



Uncovering Anthropocentric in Perumal Murugan's Poonachi or The Story of a Black Goat.

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Abstract

The concept of communal reflection among the life of human beings and animals in relation to one another is examined in this paper. The non-human issues relating to nature, culture, and terrain were generally disregarded by humans. Perumal Murugan, an Indian writer, in his fiction *Poonachi or The Story of a Black Goat*, given the anthropomorphic traits to the protagonist, a female goat named Poonachi, through which he concentrates on various subject matters, that includes the extremity faced by both humans and other living beings under the reduction of natural sources, interference of class system, government authority, sensuality, misogyny, superstitious belief, animal sacrifice, God and religion. The main focus of this paper is to uncover human-animal relationship in connection to that of the above listed issues, to prove that, this work was written from a human-centered view, that makes the work absolutely anthropocentric.

Keywords

Human–animal conflict, Environmental crisis, anthropomorphism, anthropocentric, Class, Hierarchy, Sensuality, misogyny, Life & Death.

Introduction

Poonachi or the story of a black goat is a short fiction by a renowned, contemporary Tamil writer Perumal Murugan, written in Tamil under the title, *poonachi Allathu; oru karupatin kathai* in 2017, Which was later translated into English by a translator N. Kalyan Raman. Perumal Murugan has written six novels, four collections of short stories, and 4 anthologies of poetry in Tamil, among this five of his novels were translated into English. As of awards, he was short listed for *kiryama prize* for his novel *season of the palm* in 2005, has won the *Sahitya Akademi's* translation prize for his novel *Madhorubhagan*, or *One Part Women* in 2017. *Poonachi or The Story of a black goat* was also longlisted for JCB Prize for Literature in 2018 and for National Book Award in 2020. It is evident that all his works has the reflection upon the Indian society as he was born and brought up in Tamil Nadu. Most of his works focus on caste oppression and economic subjugation, here *poonachi* also falls into this category, which includes common issues such as hierarchy, ownership, exploitation, apathy, deprivation, life, desire, love, and death. Murugan by introducing anthropomorphic animal, a she-goat named *poonachi* into his novel, he not only reflects upon the life of the particular community of southern Indian people who faces struggle, but also extends the subject to another serious issue, how this humans society still holds an upper hand towards other creatures, by ignoring the fact that all creatures in this world is equal, and has freedom to express their own emotions and feelings.

Glimpse of Poonachi or The Story of a Black Goat.

Perumal Murugan, a master of story-telling, reflects profoundly on our transactional society, its inequalities and struggles. *Poonachi* is a story of a female goat who carries burden of difference throughout her life, who survives all hardships. *Poonachi* was considered to be a mysterious being from the start, as it

was left by a Giant-like stranger under the care of an old man saying that it was the 7th litter of the mother goat he raised, from that time this goat was raised by that old man and his wife along with all other goats in their farm. They named it poonachi, as it resembled the old women's cat that she previously raised, poonachi was shown as a fragile being and was given lot of care. As she was growing up, she had to face lot of struggles like, felling a prey to eagles and wild cats. Her difference in appearance, kept poonachi away from being one among her own community, which made it difficult for her to lead an ordinary life. poonachi survived and gradually adapted to the circumstances around her as fast as she could. she was protected from all the possible hazards and was fed by old couples on regular basis in spite of their poverty driven circumstance. In spite of all these, there awaited another twist in her life. It was the time of her puberty, that is when she began to face the harsh reality of her life which made her realize that her life has always been under someone's control. She was meant to lead the designated life, and she fails to claim the freedom of her own and lived under the forced identity by giving up on her own desires and dreams. In the end she disappears from this mortal world as a stone figure. Which can be seen as an expression of solidarity with animal world and female status. This story makes the readers to reflect on our own reactions to the hierarchy and property, altruism and greed, love and lust, life and death. Giving an idol form and exploiting their pure nature for human purpose, and to gain profit out of it in the name of domestication, and slaughtering them as an offering to God which clearly reflects upon the cruelty of unequal world.

Characteristics of Anthropomorphism in poonachi

It is evident that anthropomorphism, also referred as personification, a literary device form was in usage from ancient times. For example, stories from Aesop's fables by centuries, collection of linked fables from India, the jataka tales and Panchatantra, also employ anthropomorphized animals to illustrate principles of life. In poonachi, Murugan also employed anthropomorphic trait to the female-goat. In preface, he clearly mentioned why he chose goat of all other animals. As he considered goat as a problem-free, harmless, and energetic being. He thought it would help him convey the messages in his mind to the outer world. His thoughts reflected the ideology of 1st century Greek philosopher, Apollonius. In Aesop's fable he quoted that, "we acquire certain opinions of the several animals and think some of them as royal animals, of others as silly, of others as witty, and others as innocent" (Apollonius of Tyana [23]). As Murugan considered goat as an innocent and apt animal, he created poonachi to indirectly emphasis on the subject matter, that in the world of humans there is no equal place will be reserved for other creatures, as humans themselves are striving for one, as secluded Beings under various categories as rich and poor, high and low and many more.

Human-animal conflict

The arousal of human-animal conflict can be witnessed in this novel. Background of the story, the characters involved, and its settings is all about the people of a particular community, who runs down for their livelihood in that semi-arid hill of odakkan by growing stockings and by doing farming. Even though their life was under stake they managed to feed themselves and their cattle. Trading, stock exchanging, farming, and selling goods were their occupation, but this was not the situation all the time. On the one hand, both cattle and humans had to face the consequences aroused by the government, and on the other hand by the natural calamities. Murugan has mentioned about the intense political issues in this novel, that resembles George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945).

... 'it's only poor people who come here like fools to stand in queue and suffer.'... 'speak softly, sir. The regime has ears on all sides' (Murugan 35).

The above lines describe the situation, how the powerless suffer in the hands of higher officials, and government authorities. Few incidents that include the ear-piercing segment of all new born humans and animals, the distinguished view upon sheep, and goats gives the insight upon the politically dominated society, in which, humans are secluded based on the class or hierarchy and treats them based on the stamped identity.

Nature also plays a vital role in the life of humans and animals, where the natural calamities that include, 'drought,' has its effect on farming and the livelihood. In the progression of story, Murugan has beautifully described about the destruction of Environment, through gradual changes and its effects on livelihood. The incidents where many people sold off their stockings for meat and money, act of immigration to different places, uncertainty about survival, and life is vividly shown. In poonachi, the old couple and others who stayed back sold out all their stockings and only the pregnant poonachi was left with them, which also struggled, starved, suffered and died helplessly. These incidents can be seen as the

reflection of the current suffering of people in the society, especially the farmers who suffers due to irregularities in climatic changes and irrational behavior of government.

“The woman of the house said that once upon a time, wild hounds, jackals, leopards and herds of deer had lived in that forest. Now, there were only wild boar. ‘People keep destroying everything and shoving every last bit into their mouths. How then can anything or anyone survive here apart from human beings?’ (Murugan 67). These lines imprint the fact that, the environmental issues the universe face is all man made. It can be seen as the warning to the human race, to stop exploiting the nature and its source for industrial purpose.

Mirroring upon the life of women

Poonachi’s appearance in the novel as a female goat can be seen as the life of stereotype women in Indian society or in general. The character development of poonachi replicates the women life from birth to death. Poonachi’s growth from a fragile female being to that of a strong and potential goat, transformation from infant to motherhood, seeking liberty, love and hatred, sensuality, dreams and desires fits the characteristics of women. This is obvious while we track the life of an orphaned goat poonachi, which reflects the fears and desires of us humans, that makes this work more human centric and not animal oriented.

Conclusion

In the end, it becomes an undeniable fact that, the attribution of anthropomorphism in poonachi does mirrors the intrinsic values of human over other creatures. At this point, the work gently forces us to examine ourselves and our roles in creating an uneven world. which makes poonachi the human centered novel rather than animal-based work. If the modification of thoughts and action can be implemented by thinking humans as animals or one among them rather than envisioning humans in animals there will be no space for this unequal world.

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