

ABSTRACT

From Restlessness to Reassuring Humanism in the Select Novels of Perumal Murugan

The thesis titled “From Restlessness to Reassuring Humanism in the Select Novels of Perumal Murugan” analyses the complicated caste structures, discrimination and the status of women who support their men and family. The women farmers struggle hard to come out of oppression and march towards independence. The characters also emphasise the need to create positive bonds with fellow beings and nature, which can help form an egalitarian society. Perumal Murugan, as a representative of the Kongu region, delves deep into the society and explores the intricate corners of the region. His works serve as the documentary of the lives of his people, their culture and beliefs, lifestyle, relationships and their innate bond with nature. Murugan’s works reflect his observations of the daily lives of the villagers with their fields and cattle. So, he does not leave any single dimension of the area. The thesis deals with three main ideas prominent in the seven translated novels of Murugan selected for the study. They are: *Seasons of the Palm* (2004), *Current Show* (2004), *Pyre* (2016), *Poonachi: Or The Story of a Black Goat* (2017), *Rising Heat* (2019), *Estuary* (2020) and *Resolve* (2021).

Each core chapter is dedicated to one theme. Cruelty in the Form of Caste examines the intricacies of the caste system in the Kongu region. Murugan uses the caste structure as the base of his work. Kongu region is caste-oriented. The landlords belong to the upper caste, and the farmhands working under them are of different castes, mostly untouchables. Three major issues related to caste system – Agricultural servitude, Misuse of Dalits and Honour killing are focused. The supportive-suppressive relationship of the Masters and their field hands, the importance given by the higher castes for their

communal identity and honour killing are examined. Furthermore, the misconceptions of the society on lower castes, purity, the state of the subalterns, abuses which include physical and verbal and food-based discrimination in the novels of Murugan are also clearly analysed in the chapter with reference to subaltern theory.

Murugan though not a feminist, portrays his women as strong-willed and independent. Kongu women being hard workers, play almost an equal part in every activity of the family. There are also matriarch households in the region. The next chapter titled, “Empowered Versus Subdued Women” gives an account of the social evils targeted on his women like Female Infanticide and Child Marriage. It centres on the two types of women in his novels. The empowered Women are the deciding force, have an equal say in their families, their life as farmers, their ways of empowerment, how they come back stronger after struggles and their role in family as well as in agriculture, with importance to single mothers, breadwinners and revolutionary women. The second type of women dealt is those who are subdued because of their caste and gender and become victims of honour killing and prostitution.

Nature acts as a character in Murugan’s novels. He shows the richness of the environment – grazing fields, wells, palm trees and animals. The communal bonds of the higher castes are explained based on social identity theory and related concepts. The chapter also compares the enmity between the Masters and the humanistic nature of the farmhand children. Their innate affiliation with nature and concern for their friends is examined based on P.W. Schultz’s three components of nature connectedness. Murugan, in his novels, also shows positive relationships between Masters and their farmhands. The thesis emphasises the need for positive change in people’s attitudes towards their fellow human beings, which will lead to a better tomorrow free from all discriminations.