
Cultural Identity and Social Structures in Perumal Murugan's *Poonachi or the Story of a Black Goat*

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Abstract

This research paper delves into the story of Perumal Murugan's *Poonachi or The Story of a Black Goat*, which provides intensive analysis of traditional rural life, social life, social hierarchy, symbolic animal representation and marginalized societies. The study emphasizes how Poonachi struggles to survive in the world shaped by the nature and man-made obstacles. By doing so, it confirms the novel's position as both a strong cultural object and a subtle form of resistance. Murugan's metaphorical journey to Poonachi, a weak black goat, represents the complex realities of throwing discrimination, gender criteria and rural erosion in rural Tamilnadu. The novel acts as a vehicle to criticize the infiltration of bureaucracy systems in indigenous people's lifestyle, which supported the silence of subordinate voices, and the erosion of oral traditions that supported cultural identity in the past. The novel explores the relationship between humans and eco system, highlighting the interconnectedness of human actions on the environment. Murugan's narratives examine the rural design and fiction symbols, which light and preserve the Tamil cultural heritage, while at the same time questioning the sociological institutions that possess inequality.

Keywords:Cultural Identity, Patriarchal Structure, Survival, Resilience, Gender Discrimination, Marginalized, Ecology

Introduction:**Cultural Identity and Social Structures in Perumal Murugan's *Poonachi or the Story of a Black Goat***

Perumal Murugan is considered one of the most prominent voices in modern Tamil literature, known for his rural stories and honest research of caste, tradition and social taboo. His novels often reflect the living reality of marginalized people, representing their happiness and sorrow. *Poonachi or the Story of a Black Goat* is a deep interpretation that reflects the

complications of the Tamil rural life, where cultural values and hereditary rituals determine identity, status and relationship.

Poonachi is just more than the story of a weaker goat; This is a deep focus on methods where systematic structures and traditional criteria interact to shape the lives of the poor. It examines the conflict between social analogy and existence, and highlights the subtle but universal methods that shape cultural behavior and increase inequality. Murugan reveals the metaphorical world through the life of a clearly insignificant animal, highlighting the difficulties that individuals face on the margin. Jaikumar argues in "Culture and Resistance in Tamil Rural Literature" that "Tamil rural literature embodies a dual character of cultural preservation and political resistance" (42). It strengthens double roles of Poonachi both as a symbol of cultural objects and resistance.

The portrayal of the village in this novel reflects the intricate cultural elements of the Tamil Agrarian Society. The location is not just a background; It is a living force rich in ceremony, custom and culture. Each aspect resonates with a cultural character, the way they speak, eat and worship by the villager's interaction with animals. Simple movements such as naming the goat or giving their specific grains have intense cultural significance and show how deep they are connected in daily activities. For example, the old woman naming the goat shows that naming is a cultural work that holds institutions in a social and emotional context. "That same night the old lady gave the goat kid that resembles a kitten a nickname: Poonachi" (Poonachi, 11)

The cultural identity of Poonchi is deeply associated with the routine of rural Tamil life, where social relationships, traditions and the environment work together to determine the meaning and belonging. Murugan presents cultural identity as a living, changing experience as a permanent heritage, memory, marginalized and existence. The story explains how traditions and social hierarchies are maintained in internal and rural mentality, regularly through symbolic behavior around Poonchi, such as naming, food, reproduction and prison. Even the task of registering Poonchi's birth with the government becomes a cultural event, and shows how villagers are forced to interact with official systems that highlight their social status and fear of rights, while still trying to protect their lifestyle.

Farming is a source of livelihood. This novel depicts agricultural methods, cattle rearing and irregular monsoons. In Tamil Nadu, a person's reputation is determined by the wealth of cattle. In this sense, goat represents more than animals; It symbolizes wealth, fertility, endurance and eventually sacrifice. Murugan expanded Poonachi to a symbolic position to represent emotions and concern for the village. "The kid is quite smart" he writes. The statement "She looks like a worm, but with her attitude, she is already an adult" (Poonachi, 10) highlights how animals often get spiritual and emotional meaning in rural communities.

The village has a cultural ecology where identity is passed through oral stories, rituals and human conditions; This is more than just a setting. However, Murugan also emphasizes how delicate this ecosystem is, as it is clear through ecological decline and bureaucracy. Therefore, Poonachi's journey is a mirror of cultural decline due to the symbol of subordinate resistance along with external forces.

A decaying way of life where ecological balance and cultural identity are complicated is suggested by the imagery of drought, lack of cattle and disturbed agricultural routines, for example, "Not a blade of grass had sprouted in their field" (Poonachi, 158). Finally, Poonachi is a powerful reflection of how flexible culture is in despite being in constant threat from social margins and neglect. Murugan continuously depicts hierarchy and marginalized in the country in the country without mentioning Caste. An implied system for exclusion is reinforced by the speech, functions and social interactions of Varnas, and the vulnerability and monitoring of Poonachi reflects the social reputation of the oppressed casters. His experience with terror, prison and public investigation acts as a metaphor for the people who are negotiating untreated social obstacles yet.

Gender discrimination is another important cultural element that Murugan smartly included in this novel. As a female goat, Poonachi becomes a powerful symbol that is like being a woman in patriarchal cultures. She reflects the boundaries laid on the dynamics, voice and autonomy of women, which begins with her first fragility and continues through sanctions laid on her freedom. The author makes a clear comparison between gender restrictions and animal control when she says "being female, she is destined to leave for another home someday" (Poonachi,139). Meenakshi explains in "Gender and Identity in Tamil Fiction: A Study of Murugan's Female Protagonists" that "Murugan's female protests not only through riots but also through emotional resilience and the assertion of existence" (197), which is clearly repeated with the story of Poonachi and the quiet flexibility of the older woman.

In this novel, the themes of speech and silence are both literally and symbolic. They express an important aspect of cultural identity. The prediction of marginalized people, whose stories often become quiet or remain out of prevailing stories, are reflected in goat's deficiency in voice. At the beginning of the book, the author said that he had chosen a goat because it is the only animal that can tell a story without inviting retaliation. shows that silence can also be a strategy for a survival with a rebellious expression. Murugan affects a non-human, female hero and affects human focused and male-dominated cultural stories, which means that it is essential for unseen and unheard of society. Priya Kumaravel, in "Voices of the Voiceless: Animal Symbolism in South Indian Fiction", argues that "animal symbolism in South Indian fiction acts to keep the story's focus centered" (88).

Murugan criticizes systems that are subordinate voices, and emphasizes the importance of alternative identity established on endurance, emotions, emotions and symbolic resistance. Murugan's history also criticizes how modern government policy has

destroyed the self -relationship with old knowledge systems and rural people. Krishnan states in “Caste, Bureaucracy, and the Everyday: Reading Murugan’s Rural Worlds” that “Murugan's legend represents rural life, who is not in wonderful but quickly fragmented with slow violence from administrative intervention” (82). The intervention of bureaucracy, such as the need to record livestock, acts as a state infiltration of how the state represents infiltration and traditionally interferes with rural life.

The book has a connection between the nature and identity, as weather, agriculture and livestock have immediate impact on social permanent, safety and cultural continuity. As an extension of themselves and their cultural heritage, the goat is essential for both economically and spiritual for the livelihood of the old couple. The recurring themes of the novel such as hunger and drought serve as symbolic representation of major concerns on the effects of environmental decline on rural heritage. Sharda Ramakrishnan highlights in “Tamil Modernity and Marginality” that “Murugan has shown ecology in the center of Tamil identity, and shows how environmental uncertainty destabilizes both existence and culture.” (103)

The prosperity of oral history and folklore is deeply recessed in this novel. Murugan capitalizes a story telling technique in which animals represent social challenges and human characteristics. This supernatural form mimics ancient Indian stories such as Panchatra, where moral and philosophical truths are presented through animal stories. The metaphors' destructive capacity and social norms to get outside censorship are asked questions, shown by the storyteller's reflection.

Poonachi confirmed that cultural identity is constantly interacted with flexible actions instead of sending through the custom. A subtle, but transformative type of female agency, is shown by the old woman's minor love, her disobedient patriarchal norms and her emotional relationship with Poonachi. She stands for cultural mother, who sometimes binds communities in collaboration with compassion, conscience and subdivision, despite being ignored in the mainstream debate. By showing how memory, emotions, ecology and quiet protests everyone works together to preserve identity in a world that often threatens to destroy it, Poonachi becomes a multi -level examination.

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