

A Socio-Literary Inquiry on Perumal Murugan's Novel Seasons of the Palm

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Abstract

The absolute exercise of the dominant caste groups for accomplishing supremacy is played out in the social order. The civil society that constitutes the economic, political and social activities of people existing in it. Consequently, the hegemonical caste, class and gender apparatuses utilize the cultural artifacts to dominate the oppressed communities in the Indian social structure. By tradition, the dominant forces are allocated to be in a position that appeared to be 'superior' to the 'other' caste communities in the society. However, by the exposing this brutal truth to the society, the novel *Seasons of Palm* plays a major role in 'reconstructing' the future of the dalit communities. At the same time, Perumal Murugan through his works, 'deconstructs' the hegemonical order in the society.

Keywords: Caste, Violence, Perumal Murugan, Seasons of Palm, Regional Literature

Introduction

The manhole fatalities in Tamil Nadu are the height of structural violence in the state, since it is against the law to scavenge by hand. In India, deaths while maintaining sewage systems and other septic tanks are a more frequent occurrence. Despite the fact that manual scavenging is illegal as of the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, the state's annual mortality toll from manholes is increasing. The state's caste system has a long history of requiring downtrodden community members to engage in manual scavenging, but in today's society, it has taken on a new appearance. The muteness over the demises of manual scavengers is even more treacherous than the other caste based massacres. The muteness in the common morality gives approval to caste based organizational violence that could be sustained in the society.

The novel *Seasons of the Palm* portrays the about how kids from oppressed castes are required to do manual scavenging works in the rural community. The character Tall fellow in the selected text has to move the pan of his Old

Master's 'piss and shit' to the pitch. This is the principal assignment for Tall fellow in the sunrise, with "his stomach churns, his in isides twist and turn, and he feels as if his entire body is dripping with shit." (Pg. 50)

The act continues further with Tall fellow's defenselessness to oppose to do this 'shit cleaning' work in his Master's house, but his socio-economical situation forces him to agree the status quo. "He washes his hands several times with cow dung. He sniffs at his fingers. They continue to smell of the old man's shit. He only forgets his fingers and the Old Master when he is out in the fields with the sheep." (Pg. 51) Cleaning human excrement out of every toilet in the nearby villages is a task shared by the youngster Stumpleg and his father. The study highlights that in this social system, all menial employment are always caste-related.

Symbolic Violence in the existing structure

With the structure, violence functions covertly and like an unseen grid. Symbolic violence operates and gives the system the impression of

being normal and acceptable through semantic, exemplification, and treatises that make up the symbolic field. For instance, Tamil Nadu's educational system gives the impression that it is democratic and opens to everyone who wants to further his or her education.

Omprakash Valmiki in his work *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2003), he shared his childhood among the dominant caste communities. *"Everyone in the family did some work or other. Even then we didn't manage to get two decent meals a day. We did all sorts of work for the Tagas, including cleaning their homes, agricultural work, and general labor. We would often have to work without pay. Nobody dared to refuse this unpaid work for which we got neither money nor grain."* (Pg.2) He then continues that the 'upper' caste people would touch a dog, cow or even a buffalo, which could not contaminate them. On the other hand, they were frightened to touch an untouchable that would pollute them.

Omprakash Valmiki represents the whole dalit communities in Indian society through his work. At the same time, Perumal Murugan utilizes his novel *Seasons of Palm* to represent the lives of the dalit communities in Kongu region.

The paper questions, why children from disadvantaged communities and classes are still being allocated to perform agrarian and other slave labours in the modern world, as *Seasons of Palms* highlighted, persists despite the advanced technical advancement in India today. Kunjaal is the daughter of Tall fellow's master, Mani is the son of Belly's master, and Selvan is the son of Shorty's master. These three kids have the opportunity to attend classes in the surrounding town's schools.

While the untouchable children were unable to attend school due to their socioeconomic status. The Mistresses warned their children even when they wanted to play together, *"Look! I don't want you dancing around with those low-born, rascally children. ... Must have been rolling about in the fields with those low-born varmints"* (Pg. 105)

Seasons of the Palms by Perumal Murugan accurately captures the situation of dalit youngsters employed as bonded labourers by landlords from dominant castes. Although the work portrays the

happy life inside the sensational natural landscape of the particular province, it also emphasizes on the dalit childhood that has been dehumanized by caste and class violence. The work however has the standard imagination of an orthodox novel, such as, the natural landscape, animals, trees, and mountains.

Caste Consciousness in the characters

The writings of Perumal Murugan pose insightful queries about the idea of objective violence. The horrifying conditions that subjugated people, particularly dalits, have endured for many years are made clear to the readers in this passage. Certain works, which predominate on the pages of the chosen novels, are undoubtedly about the savagery of caste and class systems. The numerous invisible violent forces that sustain the 'peaceful' circumstances inside the current social framework operate simultaneously.

On the other side, caste consciousness is nothing more than a shaky, hollow, insubstantial substrate. When the base cracks, the base can simply stop the crack from spreading by using repressive devices. The caste system's adaptability is unpredictable since it modifies norms to suit its needs. A few examples in the chosen texts demonstrated that, in a society where consuming acknowledgment by violence is fruitless and immoral, "caste honour recognition" has no real significance.

In the book *Seasons of the Palm*, the Stone deaf's Mistress permits her to perform household duties that are against Stone deaf's rules. In contrast, while her Mistress is ill, Stone deaf is covertly given orders to carry out the typical household chores like cooking, washing dishes, and other menial tasks around the house.

The most noteworthy aspect of the aforementioned scenario is that the Mistress invited the untouchable Stonedeaf into her home and allowed her to take care of the Mistress's infant. The Mistress had made her swear she would never tell anybody about the incident, and the Master is also aware of it, but he keeps quiet.

When Anand Teltumbde discusses about the concept of caste atrocities in the twenty first century in Indian subcontinent, he says, “*Atrocities are essentially human rights violations with the added association of unbridled cruelty, brutality and inhumanness. It is difficult to give a unique answer to the question of what precipitates an atrocity*”. (2010:29) Perumal Murugan through his novels he raises the questions similar to Teltumbde that about how people transformed into a brutal animals to kill a vulnerable fellow human beings.

Here, the reader could understand about the mindset of perpetrators whose actions are being justified and acknowledged by the social forces of the society. It is Dalit communities that has always become a routine object of humiliation, sexual abuse and physical injury. By penalizing Dalit and other oppressed communities, the embedded structural violence in the social structure attempts to defend the socio-moral code of a particular caste community.

Caste in twenty-first century

Caste based atrocities and riots might be perceived as the very cultural product of the hierarchical society, which encourages the dominant communities to harm other communities. “*Caste is the central faultline of modern India. Yet Indian social science has a tendency to study it as a displacement of what are seen as more fundamental identities such as class or ethnicity, despite the fact that the public spaces of modern India are inflected by violence against dalits and subordinated castes and its domestic spaces structured by strict prohibitions against caste miscegenation*”. (2006:2)

The mentioned quotesheds the contemporary perspective of caste and it emphasizes about the concept of ‘communalism’ in India is always related to ‘caste’.

Conclusion

‘Violence and otherization’, is major to Dalit literature that are deliberately ignored and marginalized in the scholarly or research accounts of academic study. The customary practices of caste honor and bigotry in the social structure becomes the major element in formation of ‘violence and

otherization’ in the lives of dalits communities. Perumal Murugan in *Seasons of Palm* fictionally documented the real life incidents based on Kongu region where feudal system was in peak in that time.

Through his work, the author criticizes the established the unjust social system which manifests in the social life to manipulate the lives of the oppressed communities. Here PerumalMurugan articulates the necessity to recognize the fundamental human dignity that every human being possesses in the society. In a way, *Seasons of Palm* led to serious discourses of the existing social conditions of the oppressed communities in Tamil Nadu.

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