



The Portia Tree Ensconces; Mapping the Tie In between Emotional and Regional Geographies in Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*

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Abstract

Modern literary thoughts have space for regionalism. There are philosophical and political aspects for it. But mental climate also have local colours .It puts forward great scope in studies. Tamil writer Perumal Murugan brings such an extent for a study in his famous novel *One Part Woman*

Keywords; regional and emotional geographies, Thiruchenkodu, memories, mind,

Portia tree

Emotions are everything. It is the matrix of past, present and future. A man's childhood, adolescence, youth and old age all go through the emotional realms of life. Emotions are what set and break our boundaries. Therefore we always crave for emotional equilibrium.

There is apparently no connection between lands and emotions. The picture drawn by geography is of barren lands, forests and meadows that are in no way connected with emotions. The boundaries of the earth are determined by logic and science. Geography is based on political, economical and technological logic. Emotions do not seem to fit in with the geography at first glance. But emotions are always camouflaged everywhere in social and personal life and influence everything. Man is a creature whose emotions are most strongly expressed in a variety of ways. Nature and other living things

are not free from emotional expression. Therefore, as in all other disciplines, geography had to give more importance to the logic of human life, so the underlying current of emotions may have to be suppressed in a way. The 'hidden game' of emotions can be seen if one pays close attention to the places where people and places are thus glared in the literature. Too often in literature, the elucidation of lands goes beyond just describing the natural beauty / horribleness and turns as answers to a lot of political and economical questions and emotional outbursts. Emotional roles can be constructed in a variety of ways in literature. The literature contains critical geographical descriptions of the emotions hidden in the body and surroundings. Geographies of social relations and identities can also be found. They discuss the feelings that arise in the relationship between the environment and the person. It is the person and the environment that create the ups and downs of emotions, not between individuals and objects.

There are many imaginary landscapes in literature. Thomas Hardy's Wessex is an example. Wessex is the setting for all novels of Hardy. Wessex has always witnessed the tragic ends of Hardy's protagonists. The geography of Emile Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is also a silent witness to every moment in the tragic novel. The mood and context of the characters reflect the landscape as in a movie. Geography is not just about witnessing the story's development. Rather, it manifests how emotions are blinking, reflecting, and changing. At times the landscapes themselves become the protagonist of the story. The situation is no different in Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha.

RK Narayan's Malgudi is the Wessex of Indian literature. Not only the Imaginary lands but also as in the works of many writers like Pannalal Patel, OV Vijayan Thakazhi Sivasankarappilla ,Srikrishna Alahanahalli, regional landscapes play an important role. Kazak and Ishan are telling the story. Those landscapes have mental, physical and spiritual dimensions. Things are a bit different when it comes to Perumal Murugan. Murugan's novels are set in the unique parts of Tamil Nadu. The linguistic varieties of the Tamil people, the standard of living, the customs, the tradition, the food and the orthodox values are all woven into each of Murugan's novels. The reader is able to experience the real and wonderful nature and seasons as well as the progress of the plot and the source of the author's inspirations. Tiruchankodu and the surrounding areas are the setting of the stories of Perumal Murugan. *Kizhalan*, *Poonachi* and *One Part Woman* are all build up and expand in those areas.

The festivals, culture, customs and linguistic varieties of the place are scattered throughout the novels. In each of these novels, local landscapes, blooming narration, and emotional environments are subtly intertwined; especially in *One Part Woman* all the progressive actions taken place in the context of the rituals and culture. *One Part Woman* which tells the story of Ponna and Kali has raised a storm in Indian culture. The thump by the cultural landscape of Tiruchankodu on the emotional lands of a group of people has been the subject of much discussion in the Indian literary world and the sentimental Facebook post of the author Perumal Murugan with regards of his existence.

The emotional lands of Ponna and Kali are intertwined with the outskirts of Thiruchankodu , Salem and its surrounding areas. *One Part Woman* starts with the thoughts of Kali who arrives at Ponna's house for the festival in Tiruchankodu which lasts for many days. The novel begins with Kali who is lying in the shade of Portia tree, thinking about the surroundings of his wife's house. But the landscapes of Kali's thoughts are intricately linked to the past of his life. The first lines of the novel describes about the Portia tree planted by Kali himself:

The Portia tree was dense with foliage.If you looked closely ,youcould see the yellow trumpet like flowers with their flared mouths,and the drooping ,fading red ones with their inviting smiles.
(P.Murugan p1)

Kali picks a flower.

He never could resist the desire to possess what attracted him. (P.Murugan p1)

It's about Ponna .He coveted Ponna. The sight of the barren yard has injured him every time he comes to her house. The isolation creates by the barren areas must have hurt Kali. He, himself is the barren land .He plants the Portia tree sapling in it .The next 2,3 pages have prolonged narration about the tree. Ponna and Kali had not been there for two years. By this time a branch of the Portia tree cuts. The wound of the plant also belongs to Kali. The problem of not having children is so acute. This wound to their happiness exposes by nature and environment. The cow that is taken to Ponna's in laws' house after a quarrel with her father also bears this biggest problem between them. The cultural image of the countryside of Tamil Nadu also illustrates the space and time dimensions of *One Part Woman*. For Kali, his late father is like a mirage that appears in the afternoon.

They said, 'Nothing would grow when sown by a woman in white' (.P.Murugan P 5)

But their farm does not abandon them. Portia tree becomes Ponna herself at the end of the first chapter when Kali talks about his life before marriage. He was free in a world without borders. But now his life is within the fence. Kali marks his pre- and post-marriage lives and his freedom in space-time dimensions. The geography of life is spread over fenced fields and boundless plains.

Whenever come in laws' home, they choose the shade of Portia tree. The coolness of the tree in the middle of the barren yard is the greenery and warmth of their mutual trust and love in their 12 years of married life without children. Many thoughts and feelings of Ponna and Kali are associated with that tree and its shade. Kali often tells about his relationship with the tree. He returns to his home and sits at the foot of the Portia tree, realizing that Ponna went for the festival, despite his last ban. Its seedling he grew in his wife's house. The shadows of Portia tree spread over his entire life. It covers the entire territory of the married life of Kali and Ponna. It is in those shadows that the revamping of their life often taken place.

Not the only Ardhanareeswarar temple in Tiruchengode but The Murugan temple and its surroundings are also associated with the life of Kali and Ponna. Kali and his family feel that the shadow of the ancestral sin of Nachi Muthu Gounder which committed in front of Murugan carved on the 14th step in the middle of the mountain is on them. As atonement they go up the hill and light the lamps. Archetypal criticism says that there are collective memories that are as old as birth, in the emotional realms of genetics and culture. Such memories and ancestry of Kali are intricately linked with Murugan Kovil. An ancestral story of a forest girl being raped and killed is also linked to Kali's infertility. That is why Kali goes to see Pavatha at the top of the hill. Kali's childhood memories are also associated with Tiruchankodu hill.

All his in laws came for the ceremony. It was a great crowd. The expenses were huge too. When preparations for the ritual were on they walked around the temple. There was a small dip in the hill between the temple and the peak of the hill. This was a small forest with thorny bushes and trees that were perhaps several centuries old...kali was wonderstruck seeing such a forest at this altitude (P.Murugan P30)

All the stories related to the circumjacent of Thiruchankodu create fluctuations in the life of Kali. Kali has visited the Ardhanareeswara temple with Muthu many times during his childhood. But as he become old, the forest grows and stands before him as a different personality. At a young age, Kali realized that the lands of his emotional thoughts and the geographies outside his body were one. Not only he has a lineal connection but his childhood, teenage and youth are kindred with every nook and cranny of Thiruchankodu .The concept of Ardhanareeswara and the temple are the life of Kali and its wriggles. The world moves forward when men and women stand together. As Kali and Ponna move away from each other according to the scales of social geography, the plain of their emotional world gets cracked.

Madhorubagan is male and female fused into one. What great pleasure it is to stay as one, body to body, forever (P.Murugan P 30)

Kali then thinks only of the happiness that the body attaches to the body but the mental intimacy and its levels resonate there.

Like Ponna, Tiruchankodu marks Kali's relationship with Muthu. Kali was Muthu's close friend. The estrangement between them comes after the marriage with Ponna. Muthu is a part of Kali's childhood memories of wandering in the jungle. They ran up the mountains and jumped into the valleys together. As Kali grew up, Muthu was as distant a sight as the Tiruchenkodu hill. They both find secret hiding places in Pavatha's forest and in the well. Kali shares his memory of the cave inside the well. The connection with Muthu is weaving like a vine. When Kali remembers his estranged friend, he marks the places and surroundings he spent with him.

The 'Maladikkallu' of Pandisvara at the top of the hill also adds Muthu and Ponna to Kali's thoughts. Kali, who used to come there with Muthu every new moon day, could not remember those moments without adding them to the landscape. They get aview of the whole of Tiruchenkodu from a cave under a rock. Kali remembers the bath in the stream and the power of the wind. But:

Perhaps such incessant chatter was the prerogative of youth alone. Once he grew up, the brain might have decided that it was all meaningless and erased all memory of that prattle. But could do nothing to the feelings of happiness that came with it. They spread out like a vast, open space.(P.MuruganP50)

The 'Maladikkallu', which symbolizes the adventure and friendship of youth, also becomes a land of devotion and desire for Kali as he grows up. The lands of emotion change but the land of contact is the same. It is the society that once again leads Kali and Ponna into another emotional plain and into the abyss. Kali then rules by the pressure of society rather than devotion and the price to be paid for Ponna's adventure.

Ponna had believed that the barren rock would put an end to all the cruel talk. But all that effort of climbing up the hill and putting her life at risk came to naught. (P.MuruganP67)

The Maladikkallu is lined Ponna with feelings of trust and at the same time pressure. Kali's emotional lands alternately touch the rock. His farmland is his mind. Kali is always close to nature. He finds more peace in the garden, in the foothills, and in the wells than in man.

The Barnyard occupied his mind whenever he was. It was only there that he felt safe. It was enough just to be there and talk to the cattle.. (P.MuruganP70)

Kali's memories and thoughts about Nallayyan uncle are related to the landscape. Kali remembers the fight between uncle and his father in the field and also the moments he spent with his uncle in the garden:

'Kaliyappa' Uncle replied, 'the world is endless. It stretches on and on.. .
(P.MuruganP74)

For Nallayan uncle, Kali's barnyard provides the protection which one gets in his mother's womb. He is not a quick-witted person. But his feelings are also connected to the native place and Kali's barnyard. In the yard of Kali's barn he laid down the burdens of his mind. Kali also sees Nallayyan's newly brought woman while they are working in the field together. Kali's views, memories and relationships are all related to the earth around him. His memories of the rituals associated with the festival are reminiscent of the surrounding fields and hill stations. In the first year he hid from the women and lay behind the bullock cart. Lying there recognizes the movements of the surrounding darkness.

Muthu's memories of Kali are intertwined with the landscape of Tiruchenkodu. He remembers when they were little children going to pasture and wandering the streets. Muthu's memories about the wooing of girls especially during the Chithirai Vaikashi months, even associate with the pasture

of Narikkadu . Kali's memories about Muthu relates to the caches that he created. Kali remembers many such safe harbors while going to drink coconut toddy. The hut above the neem and the shack in the middle of the field are such bonds.

Muthu doesn't like Kali himself in confining to lie under Portia tree and the barnyard which is protected by fencing with dry thorns. He had many lands full of laughter and games to mark Kali in bachelor life.

The chicks reared in the field are under the care of black birds on uncut palms. Ponna was also a treasure he had preserved. She enters the fourteenth day of Tiruchankodu from within the confines of his love and care.

The moment he heard that there was a theatre performance happening ten villages away,he'd gather a crowd and go there.If someone told him that there was a good movie running at Kannan Talkies in Karattur ,he would go. (P.MuruganP127)

On the 14th day, Ponna is taken to the festival, the coconut grove where Kali and Muthu arrive is also a breeding ground for deception. Even Kathayi who is found there creates memories in Kali about her visit to his land to pick coconuts. The streets of Tiruchenkodu are lined with crowds arriving for the festival. The flowers that Ponna's mother wears on her hair reminds her of the wild hedgehog flowers and cactus flowers ,growing in the fields and orchards that Kali usually brought for her and later the jasmine and kanakambaram that she herself planted. The story of their ancestor told by Kali's grandmother at Tiruchankodu pool is reminiscent of Ponna. The nook and corner of the street at the festival touches the thoughts of her. The lamps and sellers do not arouse Ponna's enthusiasm but the dust, smell and sight revive her memories and worries. Ponna, who broke up with her mother during the festival, finds solace in Tiruchakodu and its surroundings. The moving crowd was not hers. In the language of Ponna:

But then,was it easy to shake off the things that lay layered on the top of each other in her mind ?It was no problem casting aside superficial concerns.But there were those that had seeped deep into mind ,and lay there rotting.(P.MuruganP205)

Every moment of the festival brings memories back to Ponna. The first touch from the crowd reminds her of Kali. The play evokes memories of the film, Sree Valli which she had watched

with Kali in Sreekrishna Talkies. She had also seen plays performed by the Chuckilians for the Gounders. Ponna tries to free the mind by concentrating in the play. But it recalls so many memories. The second touch during the rush reminded her of the first love she felt during the time she had attained puberty. When Ponna sees the third person in the crowd, she tries to connect every face he sees with another familiar face in his mind. The reason she chooses the third person is but he does not evoke any memories in her and she doesn't feel guilty. That is why she deliberately prefers a verbal talk instead of gestures Kali always loves.

It appeared that he was taking her far away from the crowds and the noise

(P.MuruganP225)

The memories of Kali who walks from Mandyan's farm to Ponna's house are knotty. Nallayyan uncle and the desires for Ponna reach him through those memories. His paths to those memories were fields and paths in the moonlight, and the areas were as familiar to him as the lines in his hand. The answer to the crazy Kali's mentality of knowing that Ponna had left for festival is the barking of dogs and the sound of the wings of the chickens on the Portia tree. He arrives at his own home around dawn

He slid down to the ground. The rope running from the corn stracks pressed against his back. He looked above. The branches of the Portia tree had spread themselves across the sky.

(P.MuruganP240)

All the main characters in the story are inextricably linked with the mind and the soil. Tiruchenkodu is not just a place, it is a character in the story that controls the whole yarn. Reader can know that it is the land that gives twists and turns to the narration when you go through the thoughts, anxieties and emotions of Ponna, Kali and Muthu. Like Kali and Ponna, the landscape that the narrator has seen and heard since childhood influences his thinking plains. It is no wonder that regional geography plays an important role in the stories of Perumal Murugan, who is well known not only as a writer but also as a linguist and cultural scholar.

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