

REPRESENTATION OF HONOUR KILLING IN IMAYAM'S *THE BEGETTER*

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Abstract

The present study sets out to explore the concept of honour killing in Imayam's novella *Pethavan* which has been translated into English with the title of *The Begetter* by Gita Subramanian. It studies various factors in association with honour killing including, caste discrimination, violence and exploitation against women in the name of caste chastity. According to Imayam, intermediate communities do not entertain exchanging their offspring with other communities by their women. Consequently, men perform violence against women if they fall for Dalit men. The novella shatters every disbelieves and influences one to comprehend the viciousness enforced on the Dalit community and women as well. Highlighting individuals who are caught in the viciousness of caste chastity and honour killing, Imayam arouses the conscience of the public to realize the damages caused by social differences and exploitations.

On the whole, the study concludes with the idea, it is the misconception of the ancestor's communal ethics forms the primary reason for the crimes committed by the people in disguise of honour.

Keywords: Discrimination, Caste Pride, Societal Prejudice, Honour killing

REPRESENTATION OF HONOUR KILLING IN IMAYAM'S *THE BEGETTER*

India, one of the fastest-growing countries in the world still has traces of its rigid caste system. It has become a vital component of Indian social life. The caste system is used as a weapon by the upper caste and various other hateful bodies to hegemonize and manipulate society. There was unity in creation but human beings merely being one of the creations have introduced divisions. These man-made divisions in societies are practised due to the ignorance of the truth of oneness. Unless human beings develop integrity, the social systems would fail to be efficient in coping with the needs of the nation. The healthy mindset of people decides the prosperity of a country, not the fertile soil, dense woods or perennial rivers. It constructs a healthy society and helps the whole country to march ahead and rise.

According to the Indian caste system, Dalit literature is exclusively about the oppressed community. Especially Dalits have a history of survival under threats and subjugation by the superior class. The origin of Dalit literature has great historical significance. The causes and effects that lead to the age-old existence of oppression and despair in the lives of marginalized classes of the nation's vast population are also observed in many other parts of the world. Most of the marginalized groups all over the world have a similar system of oppression but the titles are different as per the class and division. The miserable state of Indians is victimized under the

caste system and Westerners under the racial system. The main cause of subjugation is inequality, which leads to insecurity, injustice and exploitation. Dalit writers take responsibility for recording the life of fellow Dalits that involves their lamentable experiences including pain, burden, personality, poverty and their status in society and their inert resistance against injustice.

The main function of Dalit writing is to awaken in every reader a consciousness of the oppressed Dalit and to share the Dalit experiences with the public. Imayam is a writer who focuses on social evils done to oppressed societies. He is a secondary school teacher from South Arcot District, Tamil Nadu.

Honour killing in general is performed due to various beliefs including if one violates the principles of a community or a religion or brings embarrassment and dishonour upon the family. It can also be defined as an act of vengeance, usually death, committed by family members against their own family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by her family for a variety of reasons, including refusal of entering into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce- from an abusive husband- or committing adultery. The mere perception that a woman behaves in a way that dishonours her family is sufficient to trigger an attack on her life.

There are several elements which lead to the practice honour killings. They are caste chastity, social and cultural patterns that discriminate against women and gender discrimination. However, the key aspect of honour killings is the danger of decline in the reputation of the family in the community, and the disgrace associated with losing social status.

Several cases of honour killing in Tamil Nadu go unreported as the deaths are passed off as suicides. The novella is found to have narrated a real-life tragedy in Dharmapuri in 2012 as

cited in “Silence of the Side lines: Caste Pride and Honour Killings in *Pethavan*” thus; “The Divya Ilavarasan love story was turned into a sensational and salacious tale by Tamil newspapers and was probably inspired by many... where an upper -caste girl was mercilessly raped or killed by her own family for marrying a Dalit boy” (50).

Imayam’s acclaimed novella, *The Begetter* narrates the downfall of a poor Hindu family after a girl in the family develops an affair with a Dalit boy. It portrays the plights and dilemmas of a father facing the threat of societal refusal, who commits suicide later, allowing his daughter to elope with her Dalit boyfriend. Bakkiyam, the protagonist of the story falls in love with a Dalit boy, Periyasami. When their affair is exposed, the whole village opposes the relationship. The village folks trace the couple whenever they attempt to elope from the village. They are brutally punished and beaten up in public view.

However, in their final attempt at elopement, they are captured by the village folks and order passed to honour kill them. The task has been assigned to the girl’s father, Vandikaran house Pazhani himself. He is warned by the panchayat that if he fails to kill the girl, she would be raped and killed by the villagers. He agrees to kill his daughter, in order to avoid such radical disgust. In the end, succumbing to the appeals of Bhakkiyam’s mother, grandmother and sister, Pazhani goes against the panchayat order and saves his daughter by sacrificing his own life.

Caste pride is prioritized above everything in prejudiced society. It is passed on from one generation to the other through the means of religion, tradition, culture and caste. Therefore, people who attempt to transgress the communal ethics are severely penalized. Imayam in the narrative expresses such rage- filled and tensed situation when Pazhani was taunted and

humiliated by the villagers for not being a man enough to kill his daughter. A party man spoke thus with rage;

“What kind of a father are you? Because people like you born into our caste, no one respects us anymore. Tomorrow, your daughter’s corpse should burn in the cremation ground. Otherwise, your corpse will. Remember this; does your daughter think the men of this village are all women? It is because of one or two whores like her that our caste has lost its honour in society. Couldn’t she find someone from among our own boys?’ the party man gave vent to his anger (8).

These lines explain the kind of ignorance and blind belief people had towards non-human practices. Bhakkiyam in the novella along with her father becomes a prey to the mad villagers, who often describe her as an animal in heat. The villagers exhibit their madness to secure their caste pride. The angry village folk contempt Bhakkiyam thus;

so, she did not like our boys? Her privates should be churned with a large truncheon. Only then will she be rid of her heat. Because they have been made to sit in the shade of the schoolhouse, they go around the village looking for fodder. If we take her to the cashew plantation and beat her up, she will be rid of her heat very easily. (11)

However, Imayam clarifies in the narrative that propagation of caste violence has no gender. In the case of Bhakkiyam, she has not even received any gender support; be it her mother or women from her own community, none prefers to take the woman's side. The cruelty of women against women is further visualized in the event where a young mother supports the idea

of killing Bhakkiyam along with the angry mob. The young mother says, “You should pour pesticide down her throat and lock her in a room. How much ever she screams or shouts, don’t open the door, and don’t give her even a mouthful of water. In a very short while, the story will be over” (2). These words of callousness from a motherly figure mirror the intensity of radical caste system in the traditional society. The angry mob also suggests multiple ways to execute the murder of Bhakkiyam. One such way is suggested by a villager thus;

It won’t even take the time to take a piss. Just take the sari she is wearing and twist it tight around the neck and hold it and finished. Then, if you cremate with four kilos of sugar added to the logs, in just an hour everything will be ashes. Then, gather it all up and throw it into the rank. Only then will the females of this village know some fear. (6-7)

Besides, the words of Samiyammal, Bhakkiyam’s mother reveal that she has lost her love and care for her own daughter. She utters in anger thus; “Bring me a bottle of Polidol. I will turn her into ashes without anyone seeing what happened” (3). Unlike the young mother, Bhakkiyam’s grandmother is represented as a broad-minded woman. She always questions the prejudiced norms of society and begs her son not to kill his daughter. She also brings out the dual standards of the patriarchal society where men marrying lower caste women is allowed and not vice-versa. According to Virginia Woolf, as cited by Alex Tickell “Women and men are inextricably linked, and thus enslaving one destroys the harmony and bliss of life (37).

The novella depicts the pathetic state of women irrespective of their caste rank in society. Women suffer at the hands of men and are treated as a mere sexual object regardless of being

from any caste or having any background of education. Bhakkiyam an upper-caste educated woman faces the threat of humiliation and rape from her own people. About twenty and thirty young men exposed themselves to Bhakkiyam saying “This is what you are running after- how many do you want- take” (21).

The first half of the novella appears to be about supporters of society rather than the family. Pazhani promises his villagers that he will be staging his own daughter’s murder several times. Not even once did he prevent the villagers from humiliating and beating her in public. He took various steps to end his daughter’s life in order to get rid of her by buying Polidol, a rope to hang, and even stopping his conversation with her. Nothing offered him the most expected end. He was very weak in front of the social superstructures that function on cultural and political dimensions. Only at the end of the novella, the readers could understand another perspective of the story, as a responsible and caring father, Pazhani understands his daughter’s determined affection and decided to unite her with her love by sacrificing his own life. Thus, Pazhani and his family stand out and go against their communal ethics.

Arundhati Roy established that love and relationship are governed by societal laws to preserve patriarchal hegemony and subjugate people below rank. Roy in her acclaimed novel *God of Small Things* says “Someone Small who has been bullied by someone Big their entire lives” (181- 182). Similarly, the novella traces the kind of threats and brutality encountered by the Dalit family of Periyasami. Though Periyasami is a sub-inspector, he did not receive his due respect from society. Primarily, society has seen him as a Dalit and as a sub-inspector later. He is not allowed to surpass the caste barriers despite his education and socio-economic status. The

villagers brutally punished him and his family for trespassing the caste barriers. The event is narrated in the novella thus;

we've beaten up that fellow four times at Vridhachalam bus stop. Making it appear to be an accident. Twice we set fire to his house. In the dead of night, we freed the goats and the cows tethered in his house. Once we slaughtered two of his goats and ate them. We set fire to his cane fields. We set up caste panchayats and had him fined five times. His parents have been tied up and beaten black and blue. (4-5)

These lines are evidence displaying the kind of brutality faced by the Dalit community, if they dare to transgress the prejudiced societal norms. Further, true to the argument of Roy the villagers oppose the love affair in order to preserve the patriarchal hegemony and subjugate the low rank.

Despite all the horrific threats, Pazhani figures out a way to break the prejudiced societal norms. All he wants is her daughter to be alive and happy. The final scene in the novella depicts his love towards his daughter which he places above the social superstructures. The heart-touching event is portrayed thus; "In the morning those who went to the fields came running back and said, 'Vandikaran house Pazhani has consumed Polidol and is lying dead in the fields. The dog is running in circles around the dead body. The whole area is reverberating with its howls" (52).

On the whole, Imayam as a social fiction writer had attempted to prompt the conscience of the public to pay attention to the destruction caused by the dreadful social differences and exploitations. In *The Begetter* he brings out the wrong perception of society and enkindles awareness in the society regarding the issues of the caste system and thereby has striven to make people realize the significance of analysing sensitive issues on humanitarian reasons to eliminate violence in the name of caste. Also, he represents the problems encountered by the people who commit inter-caste marriages.

Things can be interpreted in a variety of ways which completely depends on one's discernment, but the perception derived from their ancestral beliefs controls the minds of innocent people. As a result of this default, people get addicted to it and lose their innocence when they commit crimes in the name of honour. Everything they endeavour is done by the wrong supposition that they are preserving their culture tradition and caste. In a psychological study of these rigid people, one could realize that they are innocent in nature but as a result of certain principles and cultural belief which has been overstuffed in their mind that ends up making them fail to distinguish good from evil. However, the crimes committed and the lives ended cannot be undone and brought back to life. Hence the study brings out the ultimate fact that whether it is a brutal killing or honour killing is an act of injustice. It is concluded that the misconception of the ancestors' ethics forms the primary reason for the crimes committed by the people in disguise of honour.

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