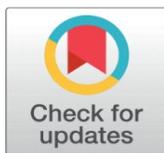


## DEHUMANIZING CASTE IN PERUMAL MURUGAN'S PYRE

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

'We write the surface only/I am surer of it now/Than ever before' writes Meena Alexander, an internationally acclaimed poet, Scholar and a writer. What Perumal Murugan did in the framework of his highly regarded novels *One Part Woman* and *Pyre* is the same. He was only trying to scratch the surface of reality; the deeper one goes, the more fragrant it becomes. Murugan rose to prominence following the highly contentious acceptance of his work *One Part Woman*. Until then, the rising star of contemporary tamil writing was mostly unknown to the literary world. His English-language novel translations caused a stir in the literary community with their combination of critical praise and economic success. *One Part Woman*, one of his best books, was shortlisted for the Crossword Award and the ILF Samanyay Bhasha Samman in 2015; *Seasons of the Palm* was shortlisted for the Kiriyama Prize in 2005. Furthermore, Aniruddhan Vasudevan, who translated the novel, was awarded the Sahitya Akademi Translation Award (2016) for his efforts. Additionally, the book was placed on the long list for the 2018 National Book Award in the translated literature category.

When *One Part Woman* was published, it caused even greater stir because the author alluded to the culture's underlying, hidden beauty. In a January 2015 Facebook post, the author himself announced, "Perumal Murugan the writer is dead." He is not going to raise himself from the dead since he is not God. He doesn't believe in rebirth either. Living as P. Murugan, he will be an ordinary teacher. After Hindutva and caste forces attacked him, he was told to "leave him alone."

## ABSTRACT

The topic of the paper is one that is hotly debated in the current context for its kind. Although the novel's female protagonist Saroja's caste was not specifically mentioned by author Perumal Murugan, readers are likely to wonder "which caste does she belong to?" based on firsthand accounts. The goal of the paper is to uncover the shaky perceptions of the lumpen human race that twirls while grasping a string. The helpless characters of Murugan who do not challenge the injustice and callous attitudes of the locals are also criticized in the paper. This essay on *Pyre*, also known as *Pookkuzhi*, seeks to contextualize the oppressions and dehumanization of the marginalized human development.

**Keywords:** Love, Aggression, Caste, Violence, Oppression.

It is very much true in the words of Vaishna Roy who claims that "our literary ecosystem should have quivered with recognition when his first books emerged but conditioned as we are to reading second-hand accounts of ourselves we are mostly blind to the flames beyond our neon-lit windows" (3).

She discovers the perfect term, neon-lit windows, to characterize the state of our existence. We are oblivious to history, and how many of us are aware of the accurate history of our own culture? This one little question transforms us into insignificance. Many people are unaware of the events that the communities celebrate as festivals. Even in modern times, villages still conduct certain rites that cover everything from childbirth to death, but they are purposeless. However, everything has a purpose, just like everything else. In Murugan's works, the concept of discovering the buried treasure is evident

*Pyre*, his most recent book, tells a tale replete with love, caste, and a rural location. *Pyre* was first rendered from Pookkuzhhi in Tamil. In order to show readers what caste politics may produce, the author weaves the novel around a rural location and caste issues that are present in the background. The narrative revolves around Kumaresan's encounter with Saroja, a stunning woman. He falls in love with her while working in the town, and since their castes prevent them from getting married and getting married with the consent of both families, they choose to wed and move to Kumaresan's hamlet

The author has done a pretty good job of distinguishing between the town and village settings. In addition, the caste—arguably the most significant part of the book—is viewed as a strong force that undermines the tale as a whole. Simultaneously, the guardians of the caste are perceived as unbelievably intolerant. The caste issue is still relevant today. The publication also emphasizes the visionary phrases that are packed with strength for living in Kumaresan, Saroja, and the other side's inhabitants. In the initial mention, Saroja is presented as a young lady who solely relies on Kumaresan for support.

The description of the vast dry country, scorching wind, quiet birds, dryness, and heat is followed by an introduction to Saroja, who seems to have hoped that "everything should go well" despite her hesitation to enter the hostile area (3). Throughout the entire book, the women's conflicted feelings are made clear. Throughout the book, Kumaresan is described as having a firm grip on his attitude and frequently saying to Saroja, "Don't worry about things, in a heartfelt manner. I'm present" (4). The dilemma now is whether or not the words of the villages can be withstand by the fear of Saroja and the words of Kumaresan. The three main themes of the book are aggression, dread of Saroja, and love for Kumaresan.

Being a girl raised in a town, Saroja found everything Kumaresan said to be novel, even the fact that he spoke quickly. When he began giving her advice and correcting her, it gave her the impression that she would be more likely to have problems in the future. When discussing the paper's trust section, the caste system comes up as the main topic of discussion. From the outset, Kumaresan is well aware that he would face consequences if he pursues a girl from a different caste. It is evident in his mother's comments when she begs him not to bring any female of his choosing into their house who is not a member of their caste. In her words "you live in a different town. Please don't come back here dragging along a girl from a different caste" (7).

She takes great pride in not dragging a girl from a different caste. In villages, caste is so deeply ingrained that it has become an unstoppable bush. Their veins are filled with their blood. Eliminating caste is a more difficult task than mopping the floor. Due to deeply ingrained customs, the communities would not even consider allowing a boy from a higher caste to date a member of a lower caste or vice versa. Murugan brings this into line quite a bit. Kumaresan faced criticism when he went to work and socialized with others. His mother Marayi had complained to Kumaresan about his attitudes that.

Growing up in a small village with his single mother, Kumaresan gained knowledge with small livestock and fields. Now that he is ready to explore the outside world, he discovers that the town is larger than he had anticipated. Caste waves are remarkably minimal in towns when contrasted with those in villages. People from every other settlement come together in the town to ensure each other's survival.

From the cremation site to the verdant desert, everything appears new to Saroja. She didn't think the villagers would treat her and Kumaresan so badly for getting married because they were new to each other and the surroundings. Everything they had planned did not pan out from the start. For example, while Kumaresan and Saroja were beneath the neem tree's shade, she heard a guy ask Kumaresan, "What is it, Mapillai?" "Why are you standing here?" he asked, shaking the pair.

In addition to closely observing Saroja, he had a variety of questions for Kumaresan. He was eager to inquire about Kumaresan's caste. In the meantime, Kumaresan received a surprise response when he requested his coworker

Periyasami to go out and locate a girl and settle down in this town. He said “Ayyo! Looking is all I can manage. In fact, I am scared to do even that. And if I do marry a girl here, I can never go back to my village. I’ll have to sever all ties with the people of my caste, and live here. If I dare to go back, they will poison me. Or beat to death” (44).

To highlight Kumaresan's disposition, we discover throughout the book that he is of decent natured man who never stares at a girl and when an old lady comments about Kumaresan, she asks Saroja how she managed to get Kumaresan to fall in love with her while he was often contacted by his village's girls. Similarly, when Saroja chances to think of Kumaresan, too, saw nothing wrong with his conversations or his approach toward her. When weighing Kumaresan against Kali, the main character in *One Part Woman*, they are equal. The masculine characters of Murugan can be described as brave and endearing in this situation. Jane Wallace likens Kumaresan to Romeo, who cherished his Juliet and was devoted to Saroja.

Murugan declares that both of them had known each other before they started to fall in love or realized they were in love as he goes into great depth about the love affair. Even though Kumaresan was in the town, he retained his attitudes from the rural. A few incidents, such as laying beneath the Indian beech tree or caressing the neem twig in an open manner, indicated that he was not used to the way the town was built up. People would remark on him when they saw him brushing a neem twig.

The shift in Kumaresan's mindset once he began to learn things or was ready to work on himself is one area that requires attention. He was just a guy with his head bowed until he found the confidence to gaze at a girl who was used to hearing music from the radio. Murugan had shown a strong desire to talk about the affection that was there between them. Murugan succeeded in bringing the exaggerated experience of Saroja needing a matchstick and having to ask Kumaresan for it at one point, especially in their segment where the male and female protagonists are shown to be internally in love. Even Saroja, a calm, attractive, and well-bred girl from a town background, was unable to comprehend what was happening when she accompanied Kumaresan to his house after their marriage. Her shyness and fair complexion betrayed that her body did not suffer in the sun; rather, it was just that she felt outside of her caste. She trusted that Kumaresan would take care of her and had given herself up to him. When her mother-in-law made disparaging remarks, she was partially oblivious to what her mother was saying and partially perceiving it as an unjustified reprimand.

Even the unpopular peasants could not find anything wrong with praising her lovely skin. Even Saroja remembers a specific incident when her mother-in-law mentioned something before she left to herd the goats. She pointed that “your flower-soft feet might hurt themselves walking on the rock. Be careful” (47). She was a source of wonder for the entire hamlet, as stated by Kumaresan, and everyone came and left to gaze at her. However, she is made fun of for being a sorceress named Mohini who seduced Kumaresan into falling in love with her. But the caste pushed their way through the entire hamlet, where Marayi would always sing the dirge song to grieve for her only son, who had left the village against their wishes. She was also concerned that she would not be able to marry into their family. She always blamed her loud sobbing for changes.

Although Saroja and Kumaresan were not well received in his community, the same was true for his appuchi. After they went to Kumaresan's ammayi and appuchi's house without permission, his appuchi struck him multiple times, calling him a “ungrateful dog” (99). Subsequently, his ammayi arrived to save him. When his ammayi took them inside their home, appuchi exclaimed that “Ey! Don’t take her inside. Who knows what caste she belongs to!” (99)

What transpired there was not what Kumaresan had anticipated. Ammayi, who was kind toward both, also had strong caste prejudice. She brought a jug of water, which she first delivered to Saroja and then took back to be a lead tumbler to give water to Kumaresan. She also did not bring them into their house, forcing them to sit on the porch instead. Everyone in the area arrived upon hearing the commotion and began to make remarks about the just arrived couples. With fury and venom that had been hidden for years, the people's or relatives' statements emerged. They were yelling that you couldn't locate another girl for our caste to marry or that you believed our caste's females weren't as good as her. They even made Kumaresan a threat to leave before his uncles arrived.

Without anybody to lean on, Saroja was forced to live in perpetual fear, and Marayi would always use the opportunity to inflict verbal abuse that would eventually destroy her. She was having the best of times without Kumaresan. Saroja's position is accurately reflected by Murugan.

Additionally, Kathir notes that the majority of instances are written off as simple suicides. Even Kathir's assertion is corroborated by the figure of Murugan, the elderly woman who whispered Saroja some advice. Astutely, she requested that she register their marriage so that others would be reluctant to touch her. I have only mentioned a handful of the people who were victims of caste-based violence: Kannagi and Murugesan, Gokulraj, E Illavarasan, and Sankar. Numerous people have died, shocking the faces of those who consider themselves to be caste beholders. This world has much more to see that even the minors are not hesitant to partake in caste based atrocities or to go a step of killing

anyone.

The very recent honour killing happened in Tirunelveli district where a thirty-two year old Shankar was slashed to death. According to the police investigation, the main suspect was the brother of the females, who allegedly plotted with four other 10th grade classmates and an 11th grade senior. Apart from them two masons had aided them in carrying out the murder. The masons had gone to work and the boys had gone to their classes, the policeman yells, as if nothing had happened or they had done anything wrong.

This story serves as yet another example of the brutality of caste-based violence that occurred in 2003 and is still fresh in people's memories. Murugesan was fed with poison in the public view and the family poured poison into her ears and nose to Kannagi. The pair allegedly fell in love while attending Annamalai University despite coming from different castes. Murugesan, a chemical engineering graduate, was from a Dalit community in the Virudhachalam district, and Kannagi, a commerce graduate, was from the Vanniyar community.

The only ways to write about annihilating caste are through words to read, images to see, and music to hear. But in truth, man would always kill man for the sake of caste unless everyone believes that everyone else is also a similar kind of them. The filth of caste and class permeates every crevice and corner of the planet. "No matter how many Ambedkars come," some say, "people won't change." It is true that instances of brutal honor killing, caste-based rape, and other atrocities that are leading to the abolition of humanity are still being reported at a time when people consider themselves to be civilized. Murugan has struck the upholders of the caste in the face by skillfully using the deadly weapon of caste. It is noteworthy that he made no reference of Saroja's caste throughout the entire book.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None

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