



Pyre

Perumal Murugan, Aniruddhan Vasudevan (Translator)

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Book'd says

Perumal Murugan is an author which never fails to leave you awestruck with his work. A simple and elegant love story which can make you cry along-with Saroja for her sufferings. A memorable and heart shaking read.

Aditi says

“We are united by our common fears and divided by our individual freedom!”

----Ramana Pemmaraju

Perumal Murugan, the idol of Tamil literature in India, who has been shunned by a court of law because of the fact that his books have erupted fires of scandal amongst its people, thus bringing an end to the glowing career of a talented writer in the country, whose another Tamil book named, *Pookuzi* has been translated from the original version of Kongu rural dialect into English by the author's dedicated translator named, Aniruddhan Vasudevan and in English its called, *Pyre*.

Synopsis:

Saroja and Kumaresan are in love. After a hasty wedding, they arrive in Kumaresan's village, harboring the dangerous secret that their marriage is an inter-caste one, likely to anger the villagers should they learn of it. Kumaresan is confident that all will be well. He naively believes that after the initial round of curious questions, the inquiries will die down and the couple will be left alone. But nothing is further from the truth. The villagers strongly suspect that Saroja must belong to a different caste. It is only a matter of time before their suspicions harden into certainty and, outraged, they set about exacting their revenge.

With spare, powerful prose, Murugan masterfully conjures a terrifying vision of intolerance in this devastating tale of innocent young love pitted against chilling savagery.

Kumaresan and Saroja marries one another out of love, despite the fact that they both belong from different caste and in no possible way their individual families would accept this inter-caste union of two loving souls, adding more, Saroja is a very pretty and fair skinned city girl and not a typical village girl, that Kumaresan's family would never approve of. So this newly wed embarks upon a journey to the village where Kumaresan was born and brought up from the city where they eloped and got married. Soon to their dismay, even before setting foot in the village, both

Kumaresan and Saroja are slightly criticized by a villager, yet this slight negative remark did not give them any idea about what was waiting for them at the end of their long journey. Little did they knew, that this holy union of a man and woman would enrage the entire village from Kumaresan's own mother to the neighbors or the distant relatives to the random strangers from the nearby villages, and that these people instead of

accepting the marriage or welcoming the new bride in her home, they begin scheming against the newly wed couple that would ultimately snatch away the only happiness they ever longed for.

Rarely we, the people belonging from a different part of the country other than Tamil Nadu, where the story is set, get to taste the local or regional flavor of other states other than ours own. And here comes Murugan, who successfully and cleverly lets his global readers get a taste of the raw regional flavor of culture, beliefs and traditions in a poor Tamilian village, filled with illiterate people belonging from a lower caste strata. The setting in this book plays a vital role, where apart from the brutally honest story, the author highlights the shortcomings of Tamil Nadu's rural side's norms, beliefs, values and customs, the narrow minded ideals and the vagaries of such a society that put a tight grip on the minds and the souls of those who exist in such a place.

But from a literary perspective, the book disappoints, and so its narratives as well as the characters, even the art of story telling that once left me entranced when I read the author's previous book, this time, the storytelling lacks that subtleness and depth. So that failed to give me any perspective of my own, and an Indian reader like me, I'm accustomed to honor killings in the name of caste quite strikingly, so Murugan's cinematic story telling only made me feel like trapped inside a sappy and dramatic movie. Nevertheless for readers who aren't accustomed to real life events like these, might find this book as highly enlightening and horrifyingly vivid enough to ponder about the story long after it has ended. Sadly for me, it was a same old dramatic plot told with a rural flavor and with requisite drama to suffice its approach and outlook.

The writing is articulate yet lacks depth. And with a simple yet sporadic prose, the readers might only find solace in the predictable yet an addictive climax in order to keep reading till the very end. The narratives are very poorly depicted, even though it is inspired highly from the local dialect and that might feel a bit heavy upon its readers, yet the dialogues exchanged between the characters lack emotions, period. Since this is a predictable story especially the title that will give its readers about the outcome of this novel, still the vividness and the raw horror will grip the readers' minds.

The outline of the characters are only sketched but the layers of shades of their myriad personalities are not drawn properly, and hence the characters failed to make me connect with their plight or demeanor. There are three main characters, Saroja, Kumaresan and the evil mother, Marayi. The story is told mainly from the perspective of the new bride, Saroja, who is a timid, hopeful yet obedient wife to Kumaresan, who from the very beginning is submissive towards her husband's demands and wishes and obeys like a dutiful wife, and even though she often voices her fears and thoughts to her husband, yet most of the time, those thoughts are often left to astray. As Kumaresan turns out to be someone obnoxiously sanguine about the whole situation, and dominates his wife to adapt to this harsh village lifestyle. Marayi, on the other hand, is the mirror image of Saroja, who is a widow and single-handedly raised her son, and has high hopes on him, so on her son fails her by bringing home a wife from a different caste, she starts singing sad death songs and makes it difficult for the new bride to adjust to their home, although she never once fails to constantly bicker and utter ugly and foul words to the poor and helpless Saroja. And the rest of the characters too reflect such a morbid society where a woman becomes a victim upon choosing to marry a man not out of his caste but out of love. Yes the tragic yet very brutal truth is highlighted with bold characters through this story.

In a nutshell, this is a compelling and absorbing story that will provoke the readers to feel enraged towards the Indian society's idiosyncrasy that even to this day exist in the most rural parts of the country.

Verdict: *A truly gripping read!*

Megha says

3.5*

I would love to read the original text, someday; or at least talk to someone who has. The book is set in an extremely small village with narrow dirt roads where the views of the villagers are even narrower. Anyone who feels that love is worth all the efforts in the world should read the book, and then in the end s/he should decide whether to affirm or change his/her belief.

Ushnav Shroff says

The last sentence of *Pyre* is one that will haunt me for days to come. The imagery created with those 24 words is simply breathtaking!

I began discovering the worlds that Perumal Murugan created with the spellbinding 'One Part Woman'. After a few other books and graphic novels in between, I began *Pyre* with very low expectations but a curiosity nonetheless as to where Murugan would take me this time. Needless to say, he didn't disappoint. In between my reading of the chapters did I find out that two sequels to *One Part Woman* are being published around the end of this year. The joy I felt when I read that only equalled the number of goosebumps on my arm as I read *Pyre* in equal parts horror and trepidation. At the same time, proper credit must go where it's due, and Aniruddhan Vasudevan has done a steadfast job of translating the menacing worlds of Murugan time and again.

The last 15-20 pages of the book were read walking on my way home, standing in lifts, walking around my house. It was only after the book's last sentence had crept inside me that I heaved a sigh of relief and felt a rush of dopamine that one can experience only after reading a beautiful book.

Krutika Puranik says

~ Pyre ~

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One of the reasons as to why I have come to love Perumal Murugan's stories is for the fact that they're raw. They are stripped bare and are made to parade in front of the readers without any hint of shyness. I started off with One part woman, Poonachi, The goat thief and when I picked up Pyre, I knew it was going to be an intense read. And I wasn't wrong.

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Pyre is the story of Kumaresan and Saroja, who decide to get married without seeking their elder's permission for the fear of being separated due to caste system. When Kumaresan brings Saroja to his village post their wedding, questions are raised about Saroja's caste. Kumaresan's mother throws a fit of tantrum and makes up her mind to never accept her daughter-in-law. The villagers taunt and poke the couple which stirs up severe mental disturbance in Saroja. Kumaresan slowly starts regretting his decision of coming back to the village.

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They are excommunicated for going against caste system and are further pushed into misery. The story takes a grave turn when Saroja's worse fears come true as the villagers decide to take her life. The author wrote

this story based on a true incident and I can only imagine the terror that the couple had to go through. Being constructed in a rural backdrop, the author's stories are always so breathtakingly shocking. Caste system has always been such a critical factor in few villages even till date and this book bears proof that countless people have had to sacrifice their life for it.

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I cannot get over the ending of this story though it was quite predictable. Probably because a small part of me was hoping it'd turn around. A gripping and painful read like this is something that the author has mastered. I'm glad I discovered him last year and I continue to look forward to reading more of his work.

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I would rate this book 4.5/5.

Meghna says

"Do you think you can antagonize the village and remain alive?"

Pyre is the love story of Saroja and Kumaresan, who belong to different castes. They elope to get married, and then go to Kumaresan's remote village to face a mother and a family and an entire community rearing in fury at this breach of faith. It's a wrath they soon realise they have nothing to fight with except the strength of their love.

It's a chilling narrative of how deeply are the notions of caste, purity and pollution ingrained in the minds of people; and the extents to which they might go to retain them. The book will remain with you for a long time after you've finished reading it.

Jay -hooked on books says

The story opens with young lovers Saroja and Kumaresan making their way to the latter's village, somewhere in the western region of Tamil Nadu, India. They belong to different castes, and their hasty marriage is a decision that goes against everything the people around them believe in.

Early on, the reader can feel Saroja's sense of displacement very strongly. Having left her hometown and her family, she is now transplanted to a village she has never been to, she knows nothing of, and to which her only connection is through her new husband. Her predicament, however, is only visible to the reader and her.

Kumaresan, although nervous, expects the problems that may arise from their caste differences to dissipate quietly. He tells Saroja as much, when she keeps imploring him to find answers that might reason with the villagers' prying questions.

Their sweet bubble of calm is burst soon, however. They're excommunicated and ostracised, their access to the local well is cut off, their relations with their family members sour, and life becomes difficult. What follows is a difficult read, as the reader witnesses how caste differences poison the lives of Saroja and Kumaresan.

Pyre is set in the 1980s in a remote Indian town, but the story rings true even today. It is a tale of blinding hatred spurred on by communal differences. Perumal Murugan captures the claustrophobic atmosphere the lovers live in rather well. The book was originally written in Tamil, and there are parts of the book where the

loss of vernacular nuances, as it often happens with works of translation, are felt greatly. But Aniruddhan Vasudevan has managed to reproduce the original work in English with as much integrity and as little compromise as possible. The book leaves you with a deep sense of dread and anguish.

Rob says

Beautifully written !! Read this book!

Rakesh Konni says

In Pyre, Perumal Murugan talks about the brutal side of castes in TN. It won't be a literary masterpiece, but it is truthful depiction of reality.

Fran says

This book is a gift to the soul

This story awakened so many feelings on so many levels.... desire, love, commitment, family.... then took you to your darkest corner where long held beliefs hold too tightly to judgement and prejudices. How many of us live our lives condemning differences in others, exhausting our energy in making everyone else happy, and fail to accept that we are all more alike than different. We all deserve to love and be loved, accept and be accepted, without fear. I absolutely loved this book... not only do I feel like I was invited into the life of this book, to share a glimpse of another culture; I feel as though the author left me to write the ending myself. He left me with the power to expect and plan for the worst or believe that there is always a glimmer of hope for salvation.

Akshay Dasgupta says

I am deeply saddened and disheartened at the tragic end of the female protagonist of Pyre. All the suffering and torment she went through over a very personal and trivial matter - 'Caste'.

Murugan's Pyre is a slap across the face for all of us who are part of a society that is still so strictly governed by 'Casteism' even today - almost 70 years down the line after independence. Though the book is fictional, I am very sure such cases still occur in India, predominantly in the rural areas where everything starts and ends with one's caste. Through this book, Murugan has aptly dissected the rot that has seeped into our society and details the suffering that people might endure due to their castes. I'm in awe and admire Indian authors who write books that deal with social issues and try to bring about a change in people's mindset. Kudos for Mr. Murugan for this book.

It would have been wonderful to read the books in its original language - Tamil. However, the translation is flawless and does not lessen the impact of the book in any which way.

Bookish Indulgences with b00k r3vi3ws says

The more I read books by this man, the more I am enamored.

He writes brilliantly and this book is no exception.

Taking simple and real characters, the author has woven a beautiful story while bringing out the evil's of caste system in our society. My heart went out to Saroja.

I will read this book again.

Sangeetha Ramachandran says

It was right after I finished reading Mathorupagan (One part woman), I came across this book "Pyre" which is the translated version of another famous work "Pookuli" by Perumal Murugan. I decided to get it right away but all I could find was its translated version in stores. Thanks to Chennai book fair'17, a great platform which promoted so many Tamil works, I got this book in there. In fact, there was an opportunity to interact with the author arranged by Publishers only I couldn't make to it. Started reading it right away. Of course the book is bit outdated. We don't see any opposition to these kind of inter-caste marriages nowadays as portrayed in this book. Still whatever described in the events are not unimaginable.

The reading was quite heavy. Unlike Mathorupagan where the author let me enjoy the prose just as I appreciated the story, this one submerged me with sadness, that is not explainable with words. Majorly deals with three characters, Kumeresan, an innocent man who tries his best to be optimistic in all cases. His wife Saroja who was brought up in an uptown environment and after eloping with him, struggles to adapt herself to the new situation where nothing is positive towards her yet hoping for better tomorrow. His mother, who just could not accept this and her mind inducing her one step above hate. I liked the way author let the readers conclude the story and did justice to the title and the point he wanted to make is devoured clear.

After reading Mathorupagan and Pookuli, I started seeing Perumal Murugan's works as an window to show the culture's cruel face which people of this generation often fail to get. The baseless superstitions that existed in the society that we can see its minor percentage in our day-to-day life even today. With all the civilization that we state today, these kind of issues are no more problems and we trying to educate ourselves to come out of the inner circle and be broader in mind and works like this help us to realize where we would be heading otherwise.

Chris says

You could see the ending coming, but there is such beauty in the writing.

Versha says

When i first read Perumal Murugan's 'One part women' i knew i had found another marvellous Indian author. So as soon as i knew his second book Pyre was translated i grabbed a copy immediately.

I am not sure what my feelings are for this book right now. I feel as though i am flooded with so many emotions - sadness, frustration, helplessness and what not. I felt as if everything was happening in front of my eyes but i was unable to help anybody. Thats the beauty of good books right, which tells you the story of people and their miserable situations just so we know how they suffer without any mistake of theirs'. Saroja a simple girl from uptown elopes and marries Kumaresan and goes to his village hoping for a better life hardly knowing the harsh, ruthless reality which she was entering into. Saroja's struggle was heart-wrenching though she chose the right person to lead her life with yet fate was not by her side.

I loved the way how realistically the author has handled two different female character here, Saroja and Marayi (Kumaresan's mother) both were totally opposite to each other yet at one point we tend to pity both the characters. Before i reached the ending i had to stop reading it for a while and pull myself back as i was not ready to accept the tragic ending which i was about to witness, thats how deep this book was for me. I am sure this story is going to stay with me for a while now.
