THE UNAWARENESS OF WOMAN ABOUT THE CASTIEST SOCIETY IN THE PERUMAL MURUGAN’S PYRE

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ABSTRACT

India is known for its different culture, language, and religion. Its heritage is pride among the nation’s integrity among many men but the unknown fact is India is well known for caste discrimination amongst the Indian race. It treats unequal societal behaviour in the name of caste. It is cruel system about separating all the humans in general. Here women are foremost victim in the matter of inter-caste marriage. This article analyses how the protagonist Saroja remains unaware about the castiestic society in many of the places that resulted with honour killing.

Keywords: Inter-caste, Marriage, Honour Killing, Unawareness, Casteism and Society

Perumal Murugan, a controversial Tamil writer, at present working as Tamil Professor at Government Arts and Science College, Attur, Tamilnadu, he is an eminent writer, novelist, short story writer and an essayist. His writings are exceptionally well known for dialects of Kongu region of Tamilnadu. Murugan’s works have been translated in many languages. He was attacked by local religious groups for the novel One Part Woman (Madhorubagan). After that incident, he
proclaims that Murugan is alive and writer Perumal Murugan is no more. In many of the novel, Murugan touches the issues of the marginalised sections of the Kongu region. *Pyre* was originally written in Tamil as *Pookuzhi* in 2013, the English version was translated by Anirudh Vasudevan in 2016. In the novel *Pyre*, he juxtaposes the problems of a married couple in the village.

In many of the Indian cultures inter-caste marriage is opposed in the name of caste: “It is generally upheld that one should marry a person belonging to the same caste, because in this way the marriage will be accepted by not only the parents and the family but also by the society at large.” It is commonly believed in our society that, the chastity and honour of the caste will be uphold only when they get married in their own caste not from other caste. If the couple get married from lower and upper-caste groups, he or she will face threatening, forced divorce, abusive words, separating them from not to have any relationship with their family, native of their same community and they may face extreme of honour killing. “Those who dared for the inter-caste marriage by violating the social norm had to face the consequences in terms of violence, social boycott, family boycott and death of the boys and girls (honour killing).” This kind of unequal hierarchy is strictly followed in all the villages of India in order to maintain the casteism irrespective of rich and poor.

An origin of caste system is predominantly suggested by Hindu Varna system knowingly Manusmirithi. According to Manu, people are divided according to their profession for serving to their superiors:

The Indian caste system is a classification of people into four hierarchically ranked castes called varnas. They are classified according to occupation and determine access to wealth, power, and
privilege. Leadership positions in society are monopolized by a few dominant castes (Pintane).

The growth of caste system which have made several norms and restrictions for the women in the name of culture. This Varna system is obstacle for the women's peace, independence and development of the society. Even after the Indian independence, women are kept at home not to indulge in social intercourse with the men because the power and legacy of the caste is protecting their pride among its believers. Castiест people always believe that the purity of the caste can be only saved by woman in the family, the castiest people are very keen about saving purity of the caste by marring a woman of their own blood relationship, else of their same caste.

The thousand years of caste and cultural heritage have come to clash with the modern world when Indian cities and towns becoming metropolitan. Most of the village people’s land, locality and street setting are based on the caste groups no other caste people is allowed to reside at their particular street or locality but it varies in towns and cities;

The caste system is very much impacted the economic structure in the Indian village. The village was essentially a food-providing unit, where each family of the craft or service caste was linked with one or more of the land owning-farmer-caste family.” (Velassery).

The people come from different caste and place to the town for their earnings and better lifestyle. In such environment it is difficult to know the caste of the people in the mainstream. In Pyre, Perumal Murugan’s protagonist, Saroja faces the surmountable problems due to inter-caste marriage. Even though she is brought up in town atmosphere, she never confronted with the unequal treatment, humiliation and
domination with any upper caste people in the town. She is only heard of such brutal treatments but she has not experienced anywhere. In town she lived happily by watching television, radio and having a mutual relationship with neighbour houses without knowing their caste and background but Saroja’s fearfulness begins to drive her when she comes to the village after getting married with Kumaresan, because her husband is from upper-caste she is from lower-caste.

Saroja blindly believes in Kumaresan’s words. When he was working in a town, he tempted her with unconditional love afterwards he assured Saroja that his mother would accept her on the ground that only he is the only son and also she is the widower nobody is there to look after her. Those words, promises and blind love of Kumaresan made her to hold his hand forever;

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’. (Pyre.5)

The novel opens with fearful experience in the unknown village. She was looked very strange by the villagers, many questions were asked by the villagers about Saroja’s caste, colour and language she has spoken. Whenever she was over sighted by the villagers, she used to hide herself behind Kumaresan. It is clearly shows her lack of the knowledge about village and its people. Many have passed derogatory comments upon her colour because Saroja’s white skin is mismatched with skin of her community women, therefore they decided that she is unfit to work in the field. Hence the villager’s have decided not to involve her in the labour work because of her skin colour.
'Can’t I tell by face’ he prodded relentlessly. ‘This is not a face from our caste, Mapillai. Does a face that wander over fields and rocks look like this? This is the face that wander over fields and rocks look like this? This is the face of someone who hasn’t toiled, a body that hasn’t suffered summer’s heat. (Pyre. 12)

Saroja believes in Kumaresan, because he firmly stands in favour of Saroja at all the time by defending her by difficult arrowfull questions against the villager’s. By because of this attitude, the villagers look at Saroja with the vengeance.

After marriage every woman used to think about her new familial life and to build a strong relationship with her mother in law and father in law next to her husband. The most of the arranged marriages in India are lacking better familial relationship with her husband’s family because only a few are succeeded in the conjugal relationship. Likewise Saroja is not exceptional, she is totally unaware of inter-caste marriage before she getting married. Saroja’s thoughts are very common as many Indian women, that her expectation goes to the minimal level as she imagined during love affair with Kumaresan. Hence she is victimised after she got married.

The expected marriage life of Saroja which collapses when she enter kumaresan house, poorly it is small hut Saroja neither lived in a hut nor without electricity but when she approaches Kumaresan's house there is no proper sanitary facility. She was disgusted over open toilet system and taking bath without walls in an open place. But Saroja sacrifices her little amount of expectation for the sake of Kumaresan and her only hope and happiness is being with him. When Kumaresan promises Saroja to shift her house nearby the town for their peaceful life she feels
comfortable. It shows the attitude of Saroja who is unprepared to face the problems of marital life.

Saroja is gripped with anxiety over the new environment that actually made her to investigate new atmosphere, whether Kumaresan’s mother would accept her? If she accepts, how to interact? If she doesn’t how to react? How these villagers will look at her? Would they speak normally? If they speak, how to react with unknown? Such questions confuse her state of mind. Sometimes she hesitates to speak with the neighbours, whether to reveal her identity to them? Would they compel her to tell her caste? These are all the type of questions fills her mind without tranquillity. “She had not expected the people to be so inquisitive about caste here.” (Pyre.29)

In all the situations, she wanted to have Kumaresan with her, Saroja hesitates to drink water from her own hut when Kumaresan is unavailable. This is the worst experience which makes a woman to think to be not in such premises. Sometimes she doesn’t understand what villagers utter when they speak with Kumaresan.

In many of the places, Saroja remains very sarcastic by not replying to the people, her weakness is shedding tear about thinking of her past life with father and brother in the town. Sometimes she thinks of going back to the town and apologise for her mistake to the father. “She couldn’t help but feel that it was her father’s and brother’s knowledge.” (Pyre.32)

These are all the existential problems faced by Saroja. It shows she is not a rebel in breaking the cocoons of the casteism in the inter-caste marriage life, typically it shows that she is ordinary woman who is not aware of her circumstance. She is not in a position to face her consequences what she would going to face after the marriage. It is a huge drawback on the part of woman who is nonchalant about the
society in the twentieth century. Saroja remains quite in every situation wherever she is required to voice against and she is incapable of tackling the situation in many aspects. If she would have rebelled against these anti elements, she could have saved from the honour killing. The main cause of her loss may be Saroja's inexperience with the dangerous of casteism at the village set up.

Perumal Murugan is an indefatigable chronicler of the societal syndrome especially caste and its ugly faces. In Pyre, Perumal Murugan has vividly portrayed Saroja, the woman protagonist, who is the helpless victim of inter-caste that ransacked her life. In fact castiesm plays decisive role in the society. Each and every move of the people is based on the caste. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his Annihilation of caste has come out with the novel suggestion of eradicating castiesm by way of inter-caste marriage which actually binds the people of different castes into one umbrella. But the people are not ready to heed the advice of Ambedkar and they are adamant of following castiesm, as advised by Manu, which is detrimental to our Indian society. Perumal Murugan has dauntlessly exposed the cruelties of inter-caste marriage and its ramifications in this award winning novel Pyre.

References

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15 Real Problems Couples Face After Inter-Caste Marriages