

## **Gender Performativity: An Exploration of Gender Configuration and Masculine Identity in Perumal Murugan's One Part Woman and D.H.Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover**

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### **Abstract**

The paper is an attempt of the researchers to compare two culturally diverse texts of different countries based on the Ideological standpoint of 'Gender Performativity' of Judith Butler. According to the presupposition of the researchers, Gender has been delineated based on the the performance or the responsibilities done by the subject, when the victim fails to fulfill these duties, the subject is deemed as unfit to be categorized under the premised Gender. The notion has been furthermore expounded by Germaine Greer in her critical text, *The Female Eunuch*. The paper furthermore demonstrates the way in which the Gender configurations work and how masculine identity is seen in different cultures. The researchers have also used theories derived from Disability Studies to reinforce the argument.

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The novels, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *One Part Woman*, both are compared based on the common disability of the male characters who fails to provide offspring to their wives. The impairment of impotency is seen in both the cultures as a failure of their gender performance. When the characters fail to do up to their gender role they are seen as an object occupying the space. The discourse of Gender configuration in both the culture is constituted by performing certain duties as husbands. *Lady Chatterley's lover* gives a vivid picture of

how the deficiency leads to one's loss of identity in the society as well as family. Whereas, in *One Part Woman*, Kali is seen as searching to establish his masculine identity through Ponna, his wife.

In both of the novels, when the absence of the gender performance is found, the attraction is shifted to another person who functions without any disability. Here the gender configurations and superstructures accept the gender of both, the man Ponna meets and Mellors, are accepted due to their gender performances. The Disabled husbands, Clifford and Kali are ignored due to their disability. In both cultures, the need is different and the struggle is tackled in different ways either. In both the novels, the husbands are aware that their wives are displeased with their impairment and seeking the third person to fulfil their place where they failed. The psychic struggle is dealt contrarily in both novels according to their ideological superstructures and lifestyle. The concept of Gender Performativity can be defined as,

Gender as an action and humans are compelled to perform by society rather than a state of being or bodily function. Gender can be imitated because it is already a performance to begin with. Gender does not have an essence, or an intrinsic nature or identity. Society constantly imposes gender upon us. This does not mean that gender is something which we can opt out of. (Buchanan 364).

When the male are failures, they lose their identity to be a male and thus their place is given to someone else with perfect physique. Eventually, the failed male has become the victim of hatred and contempt. The notion of respect is also interconnected with the identity of the male to produce child. But, here, the loss of identity provides discomfort and disrespect to the male victims. The disabled victims are seen as having a 'lack' in them which cannot be fulfilled with material things. Kali is deeply hurt when his own mother insists on him to "Send your wife to another man." (83). Kali is furthermore infuriated when his wife Ponna nods to the same thing by saying, "I will, if you are fine with it." (83). Thus, the victims of loss of identity are hurt verbally and psychologically. Though they are infuriated, the victims cannot raise their voice since the fault is in their side. This can be evident in the novel as it is mentioned, "He came to be possessed by a fury for revenge, a desire to pound her violently and tear her apart." (84).

Likewise, in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Clifford's disability and loss of manliness is ridiculed by his own wife as a result of his impotency. Clifford's hurt and emotions are seen through his facial expressions. The rudeness of her wife's merciless selfish heart is evident through the words of her, who says,

But, mind you, it's like this; while you live your life, you are in some way an organic whole with all life. But once you start the mental life you pluck the apple. You've severed the connection between the apple and the tree: the organic connection. And if you've got nothing in your life but the mental life, then you yourself are a plucked apple...you've fallen off the tree. (163)

Therefore, both the husbands are verbally attacked and ridiculed by their wife as a result of their lack Of Gender Performance. The same notion is expressed by Germaine Greer, for whom the lack makes a masculine a eunuch (93). The verbal attack of the woman can be further seen in *One Part Woman*, where Kali is insulted by Ponna, for asking him to have festival money from her mother, as,

Like that's the only thing lacking in my life. If I had one child each in my arms, on my waist and in my womb, I would demand it rightfully from my father and brother. Now, if they give it to me, I will take it. If they don't, I will not ask. (25)

In both novels, the lack is rectified by the husbands by allowing their wives to have intercourse with another men. Both Clifford and Kali are, at first, not interested in allowing their wife to have illicit relationship with another men. But, when they need to fulfil their disability by pleasing their wives, they allow them. In this case, Clifford is far different from Kali who still has an ambivalent feeling to allow her wife to have intercourse with someone else. But, both the female characters are strongly in need of another man who can fulfils the lack which their husbands made. It is evident through their conversation that the women in the novel, are always ready to fix the imparity with another source.

The notion of 'Gender as socially contracted' is here deconstructed as cultural factors which requires certain performance to determine one's gender. Both, *One Part Woman* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, have concept of anima and animus as deciding factor of gender. The female characters are given their gender identity based on their performance to have

babies in their womb. Both Lady Chatterley and Ponna are not questioned of their identities. Both, Ponna and Lady Chatterley are shown as if they are good with their physique and without having any disability. That is shown through Ponna's argument in who she says,

I might be barren, but nothing I have touched has ever withered. 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 . . . 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—had taken better care of the land, maybe it would have all grown. (81)

Another important factor, in the text is, in Lady Chatterley's Lover, when gender performance is provided, the class consciousness is ignored. The victim also internalises his disability and accepts his lack. But Kali does not want to ignore class consciousness even though he is benefitted by the 'untouchable'. It is evident through his words:

Then how would this work? More than half the young men roaming about town are from the "untouchable" castes. If any one of them gets to be with Ponna, I simply cannot touch her after that. I cannot live with her if someone touches her. (96).

But Clifford accepts Mellors for his wife, though he is lower than his social status. But Clifford's social class consciousness is predominant in other parts of the story. It is obviously seen when he says "He was at his ease in the narrow "great world", that is, landed aristocracy society, but he was shy and nervous of all that other big world which consists of the vast hordes of the middle and lower classes, and foreigners." (127). Thus, Class consciousness is handled in both novels.

Therefore, Lady Chatterley's Lover and One Part Women both has comparisons as well as Contrasting elements. Based on Gender Performance, in both societies, the male are discriminated as well as worshipped.

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