



Available online at [www.jlls.org](http://www.jlls.org)

---

## JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTIC STUDIES

---

ISSN: 1305-578X

*Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 2873-2876; 2021

### Identity Crisis of Dalits in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*

M. Charmaigne Owenita<sup>a</sup>, Dr. V. Francis<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Ph.D Research Scholar, P.G. and Research Department of English St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy – 620002, Tamil Nadu, India.

<sup>b</sup> Assistant Professor, P.G. and Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichy – 620002, Tamil Nadu, India.

#### APA Citation:

Charmaigne Owenita, M., & Francis, V. (2021). Identity Crisis of Dalits in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(4), 2873-2876

Submission Date: 10/10/2021

Acceptance Date: 24/12/2021

---

#### Abstract

Dalit Literature is the literature of the oppressed people, telling about their pains, agonies, disappointments, defeats, humiliations, oppressions and depressions. It also represents their vibrant culture, dreams and values. The present paper attempts to examine how Dalits are represented in society and the identity crisis faced by the Dalit people in the Tamil society as reflected in Imayam's in *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*.

*Keywords: Dalit, Literature, Imayam, Beasts, Tamil Society.*

---

## 1. Introduction

Literature is a camera that captures not just moments but also emotions. It reveals the reality in its true colours, immersing people in nostalgic occurrences and also mocks the repercussive episodes. Dalit literature reverberates the melancholy of the marginalized, echoes the cries of oppressed women, demonstrates the plight of the destitute, marks the identity crisis of the anonymous people and records the revolution of the rebels. Significantly, the inceptions of Dalit works should be pulled in the battle for social and financial change. This clarifies all parts of profound thought in Dalit's books. The Dalit writing is firmly identified with the expectation of freedom for a bunch of individuals since they are not the casualties of social and financial disparities.

Caste ideology operates at a deeper level, and the dynamics of caste and Dalit issues are closely linked with our ideas of identity and self. All Dalit writers in India wish that the people in India should show empathy for the pain of a Dalit. But to experience the pain of a Dalit, what is needed is to unlearn the typical and usual response that we give to the lived experiences of a Dalit. Imayam, a prominent Tamil Dalit writer, suggests in most of his novels how Dalit women are forced to be used as commodities to hold off poverty and help themselves and their dependents survive. Ignorance, sexual harassments, poverty, anger towards rites and rituals, injustice and slavery, are the main themes of Dalit Literature. These themes are also focused on in Imayam's novels. The explanations behind the utilizing realities are evidenced that Dalit writers can uncover human suffering on the planet through their writings. The works crafted by Imayam show this point well.

Imayam's novels *Koveru Kazhudhaigal (Beasts of Burden)* and *Arumugam* foregrounded the dominance of a particular Dalit community, often resulting in a duplication of the hegemonic caste structures of Hindu society among Dalits and how this has percolated even among Dalits who have

converted to Christianity. Imayam's novels received hostile criticism because of their critique of Parayar's dominance over Dalit communities, who stand further below the caste ladder.

The novel *Beasts of Burden* is considered one of the classics of modern Tamil literature, especially in Dalit writing. The first and foremost striking feature of this novel is the portrayal of the delicate caste structure among Dalits. Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* (1994) portrays Dalit communities, their lives, culture, and legislative issues. In this novel, Imayam depicts the predicament of lower-caste people who fall into double subjugation in society. Imayam criticizes the lower caste people who become counterfeit and battle against the individuals who are viewed as subordinates among Dalits. Both the novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam* have one common feature that is sexual harassment of women by the upper caste.

The title *Koveru Kazhudhaigal* means 'mules', which have been utilized by the washermen to wash garments. It ironically refers to the washermen community and their predicament. The mules have the responsibility of carrying and thus beasts of burden. This story is about the Poothurai Vannaar Catholic family, who works among farming labourers in the Dalit province. The story also depicts the economic changes occurring in the progress of the novel and developments taking place in the village, which are seen throughout the perspectives of the protagonist, Arokkyam.

Representation of Dalit women is an integral aspect of Tamil Dalit Literature in terms of space and voice granted to Dalit women characters. Dalit women characters are portrayed as lively, vibrant, earthy, witty and hard-working women who have the inner strength to face crises and work tirelessly at home and outside. Imayam's *Beasts of Burden* carries within itself the grief and pain of the Dalits. Imayam has beautifully captured the ringing poignancy the trials and tribulations of a washerwoman, Arokkyam, who is trapped between the dilemmas of changing times. The vannaathi woman, Arokkyam, washes the clothes and serves the colony where the Dalits live. The novel discloses the Intra-Dalit strife and the sorrows of the lowest of the low-born. Arokkyam's dilemma within changing systems of belief about the self and society captures the reader's interest. The scriptural and patriarchal authority voice speaks through the mother character in the novel *Beasts of Burden*. The mother character Arokkyam laments about their life in society. The mother here is simply the medium of articulation minus subjective agency. She frames her identity and existence within this scriptural and social authority voice.

The story revolves around the life of Arokkyam, depicting her sufferings and pains that are caused when her son Joseph moves away with his wife Sahayam. Her grief intensifies when her daughter, Mary, is seduced by Chadayan, the Kothukkaaran. As her first son Joseph is away from her, she doesn't want her second son to depart from her. Hence, she denies her second son Peter from becoming a priest. But then Peter elopes, bringing her more pain. The grief thickens with the death of Mary's husband, Diraviyaraj. When everyone is fortunate to frame their lives to live independently, the Dalits alone are so unfortunate that they gift their life with great devotion and diligence, unaware that surrendering oneself is slavery. This dependence on other people has paved the way for the Dalits to survive in a home without happiness and in a society without safety and security.

The Dalit people constitute a large segment of the population, and they have been forced to mobilize themselves in order to fight for their rights and justice in postcolonial India. Dalit human rights emerge in a national context, but they write about their own lives, explicitly referring to the atrocities committed against them. Indeed, the narrative tradition of recognizing the outcast human in India offers strong parallels with other such humans. In its representation of suffering humans, Dalit writing generates an abject type for possible appropriation by a global literary field for human rights. They invoke objectification - deliberately echoing objectification to signal social processes of economic and political oppression – modes of atrocity and injustice and the representational process.

The next novel *Arumugam* (1999) is a tale of an emotional bond between a mother and son woven together with strings of love. Thrown from a secure, loving home into the cruel world, Arumugam learns that his perceptions of life are as unreal as wisps of smoke and finally he understands the reality of life. In *Arumugam*, Imayam presents the people living around Pondicherry Auroville and their sufferings. It

is in recognition of the Dalit and the other that is the bearing witness to another Dalit that the protagonists of the Dalit narrative discover their own humanity. The primary witness proposes a programme for the community, nation, or even humanity. This is the ethics of primary witnessing to the survivors duty to remember. Iyamam writes in a formal style reporting the happenings and incidents with a complete lack of inhibition as he uses the colloquial, conversational styles of the protagonists both in their reference to their work and in their exchange of banter between themselves.

In the novel *Arumugam*, the writer brings out different aspects through the conversion character. He explains that life is not the same for all individuals in society, especially for Dalits, the relationship between them and the upper-class people, their way of life with the rules and regulations of Auroville, the ethics, the conventions, the beliefs, and traditions of life in the society. The characters who are confined to a limited way of leading their life are not great thinkers or rebels but people who belong to the lower class. Iyamam criticizes the Indian dominant narrative forms and their language by exposing the duplicity of dominant discourses within the society generating a different history. The Dalit writers reflect the narrative recovery of emotional life through their writings, pointing out the fault lines, conflicts, and repression within dominant historical narratives. Iyamam's narratives, in the same way, reveal that even decades after political independence, social justice is still a dream for the Dalit.

Iyamam offers multiple voices within the ravings of the abused woman in order to foreground the Dalit condition in the novel *Arumugam*. Arumugam's anguished voice narrating his trouble is the personal one. The mythic voice is the reference to their local god, who will, he believes, avenge his humiliation. The historical voice is subsumed into these two when Arumugam expresses the poor Dalit's inability to be recognized as humans with dignity in the society. Their voices and the three contexts thus set out are the personal, the historical-social and mythical.

In the novels *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*, the writer takes different parts of evolving the character. He clarified that the existences are unique, their relationship with the class, their lifestyle and the standards of Auroville, moral gatherings, convictions and public customs, particularly in Dalit. Individuals whose lives are confined are not extraordinary people or blasphemers but rather detestable individuals. Iyamam censures the Indian story structure and language by uncovering the redundancy of acclaimed discourses in social orders that have made various chronicles. Dalit essayists exhibited the change of passionate life through their works and found some unacceptable lines, clashes and persecution in societal issues.

Dalit writing reformulates the caste question and reassesses the significance of colonialism and of missionary activity. It resists the reduction of caste to class or to non-Brahminism and vividly describes and analyses the contemporary workings of caste power. So, Tamil Dalit Literature studies have to chart out its critical course of intervention as a tool to aid Tamil Dalit writers' agenda of working towards Dalit liberation or empowerment through writing.

## 2. Conclusion

Thus Iyamam's novels narrate the tales of the oppressed Dalit people. When the writers' voices and their characters reach the desired and required distance and readership, everyone will hear their voice. The resistance that will follow may bring along with it the desired effect. Removing every stumbling block stands as a barrier to attaining equality and dignity, though a great task has already been started. Every attempt made by writers towards attaining that goal will become a beacon of light showing others the path and a milestone in their journey.

## References

- Azhagarasan, R., and Ravikumar, editors. *The Oxford India Anthology of Tamil Dalit Writing*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- Iyamam. *Beasts of Burden*. Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, East West Books, 2001.
- . *Arumugam*. Translated by Krishna Ayyar, Katha, 2002.

Indumathi, R. "Acquiescence Disability: A Study of Imayam's Beasts of Burden." *The Vedic Path*, Dec., 2012, pp. 131-139.

Prasad, Amar Nath, and M.B. Gaijan, editors. *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*. Sarup & Sons, 2007.