

# Poonachi: Or the Story of a Black Goat

*Perumal Murugan , N. Kalyan Raman (Translator)*

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Through a seeming act of providence, an old couple receives a day-old female goat kid as a gift from the cosmos. Thus begins the story of Poonachi, the little orphan goat.

As you follow her story from forest to habitation, independence to motherhood, you recognise in its significant moments the depth and magnitude of your own fears and longings, fuelled by the instinct for survival that animates all life. Masterly and nuanced, Perumal Murugan's tale forces us reflect on our own responses to hierarchy and ownership, selflessness and appetite, love and desire, living and dying. *Poonachi* is the story of a goat who carries the burden of being different all her life, of a she-goat who survives against the odds. It is equally an expression of solidarity with the animal world and the female condition. The tale is also a commentary on our times, on the choices we make as a society and a nation, and the increasing vulnerability of individuals, particularly writers and artists, who resist when they are pressed to submit.

## Reviews for Poonachi

"Murugan's sarcasm speaks of the robustness of his spirit ... As in all his novels, (his) story is rich in detail ... (He) sustains the narrative tension right from the start."- **Elizabeth Kuruvilla, The Hindu Literary Review**

## Poonachi: Or the Story of a Black Goat Details


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# From Reader Review Poonachi: Or the Story of a Black Goat for online ebook

Anupama C K(b0rn\_2\_read) says

This was my first Perumal Murugan novel and I loved it. I'm in love with Poonachi, it was heartbreaking to see her struggle. I love how the author humanizes the animals in the book. The starting reminded me of fairytales, but later the book talks on serious issues like discrimination.

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Prashasti says

*“Once, in a village, there was a goat. No one knew where she was born. The birth of an ordinary life never leaves a trace, does it?”*

Poonachi or The Story of a Black Goat is written by Perumal Murugan and translated by N. Kalyan Raman.

If you have read books like Animal Farm, Heart of a Dog, Jungle Book, Maus, Stuart Little, etc you'd be very well aware of the concept of anthropomorphism, where basically, animals are ascribed with human behavior and characteristics; Poonachi also falls in this particular genre.

Poonachi is a story of a black goat who is anthropomorphized specifically to the women in Indian society or at times, women in general.

*“They talk about the highs of toddy and liquor, but those are not highs at all. Real intoxication comes from talking. The moment it crosses a limit, we forget everything.”*

In the beginning, it feels just like reading a fable and made me reminisce with my childhood times where I grew up reading Jataka Tales, Panchatantra, Baital Pachisi, Hitopadesha...all these folktales instill morals inside a tender mind of a child which imprints a permanent mark that lasts for a lifetime. Except, in this case, it's considered to be an Adult novel, but I'm pretty sure it still has the same effect, you choose to view the world a little differently once you read these kinds of books.

Poonachi is a blend of all the uncanny ways human civilization have adapted to function since eons to the present and the emotions of an innocent animal who undergoes exploitation by human beings for their own good. At parts, it feels like it's not Poonachi who's describing herself and the utter agonies of her story but it's you, yourself reading all your struggles through it.

Perumal Murugan has successfully captured the essence of being a woman in the form of a goat, her struggles and dreams represent the innocence of daughters in our society, and as she grows old the weight of responsibilities and expectations grows tenfolds from the people of the society and how she sacrifices everything that's of hers in order to subdue that burden.

The book majorly provides the insights of Rural India with the perspective of goat and simultaneous representation of the scene where a Farmer goes through an inevitable cycle of debt, hunger crisis, and survival.

The basic human instincts in order to survive and changing oneself inconvenience to it ultimately leading to selfish motives of a man are properly showed by her owner, the old lady...who is major part seen as an

extremely compassionate and kind woman who treats Poonachi no less than a daughter but at times cursing her for even being born.

Several social and political references have been provided, for instance-

**“Speak softly, sir. The regime has ears on all sides.”**

**‘There’s an old saying that the regime is deaf.’**

**‘It’s deaf only when we speak about our problems. When we talk about the regime, its ears are quite sharp.’**

*(Tsk-tsk, somethings never change! )*

This is the first book written by Murugan, my first time reading him and a translated novel. Being new to Tamil literature, I would like to say Kalyan Raman did a commendable job with all those translations. Some parts did sound a bit funny and odd to read but it went well since I haven't read the original Tamilian text, I do understand how difficult it is to get the translations right, he did retain some Tamil words as it is in the book, which kept the original essence intact.

My heart felt heavy at the end after I finished reading this book.

P.S. It breaks my heart to see how these innocent creatures are treated, just a gentle reminder: **Please be kind to animals and make this world a better place to live.**

Poonachi is an important book, I'd recommend it for everyone to read once.

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## **Padmaja says**

"Once in a village, there was a goat. No one knew where she was born. The birth of an ordinary life never leaves a trace, does it?"

~

This is the story of Poonachi, a rather fragile and puny black goat who becomes the centre of an old couple's lives. She is so puny and lifeless that people around her wonder if she'll be able to survive. Her life is difficult, a nanny goat refuses to let her suckle her, an eagle tried to attack her and a wildcat who tries to make her it's prey, but Poonachi endures it all.

Poonachi is grounded, extremely observant, curious and humble. She stayed on with me long after I finished reading the book. Murugan has given a strong voice to Poonachi.

~

The narrative is honest, nothing is sugar coated and this book jabs your heart at the right places, and that's how you know it's good. The human characters aren't named, the animals have beautiful names. What I loved most about the book was how the emotion of love between animals was written with conviction. Who can forget Poonachi's yearning and love for Poovan! This book is not just the emotional journey of Poonachi but also is a very beautiful satire on society. Some of the events of the book are hard hitting and leave us in a sullen mood. It's a short book, just 170 pages but it manages to convey so much in a short number of pages! The translation was done gracefully and tastefully, but still I would advise people who can read Tamizh to read the original.

~

Only Perumal Murugan can write something as hard hitting as this one. I am in complete awe of this man! This book is said to be the 'Animal Farm' of India. I absolutely loved reading it!

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## Richa Bhattarai says

(3.5 stars)

“A large populace reads your work only as translations. Don’t you think this creates a loss of your original text?” This question was put forth to author Perumal Murugan at the recently-held Jaipur Literature Festival.

Murugan, perhaps accustomed to the query, did not need to pause before he answered in Tamil, “Barely a quarter of the ideas in my head get transferred to paper as I write. So there is a kind of loss inherent in the very act of writing--why should it then come as a surprise during translating?”

“It can also contain the possibility of enhancement. A tightening of structure, erasure of fluff, coat of beauty. I would request you to read the translation as a literary text that is complete in itself. Do not accuse the process of translation of diminishing the value of the original text. It is all you have, all you need.”

This was interpreted excellently into English by N Kalyan Raman, the translator of Murugan’s latest novel, *Poonachi*. Raman himself added, “We should stop assuming a priori that translation is a loss, just because Robert Frost said so.”

Quite. Forgetting all about the Tamil version, we now have the English rendition at hand. A slim, thoughtful, sweetly-etched life story of a tiny black goat. Judged only by the style and flow of the translation, it is a smooth, pleasant and heartwarming read. The undercurrents and insinuations, accusations and symbols, though, are both joyful and laborious to untangle. And while its experimentations of merging a fable with contemporary satire are curiosity-rousing, they are also responsible for the muddles they give rise to.

The novel leads us to a hamlet, where an elderly couple ekes out a meagre living. One day, *Poonachi* enters their ordinary life and creates an astonishing change. The miniscule black goat, likened to a wriggling worm, takes up a huge space in their home and heart(h). This bonding between humans and animal is an emotional and intimate relation ingenuously conveyed. The little kid strengthens the couple’s ties with its neighbours, and even between the couple themselves. This arouses a tenderness in readers’ hearts, a gentleness and magnanimity rarely discovered in today’s works. As we are lulled by this simple world brimming with affection and bonhomie, the gears start turning beneath our delicately-placed feet. That there is something sinister afoot becomes evident only after the kid has nudged itself gently into the readers’ souls.

Suddenly, the reader is made aware of the unforgiving world outside this idyllic microcosm. As the old lady stands in line for hours to procure government identification for *Poonachu*, the sorrows of the state come pouring in. No one knows exactly what the identification does, or why a citizen has to face such misery before even getting a glimpse of a taunting, unhelpful, threatening government official. The harping about the state’s good intentions, convoluted reasons of having to stand in an unforgiving queue, the constant glorification of the regime are discomfortingly reminiscent of many countries around the world right now, including our own.

This is where we realise the story has evolved from an animal fable to a political satire. “I look even at politics through a literary lens,” explained Murugan at the festival. “But nothing is free of politics, and so it is embedded in my work, too.” This portrayal of an obsessive, watchful, oppressive state is quite similar to Orwell’s 1984, or the more recent state surveillance in Murakami’s 1Q84. It also has a jagged connection to

Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*, of terror submerged beneath a seemingly tranquil façade.

The rows upon rows of villagers tottering in line to get their cattle verified, and being flogged and punished ruthlessly if they dare faint of hunger or heat, is a direct parallel to citizens outside the novel, of suffering piled on to the already deprived. Our minds will wander, angrily and fruitlessly, to fellow country people who trudge for days to fulfill an official diktat, but are spurned and ridiculed, and their work left undone. We will be enraged by recollections of students who must pay fines to get their certificates corrected even though the error was not their fault; of officials turning defensive and inserting obstacles in the procedure where there are none.

If anyone dares to protest this injustice, they are reprimanded, "Speak softly, Sir. The regime has ears." Murugan examines these ears and exposes their worthlessness, puts them up for everyone to understand their injustice and begin to rally against them. The helplessness of the couple will ricochet back, ultimately, to the readers themselves.

This simmering resentment, anger and introspection are veiled by the childlike tale of the goat that touches the lives of everyone she meets. She is anthropomorphised, much like Premchand's or Tagore's animals, and serves as a careful representation of a girl morphing into a woman.

The rural milieu, its very flavour and atmosphere, is captured gorgeously by the writer through knowledgeable insights; it is a timeless representation of fresh pools, tender buds and cud-chewing cattle of a far-flung village. Yet the writer is more than aware of rural hardships, and has stopped short of romanticizing it.

The lilting story is disturbed only by the author's insistence on treating the kid as a human--what then of the humans themselves? It ends up as a hotchpotch, an animal baa-ing for attention while its owner clamours for the same space, of an animal not remaining one and a human rendered useless.

Murugan has humorously described why his protagonist is a goat. "I am fearful of writing about humans; even more fearful of writing about gods," he says, a jab at the huge furor that followed his *One Part Woman*, which talks of both gods and humans. "It is forbidden to write about cows or pigs," he says, another sly reference to the growing religious intolerance in the country over meaty issues.

So choosing the goat is fine, but why is she burdened with a girl's depictions of menstruation, sex and childbirth? A girl in her place would have been far more evocative, if the goat doesn't serve a special purpose. It is a stirring read, reminding us of the goats sacrificed during our festivals, yes, but this is a not a tale seeking sympathy for a goat's assassination. It is a call for innocence and parity, of naivety destroyed by a haranguing society, of a society trapped in nonsensical rules--the goat here isn't symbolic enough for it all to shine through.

The satire, beginning promisingly, also ebbs and fizzles and dilutes itself, turning every which way in the author's apparent haste to end the novel. The ending, though, is superb. Just a simple sentence, but centuries of myths and cultural complexities layered in it that makes for extensive, and very interesting, background reading.

A novel that is all heart, and yet the flesh is weak, and the fur matted almost as much as Poonachi's.

First published here: <http://kathmandupost.ekantipur.com/ne...>

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## **Smitha Murthy says**

Everytime, I go to a bookshop these days, I keep seeing a goat staring at me. Don't get me wrong - there are no goatherds in bookshops. But this cover of a goat is on the top-selling list of the bookshops I frequent.

Out of curiosity, I bought Murugan's first book, 'Poonachi,' rather than 'The Goat Thief.' Both are translated by the same translator. As with any allegory, you are left wondering if you should treat this as a simple fable of an old couple's bonding over a goat, Poonachi, or if you should dig deeper and look at issues that you imagine the author wants you to look at. In the translator's note later, he urges you to consider these deeper nuances. Is it a political satire as other great allegorical novels of the past? Or is there a deeper look at survival? At love? At motherhood and its deep bonds? Do we think of subversive regimes? Do we just wonder at miracles? Or do we just rejoice in a good story?

I think the answers are all of those.

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## **Helly says**

I'll write the review when I stop crying.

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## **Kavya | aworldinpages says**

"Once, in a village, there was a goat. No one knew where she was born. The birth of an ordinary life never leaves a trace, does it?"

Written by Perumal Murugan and translated into English by N. Kalyan Raman, thus begins the life of this black goat named Poonachi.

There's a very prominent, recurring and touching theme throughout the book—something we see and witness every day without ever really sparing a thought. The plot is exceptionally well written and equally smoothly translated. Simple language, funny at instances, and you sail through it, wanting to delve further into the life of this little, inquisitive, intelligent and precious goat.

All the fuss around it feels justified and I'm glad I bought this book.

Verdict: Buy!

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## **Em\*bedded-in-books\* says**

In the past couple of years, Murugan has become a reliable and favourite author.. And hence didn't hesitate to pick this from a choice of 5 books in the Amazon ebook promotion scheme for prime members wherein one is allowed to pick a free kindle book every month.

I have also enlisted for a literary bingo game where numbers are called every week, and one has to read a

book fitting in the corresponding fact/clue.

This week the theme was discrimination, and this book fit in perfectly.

As the title declares, Poonachi is the story of a black goat who came to be raised by an old couple under mysterious circumstances .

We are exposed to lots of discrimination and troubled lives.

The government is troubling the Asuras ( I assume them to be lower caste community in Tamil Nadu as Murugan is fond of penning down caste based oppression stories) and Poonachi represents discrimination based on color and gender, along with caste.

This is not at all a happy story ..

It is depressing and morose, but is a powerful story which makes one think and retrospect and be filled with turmoil, if one lets oneself be dragged into the injustices existing in the society.

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### **Manpreet Kaur says**

story of a goat... well, it could either be something like a children's classics like black beauty or something like animal farm by George orwell... written for adults, an allegorical novel.

it was more of a latter. It was a sweet tale of an orphaned goat and the ups and downs in her life... the little moments of joy and sorrows.

It's a good book. I was reading something from Tamil literature for the first time and I am happy I picked it up.

it seems like a quick and short read... But u have to read it slowly to grasp the subtle hidden themes. I am not sure I did that very well but I did enjoy the book.

the first half is better than the last... But i am happy I picked it up.

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### **Priyanka Goswami says**

"The difficulties of the dead leave along with them, those of the living are here to stay".

Finally done with reading the first book of 2019, and as I said this year I am going to read only some of the best books of my TBR.

This book has taken all my heart out. "Poonachi, or the story of a black goat", is the tale of a baby goat, about how she deals with life, her weaknesses, how she overcomes all her difficulties. This novel brings in front poverty, love for animals and everything altogether.

The name of the human characters are not provided in the group, rather we can see names and descriptions of every animal present there, which makes the plot more beautifully decorated.

The translation is so good, and the descriptions along with the plot is magnificent. Perumal Murugan is actually a genius story teller and this book deserves to get all the attention.♥?



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### **Ashish says**

The book has a promising start, the premise and the way the author speaks through the goats, their personification seemed good. Despite his best judgement to not write about religion and politics and hairy topics like that which he foretells in the preface, there is some socio-political subtext in the world that he writes about. However it all goes south as it gets real old real fast. The rampant personification and the amount of human emotions that the author piles on the animals, that too in a world where humans already exist and interact with them seems hammy. Despite being unabashed in showing the heartache, it seems not believable. The characters of the owners were much more believable than any of the others. It's a book that had tremendous potential at the start but fizzles out by the end. It's a short and fast read so I didn't really mind finishing it, but it wasn't something that had me hooked.

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### **Nalini Srivastava says**

Poonachi is a tale of a goat, but her story is humanised. This story is about animal but it's not meant for children. A must read if you like Animal Farm. Life in a village is depicted with beauty. The ordeal of a female is expressed so vividly. You can feel every thought of the characters, whether human or not. I loved this book. Beautiful writing and complex tale but very simple to understand.

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### **Karthik Ramesh says**

4.5 stars.

Loved everything about the book.

But still I regret not having read this in its native language TAMIL.

Perumal Murugan begins the book with this,

"I am fearful of writing about humans; even more fearful of writing about Gods. I can write about demons, perhaps. I am even used to a bit of the demonic life. I could make it an accompaniment here. Yes, let me write about animals.

Dogs and cats are meant for poetry. It is forbidden to write about cows and pigs. That leaves only goats and sheep."

This made me very eager to start at once and read more.

Though Perumal Murugan has said that he is fearful in writing about humans and Gods, he has clearly expressed everything he feels about human, Gods and Governments that rules us and everything just through this short story of the black goat Poonachi.

In short this was like a coming of age novel. But in this case, it's of a goat.

Though I have put that in such simple words, it's not just as simple as that as it gets.

It contains some deep thoughts and meaning behind all this.

I am really happy that I found this book. I hope everyone of you will enjoy this sheer brilliance too.

♥♥♥♥♥.

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## **Aishwary Mehta (The\_Fugitive\_Biker) says**

**4th Book of 2019**

**Quote from the Book I Liked** - 'Oh, men of fortune are as plentiful as fruit worms, but a kind heart is rare.' (Page 5)

**Rating** - 4.5 Stars

**Plot Summary** - *Through a seeming act of Providence, an old couple receives a day-old female goat kid as a gift from the cosmos. Thus begins the story of Poonachi, the little orphan goat.*

*As you follow her story from forest to habitation, independence to motherhood, you recognize in its significant moments the depth and magnitude of your own fears and longings, fuelled by the instinct for survival that animates all life. Masterly and nuanced, Perumal Murugan's tale forces us to reflect on our own responses to hierarchy and ownership, selflessness and appetite, love and desire, living and dying.*

*Poonachi is the story of a goat who carries the burden of being different all her life, of a she-goat who survives against the odds. It is equally an expression of solidarity with the animal world and the female condition. The tale is also a commentary on our times, on the choices we make as a society and a nation, and the increasing vulnerability of individuals, particularly writers and artists, who resist when they are pressed to submit.*

**My Review** - Umm.. it took me too long to write this review. I still, while writing this post, can't decide what to say about this book. This is no conventional book you read, this is a kind of book you read once in a while. Maybe I'll try my best by writing this review and hoping that my review does justice to this book.

The book is an Anthropomorphic account of a Human girl depicted here as a Black Goat. Once an Old farmer from the rural area took his goats in the field for herding. While heading back, he saw a very large Human-like man passing by with a small bundle in his hands. The Big black man approached the old man and gave the small parcel to the man and told him that it is a small Black goat and she can give birth to 7 Offsprings, which is a very uncommon thing. The Big black man told that his name was Bakasur (The King of Asurs). When the old man bought that goat home, her wife (old women) didn't believe in the story and thought that his husband might just have stolen this malnutrition looking black goat and is now making up stories to get away with his crime. That day they named the goat as Poonachi.

The book says a great deal about the difficulties faced by a girl child as well as women in rural and many developed urban areas where from the arrival of a girl child till her last breath she is believed to be a curse rather than the package of joy. Still, there are certain places around the globe where every bad event or situation faced by one or the whole family is blamed on the girl child and assumed her to be the bad luck that she brought since her birth. The book also talks a great deal about the hardships of the farmers, the 'Anna-devta' (Food-lord) as considered in India. It shows how hard it is for a farmer to survive in the world where they are been forced to feel lesser rather than the royalty they must deserve. How farmers are subjected to all the bad circumstances may it be natural as depending on Rains or Government work. All they want is to just

see their crops grow or else they are left in debt from which their survival is so harsh that a City-dwellers may not even understand. The book has a third element which it highlights gravely. The topic of Animal abuse. It's the animals that are subjected to various abuses for all types of greed a Human can get from those Voiceless creatures. From food as meat to Traditional sacrifices.

All the three critical issues the book raises moves the reader deeply and makes us think of all those activities which are just so mundane that we as people are not even giving the attention they need and just pass by as if it's common and right. All the 3 issues must get their much-awaited justice soon. May it be the right place of farmers among us or may it be Animal abuse or the disappointing fate of how Girl child and even grown-up women's are being treated among us, It's us and only us who can change the scenario of such highlighted issues by just changing the way we react and the way we behave. It's not some Mountain breaking task for us to improve as a whole living creature.

Just pledge to yourselves that the next time you see some idiot teasing and abusing any creature may it be an animal or Women or even Man, **TAKE A STAND!!!**

**DON'T WASTE THE FOOD!!!** Donate it to someone needy, the issue for hunger is not a local one. Hunger is a worldwide issue which can be helped by simply donating your leftover the next time you visit a Restaurant. Why just donate and do good deeds to poor on Thanksgiving or Eid or any other festivals on a Single day of the year. Celebrate them every day, **HELP THE NEEDY, and DONT BE GREEDY!!!**

**Conclusion** - Deeply moving and thought-provoking.

Full Review on Blog.

Link to Blog - The Tales of Fugitive Biker

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## **Dilip Chauhan says**

Well! It was a buzz on Indian bookstagram community, and because of which I bought this book, though I had this one from long time, suddenly I picked it and started reading. I am glad that I trusted my instinct this book is one of the best book of this year from an Indian author I have read.

Rating

Plot / Story - ????

Characters - ????

Pace of the book - ????

Narrative - ????

Cover image - ????

Overall Rating - ????

### **Poonachi or story of a black goat**

Is the book which narrates the story of the miraculous black goat Poonachi.

One day an old couple finds a pitch black goat from an unknown person. Nobody exactly knows how and from where the goat came from.

The old couple takes the goat back to home and hence starts the story or a Poonachi and journey of an amazing book.

Perumal Murugan has written the story in very simple manner. Yet the book is absolutely captive.

Through the life of Poonachi we will see how the world works. How not only her but us live our lives.

Author has done a fantastic job in narration, with this book he has also pinpointed many social issues which are really need to be addressed and taken care.

The only thing I disliked about the book is its end. It was very sudden for me. And somehow I just can't digest it. Hence the Rating dropped to 4 stars.

If you are looking for fine Indian book with amazing narration and light hearted story this is the best one you can pick.

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