



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

UNDERSTANDING VANISHING VALUES, TRADITION, AND CULTURE THROUGH WRITINGS OF AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR, PERUMAL MURUGAN

Dr. Alka Dutt

Assistant Professor, Amity University Manesar, Haryana, India

Email: alkaduttdutt@yahoo.co.in

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.1.326](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.1.326)



Article info

Article Received:06/03/2024

Article Accepted: 27/03/2024

Published online:31/03/2024

Abstract

Translated works of Perumal Murugan offer the contemporary state of Indian Society. Award winning author of several works, Professor Perumal Murugan, shows his keen interest in bringing forth to his readers different aspects of simple life as led by both rural and urban Indians. His applaudable translated works from Tamil to English are an insight into universal emotional upheavals at individual level along with grave issues that continue to traumatise man in these modern times. This paper explores lives of low- and middle-class Indians who struggle to retain all that they value against all adversities. Perumal has deftly managed to pen down worries of parents, issues cropping up in sensitive relationships, problems with educational institutions and problems in Society at National level. Importance of translation is highlighted as one learns about cultural diversity in the Indian Subcontinent that, though regionalised, is still coming up with universal elements and age-old problems that have refused to be eradicated and continue to plague lives of Indians.

Keywords: Society, Problems, Children, Culture, Marriage

Defining tradition and culture

Traditions are personal to families and are passed down from one generation to next for safekeeping. This system could have originated as cue taken from Roman Laws that allowed transfer of inheritance to save it within the family. Valued traditions can be something that have been transmitted through culture of a larger group that an individual or a family is part of. Traditions are meant to generate peace and harmony among diverse minds; but this does not necessarily mean that goals are always achieved.

As understood, family is the smallest unit of any given society and it constitutes of a husband, a wife, and children resulting from the union. This socially approved relationship is further sanctioned by customs and laws of the land as per requirement. Question of children born out of man and woman united through marriage are deemed legitimate and entitled to property of parents as per the law. Marriage in India is taken to be a duty through which continuity of human beings bigoted through felt sensual pleasures is ensured legally.

All cultures are not the same. Social institution of marriage can be differently explained

according to patri-local society or matri-local society. In some cases, bride goes to the groom's house and in other case it could be the other way round. Monetary transactions too are done according to situation. While Natural Marriages, like those in Catholic faith, are meant for lifetime, there are others like Widow conservation in which a vicar's widow marries successor to her husband's position for economic support. Marriage between different sexually oriented male-female fall under the category of lavender marriage that conveniences concealment of socially stigmatized partner. What goes on in a human mind is beyond anybody as one comes across people who have been reported to have married their pets. Shotgun marriages take place between couples who happen to get a child as result of premarital sex. No matter what name is given, most marriages are there to take care of monetary aspect of living through life.

Murugan on human psyche

This paper explores issue of marriage and religion as taken up by Perumal Murugan in his book, *One Part Woman* and its one sequel, *Trial by Silence*. His novels are an insight into psyche of people in love. He comes up with simple narrative style to discuss complexities of relationship that sets a couple apart from their own society and goes on to elaborate on corrosive effect of that very society on its valued emotion. Perumal leaves readers in suspense with his cliff-hanger ending to *One Part Woman*. Apart from marital relationship, Murugan has managed to arouse readers' curiosity regarding this institution called 'marriage'. This socio-religious practice also makes one inquisitive to know more about role of religion in Indian society. His novel, 'Pyre', again is a love story. Here one sees the lovers fighting off the abuses of an inter-caste marriage. Here one can perhaps find hope for Saroja as she can hear 'bicycle approaching', probably that of Kumaresan, that would bring her out of the concocted 'pyre' of hatred and insanity.

Tragedy of Man in love

Author of works under discussion has managed to invoke sympathy of readers for the fictional protagonist, Kali. Milk of humanity flows through Kali as revealed through every part of *One*

Part Woman. Kali falls in love with his childhood friend Muthu's sister and stays in love for rest of the story. Ponna loves her husband no less and let's readers decide as to who loved more at the end. Poignant story leaves one with a sense of numbness as one cannot say that Ponna was wrong, or it was wrong on part of Kali to think the way he did about his wife. The couple takes tradition of marriage seriously as is the practice in cultures across the world. Kali's love gets communal sanction, and he wins hand of Ponna for life. When he refuses to re marry to beget a child, he adheres to his marriage vows and his own true feelings for his wife. It is different for Ponna. Ponna feels the pinch of not becoming pregnant. Her face becomes shadowed as she sees tree planted by them. Tree is laden with fruits and flowers, cow brought up from her father's house had several calves while she continued to stay barren. Kali's emotions run rampant on seeing her pain, but he refuses to fall for another liaison to become a father as suggested now and then.

Novels under discussion do not discuss system of marriage under different headings, but one finds that people like Kali wish to practice monogamy where man stays true to his wife during conjugal relationship. Kali is physically and psychologically bound to his wife and spiritually pleases himself and his wife during time spent with her. He raises himself up and away from traditional form of marriage that demands man to go for polygyny as mentioned in Apastamba Dharmasutra. He and Ponna had been married for twelve years and Ponna had not conceived. Kali could have gone for another marriage just after ten years because of this.

Definition of marriage however changes according to place and time. This reflects upon nature of man as man moulds every law according to his need. Relationship of Kali with his wife is firmly tied to his personal emotional beliefs. Though he follows every ritual and every practice that can make Ponna conceive, he never ever thinks of another woman for his own needs or another man for Ponna to impregnate her. He is satisfied with his own little world and all that he has. Small incidents, certain events and other tell-tale actions of Ponna are deftly mentioned by Perumal to state that all is not well at

this end of the marriage. In certain places one finds Poona as a strong person who defies all insults unreasonably thrown at her person. She cries out her pain on her husband's chest on being stalked by other men around the village on not being able to give birth to a child. She suffered for her husband at social ceremonies when refused to be part of a ritual on account of being "unfruitful". Slowly and steadily, we see Poona breaking apart. For a change one finds Kali, the man of the household struggling to keep his marriage vows intact by defying all plans that are laid down by women around him to get an offspring for the family. He fought off cattle dealer's attempts to "quietly change the cow" or his offer of, "Mapillai! Shall I find a new cow for you?"

While one grapples with problems exposed in the main story, Perumal touches upon another issue that of breaking traditions behind the cover of religion. He takes up an old tradition that was in vogue around the area of begetting children through "Gods" in case of an impotent father. Murugan's works contain many traditions that strive to become cultural norms that would allow for free practice of these to suit the purpose of many over the time. Religion in India is responsible for lot that has affected Indian culture. There are those who say that it is culture that determines a religion. Perumal simply states that to continue one's bloodline, people of Kali's community did not hesitate to get aid from the almighty in some manner or the other. It was a belief that during the chariot festival Gods came down on earth and helped women without children to conceive in human form. Anthropology delves into 'tradition in traditional societies' and according to them Poona should do what the women of the house, her mother and mother-in-law and others who sympathise with the situation demand of her; to sleep with one of the 'Gods'. Sociologists give consent to this 'action' as "it has always been that way", a logical appeal to tradition. Seerayi, Kali's mother, tried to convince him to send Poona to this festival where he himself happened to go during his bachelorhood. And, Kali would not say yes as he knew that there were men like him who played at being "God".

In his preface to the second sequel, Perumal says, that identities are created and erased

through the story as the story moves forward. This is not intentional. It is the demand of the story as it progresses. Hence, one can say traditions are made and erased as per one's convenience. One sees tradition opposing modernity and progress that sticks to age old rituals and beliefs instead of visiting a doctor for consultation. Practice of visiting the Chariot festival taken up by more than two generations of people around Kali's home highlight the 'traditional' aspect of practice in vogue that ensures continuity of a family.

Conclusion

A person should live to what is deemed as best in one's life for life is full of surprises. Values give purpose to lead life, they generate meaning and help in finding right path for fulfilment where it is emptiness all around. A good connectivity to one's own personal values can keep mental illness at bay and save one from committing suicide like Kali. It is for an individual to decide whether wife/ husband exchange is best way to move ahead in life or to stick to one-man one-woman lifestyle. Practice of begetting children through 'Gods' or through modern surrogacy can lead to complications of committing sin like that of Oedipus.

Apart from pointing out queer practices among people to beget children, Murugan has also exposed loose relationships that continue to exist under veneer of social constructs like that of marriage. Seerayi while talking to Poona's mother, says, "There are women who quietly meet other men in the maize and millet fields, going there on the pretext of cutting grass. And later, they just wash themselves with a pitcher of water under a tap and quietly come back." Here one can simply assume that there is unnecessary hue and cry about illicit relationships in today's date when what one desires is to simply have one, but away from prying eyes. There is again too much talk about illegitimacy, but this existed even earlier as Seerayi says in one place that her grandmother slept with her father-in-law and happened to conceive her first born through him. About dealing with husband's who sleep with prostitutes, Murugan relays through his fictional character that wife should go ahead and bash him up with a broom and do something about her own

chastity. Murugan writes with tongue-in-cheek, and readers need to take it in that manner.

Murugan is serious when he talks about emotional upheavals of Kali and Poona. He sympathises with them. Throughout the three novels under lens, Poona's every emotion, every memory is about Kali and her life with him and her loved one's are aware of it yet family unity is always there to support the cause of child for the family in order to help her. During village meeting, Poona gets official sanction from the elders to bring new life to the world. Truth glares at everyone, but everyone 'Understands'. Murugan has created a strange world to help defaulters in life to keep fear of being exposed at bay.

Reference

Murugan, Perumal.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perumal_Murugan

.Kumar, Amitava. *How Perumal Murugan was resurrected through writing. December 12, 2019.*

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-perumal-murugan-was-resurrected-through-writing>.

A Novel that roiled India is now translated into English.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/16/books/review-one-part-woman-perumal-murugan.html>.

Murugan, Perumal. *One Part Woman.*

ISBN9780143423546. Penguin Books.

Murugan, Perumal. *Trial by Silence.*

ISBN9780143428336. Penguin Books.

Murugan, Perumal. *A Lonely Harvest.*

ISBN9780143428343. Penguin Books.