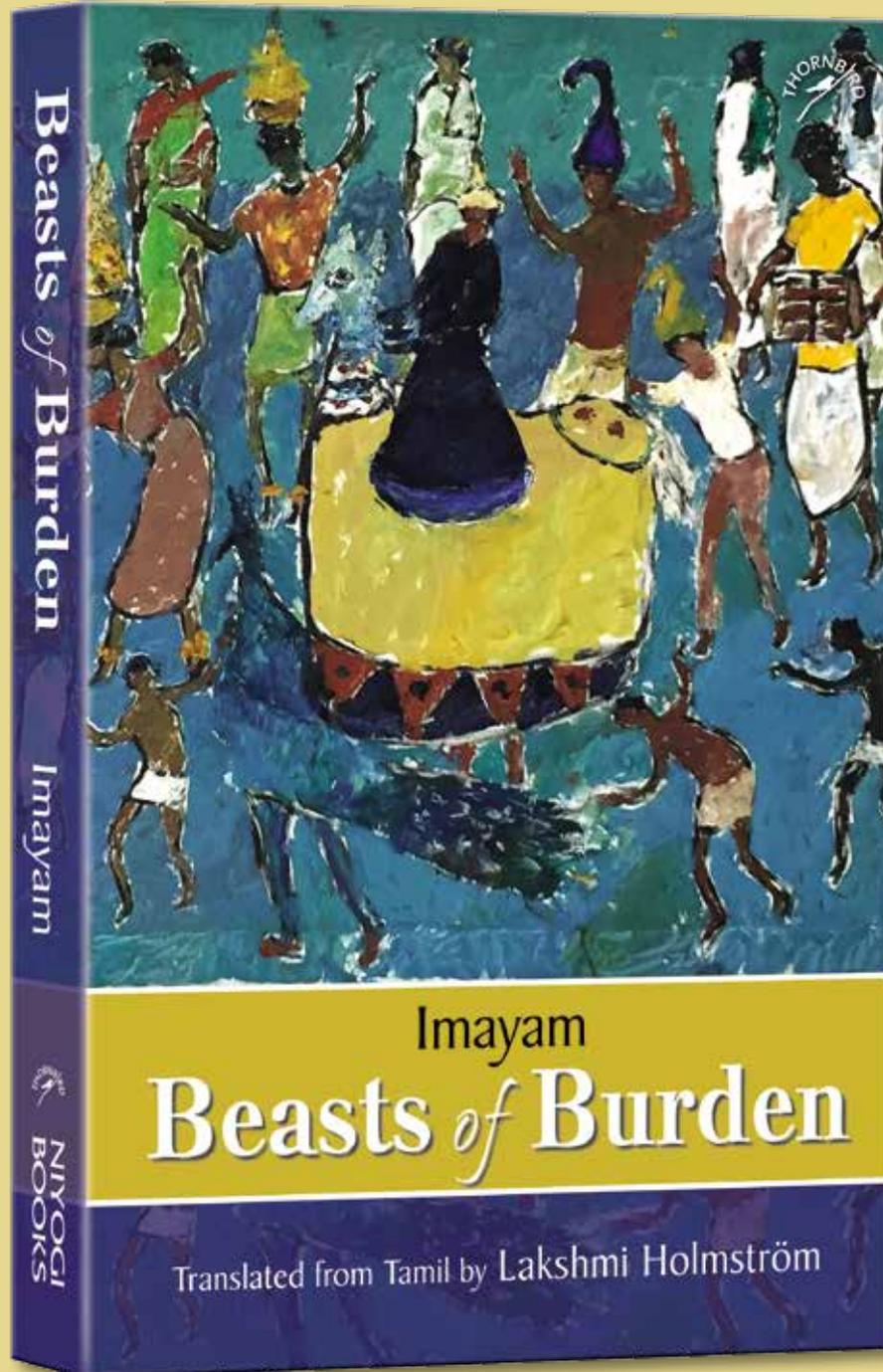


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Imayam

Beasts of Burden

TRANSLATION/FICTION

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Translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmström

The first novel of one of the best writers today, *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* is located in the early 1970s when ritual status and payment in kind were giving way to cash wages. It is a tapestry of despair, courage and a journey both outward and inward and a story of decline and change in a village seen through the eyes of a washerwoman (*vannaatti*) Arokkyam, who serves a dalit community of agricultural labourers. The ‘mules’ of the title refers ironically to the *vannaan* and *vannaatti* themselves who traditionally carried their washing on donkeys. Although they play an important role in all Hindu rites of passage, it is striking that Arokkyam and Savuri are Catholics. Most importantly, they defer to the authority of the priest at the Church of Saint Antony and seek his blessing on family and community occasions. The novel gives us an extraordinarily detailed picture of a lifestyle that has now passed—reclaimed and told with pride.

The worst oppression of the caste system, Imayam suggests, is that people are dependent upon it for their living.



Imayam (pen name of V. Annamalai) is a prominent and well-known Indian novelist writing in Tamil. He wrote five novels, five short story collections and a novella. Imayam had his college education at Periyar E.V.R. College, Tiruchirappalli, where S. Albert, a Professor from Trichy, ‘opened the door to the world’ for him. His first novel *Koveru Kazhuthaigal* (*Beasts of Burden*) created heated debates on issues like the role of a Dalit writer in the context of oppression of the Dalit community. The book won Imayam many awards, including Agni Akshara Award, Tamil Nadu Progressive Writers Forum Award (1994) and Amudhan Adigal Ilakkiya Award for Literature (1998).



Lakshmi Holmström (1935–2016) was an Indian-British writer, literary critic, and translator of Tamil fiction into English. Her most prominent works were her translations of short stories and novels of the contemporary writers in Tamil. She was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 2011.

Located in the early 1970s, the novel depicts the oppression of the caste system.

A tapestry of despair; a story of decline and change in a village, seen through the eyes of a washerwoman.

An extraordinarily detailed picture of a lifestyle now passed—reclaimed and told with pride.