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# **The Dark Side of Tradition: Unveiling Honor Killing, Caste Oppression in Perumaol Murugan's Pyre**

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## **Abstract**

*The novel Pyre is written by an Indian Writer Perumal Murugan and subsequently been translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan into English in 2016. The novel sets in a village focusing on the life of a young couple Kumaresan and Saroja and the challenges they face after their inter caste marriage. Murugan continues to focus on the potent symbol of the conflict between love and caste. This novel unlikely to have a happy ending, it is because of this novel's journey towards undeniable outcomes that disturbs the insights of the human about the treatment of the vulnerable castes and its guardians dominate the innocent loves. The outcomes of these vulnerable caste systems much like protagonists like Romeo and Juliet ends their life due to this ultimate sin. This paper critiques on the powerless state of the characters who fails to question against this ultimate sin rather they unknowingly undergo such inhumane attitudes. This paper also tries to explore the dehumanizing state of the human.*

**Keywords:** Conflict, Caste, Inhumane, Dehumanizing, Dominate, Prejudice, Injustice.

India is a developing country where unity in diversity is still in progress, though the country divided by number of different castes and classes it still working for its unity. Though the country aims for its unity, still somewhere people are being oppressed by the name of caste, race, colour and religion which its affect its growth. People of India's lower caste were oppressed by this discrimination and untouchability. Though many leader fought for the downfall of this discrimination, differentiations still seen from the people in their house, schools and even in working places. Because of this discrimination rights for equality is being denied. The worst scenario is even the educated people got trapped by this class divisions. Witnessing all this evil activities the Indian constitution has abolished this ultimate sin of 'castes' through many Acts. Great leaders like Ambedkar, Periyar voice out for abolishing such sins, still the class divisions prevails in India even in this modern era. Infact on this issues many literary works has been published foe educating its readers to abolish caste divisions. B.R. Ambedkar once said:

*Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practice casteism and we observe untouchability because we are enjoined to do so by the Hindu religion. A bitter thing cannot be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed. But poison cannot be changed into nectar. (Writings and speeches ed. 2003).*

Casteism is an incurable disease. There is no treatment for this disease. The only way to cure is to have a stable mind and to think rationally, considering all as a human being instead of looking at their caste tag. How the bitterness never changes into sweet like that the action of showing off the caste has not changed off. The Indian culture appreciates only the concept of arranged marriage where the parents decide the suitable one for their family and this practice is followed from the Vedic era. When the daughter or the son in a family reach the suitable age to get married, the parents start to find a better match prospective one according to the preference they have. On the other hand marriage is being projected as a caste tool for most of the Indian people. Marrying suits out their caste is being considered a sin which brings shame for their caste they belong to. In fact those who marry out of the caste even the elders consider it as a shame and their anger reaches the peak and they end up in honor killing. Taking into account the issue prevailing in the society as an example contemporary writer Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* serves as a controversial and serious novel which mirrors the evil side of casteism. Aniruddhan Vasudevan has translated the book '*Pyre*' from Tamil without losing the essence of the story. The novel has the themes of love and care, casteism which includes the pride and honor killing, and hate of jealousy, gossip and harsh words, different life styles of village and city, dreams of newly married couple, and finally the death.

*Pyre* is set in the village of Kattupatti, located in Tamilnadu. The original work was titled *Pokkuzhi* which was written in Tamil. The protagonist of the novel is Kumaresan who leaves his widowed mother in their native town to look after his work. After searching for a job, he successfully finds a soda factory and works in it. Between his regular job of washing the bottles, filling them up with the water and distributing them to the shops, Kumaresan finds his love: of life a skinny and a wiry girl named Saroja who is a poor girl resident of the place where he resides. This two love birds exchange their love for others and ends up with getting married together and begin a new journey of life. After their marriage Kumaresan takes his wife Saroja to his native village. On entering the village, Saroja does not feel secure, she feels alienated and finds herself isolated in the new place. The village also looks deserted and where is not much of civilization as found in the town which she grew up. Even during the hard times Kumaresan still wishes to preserve the common rituals and duties that are expected of a husband, "Saroja hesitated to venture into that inhospitable space. Step down with your right foot first, Kumaresan had said to her." (Murugan, 1)

Saroja who always believed in one person, who makes her fall in love and for whom she came out from her home is Kumaresan, she blindly trusts him for her he is the future and safe life so she took decision to come with him to his strange village. When he rehearsed into himself about the plan.

*Saroja clutched his shoulder and continued to shuffle ahead, making sure her legs didn't get in the way of his. Smiling faintly, she wondered if he would have taken her smile to mean, I have no one besides you. I have come placing all my trust in you. (Murugan, 5).*

Whenever Saroja is in trouble and cannot overcome fear, it was her husband Kumaresan who always stands back for her and acts as the pillar of hope. She always seen with the fear of future though she has her husband aside. He constantly gives hope and cheers her up and never lets her spirit and love go down as he often says; He had already said enough to dispel her fear and boost her confidence. She held on those heartfelt words he had uttered:

*If you can trust that from now on I am everything for you, he had said to her. (Murugan, 6).*

As they near to the rock, Saroja saw the face of a woman who sat there. When they close to them their voices rose like the cacophony. As soon as they saw the pair, they all got up. Everyone went in a silent mode for a minute. Saroja who did her head bowed and stood there in front of them. Kumaresan set the bag down and there also some men too. But no one said anything. Suddenly from the hut aggressive voice attacks them. His mother expresses her words of disgust "*you have*

*smashed my head with a rock!*” Saroja rises her head too see the owner of that voice. She is none other woman than the mother of Kumaresan. Her name is Marayi. His mother protests him by hitting his chest.

Perumal Murugan wishes to focus on the fact of differences, rather than the detail, to enhance the story’s universal appeal. Whenever Kumaresan’s mother started scolding him about his impurity action in result of his marriage, he explain to her that he did not do anything wrong. He only married his loved one and she also loves him back.

*Have I done such a terrible thing, he wondered. Was it such a sin to get married? Can’t I marry the woman I love? In what way have I wronged anyone by doing that? She loves me with all her life. I love her the same way. I have not gone to anyone asking for money. Why is everyone chasing us away? (Murugan, 175-176).*

When Kumaresan went out two days for a job, Marayi with the help of other village people planned to kill Saroja because for Marayi her honor is more important than her son’s happiness. Though Marayi kept her anger only for the sake of Kumaresan, but she can’t accept Saroja as her daughter in law. When they waiting for the chance to kill her, they did not hesitate. The time when Saroja went out for walk. There she heard sounds of footsteps and whispered sounds too. It makes her fear to death. Kumaresan said her that bushes had lot of snakes and insects. So don’t go deep into it. When he said her that he going for work, she pleased him to come back earlier. *‘Doesn’t matter how late it is,’ she had pleaded. ‘Please come back home. I can’t be here alone.’ (Murugan, 178).*

They searched for her in all places where she used to be always, but they failed caught her. The searching makes them tired and irritated. At that time Saroja prayed to all gods to save her life from their hand. She wants to hear the sound of her husband’s cycle bell sound. Her last wish is to hear the sound of his arriving. When they known that she was into the bushes, they put fire from the all sides. Saroja called his name as, *Kumaresa! Can you hear me? Where is the sound of your bicycle?* (Murugan, 192).

The process of searching makes the readers heartbeat rushing to save Saroja from them. She does not want to die into their hands instead of that she wants to get a bite by snakes or any other insects. When the fire reached her body, she recalls her every moment of life and love, dream, and all the things. She could feel the light from the fire. The light surrounded her from every side. *Her dream would end now* (Murugan, 196).

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