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A Brief study on woman's Agony reflected in Perumal Murugan's *Pyre*

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Abstract

People use language as their primary means of communication and literature elevates the purpose of language to a new level. Literature has always served the following fundamental functions: Self-expression, public education, human exploration, and providing some sort of amusement and aesthetic pleasure. The backbone of literature is culture, which differs depending on a person's race, nationality, customs, and traditions. As a result, the aim of writing is different depending on the nation and its historical setting. Alike other countries, India is also a reservoir of literary masterpieces, including epics, myths, and scriptures, and is notable for its consistency in variety. Since 1500 BC, Indian literature has been composed in a variety of Indian languages, each with its own distinctiveness, including Tamil, Sanskrit, Urdu, Kannada, Malayalam, and Hindi. Classical Sanskrit literature and Sangam Tamil literature are regarded as the best in Indian literary history. This current research paper focuses on, A well-known Tamil author, Perumal Murugan, from Namakkal, a district in Tamil Nadu, is well-known for his writings that are set in the Kongu district of Tamil Nadu. He was born in Tiruchengode in 1966. Raised in an agricultural town, Perumal Murugan has loved reading since he was a little child. In a theatre outside the tiny village, his father operated a soda shop. His early compositions were greatly influenced by his recollections of his early years spent with family and friends. The present investigation looks at how the horror of caste and class division in rural India and how it brings agony to woman protagonist is woven throughout the novel *Pyre* of Murugan. And there is enough evidence to imply that he doesn't shy away, to be fair to him. He has the appropriate ideas and the dubious depths of forbidden love to draw from, but he does so methodically, occasionally sending people to realistic opponents at the table in a discussion that deserves its own heavy silences but doesn't get any. When Murugan distinguishes between Tholur and Kattuppatti, *Pyre* makes a clear comparison between the temperance of people's lives in a city and those in a rural.

Keywords: Inter-Caste marriage, love

Introduction

Perumal Murugan is a chronicler of literature. He wrote short stories and poems for the journal *Manavosai* to start his writing career. Ten novels, five anthologies of poetry and short tales, and ten pieces of non-fiction are among Murugan's accomplishments. His creations function as Tamil Nadu's "cultural map." Among his other noteworthy works are *Rising Heat* (2019), *Estuary* (2020), *Resolve* (2021), *Black Coffee in a Coconut Shell* (2017), *Songs of a Coward* (2017), *Lonely Harvest* (2018), *Trial by Silence* (2018), *One Part Woman* (2010), *Pyre* (2016), *Poonachi: Or the Story of a Black Goat* (2016), and *Current Show* (2004). Through his novels, Murugan would have embodied a form of intellectual challenge to social background of culture and their life styles. It is the task of this proposed thesis to outline how these concerns find expression in literary forms through Murugan.

Aniruddhan Vasudevan translated *Pyre* (original title: *Pookuzhi*) into English in 2016. The book was first released in Tamil in 2013. Aniruddhan Vasudevan is a Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin, as well as an actor, author, and interpreter. In 2013, the Tamil Literary Garden's Best Translation award, established in Canada, was given to his highly acclaimed translation of Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman*. Professional Bharatanatyam dancer Aniruddhan Vasudevan has a fascination for Tamil culture. According to him, it has been a more interesting experience to decode *Pookuzhi*, which was released as *Pyre*.

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"This is a novel about caste and the resilient force that it is, but it is also about how oddly susceptible caste and its protectors seem to feel in the face of love, and how it often seems to assert itself both in everyday acts of judgment as well as in moments of most unimaginable violence," wrote Aniruddhan Vasudevan, the novel's interpreter, in the translator's note. For the 2017 DSC Prize for South Asian Literature, the book received a nomination. R. Ilavarasan, a young Dalit man who was discovered dead on a railway track after his intercaste marriage caused violence in his society, is the subject of the Tamil version.

The story takes place in Kattuppati, a secluded village in Tamil Nadu, Southern India. Kumaresan and Saroja, who have just married, arrive by bus to settle into Kumaresan's home in the village. Their marriage, which is inter-caste, was conducted in secrecy after they eloped from Saroja's residence in Tholur. Kumaresan believes that as long as they do not acknowledge Saroja's different caste, no one will find out. Upon arriving at their home, Marayi, Kumaresan's mother, laments her misfortune over her son's marriage to Saroja. Her wailing attracts the attention of many villagers who gather at the house to view the new bride and ridicule her about the marriage. They cannot accept that someone as fair-skinned as Saroja could possibly be from the same caste as theirs.

Perumal Murugan subtly disguises the significance of the caste Hindu identity, which plays a crucial role in determining one's marriage. Although marriages are largely seen as private matters, they still require the approval of community elders who hold significant influence over such events. As time goes on, Saroja must endure Marayi's relentless insults and the inquiries and remarks from the villagers regarding her caste. A visit to Kumaresan's grandparents turns unpleasant when his grandfather confronts him, claiming he has brought dishonor to the family. Saroja learns again about their relationship in Tholur, where Kumarasen had arrived to work with the assistance of Bhai Anna. Kumarasen was employed at a soft drink packaging and distribution company called Soda Bottle. He was Saroja's neighbor, and they frequently exchanged furtive looks until a few soda bottles burst in Kumarasen's grip and Saroja brought him some food. Realizing that her father and brother would never approve of their union, Saroja decided to run away with Kumarasen to get married.

In their village, a council decides to exclude them from any social gatherings and access to a public well. Kumarasen and Saroja are still invited to the coming-of-age ceremony of a relative from another village. Kumarasen attempts to establish a soda-bottle vending business across several townships. He brings Saroja along to Virichipalayam, where he has set up a shop using funds raised from various networks. Saroja hopes he will settle in Virichipalayam and distance himself from his own township. They choose to go directly to the temple for the ceremony instead of walking with others from their village. During the ceremony, Kumarasen feels embarrassed by his uncle and is asked to leave immediately.

Upon returning home, Kumarasen finds out that Saroja is expecting a child. Saroja hopes that the arrival of their baby will convince Kumarasen to leave the village with her. Kumarasen needs to be away from the village for a few days to tend to his workshop, but Saroja urges him to return that night, even if it's late. Later in the evening, while Saroja is

in the bushes near the rock to relieve herself, she overhears Marayi plotting with other villagers to kill her while Kumarasena is away. Determined not to be captured, she hides deep within the border. When the villagers figure out her location, they set fire to the vegetation surrounding her, just as the sound of Kumarasena's bicycle is heard approaching the village.

The central theme of this story revolves around an "inter-caste marriage" between a fair-skinned girl and a boy from a village. The relationship between Saroja and Kumaresan is intricately linked to a significant factor in their lives known as "caste." Upon exploring the caste system in India, readers will find it presents numerous challenges and consequences. In the context of inter-caste marriage, it often acts as a formidable obstacle. The mindset of many in India, particularly within the Hindu community with its various class divisions, tends to resist accepting the notion of caste, which is ostensibly intended to enhance societal welfare.

Tamil Nadu is divided by deep-rooted culture and traditions that discourage young people from marrying outside their caste. This practice was initiated by the Aryans. Nevertheless, intercaste marriages are gaining some level of acceptance due to increased education and awareness. *Pyre* inspired by a true story that highlights the painful caste discrimination faced in countless villages across India. In reality, many communities in India find themselves trapped in the harsh realities of social class divisions. Over 160 million individuals in India are regarded as "Untouchables", people whose birth into a caste system renders them as less than human. There has historically been a strong expectation in India that marriage should occur within the same caste and religion. Tamil Nadu takes pride in its Dravidian heritage while attempting to sweep its intense caste issues under the rug. Caste remains one. Such a significant denominator has led to turmoil in the lives of many individuals. These individuals lost their lives like fish out of water. Saroja and Kumaresan aspire to spend their entire lives together. Society is deeply entrenched in the morality of caste, which fails to prioritize individual perspectives. Saroja and Kumaresan encountered a great deal of awkwardness following their marriage. *Pyre* illustrates the social construction and the intricacies of issues arising from inter-caste marriage. They never attempt to view life beyond the biases of caste. They lack the vision to appreciate the beauty and goodness in individuals from lower castes.

It is quite striking to understand that the consequences of the caste system merely reflect feelings of insecurity. These social constructs were established to enhance human life. Rather than fostering improvement, it leads to devastation and has greatly impacted marginalized individuals. A century-long oppression, without any scrutiny of its negative aspects, is seen as a burden for India. This situation will continue until society acknowledges the injustices they are perpetuating. While it is essential to adhere to certain traditions and cultural practices to foster societal harmony, it is equally important to evaluate the reasons and outcomes before integrating religious beliefs into an individual's life.

Throughout the narrative, Saroja and Kumaresan endure humiliations based on caste, manifested in harsh words and degrading physical violence. Although the villagers remain unaware of Saroja's cautious caste and its hierarchical link to Kumaresan's caste, her lighter skin compared to their darker complexions is enough for them to question her caste identity. The inter-caste marriage serves as a justification for

violating the caste purity of the entire village, leading to Kumaresan and his family being ostracized. The entire community raised their voices in opposition to his marriage and refused to recognize it.

Murugan is resolute in his decision to center his narratives around the brutal reality of caste and class divisions in rural India. To his credit, there is ample evidence to indicate that he does not shy away from this issue. However, despite having the right perspectives and a wealth of controversial experiences to draw upon, he approaches the topic laboriously, at times reducing individuals to mere opponents in a discussion that deserves its own weighty pauses, yet none are provided. In *Pyre*, Murugan effectively contrasts the experiences of lower-caste individuals living in urban areas with those in rural settings by distinguishing between Tholur and Kattuppatti.

Saroja was cherished and enjoyed her freedom in Tholur, as she is valued by her family. Her brother affectionately refers to her as Roja, my precious gold, my little calf when he is intoxicated. Meanwhile, Marayi labels her as a bringer of misfortune. Roja, which means the rose flower in Tamil, contrasts sharply with Marayi's comparison of Saroja to the Erukku shrub that grows abundantly on her son Kumaresan's grave. Vrichipalayam, where Kumaresan aspired to open a rental shop, was also a modest town.

Saroja quickly developed a fondness for the town of Vrichipalayam because the residents there did not inquire about her caste or the amount of gold she had brought with her. The people in Vrichipalayam are preoccupied with their own activities and show little interest in the personal details of others. This atmosphere reminded her of Tholur when she arrived in Vrichipalayam. Consequently, Saroja envisions starting a fresh chapter in her life there. She received praise for tidying up the entrance of the new shop, and everyone treated her warmly, making her feel at ease in Vrichipalayam. She began to see Vrichipalayam as a mirror of Tholur. In contrast, Kattuppatti, Kumaresan's village, is portrayed as a place steeped in backwardness.

After running away with Kumaresan, Saroja reaches the village. Her initial meeting with a man in Kattuppatti completely startled her. He was dressed in a loincloth with a towel draped around his neck. To Saroja, he resembled a dark pig. A feeling of rawness also emerged when she experienced a nightmare. In her dream, she found herself surrounded by darkness. Abruptly, she awoke from the nightmare in fear, feeling as if she were confined in a cave.

In the portrayal of Saroja as a gentle and submissive character who adores her husband, Marayi stands out as a malevolent figure. Marayi exhibits stubbornness and cruelty, lamenting for her daughter-in-law, Saroja. Through this contrast, Murugan suggests that among the Dalit community, only the strongest individuals can thrive. Kumaresan is depicted as a naive person who perceives only the good in others. Despite Saroja's pleas for him to come to Tholur, Kumaresan refuses, clinging to the hope that his mother and other elders will change their attitudes and fully embrace Saroja.

The depiction of Marayi holds significant importance in the manuscript. She embodies the aggressor and ruler who adopts a male-dominated persona and is even willing to kill those who deviate from the village's norms. Saroja serves as the victim in this narrative. Lacking any honor, she perishes in the flames instigated by Marayi. Kumaresan is Marayi's sole child. She has dedicated her entire life to caring for

Kumaresan. Marayi is shattered to witness Saroja eloping and arriving in Kattuppatti with Kumaresan. Fueled by a desire for vengeance, Marayi targets Saroja whenever an opportunity arises. It is also noteworthy that Marayi maintains her presence in Kattuppatti in a commanding manner.

Murugan in *Pyre* strives to grant the power to vocalize the inner fears and turmoil of Saroja, providing her with the foresight to anticipate the grim fate that lies ahead. Even with this vision, she cannot avert the destruction that is destined to happen to her. Consequently, Saroja ends up as a victim who suffers trauma and is ultimately killed by the caste indifference.

In many Indian traditions, there is opposition to inter-caste marriages due to caste-related beliefs. It is commonly thought that people should wed within their own caste to guarantee acceptance from both family and society. A widespread belief in our community is that the integrity and honor of the caste can be preserved only if individuals choose partners from the same caste instead of marrying someone from a different caste.

When individuals from different caste backgrounds choose to marry, they often confront threats, forced separations, abusive language, and are pressured to sever ties with their families or communities. Those who challenge these social norms by engaging in inter-caste marriages may suffer severe consequences, including violence, ostracism by their families, and even the tragic outcomes of honour killings. This kind of discrimination is consistently upheld across all communities in India to preserve casteism, irrespective of socioeconomic status.

In Tamil Nadu, honor killings are one of the cruel methods employed to eliminate their own children in order to preserve a false sense of honor in society. This practice has destroyed many lives, including that of Saroja. Murugan has dedicated his work, *Pookkuzhi*, to examine how individuals are coping with these situations. Love is a beautiful thing that transcends boundaries, yet society imposes its own laws relating to caste, creed, and religion. Any violation of these societal norms is deemed a crime and is unacceptable. This lesson is conveyed through the novel, with *Pyre* serving as a significant revelation to society.

The novel illustrates the mistreatment of individuals by exploring issues through the perspective of caste. Additionally, it highlights the discrimination faced by women. The emotions of Saroja, who is separated from her family in pursuit of love, are overlooked by others. It depicts the true picture of an unsuccessful elopement and the challenges involved, particularly concerning the hardships endured by women.

Saroja and Kumaresan become victims of discrimination and bias based on their caste. Kumaresan's dreams are crushed when his community refuses to accept his marriage to the girl he loves. This rejection stems from the belief that the girl he has brought home, judged by her looks, does not come from their caste. They comment on his choice, noting that he has selected a light-skinned girl who doesn't share their darker complexion. As a result, the entire community ostracizes Kumaresan and Saroja, along with his mother, Marayi. Both Saroja and Kumaresan endure suffering as a consequence of the overwhelming prejudice from most people in their community.

They are excluded by their community. Although the villagers were well-meaning and referred to one another as

Mappillai, it was still challenging to change their perspectives on caste and social hierarchy. Despite the fact that the young couple is not involved with caste, their identity becomes an issue. Even though Tamil Nadu takes pride in its various self-respect movements, caste continues to be a significant stain on our society. In *Through Pyre*, Perumal Murugan highlights his social responsibilities and sheds light on the injustices faced by a particular community.

Pyre tells a familiar tale of tragic love intertwined with caste divisions, which seems insignificant compared to the true stories of doomed lovers. What it provides is an intimate depiction of the land, its inhabitants, their language, cuisine, and the mindset that continues to resonate with us. It presents a straightforward narrative without any pretensions. Perumal Murugan is a steadfast observer of the societal issues, especially those related to caste and its harsh realities.

In *Pyre*, Perumal Murugan has vividly depicted Saroja, the central female character, who is an unfortunate victim of the inter-caste conflict that disrupted her life. Indeed, casteism plays a crucial role in society. Every action taken by individuals is influenced by caste. In summary, the novel *Pyre* showcases the traditions of lower caste communities and the ingrained misogyny faced by rural women within the current social structure. With a tragic conclusion, *Pyre* offers a harrowing perspective on human cruelty through its portrayal of inter-caste relationships in modern Tamil Nadu.

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