

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**THE SUBJUGATED AND DISORDERED LIVES OF DALITS IN IMAYAM'S  
“BEASTS OF BURDEN” NOVEL**

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**G. Naveen Kumar**

PhD Research Scholar

Department of English

Thiruvalluvar University

Serkkadu, Vellore 632 115

Tamil Nadu, India.

**Dr. K. Ravichandran**

Associate Professor & Guide

Department of English

Thiruvalluvar University

Serkkadu, Vellore- 632 115.

Tamil Nadu, India.

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**Abstract**

Writer Imayam is a prominent Indian novelist in Tamil literature, recently he has received Sahitya Academy for the novel “*Sellatha Panam*” (Invalid Money) and got several awards for his writings. The novel *beast of Burden* represents the dual subjugation of women, from the so-called Puthirai Vannar community who are considered the most deprived sections in the Scheduled Caste. They have been marginalized, thrown out, exploited and oppressed by their men, as well as upper-caste men and women. For centuries, these Dalits community have remained one of the exploited, depressed groups in Indian society. Arokkyam the protagonist of the novel, is abandoned, victimized by the upper-caste and by her own children. However, the novel represents the ultimate sufferings of the Puthirai Vannar community in the houses, fields, birth, death and puberty rituals in the caste dominated society. This paper attempts to bring their poor conditions and how they struggle to receive their basic needs from upper-caste throughout their life. Besides, the novel gives a clear picture of modernization, and how that functions as one of the tools to destruct their livelihood.

**Keywords:** Marginalized, Dalit, Subaltern, Exploitation, Supremacy, and Caste

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The uncertain life of the Dalits can be witnessed through the lines of Madhukant Kalpit's poem Amadavad, 'Crushed under the road roller / Of inhuman behaviour/ The ugly face of my tragic history...' (Prasad 159). Dalit literature gives voice to the voiceless that were suppressed for a long period. There are many prominent Dalit writers like Bama, Azhgiya Periyavan, Meena Kanadasamy and Imayam who have initiated expressing their concerns for their dominated society through their medium of writing. Dalit literature seeks a great change in society and the writers believe that it can be contributed through their literary works. Hopefully, these writers express their wish to live with dignity. Naturally, these Dalit writers write their personal experiences and sufferings of their own in the caste-ridden society. Some non- Dalits writers contribute to the issues of Dalits and support their emancipation as well as the social change.

**Subjugated and Marginalized Lives of Dalits:**

One of the most controversial matter in Indian society and its culture is the rigid caste system that divides people based on their birth and by their religion which keeps restricting mobility in between the castes. Despite, the legal eradication of untouchability in post-independent India, the effects of inequity continue to affect the Dalits even today. The Dalits in India constitutes the lowest layer in the most disadvantageous state. Dalits are indulged in a constant search for their identity in the mass. These subalterns groups have started to converse through literature, although the majority of the dominant group suppresses their voices, language, tone and tradition of these subalterns, like the colonized were victimized by the colonizer.

In our Indian society, men who are born in a lower caste are traditionally leading impure lives and associated with occupations such as washing clothes, latrines, sewages, tanning leather, disposing of dead bodies. Since they have been treated as untouchables by the upper castes. Still, Dalits have been undergoing injustice and cruelty that gives dehumanized experiences through caste-based tendencies. In the novel, the Dalit women are oppressed in many ways. Being a woman in Indian culture, certainly, they are oppressed by the patriarchy. And being a Dalit, a woman is oppressed by the upper-caste men and women.

The novel *Beasts of Burden* serve as the finest examples of the poor Dalit people regarding how they lead their life and get their basic needs. It gives a clear representation of a lifestyle that is led by the poor low-caste Arokkyam family. Arokkyam has been abandoned in many of the places such as asking for proper wages in death ritual, in the field works for demanding one more marakka of paddy but she never stops fighting her right. Despite the upper-caste never listen to the marginalized, rather smashing the voices of voiceless Arokkyam.

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Sauri, her husband just happened to scoop the grain with it. While the landlord Azhagan stops him suddenly and gave him an old threadbare, partly split the muram instead.

‘Scoop it with this da.’

‘I can’t measure it with that, saami.’

‘if you can’t, then just go.’

‘Why are you speaking so sharply, saami? Where can we go if we just leave you?’

Arokkyam stood there, stunned and unnerved.

She never expected that Azhagan would speak to her like this.(BB. 65)

Writer Imayam finds his voice in the language that is not recognized by the literarians but he has registered people’s language, now that has discovered the voice of the voiceless. He uses this language as a tool in bringing the derived changes in Tamil Dalit literature. The usage of grammar has now become part of the Tamil literary language. Through his writing has found a place for the marginalized. With the help of his language, he has grasped more attention of the readers as much as other writer uses.

The condition of the Arokkyam family in their villages is very poor; she must work hard for the whole day in order to get food and clothes for the wash. The social classification in the village is set to have no space for the Dalits development in the society. Even the children of Arokkyam have to accompany them in washing clothes and beg raachoru every night. One of the major problems in the caste system is that a person’s capability is not determined by his quality rather determined by his birth. Hence the children of the next generation have to carry their clan works. The boy Peter represents a challenging character to carry out the clan works of Hindu law Manusmiruti because he tries to come out from the caste-discriminated village so far.

Imayam writings were impelled through various motivations that as a quest for freedom, religious conversion, and self- representation. When the Dalit writers feel the need to express themselves, they talk about their experiences. Thus, their autobiography became a tool for such expression. The representation of the individual becomes a representation of an entire Dalit community. In the novel *Beasts of Burden* Imayam suggests remedies to restructure the condition of the Dalit women. In customed Indian history, women are the first victims in the patriarchal society. Due to their poverty, lack of education and ignorance are denied their rights in every sphere of human activities. Therefore, the novelist conveys that, the Dalits should put their efforts to establish that they are also human as men.

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A writer should not confine himself between producing works and making criticisms but his work fulfils when it has its effect on actual life conditions. Imaiyam does this through his novel, *Beasts of Burden*. it depicts the Paraya caste who forget their rank in the society and think of themselves as overlord and keeping the head- slave distinction within the Dalit sub-castes.

Imaiyam plainly expresses the truths that how the depressed caste is being treated by the same Dalit community. Shockingly how they approve and justify it being suppressed by the upper castes in the society. In *Beasts of Burden*, Arokkyam's hardworking was exploited by the Dalit community who also considered lower rank in society. The novelist discusses through the novel that, how the Paraya, a depressed community are forgotten their rank in society and themselves being the great reason for exploiting the Vannar family, who are considered as lower rank among Dalits. However, Arokkyam's family gets exploited by her community. Her family worked hard for the entire village for both lower and upper castes. The routine of washing the clothes of the villagers and stitching the torn clothes. Even though they are dedicated to every job in which they served Naidu families and colony Paraya community. As a result, they receive small wages for their hardworking and gets night food. When the wages become lesser day by day by the arrival of new tailors and laundry shops in the village, Arokkyam starts to curse them rather than nothing doing nothing. The begging call "Saamiyow, your vannaati has come" (BB.272) will keep sounding in the village till Arokkyam's death. This shows the victimized conditions of her family. Here, Imaiyam conveys the modernization occurring in the village makes the Vannar caste suffer more.

In the novel, Imaiyam uses the image of mules (Koveru Kazhuthai) to depict the ordeals of Arokkyam who carries her entire family's burden in her back like mules carries the bundle of clothes. The phrase or title '*Beasts of Burden*' represents the Vannaar community ordeals and it illustrates the Vannaar community's identity and place in society. Imaiyam's novel *Beasts of Burden*, even though a Dalit work, is measured as a non-Dalit novel for its discussion and the dominance over other lower community instead of supporting the Dalits.

Om Prakash Valmiki explains Dalit Literature as;

It is not only literature on pain but also the literature of change. One finds not merely resentment or what is called aakrosh in Hindi but also an inner, articulated or unarticulated urge for change. And a standard tool to bring about this change is through education. (Valmiki, 2008: 20).

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Every Imaiyam's works stand aside because of his theme; he chooses which is uncommon in Dalit literature. Though all the writers in Dalit Literature write only the sufferings of the Dalit community, Imaiyam writes about the oppression within the Dalit community, in bringing dominance over the other lower communities. He notably exhibits these thoughts in all of his works.

The German philosopher Hegel's quotes "if a man is a slave, his own will is responsible for his slavery, just as it is its will which is responsible if a people is subjugated. Hence the wrong of slavery lies at the door not simply of enslaves or conquerors but of the conquered themselves" (Bulhan 106). Similar to this idea, the characters that Imaiyam was chosen in this novel create great confinements within themselves and society is simply accepts the other caste confinement and don't want to relieve from such captivity.

Therefore, every suppressed community are responsible for their confinement and supporting slavery without reacting against them. It is a mental disability that makes the downtrodden suffer more. Anyway, Dalit literature brings out the reality in every its nakedness in front of all the audience. The novel demonstrates that how humans exploit their fellow men and force them to lead a life worse than the animals. It explains how the supremacy structure works in society and how the power structures are consolidated by the upcoming generation. Moreover, Dalit literature is a call for the conscience of the upper castes who live within the boundaries of their houses.

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