



# Burdened Lives: Dual Marginalization in Imayam's Narrative

<sup>1</sup>Ebinezer D & <sup>2</sup>Dr. Rajeswari A

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English

Veltech Rangarajan Dr Sagunthala, R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu

<sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, Department of English

Veltech Rangarajan Dr Sagunthala, R&D Institute of Science and Technology, Chennai, Tamil Nadu



Open Access

Manuscript ID:  
BIJ-SPL1-Jan26-ES-105

Subject: English

Received : 09.11.2025  
Accepted : 10.12.2025  
Published : 22.01.2026

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si1.26.jan105

Copy Right:



This work is licensed under  
a Creative Commons Attribution-  
ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

## Abstract

*Imayam is a prominent writer who narrates the contemporary social and economic conflicts in the society. His works concentrate on caste, honour-killing, inter and caste discrimination, violence and dominance on women. Imayam's The Beast of Burden is the portrayal of marginalization of Dalit people by the upper layer of Dalit community people. The aim of this research article is to bring out the double oppression experienced by the Vannar community people into light. The center of the research is to uncover how the Vannar caste is repressed by the people of dominant caste and of their own caste. An analysis on the social and economic struggle faced by the protagonist Arokkyam, a Vannathi woman is the vital focus of this article. The tireless hardship of Arokkyam to raise her three children and safeguard her family is illustrated by the novelist Imayam. He has showcased how Arokkyam struggles to protect her family and keep her family united amidst the caste and identity issues. The Intra-caste suppression faced by Arokkyam, her family and Vannar community people is explored in detail. The research article exemplifies how lower caste women are harassed by the male dominant society.*

**Keywords:** caste, suppression, women oppression, marginalisation, intra-caste repression and socio- economic struggle

Discriminations among humans were found and practised all over the world. People were classified and illtreated based on their birth, economical status, physical and mental health. Discrimination on birth is the most venomous which downtrodden one's life into ruin. Though this practice of discriminating on birth was reduced all over the world, this practice of classifying on the basis of birth is still prevailing in India and it has become ritualistic. One set of people sets the trend that it must be followed as per the guidelines of Vedas, which comprise birth out of Brahma's Body. It is believed that the people were classified into four categories: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (merchants and landowners), and Shudras (laborers), with the

hierarchy based on their jobs and derivation. A study of the world's religions reveals that only the Hindu religion condones the worst type of discrimination based on birth. Perhaps some adherents of other religions commit caste prejudice. However, Hindus derive the caste system directly from their scriptures, which authorize caste discrimination.

The caste system in Indian society restricts movement across castes based on birth and religion, making it a contentious issue in the culture. Despite the formal abolition of untouchability in post-independence India, the consequences of injustice continue to impact Dalits today. Dalits are the most marginalized group in India. They are always searching for their identity among the masses.



Subaltern communities are expressing themselves via literature, while the dominant group suppresses their voices, language, tone, and traditions, similar to how colonial people were persecuted by colonizers.

According to Charmaine Owenita (2021), in the research titled “Identity Crisis of Dalits in Imayam’s *Beasts of Burden* and *Arumugam*”, the striking feature of this novel is the representation of the fragile caste system among Dalits.’

According to Raj Sekhar (2020), in “Intra-caste discrimination among Dalits: An analysis. *Journal of Social Studies*”, although dominant group caste oppression is a thoroughly documented theme in Dalit literature, *The Beast of Burden* delves into an inner layer of oppression—how sections of Dalit groups oppress others. He pointed out that intra-caste discrimination within the Dalits is an under-explored yet significant area in the study of caste dynamics in India. Imayam’s novel demonstrates this by illustrating how the Vannar people are discriminated against not only by the higher castes but also by the other Dalit sub-castes.

According to Sharmila Rege in her research article “Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar’s Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy”, the life of Dalit women is unique in the sense that they endure both gender and caste-based discrimination. This is expressed through the life of Arokkyam, exemplifying how Dalit women have the cruelty of poverty and patriarchy. The circumstance is argued by her in *Against the Madness of Manu*, describing that Dalit women are twice marginalized as they are overpowered by the caste pride rulers and men of their own caste. Arokkyam’s steadfast struggle to keep her family in the face of such problems reflects this larger societal dilemma.

According to Anand Teltumbde (2018) in his article “The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India’s Hidden Apartheid”, Imayam’s novel brings out so clearly how caste subjugation translates into economic slavery. Like Arokkyam, so many Dalit women are caught in a cycle of everlasting labor with least economic protection. He contends that caste and economic frameworks are inseparable connections and thus it is impossible for

lower caste people to break free from systemic poverty. The novel exemplifies this economic burden in Arokkyam’s daily struggles, focusing how labor segregation by caste continues to influence Dalit lives.

This article speaks about a woman of Dalit community, which is considered to be the least and untouchable community among all other classifications according to the Vedas. The term “Dalit” itself is taken from Sanskrit, which means ‘broken down’ or ‘broken into pieces’. It was Jotibarao Phule (1826-90) who coined the phrase to characterize the status of outcastes and untouchables in India. Later, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar popularized the word through his lectures and writings in Marathi. The phrase got new significance in the 1970s, a period of literary and cultural boom that witnessed the emergence of Dalit literature, and the term now alludes to delayed recognition of the Dalit’s militant claims upon a legacy of humiliation and misery. Many writers started to write about the oppressions that were faced by the Dalit community people. Imayam who is one among them, in his debut novel *Beast of Burden* expressed a lifestyle of a dalit woman in a village.

Literature has helped a lot and has led the government to introduce various welfare schemes in order to enhance the lives of the deprived people to claim their rights in society. This literature especially emerged from the 1990s which influenced the government with their schemes to uplift them and make their lives one among the non-social outcasts. Thereafter, it becomes sensible to talk ill or act outwardly against those deprived people. Upon all introduction of welfare schemes and other benefits like reservations, these Dalit people still face trauma in the caste based society. In India, the caste system divided the people into many social classes and predetermined their rights, culture and career based on their birth and heredity. Despite many schemes to strengthen the weaker sections of society, they still live in isolated locations with few facilities, encounter discrimination when coming to public places for participating or availing the government



schemes. Even they struggle to claim their rights to get with proper dignity and manners.

The novel depicts the destitute Dalit people's daily lives and fundamental requirements. It enumerates the lifestyle of the low-caste Arokkyam and her family. Arokkyam has been abandoned in many areas, including requesting for adequate pay in funeral rituals and demanding one extra marakka of rice. However, she remains determined to fight for her rights. Upper-caste individuals often disregard underprivileged groups and silence their views, including those of Arokkyam. Imayam's writings encapsulate the harsh vocabulary of the upper caste. The Dalit communities express their identity as well as their language. His writings reflect traditional Dalit identity and experiences.

Imayam's protagonist Arokkyam depicts a mother, wife, and downtrodden woman. He realized how the protagonist, Arokkyam, was trapped in the dilemma of changing times. She struggles to fulfill her responsibilities and lacks the necessary social and economic independence to lead her family. Despite obstacles, she tries to prevent her family from being separated but her efforts are ruined. She was showing the anguish and sadness she experiences after her son Joseph and his wife Sahayam move away. When Chadayan, the Kothukkaaran, seduces her daughter Mary, her sadness grows. She doesn't want her second son to leave her as her first son, Joseph, is currently away. As a result, she forbids Peter, her second son, from becoming a priest. However, Peter's elopement causes her even more suffering. The loss of Mary's husband, Diraviyaraj, deepens the pain. The Dalits alone are so unlucky that they give their lives with such passion and diligence, oblivious to the fact that giving up oneself is slavery, whereas everyone else is fortunate enough to live independently. The Dalits' dependency on others has made them live in a society without safety and security as well as a household without comforts.

The Arokkyam family lives in extremely poor conditions and depends on the upper caste people in their villages. She has to work all day to buy food and laundry clothes. The village's social hierarchy

will not allow for the Dalits' welfare in the community. Every night, even Arokkyam's children must go with them to wash their garments and beg food for dinner. The fact that a person's ability is based on his birth rather than his qualities is one of the main issues with the caste system. As a result, the next generation's children must continue their clan's labor. Due to his attempts to leave the caste-discriminatory village thus far, Peter poses a challenge to the clan works of Hindu law Manusmiruti.

Imayam's writings were inspired by a number of factors, including his desire for self-representation, freedom, and religious conversion. The Dalit writers discuss their experiences when they feel compelled to do so. According to Indian tradition, women are the first to suffer in a patriarchal society. They are deprived of their rights in all areas of human endeavors because of their caste, gender, poverty and ignorance. Mary, Arokkyam's daughter, experiences sexual exploitation, just like the majority of Dalit women. Mary was utterly terrified to approach Chadayan's house when she went to pick up the clothing from the villagers. She is aware that she will be harassed by Chadayan. Her legs shook, her entire body shook, and she was rendered utterly immobile when Chadayan made her enter the house to retrieve the garments. He was powerless, and she is aware that her criticism of Chadayan is pointless. She is fully aware that the villagers will criticize her and not hold Chadayan responsible. Mary is aware that Chadayan is strong enough to accuse her and expel her family out of the town. This type of abuse is prevalent in society. Dalit women are usually raped by people of the upper caste. It is mostly regarded as honorable and decent for a lady to avoid being touched by a guy other than her husband. However, males from the upper caste frequently wreck the chastity of Dalit women. They encounter male aggression and sexual harassment on a daily basis.

On the other hand, Dalit women are marginalised by their own group as well as by men from higher castes. Being a Dalit man, Azhagan faces a barrier to their own community's development. He suppresses Dalit women and their



means of earning a living rather than helping the Dalit community. The struggles faced by Dalit women, particularly for the washermen community as depicted in *Beast of Burden*, are deeply in-sighted in the oppressive framework of the caste system. This strong caste hierarchy has historically recited an individual's rights and social standing from birth, leaving little power for lower castes, especially the Dalits. These deprived people have tolerated generations of untouchability, undergone rejection from studies, owning a land, and social rights, while being confused with demeaning, caste-specific jobs. For Dalit women like Arokkyam, this oppression is emphasized as they experience not only caste-based discrimination but also gender-based oppression within their own community. The institution of 'untouchability' has strengthened their suppression and pushed them into social and economic isolation. This has resulted in systematic constraints on their mobility, freedom, and opportunities, keeping them in an evil cycle of shortage and struggle.

Imayam's novel records these pathetic realities in the life of Arokkyam, who struggles to defend her family as she finds the strict frameworks of caste and gender oppression. The study connects these larger social injustices with the lived realities of Dalit women, exemplifying how their oppressions are formulated by historical and cultural forces that continue to reject them today.

This article thus witnesses the unspeakable suffering of a Dalit women who endure physical attacks, verbal abuse, and sexual abuse through the characters Arokkyam and Mary. It observes the helpless, pitiful state that leads to anxiety, despair, and fear of the future. While some people struggle to improve their lives, others are unable to do so. Imayam's *Beast of Burden* eloquently captures the plight of the Dalit woman in a society of washermen. Dalit women live in patriarchal society where they are denied freedom in many areas of life and experience extreme social prejudice because they are women and Dalits. No one noticed or listened to their cries or concerns. Like Arokkyam and Mary, many

other Dalit women's lives are in reality which are unwritten.

## References

### Primary Source

1. Imayam. *Beasts of Burden*. Translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, East West Books, 2001.

### Secondary Sources

1. <https://vedkabhed.com/index.php/2014/01/01/caste-and-racial-discrimination/>
2. TS, RB 2010, "Manu Bhagavan and Anne Feldhaus (eds), *Claiming Power from Below: Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008. x + 222 pp. Notes, references, appendix, index. (hardback)," *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 44(3):444-446, <https://doi.org/10.1177/006996671004400318>.
3. Arulselesteen Prema, Dr S.Kalaimani 2016, *Beyond the barriers: A Study of Imayam's Beast of Burden and Arumugam*, <http://www.ijelr.in/3.3.16c/695-702%20ARULSELESTEEN%20PREMA.pdf>.
4. Naveen Kumar, Dr. K. Ravichandran 2021, *The Subjugated and Disordered Lives of Dalit in Imayam's "Beast of Burden" Novel*. [https://www.ijoes.in/papers/v318/22.IJOES-G.Naveenkumar\(158-162\).pdf](https://www.ijoes.in/papers/v318/22.IJOES-G.Naveenkumar(158-162).pdf)
5. Charmaine Owenita, Dr. V. Francis 2021, *Identity Crisis of Dalits in Imayam's Beasts of Burden and Arumugam*. <https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/download/4450/1338>
6. Sekhar, R. (2020). Intra-caste discrimination among Dalits: An analysis. *Journal of Social Studies*, 45(3), 112-130.
7. Rege, S. (2013). *Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*. Navayana Publishing.
8. Teltumbde, A. (2018). *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid*. Zed Books.