

## Think India (Quarterly Journal)

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-06

### International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies

held on Saturday, 3rd August 2019

Venue- Seminar Hall, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Jain Deemed-to-be-University, Palace Road, Bengaluru, India



## Unknown Identity in Perumal Murugan's "Seasons of the Palm".

A.Anushya

*II M.A.English Literature*

*Bharathiar University*

*Coimbatore*

*aanushya96@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

*"Our struggle does not end so long as there is a single human being considered untouchable on account of his birth."*

*This paper deals with untouchability, loss of freedom, emotional problems and the subalternity of the people in PerumalMurugan's "Seasons Of the Palm". The fact of being oneself should not be given up for any cause. In the novel, the protagonist work as a "bonded child labour" which is an indigenous act. Shorty(protagonist) lives with sheep, like a family It depicts the brutality of landlords. He undergoes lot of torments throughout his life due to his identity and the title "bonded labour". He was not allowed to create his own identityeventhough he had more talents.The pain of social injustice prevailing in the novel has been portrayed in this research paper. The lack of education makes them unaware of the changes happening in their own selves.The caste system fills the society with inhumanity. The children manual labour has been forced upon them by their exploiters and how self actualization remains a distant dream has been discussed in this paper.*

**Key Words:** *Untouchability, subalternity, injustice, inhumanity, self actualization.*

### **1.Introduction**

Identity is one which defines Who we are? and What we are?. A person can be identified only through his identity. It plays a major role in current world. A person must possess his/her own identity. Nowadays life is based on one's identity. "Seasons of the Palm" deals with the perspectives on identity. Originally titled as Koolamadari in Tamil by Perumal Murugan. He is an Indian Author who focuses mainly on the village life of kongu region, their way of living, how people of lower caste suffer for their daily needs, difficulties in livings especially in their workplace, among friends, commoners if their identity is revealed. The life of the people is all about the

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relationships between different castes. His novels deal with the important aspects of untouchability. This novel also depicts about caste, untouchability, suppression of the landlords and mainly identity crisis as it's main theme. The people of lower caste are not given much importance. Thus all these acts remain indigenous and unchanged. The novel talks of a young boy Shorty who was bonded to work to repay his family's debt to a very strict landlord. He is unaware of the things around him, a little boy who knows only to maintain the goats. He was only given a day's meal. Hunger and his goats were only his companion when he was alone. He was considered as shame and only involved in the household works, lost his freedom when was born as the child of lower class people. Thus poverty is one of the reason for his suffering. He was given severe punishments by his landlord when he loses one of his goats mistakenly. Shorty is used as a tool to fulfil all the needs of the landlords. The landlords punish him in a cruel way. This punishment makes him suffer both physically and mentally. It was not the age to bear the sufferings of the punishments who was only nine years old. The inhumane nature of the landlord is revealed in this paper.

"If I was the only person to resist untouchability I would resist it with my life"- Ambedkar.

"Untouchability is a sin". Untouchability prevails in rural areas where people are not allowed to take part in any occasion of the upper caste. Some people are suppressed by their own people. We even teach our generation to treat the lower caste people as untouchables. Thus this act must be stopped by the people. The minds of the younger generation are corrupted and lead them to a wrong future. Thus the untouchables also should be given the equal rights. Untouchability is seen everywhere. We see in old days the children in schools were given separate seats based on their identity. This novel depicts the untouchability of the children namely Shorty, Belly, Tall Fellow, Stone-deaf and so on. These children face many difficulties to face the society. They are denied by the community because they are untouchable. They feel hesitated to reveal their caste. They think that if the people know that they are untouchable they will be thrown away from the commoners. They feel a kind of hesitation to talk to the people who know that they are untouchable. Even they possess so many talents they are not recognised. The thoughts of the people differ for them. Thus they remain the same as untouchables. They also face many hardships in their life. In the novel, they mostly live along with goats. Shorty (protagonist) runs his life with goats as his family. He is so forgotten by his family. He is not connected to his family. Only because of untouchability the young boy faces all the struggles in his life. Though the reason for his struggle is poverty, the main thing reason that pushed him in such situation is his untouchability. They are not send to schools not because of their nothingness but for their untouchability. Selvan the son of the landlord learns like other children except Shorty and his friends. Selvan was instructed not to meet, touch and talk to Shorty and his friends only due to their untouchables.

Aiy! You touched that low-born child? Have you washed?'

'Of course not! Not even his fingertip.'

'Look I don't want you dancing around with those low-born, rascally children. And if you do,

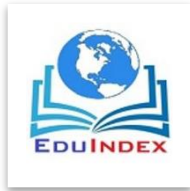
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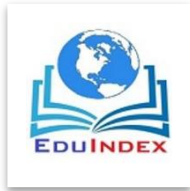
Do forget about food tonight.

These children are not paid for their hardships. The children lack shelter, food and clothing. The society lacks respect for these people and the children. Children are not seen as children but the symbol of untouchable. They are treated worse than animals. Shorty was beaten so badly when one of the goats is found missing. Even before a child was born, their freedom was lost and their dreams get shattered when the child begins to grow up, when he belongs to untouchables. The child builds a wall around itself and finds difficult to reveal its “identity”. Most people ignore hesitate or ignore them though everyone are humans. They lack humanity.

A Subaltern is someone with a low ranking in a social, political or other hierarchy. It can also mean someone who has been marginalised or oppressed. Subaltern is seen every place. It is not just a word but emotion and action. The authoritativeness of the owners is revealed through their actions. Either in the workplace, family members and so on.

They are controlled not only by actions but minds. Subalterns follow not their mind, but their owners. They don't follow their own actions but the actions of their owners. Similar in the case of life, they don't live their life but the lives wished by their landlords. Subalterns see their masters as God and only believe their words. They take those as words as the “verses of the Bible”. In this novel the landlord suppress. Shorty and unjustly punish him for his silly mistakes. Shorty can be seen as a prisoner to his master. He fulfils all the works immediately after his master's command. Subalternity can be seen throughout the novel. Almost all the children are marginalised. Children are forced to work when they are expected to study and enjoy their life by their masters. “Shorty doesn't know the name of his master” which reveals the relationship between Shorty and his master. Subalternity can be seen throughout the novel. Masters are injustice and inhumane. Murugan perfectly brings out the subaltern in the right way. Children are without sufficient food, no proper wages and rest. Children doesn't enjoy their childhood, lost their innocent and suffer both mentality and physically. The freedom of the children is lost due to the suppression. “Master please don't get angry” here we can see, Stumpleg address Selvan as “Master” where we can see even Selvan was also of Stumpleg age. Thus they have no independence of their own.

Education is the one which provides us knowledge regarding various things. Education creates an awareness of our surroundings, the things that happens around us. It gives wide range of knowledge to deal the problems. The novel portraits the “dream of the young Shorty who was only nine years old who loss his dream and bonded to work. They live in a world of brutality. Shorty is crushed to an extent



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which forces him to run away from the punishments. We see in the novel the children who are bonded are not without potentials. They born with talents but are not exposed to the society, thus education pays them a platform to overcome such problems.

Shorty has wide love towards Nature with lot of sensibilities and capable of sensing everything accurately. But he fails to express his potentials. Belly was with high level IQ which can't be matched with so many educated persons. Tall Fellow has the guts to refuse to work after his master has beaten him enough. Stonedeaf was a beautiful and capable of managing all the households and fulfil all the responsibilities better than her mistress. Eventhough they possess all the capacities they are so helpless against their circumstances. They move towards their dark, hopeless future. "Dream the impossible" is a saying which suits most of these characters in the novel. Children experience poor schooling opportunities. Children attain self-actualization when they are provided with Education. Nowadays Children education is provided who belongs to lower class but we can see in some rural areas children are not allowed to go to school due to many reasons.

## 2. Social relevance

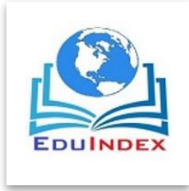
The text has a social relevance with the article "A dream that turned into a nightmare". In the article R.Murugan was studying in class 7, he was sold a dream of freedom, pocket money, a movie a week, and occasional car rides. He was forced to work at Murukku and Appalam (snack) making unit in Karnataka. He agrees to it because of his economic situation of his family, aged 13. In the novel we see the protagonist Shorty was also forced to be a bonded labour when he was 9 year old due to his father's debt. Shorty was beaten to death, in a way of punishing the animals and spends sleepless nights in the sheep shed. Thus Murugan also undergoes similar punishment as SHORTY does in the novel, where Murugan works 20 hours day and served only two day meals. He was sprayed chilly powder on his body to thrashing him with iron rods or rubber tubes. Thus we see in both the novel and the article the characters suffer for the same reasons where their identity are unknown and the dreams unfulfilled.

## 3. Conclusion

On the whole, the paper focuses on the problems faced by the characters, the traumas, and the identity which was not revealed due to untouchables, the subaltern characteristics of the people, education which acts as a remedy to the children. Untouchables must be given an opportunity to reveal their talents though they carry a lack of identity. The fact of being oneself should not be given up for any cause and the awareness should prevail in the young minds to explore and enrich their own world and live their life to their fullest.

## Acknowledgements

With immense pleasure I, Ms. A.ANUSHYA presenting the paper " Unknown identity in Perumal Murugan's Seasons of the palm" thank Jain Deemed-to-be-



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University for organising the International Conference on Indigenous Languages and Translation Studies. I thank my guides from Bharathiar University who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted my research paper. I wish to thank all the people who gave me unending support.

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