

## CHAPTER IV

### ESTABLISHING RAPPORT FOR LIFE ENHANCEMENT

Religion of Humanity is the greatest religion

– Rabindranath Tagore

When the world is infected with social threats and anti-human activities like marginalisation, segregation, injustice and exploitation on the basis of divisions like caste, race, religion, class and gender, the only hope that remains is the presence of humanity. When a group of people use others for their selfish needs and stigmatise them to exhort their power, there are other compassionate people who, with their humanity, still care for the impoverished and the needy. They ensure that the world is fine by doing whatever they can to remove the stigmas and maintain neutrality. They also make others realise that humanity is the key to equality.

Humanists International says that these discriminations are a threat to humanity. It also suggests,

Humanism requires that nowhere in the world will people be discriminated on the basis of colour, creed, language or religion. But in India the basis of 'varna-jati' system sanctioned by scriptures the majority of the people are condemned as Panchamas. This is the caste system, which is iniquitous and unjust. So it is an obstacle to promoting Humanist development and happiness. In order to abolish this pernicious system it is resolved to request the law makers to amend the constitution to state that caste-ism is abolished in place of the current article which says untouchability is abolished, since untouchability survives only due to the prevalence of castes.

Humanity is being compassionate and kind towards fellow beings, animals and nature. It also includes other qualities like respect, love, gratitude, and generosity. Generally, humanity refers to the quality of being humane, characterised by compassion, empathy, and a sense of shared community. It is the capacity to feel, recognise and understand the pain and suffering of others, and to respond with acts of kindness, generosity, and selflessness. In a broader sense, humanity can also refer to the collective achievements and characteristics that make us human, such as our capacity for invention, art, culture, and social organization.

Through their continuous efforts and collaboration, human beings have reached the state of civilization. Sharing the same environment with animals and following the same biological processes of digestion, respiration and reproduction, humans differ from them only in their humane nature. As a species, humans have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges and have achieved tremendous progress in all areas. At its core, humanity is about recognizing and valuing the dignity and worth of every individual and striving towards a world in which all people are treated with respect, compassion, and fairness. The concept of humanity is a reminder that humans are all together and have a shared responsibility to work towards a better future for themselves and future generations.

Humanity, humanism, humanitarianism are related terms with similar meanings. Humanity refers to mankind, an umbrella term to include the group of people in the world including all races, nations, ethnic groups considered as belonging to a single entity. The other denotation of humanity is the quality of being kind. Humanity refers to the presence of the qualities that help in the prosperity of all.

Humanism, on the other hand, is a positive outlook of giving importance to human feelings and ideas rather than religious or supernatural beliefs. It prefers logical thinking,

scientific understanding and evidence over superstitions, dogmas and beliefs. As far as humanism is concerned, importance is given to human life irrespective of the differences. Humanism emphasises human freedom, individual sovereignty, secularism, empathy, social justice and equality. It seeks to promote the happiness and well-being of society along with helping in the improvement of nature and all other beings.

The word 'humanism' is derived from the Latin word 'humanitas' which is attributed to the values associated with liberal education. Cicero used the term first, and till now, the term is used as humanities to refer to the studies in arts, philosophy and other related subjects. The term humanism has evolved in meaning and understanding.

Humanism is a revival movement in Italy at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century during Renaissance. It aimed at the revival of classical studies, and spread to other parts of the world. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term clearly differentiated the classic idea of humanism, which referred to the study of arts, grammar, rhetoric, poetry and philosophy, especially in Greek and Italian literatures.

During Renaissance, the term was used by the Christians to renew the Christian ideas. Petrarch was called the 'Father of Humanism.' The motive of the humanists was to revive the culture and Christian beliefs of the past. Later, in the Age of Enlightenment, scholars started to understand that science and reason are the base of understanding human existence; they started exploring the advancements in science, which led to a more specific understanding of human existence. After the 20<sup>th</sup> century, humanism came to be solely concerned with human reason and understanding.

There are variations in humanism like Secular Humanism, Religious or Ethical Humanism, Christian Humanism, Marxist Humanism, and Scientific Humanism. Secular and Religious Humanism are the most basic types of humanism. Secular Humanism came out as an opposition to the conventional ideas of Christian Humanism. It gained popularity

because of its focus on the scientific grounds. They did not believe in God or other beliefs related to God. They do not consider humans as gods. Humanity is the basis of this movement. Religious Humanism, on the other hand, combines humanistic ideas along with rituals and beliefs. It gives importance to the human emotions, ideas but on the grounds of religious principles and not on superstitious beliefs. Religious principles and human interests override science in Religious Humanism. Christian Humanism is an example of Religious Humanism. It is also called Ethical Humanism.

Secular Humanism does not have any hint of religion associated with it. Till now, humanism advocates the freedom of human understanding, science and the power of evolution, leaving the superstitious and mythical beliefs aside. Understanding science and mankind also helps in working for the well-being of society. The health and moral growth of humans and all ideas that help in the sustenance of life is one of the crucial points put forward by humanists. Secularism is emphasised more than the other reasons for existence.

Humanism is a non-theist concept. There are many denotations of the word humanism. Many philosophers and critics have given their definitions of humanism. Some of them are as follows: *Merriam Webster's Dictionary* defines Humanism as, “a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values, a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual’s dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason.” *Cambridge Dictionary* defines Humanism as, “a belief system based on the principle that people’s spiritual and emotional needs can be satisfied without following a god or religion.” Both these definitions give the same understanding of the concept. American Humanist Association defines Humanism as “a progressive philosophy of life that, without theism or other supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfilment that aspire to the greater good.”

Leo Igwe, a member of Nigerian Humanist Association gives his view of Humanism as. “What being a humanist means to me is taking a stand with humanity, taking a stand inspired by human rights and human values... Humanism is a way of thinking and living that emphasises the agency of human beings. Humanism stresses the fact that we, human beings, are capable of changing the world.”

There are many organisations worldwide like Humanist International, American Humanist Association and International Humanist and Ethical Union. They work with the motto of supporting human life on the basis of reason and understanding. According to the International Humanist and Ethical Union,

Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance, which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.

Andrew Copson, a famous humanist defines Humanism with specific features like a naturalistic understanding of the universe, science and free inquiry, which will help in effective comprehension of the universe; a scientific approach; the pursuit of a self-defined, meaningful, and happy life; morality is a way for humans to improve their lives; practical action to improve personal and social conditions.

All these definitions lead one to the understanding that, humanism is a concept purely independent of superstitious and religious beliefs. It does not vary according to the race, ethnicity, caste or such diversities. It is a scientific pursuit, and so it considers everyone in the universe as equal beings. Humanists around the world believe that there is a world which is unaffiliated with religious and mythical beliefs. Humanist International points out four essential characteristics of being a humanist.

1) Humanists are non-religious people who strive to lead fulfilling, meaningful and ethical lives, using reason and empathy to guide their decisions and actions. 2)

Humanists base their understanding of the world on reason and science, rejecting supernatural or divine beliefs. 3) Humanists reject all forms of racism and

prejudice, and believe in living in harmony with one another, respecting everyone's human rights, including the right to freedom of religion and belief. 4)

Humanists believe that everyone has a responsibility to respect and care for one another and to protect the natural world.

Secular Humanism does not have any hint of religion associated with it. Till now, humanism advocates the freedom of human understanding, science and the power of evolution, leaving the superstitious and mythical beliefs aside. Understanding science and mankind also helps in working for the well-being of society. The health and moral growth of humans and all ideas that help in the sustenance of life is one of the crucial points put forward by humanists. Secularism is emphasised more than the other reasons for existence.

A similar concept was August Comte's 'Positivity', an empiricist philosophical theory. Like humanism, the theory is based on the idea of humanity based on scientific understanding. He supports posteriori facts (based on sensory experience or experiments) like scientific fields as the basics of human knowledge. In Positivism, other ideas unsupported by human sensory experience and experiments like metaphysics and introspection are ignored. Comte advocated the well-being of humanity through science, religion and not God. It is based on 'Religion of Humanity.' His concept can be defined as a religion where there is no particular God, though there are prayers and hymns, and the ones involved will undergo similar processes like baptism and spiritual education.

This Religion of Humanity focuses on three pillars, Altruism –generosity and taking care of society’s needs more than their own; Order –societies in a systematic form; Progress – which primarily gives importance to scientific advancements to help humanity and society flourish. Comte wanted the followers to go through the education of these three pillars in seven sacraments, and they honoured great men of history like Homer.

Comte created a positivity calendar with 13 months, each month with 28 days. The article “August Comte and the Religion of Humanity” describes the idea of Comte, “He named each month after a ‘great man’ and named days after great men in history too. In total the positivist calendar includes 558 names of great men. The months were named as followed[s]: Moses, Homer, Aristotle, Archimedes, Caesar, Saint Paul, Charlemagne, Dante, Gutenberg, Shakespeare, Descartes, Frederick and Bichat” (qtd. in Adibe).

Marxist Humanism is deeply rooted in the ideas of Marx for the welfare of humanity. Like other types of humanism, Marxist ideas are collaborated along with humanist principles for the thriving of mankind. It started with the publication of György Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch’s *Marxism and Philosophy*. Antonio Gramsci’s ideas also has influenced Marxist Humanism.

The most popular type of humanism followed worldwide is Secular Humanism, which primarily works for human freedom, development and understanding through science and evidence. A sub-field of humanism – Humanist Psychology works on improving an individual’s potential through the understanding of self. Humanist psychologists believe that human beings are innately good, and the change in circumstances has led them to destructive ideas. By understanding the power of self, humanity can be upheld. Kendra Cherry in her article “What Is Humanistic Psychology? A Psychology Perspective Influenced By Humanism,” on Humanist Psychology says, “The need for fulfillment and personal growth is a key motivator of all behavior. People are

continually looking for new ways to grow, to become better, to learn new things, and to experience psychological growth and self-actualization.”

From all these theories, concepts and varied definitions, it is crucial to understand what these humanists work for and the main concern for their existence – a society with equality, justice and welfare of humanity irrespective of the divisions. Though Humanists work hard for people’s equality, society’s state has not changed. Societal inequalities are the causes of all pain and discrimination, which humanists want to resolve.

Discriminations due to race, nationality, caste, gender and economic status are the most common forms of discrimination.

A man’s final place of solace is God. C S Lakshmi, in her Translator’s Preface to the book *Black Coffee in a Coconut Shell: Caste as Lived Experience* says, “There are times when caste protects you and gives you security in the form of a goddess or god that belongs only to you; it becomes a group solidarity you can fall back on even when it limits you in many ways” (x). Nevertheless, it is because of such religious reasons, that a group of people are oppressed. In the case of caste discrimination, people who are victimised, most of the times, lose their belief in God also.

Gangadhar Pantwane, Professor of Marathi and a Dalit thinker says, “To me Dalit is not a caste, He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country, He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy books teachings, Separatism, Fate and Heaven because they have made him a slave. He does not believe in Humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and Revolution” (qtd. in Clarke).

It is a natural instinct for a suppressed human being to become hostile towards the suppressors. An untouchable who has been relegated to the lowest level for ages due to man-made concepts, said to be created by God, has an unvented anger in him. In the case of an oppressed person, he cannot even surrender and find peace at the feet of God

because the discriminations are justified in the name of God. He is forbidden to enter the place of worship in Hinduism.

A Dalit may not believe in humanity, but it is only through humanity, that one can have equal opportunities and create an equal society. Any form of inequality in the name of caste, creed or race can be changed only when people's attitude and mindset change. Sharan Kumar Limbale in his poem "White Paper" describes his anger and hatred towards the religious books due to the problems he faced as he grew up as an untouchable.

I do not ask  
 For the sun and moon from your sky  
 Your farm, your land,  
 Your high houses or mansions  
 I do not ask for gods or rituals,  
 Castes or sects.  
 Or even for your mother, sisters, daughters.  
 I ask for  
 My rights as a man.  
 .....  
 I want my rights, give me my rights.  
 Will you deny this incendiary state of things?  
 .....  
 My friends!  
 My rights are rising like the sun.  
 Will you deny this sunrise? (75, 75)

The wish of every untouchable is to get out of his forced identity and be considered a fellow human. The central theme of the literature dealing with the marginalised is their

emancipation. The hope for a better future will allow Dalits and others to transcend the barriers. Perumal Murugan, in his novels, gives a detailed description of casteism practised in the Kongu society. He portrays the oppressed, their life and the trauma they face. However, his novels also show that there can be a ray of hope by establishing meaningful and supportive human relationships.

H J Blackham, a famous British humanist describes humanism as a “concept that focuses on the improvement of human beings’ social status by increasing the self-sufficiency and dignity of human beings.” Murugan’s novels which are based on the caste discrimination helps the society understand the need for changes in the life of the untouchables. Most of his characters are subalterns and so they in the lowest strata of the social ladder. They do not have proper education, and so they do not have decent jobs and a considerable pay. They lack the respect they deserve because of their caste identity. The untouchables should be uplifted into a better status and that becomes the responsibility of everyone.

Blackham also says that “Faith without works is not Christianity, and unbelief without any effort to help shoulder the consequences for mankind is not humanism” (qtd in Copson 24). The characters of Murugan do not keep their faith on anyone. They work for themselves. They know nothing is going to help them and so they share their pain among themselves and support one another at struggles.

Murugan’s subaltern characters have love for animals as well as human beings. In his novels, the untouchable children and the people from lower castes are the ones who show more signs of humanism than the higher castes. The most important characteristic of humanism is thinking and doing good for fellow beings. Shorty in *Seasons of the Palm* is the best example for that. He is shown as full of compassion and love. His character is portrayed through minor incidents and minute details, and Shorty wins the heart of the

readers. Though he is angry and hostile towards his masters and his bullying friends at times, he cannot harp on the hatred. He wishes good for his friends, even for his cruel Master.

The friendship of the children is what keeps them agile and alive despite all their struggles. They support and wish good for one another at all times. When Shorty learns that Tallfellow has escaped to town, he feels happy for him. Being with Tallfellow for a long time and knowing the troubles and problems he is undergoing, he wishes Tallfellow to be successful in his future. He feels happy that Tallfellow has escaped to the world beyond the fields. He even imagines Tallfellow's development, which is quoted here extensively for a better understanding of the boy's longing:

Tallfellow would earn a lot and come back dressed in fine clothes one day. Why, he might even wear dark glasses like the great actor MGR. And then no one would know him. People might ask, 'Who's this?' and look at him screwing their eyes into narrow points. And Tallfellow would stand there, leaning against a wall, smiling. He would slowly take his glasses off, twirl them and look around him carelessly. . . . But that's what he wants Tallfellow to be—a young man in fine clothes, glasses and perhaps a new haircut. He wanted Tallfellow to come up to him, when he went to Amaraan Talkies next time, and put his arm around his shoulders. Shorty would look up and laugh. So would Tally. . . . And, of course, there were no sheep and no more grazing. (246)

Similarly, when Shorty learns that Tallfellow is caught, he becomes worried. He cannot even eat. He cries when he sees Tallfellow back in the fields though the others mock at him. When Stonedeaf acts indifferently towards Tallfellow, he becomes worried and thinks of supporting him. He has similar care towards other children as well. He loves being in the company of Belly and empathises with her sufferings. Belly is shown as his

best friend. He feels lively when Belly is around, even though they fight over silly things. The author says, “And other things. He misses her. It does not matter if the others do not come: Stonedeaf, Stumpleg . . . But Belly. . . How her laughter rolls across the empty expanse of the field, scattering red dust in his face!” (18).

At the end of the novel, when Selvan continuously tortures Belly by kicking her inside the water, he argues with him to protect her from Selvan; but when Selvan does not care and attacks him, he calls others and climbs out of the well. Unable to accept his defeat, Selvan talks badly about Shorty and Belly. Shorty cannot control his anger, and “Something breaks inside Shorty. His anger, pushed deep into his chest, pushes through his ribs and enters his blood. He grits his teeth and lunges down after Selvan. He holds him by the head and with all his strength brings his legs to bear down on his shoulders. Holding him thus, he pushes him down into the water” (330).

Shorty is also concerned about the well-being of his family. When he goes to his house for a feast, his Master asks him to come in a day. However, Shorty feels that he needs rest and does not want to return. He wonders about his Master’s reaction: “One more day . . . One more day is all I’ll wait. If your son doesn’t turn up, make sure you have his younger brother ready! If not, put out the money that you owe me!” (313). Shorty does not want his little brother to be included in this drudgery. He knows that he would be getting thrashes and scolding but he is quite used to all that. He thinks his brother is very young and he should be happy in his home for some time.

Shorty’s grandmother is much concerned about him and is supportive of him, and hence he is closer to his grandmother than his parents. While sleeping in the cowshed, he thinks of how warm he felt being with her. “. . . when he cuddled up to his grandmother and slept in the vast folds of her sari! It made him forget all those other nights, wiped away their memory. He tries to imagine his grandmother’s wrinkled hand, wants it to curl

around his waist in a comforting hug. His memory dissolves into nothing by the cold sting of the damp” (292-293).

Shorty is very considerate of his Master’s family also. When his old Master was alive, he would take the farmhand children to movies in the evening. Once when they were trying to take the tamarind pods from a nearby tree and in a state of getting caught by the owner, they ran away. Once he stopped running, he understood that he had left the others behind. He felt ashamed of being selfish. The old man was weak and could walk only with the help of a stick. Tallfellow, who ran next to him did not think of the old man who was with them; but Shorty became worried and thought he would return and find the old man, though he knew he would be caught too. “He felt a pang of regret. Then shame, utter shame, . . . He felt bad – they ought not to have left a defenceless old man, a hobbling old man, to his fate” (190, 191).

In the same way, Tallfellow, who is a farmhand, is considerate towards his old Master. The Master he works for, has a bedridden father. He cannot walk and so he pees and poops in a pail kept under his bed. When none of his family cares for him, Tallfellow is given the duty of cleaning the pail daily. Though the task is sickening and stomach-churning, Tallfellow has no other option but to do it. He hates the task and feels uncontrollable hatred towards the old man. Whenever his anger overwhelms and he feels the itch to kill the old man, Tallfellow controls himself. He tries to remain considerate, thinking he should act humanely towards an ailing old man.

The lower caste farmhands go even to the extent of sacrificing their lives for the masters. In the short story, “Pork Roast” in the collection *Four Strokes of Luck*, Kumaresan’s grandfather tries to protect his master in a duel and dies.

Thaathan spat out the curry he had put in his mouth, cried, ‘Don’t, saami’ and ran to throw himself between the two men as Chellayan brought the knife down . . .But

no one could match Chellayan for speed. He pulled out the knife which had sunk deep into Thaathan's shoulder blade with some effort and leapt towards Vellayan. . . . As Thaathan tumbled into the canal, only Kumaresan remained to catch him."

(94)

Sathi in *Current Show* is found among the beggars and brought to the theatre by Natesan. He has lived a life of poverty, and when he finds friends, he feels at home. When he is a sufferer and treated like a slave, he is concerned about others. When his leper-father comes to meet him, he is angry because he does not want to be associated with his father and fears that he may lose his job and friends. Nevertheless, when Natesan is angry with his grandmother, Sathi is full of love and concern, "Sathi wants to hug her, hold her to him and console her" (107).

The film-reel man gives Sathi alcohol and food and tries to abuse him sexually. Despite this abuse, when the reel man describes his pain and suffering at the hands of the theatre manager and tells about the way he misses his family, Sathi is filled with remorse. "Sathi feels sorry for the man. Not a bad sort, but what a life! What can he do, though? He feels burdened by his own sympathy. He is not sure why the film-reel man is telling him all this. I should throw open the room door, the theatre door and free the film-reel man. Free him and send him to his daughters. Wild thoughts cloud Sathi's head. He feels angry, suddenly" (96).

The revolutionary nature of the children and the compassion they have for their fellow beings is something remarkable. Empowering others after becoming empowered is an essential trait of being human. Even when they have everything, the higher caste men will not allow the others to come up. The oppressed, on the other hand, want their fellow untouchables to reach heights. The best examples are Sathi's wish to save the film-reel man and Shorty's dream about Tallfellow. The compassion and concern for others, found

in these boys are lacking in their Masters, who are of the same community. They are filled with jealousy and hatred and think of ways to overpower or humiliate others.

In *Seasons of the Palm*, when Shorty steals coconut from the grove of Vaya Kattu Master, the Master takes him to Shorty's Master. Their status is more or less the same, and they appear to have a close relationship with each other. However, in reality, one fumes at the growth of the other and backbites whenever possible. Vaya Kattu Master and Maccharu Master are neighbours, but there is a discord between them. Shorty's Master has sold a high-yielding cow to Vaya Kattu Master. Unfortunately, the cow falls sick and does not recover. Their relationship becomes strained, and both use every chance to humiliate each other.

When Shorty is caught red-handed, Vaya Kattu Master is angry, but when he comes to know that he works for Machaaru Master, he becomes all the more enraged. He beats Shorty on the way home and uses this as a chance to tell everyone that Machaaru Master has advised his farmhand to steal from others.

Does your Master feed you or do you have to steal for your daily meal? Perhaps he lives by thieving too? A rascally shepherd for a rascally Master! What a pair! . . .  
His Master sent him to steal my coconuts. The lad came all the way just to do that.  
Do you think he could have done that without someone putting him up to it? . . .  
His bloody Master must have encouraged him. (283)

Higher caste children, imitating their elders, cannot accept the situations that make the lower caste feel proud, whereas the farmhand children think about the welfare of others. Murugan describes Selvan as an annoying, childish, sulky, and short-tempered boy; even his grandfather feels tired when he is with him. He does not obey his school teacher, does not accept his defeat even in a small game, and will not pay heed to the good ideas given by the farmhand children. When Shorty tells him that he has seen Munisami, he

feels very jealous, and when Shorty requests him to tell his Master that it is Selvan who has seen Munisami, he is inwardly happy.

In *Current Show*, the soda man's son Muthu is indifferent towards the other boys. He is selfish and greedy. When he orders Sathi to let the tank water out, Sathi rejects it, saying that people without money need water to drink. Whereas Muthu, feels that people will not buy soda if water is available. As people become profit-minded and grow more affluent, their concern for people experiencing poverty becomes less.

### **Human Bonds:**

In his works, Murugan emphasises the power of human bonds. When the world is filled with vices, humanity keeps it going. Murugan is careful in presenting the reality of the geographical, cultural and social life of the Kongu Region, along with the inhuman practices prevalent in the region. He also describes the positive bonds that exist which help in the survival of the untouchables by giving them hope for the future. Through such representations, Murugan highlights the need for humanity to create an egalitarian society.

Laws cannot change caste.

Exogamy cannot change caste.

Religious conversion cannot change caste.

Even education cannot; nothing can change caste,

But a change in human outlook can.

The human bonds primarily dealt with by Murugan are the positive bonds between Master and servant, inter-caste friendship and love and affinity inside the family, like between parents and children, and husband and wife. Murugan, through his works, shows the importance of such inter-communal and communal bonds. His characters, from higher or lower castes, find solace in human ties. Sometimes, it comes in the form of a Master

who is better than others (Master as a father and Master as a son), a friend who is more supportive than his community, and love beyond caste.

Human bonds are essential for the social and emotional well-being of people, which can be strengthened by communal or inter-communal ties. Every person will have both communal and inter-communal bonds. In the case of inter-caste ties, people will draw a circle and will not go out of it, crossing their limits; nor will they allow others to enter into their circle. Communal ties are built on shared cultural or societal norms, values, and beliefs. These bonds help to build a sense of identity and belonging within a community.

Identity is a term which allows one to stand alone as an individual and helps him one to be in a group or a society. Identity helps one to hold on to the roots. Multiple types of identity come together within an individual which can be broken down into many forms like, cultural identity, professional identity, ethnic and national identity, religious identity, gender identity, and disability identity. Johnson talks about the “Big 8” socially constructed identities which are: race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality and socioeconomic status.” (Race Matters)

Social identity is an idea of belonging to a group in which the members share certain similarities. It gives a feeling of togetherness between the individual and the group members. This social identity creates love, fraternity and harmony in interpersonal groups and at the same time, it creates hatred and derision with other groups. The socially identified groups can be both dominant and subaltern which may result in misuse and abuse of power.

According to Johnson, “Social identities are a result of shared constructions and social relations of the people who created it based on societal norms.” Dominant and subordinated identities can affect an individual’s experience of privilege and oppression.

The particular societal norms can be of any kind – oppressive or over powering and the people coming under that group abide by the norms automatically. The dominance and oppression continue to the next generation and thus become an endless process.

Social Identity theory has its origin in 1906 with the idea of William G. Sumner. The following excerpt from his work *Folkways: A Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores, and Morals* describes social behavior and social identity,

Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, warlikeness without,—all grow together, common products of the same situation. . . . Men of an others-group are outsiders with whose ancestors the ancestors of the we-group waged war. . . . Every group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders (13).

The concept had its development when it was formulated as Social Identity theory by social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 1980s. Social Identity theory helps in identifying a person's interpersonal behaviour on the basis of the group behaviour. This concept works in both ways: the group one belongs to can help understand his individual behaviour, and one's individual behaviour helps to identify his group's characteristics. Everyone in the group has a prominent role as change in individual character can help change the behaviour of the group.

Identity of a person decides the bonds he creates. Society and the community of an individual becomes a notable element in such relationships. The bonds made within the community or social division may not be helpful in the growth of an individual because there are times when he needs the support of others as he moves into the world. During

those times, communal bonds may prove insufficient as communal beliefs and ideas get priority over personal feelings. It has selfish expectations and irrational rules attached to them, which can lead to discrimination and exclusion of those who do not fit within the community's norms and values. For Instance, the bond of Kumaresan with his community breaks when he marries out of caste. When violated – though for the individual's well-being – it will show its reality. In his Interview with Nikitha, Murugan says about the limitations of communal bonds: “Our Society has the power to minoritise anyone who violates it. How loving and protective a family can be, when it comes to a minor breach that may disturb their idea of honour renders all love for naught. Honour killing is a suitable example” (21).

The one who tries to come out of such a communal tie is alienated and this is called black sheep effect. The accused is alienated which is called ‘black sheep effect.’ APA Dictionary of Psychology describes black sheep effect as, “the tendency to evaluate a disreputable or disliked person more negatively when that person is a member of one's own group rather than of some other group . . . . People respond negatively to those who act in ways that threaten their group's identity, particularly when they affiliate strongly with their group.” Kumaresan's family is ostracized from village, and Kumaresan and Saroja are specifically alienated by his mother.

The communal groups also follow the idea of ‘ingroup bias’; this ingroup bias means that a social group supports its members in spite of their mistakes and slight deviations from the group behaviour. The murder of the man or woman of the other group and not the one from the same community is an example for such behaviour. This behaviour makes one act partially and exclude the other groups despite their goodness and abilities. Murugan shows this behaviour of the villagers when they plan to kill Saroja, who

is from a different community and not Kumaresan. But at most times, people alienate the violator.

The inter-communal bonds are strengthened by genuine emotions like, empathy, understanding, mutual respect and, most primarily, love. Inter-communal bond is a relationship that exists out of all odds, like friendship or love that breaks all the barriers. It can create equality and exemplifies what real human bonds should be. Profit, intention, selfishness, and control do not have any role to play in this kind of bond as they do not have any 'tags attached' and are built with heart and held with love.

The bond within a family plays a significant role in the development of an individual. Murugan shows the importance of family and the need for understanding within the family members through his novel *Estuary*. *Estuary* deals with the life of Kumarasurar, a middle-aged government employee. The central theme that moves the plot is the relationship between Meghas and his parents. Though both his parents are very loving, his father is more concerned about him and his future. Thinking of the generation gap, Kumarasurar is befuddled by his son Meghas' adolescent mindset and viewpoints; he is also astonished at Meghas' knowledge of modern technology.

When Meghas asks for a costly mobile phone when he is admitted to college, his anxiety becomes intense. The profoundly disturbed Kumarasurar wonders why his son asks for such a costly mobile. Like all normal Indian parents, he feels that his son is an innocent youngster and that the evil world and modern gadgets like mobile phones will corrupt him.

The incidents he heard about the harmful impacts of addiction to modern technology make him a maniac. He is torn between his love and trust for Meghas and the reality around him. He is perplexed by what he sees in the world around him and what he hears from the unfavourable neighbours, jealous friends, manipulative media and hostile

co-workers. His ignorance about the outside world intensifies his agony. He spends sleepless nights filled with fright because of his nightmares and illusions. He locks himself up alone for days together, loses his emotional balance, and screams, cries, and scolds his wife without apparent reason. Looking at his plight, his wife seeks the help of his friend Adhigasurar, who is in the city. He spends a few days with his friend, cooks, listens to songs and visits the estuary. The confluence of the river into the sea influences his mind and brings a positive mindset. He starts missing his wife, and their bond is strengthened, and he talks more lovingly to her. He gets clarity of thought and starts understanding his son's attitude.

Kumarasurar's love for his son, his anxiety, and his confusion regarding his son's future make society understand the importance of bonds in a family. The concern of a father is irreplaceable. "Kumarasurar had never shied away from his parental duties; he never would" (19). Kumarasurar always finds it difficult to explain his feelings to Meghas because of the generation gap. Meghas' mother is closer to her son, and Kumarasurar wonders at the happy conversation between his wife and son when he does not know what to talk with his son. Moreover, when Meghas talks at length with his mother, he will always get a monosyllabic reply from Meghas. She understands her son's behaviour, though she is ignorant of all the incidents happening around.

Every day Kumarasurar will call his son and ask the same seven questions again. He says, "The call of Yama is certain. A call from one's son is an event" (1). When he starts speaking, he will guess the mood of his son and will change the tone and the order of his questions. The questions are as follows:

'Are you well, aiyya?'

'Did you go to class, aiyya?'

'Have you eaten, aiyya?'

‘Do you have enough money, aiyya?’

‘Have you washed your clothes and hung them to dry, aiyya?’

‘Are you studying, aiyya?’

‘Shall I hang up, aiyya?’ (2)

Meghas would answer only “Mm.” He thinks about the good old days when Meghas needed his constant attention and longed for that Meghas. Kumarasurar is very careful about choosing a school and college for his son’s education, which is common among parents. Kumarasurar looks for a college with strict rules to discipline the students, where his son will get a job as soon as he finishes his studies. However, Meghas wishes to have the freedom to select it himself. He even bursts out angrily at Kumarasurar. At last, they allow him to join the college of his wish, but Kumarasurar cannot sit still in his house. “He wasn’t able to sit still. He tried to go back to sleep. He couldn’t lie still either. His tongue went dry, and he felt suffocated. What if he goes into cardiac distress?” (25).

Kumarasurar feels that his adolescent son is in such a stage that any small change can affect him. Sometimes, he dreams of Meghas standing at the railway track and being hit by a train while attempting to take a selfie.

The next problem arises when Kumarasurar’s neighbour tells him about the students arrested for uploading videos of women in their neighbourhood bathing. Kumarasurar, then dreams of his son being arrested. He calls his son, who is in college and enquires about his well-being. As Kumarasurar tries to come out of such illusions, he comes to know about pornography and how youngsters are deeply attracted towards it. When he returns home that evening, everyone appears naked to Kumarasurar’s eyes. He starts spending sleepless nights again. He is worried if his son will also be watching porn. He worries about Meghas and calls him unconsciously. He says, “Look here, pa, people say all sorts of things. They don’t want us to be happy. They’ll ruin our lives. . . . You

have to be careful. Don't pay attention to anyone. I'm here for you. Be brave. Listen to me, the whole world has gone to the dogs. You need to be alert.” (157).

He could neither ask his son about anything nor discuss it with his wife or friends. He locks himself inside the room and cries. He trusts his son at the same time. Murugan mentions that “It is the world where ugly habits prevail, where rules are broken, a world of no values, a world of greed and desire and cruelty, a world that has rotted from all these” (ix).

Kumarasurar also learns about a boy addicted to online games without any control. The boy is admitted to a hospital for treatment. Kumarasurar loses his sense of reality and shouts at his wife, “It's not enough if you birth a son, di. You need to know how to raise him. He's immersed in his phone day and night. The games in there have drawn him into their trap and made him their slave. We have to break his shackles and set him free” (205).

The novel ends with Kumarasurar meeting Meghas in his college and agreeing to get the new model mobile phone Meghas has asked for. Meghas has changed his mind now and says that he is interested in coding, for which he can use his laptop; so he does not need a new mobile phone. Kumarasurar asks Meghas to order a new phone, which he will use. Meghas says, “you only need a mobile phone so you can make calls. I barely have time to study. I don't want to distract myself and waste time. I only speak to you and Amma anyway. The phone I have lets me do that. I'll buy a new one when I see fit” (241).

The novel clearly portrays a father's love for his young son, his doubts arising from his excess love and a wife's concern for her husband. Fathers, in whatever situation they are, irrespective of their economic status, constantly think about the welfare of their children.

In the novel *Current Show*, the boys are oppressed and degraded because they are parentless. Only Sathi has a father—a leper beggar. Despite his poverty, his love for the boy is evident. When Sathi becomes angry on seeing him, his father pleads, “Dai, Sathi, don’t talk like that. What can I do? Can I help it—maybe it’s my fate. How can I not see you, you tell me that. You’re all I have” (61). He brings some meat and food for Sathi and gives him some money before leaving.

Sathi, on the other hand, does not want to be identified with his father. He wants to escape his identity, so when he sees his father, he abuses him and asks him to leave; but he has love and sympathy for his father. Sathi longs to hear his father’s voice: “He feels himself melt in the warmth of that voice. It is smooth and this makes him absurdly happy, the voice is enough. . . . His hands want to strangle the throat that called out his name. But he also wants to rock himself and cry. . . . He feels pity wash over him” (57,58,59), hearing such a soothing voice.

Similarly, in the novel *Neduneram*, Kumarasurar is a government teacher. He undergoes a lot of struggle and pain after his father’s death in his early childhood. His mother works hard to take care of him, and his maternal uncle takes his father’s role. Even though his uncle has to pay back his debts, he remembers to send money to his nephew. He even stops his son’s education to educate Kumarasurar. Kumarasurar marries his cousin Mangasuri, and when he begets children, he makes sure his children’s needs are fulfilled. He is also a very supportive father like Kumarasurar of *Estuary*. However, both fathers take time to recognise the importance of their wives.

The bonds described above are familial bonds—the bond everyone has with their family members and relatives. But the most supportive bonds are the ones that exist out of the caste. They are beyond discrimination. People bound by such bonds are concerned about the well-being of the other, a friendship formed out of emotions and a love that tries

to break the segregation. The friendship of Kumaresan and Soda Bhai, Kumaresan and Periyasami in *Pyre* and Marimuthu and Raman in *Resolve*, are such bonds without expectations. There are two inter-caste marriages shown by Murugan, the marriage of Kumaresan and Saroja, which is better than that of Marimuthu and Rosamani because the former takes place due to love, whereas the latter is because of lack of choice.

In the novel *Pyre*, Kumaresan is from the land-holding caste. His mother, a widow, tries as much as she can to bring up the boy. She believes that her family and brothers will get him a job and may probably give their daughter in marriage. However, Kumaresan knows their intentions and that they will not give their daughter to Kumaresan though they were kind to him in his childhood. “Kumaresan wondered if it was because his uncles were not keen on deciding anything for fear that they would have to spend on the wedding” (40). Moreover, that idea is not feasible for his aunts also. “He could marry one of them. But his uncles’ wives didn’t like the idea. When they already knew how Marayi’s life had turned out after marrying someone from that village, why risk that again with another girl. But they never said it in so many words; they just said it wasn’t a good match. ‘We will find an excellent girl for him,’ they promised, but it proved to be more difficult than they thought. (96)

A community holds one with love only when the rules are upheld. This happens even among close relatives. His maternal relatives, who were kind to Kumaresan, when he was a child, start abusing him when he marries Saroja, “You wretched dog who feasts on waste!” (174). On the other hand, Soda Bhai helps Kumaresan when he is jobless. He convinces Marayi, who is concerned about sending Kumaresan to a town. He is an egg seller who comes to the village to collect eggs. When everyone else in the village calls Kumaresan ‘Nōndi’, he calls him, ‘Kumaresa’ or ‘little brother Kumaresu’. He helps him get a job by taking him to Tholur, to his relative, who owns a soda shop in the town. The

soda shop owner supports Kumaresan and takes care of him like a son, when Kumaresan meets with a small accident in the shop. “He didn’t need any stitches on his legs, but there were gashes in five or six spots. Bhai bore all the expense for the treatment. Eager that Kumaresan should heal soon, he began sending him biriyani and kari kozhambu from his home once in a while” (106-107).

When Kumaresan wants to marry Saroja out of love without the knowledge of his family, his friend Periyasami helps him. He gets them clothes and whatever is necessary. They are not related to Kumaresan, but they understand Kumaresan’s wishes and help him, but his mother and relatives who have been with him, and seen him grow, do not accept him. They even beat him heavily and abuse him once they feel that he has brought dishonour to their community. When he cannot manage his stress, he bursts out, “At my uncle’s house, they keep saying that they did this and they did that . . . What exactly did they do? They were merely protecting their own. . . . Did they spend their own money on us? Caste! Which caste is Soda Shop Bhai from? Wasn’t he the one who offered me the job? If he hadn’t done that, how could I have made some money? Which man from my caste came to my aid?” (176).

Similarly, in *Resolve*, Marimuthu’s family and relatives look down on him as he remains a bachelor in his thirties. His mother, who should be of some support, intervenes in his marriage plans due to her greed. She asks for a dowry much higher than what the bride’s family could afford. She finds fault with the brides. When Marimuthu starts getting old, and there are not many girls around, she complains about Marimuthu. His father, on the other hand, is a hedonist- “Marimuthu’s father –knew nothing but hard work in the field. . . . All he needed was some gruel and some kambu meal with thick milk curd. And, of course, palm toddy” (64). Everyone in his family and community backbites his inability to get married.

Ultimately, when Marimuthu loses all his hope in his relatives and family, he meets his friend Raman. He belongs to the community of toddy tappers. He has worked in Marimuthu's farm in his childhood. When they meet again, they recall all the good old days. Unlike Marimuthu's parents, Raman understands Marimuthu's feelings and the pain which has been disturbing him for many years. He tells Marimuthu about a girl in a nearby village and arranges for a meeting. He tells Marimuthu, "I think this girl is perfect for you. If you say yes, I can go there tomorrow and take things forward. You will be married in fifteen days. But if you still keep worrying about others, I will leave now" (290). His parents are not convinced about the bride because she is poor and from a lower caste. They try to stop Marimuthu from marrying her. However, Raman helps Marimuthu to get married to the girl taking care of all the formalities.

Love in a relationship is crucial to maintaining humanity and creating an equal society. Love is the base of all positive emotions. Love helps people to get out of their communal shells and understand each other. Murugan says that inter-caste marriage is one of the most effective ways to reduce caste oppression in society. But, people under group cohesiveness fail to come out of the ties they have developed with their community. An article on *Being Intelligent* defines Group Cohesiveness as,

. . . the degree and strength of attachment (togetherness) between the members of the group. It is one of the important factors which influences group behaviour. The higher the group cohesiveness, the greater will be the interaction and degree of agreement (on various matters) between the group members. Group Cohesiveness is the extent to which group members are loyal and committed to the group members and the group as well, and are motivated to remain a part of the group.

Everyone in a community is under group cohesiveness. When an individual's wish clashes with communal values, the values are given priority. One, who is closely

associated with his community refuses to come out of the cohesion, even when he knows that some ideas may lead to harmful effects. People are not allowed to come out of it. In the novel *Pyre* Murugan uses the love of Kumaresan and Saroja as a revolutionary activity against the caste system. Though he hails from a village, Kumaresan goes against the community and marries Saroja from a community of leather workers. Contrary to his belief that his mother will accept them, she refuses to accept him till the end.

Many inter-caste marriages end in honour killing, and there are others which bring out the cruelty of the caste system. Love is a bond that is beyond rules or restrictions and cannot be controlled by the divisions of caste, race or religion. In the article “The Limits of Freedom Now Are Exactly as They Were in the Past”, Murugan says, “In fact caste-related honour killings have increased today. It is now possible to commit such killings easily, even in busy places like public thoroughfares and residential colonies. Our society has provided no safe spaces for lovers. Love allows people to transcend barriers. But our caste system won’t allow crossing over.”

It is quite interesting to note that Murugan practises what he says. He has loved and married a woman from another caste against his mother’s wish. She was angry and remained silent for some time but did not humiliate them or abuse their relationship. She has taken time to accept her daughter-in-law and, once accepted, treated her like her own daughter. Murugan’s wife, Ezhilarasi says in her Preface to the book *Amma*, “Her humanity shone through in the fact that she did not see me as her daughter-in-law” (xviii).

Ezhilarasi has written her Preface as an acknowledgement and a note of gratitude to one of the best humans she has ever lived with—her mother-in-law. Her description makes it clear that her mother-in-law, Perumayi, is a humanist. She is of a higher caste and Ezhilarasi belongs to an untouchable community, but she has accepted her. She has never compelled her daughter-in-law to follow their communal or religious customs. Nor has she

bragged about the highness of her caste and abilities, making it difficult for the girl to adapt. She has understood the girl's feelings giving her freedom in everything. She has also shared all the responsibilities without exhorting her dominance.

In *Pyre*, Kumaresan truly loves Saroja. So does Saroja with all her heart. She leaves her family for her love. Once Saroja enters the village, she is filled with fear, "Saroja clutched his shoulder and continued to shuffle ahead. . . Smiling faintly, she wondered if he would have taken her smile to mean, 'I have no one besides you. I have come placing all my trust in you'" (5). Kumaresan assures her that he will take care of her. He tries to make his mother understand their love for each other. These lines prove their trust in each other, Kumaresan: "Don't worry about a thing. I am here "(4) and "If you can trust that from now on I am everything for you, then come with me.' Even if she came to lose everything else, as long as she had him it was enough." (6)

Except for the family's opposition, they do not have any other problem, and they get along. He tries to give her hope, and she tries to be happy for his sake. He feels that she looks like a plant separated from its roots but will be fresh with a little rain. He plans to start a soda shop in a nearby village when he finds that his mother is adamant and will not accept them. The mother does not understand her son, nor does she try to accept her daughter-in-law. She kills Saroja. When love tries to transcend the boundaries, the community limits it from achieving its goal.

Marimuthu of *Resolve* marries Rosamani from a lower caste. He marries her because he has remained a bachelor until thirty years, and there is no prospective bride in his community. His friend gives him the idea of marrying her. Despite these reasons, once he sees Rosamani, he starts loving her, unmindful of the social division. She is from a poor family, so he gets her the jewellery and money to be given by her father as dowry to protect her from his relatives' belittlement. When his parents and relatives try to dissuade

him from marrying Rosamani, he fights with them to marry the girl. Due to the unavailability of a suitable girl from his own community, he agrees to marry Rosamani. After moving with her, he understands that having a good heart is more important than being in the same community or economic status.

In all his works, Murugan emphasises the importance of human bonds, the need for humanity and how humanity can bring about positive changes in the life of the oppressed. There are instances from Murugan's life which are worth mentioning. When Murugan was forced to leave his native Namakkal because of the controversy that ensued the publication of *One Part Woman*, he lived in exile in Chennai. More than the exile, it was the hatred that tormented him more. He had a strong faith in his people, and he never expected such an outburst of anger from his own people. The trauma made him announce his literary obituary. Writing has been a solace, a way to vent his feelings. When he could not write, he felt dead. He started writing again with the support and motivation of his family and friends.

Murugan, during the launch of the book *Songs of a Coward*, describes his life in exile,

I consoled myself that there were things to do in this world other than reading and writing. And I did my best to turn my attention to them. But it was impossible. It was then that I realized the full meaning of the Tamil phrase, 'nadaipinam', 'a walking corpse'. Towards the end of February 2015, I went to Madurai to see my daughter, and spent a few days in my friend's house. On the first floor were two rooms. One was stacked with books and the other had a bed. With nothing to do I lay dazed night and day. I wallowed in a dark hole without the urge to see or talk to anybody. (The Wire)

Murugan says that because of the exile, he has understood that people are not always good and reliable; and at the same time, he has come to realise that it is the goodness and support of people that have the power to sustain relationships.

**Bond with Nature:**

Humanity is not restricted to showing concern for fellow human beings. It includes all creatures- animals, birds and all objects of nature alike. Ecologists and environmentalists express their concern for nature. Similarly, eco-writers describe the bond of human beings with nature.

The locale of Murugan's works is the Kongu region which is entirely agriculture based. There is no way the region can be described without stating the importance of cattle and the well-known breed of cows and bulls called, 'kangeyam kaalai.' It is one of the native breeds of bulls trained for 'jallikattu' and farming.

The land is rich in natural resources. The perennial rivers feed the entire population. The land provides food, water, and also raw materials required for industries. Besides agriculture, the second most prominent occupation is cattle rearing. Agriculture is relatively dependent on cattle and animal life. For human beings to live a meaningful life, many things like religion, their bond with nature and fellow beings' help.

Nature connectedness is a concept that deals with a person's affinity towards nature. Wesley Schultz, a professor of Psychology describes three components of nature connectedness— cognitive (how a person is connected with nature), affective (how he cares for the nature around him) and behavioural (how much he is committed to the protection of nature).

Hugh defines Nature connectedness as, an individual's sense of his relationship with the natural world that goes beyond mere contact or exposure to nature. It is necessary to emphasise this because contemporary urbanisation and technology are increasingly seen

as influential to the point where people see themselves as separate from nature. Nature connection can be viewed in terms of engaging with nature through our senses and immersing ourselves in our natural surroundings. Nature connection can also be seen as the mental, physical and emotional benefits that can be felt as a consequence of spending time with nature. (Darach Social Craft)

Muugan's works are completely based on natural surroundings. He never misses the fields, wells, trees and cattle. His characters are people of soil. The land is their god, teacher, friend, and philosopher. They find solace in nature, in the warm evenings, dark and cold nights, the deep wells and the palm trees. It is worthwhile to make a note of what the English Romantic poet, Wordsworth says about his connection with nature in his poem, "Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey",

. . .Therefore am I still  
 A lover of the meadows and the woods  
 And mountains; and of all that we behold  
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
 Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,  
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise  
 In nature and the language of the sense  
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
 Of all my moral being.

Murugan's novels also talk about his close connection with nature in a similar way. The concept of Schultz is in the form of a man's journey where he first feels attached to nature, and then starts loving it, how he begins to care for nature and at last, how he is bent on protecting nature from all harms. In the works of Murugan, the children are the ones

who are more connected to nature. The farmhand children are closely related to the fields, trees, birds and cattle. They are biophilic. They love the consoling harshness of the palm trunk, the drunken mynas and the lakebed. They are worried about the dryness of plants in summer.

When the day is warm, they feel comforted; when the night is cold, they feel embraced. Shorty especially likes sleeping on the mud floor, which allows him to feel its love. “The earth hoards a lot of stories, he knows that. Stories from long ago that insist on being let into his ears. He does not think the likes of Selvan can ever know these tales. . . . Shorty thinks he is blessed that way” (122). In the cowshed, he finds it difficult because of the wetness and smell of the sheep urine and mosquitoes; but when it comes to the open fields, he always prefers soil or rocks under the moonlight.

Rocks are one of the symbols used by Murugan. Rocks denote comfort. Like an island, they give rest to the wandering souls- whether they are people or animals. In *Alandapatchi*, when Muthannan is worried about Thannaya Patti sleeping on a rock, she says that rocks are the gift of god to man. The children in *Seasons of the Palm* love playing on bare rock. There is a rock called ‘The Big Rock’ where the children used to play five stones and rest while grazing sheep.

Shorty loves the moon and its coolness. The sky and the fields will expand largely and he will feel himself a small point in it. Murugan describes the night beautifully,

The fields bathed in the light of a bright half-moon. Darkness has fled the earth, flushed from every hole and crevice by the searching moonlight. . . . The wind is cool and soothing . . . content to gently caress man and beast. . . . nights are beautiful. . . . Shorty cannot wait to cross the dry water way that leads from the Master’s home to the fields. He feels that the hours ahead and the vastness of the land belong to them and them alone. (136,137)

The palm tree is the next symbol used by Murugan. He shows lonely palm trees, twin palms and palm groves. In *Resolve* he shows the palm tree as a silhouette when Marimuthu feels lonely. The novel *Seasons of the Palm* is named to highlight the importance of palm ripening season and the children's activity of collecting the roots. It is the palm roots that make the palm root trader call Shorty 'little Master'. When Shorty is up in the palm trees, he feels like flying.

He sees the entire field below him. Wide, with knots of palm trees growing out of its stomach. The field is a giantess, he thinks, and the trees are her hands. The lakebed is a dull white. Sengattu Master's fields are mere dots. The sky above dares him to touch it. And still, the moon continues to pour out its white and yellow happiness. . . . Now, he is taller than the tree. Not short, Not Shorty. He sees the field through the leaves and fronds. He wants to stretch his hands out and fly. Float on the night air, slide down a moonbeam, swim the expanse of the sky.  
(144)

The palm trees provide livelihood for the toddy tapper community. In all the novels where Murugan uses rural background, he refers to the palm trees. Palm trees are the symbol of sustenance. They grow well in dry areas withstanding all heat and they never wither by heat. Though they are thorny and scathing, they support an entire community and are used in several ways – ice apples, toddy, palm fruits, palm roots, and palm jaggery; the leaves to thatch houses and trees to help in the regulation of rainfall in dry areas.

In *Rising Heat*, Selvan has a fight with his aunt because of the fruits of a palm tree. He laments when the tree is uprooted when the lands are taken for urbanisation. As much as the dry areas are given importance, Murugan shows the power of the water bodies – wells, lakes and estuary. He says, “water could be a clever temptress, seducing one until it

could swallow one whole” and sea as “an endless body of water. It curled its finger and called out to him alluringly” (227).

Deep wells are very common in the Kongu region. Except the river beds where it is river water irrigation and drain irrigation, agriculture in other parts depends solely on rain and wells. There is a story which says that when a person wearing an *urumaal* (turban) in his head has to see the water level of irrigation wells, the turban will fall into the well, meaning that the water level will be shallow.

Wells are symbols of solace and soothing chillness. They are breathtaking, assuring and provide comfort in the hot summers. During summer, the days are scorching, and the rocks emit heat. In such times, the wells are a form of escape for the characters. In *Seasons of the Palm*, the well has greater significance; the children play in the unused well in the grazing field.

Stonedeaf thinks, “The sun pours heat steadily on her head. If she gets into the water, her body will thank her for it. To feel the water lap around her, to paddle in it till her eyes turn red and her skin gathers wrinkles, to remain in the well till the sun climbs down and the heat loosens its hold on the air—the heart never tires of the water” (62). The well determines the fate of Shorty. At the end of the novel, when the children are cleaning their sheep for the harvest festival, Selvan, in a fit of madness, pushes the sheep’s head into the water and continues kicking the children in the water as well. Shorty pushes him deep into the well in his anger when Selvan talks ill of Shorty and Belly. Selvan disappears into the well. The other children advise Shorty to escape, as Selvan might have died.

In *Rising Heat*, Murugan describes the importance of an ancient well which has irrigated the entire fields of Selvan. When it is closed and his grandfather, who witnesses

the closing of the well laments, “That one that never dried even during the hottest years, da. How many cultivations we’ve reaped from that” (49).

In *Pyre*, the well becomes a symbol of discrimination. After the death of Kumaresan’s father, who accidentally fell into the well, his mother stopped using their well. She, along with the women of the village, has to go to another well for water which is far away. It is the only good well in their village which belonged to a farmer in their community. When Kumaresan’s family is ostracised, they cannot take water from the well.

In *Resolve*, Marimuthu feels the water in the well to be comforting. He prefers bathing in the well every day. He does not like bathing in the water from the pump set but likes jumping into the well to bathe. In *Current Show*, the boys who are marginalised labourers find happiness and comfort in the well. They go to the well to destress, enjoy and bathe. Being in the dirty theatres, they free themselves of all their worries by playing in the well.

In one of Murugan’s famous short stories, “The Well,” Murugan portrays the nature of the well through fine descriptions. A well seems to invite people and also gives them a mild chill in their spines about entering into its world. He describes wells as, “gaping mouth of the land”, “frozen silence”, “poultice”, and “universe that no one could conquer.” The narrator feels that a well seduces the lookers to jump into it. But it also has some secret eyes to devour the person. When a little girl jumps into the well, he says that the well obediently holds her like an angel in the sunshine. A well in winter provides the warmth the body needs and in summer it entices people with its chillness inside. Only a well is capable of that.

The next important part of nature described by Murugan is the estuary. Murugan lives within the Western Ghats, with its terrains, rocky fields and goats. He does not go

beyond that in his works. But in his novel *Estuary*, he describes a coastal area for the first time. His description is one of the most lucid and remarkable portrayals of an estuary in literature. “The chaotic roar struck their ears from one side, and deafening silence hit them on the other. Calm and fury were side by side, so palpable you felt you could touch them with your hands. Perhaps the stretch of sand between the two comprised linked hands reaching out towards both the stillness and turbulence” (225).

Nature has the power to heal. One who is close to nature will always remain calm. People closely associated with nature will have more courage to face their struggles. As wells have provided solace to the children, Kumarasurar finally finds solace in the estuary. He undergoes mental trauma and is beset by illusions because of his fear that the overuse of modern technology may spoil his son. Kumarasurar starts his life afresh once he returns to nature and merges himself with the shore, sun, wind and sea. He “came under a spell. . . . the sea licked his feet in a teasing caress, and then rose to his knees, and then flowed away. It was as if the water were tickling him playfully. He closed his eyes, laughed out loud and allowed himself to enjoy the experience. He was tempted to wade further in” (226, 227). Nature provides him solace and the clarity to understand life.

Murugan’s characters are born in a natural environment. They find happiness in nature. Even when separated from their natural setting, they find ways to return to their natural environment again. Selvan and his family in *Rising Heat* are evacuated from their ancestral land. However, he and his father want to return to the old life of being in the land. His father feels that land will never become useless and money invested in land is not an expense. When Selvan comes to know that his father is going to buy a new piece of land in a nearby village, he is filled with excitement. “If Appa bought the land, the boy could play outside again. Jump into the well. The idea of being out again filled the boy

with excitement” (67). Thus, Murugan’s characters are biophilic, and are innately connected to their environment.

The second component of nature connectedness is ‘affective’ which refers to care for nature. The people of the Kongu region are closely associated with nature and animals. They cannot be separated from their environment. They rear the cattle as their own children. Murugan usually uses cattle as a form of expressing the richness and lifestyle of his region. The people are very close to the environment and use their cattle and fields effectively.

People of the Kongu region are not forest dwellers. They take care of the fields, plants and cattle. The affinity towards animals is given more importance in Murugan’s works. Shorty cares greatly about the sacrificial sheep Veeran and the dog Poochi. When his Master takes the sheep for sacrifice, he cannot get separated from it. His eyes well up, “‘Veeran!’ His voice came out a slur, choked. ‘Veeran!’ . . . As the sheep angled his head to look up at Shorty, the moonlight made his eyes glow. . . . Shorty felt a great urge to hug him, put his hands around his neck and weep. Cry to his heart’s content.” Thinking about Veeran, he cannot sleep the whole day before the festival. (231, 232). After the sacrifice, he refuses to eat the meat of the sheep.

Shorty is sensitive. When Belly and Tallfellow ask Shorty about selling parrots, he dreams of becoming rich by selling baby parrots. However, when he climbs to take the baby parrots from their nest in a palm tree, he sees birds that are “red and featherless. Hearing a sound and sensing movement near the hallow, they open their beaks, confident that it is their mother returning with food. Shorty’s heart melts and his resolve drains away. Swiftly, he climbs down and jumps off the tree” (214).

Shorty and the other children feed the dog with their own food. When the masters feed the children with the leftover food, which is supposed to be given to the dogs, it

becomes clear that they will not feed the dogs well. Shorty likes the dog and when Tallfellow pushes Poochi into the well and it cannot come up, Shorty helps the dog to come out. When Selvan plays pressing the sheep's head into the water and the sheep struggles for breath, Shorty argues for the sheep. "Don't do that, Master! Poor thing! You might even kill it" (328) and Tallfellow also supports Shorty.

Most of Murugan's novels describe the love between animals and human beings. As much as humans love their animals, the animals love their owners. Goats are used as a symbol of revolution by Murugan. After his exile, he gets resurrected with the help of the goat, Poonachi. He says that goats are humble but revolutionary. They always walk holding their heads high, and aim for the plants that have grown tall. Through the character of Poonachi, he shows the life of women in Indian households.

Goats and sheep also add to the description of the landscape. The old couple takes care of the goat, like their own daughter. In the Kongu society, every animal has a name and every one of the animals is a part of their family. Murugan in *Poonachi* treats the goat as if it is a human being. He shows humanism through Poonachi as she lives for the welfare of her family and sacrifices her life.

In *Seasons of the Palm*, Shorty, is responsible for caring for the cattle. He takes the sheep to graze. He loves Veeran, the sacrificial sheep. Often, Veeran will come close to Shorty and play with him. He pets the sheep calling him "sweetie" and "my pet." He does not even allow his friends to beat the sheep. He gets furious when his friend Belly hits the sheep.

Shorty's face darkens with anger. His jaw tightens. True, he scolds Veeran sometimes, but never really seriously. If even by chance, his leg touches the sheep, he bows down and begs his forgiveness. . . . 'Why hit him like that?' . . . How dare she beat Veeran? Just like an idiot girl. Veeran didn't butt her. Didn't go at her

belly with horns. He only wanted to rub himself against her. Was that wrong? She doesn't know a sheep's affection. (33,40)

When Shorty and Selvan set their sheep pen in the middle of the fields, without knowing that it is the path of Munisami, Shorty witnesses Munisami, the village god, riding his horse. He is frightened to see Munisami in a massive form standing before him. Veeran protects him from the wrath of Munisami. Veeran immediately comes to Shorty's help. He talks something with Munisami and protects Shorty.

Shorty's love for Veeran increases when Veeran protects him when Lord Munisami appears before him. Shorty's genuine love for Veeran becomes apparent when he refuses to eat the meat of Veeran during the festival. His heart does not allow him to eat the child he has reared so lovingly. "I don't want to eat Veeran" (241).

In *Rising Heat*, Murugan deals with the theme of urbanisation and the love of the villagers for their land. They consider their pets as their own family members, and the family has even made a figurine for their dog, Mani, in the village temple. When they move away, the dog goes along with them. But Mani cannot live there in the *valavu*. Nor can it live roaming around in the deforested land without its owners. The author describes Mani's plight, "The dog didn't want to get caught. Nor did it want to leave the boy and run away. It stood there, torn" (6) and, while telling about the other animals he says, "Only the dog still remained, but in a calcified state, and kept coming back into the forest" (25).

The dog misses the land but cannot leave his owner, Selvan. He does not come home even for food. Though the boy tries hard to take it back home, he cannot catch it. Selvan wonders, "But how could he explain to the dog that they had been completely uprooted from this soil? . . . Those people whose laps you laid on and played with like a child are no longer here. Those houses in front of which you lazed around and ran barking towards at the slightest sound stood ruined, empty and motionless" (6). Even after they go

to their newly bought land, Mani does not return. He often goes to the colony where their ancestral land was. It becomes ill and dies near the land.

There is also a cat which Selvan's sister loves very much. She lets the cat eat from her own plate. The cat also cannot leave the land and it dies. "Poor cat . . . It grew up like a child with the family. As soon as they began to pack all the things, it turned mad. It meowed incessantly. No one could catch it . . . They tried cajoling it, tempting it, chasing it, chiding it. It ran away somewhere. The next day, it was found right there in the forest, dead, with its throat bitten off" (24).

Apart from Mani, Murugan talks about a buffalo the family-owned. They have sold the buffalo as they could not take care of it in the *valavu*. But the buffalo comes back to their house the very same night. They could not do anything but shed tears. "The buffalo had been with them ever since he was a little child . . . They had sold it only a month before they were displaced. . . . The very next night, his mother thought she heard the old buffalo and got up to check. And sure enough, there it was standing outside! It had come running back in the middle of the night" (16-17).

Murugan gives a similar incident through the short story, "Seemaatti the Buffalo." The narrator's mother rears a buffalo named Seemaatti. One night she hears the buffalo calling her. They sold the buffalo a week earlier, and the entire family is saddened. The buffalo has been one among the family. When the narrator's mother came as a new bride, she brought the buffalo as *seeru* (dowry). His mother is very much attached to the buffalo. She tells her son, "She's not a buffalo, da. She's the Seemaatti who has come to protect me" (51). She will stop talking with anyone who talks ill about the buffalo. She feels that Seemaatti is a treasure and the pen has increased because of her. Every other buffalo in the pen is a descendant of Seemaatti. But as the buffalo grows old, they cannot bear the pain

Seemaatti undergoes because of her health. So they sell her in the market. But the buffalo comes back from the house it is sold.

‘It’s her, she has come back. She won’t abandon me!’ Amma cried . Having seen them, the buffalo let out a louder bellow. Mother and sons rubbed their eyes and opened them wide. The buffalo remained. It was no illusion. Amma ran and threw her arms around the buffalo’s neck. The buffalo licked her. . . . The peace of having returned to her rightful place showed in her eyes, which twinkled in the darkness of the deep shadow. (56)

The third component of Schultz is ‘behavioural’, and it denotes the commitment of the humans to preserve their environment. Murugan’s characters also show their interest in preserving nature. The old woman in *Poonachi* expresses her worries about the reduction of the animal population in the forest. *Rising Heat* is all about destructive activities against nature. When nature is destroyed, humans will become destitute. In the novel, Selvan and his family get scattered because of urbanisation. After living away from their natural surroundings in a housing colony, they attain peace only after buying a new land.

Murugan’s people pay more tribute to the nature around them. They treat nature as their god. They pray to the sun, land and water sources. Through his works, Murugan shows the importance of bonding with nature for the well-being of human society. The discrimination people have been facing for ages is inhuman. As they are born like everyone, they should be given the same rights. People- man or woman, higher caste or lower caste, blacks or white, are equal before God and law. Nevertheless, the stigmatisation has not changed even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It has been more than seventy years since India gained independence, but the state of an untouchable is more or less the same in society. Even after equality in education and other professions, women are not treated equally.

There have been positive changes in the last fifty years. The strict forms of discrimination have lost their vigour and have become relaxed. And still, there is a long way to reach equality. The solution for a better tomorrow is a change in the mindset of people. As Tiruvalluvar says,

Melirindhum mellalaar mel allar keezhirundhum

Keezhallaar keezh allavar (Kural 973)

The men of lofty line, whose souls are mean, are never great

The men of lowly birth, when high of soul, are not of low estate. (Valaitamil)

A man with humanity and nobility will be great despite his lineage. When everyone gives importance to humanity and become humanists, they will accept and embrace the differences as variations. If humans start understanding nature and start living close to it, they will learn more about equality. Humans should work for the well-being of the entire society as nature remains impartial. What the famous American transcendentalist, Emerson says about nature in his essay “Nature” can be considered in this regard:

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. . . . The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food. In the presence of nature, a wild delight runs through the man, in spite of real sorrows. Nature says,—he is my creature, and maugre all his impertinent griefs, he shall be glad with me. Not the sun or the summer alone, but every hour and season yields its tribute of delight; for every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of the mind, from breathless noon to grimmest midnight. . . . In good health, the air is a cordial of incredible virtue. . . . I have enjoyed a perfect exhilaration. (5)