.78)

Kali was adamantly in opposition to the choice, and he never believed that his family would make it. He believed that Ponna would also oppose it. But Ponna insists that she must have children no matter what. Her mother, father, brother, and even Kali's mother supported it. Ponna bravely made it to the celebration's last day. "Kali was speechless. He had never thought there could be such a motive for attending the fourteenth day of the festival...All men who set their foot in Tiruchengode on the fourteenth day are gods. It is god who is giving this" (Murugan, 2018, p.79). According to Kali, it was not righteous to send his wife with somebody else for the sake of kids. He is not ready to accept it at all, Muthu (Ponna's brother) somehow tricked him and told Ponna that Kali agreed to this. Finally, she went to the festival and started seeking a man with whom she can have kids. Though she remembered Kali, she did not stop searching for a man. She cooperated and got involved in the ritual tradition. She believed, "He is my god. My job is to go where he takes me" (Murugan, 2018, p.184).

The ethnic customs and traditions she had followed up to this point have made her more eager to become a mother. She went to great lengths to demonstrate to society that she is not infertile as a result of the shame she experienced when people called her infertile. The family's elders all recommended different rituals, but no one mentioned taking her to the doctor. Even the juices she consumed to delay menstruation contained neem leaves and other all-natural cures recommended by her grandma. The novel has not a single revelation about western medicine. According to cultural ideas, surrogacy and artificial insemination are sins. Traditional values place a strong emphasis on organic, natural remedies.

This adversity still prevails, getting married and having children is often seen as prestige, and those who fail to produce this so-called boon are deemed outcasts and are generally frowned upon in all facets of life. Family life is still recognised to be pointless if the couple is not able to have children. The suffering that women endure in the guise of ritual and atonement is just incomprehensible. Rituals are carried out because people were made to believe that they would be effective. In the Indian notion, childlessness is still a problem, and women are shamed and blamed for it. Women are devastated for not having children, which is regarded as a major issue, like Ponna in *One Part Woman* (2018). *The Second Sex* (1965) perfectly describes this misfortune of women, it says, "Doomed to procreation and secondary tasks, stripped of her practical importance and her mystical prestige, woman becomes no more than a servant" (Beauvoir, 1965, p.113).

It's important to empathise with those who are suffering, and any remedy should bring serenity as opposed to adding misery with further suffering. Biotechnology plays the role of the panacea provider, though the financial requirements are unaffordable for all. There are now treatments for infertility and the credit goes to the technology that is improving every day. But the fear of others' opinions drives people conscious not to visit fertility clinics, which they feel is shameful, and opt for other remedies firstly consulting a specialist in the area can aid in determining the precise issue and providing a solution. A consultation would at the very least reveal information about the problem related to childbirth, but most individuals choose to employ alternative culturally appropriate solutions instead, making this their final resort as "Cultures spread by horizontal transfer of ideas more than by genetic inheritance" (Peters, 2010, p.105).

The world of technology is expanding more quickly than people. It makes an effort to offer solutions to the problems that individuals are experiencing. Its ongoing development benefits and improves people's quality of life. Technology-based capitalism, which is what is currently taking place, has captured the attention of the entire world. Because it has eliminated the need for manual labour by making everything available for rapid use, capitalism in the twenty-first century is known as bio-capitalism. In an article titled "The History of Eugenic" (2016), the author says, "biological innovations initially regarded as repugnant tend eventually to become commonplace. Just as it occurred with artificial insemination, so it may happen in the age of biocapitalism with human germline editing" (Kelves, 2016, p.49). In vitro fertilisation and artificial insemination are seen negatively by many people because they go against long-held notions of how a family should be created. Because of societal expectations, some people might also judge those who employ these approaches. Rituals and cultural practises, put the bio-capitalist structure incompetent ideologically. Like Ponna, who was compelled to make multiple prayers under the impression that she was praying for a family that had no children. Such persistently held ideas act as a barrier to biomedicine, preventing it from reaching every patient. Particularly in India, a country rich in the great tradition and people who cherish it.

*Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003) also brings in the ritual practices which are followed in the Indian culture. At the beginning of the film, a mother gives birth to a girl child, having a girl child was seen as a burden but having a boy was seen as a privilege. As a result, the girl child is murdered by her father; this tradition persisted and later led to the eradication of women from the country. The first scene in the film shows a father killing his newborn daughter simply because she is a girl.

It's a girl. Next year... a boy. (Jha, 2003, 00:02:21-22)

Thousands of baby girls are either aborted or killed at birth everyday in India. Dowry has been the cause of the Indian girl being treated as a curse to the family. Where will these crimes lead us to? (Jha, 2003, 00:04:06-20)

Such discriminatory practises undoubtedly halt the reproduction cycle. Even though things have changed and the



government has made it a crime, certain villages continue to look into cases of girl children going missing after birth. Reproduction biotechnology has evolved, but the continued use of such inhuman practises in some Indian villages might impede progress. One such incidents as the family already had two girl children, the grandmother and father in 2019 abandoned the twin daughters in the Punjab Canal two hours after they were born (Ghazali, 2019, sept.26). A survey in the state of Uttarakhand, specifically in the district of Uttarkashi, revealed that in the span of three months, 216 infants were born throughout the 132 villages, but not a single one was a female. Both government officials and activists began to speculate about this (No girl born..., 2018, July 22). The investigation's findings demonstrated that female infanticide was still taking place in those villages. In 2018, a man in Uttar Pradesh killed his one-month-old daughter because he was expecting a son. This shows how common it is for Indian families to expect a son. (Press Trust of India, 2018, February 20). When such haughty acts are committed, it halts India's reproductive cycle.

The way Kalki is forced to experience sex in the film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003) makes the act of sex between married people horrific. The lack of women in the village hindered the men from getting married as a result of female infanticide. As a result, Kalki marries a family of five sons, but the entire village treats her cruelly and exploits her like an object. It causes the body to become significantly injured and she is devoid of taking healing measures. Her life has been exploited by multiple violent sex scenes in this film. When she becomes pregnant, she is not provided the required care, especially since no plans were made for a doctor's appointment. The human body has inherent healing potential, but when it is sexually mistreated, this potential is completely destroyed.

## 7. Conclusion

Even today, there are still some families that force women to deliver their infants at home, which is fatal. The year 2018 saw Kirthiga from Tamil Nadu under pressure from her husband's friends to give birth naturally. She bled a lot because she was made to feel that natural treatment was the only option (Rajasekharan, 2018, July 27). The same occurs in 2021 when a woman from Trichy passed away at home while giving birth (India, 2021, December 6). Even though biotechnology has improved its procedures, these incidences are rising annually. People's beliefs in alternative medicine and opposition to technology, which they believe will have unnecessary side effects, are the causes of this. Even if biotechnology has become widespread around the world, some areas of India stay intact. The study explores how rituals hinder the development of biomedicine in relation to the issue of childlessness, which is addressed in Perumal Murugan's book *One Part Woman* (2018) where people perform rituals and visit temples to conceive, as well as the film *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (2003), which focuses on female infanticide, exploitation of the female body, and brutal treatment of sexuality.

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