

Honour: An Analytical Attempt with the Special Reference to Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*

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Abstract

The concept of "moral and honour" has received more emphasis in this context and in the present day throughout Indian civilizations. The discussions on "moral and honour" have generally focused on the idea of "honour" as seen through the lens of "culture." The cultural perspective, however, falls short of adequately illuminating the elements underlying the hegemonic concept of honour. Discourses about honour have always been ambiguous in the current culture. Reinterpreting "existing cultural" norms is essential to bringing the voices of oppressed, depressed, and exploited communities to light. As a result, this study examines the concept of "honour" from the perspectives of Caste, Class, and Gender at the junction of various elements that support and cultivate the concept.

Keywords: Honour, Imayam, Beasts of Burden, Literature

Introduction

The paper examines the contemporary social crisis that has been deeply rooted in Indian history in the name of 'honour'. Despite the fact, the concept of 'honour' and honour killing becomes the common phenomenon in Indian society. With reference to National Crime Records Bureau, the honour based crimes are being constantly increasing every year and honour based crimes are also admissible and acceptable factor in India. The paper critically analyzes the position of oppressed communities in the society and at the same time, it intends to examine the primary factor that propagates and perpetuates brutal killings in order to defend their caste honour.

One needs to ask certain important questions in order to solve the riddle of this extremely frequent phenomena. What does the word "honour" mean? Is it possible to define honour? What challenges must one overcome to define honour? How does the discourse of honour get started, spread, and continue in society? The

receivers are who? In a nutshell, we offer an outline of the idea of honour as it has been accepted in many communities throughout antiquity across numerous cultures. In addition to this summary, we also want to take a close look at how women were treated in these prehistoric communities. At the same time, we want to examine several myths concerning honour killings that perpetuate the notion that these crimes are only committed in uncivilized nations.

In the majority of modern civilizations, religious cultural systems serve as both a guide and an inspiration for many laws and ways of life. For example, is the idea of honour local or global? Does it imply differently in different cultural contexts? As we mentioned in the introduction, men in a culture are typically in charge of regulating honour. In order to understand how violence against women came to be normatively connected and naturalized in various cultures, we must sequentially delve into the study of patriarchy throughout societies. There is no doubting the

importance of caste and class in Indian society historically and today. Looking at the massive body of writing created in and around caste studies notably after the 1990s might underscore the same point.

In addition, current scholarship emphasizes that caste is dynamic rather than static in character. In essence, the study aims to provide a critical interpretation of honour and honour killing as a manifestation of patriarchal male fear that wants to silence concerns about female autonomy, particularly the right to her own body and sexuality.

Defining Honour

Without a doubt, the concept of honour is difficult to describe. We also come across the word honour frequently in our daily lives. When a person enters a school or college, the institution welcomes them with a "board of honour" at the entrance that lists the students who have excelled at that institution. For instance, whenever someone announces that they will get the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour, they invariably refer to it as a matter of "honour" for their family. The concept of honour has an upbeat connotation from the perspective of this hierarchically constructed society. Above all other factors, honour is attached to a person's personal character or persona as a representative of a certain cultural or caste group. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary definition of the word 'moral' is "concerned with principles of right and wrong behavior" and the word 'honour' means that "something that you are very pleased or proud to do, because people are showing you great respect". In addition, the given concept on this paper has also concentrated on the regional viewpoint so that the readers understand what it signifies in the context of Tamil Nadu. The Administrative Glossary General of Tamil Nadu (2014) has the meaning of the word 'honour' means 'Goodwill and State of Chastity'. It is clear from these two definitions from two distinct but significant dictionaries that the word's meanings are inextricably linked to a person's moral character and the respect that person must uphold in the society.

On the other hand, wherever 'honour' is defined, the concept of 'shame' that goes along with it is also examined. In addition, to being motivated by a desire to earn society's respect, upholding one's honour is also closely related to avoiding humiliation. Most often, breaking cultural norms causes shame to be felt, but it can also be brought on by one's own acts or conduct. For instance, making unpleasant remarks against a group or making aggressive remarks about one's own sense of self-worth. In contrast, the study's focus on shame had an impact on both the offender and the observer.

Literature and Honour

Who creates morality and honour is a categorical inquiry that will always have a classified answer. On the other hand, it is clear from the histories of every civilization that morals and honour were deliberately developed and justified from the viewpoint of the civilizations' ruling reputed classes. The binary opposition matrix of "purity x pollution" graphically expresses the social validity of the concepts of "moral and honour." The pollution-purity matrix is an essential component of Hinduism, but on the other hand, the other two major religions in India, Islam and Christianity, are also inextricably linked to it.

There are several forces that have emerged to question the "dominant" value systems in the society, which are being challenged by ongoing changes in the social order, political leadership, and civic institutions. The established hierarchical structure in Indian culture is unquestionably determined by caste, which is a fundamental determining element. Studies and analyses currently available reveal the truth that caste has undergone a rapid transformation to fit the modern day. For instance, despite the fact that the text's time period is quite different, the philosophy of caste is consistent throughout all of them. These days, it is more important than ever to protect and reproduce a community's honour. Anupama Rao stated the following regarding castes in India in the introduction to her book *The Caste Question*:

Caste subaltern's efforts to overturn prevailing relations of caste and community through the creative transformation of existing social categories and practices thus challenged caste Hinduism and the privileges that reproduced it. (Pg.1)

For instance, men from Tamil Nadu's oppressed and disadvantaged communities are at risk, and at the same time, their wives and daughters are much more helpless than the other victims. Iyamam explained the community's helpless status as being lower than the lower caste community in his novel *Beasts of Burden*. Chadayan sexually assaulted Mary in his home when she was collecting garments from each home in the colony for washing. It is notable because Chadayan is a member of the colony's decision-making committee and is referred to as "kothukkaaran," a man with considerable authority. Iyamam documents the circumstance, *Mary did not have much physical strength, in the first place. More than that, she was simply paralyzed with fear. Her body quaked all over, as if she were caught in some terrible cold. She held on tightly on his foot as she pleaded with him. She was trapped against the last corner of the house. (Pg. 124)*

She then became concerned about the incident's repercussions and was terrified that the colony would suspect her of purposefully seducing Kothukkaaran. The complete helplessness of a woman from a lower caste in the honour household strikes one as vile and disastrous.

The struggles of those from lower caste communities who worked for high caste communities were depicted in Iyamam's *Beasts of Burden*. The village's upper caste community has complete control over Savuri and Arokkyam's lives. Each caste community is free to create the sociopolitical-economic conditions that best suit them. However, caste and class politics are also being used to influence the access to future growth by giving menial jobs to members of lower caste communities. Mary once promised Arokkyam that they would leave this location in order to live a better life. It demonstrates Mary's desire for a

respectable existence outside of this caste communal village.

Conclusion

With the aid of socio-economic-political forces, the concepts of honour and caste form a structured and centralized authoritarian unity. In western civilization, discrimination only occurs at the level of class and gender, but in a nation like India, caste, class, and gender are all intertwined to create three levels of dominance or submission. The reader might easily understand the significance of honour in Tamil society by carefully examining the talks in the chosen book.

The goal of this paper was to analyse the chosen literary works from the perspectives of caste, class, and gender in relation to the concept of honour. Iyamam analyses and criticizes the current sense of honour in Tamil society through his literary works, which provide a challenge to the dominant culture. In Tamil Nadu, the politics of honour and honour killings are primarily connected to long-standing caste systems, class distinctions, and exclusionary practises. Tamil Nadu's political representation of honour killings is insufficient to end the killings on its own. The discourses on honour, however, may be applied to all facets of society in an effort to decipher the harshness, exclusivity, prejudice, and violence that motivate people to defend their violent cultural practices.

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