

Surveillance and Urban Anonymity in Perumal Murugan's *Pyre*: An Eco-critical Reading

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Abstract:

In this article, the violence in Perumal Murugan's book *Pyre* is explored. He does not demonstrate it as a phenomenon in society. As something that is around us and even in society. The author of this article wishes to see a change in perspective of the countryside and the cities because of Murugan. He builds on the concepts of environmental researchers and of Michel Foucault, the investigator of the observation and control of people. The article claims that *Pyre* is not a book about environmental destruction. It is also about the use of the environment to regulate individuals, particularly concerning caste. Rocks, the sun and other elements in the book enforce caste rules. They reveal those who do not follow these rules, watch them and even punish them. Cities, on the other hand, are depicted as the setting for anonymity. They can roam freely in the streets, they live in private homes, and they are not constantly monitored. This is as opposed to village life, where everybody knows everybody's business. This anonymity is not guaranteed for eternity. The characters in the book are put back in the village, where the environment once again controls them, and the caste system is maintained. The author of this article read the article on *Pyre* and analysed the setting used to depict the functioning of society in *Pyre* by Murugan. The article contributes to the knowledge of the surroundings and literature. It illustrates the relationship of the environment to power, control and caste violence in literature. The setting is not just a backdrop or setting piece. It is an element of identity construction and inclusion/exclusion in society. *Pyre* by Perumal Murugan is an instance of this.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Surveillance, Urban Anonymity, Caste, Environmental Humanities, Rural Ecology.

Introduction

The scope of contemporary 'ecocriticism' has grown far beyond the initial focus on wilderness and conservation, and environmental degradation, to explore the multifaceted interconnections between ecology, power, identity and social justice. In recent scholarship, landscapes are not only physical contexts but also spaces loaded with politics, where systems

of authority become inscribed into the physical world (Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2012). This is especially fruitful when reading Indian literature, where frequently the environment plays into caste relations, labour, religion, and community identity. In this context, Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* is an intriguing study of the active role nature plays in maintaining social surveillance and caste discipline. *Pyre* tells the sad tale of Kumaresan and Saroja, an inter-caste couple whose marriage stokes tensions in Kumaresan's hometown. The novel has been studied for its depiction of caste discrimination, violence, and social exclusion, but comparatively less attention has been given to its environmental aspects. Murugan repeatedly invades the rural terrain as an active agency that works in conjunction with social institutions to reveal, recognise, and discipline bodies that do not meet caste expectations. On the other hand, urban areas offer temporary anonymity, allowing people to go about without being constantly watched. This conflict between these opposite ecological spaces is the core of this article.

This research suggests that surveillance in *Pyre* is more than just human looking. The village itself is an ecological surveillance system. In this place, nature, such as the sun, the wind, the bare rocks, the thorny bushes, and the open fields, is added to villagers to maintain castes' visibility. Surveillance then is less social and more environmental. All the physical aspects are part of the construction of Saroja as an outsider body whose body does not match the ecological expectations of the village. The landscape does not only read her through her speech and behaviour; it reads and exposes her to condemnation. At the same time, the article delves into Murugan's contrasting depiction of the city. As opposed to the open and exposed geography of the village, urban space offers architectural enclosure, crowded streets and social heterogeneity, which allows for anonymity. The city enables people to become part of the crowd but not the focus of the people. Murugan thus sets up an interesting dichotomy between two ecologies—one that enhances surveillance and another that provides temporary freedom for the individual. However, the novel ends with a sense of anonymity's fragility, since caste power is not limited to geographical boundaries.

This article integrates ecocriticism and some concepts from Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*. Michel Foucault writes about the surveillance of individuals in institutions like prisons, schools and hospitals. His concept of power and how people perceive it allows us to understand the village in Murugan's work as a large network where everyone is watching everyone else. This is not the same as the panopticon, which means that people are observed from a point of view. People are being monitored in Murugan's work as there is plenty of sunlight and open space in the environment. This implies that nature is also a means of regulating human beings. The article also looks at scholars' views on cities and their anonymisation of people. There are people such as Georg Simmel who believe that the good thing about cities is that there are a lot of people, which means you are free and do not have to be constantly monitored. Tholur is like this, says Murugan: When you are in a crowd, you are safe. People do not judge you; you can be whatever you want to

be. This is quite unlike other towns where everybody knows every other person's business and where people are continually on their guard.

Research Questions

This article aims to tackle three related research questions: 1. How does Murugan create an apparatus of surveillance for nature in the rural setting? 2. How is the city an ecological space of anonymity and freedom of personal choice? 3. How does the novel illustrate the eventual breakdown of the anonymity of the environment in the face of the persistence of caste power? Responding to these questions is both an extension of and a challenge to the expanding area of the environmental humanities, and they show that ecological spaces are not divorced from issues of social justice, caste politics, and human identity. Murugan does not view nature as mere scenery, but rather as an active contributor in the creation of visibility, exclusion and violence. Finally, the novel uncovers the non-neutrality of landscapes; landscapes are either perpetrators of oppressive structures or openings for resistance. Thus, the purpose of this article is to assert that *Pyre* is an ecology that is always in balance between visibility and invisibility, and always a political space. The open spaces and materiality of the rural setting draw attention to the presence of caste. At the same time, the city momentarily suspends it from the system, enabling individuals to vanish in its ecological layers. The eventual loss of this anonymity, however, reveals the tenacity of caste surveillance, and the pathetic failure to be able to breach socially constructed environmental barriers.

Literature Review

Perumal Murugan has become one of the most important contemporary Indian writers whose fiction poses a critical question to caste, ecology, labour and rural life. Although the novel has been studied extensively using the lenses of caste oppression, social exclusion and subaltern identity, the environmental politics of *Pyre* have received relatively little attention so far. The novel's engagement with landscape as a form of surveillance has been largely ignored, even though the environment is crucial to the novel's themes. The environment is used not as a setting for the action but as a character in the story, and an eco-critical reading of Murugan shows how nature is integral to the social relations and used to maintain power structures. The present study thus builds on previous research by looking at how ecological space becomes a means of surveillance, and how urban space provides temporary anonymity. Early ecocriticism was initially interested in the image of wilderness and environmental degradation (Glottfelty & Fromm, 1996). There has, however, been a great deal of theoretical development in the field in the past two decades. However, according to Buell (2005), environmental criticism needs to explore the connection between political structures and ecological spaces beyond conservationist issues. Likewise, Garrard (2012) illustrates that landscapes are social constructs that embody ideologies of class, race, gender and power. These developments enable an examination of *Pyre* beyond its portrayal of drought and rural poverty, so that the novel can be seen as a study of the power of the environment.

In recent environmental humanities research, social justice has been increasingly recognised as intertwined with ecology. Nixon (2011) presents the idea of ‘slow violence’ as a way to describe how environmental conditions slowly embed structural inequalities, while not being immediately apparent. The concept of slow violence is useful for examining forms of ecological and social harm that develop gradually and remain obscured from immediate public attention (Sathikulameen et al., 2025). While the narrative of environmental degradation is the main theme of Nixon, his approach applies to the understanding of caste oppression in *Pyre*. The violence that Saroja is going through is not a flash but a process that builds up from watching, being suspicious of, being excluded from and exposure to her environment. The landscape itself slowly evolves into a weapon: ordinary spaces become weapons of intimidation. Indian ecocriticism, too, has had a transformation with its focus on the relationship between the environment and social hierarchy. Huggan and Tiffin (2010) argue that postcolonial ecocriticism must acknowledge that environmental exploitation often occurs in conjunction with other forms of racial, economic and cultural oppression. Caste has a significant impact on access to land, labour and ecological resources in the context of India. In all of Murugan's fiction, the social and the ecological are intertwined, and environmental spaces are caste-segregated. The scholarship on Murugan has largely focused on caste violence and rural social organisation. His novels have been noted for depicting villages as places where community surveillance controls the way people act and where transgression is punished. Surveillance within a socially regulated community can be understood not merely as observation but as a mechanism through which dominant social structures monitor, categorise, and regulate marginalised subjects. Such processes contribute to the suppression of agency and voice (Subhashini et al., 2025). Caste-based marginalisation can produce an identity crisis in which individuals are compelled to negotiate between their social identity and the expectations imposed by dominant communities (Kumar & Sathikulameen, 2025). The relationships between castes become very conspicuous, especially inter-caste relations, as intimate knowledge of individual family histories, occupations and social status is essential to the village way of life. In most of these studies, however, surveillance was credited solely to the villagers without taking into account how environmental characteristics support this ongoing surveillance.

This article contends that Murugan's use of the landscape is a radicalisation of the conventional notions of surveillance, and presents the landscape as an agent of caste order. The sun, wind, rocks, thorn bushes and open fields are multiple agents of the environment that reveal the bodies over and over again. Thus, surveillance is first of all environmental and only after it is social. The rural world, in contrast to the urban, is important in the studies. In Georg Simmel's famous argument (1903/1971), in the city the processes of personal observation are less intense, which leads to individuality. In cities, people can still be anonymous in the crowd, whereas in rural areas this is not allowed. Richard Sennett (1977) also notes that the city of modern times affords freedom through impersonality: a person can enact several roles and not have to be constantly judged by the community. These

sociological observations reveal how Murugan's depiction of Tholur, as an ecological sanctuary, is a place of freedom and agency for Saroja because she is not the only one watched by the community. These sociological observations highlight how Murugan's depiction of Tholur, an ecological sanctuary, allows for Saroja's freedom and agency because she is not the single focus of collective attention. *Pyre* thus combines three fields of scholarship, namely ecocriticism, surveillance theory, and urban sociology, to show how *Pyre* can be read as an ecology as a "living political power that constructs visibility, identity and violence.

Theoretical Framework

In this article, the theoretical approach combines several ideas. It examines the relationship between people and the environment, as well as what Michel Foucault said about the observation of people and the solitude of people in cities. These ideas are applied in this article to gain insight into the problems and politics of *Pyre*. This is mainly to observe the relationship between the environment and politics in *Pyre*. Ecocriticism is an examination of the relationship between literature and the environment. Treats nature as a beautiful backdrop, rather than a living being. Rather, ecocritics believe that nature impacts people's lives and their productions. For instance, people's writing can be affected by the land and weather. Current ecocritics also examine the impact of the environment on people and the environmental interconnections with social issues. Lawrence Buell believes that the environment is a space where nature and politics meet. Greg Garrard also believes that, in the context of the environment, some have power and others do not. These concepts are crucial concerning the book *Pyre*. Within this narrative, nature takes the place of regulating man and determining who gets to be where. The author Murugan demonstrates how the land and the weather help to keep people in check. The characters are controlled by rocks, fields and even the sun and the wind. Nature is not a standalone entity. It is one of the components of a system which enforces social rules. Ecocriticism is used as a tool to help us understand the relationship between the environment and literature in *Pyre*. There is never a neutral environment in *Pyre*. It is always linked with the social rules that control individuals' lives.

Pyre is based on the concepts of surveillance from Discipline and Punish (1977) by Michel Foucault. For Foucault, a modern society is not a society of power primarily exercised through the force of arms, but rather through continuing visibility. The Panopticon works by getting people to observe themselves and to self-regulate their behaviour. The village has no institutional mechanisms like prisons or schools, but the same disciplinary mechanisms are in place in *Pyre* as in other institutions. Observation is decentralised. All the villagers are simultaneously observed. Most importantly, the landscape is conducive to this. There is no cover in open fields. The sun is shining brightly, making things easier to see. The porous huts do not allow for privacy. Voices travel over the land of the wind. Murugan thus refashions the open spaces of the environment into an ecological version of the Panopticon. In *Pyre*, the concept of surveillance does not take the form of architecture, but is part of

geography itself, unlike Foucault's architectural model. Disciplinary power is made the infrastructure of ecology.

The article uses ideas from Georg Simmel and Richard Sennett about what it is like to be anonymous in a city. According to Georg Simmel, city life provides people with freedom, as there are many strangers in the city all the time. They are not in constant fear of others' opinions of them. It is easier to be yourself when there are a lot of people around. As Saroja gets into the city of Tholur, what happens? The city is quite a busy place. This enables Saroja to fit in with the crowd. She does not have to do anything she does not want to do because people will not judge her. Also, houses in the city provide her with privacy, which she could not have in the village. Murugan also questions whether anonymity in a city is sufficient to circumvent the rules of the caste system. Saroja visits Kumaresan's village and is no longer anonymous. The village is open to the public. All can observe her activity. This illustrates the amount of freedom that is available in different areas of the country. The city helps people like Saroja. Does not eradicate the caste system. The difference between the city and the village is illustrated in Murugan's story. The city allows Saroja to be free. The village takes it away.

Research Gap

The setting of *Pyre* is not a setting. It has a part in managing the visual and the inclusion/exclusion of the other. This is the writer Murugan's message. He believes that the environment is a character that determines what is visible and what is not. This is an attitude towards the environment. It is not a place where things happen. *Pyre* environment regulates who is in and who is out of the group. The concept is significant for caste literature. It is also relevant to students studying the environmental impact on life. The book *Pyre* helps to spark some of these conversations. It is getting us to consider the environment as a way to manipulate people. The environment in *Pyre* is a tool which is used to keep people in line. This is what Murugan is saying. He is telling the story of *Pyre* to illustrate how the environment controls people's lives.

Methodology

In this study, the approach will be eco-critical literary criticism, which is close to the text. *Pyre* is written by Perumal Murugan and translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan (2019) and is the main text. A close examination of the text shows sections that discuss how natural elements like rocks, fields, sunlight, wind, bushes, and homes are linked to practices of caste surveillance. These natural features are not the background but are explored as being integral to making things visible, to moving around and to maintaining caste systems. The concepts on which the ideas are based are derived from ecocriticism (Buell, 2005; Garrard, 2012), from Foucault's (1977) concepts of surveillance of people and from sociological theories of the unknown in the urban environment (Simmel, 1971; Sennett, 1977). A combination of these ideas enables us to look at how nature places its eyes on the environment and how power works in society. Symbols, pictures of space and ideas of nature are analysed in the book using close reading. The selections of the text are organised in themes that correspond

to the natural worlds in *Pyre*: (a) the countryside as a place where people are watched, (b) the city as a place where people are not known, and (c) how nature violence breaks the idea of being unknown. Themes are organised in this way because the book shows a gradual connection between the land and the sight of caste.

Analysis and Discussion

Murugan's village is not marked on the map. It is a place where nature and its inhabitants collaborate to monitor events. The village of Murugan is always on the lookout. Each tree, each rock, every person in Murugan's village contributes to the sense of someone always looking. It is not the watching that cities typically have, such as by police or cameras. Houses in Murugan's village help to watch people. The village of Murugan is like a system in which one always knows what is happening. It is difficult to keep it hidden in the village of Murugan, as everyone can see what is going on. Things begin to go wrong when the villagers begin to think about Saroja's appearance. This is one indication that people are closely watching Saroja and listening to what is happening around her; this is eco-watching and eco-hearing. The villagers are gazing at Saroja. They are considering how she looks physically. This is because the villagers are conducting some surveillance of Saroja.

"Can't I tell by the face? This is not a face from our caste, Mapillai. Does a face that wanders over fields and rocks look like this? This is the face of someone who hasn't toiled, a body that hasn't suffered summer's heat" (Murugan, 2019, p. 15).

The problem with caste is that villagers believe that they can determine by looking at you and the space you occupy what caste you are. They believe that if you work out in open spaces outside, like Kattuppatti, then it will appear on your body. If your skin is sunburnt, tired, and your face is weathered, it means you are from a caste. So, when they look at Saroja, they can see that her body does not look like that, and so they know that she is not from around there. The environment in which they live is a sort of record book, which reveals their caste. The fields and rocks are like tools which set the hierarchy on people's bodies. So, the environment is not a background, and it contributes to the formation of the caste system. The concept is similar to Foucault's notion of the power to control others based on observation. If a person can see what is happening, they can take control of it. In this instance, the villagers can have a look at the environment and observe who Saroja is. They believe that "nature reveals true character." Saroja does not fit into the environment, and so she cannot hide who she is. This indicates that individuals' differences emerge through the environment. The writer Murugan believes that the environment is not neutral; it reinforces the caste system.

Nature is not a setting; it is a tool to recognise people who do not fit. The villagers read the environment to see what caste someone belongs to; the landscape itself is a kind of book of record which shows the caste system. The environment contributes to the

development of the caste system. Nature is not neutral; it helps to maintain the caste system. Soon after Kumaresan and Saroja begin their journey to the village, Kumaresan observes: "Anyway, now the news of our marriage will reach before we do. That is good in a way. We don't have to say anything" (Murugan, 2019, p. 16).

This is a casual statement that points to one of the more striking depictions of surveillance in the novel. The information seems to be moving without the movement of the body. The village is a place where news travels light of foot, and it can make it seem as though the news itself travels across the village. In an eco-critical sense, Murugan introduces communication as a phenomenon of the environment. The open landscape has no physical structures that can obstruct the flow of voices, rumours and social knowledge. The village is filled with information; it is like an invisible ecological network, and the information is constantly flowing. This atmospheric circulation is similar to what Timothy Morton (2010) calls ecological interconnectedness, in which seemingly separate entities are "materially entangled." The voice of humans, the open nature of the environment and the communal surveillance are combined into a single ecological system in *Pyre*. Information is not transmitted from person to person, but is spread through the environment. The result is "no privacy". Long before the actual arrival of the dancing couple, their identity has been socially manufactured through rumours. So, presence is preceded by surveillance. The welcome is to an already unfriendly social world; ecological openness is thus a reinforcement of disciplinary power.

Murugan repeatedly portrays sunlight as an active participant in the village's surveillance mechanisms. One villager remarked:

"Did you see how brilliantly her nose ring shone, catching the sunlight? That must be what knocked Kumaresan down" (Murugan, 2019, p. 23).

At first glance, it is funny. It is a big deal! A common decoration is highlighted in the sunlight. It becomes an obvious indication of difference. The light reflects, and everyone turns their heads to see Saroja, and she cannot go anywhere without being noticed. It is a bit of a bitch in the city. It makes it complicated with shadows and crowds, but in the countryside the bright sun makes everything glaringly visible. So Murugan employs something natural to help people understand who is different. The villagers benefit from the environment because they can easily see the signs indicating a person's caste. Sunlight is not only about weather; it is also a power that governs what people can see when they think about how people interact with the environment. Nature itself helps to foster the notions that some people are not like others. In the sun of the countryside, Saroja's jewellery becomes more prominent, which is linked to city life and modernity, making it more apparent that Saroja is an outsider. According to Foucault, one way to control someone is to be able to see him. Murugan goes further, demonstrating that it is not only buildings or technology that make

people visible, but the natural world. The sun shines, and the whole village is silent; it is a witness to everything. Thus, the village had to keep an eye on everyone, and the environment does the job of keeping an eye on things. The countryside has its own ability to keep people in check.

The Porous Hut and the Ecology of Domestic Surveillance

Murugan also complicates the ecology/surveillance dynamic with his depiction of Kumaresan's small home, where "there could be no secrets here" (Murugan, 2019, p. 97); "even when they spoke very cautiously, they felt like she was standing right outside, listening" (Murugan, 2019, p. 97). The village hut is made using the leaves of the palm tree and natural materials, while the houses in the city are enclosed and constructed with concrete walls and secure doors. It is physically not permeable, so there is no private domestic space. The loose construction makes it easy for them to overhear private conversations, and voices are readily heard from neighbours. The hut thus represents an ecological architecture that cannot guarantee privacy or individuality. Materiality of the environment directly impacts social experience. Domestic living is always at risk because there is no natural barrier to the community's observation. The architectural project is integrated with the environment; from an ecocritical point of view, it is not an artificial entity but one that belongs to the environment. The natural materials that incorporate the hut into the environment also leave the occupants constantly under surveillance. Murugan's depiction of the hut is a testament to the fact that privacy is not just a matter of social attitude but also a matter of environmental design. The difference with Saroja's memories of the city is particularly noteworthy as it provides enclosed areas where separation between public and private life can be achieved. The village, on the other hand, eradicates that distinction.

Elemental Surveillance: Wind as the Carrier of Social Observation

Murugan continues his work in the field of surveillance, giving communicative agency to the natural elements. Once, a villager says, "The wind brings many voices; the radio box pulls them in and lets them out to us: see! (Murugan, 2019, p. 57). The statement is about a radio, but it shows a key environmental imagination. The villagers see air as a space carrier that can carry voices from one place to another. Wind is more than just a climate; it is a carrier of communication, and it makes one feel that no conversation is totally private. The surroundings seem to be a medium of communication. This representation from the eco-critical standpoint effaces the limits between natural and social worlds. The atmosphere is not separate from people's actions, but is interwoven into the social relationships. To metaphorically represent the wind as a circulation of gossip, rumours and collective memory, surveillance suddenly becomes ubiquitous. In Pyre, then, surveillance is a decentralised process, not reliant on the presence of any one individual, but dependent upon an ecological network where voices are constantly shifting through space.

Foucault's (1977) idea of disciplinary power highlights that a person's sense of being watched is effective when it becomes a part of their consciousness. Murugan builds on this understanding by proposing that people also learn to "listen to the environment". This kind

of worldview heightens psychological discipline, for privacy is seen as impossible in the environment. Everyone can hear every word spoken. Moreover, the wind's movement of voices is a metaphor for the invisible but omnipresent character of caste ideology. As with the atmosphere, caste is not physically discernible, but it envelops each person and influences social relations. Murugan thus metaphorises a natural phenomenon as a metaphor for the invisible power, and shows how ecology and ideology become intertwined in rural space.

The Inescapable Rock: Landscape and Total Exposure

The geography of the village is exposed to that of the city, with Saroja's memories of the latter contrasting with the former, as she has never been able to feel safe in a one-room house as she did in the village (Murugan, 2019, p. 66). One of the unique features of this passage is the contrast between the closed-in and the open-out that the novel exemplifies. The house in the city provides people with a hiding place. There is no hiding place in the big rock place of "Kattuppatti". As we consider the earth, "rock" is understood as a place where there is no protection from nature. People walk around throughout, and there are no trees or much greenery. It is not as in the forest where you can hide; the empty land of Kattuppatti reveals all.

The rock is also a statement on the rules of caste. It does not. Just as the social rules of the village do not change, so too does the rock not change. Murugan demonstrates a linkage between land and social rules. Saroja feels anxious. This is the space around us, and it impacts our sense of feeling. There are no walls or barriers; she does not feel safe. She could be by herself in her city home. Think: everything is out in the open in the village. Everyone can see her actions and movements. This is not the kind of space we normally associate with books; we usually think of freedom. Exposing oneself in *Pyre* is not free; it is being exposed. The ground around us can make us more visible to people than we are invisible.

The Urban Landscape as a Site of Anonymity

When the countryside is what nature looks like, the city is its counterpart in terms of space. Murugan presents Tholur as a space with various types of people, where numerous people in closed buildings and public spaces are invisible. The community constantly supervises people in the village. In the city, it is possible to be present and not be observed by others. The city provides a means for people to relate to space. The city diffuses attention over a lot of people, and thus makes each person less salient.

Ecological Freedom of Movement

Recalling life in the town, Saroja reflects:

"Here, in this town, you walk about freely, swinging your arms. You can't do that there. Why do we need such a place?" (Murugan, 2019, p. 61).

There is meaning behind the simple phrase "swinging your arms". The movement of the body exemplifies freedom. People move around in the city without thinking since they do not know one another. The setting allows for individuals to behave as they would in a

natural setting without being monitored. Every step counts in the village. Walking, talking, dressing or meeting others is always monitored. There is always someone who is judging you. They have their control in the hands of the people around them. Murugan demonstrates from an eco-critical point of view that one's body feels differently in one's environment. There is too much of a crowd in the town; no one is listening. In the village, it is open, meaning that everyone sees you. The body changes depending on location. This concept aligns with Simmel's perspective on the freedom of city life: that there are lots of people who do not pay attention to you. It is not the same to be alone in a city as it is to be alone in a village. Murugan demonstrates that freedom is a matter of one's place. Where you are will determine how independent you will be. The environment. Helps or stops others from watching you.

The Protective Throng: Crowds as Ecological Shelter

One of the novel's most revealing descriptions of urban life occurs when Saroja remembers: "How lovely to just be one in so many, she thought. Going away from the crowd was the reason for her unhappiness" (Murugan, 2019, p. 118).

This is a change in the thought of literature on crowds. The crowd does not remove this uniqueness from the person, but holds it on to. She is the city, and it is like she is in a dense forest. It allows Saroja to blend in with the populace of which she is not a member. The crowd is a place of trees, from the point of view of nature. As plants conceal animals from harm, a large population of people conceals individuals from being overobserved. The person is like a man in a city armed with a shield. This is a very different picture from the one that Kattuppatti has. There, Saroja is always seen, as there are fewer people and they are similar to each other. Everyone new to the group stands out. People in the city look out for one another from a distance, and they do not have the time to keep an eye on somebody. In 1977, Richard Sennett stated that people in cities do not get to choose how they want to be when they are away. There are no limits on people's ability based on group rules. In the character of Tholur, Murugan has exemplified this concept. Not knowing makes a person feel safe from feeling all alone. The crowd then becomes a means of protection for people.

Urban Nature as Leisure and Freedom

The memory of Tholur further highlights the different connotations that can be given to natural spaces: "The city even had a large fort surrounded by a moat, and a large open area full of trees... In those days, life was just uninterrupted playtime for her" (Murugan, 2019, p. 62). Natural spaces in a village, in contrast to urban space, can be used for monitoring, whereas urban greenery represents leisure, recreation, and emotional well-being. Trees are no longer used as observation tools, but as places of rest. This contrast is especially striking because vegetation has opposite functions in the two environments. Green areas in the city foster freedom, childhood and fearless community interaction. However, in Kattuppatti, the absence of bushes and trees is marked, rumours spread and then violence erupts. The ecological meaning is thus socially produced, as Murugan shows. Nature is not inherently oppressive or liberating; its meaning is determined by social structures in specific landscapes.

The city is not only different geographically, but it is different in so many other ways. It is an alternative environmental ethic that allows space to be inhabited by difference and not conformity. However, Murugan also argues that this freedom is limited, as geographical borders do not bind caste ideology.

The Collapse of Anonymity: Ecology as an Instrument of Violence

In *Pyre*, Murugan teaches us that one can be anonymous in the city, and it provides some protection from being watched because of one's caste. The book claims that merely relocating to a new environment is not sufficient to 'break out' of the social rules that humans must adhere to. The final chapters of the book demonstrate that the very same places which could provide a hiding spot could also be used to harm people. One unfortunate thing is when the villagers decide Saroja must leave the hiding spot where she is hiding. "Uncle! Let's set fire to the bush, it is all dry except for the thorns, which look lush on the outside. We will smoke her out of there" (Murugan, 2019, p. 150). This moment demonstrates the environment's full politicisation through people's interaction with it. The bush was also one of the places where Saroja could get away from the constant scrutiny of the village, as mentioned earlier in the story. The bush was like an invisible place in the environment where she could feel her emotions and get emotional relief for a short time. The villagers, however, envisaged this landscape as a weapon of attack. Things like fire, lack of rain and thorny plants became ways for the community to be violent. The environment is no longer neutral, as evidenced by the way the bush changed. Nowadays, the environment is not protecting the people who need help but hurting them. The safe space the environment offers is removed by force, implying that what landscapes mean depends on the power of people rather than anything intrinsic to them. This section of the tale also provides a glimpse of what Nixon, in 2011, refers to as "violence against the environment. Those plants that are suffering due to the absence of rain are the ones upon which violence is carried out. The environment being. The people being treated unfairly are linked, indicating that when the environment is in crisis, it is likely to worsen inequities, not equally affect everyone.

The author's criticism of people's interactions with the environment is emphasised by the use of fire in the story. Typically, fire is considered to be making something clean, new and changed. Fire is employed in *Pyre* to keep the purity of the caste system. The title alone is very sad, as the pyre is a stack of wood to burn, and not only the physical destruction is symbolised but the end of a safe place in the environment too. Fire makes the hidden visible, and makes there no anonymity. The author demonstrates the power of the caste system in this sad conclusion, as the caste system not only watches people but also controls the environment as well. If the terrain is employed in the battle, there is no way out. The environment is no longer a place where violence is happening; it is now a place where violence is happening TO and FOR the environment. The environment, the pyre, and the fire all indicate that the author is condemning the attitude of the people towards the environment and their fellow human beings. The concept of the pyre and fire is used to convey the author's message on the environment and caste system.

Conclusion

This work has insisted that *Pyre* by Perumal Murugan is a new rethinking of landscape as an actor in the making of caste surveillance and in the governance of human identity. Murugan's representations of ecological spaces are not simply a backdrop of nature, but rather are spaces that are politically charged and either reinforce or temporarily challenge systems of social domination. This article's combination of ecocriticism and Foucault's notion of surveillance and sociological theories of anonymity in the city shows that the novel enriches current conceptions of environmental politics. Kattuppatti's rural area is a total ecology of surveillance. Rocks, open fields, hot sun, wind, flimsy homes and desolate land, in addition to communal observation, wipe out privacy.

Visibility is created not only by human activity, but also by the openness of the environment. Saroja's body is constantly revealed as an ecological outsider whose presence does not match that of the body of the caste labourer. Thus, caste identity is made "environmentally readable". Murugan, on the other hand, also depicts the city as an ecological space of anonymity. In the crowded streets, in the closed house, through public transportation and in the diversity of the city, people have opportunities to avoid the constant communal surveillance. The crowd is an ecology of protection, and urban architecture restores the separation between public and private life. In this case, freedom in the city comes, not in isolation, but in environmental complexity and spatial density. The novel does not, however, have a bright happy ending. The fact that Saroja has returned to the village shows that the anonymity of the city is not enough to overcome the surveillance of caste. The weaponisation of the bush illustrates the extent to which ecology itself becomes a component of structures of violence. Environmental spaces once meant to conceal become the means of exposing and destroying. Murugan thus shows how caste power transcends the institution and becomes a part of the material world itself.

The article also contributes to current studies of ecocriticism by showing that environmental criticism needs to be more deeply involved with issues of caste, surveillance, and spatial politics. Ecology and social visibility, disciplinary power, are all interwoven, as *Pyre* highlights, as ecocriticism has begun to take up the theme of environmental justice. The novel invites readers to engage new ways of thinking about landscapes not as natural places, but as an active political force that creates possibilities for belonging, exclusion and resistance. The method could be further developed in the future by analysing other novels in the South Asian canon that examine the connection between ecology, caste and spatial violence, such as those of other authors. Comparative analyses of Bama with P. Sivakami, Meena Kandasamy and Arundhati Roy may also help shed light on the role of environmental spaces in the creation of social inequality. This interdisciplinary research would not only benefit eco-critical studies, but also caste studies by making the landscape more prominent in terms of political agency in the present-day literature. Finally, *Pyre* reminds readers that the fight against the oppression of caste is a fight over space, environment and visibility.

Murugan's success is in demonstrating that nature is never far from human history. Still, it is one of the key fields in which power is wielded, identities are controlled, and resistance is envisioned.

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