

Inner Conflict and Transformation: Unveiling the Trauma of Arumugam in Iyayam's Novel *Arumugam*

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Courtesy: www.amazon.com

Abstract

Iyayam is a well-known Indian novelist, and his works are primarily found in the Tamil literary canon. Recently, he was honoured with the Sahitya Academy Award for his novel "*Sellatha Panam*" (Invalid Money), in addition to receiving numerous accolades for his work. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the anguish and trauma experienced by a young Dalit boy named Arumugam. Arumugam's life is filled with unending anguish, and this paper will explore how he fights to come to terms with his own history while also attempting to put

some distance between himself and that history. Arumugam is described as a robust child who also has a kind disposition. However, he is helpless to stop the transformation of his flourishing life into a tragedy brought on by outside forces, and as a result, the boy is deprived of a happier upbringing.

In due time, he was compelled to find himself in the position of becoming a victim of the stubborn and indecisive actions of others. Children are even more sensitive than adults to experiencing pain and suffering; Arumugam did not have time to realise what had happened to him. Also, how difficult circumstances and his inability to alter anything about his life suffocate him and his life all the way through his boyhood, which ultimately results in traumatic experiences. In addition, the narrative gives a realistic image of both the rural life and the city life, as well as how Arumugam adapts to making a better living in a city he has never been to before and develops into a mature and responsible boy because of this experience.

Keywords: *Arumugam*, Inner conflict, Dalit studies, childhood trauma, an unheard voice, self-identity

Introduction

A tragic event, such as seeing a death or witnessing a natural disaster, can cause an emotional response known as trauma. It is both disturbing and painful to experience this happen. “Essentially, past trauma and traumatic memories affect the mind of the characters. confusion and insecurity cause trauma; typical causes of psychoanalysis trauma are sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence, and particularly childhood experiences (Heidarizadeh, 789)”.

The novel *Arumugam* recounts a terrifying experience dealing with a traumatic event throughout childhood. However, the experiences of marginalised children around the world would be different from those of children living in rich cultures because of the fact that these children are neglected on first-order racial or geographical grounds. Children of migrants are frequently exposed to traumatic experiences.

People who are unable to escape the effects of early trauma usually squander their human potential by indulging in unlawful lifestyles, which ultimately results in behaviour that is damaging to themselves. They typically suffer from some insufficient skills, which prevents them from becoming successful. Some people might be able to overcome the trauma response, while others might not. "Childhood trauma has been linked to the development of anxiety and depression in later life," and "a history of abuse may be more identifiable by adulthood as emotional and behavioural patterns have evolved by this period," "Childhood trauma has been linked to the development of anxiety and depression in later life" (Hovens, et al., 2010).

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V. Annamalai (Imayam) (Courtesy Niyogi Books)

Courtesy: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/books/review-beasts-of-burden-by-imayam/story-pFtClnCyKa95XLbcc0KzFO.html>

Imayam is a well-known author in the Tamil language. In his writings, he focuses on the life and treatment of the impoverished, portraying the unfairness that subalterns face in societies that are structured according to caste systems. The topics of caste, horrific injustice, subalternity, and segregation are prevalent in most of his texts. His works address topics related to the caste-based cruelty that Dalits in rural and urban areas of Tamil Nadu endure. According to the author, looking back on those trying days can now provide a sense of "solace." He is an authority in Dalit narrative, and as such, he believes that Dalit literature encompasses more than just the tragic experiences of a single individual. Instead, the story of the struggle of the Dalits and how it interacted with those in authority should be conveyed, which will result in a political response.

Imayam stands out among Tamil authors in that he has put himself through meticulous editing. He allows characters to emerge through conversation while paying close attention to the linguistic variety of the spoken language which is why his texts rarely have authorial interventions. The most complex events are rendered in the readers' imaginations through the thought processes of the character, the words they use and also the context description. Arumugam is expertly translated by D. Krishna Ayyar. He meticulously analysed the original structure of the text and effectively reproduced it and the author's intention as well. He retains the authenticity of Imayam's works undoubtedly.

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Arumugam

The significance of *Arumugam* in engaging the readers' imaginations to the point where they can empathise with the mental suffering that the people in the book are going through cannot be overstated. It is conveyed effectively as the author uses a colloquial and conversational style in a formal tone, documenting the incidents with zero restraint. In the beginning of the book, we are introduced to Arumugam as a little child who lives in a village in Tamil Nadu. He is a happy and upbeat young boy who takes great delight in spending time with his friends and exploring the world around him. His unexpected father's death and his beloved grandfather's suicide both traumatised him, and he is currently going through psychological turmoil, which causes him to suffer from separation anxiety.

Separation anxiety is characterised by excessive stress and worry about being separated from loved ones. This ailment can cause a great deal of emotional distress and make it difficult to carry out routine responsibilities. The transformation of the protagonist from a child into an adult reveal that throughout his life, he had a lot of trouble accepting even the most trivial of inconvenient circumstances. His seemingly perfect upbringing, on the other hand, was suddenly shattered when his mother passed away in the later portion of his life. This experience has a profound effect on Arumugam, and as a result, he is forced to grow up much more quickly. He moves to the city and immediately starts walking about aimlessly.

Impact of Inner Conflict and Traumatic Experiences

In the first scene of the book, Arumugam is talking to his mother, Dhanabhagam, and he is continually bugging her with questions like "Where are we going, Amma? Our village? Amma, do you know of any other villages? Where is the Temple? (7)" And in addition to that, he answers to her with his naughty replies, demonstrating his endearing personality that is suited for his age. This inquisitive temperament of Arumugam's is passed down to his grandpa Muthukizhavar, his lone company in his home country of Tamil Nadu. After Arumugam's father Raman passed away, Dhanabhagam, made the decision to relocate their family far away from their hometown of Pooothurai.

He delights in spending time in his grandfather's presence at all times. The fact that his grandpa took his own life is quite upsetting to him because it was not expected. He never stops thinking about the countless stories that Muthukizhavar has to tell. Before he can comprehend the domino effect that these two deaths in quick succession have on the world, he is forced to remain in the fresh atmosphere of Auroville. He did not have the opportunity to recognise it, and he was confused by the fact that the reason of death and transference was unknown. His mother's relationship with another guy provides the next rude awakening for him before he can fully heal from the previous one.

Arumugam races to every nook and corner of the streets in Pondicherry in an effort to appear from nowhere. The terrified child went completely insane as a result of the shocking incident. His screams went unnoticed, and then all of a sudden, one day, he realises his

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predicament in the midst of the crisis that is occurring in his life, and he comprehends the unpredictability of his destiny. His inquisitive temperament at the very start of the book, reflects the acts he will do and the path he will follow throughout his life "I'll run away if you don't tell me (7)".

When Arumugam visits Chekkumedu, he frequently thinks about the insensitive statement that Dhanabhagyam made there. Although Arumugam takes after his father in terms of his physical size, he is most like his mother Dhanabhagyam, when it comes to his demeanour. Despite this, his mother constantly refers to him as the "son of the murderer" so that she can vent her animosity towards her late husband. Arumugam is left with a resentful impression because of this, and as a result, he continuously questions and doubts his own abilities. This is despite the fact that Dhanabhagyam conveys this sentiment in a more light-hearted and humorous manner by referring to him as tiny Raman. The emotional turbulence and the effect of each occurrence had a significant and profound effect on this sensitive soul.

Concern At Being Left Alone

Arumugam had a muddled perception of who he was because he was frequently portrayed as a poor young man who had neither an education nor a job. Sometimes he is surrounded by people who show him an abundance of love, but he believes that either they will suddenly abandon him without warning, or he will run away from them, in which case they will perish. He is guilty of shifting all of his love to a motherly figure named Chinnaponnu, and he is unable to love Dhanabhagyam. This causes his dreams of acquiring an appropriate education to become distorted. He is unable to experience the maternal affection that he once received from his birth mother. He is concerned that the individuals who are currently travelling with him would abandon him as a consequence of their separation from his mother. As a result of the cultural shift that occurred during his relocation from poonthurai to Auroville and then to Chekkumedu, he frequently experiences anxiety due to the fact that his way of life has been altered. He had the impression that he had lost his sense of who he was as a person. Because he is afraid of being abandoned and of losing his identity, he is unable to form attachments to people whose company he enjoys and whose judgement he values.

Arumugam's move from rural life to that of an urban centre presents him with an undeniable opportunity to actualize his full potential. Despite the fact that he was travelling for a miserable reason, he learned a lot about himself through the ordeals he went through and the people he met along the way. But in order to go through with such an experience, he had to internalise the suffering of those closest to him as well as those further away. He has a hard time making it through life in a society that relentlessly abuses and punishes those who have no voice. He does not understand the concept of independence, and his life is governed by the choices made by his elders, regardless of whether or not those choices are appropriate.

According to Arundhati Roy, "the social status of an individual by itself often becomes a source of power and authority," as can be seen as proven by the hold that the Mahatmas had over the ordinary man (*The Doctor and the Saint* 132). Be it a child from a marginalised community or a man from the same community who has to face a similar kind of irreverent and unkind treatment. But for the child, it is more of a burden to be unnoticed and ignored. However, his knowledge and smartness shine through in certain locations, despite the fact that he cannot modify his environment to better demonstrate his capacity. His demeanour shifts with every obstacle that he encounters.

Realization of Oneself and Progress Toward Goals

In this particular scenario, destiny serves as the adversary and primary challenger to him. Arumugam's way of life and his means of making a living shift drastically with each passing of one of his relatives in the blink of an eye. When he is working at the factory that makes cardboard, he has a conduct that is completely different from the Arumugam that is presented in the first few episodes of the novel. He is sincere, dedicated, and focused when he is working there. As more time passed, he gradually transformed into a boy who was more responsible and mature. He acquired money and gave it to Chinnaponnu, who he regards to be the replacement for his mother, and she performed the responsibilities necessary to satisfy the requirements of a mother.

Arumugam fulfilled every goal he had to live a life of integrity. When he was working in the cardboard factory, he captured the heart of his manager with his dedication within a week. This demonstrates his ability to work effectively from a young age, which is very admirable. Though his co-worker Vasantha requests him to take a break from his job, Arumugam never failed to finish what he started. He never distracted himself from his duties in the factory like the other employees did by staring in awe at the ice, buttermilk, and fig merchants who passed by. "What should I do next?" was a question that he often posed (113).

The manager had taken note of Arumugam's contributions to the company and had stated at one point that he was a model employee. Although he possessed a number of admirable characteristics, all of his efforts to demonstrate his full potential were in vain because he was required to leave that place of employment for the sake of Vasantha, who had followed him to the factory. Even though he was not aware that Vasantha had been harassed there, he was prepared to leave his job for her sake even if she was leaving her job. He has reached the point where he is accustomed to being let down.

The death of his mother and the appalling condition in which her mother was found, both of which were linked to a White guy whom he despises and whom he saw in his house just before he fled were the most significant traumatic events that occurred to him.

He cried, “I won’t come over there”, he screamed, beating the floor violently.... that body died a long ago.... Why must I see a corpse that’s given up its life- that’s died without anybody to mourn it, without anybody to bathe it- no one to follow it to the cremation ground? Nothing’s ever happened in my life the way I wanted it to – nothing that I hated stopping happening. What’s going to stop happening if I am not there? Tell me, tell me... (235).

After he ran away from home, he developed a strong hatred for his mother. He is given shelter by a rickshawala man in Chekkumedu, and it is through his subsequent contacts with the prostitutes that he gains knowledge about the ways of the world. When the men that approached Chinnaponnu in Chekkumedu residence, he was forced to listen to them curse in an unpleasant manner at times. The following statements made by her illustrate the unfortunate circumstances in which a lady living in Chekkumedu finds herself: “Arumugam, go outside and stand guard. Thrash any cur that walks with your chappals and chase them away. Their mothers also have what they want. Tell them to get it there (116)”. As soon as he is confronted with the harsh truth of a woman's life without her husband, he goes looking for his mother in the hopes that they might rebuild their relationship.

Arumugam voiced his sorrow, but he couldn't bring himself to despise her all of a sudden. Every day, without fail, he would bemoan his situation, wish to be reunited with his mother, and feel ashamed for having walked away from home. He never went a single day without bemoaning. One day, when he was watching a parade of the dead, thoughts of his mother began to resurface in his head. The thought struck him with the pain like a lightning bolt; he wailed and prayed frantically to Mailam Murugan,

"Muruga, my mother is everything to me. Please help me. If you can bring her back to me unharmed, alive, and in good health, I will smash ten coconuts in your sacred temple. On the day of the event, I will go so far as to shave my head. He screamed out loud, Please, please guide me to where my mother is..., but might his mother have already passed away? Why, oh why, did I decide to run away from home? More importantly, why did my mother leave that house? And after that, she came looking for me...I can only imagine how much she must have cried and how hard she must have looked for me! (98).

Arumugam comes to understand the horrible realities of life and the ruthlessness of people. Arumugam eventually achieves his goal of overcoming all of the obstacles and is content with his decision to live a more straightforward life. At the end of the novel, he discovers that he has, at long last, become an adult and evolved into a mature and responsible young man.

Conclusion

The themes of victimhood and suffering are ingrained in Dalit writing, and there is no doubt that bringing attention to these themes contributes to the process of social transformation. The sudden death of every member of his family left him with horrific experiences that he carried with him throughout his boyhood and made him feel like he had a wound that would never heal. Those who suffer from poor self-esteem, hopelessness, and anxiety often experienced childhood trauma. Chekkumedu is where Arumugam gains his knowledge of life and realises that sorrow and suffering are an inevitable component of human existence, but that the severity of these experiences varies greatly depending on a person's place in life and their surrounding environment. Arumugam's state of bliss is precarious since, after each defeat, he is confronted with a fresh challenge, and his joy no longer endures for an extended period of time. He fights to keep the smile and happiness on his face, as well as the company of those who have been with him. When he was going through a difficult time, he became estranged from the individuals he regarded to be his guard or his loves. In the long term, he became accustomed to being in the same circumstances, which caused him significant emotional distress.

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