

# Victimisation of Marginalised People: A Study of Imayam's Beasts of Burden

<sup>1</sup>R. Jayakumar, T. Deivasigamani

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu-608002, [hrithik10071983@outlook.com](mailto:hrithik10071983@outlook.com)

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, Chidambaram, Tamil Nadu-608002, [dridenglishau@gmail.com](mailto:dridenglishau@gmail.com)

## Abstract

Marginalisation is a destructive behaviour that has persisted in society for a long time. At some point, marginalised people become victims of upper-class society's persecution. Victimisation is the process of being victimised physically, psychologically, morally, and sexually. This study shows how Imayam's Beasts of Burden reflects the sorrow, grief, and misery of oppressed people. His protagonist and other characters are shown in this work as being involved in class tensions, class distinction, and social eviction. It also emphasises how upper-class society victimises underprivileged individuals and their physical, emotional, and financial hardship or threats. After independence, marginalised groups in India continued to face caste and class discrimination due to upper-caste capitalist attitudes toward Dalits. The difficulties of the poor, regarded as inferior among Dalits, who are oppressed and exploited by the upper castes and within their society, are the subject of Imayam's Beasts of Burden. It also depicts how the oppressed are just compliant, surrendering, and enslaved by dominating classes. This work is one of the best depictions of a persecuted impoverished washerwoman family and how they survive to meet their basic requirements. It portrays a vivid picture of the marginalised caste woman Arokkyam and her family's lives and experiences.

**Keywords:** victimisation, marginalised, downtrodden, oppressed, enslaved, exploited.

## INTRODUCTION

The novelist Imayam was born on 10 March 1964 in Vriddhachalam, Cuddalore district, Tamil Nadu. He is an eminent novelist, short-story writer, essayist, critic and committed teacher. His celebrated novels Koveru Kazhuthaigal, Arumugam and others have won him critical recognition and prestigious Tamil literary awards. Most of his writings have been translated into English and French.

The novel Beasts of Burden was written in Tamil as Koveru Kazhuthaigal in 1994, translated to English by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2001. It starts with the story of the protagonist Arokkyam, who decides to visit the church of

Saint Anthony in Melnariappanur. Arokkyam and her husband Savuri served as Dalit launderers in a village known as the "the colony". Less than two hundred families are residing in the colony. They have a daughter Mary and two sons, Josep and Peter. Younger son Josep is married to Sahayam. As catholic launderers, they serve the Dalits, right from the Hindu traditional rituals related to childbirth, puberty, death, the daily washing of clothes and helping them during the harvest season. For their work, the village people gave the name of them coolie partly to cooked rice, cereals, foodstuffs, clothes, and everything is fixed in a timely. As marginal members of society, they balanced between Hindu rituals and Christian

devotion. They also served as agricultural workers for the Dalit community in the village, but this community bonded workers for the families that owned the Gounder, Udaiyaar, Servai or Pillai. As a family of Dalit launderers, they serve the village, but they are not even permitted to enter the houses of the other Dalits in the village. Although Arokkyam and his family sacrifice their lives for the Dalit people, they are treated as a slave by them. The novelist metaphorically refers to these humans as animals because they are treated no better than the animals by the dominant communities in our society even today.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study traces the victimisation of marginalised people represented in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*, which she imagines through her characters. This research paper focuses on the following objectives:

To investigate how castes and capitalists victimise marginalised persons in contemporary society.

To highlight the focal points, various aspects of the novelist's experience, and the vision from a different angle.

To find a realistic picture of Imayam's characters portrayed by recording the changing south Indian social issues and problems and how the central characters are isolated from their social values through their empathy.

To study how human beings are separated on behalf of caste systems and how the social life of launderers, Dalits and upper classes is reflected in the novel.

To understand contemporary Dalits' real nature and characteristics and how they are victimised by the higher caste and their community people.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

Dalit writing is one of the main branches of Subaltern Studies. In India, it seems more

complex, and domination is based on gender, caste, religion, language, ethnicity, region and political and economic power. "Dalit Literature" is literature created with Dalit consciousness on Dalit life. Significantly, Dalit literature originated from a revolutionary struggle for social and economic change. It is closely associated with the hope of freedom for a group of persons suffering from social, economic and cultural inequalities. The Tamil Dalit writings came after Marathi and Kannada. It challenges many ideologies and practices of Tamil culture that had been dominated for a long period by the upper castes. The uniqueness of their representative creation is the growing self-confidence and self-consciousness with which they courageously challenge the dominant norms of society and literature and, at the same time, never fail to be self-critical. Dalit literature reveals Dalit society's life and experience. Tamil Dalit writer Imayam writes about the oppression within the community instead of supporting their dominance over the other lower communities. He exhibits these thoughts in all his works. This study concentrates on the marginalised persons' lives and experiences in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*. The novel describes the sufferings of the launderer community, who are exploited by the upper caste and their Dalit community. It also highlights fundamental issues such as gender discrimination, class division, sexual harassment, women's suffering, male dominance and religious fanaticism.

### **Review of Literature**

In her article, S. Brindha (2018), "Waxing of Hope in the Lives of the Wretched about Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*," depicts discrimination as a toxin that has contaminated the people's minds, leading to the pollution of the society. This toxin has been widely affected by Dalits, and it has tainted their lives. The Dalits have consistently rejected a decent life and a complete look. This document sheds light on the desperate lives of the destitute, as portrayed by Imayam in *Beasts of Burden*. Discrimination, exploitation, casteism, slavery,

diversification among Dalits and harassment of women is the primary social issue emphasised. Society prefers a shabby gaze because their lives are already in tatters. Dalits make an effort to change their way of life; they are criticised and commented upon by people. Caste discrimination influences on the lives of the poor are like an epidemic that has paralysed the host. Caste denied her affirmation of self and her human dignity. Oppression and unfairness are the curses of caste discrimination in the untouchable's life.

N. Nancy Poornima 2019, in her article, "The Unheard Screams of Dalit Woman in Iyayam's Beasts of Burden," portrays the difficulties of a Dalit woman, oppressed by the upper caste people and by their community. They are subject to caste oppression and gender discrimination within society. Sacrifice, hard work and tolerance are the strengths of these women, but the lack of freedom and repression, in fact, victims in a patriarchal society. Dalit women are considered marginalised in society. Their state is more vulnerable than any other woman. They faced both gender-based inequality and marginalisation. The Dalit community is deemed inferior, and, in particular, the women in this community are treated very severely. They are haunted by poverty at home and grave exploitation at work. They have been sexually exploited by wealthy men and also by upper-caste owners. Their inner pain and mental agony are embedded in them. Moreover, the caste system in India is ruining the lives of people of lower caste socially, economically, physically, and mentally.

Lakshmi, Holmstrom 1996, in her article, "Not Victims but Rebel: Image of Women in the Protest Literature of Tamil Christian Dalits," criticises the three novels that are strikingly different Dlite Writers written in the 1930s and 40s, about the casualties of our society. Coolie and Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand and Tile Scavenger's Son by Thagazhi Sivasankaran Pillai were major novels of their time, sinister studies stemming from the guilt of the middle class. Their protagonists are described as victims of blatant social oppression. Koveri Kazhudaigal, Kalakkal and Karukku, for their

part, concern themselves not only with the victims but also with the rebels. These three works are complementary and contribute to constructing a Dalit perspective and an emerging Dalit Tamil literature. As a self-consciously Dalit novel, Koveri Kazhudaigal gives an extraordinarily detailed picture of a lifestyle that has now passed. This lifestyle is reclaimed and told with pride, without attempting to 'sanskritise' it. Such satisfaction is characteristic of Dalit writing today.

R. Indumathi 2012, in her article, "Acquiescence Disability: A Study of Iyayam's Beasts of Burden," attempts to flash the disability of marginalised people who are getting suppressed and subjugated by the casteist/capitalist society. In the article, she discusses the suffering of low-caste people, considered inferior among the Dalits. They are enslaved and exploited by the higher castes and within their community. It also explains how these exploited people are simply passive, surrendered and enslaved by upper caste people concerning the work of Iyayam's Beasts of Burden with a brief introduction to the Dalit literature. Iyayam adopts the novel's characters to create confinement within themselves and society, and he does not want to free himself from that isolation. Thus, every suppressed person is responsible for their detention and slavery without reacting against them. It is a mental disability that makes the downtrodden victims of slavery.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Iyayam's Beasts of Burden begin with a pilgrimage to the church of Saint Anthony at Melnariappanur. The story is a journey of hope and experience of Arokkyam and her family. She is the novel's protagonist, who lives with her family as a washerwoman in a village. More than two hundred families are living. Each family has a traditional employer who they serve in the highest caste Gaunder communities of Udaiyaar, Servai or Pillai and Dalits. Arokkyam and her husband Savuri only did laundry work in the Dalit streets, having their lesser caste Priest. Their service to the

colony as early as traditional Hindu rituals related to childbirth, puberty, death, daily washing of clothes, and assisting them during harvest season. The colony's inhabitants partly paid for their work in cooked rice and leftovers every night and cereals, foodstuffs and clothing at other fixed times of the year. Although they play an essential role in all Hindu rites, they do not even have the right to enter the houses of other Dalits.

According to the agreement, the Dalit people do not pay wages for questionable services adequately. Arokkyam wants to meet Priest and tell him about her grievances and problems because she wants to get comfort and advice from the Priest. She planned to invite the Priest to the town and talk to the members of the leaders about improving his family situation. The church is some distance from the village and also their services in the village are needed constantly, so they are not often attending the church, only at festivals and on special days. In this situation, they wanted to go to Saint Anthonys' church; Arokkyam requested permission from the village elders. They say no at the beginning, at least they agree. But it hurts at the hands of Ramasaami and Chadayan. They say:

What need is there for you to go to the church at an ordinary time like this?' 'And who's to wash our clothes meanwhile?' 'If anything happens in the village, good or bad, who's to deal with it?' 'Are there four vannaans in the village or what? Thieving rogues!' 'Exactly what I say.' 'If you push off with your entire family on some sudden whim, who will put up with it?' The way you are carrying on just isn't right. There's nothing else for it but for us to bring another vannaan here instead of you.' 'We don't need all this showing off. (26-27)

Ramasaami and Chadayan are the elders of that village, the Karaikkaaran and Kothukkaaran families. When Arokkyam asks, they warn her and threaten her. As a washerwoman, Arokkyam depends on the people in the village, and their support and help are essential to them. In this incident, Imayam describes how the marginalised Arokkyam has fallen victim to the dominant Ramasaami and Chadayan

communities. This launderer family serves and scarifies their lives for the villagers, but they treat them as victims in every situation. Arokkyam can do nothing against the elders and leaders of the village. Finally, to meet Priest, she gets the permission of everyone, and they reach the church of Saint Anthony in Melnariappanur.

Likewise, Imayam describes another incident with Mary. She is the daughter of Arokkyam and Savuri. Arokkyam was a concern for Mary from the time of her birth because she alone caught all the diseases that never otherwise came to Arokkyam's house. Each morning, Arokkyam goes to the thorappaadu, a water hole dug in the river bed where they do their washing. Mary is learning to do housework properly. As she grows older, Arokkyam's duties begin to decrease gradually. One morning, when Mary went to the main street to fetch the clothes from the houses, a quarrel broke out between Mary and Chadayan. He is taunted and teased her severely, so Mary has reported to her mother. With great anxiety, she asks Arokkyam:

Don't you even care about me?' 'What's the matter, now?' 'Why don't you just hand me over to some fellow?' 'Why, di?' 'I don't know why my body is like this.' 'What's the matter with it now?' 'It's all because of this rolling-pin body that I get into fights with all these people. They want to take a nip at me, not even caring that I am low-born. (29-28)

Chadayan is a Kothukkaaran, and he is one of the chiefs of the colony. Whenever he watches low-caste women with his lustful eyes, on this day, he has the opportunity, and he has tormented Mary. After knowing the victim of his daughter, Arokkyam gets angry, and then his anger turns into tears. For her daughter, she cannot get any rights against the dominant community, so she advises her that:

Even older men with white moustaches make suggestive remarks to me in our town. I can't stand any of the men here. They make me so angry. They are always staring at my lower belly.' 'Where are you going to find a town with no men?' 'We have to get away

somewhere, to a place that's a bit better than this, that's all. We have to live out our lives somehow.' 'But wherever we go, we'll still be beneath someone else. They'll always treat us like that because we do the lowest duties to the lowest communities. (30)

The dominant person in the village always treats them that way because Mary's family does the lowest duties among the dominant groups. The author describes how Mary has been victimised by the leader of the dominant community, Chadayan. He has tormented poor Mary with his authority, but she cannot do anything against him. As a mother, Arokkyam advises Mary: "If we lose heart, then that's it; we're finished. So make your heart as hard as a stone. (10)" We have to get the strength of mind and heart to accept this kind of an elusive treatment. Arokkyam is concerned about Mary because she needs a man.

The novelist also describes another incident with Peter. He is the youngest son of Savuri and Arakkyam. Although Peter does a few household chores for his family, he spends most of his time playing with other street boys. One day, he comes into the down after, having played with street boys. In a fight with some street boys, Peter has beaten. Mary has scolded and beat him to mingle with the boys from the village, but he is not obeying her. Peter grows older and bigger, and he refuses to heed anyone.

It rains, and then the boys are cracked wet mud in the street. They wrap it firmly in empty coconut shells and then tip it into a pile of round mud cakes. Then, they divide the entire mount into rice and curry. When they all sit down to eat, each boy mixes his portion and relishes it. Peter starts the fight by kicking away what they put to one side for the crow, the dog and the launderer's boy. It comes at the blast and the bloodshed. Peter gets soundly thrash. He tells this incident with Arokkyam that night. He asks:

Amma, why do we have to call at houses for our evening meal? Why can't we cook at home every day?' 'Why, da?' 'Why don't you cook at home, like everyone else?' Til twist your

arms and legs for you, son of a donkey!' 'All the boys torment me, calling out "raachoru, raachoru".' 'What shame is there in that, let them say what they like.' "They keep on calling me "the vannaan lad" and shoving me away.' 'Even if I come to collect the washing, I won't come to fetch food.' 'Just come here, I'll twist off your leg and thrust it into the fire, idiot! (31-32)

After hearing the incident, Arokkyam feels worried about her son Peter, and she hates the cruel treatment of the village boys. She has nothing to do with them because she wants to survive. All of this is not new for Arokkyam. It has always been this way since coming to the village. People have been teasing and provoking her. At that time, she never went to the thorappaadu nor to the street to fetch food in the evening. Nowadays, even little children call her: "vannaati woman! (32)" Arokkyam smile and ask: "What's the news? (32)" She thinks to herself that they are a humble community. "What's the use of getting angry? (32)" She immediately forgets about the incident.

The launderers struggle a great deal to fill their stomach in the village. In their basic need for food, they lose their identity. Having concentrated more on the belly, they forgot about the idea of improvement, and therefore they do not lead a meaningful life. The act of victimisation not only mingled in the minds of elders, but also young boys in the dominant community. It shows how the power structures work in a society and how the power structure is consolidated and concretised by the coming generation.

In *Beasts of Burden*, the novelist depicts how Ramasaami and his wife Kullammaal victimise Arokkyam and Savuri. Ramasaami is the son of Ramaayi, the aged woman in the town. After visiting the church of Saint Anthony at Melnariappanur, Arokkyam and Savuri lay curled asleep upon outspread pieces of worn sacking. Except for the cold nights, they prefer to sleep on the pathway in front of their house. They are never bothered by mosquito bites, no matter how severe. Arokkyam only sleeps until the birth of Josep and Mary. Savuri always

sleeps on the pathway. Ramasaami begins to shout out louder: “Ei, Savuri...Savuri. Arokkyam, Arokkyam. Savuri! Hanh! (46)” Arokkyam looks up first, startled awake by the sound of that voice. She shakes Savuri awake. “Wake up, da, useless fool (46)” Ramasaami shouts. Savuri awakens deeply troubled and confused.

Ramasaami directed the Panchayat and the colony. His mother Ramaayi is dead, and they arranged her last resting place. He calls Savuri for a ritual for his mother. After calling, Savuri runs to loosen her dhoti from her waist and roll it up. Before him, Ramasaami walks fast, pulling on his cigarette and making it shine. It approaches the age of Savuri when he has to die at all times. Without hesitation, Savuri and Arokkyam do all the rituals following his mother’s death. His mother’s death brings no grief to him, nor his wife, children and inhabitants. Though Ramasaami’s victims thought, Savuri and Arokkyam were treated as enslaved people by him.

Likewise, the novelist describes another event through the hand of Kullammaal. She is the wife of Ramasaami. Arokkyam, Savuri and all the launderers from outside laid their pots in front of the door of Kullammaal. In the ritual of Ramaayi, they wait for receiving their portion. Kullammaal measures grain with his hands and gives it to the person carrying the container. The launderer received the grain either by holding the fold of cloth at their waist. But the hands of Kullammaal became a narrow cone when she poured rice. As usual, a good spoon of rice can measure three-quarters. Regardless of the community, when a death takes place, it is never the inmates of the house who distribute the rice. It is always done only in the ritual by family members or neighbours.

Afterwards, hearing the news of death, Arokkyam hopes that for once, she has to cook a meal of rice alone, without having to mix it with other grains. But in the event, his whole body becomes warm and incense. Savuri loses the dhoti and ties it around his head. Then, he receives four scoops of rice for the four containers. The launderers living outside the city have looked for some time at how

Kullammaal shapes his hands, but they have become silent. Arokkyam alone raise the question: “We people fill our bellies only by depending on you, saami.’ ‘So who can do anything about that? (59)” Savuri comes and drags Arokkyam away from wherever the bier is kept ready. Arokkyam propagates all his resentment against Kullammaal.

Since that morning, her thought was highest in her mind that they would receive the rice that day. She comments: “Rice on its own, unmixed with other grains! How long was it since they had feasted on that! (59)” The novelist illustrates how human beings are victims of their fellow human beings and force them to live a life worse than that of animals. Victimisation makes them live their lives at the mercy of those who do not own them. They have been thrown as garbage after the essence of life is squeezed out of them. They live, breathe, and work to escape from the monstrous clutch of poverty and starvation.

The novelist also depicts another event of the Ramaayi ritual. At the ritual end, all elders are seated around a circle. In the middle of the circle lay a pile of small coins. After having their bath, visitors, drummers, shoemakers, and launderers come to the funeral and sit there. Those who stand hold out their wet clothing, leaving it dry in the wind. Thereafter, one by one, receive their portion by elders in the village. Mottayyan calls at last: “Come on, de, vannaan (69)” Arokkyam and Savuri fall to the ground and bow in front of him. Mottayyan gives Savuri what he deserves. Then Arokkyam holds her sari and receives her portion. After receiving the lowest due, Arokkyam shocks and asks him:

What is this, saami, it won’t even come to two rupees, it seems.’ “That’s quite enough. Off you go, ma,’ laughed Chadayan. These are the funeral rites in a big house, saami. We wouldn’t beg you if you didn’t have enough. We are people who spend our lives under your shelter, saami.’ ‘Have you gone that far? Shut your trap, you donkey admonished Mottayyan. (70)

Savuri drags Arokkyam and scolds her. The dancers, drummers and guests all left at that time. Josep, Mary, Peter and Sahayam all fall to the ground and receive their due from the dominating community. In Raamayi's rituals, Savuri and Arokkyam services are essential to Ramasaami's family. But their dominant authority they are victimised by Savuri and Arokkyam and other low-caste community.

In the same way, at the time of the harvest, Savuri and Arokkyam harvest on the threshing floor of Azhagan. He is the husband of Karuppaayi, and they belong to Dalite community in the village. Azhagan is working as a bonded labour for the Subbu Gaunder family. He is a wealthy man who gained sufficient strength from his childhood. Azhagan's parents have worked as bonded labourers at Gaunder's house. So, he has exploited Azhagan's family for low wages for a lifetime. Karuppaayi works as a servant for Gaunder's daughter in Niramani. Subsequently, He arranged the marriage for Azhagan and Karuppaayi and spent more money on their marriage function. After marrying Azhagan, Karuppaay starts working with Azhagan in the Gaunder's house, where an illegal relationship develops between Gaunder and Karuppaay. At one point, Gaunder became seriously ill. He is afraid to die at any time. Then he presented a field and that threshing floor to Karuppaay. The whole town people and Azhagan also know how the land has come.

On the threshing floor, Azhagan orders Savuri: "Ei, Savuri, scoop up your grain with your winnowing tray, and go now (88)" Arokkyam pushes forward and gives him the winnowing tray that she still holds in her hands. Savuri just scooped the grain with it. Azhagan stops him immediately and gives him an old, threadbare, partly split winnowing tray instead. That winnowing tray is Karuppaayi had been gathering the rubbish from the threshing floor. Hereafter he orders Savuri: "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? (88)" Arokkyam stands there stunned and unnerve. She never expected that

Azhagan could speak to them like this. Savuri behaves as if nothing has happened.

She realises that the sugarcoated words Azhagan and Karuppaayi have spoken to them since in the morning, till now. Arokkyam speaks to Azhagan: "We are people who depend upon you, saami, to work and make a living (88)" Azhagan is angry and shouted to her: "You shut up, you bold female." 'Just ask a few of the other elders, like you, what is right.' 'Ei, donkey of a washerwoman, are you trying to tell me about justice, mongrel bitch?" Arokkyam then picks up the empty rice container and starts returning home. Karuppaayi stand in her way, stopping her: "Ei, vannaati woman, come here, di. We won't lose anything by letting you take a couple of murams' worth. Why do we need all this argument and fuss just at the time when Lakshmi, the goddess, enters the house? (88)" Arokkyam takes the dothi that Savuri has tied into a turban then spread it out just by the heap of grain.

Savuri takes the new winnowing tray that used to winnow the grain earlier. Then he takes two scoops and pours the grain onto the dothi. As he reaches out the third time, Azhagan plucks the winnowing tray from his hands and fling it away. In *Beasts of Burden*, Imayam describes how marginalised people are victims of the dominant community through this unbearable incident. The marginalised Savuri and Arokkyam are still getting quieter. And they do not know what they can do. They cannot understand why the dominant Azhagan speaks to them in such a curt, sharp way. Then, they tie the grain into a bundle and say goodbye.

The novelist, Imayam portrays the victim of marginalised people through the character of Sahayam Mary. She is married to Josep and daughter-in-law to Savuri and Arokkyam. She has one brother, Albert. After the death of his parents, he left the village and worked the daily salary in a laundromat in Chinnasalem. Sahayam has not been at school long enough to learn a bit of English. Thus, Arokkyam arranged marriage to Josep and Sahayam in memory of her dead parents. After the wedding, she never sent Sahayam to fetch the

evening meal. Sometimes she would send it to the thorappaadu. Peculiarly, Arokkyam's heart is happy, having acquired a daughter-in-law with such looks.

For the first few days, Sahayam has seemed cheerful enough. But after that, when Arokkyam always seemed to turn her face away, she did not like her. When Josep walked in the street with Sahayam, people made fun of him. They says "De, Josep, you've caught yourself a fine one." "What does he lack? He's got a bride like a paappaati." "Where did you find her, Josep, with that skin like a glowing fire?" "He's a lucky old fellow. (97)" Arokkyam often thought that she had been charmed by looks alone. She blames herself for not looking for a girl from a family who could claim at least a salary or two in privileges. Maybe she did something wrong. Nor did Arokkyam act unnecessarily argumentative or intentionally defamatory towards any of them. She cannot tell Savuri about this constant tension. She does not wish to shed tears before Sahayam, but she still cries scolding and blaming her for everything. And in the same manner, Sahayam calls growling and blames his brother Albert. Arokkyam insists that she go to collect the washing. Sahayam laments:

Never, impossible. Every man from every house stares at me, wanting to know what's under my sari. Do you think I will go and take the clothes from these fellows' houses?" "What can they do by staring at you?" "If you haven't any shame or self-respect, must you think that another woman doesn't?" "Don't shoot your mouth off so rudely. That's enough. I've told you now." "Did I come running to you?" At last, Mary shouted at both of them, "Are you going to shut your mouths this instant, or aren't you?" (104)

Sahayam and Arokkyam feel silenced. Mary was quiet until then. But there does not seem to be any hope that the argument can have an end. Sahayam is mentally distressed by the villagers. Her mental pain and agony is unbearable as she decides to leave the village.

The novelist also describes one other character, Mary. She is harassed brutally by one of the

village heads Chadayan. One day, Arokkyam was paralysed on one side; she was confined to her bed for three days. She became unable to do anything. And that took place at a time when Arokkyam sent Savuri to Chinnasalem to visit Josep. After these days, Mary must pick up the dirty clothes from the upper caste home and wash the entire lot in thorapaadu. After returning from thorapaadu, she delivers the clean clothes, gathers the evening meal, and does all other household chores. On another day, she calls in front of their house: "Who's at home? The vannaati's daughter has come, bring out your washing." "Ammov, it's me, the vannaati." "Ammov, put out your washing." "Here, little one, come and collect this. (120)" Mary was usually gathering along one side of the street. Chadayan shouts from the opposite side, where he is seated.

Chadayan is a Kothukkaaran, a resident of the village for many years. He can do what he pleases to Mary. Nobody can ask him anything. When the Panchayat met, he always meted out severe penalties and beatings so that people would not dare cross him. He is always on the lookout, with his snake eyes, to attack the wrong people. Thus, all Kothukkaaran and Karaikkaaran remain in their hands. Chadayan can easily find an opportunity to call his family to appear in front of the Panchayat because they did not do the washing properly. Mary's family is the lowest servicing clan in the whole town. She calls: "Ammov, I've come; it's the vannaati's daughter. Who's at home?" (122)" She comes in to watch. Chadayan's wife, Amaravathi, was never found. Mary pleads with Chadayan:

It's the vannaati, saami I'm a woman who will soon be married, saami My whole family will be ruined, saami I could become pregnant, saami I'll kill myself, saami I touch your feet, ayya Think of me as the daughter of your own body, ayya If you want, you can kill me, burn me to ashes O Saint Anthony O God O Saint Anthony O Mother Mary (123)

Mary does not have much physical strength as Chadayan. More than that, she is simply paralysed with fear. She grabs his foot firmly while begging him. She prays desperately to



Saint Anthony. When she thinks the townsfolk will accuse her of having set out deliberately to seduce the Kothukkaaran, her eyes begin to dim in sheer terror. His tongue never moves. She can no longer utter a sound. She believes her whole body smells like grogs. Women in the marginalised community have constantly been victimised by sexual abuse and harassment. They are considered decorative toys to play with, rather than a human with meat and blood. Though marginalised women are the victims of sexual abuse, they are the ones who are cursed and criticised. Men who abuse women are not questioned or blamed because they belong to the higher caste.

The author also describes the other incident in the town. The village has such starvation. The grain that has sprouted stands at the same level. It looks like everything will fade and fly in the wind. They watch the sky constantly. They look for all sorts of omens and all kinds of offerings. Finally, they decide to sacrifice a pig and cook the Pongal, and they believe it started raining. There are now crowds of women on all four sides of the Mariamman temple, laying more firewood on their homes and stirring the Pongal rice. Children are raising noise and playing all kinds of games. The Mariamman temple is roofed with country tiles. In front of the temple, there is a shaded neem tree. At its spreading roots, there are two tridents. Ripe limes have been glued onto them recently and decorated with Kumkumam. Arokkyam and Savuri are going to the temple immediately after returning from the thorapaadu. Peter runs towards the temple, hopping and jumping gradually.

The village people bring the pig and place it in front of the tridents. And they garland and decorate it with kumkumam and sandalwood paste. The temple priest, Kannan, surrounded it with camphor, scattered holy ashes, and then entered with his camphor tray. Arokkyam and Savuri accept the Holy ash, smear it across their foreheads and the base of their throats, and then stand at the butcher. Ramasaami was hurrying the proceedings: "Come on, you rascals. Get on with it. Hurry up and finish it (200)" Viramuthu, baths, wearing a wet dhoti and garland, fells the pig with a single stroke.

When a sacrifice is made to the gods, he is allowed to do so. Kumarasaami, his father, had done it before him. Ramasaami says: "Divide up the carcass between all the clan groups and make sure that each family gets a piece of meat (200)" He instructs them to auction the head and entrails. Arokkyam and Savuri prostrate opposite Ramasaami. After a while, Peter does, too, and he examines the flesh with care when separated. Arokkyam addresses Ramasaami:

Saami, please understand me. But hasn't it always been the custom, whenever a goat or a pig is slaughtered, to give the head and the entrails to the vannaan?' 'This is not Deepavali, Pongal or the Eighteenth day,' Chadayan stared hard and spoke sharply. 'What does it matter when an animal is slaughtered? It isn't the custom in any town to auction the head and entrails.' 'You need to be whipped with my slippers. Bitch of a vannaati, how much disrespect must you carry in your heart that you dare to oppose me in public! Have you gone that far? You monster! You whore!' An unknown voice was heard saying, 'Talking back! How dare she, I ask you. (201)

Here Mottayyan is flying in great anger against Arokkyam. She is shaking and afraid on the inside. Savuri stands silently, his arms folded. Peter picked up her saris and twisted them. The novelist Imayam demonstrates bureaucratic atrocities against launderers in the village.

In this novel, Imayam describes how the marginalised launderers are victimised their entire lives by the dominant people in the village. Many years pass, and Savuri and Arokkyam become old. They never fill their rice vessel in the streets. They get no good from winnowing in the fields or on the threshing floors as they used to. They are offered no charities at weddings or on good days. The villagers do not expect launderers in their lives or after they die. They perform their tasks and ceremonies. Arokkyam used to say in the earlier days: "A vannaan's life is a prince's life (294)" Now, all kinds of practice have been turned on its head. The village hires a regular tailor and a launderer with a box iron, both of whom serve the residents of the town and the colony residents. They are taking away the

custom from the traditional launderers in the town. Men are beginning to wear shirts and pants that require ironing rather than the conventional dhoti wrapped around the waist, which contributes to this.

Both Arokkyam's sons move into a more liberated world: her elder son, Josep is persuaded by his wife to leave home and go into partnership with his brother-in-law to start a laundry business in town. While her younger son Peter is perplexed as to why they do not apply for coolie labour, which pays daily cash earnings. Josep, Sahayam, and Mary had all requested that they finish their business here and relocate to Chinnasalem, but they cannot do so. One day, Arokkyam and Savuri talk anxiously about the seeding that year and the notable lack of cereals and food crops. This way, there will be no labour required for winnowing. Savuri, who often has trouble deciding on his own, suggests that they go to Josep. Savuri says to Arokkyam: We'll go there in a month or two. What have we got here, after all? A couple of carrying vessels, four or five pots, storage jars. That's all. And a few poles from the fallen roof. (317) Savuri has changed, so he no longer waits to hear what Arokkyam say to him. He manages on his own sometimes and stays silent. If he is irritated, he will bark like a dog. In earlier times, Arokkyam take no account of Savuri. He seems like a very aged man. Even his voice is not the same any longer. Arokkyam continues to mourn:

My blood has gone numb. There isn't any healthy blood in my body. My body will not move. No strength in it. What are we going to do at home, after all? Half the people in this town fell into my hands when they were born. Is there a single person in this town whose pollution I have not cleaned? Is there a woman who has not had trouble suckling her child? Is there a woman whose umbilical cord I have not cut and buried? It was I who answered the summons of each person in this town; I worked for them all. (320-321)

For generations, victims of the caste system have inflicted excruciating anguish on marginalised people. They suffered ill-treatment, humiliation and exploitation from

the dominant caste during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods of Indian history. Even after India gained independence from the colonisers, they were still forced to work as bond labour for landowners in the most deplorable conditions. Violence in the lives of the lower caste is victimised unjustly and arrogantly by the upper caste.

## CONCLUSION

The theme of victim and suffering is an unavoidable component of Dalit literature, and no doubt that social changes are induced by highlighting these themes. It reflects Iyamam's *Beasts of Burden* through the character of Arokkyam, who is an underprivileged and self-conscious individual. When others ill-treat her family, Arokkyam never feels and does not care for it. She never gives up her self-respect and dignity. The research article provides an insight into the issues of marginalised people's submission and poverty, and it also illustrates how they are victimised and harassed at the workplace. It develops through the characters of Arokkyam, Savuri, Peter, Sahayam, Mary, and Joseph. In addition, it inspires the oppressed sections of people to get new and fresh energy to live with a sense of honour and dignity. Apart from external agencies, there should be a profound necessity for inner change, which should be imperative for the lowborn. They should realise their failings and try to reform themselves by shedding such demerits for attaining intellectual and spiritual transformation.

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