

***Dissemination Of The Caste Paradigm In The Oppressor's Psyche Of Perumal
Murugan's Pyre***

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The word 'Subaltern' is drawn from the Late Latin 'subaltern us'. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary denotes that the word Subaltern, as any officer in the British army who is 'Lower in rank' than a Captain. Its adjectival form denotes of inferior rank'. But Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci for the first time used it outside the non - military sense. In Latin 'sub' means 'under' and 'alter' means other. So literally it denotes to any person or a group of people with inferior status. According to some thinkers, perhaps he used the term as a synonym for proletariat. Literally, he refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. Perumal Murugan's *Pyre* resonates with a tone of anger and pity rolled out together. Tamil Nadu prides itself in the Dravidian legacy sweeping the burning caste issues under the carpet. Caste is one such major denominator which has wrecked havoc in the lives of many people.

Perumal Murugan reigns supreme in Contemporary Tamil Literature. An award winning writer, scholar, and poet he has garnered critical acclaim and commercial success for his vast array of work. Some of his novels have been translated in to English to immense acclaim including *Seasons of Palm* which was shortlisted for The Kiriya Prize in 2005 and *One Part Woman* his best known work was shortlisted for the Cross word award and won the prestigious ILF Samanvay Bhasha Samman in 2015. Aniruddhan Vasudevan is a performer, writer, translator and a Ph.D. student in anthropology at the University of Texas, Austin. His much lauded translation Of Perumal Murugan's *One Part Woman* won the Tamil Literay Garden's Best translation award instituted in Canada in 2013. He has written six novels and he shot to fame with *Maadhorubaagan*, a novel in which childless women are allowed to have sex on a particular day and it is assumed that the Gods themselves would have the relationship and it would not be considered wrong. The Novel created a furore among the Fundamentalists and they rose in arms to ban it. The writer was

hunted down and was forced to apologise in front of the Revenue and the Police Officials. The incident sparked a widespread outrage against the Fundamentalists. Perumal Murugan went to a shell and he refused to write any more fearing retribution from the self appointed cultural goons who threatened with dire consequences if he went ahead in writing the book. Eventually the court granted Perumal Murugan relief and defended his right to express. *Pyre* as the title suggests burns with the caste stereotypes. It was originally published as *Pookuzhi*. Aniruddhan Vasudevan has translated in English. The novel revolves around a young couple who decide to get married after falling in love with each other. Though Perumal Murugan bases the locale in the Kongu region yet the implication of the story is universal for it is a common grouse that in India caste based “honour” killings are on the rise and it is no secret that every year in India thousands of youngsters are forced to relinquish their will of marrying a girl of their choice. The story begins with the young boy Kumaresan consoling Saroja that everything would be alright and he would take care of her. Kumaresan takes Saroja to his native hamlet where he feels that he and his newly wedded wife would be safely nestled in the region. With the passage of time, Kumaresan realises that he is in for a tough ride among his villagers.

Kumaresan’s mother became a widow at a very young age and she felt the pressure of making both the ends meet. Unfortunately for Kumaresan, his mother was in no mood to accept Kumaresan’s excuses and she pounded him for doing such an act. Saroja was stretched to the limits, but she chose not to respond to her mother in law’s insinuation, Saroja was calm and recalled her memories with his father and brother back in Tholur. Saroja lost her mother at a very early age. She focused herself in household duties, and did not regret the fact that she has lost her mother. Kumaresan went to Tholur with Bhai Anna to search for work from his remote hamlet to search his fortunes. Kumaresan’s mother was reluctant to let him go, yet the villagers convinced her that a man must go out to seek his fortunes. Kumaresan found tholur a throbbing place where people thronged in great numbers and everybody seemed to mind their own business irrespective of their caste. Kumaresan was working in a soda bottle clearing unit which was owned by Bhai Anna. He was happy to see Kumaresan get engaged with the work. Kumaresan met Saroja in the vicinity of the shop, he immediately took a liking to Saroja and longed to see her face regularly. Saroja noticed Kumaresan’s looks and she eventually took a liking for kumaresan.

They both loved each other and it was inevitable that both had to get married. It was difficult for Saroja to let her plans known to her brother and with no other choice left they eloped. Kumaresan's villagers were in no mood to accept the newlyweds and they were curious to know the caste of the girl and pestered Kumaresan about her caste. Perumal Murugan subtly camouflages the caste Hindu identity which plays a major part in deciding one's marriage. Though Marriages are strictly a private affair, yet it cannot happen without the consent of the community elders, who have a towering presence of any such activity. Kumaresan was left with no other option except to start a business on her own at Virichipalayam, a semi urban town. Though the villagers were kind hearted and they addressed themselves each other as Mappillai, yet it was difficult to convince them in matter of caste and hierarchy. Though the young couple have nothing to do with caste yet their identity becomes a problem. Though Tamil Nadu boasts itself of many self respect movements, yet the caste has remained as a huge blot on our society and it still bleeds in our hearts.

Perumal Murugan's language evokes tears in the readers, for the young couple is innocent and they just want to lead a peaceful life together. With the inference of the text it can be pointed out that Kumaresan belongs to the upper caste and Saroja belongs to the lower caste. Kumaresan is well aware that it would not be easy for them to grind it in Tholur, yet he believes that if they adopted a no hostility approach towards the villagers they may pardon them. The villagers were in no mood to relent and they went to the level of excommunicating the couple from their village. Kumaresan's mother Marayai was also not spared. She hurled abuses at her young daughter in law, whom she considered as a devil incarnate. The power structure of the upper castes is now being shaken with girls from upper class are allowed to share their space with lower caste boys. It is inevitable when they share the space be it in a class room or office it is natural that love would sprout and eventually they want to tie the knot. Perumal Murugan highlights the fact that numerous caste outfits have risen in the Post - Modern era where these self appointed watch dogs have ensured that their lust for power does not get affected with the emergence of a new order sans caste. Though the government has announced various schemes to support the inter - Caste couple marriages yet it remains a mystery that why people hesitate to accept the inter caste marriage. Kumaresan was left alone in his household where his own mother considered him as a sworn enemy.

Though Marayi opposes Kumaresan, the readers are able to empathise with her, for she was twenty when she lost her young husband and she worked hard in the fields to raise Kumaresan. Saroja remained calm through these turmoils and develops a thick skin to absorb the barbs hurled against her by Marayi. The novel ends as a painful tragedy. Kumaresan leaves Virichipalayam set up soda factory and he leaves Saroja alone for a day. Unfortunately Marayi learns this and decides to kill Saroja. The end becomes more poignant with the fact that Saroja is pregnant and Kumaresan believed that a new flower in the garden would quell the unrest and peace would regain. The vicious caste has spread its manacles and Saroja and Kumaresan were unable to claw out of it. The ugly face of caste reared its venomous head in the times of elections where all the 'Progressive' political parties field the candidates based upon the upper hand of the constituency's caste identity. The political parties are guilty in consolidating the community based votes and they have ensured that the majority community in a particular belt is kept satisfied to garner their votes.

Saroja, being pregnant feels happy that all her miseries would cease with the arrival of the new entrant unfortunately the villagers have convinced Marayi that Saroja has become a blot to their village pride, and if this practice is encouraged then many youngsters from their village would go astray and bring girls from other communities, which may bring a curse on the village and their goddess won't spare them for mixing her blood with an alien one. Marayi and the villagers hatched a plot together in eliminating Saroja. On that fateful day, Saroja went out of the hut to relieve herself in the bush where Kumaresan had suggested. It is an isolated place yet it was safe from the peeving of the villagers. The bush looked dark inside which denied visibility to the onlookers who felt that it is their right to stare glances at Saroja. She heard the murmur outside where Marayi with the villagers was discussing the shame Saroja has brought on her household and even lamented the fact that Kumaresan has started speaking back at her words of advice. The crowd swelled and they found it difficult to locate her. Finally they predicted that she might be hiding in the bush, Saroja was caught trapped like a mouse which had nowhere to hide after being caught in a mouse trap. Saroja tried to stay deep in the bush. The mob tried to pull her out by beating the bush with rods and logs but Saroja bore the pain for her child in the womb.

The mob was furious that a woman could disguise them that too in their own native place. A menacing idea dawned upon the mob to lit fire on the bush and let Saroja get roasted in the fire. The end was pathetic with Saroja listening to a faint noise of the arrival of Kumaresan's bicycle. The novel does not end in the literal sense, Perumal Murugan leaves the denouement open to the readers, Kumaresan rescuing Saroja is remote for the crowd is intoxicated with the caste fury. Perumal Murugan's writings make us take part in the crime for we are all the cruel perpetrators of caste in the Society. It would augur well for the society to introspect on the subaltern sufferings and the enlightened young generation doing away with this primordial cruelty.

WORKS CITED

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