

**An Abstract of the Project entitled  
A Hard-Hitting Tale of Caste Injustice:**

**In the film *Jai Bhim***

**By**

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In our Indian society caste has been diffused into almost every panorama and films have a great mass reach. Therefore, taking both together becomes quite imperative. The project aims at reading 'Caste' through caste discrimination, caste oppression, caste system, etc with specific focus on the film '*Jai Bhim*'. The film stands for the function of casteism that dominate in the Indian social status, especially in Tamil Nadu. The narrative of the film focuses on the tribes called *Irulas*. It also throws light on their struggles and fighting in getting justice for the marginalized community. Dalit identity is closely associated with the exclusion they have faced for centuries. Dalit exclusion is a historical phenomenon. It has tactfully adapted to the changing social, political and economic scenario. It is the attitude and mindset of a society that makes the Dalit exclusion possible.

**A HARD-HITTING TALE OF CASTE INJUSTICE:  
IN THE FILM *JAI BHIM***



*Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of BACHELOR OF ARTS in English Language and Literature*

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project titled “A Hard-Hitting Tale of Caste Injustice: In the film *Jai Bhim*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Elizabeth Maria Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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## CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “A Hard-Hitting Tale of Caste Injustice: In the Film *Jai Bhim*” by Thameena. K is a record of bona fide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

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## Introduction

Dalit literature are texts made by writers whose writings engage with caste discrimination and Indian life from a Dalit point of view. Dalit literature and films empower the marginalized by retrieving the voices, spaces and identities silenced or suppressed by caste's powers. It is a revolt against dominant ideology and cultural hegemony. It examines the human condition and provides inspiration for struggle to the marginalized because shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are its cardinal elements. The position of Dalit related films and books can be graphically understood in terms of the paradigms such as colonizer or oppressed, victimizer or victimized, dominant or dominated, subject or subjected. In the present era Dalit writers and filmmakers focus on victimhood, oppression, suffering and demand of their dignity as a human being and their answer is caste. People may go on denying that there is no such thing as caste but now the fact is that caste is deeply embedded within Indian society. As soon as a person is born, caste determines a person's identity.

Dalit literature puts a human at its centre and registers a strong protest against the fixed frames of caste, race, tribe, and gender for showing the values of human liberty. Dalit creativity has blossomed through all recognized forms of literature such as poetry, autobiographies, novels, short stories, critical essays, drama and street plays. Dalit literature, therefore for them, merely becomes a kind of a protest aimed at the upper castes who try to subdue and contain the Dalit.

The film *Jai Bhim* powerfully captures the abuse and humiliation that is heaped upon the underprivileged by those in power and the kind of defiance it will take to get them justice. It highlights topics mainly of marginalization, equality and uprising of Dalits. It's not about custodial violence but it's about how caste discrimination forms the basis of custodial discrimination. "It's not a fight between

low caste and high caste, not even against the police but it's a fight against the entire system". (Basta)

The word Dalit means untouchables and Dalit is a term taken from Marathi word *Dalan*. They are the people who do not belong to one of the four varnas. In the varna system, Dalits lay at the bottom. There are mainly four varnas. *Brahmans* are at the top most layer, they are the highest of the four varnas, and it includes intellectual leaders, Hindu priests and advisers. The second of four varnas are *Kshatriyas*, it includes landowners, military leaders and rulers. The third of four varnas are *Vaishyas*, it includes farmers, merchants and traders. The lowest and fourth of varnas are 'Shudras', it includes servants, artisans and laborers. A fifth category with no varna designation is the *Harijans* or Dalits; it includes outcastes and untouchables. *Harijans* was a word used to describe the ex-untouchables but in 2017, the Supreme court noted that calling people *Harijans* was offensive.

In the past, Dalits were considered so impure that upper caste people believed their presence to be polluting. Forced by the circumstances of poverty, Dalits in India continue to work as garbage collectors, sweepers of roads, cleaners of drains, and manual scavengers etc. To prevent these harassment, discrimination and assault against this community, the Government enacted the Prevention of Atrocities Act on 31 March 1995 which is also known as the SC/ST Act.

Chapter one briefly sketches the dark life of Irula tribes. It shows their daily struggle to live a life and the brutality that they had been facing throughout many years. Also, it highlights on their customs, cultures, about the people and the relation among the castes, economical and occupational system and caste discriminations etc. This chapter also includes the short summary of the film *Jai Bhim*. *Jai Bhim* is a 2021 Indian Tamil film released on Amazon Prime Video, on 2



November, directed by T. J. Gnanavel produced by Jyothika and Surya under 2D Entertainment. It won the Best Feature Film award. Main cast of the film are Surya (Chandru), Lijamol Jose (Sengeni), Manikandan (Rajakannu), Rajisha (Myntra).

This film is inspired by a real story that happened in 1995, in India, which involves a case fought by Justice K. Chandru. It revolves around the lives of Sengeni and Rajakannu, a couple from the *Irular* tribe. Justice Chandru's life who fought for the downtrodden. This is a film about justice or, better injustice and this teaches us the power of the law and how to use it correctly to build a better world. This film seeks a better society, where humans must have human rights. This film illustrates the struggle of ensuring the non-discrimination, equality and justice to the marginalized Irula tribe people.

The second chapter discusses the life of Chandru in the light of Ambedkar. The film's title is based on the slogan used by followers of B. R. Ambedkar. Justice K Chandru makes us realize that sometimes better to be a lion for a day than to last as a sheep all your life. He is the real hero of the film *Jai Bhim*. Surya is the one who acted as Chandru. There are many significant lessons in the film and these lessons are also applied in this chapter because it gives a real image of Chandru.

He always considered law as his weapon. He followed the ways of Ambedkar by helping all the marginalized groups and for these kind acts he received Dr. Ambedkar Award. Chandru always uses the power of words, not violence. Even in most parts of the film we can see that his words make him own victory. The title of the film is also a topic to discuss, *Jai Bhim* means Long live *Bhim* or Victory of *Bhim*. It refers to Ambedkar's first name Bhimrao. Babu Hardas was the one who gave the slogan in 1935. It was a victory for all the *Dalits* because *Jai Bhim* became a symbol

of battle. Also, this paper focuses on Dr. Ambedkar's views on the untouchables and his suffering as being a Dalit himself.

This project tries to analyse the film *Jai Bhim* by focusing on the issues faced by the marginalized people, their struggle and resistance. The film received universal acclaim from critics, who praised the story, performances, direction and social message, and several publications listed the film as one of the best Tamil and Indian films of 2021.

## Chapter 1

### A Call Against Caste Injustice

Irula means people of darkness in Tamil. This could refer to the fact that their all-important events traditionally took place in the darkness of night or maybe because of their dark-coloured skin. People of Irula are called *Irular* or *Irulas*. *Irulas* are a tribal community living in different parts of Tamil Nadu. They are a recognized Scheduled Tribe by the Government of India. The tribe numbers around 189,621 in Tamil Nadu. The *Irulas* are mainly concentrated in northern Tamil Nadu. The *Irulas* speak the Irula language, a Dravidian language that is closely related to Tamil. An Indologist Kamil Zvelebil described and classified the language. He showed that this language is dependent on the Southern Dravidian language that is related to Old Tamil, with some Kannada-like features. Then this language became the basis, which must have been in close contact with the other tribal languages of the Nilgiris area as well as with the large surrounding languages such as Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam.

In Tamil Nadu Irula tribes are the second largest group. They are situated at the base of the Western Ghat. Here male members exercise dominant authority over the family members while women occupy a subordinate position. The life of these tribes revolves around the pastoral and agrarian economy. Their blind faith, absence of education and lack of contact with the other society is the biggest reason for the unchanging belief and practices.

Their houses are built with branches of bamboo trees and roofed with dry coconut leaf and some grasses. They are a devout group with immense faith in God. The sivarathri festival is celebrated in all its grandeur. Sivarathiri is one of the biggest festivals, when this community connects a feast with *pa: lkurumpakavunder-irular* to

have good relationships. The Irula caste has a strong fraternity and unity which are found among them. There are mainly four kinds of *Irulas* : *Vettakedu Irulas*, *Male Nadu Irulas*, *Urali Irulas* and *Kasabas Irulas*.

This community considers death ceremonies very important. In the case of male, visitors spread white cloth over the body while in the case of women they spread colour cloth over the body. They handover last used and special memorable things of the dead husband to the widow by placing them under a hibiscus flower, but before it, the widow and her children used to walk around it. If a married man dies, seven people from seven clans remove the *thali* (marital necklace) from his wife. Also, after then the widow is not allowed to remarry and should not attend any functions. They have a custom of burying up the body instead of burning. During the times of funeral, they have a ritual of dancing and playing musical instruments like *Pora*, *Thavilu* and *Kuzhal*. (Gnanavel 1:52:24 – 1:53:20)

As shown in the beginning of the film, these *Irulas* are traditionally experts in catching rats and snakes and also in collecting honey, which makes them so special. *Irulas* have an intimate and ancient knowledge of snakes and they used a special tracking technique to catch snakes. They also work for land owners as labourers during the sowing and harvesting seasons or in the rice mills. Fishing and cattle farms are also a major occupation. Rats destroy the grains, to catch these rats the *Irulas* use a traditional earthen pot fumigation method. They use smoke and this smoke is blown through their mouths to the holes that are made by rats. They hunt to fulfill their food requirements. (Gnanavel 0:04:20 – 0:05:45).

The film shows a clear image of the Irula people. Even in the film we can see Sengeni helping people who got bitten by snakes. She doesn't even take money because she believes that taking money for helping someone is a sin.. She treats them

in their traditional way of making some medicine with leaves and feeds them. Then binding their bitten leg with a cloth and cuts the below part where they got bitten. Also she gives them instructions to not let him sleep because now he is only out of danger and sleeping can cause no good. (Gnanavel 16:42-16:55)

Some of *Irulas* men went to other states for housekeeping, looking for jobs and most of them were going for building, gold covering works etc. Women are raising animals like cows and goats for their daily needs and they earn little from this too. They use cow dung as fuel. These Irula community people have a great relation with forests. Also, the government uses these *Irulas* for collecting medicinal plants from forests because they are very familiar with the forests.

Coming to the brief summary of the film *Jai Bhim*, we can see a poor but happy couple Rajakannu and Sengeni, who were from a marginalized community known as Irula. Being *Irulas*, they were experts in catching snakes. One day Rajakannu is called to the house of the President to catch a snake that sneaked inside a room. The next day, a fake case for theft is reported in the name of Rajakannu, when the wife of the president reports missing jewellery pieces from her closet. The police visited Rajakannu's home for invasion and arrested them all, during the invasion, the police brutally beat and unlawfully detained the pregnant Sengeni, Rajakannu, his brother Iruttapan, his sister Pachaiammal and his brother-in-law Mosakutty. They brutally attack Rajakannu to confess the crime. Then it came to know by the police that Rajakannu, Iruttapan and Mosakutty had escaped from the police custody.

Mynthra introduces a lawyer Chandru, who fights cases for marginalized communities, and she manages to convince him to seek justice for Sengeni. At court Chandru points out the police report which states that Rajakannu and the other two escaped from the police custody the night they were arrested and says that there was

no FIR registered yet and he has many doubts in this police report. Also, in the witness's cross-examination Chandru finds mistakes in the witnesses' statements, Chandru discovers that they were committing perjury. On this Chandru requests the judge that this case must be handed to the CBI because the cops have repeatedly foul-played the case and this case is nothing but a scandal. After a few weeks Chandru came to know that Rajakannu's dead body was found on a road near the border of Pondicherry, the day after he supposedly escaped from police custody. But Chandru finally proves that it's a clear-cut case of murder in lockup by the police.

After hearing this evidence, the court announces the verdict that the policemen who killed Rajakannu will be arrested. Iruttapan, Mosakutty and Pachaiamma will get two lakh each and Sengeni will get three lakh and half a ground land as compensation. Sengeni thanks Chandru for his help getting justice and also fulfilling Rajakannu's dream to get Sengeni a new house. Chandru attends the inauguration of Sengeni's new house which is named as Rajakannu house. The film ends with the scene of Chandru and Sengeni's daughter sitting and reading the newspaper.

## Chapter 2

### Justice K Chandru in the Light of Dr B.R. Ambedkar

*Jai Bhim* revolves around a case of 1995 led by Chandru, an advocate for getting justice for a tribal woman called Sengeni. He is an advocate and former judge of the Madras High Court. He has also written several books and columns on the law. He followed the way of Ambedkar by helping all the marginalised groups. Chandru uses his power of words, not violence. He gave successful judgement for more than 9600 cases in his 6 years career as a judge. The film has many certain significant incidents which gave us a lesson and makes us inspire the life and character of Chandru. Through the film we can understand that, instead of showing the individual heroism of a lawyer, the movie makes him a subdued personality and is true to the legal proceedings in the High Court. Surya has played a completely restrained role.

In many sections of the film, we can see Chandru's love and care towards society and common people. He is always fighting against the violations of human rights; he doesn't even charge tribals for these cases. As Sengeni a tribal woman she had nothing to pay back to Chandru, when she addresses that to Chandru, he says that, "I wasn't born as a lawyer but a human. Your skill is respected when it's used for someone's well-being. When your community gets justice, I'll sleep peacefully. That will be my fee." (Gnanavel 1:32:58-1:33:27)

In the film, he already knew that this case is going to be complicated and won't be an easy case for them because they were not fighting this case against the police for lack of evidence but it is a battle against some very powerful people and the government. Even though he is not afraid of failure, he always teaches Sengeni to say

the truth in court, no matter how many times they ask, but you should tell them the truth because he believes only the truth can save them to win the case.

In 1995 as DGP issued an order that only the cops with clean records will be promoted. So many police in Tamil Nadu have arrested 7000 innocents in the next few weeks and declared them guilty to close their unsolved records. Chandru fought for this case by declaring that police are hardened criminals who love framing up false charges. Whether 7 or 7000 it makes no difference. "Every accused has the right to fight against this injustice and the court is obliged to grant them justice" (Gnanavel 32:24-32:30). He has tarnished the entire police force based on a single case.

In the court and outside he faced my difficulties. When he used to fight for human rights of common people and tribes, all other opposing lawyers say that he is trying to win the case with tribes and human rights sympathies and luck won't favour all the time. But Chandru only says that he only believes in truth instead of luck. Chandru says that "never be afraid, I have faced threats but ultimately you can't die every day" (Agrawal).

In one of the scenes Chandru was asking police what he thought of this case, then he put over his opinion that it is common in the tribal, because most thieves are from their community. Here this Chandru says that "There are thieves in all communities. Be it your caste or mine. There are thieves in every community. First, stop dividing people based on their castes". (Gnanavel 1:46:39-1:46:50)

In Sengeni case he already collected the evidence but he was waiting for the right moment to use them. Also, several times the opposing lawyer tries to hold down Chandru to close the case by offering money. He says that he is not fighting this case for money but to get justice for Sengeni. If today Sengeni gets justice, someone



else will get it too. If the court doesn't do justice, then he will take to the streets. Only the law is his weapon. "Law is a very powerful weapon, But the most important thing is who you save with this weapon". (Gnanavel 32:32-32:37)

They couldn't stop the injustice done to her husband Rajakannu but Sengeni fights after with hope, so that others like her won't suffer again. There are always many people to support criminals instead of these innocents. No one cares for them. Men like Chandru are their only hope. His simplicity is well shown in the film, like his care for society, love for children, his attachments to common people, etc. He has a deep trust in fellow human beings, because of that he even had no protection around him like other judges. He believes that if innocents can't fight for justice, then it will be worse than injustice.

He writes books in both English and Tamil. He wrote several inspiring books and one of his bestselling books was, *Listen to My Case: When Women Approaches the Courts of Tamil Nadu*. The main element about the book is that the cases include women from marginalized communities. He fought and kept advocating for the political rights and social freedom for Dalits. The term *Jai Bhim* was used for the salutation, by followers of Ambedkar. He is also known as the Father of the Constitution. Ambedkar's childhood had also been hard as being himself a Dalit. Ambedkar and other untouchable children in the school got little attention from teachers.

By 1927, Ambedkar started to launch some movements against untouchability like, providing public drinking water resources, right to enter Hindu temples. For the defence of Dalit's rights, he started many periodicals like *Mook Nayak*, *Bahishkrit Bharat*, and *Equality Janta*. On 16 October 1956, he converted to

*Buddhism* with half a million Dalits and this movement was known as Dalit *Buddhist* Movement. It challenged the caste system and promoted rights of the Dalits.

Chandru and Ambedkar have many similarities. They both served their life as an advocate and fought for marginalized communities. Both of them had the same mind set. In the very last scene of the film *Jai Bhim*, Chandru sitting in front of a mirror giving all freedom to read Sengeni's daughter newspaper gives us a real reflection of Ambedkar on the mirror even if it is not shown. It tells a lot about Ambedkar's view on marginalized people.

One scene in the film shows the photos of Ambedkar, Karl Marx and P.E. Ramasamy on the wall of Chandru's house, that was the only scene in the film where Ambedkar is shown, but the whole film gives us a vision of Ambedkar. Even that one moment speaks of a million things and lessons of Ambedkar throughout the film.

(Gnanavel 1:03:37-1:03:40)

Even in one scene where Chandru went for a school's children's day program, he asks a teacher where Ambedkar is, Because there were important leaders like Gandhiji and Jawaharlal Nehru but Chandru didn't see Ambedkar around it. Several scenes of the film show Chandru's love and respect towards Ambedkar.

(Gnanavel 32:36-32:42)

Chandru became the savior of *Irulas*. Chandru' every trial scene gives us goosebumps. Gnanavel has arranged a great cast in the film and their acting made the film look like a reality. From most real story movies which add masalas but this was a mass one with great scenes and dialogues.

## Conclusion

Dalits are also the citizens of India hence their safety has equal importance. Both the governments and service organizations must improve the economic conditions of Dalits and bring them to a state of secured living. They also should get educational, medical, agricultural and also housing facilities. Dalits want improvement without being discriminated. Their culture and customs should be respected and their local rights should be protected. The government should consider their basic requirements and demands.

As the essential traits of the Dalits are portrayed as vile and detestable and the *Brahminical* traits are praised, a Dalit individual who tries to be a part of the cultured society can't enter its threshold without feeling inferiority complex. Even today the Dalits face several harassment and discrimination from upper castes and policies. The cases are getting increased day by day and numerous such cases are reported every year.

There are several cases all over India. In the film where Rajakannu is caught by the villagers and before handing him over to police they beat him so brutally, this scene reminds me of the all-time memorable case of Madhu, a 27-year-old tribal man, who was beaten up by a group of men on charge of theft. From that beating he got internal injuries and he died on the way to hospital on 22 February 2018. It's so sad that there is no one to ask back and literally no one cares for them. The Irula tribesmen aren't even allowed to live in their own village. Now they live in oblivion. Even our government treats them like orphans. Even the Government doesn't consider any importance to their education. They believe that tribes should live in jungles. Tribals don't have the rights to have their caste

certificates because they don't own any piece of land, have no ration cards and their names are not there in the voters lists too. (Gnanavel 13:48-14:33)

*Irulas* have been continuously abused by Tamil Nadu State Police for decades. Even today they were harassed by these small faults that they were born to a marginalized community. It's even unbelievable that independent India is host to such crimes even today. Police mainly suspect tribesmen and charge unsolved and pending cases on them. Then it goes like father, husband and son, they were all accused by the police. Even if *Irulas* try to greet police, they frame false cases like theft on them and send them to jail for years saying that they dared to greet police fearlessly. By these all things these *Irulas* always use to walk away from the police's sight. But even the police spot them walking away, they catch and charge them in unsolved cases for no reason. Also, the police torcher them by hanging up their thumb fingers and beat them up mercilessly, even if they do not confess it, they touchers their entire family which leads them to give themselves up to the police. The police beat the suspect's children as they couldn't find them. This causes a bad image of the child in the school and due to this embarrassment, the children even stop going to school. (Gnanavel 1:40:48-1:42:33)

The project ensures that *Jai Bhim* is a record that rises up against the cores who are blind towards humanity. As a work of Dalit literature *Jai Bhim* clearly depicts the society's prejudiced mind that Dalits are irrational, uncultured and untouchable. It brings light upon the unheard, veiled and alienated *Irulas* community. Chandru becomes a classic. Ambedkar is not a person but a universal man who represents all who are alienated due to caste, race, culture etc. He makes a loud noise, loud enough to reflect the sufferings of thousands of people. He will never own a single throne if he is not able to define himself as a human being.

Neither our identity nor our features that matters, what matters is our kindness towards others and the character of helping someone in their hard times, which two key points make a human perfect. As we can see in the film, Chandru's hard work and sincerity to his work made him successful. Sometimes it's not about winning but it's about not giving up. If we have a dream, fight for it. It's not about how many times we get rejected or we fall down or we're beaten up, it's about how many times we stand up and are brave and keep on going. The movie ends with a Marathi poem about Ambedkar which says *Jai Bhim* is light; *Jai Bhim* is love; and *Jai Bhim* is also hope.

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