

**THE PHONEY HONOURS OF UPPER-CASTES IN EXECUTING  
HONOUR-KILLINGS IN IMAYAM'S PETHAVAN: THE  
BEGETTER NOVELLA**

**Author 1:**

**G. Naveenkumar**  
PhD Research Scholar  
Department of English  
Thiruvalluvar University  
Serkkadu, Vellore 632 115  
Tamil Nadu, India.  
Mobile: +91 9790147889  
gnaveenappu@gmail.com

**Author 2:**

**Dr. K. Ravichandran**  
Associate Professor & Guide  
Department of English  
Thiruvalluvar University  
Serkkadu, Vellore- 632 115.  
Tamil Nadu, India.  
Mobile: +91 9865769203  
drkrctvu@gmail.com

**Abstract**

The novella *Pethavan: The Begetter* discusses the caste-honour killing of Bhakiyam, the protagonist of the novella who wishes to marry a Dalit guy Periyasaami. The conspiracy of honour killing idea of the villagers emerged when Bhakiyam tried to elope with Periyasaami for the third time. For the upper caste, the caste pride is the most important characteristics to survive and the chastity of the caste kept in women virginity so that women are symboling their caste-pride. The novella also discusses how the Indian patriarchal society imposes prestige and pride in women in the name of family honour. The political party's interventions in the caste- honour killings had shown the subtle politics and the hidden sophisticated politics. The story seems to resemble Ilavarasan and Divya inter-caste marriage issue happened in Dharmapuri, in 2013. However, writer

Imayam uncannily predicted the incident through this novella before it occurred.

Therefore, this research article attempts to find the barren honours of the upper-caste people with references.

**Keywords:** Honour-killing, Caste, Inter-caste marriage, Barren, Phoney, Begetter, Patriarchism, Political party.

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Writer Imayam (pen name of V. Annamalai) an eminent Indian Dalit writer of Tamil language. At present, he works as a teacher at the government school at Viruthachalam, Tamil Nadu. He has written five novels, novella and five short story collections. His famous novels Beats of Burden (Koveru Kazhuthaigal) and Arumugam bought him critical acclaim and with prestigious awards in Tamil literature. Most of the writings have been translated into English and French. His other novel Sedal deals with women in the Dalit community who are designated as oracles. He won Agni Akshara Award, Junior Fellowship Award, Department of Cultural, Govt. of India, and Award for Contemporary Tamil Literature - The Hindu etc.

India is known for the centre for multi-culture, language and people. Irresistibly the practice of casteism has been divided the people over two thousand years. The caste system is based on Hindu law, Manusmriti teaches some groups as superior and some as inferior. The upper castes were said to do noble professions like priest, lawyer, goldsmith, and an entrepreneur, at the same time lower-caste people treated as slave labour to work on the fields and household jobs of the so-called upper-castes. Over time the political situations had changed after the British invasion and afterwards, in

independent India, the soul of democracy, the Constitution upholds in the Preamble, “Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” (TCD). In order to retain the justice to the people. Its been seventy-three years of independence, seventy-one years of the republic, many laws have been created to eradicate the caste centred culture but the people of India are not ready to accept the changes. Still, the casteism improves its dimensions to retain its existence.

The caste honour is a phoney honour, which is created by the patriarchal community. The attacks are targeted at women on any issues like caste, religion and ethnicity riots. At such times, the overwhelming politics is, women are being plundered and killed because of chastity and women remained as the productive devices of all the ethnic groups, especially in the caste-centric culture. Hence, blood mixing with other castes is prevented by men. Their parents, relatives and caste bullies, assaulted many men and women. When a woman is murdered for loving a lower-caste guy, psychologically it fears other women in the castes for falling in love with other caste men. this is what could be seen as a motive for honour killing. Keerthana R Shenoy in her article Honour Killing in India-A Socio Legal Study says, “Most of the honour killings directly focus on women and very few on men and thus lead to gender violence. (4919)”.

Women were celebrated as goddesses in Indian mythology but it is a myth and contrary to the real-life situations. Women until the twentieth century were refused education, to possess assets, go to the job and denied to be empowered like men. However, women were kept at home only to cook and rear the children at home. Thereby women did not get basic education but the changes over the century in women empowerment brought them to the educational institutions and into various fields.

Nevertheless, the contemplation of caste pride in the upper-caste parent mind never been changed. The inter-caste marriage is seen as taboo in Indian culture, therefore the people who get married by breaking the long followed customs, he or she undergoes honour killing by their own parents, especially women from the upper-caste are the most victimized. A survey made by the news journal, Deccan Chronicle in the year 2016, in between 2013-2016 there are eighty-one honour killings occurred during these three years in Tamil Nadu. Out of these eighty-one, there are eighty per cent of victims are women. In that article The Managing Director of the NGO, 'Evidence Kathir A' says, "Though honour killings are on the rise, not a single case has ended up in conviction in the state as family members are involved in such murders" (HKTYTN). The novella *Pethavan: The Begetter* by Imayam, was a serious attempt to expose the real faces of such brutal murderous into the light.

An emotional intervene of upper-caste people stimulates parents in an honour killing. Because, in Indian culture women in the family meant to prestige, honour and pride of the men from her birth to death. Therefore, the men in upper-castes keep up their purity of the caste in the women chastity and those men are very much concerned about women of their family not get married to the other-caste people, especially to the lower-caste Dalits. The opening scene of the novella indicates the conspiracy of villagers in killing Bhakiyam, for having tried to elope with Dalit guy Periyasaami for the three times. The villagers accuse Pazhani, Bhakiyam's father that, her elopement that degraded the caste pride of the village and anyhow this time she must be killed.

Even though Dalits are well educated and economically grown well as like upper-caste people, as like Ilavarasan and Divya inter-caste marriage issue. In an interview of

the Ganesh Nadar A, titled as ‘The Divya-Ilavarasan tragic love story: a year on’, one of the villagers says, “The lower castes are now well-educated and they are better off financially, which is a good thing. Love happens at a certain age. This one became tragic because of outside interference,” (DITLS). In the novella, Periyasaami is a Police-Sub-Inspector, who has capable of taking care of Bhakiyam, but the villagers are not ready to let Bhakiyam marry a Dalit guy anyway.

The politician Durai in the novella, is very keen on executing the honour killing. It is a subtle political interference of the political party on inter-caste love affairs. There are two things are involved, one is the politician express the strength of their party and another thing is, they show the unity of their caste to the other communities but this results in great loss of possessions and fatal. Pazhani at the end of the novel says, “The Party man is at the forefront of this.(47)” It reveals, the political parties intervene on inter-caste love affair will destruct the family, like Pazhani, Bhakiyam's father in the novel, and Divya's father Nagarajan in Divya-Ilavarasan case who becomes a victim of the politicians' diplomatic politics.

In Indian Hindu culture, nobody would get marry his cousin sister because they are seen as brothers and sisters. In the novella the Thottikuppathar son Mani who married his own cousin sister, leading a peaceful life without any opposition by the villagers. This has never been brought onto the village panchayat at any cost. Because both belong to the same caste and their customs have not affected their conscience anymore. However, the villagers conduct kangaroo court in order to recover the lost caste pride by Bhakiyam by ending up with honour-killing. This shows the upper-caste villagers are very cruel and strongly believes in protecting their caste chastity. Although the Dalits are more

educated, economical and influential than the upper-caste people, it is clear that the upper-caste tends to believe that the Dalits are in the lower ladder in the social hierarchy. Therefore, it reveals the upper-castes are suffering from a mental illness called caste prestige. When Bhakiyam rested and apologized, Pazhani, who understands the cruel face of the caste says, “This is the caste that will swallow a sword out of sheer cussedness: a man may not even have a loincloth but he will not give up his caste pride. (31).”

In the novella, Ravi and Gita, who was honour-killed in Nallur for, fell in love with each other as like Bhakiyam and Periyasaami during their college days at Chidambaram. By knowing the matter, the upper-castes and colony people often clashed with assaults and casualties. Then the villagers sentenced them to death by pouring poison on their both ears. Almost two thousand people were said to have watched the murder but the case was dismissed in the court because no one had come to acknowledge the witness. The caste prestige of the whole villagers is supporting for their own caste. Similarly, when the villagers planning to kill Bhakiyam, the restrictions on all people in the villagers have created that, “No one is to step out of his house even to work in the fields. Anyone responsible for the word of this getting out will not be allowed to stay in this village.(9)”. Thus, all the villagers should be found guilty of being involved in the massacre.

Every upper-caste people show their caste pride only in the public sphere and among his or her relatives and of their natives. Though Pazhani promises to kill Bhakiyam in the village Panchayat, his genuine approach as a father was, he wants to save his daughter's life and the villagers shouldn't blame her. Such an attitude of Pazhani makes him anti-caste and cultivated one among the barbarians. The villagers are the chief

reasons for stimulating Pazhani to commit suicide because at the moment in panchayat Durai says, "You would have been a man if you had killed her as soon as you found out. (7)." Moreover, these words sensationally enter into the Pazhani's mind and stimulate him to commit suicide. Hence, the villager's are considered the real murderers in the novella.

Similarly, in the novella, Thulasi, Pazhani's mother, is seen as a conscientious woman, she has not approached the things through men eyes like other women who are born in the same upper-caste. Although she criticizes Bhakiyam for degrading her son's prestige in front of the villagers and for destroying her family tree, she gets a promise from Pazhani not to kill her. However, he comes by promising the villagers that he was going to kill his daughter earlier tomorrow, whilst she takes him to the cowshed and begs him, "This is a promise. Do not chop off the family's banana tree. One will become a hundred. A hundred will become a thousand. Listen to me. You will live and prosper! (14)." These words clearly address Thulasi as an optimistic, her begging to save a girl life must be seen as a modern thinker one among the conservatives.

Although as a begetter Pazhani allows his daughter to marry another caste boy in the novella, the ill-minded natives, villagers, caste protectors and politicians around him are the real antagonists. They stand as an impediment for the progress of society and of the women empowerment. It is clear that the upper-caste pride phoney honour and fame rather than nothing. The dignity of the upper caste people of India should be seen as an imposition on women. Moreover, the society of women who are in the grip of patriarchy in this novella represents more conservatism. The woman born in any caste, she is treated lower than the Dalits, they are still deprived of their liberties and rights in the hands of

patriarchal society. Dr. Ambedkar Addresses in the Second All-India Depressed Classes Women's Conference which held on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur, he said, "I measure the progress of a community by the degree I measure the progress of a community by the degree of progress which women have of progress which women have achieved. (ACWR)." Therefore, it is only the women who are most affected by these homicides either honour-killing by their own parent. Therefore, society needs education based on women's social conditions and the political empowerment of women should be seen as an important factor in women advancement. Hence, academicians believe that political power is the most important tool to protect women from patriarchy and honour killings. Through that power, women can enact their own laws and build their self-independence. Apart from these, the government must pass a separate law for the Dalits and women in preventing honour killings.



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