



**LOVE AND STRUGGLE: SURVEYING THE SUBALTERN ROMANCE
INTHAKAZHISIVASANKARAPILLAI'SCHEMMEEN**

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ABSTRACT

In this study describe about the life and works of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. It introduces Malayalam literature especially the growth of novel as a front runner among other genres. It takes Sivasankara Pillai's novel Chemmeen as a critical device to analyze how the author's original intention to portray the economic status of fisher folk have turned into a mere romantic writing. The writers from Indian regional writings also used sea as a metaphor due to the influence of the west. Such as, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's Chemmeen, the novel set in Kerala coastal area, based on the myth that if the fisherman on the fishing, the wife should maintain fidelity or else Kadamma will ruin the shore. Pareekutty and Karuthamma rejoin at the end of the novel and Palani died in the whirlpool while fishing and finally this novel ends as romance. The inter-religious love story of Pareekutty and Karuthamma tightens the struggle and makes more tension. Chemmeen (1956) is the novel set in the sea shore huts on Ambalapuzha and Thirukunnapuzha. Fisherman's day to day life and struggle, eternal fate, love, poverty, customs, taboos, rituals, culture, tradition, the women's situation in the coastal areas and their aspirations, are mellifluously portrayed by Thakazhi.

Key Words: Fisherman, Love, Community, Sea, Boat, Marriage, Culture, Poverty, Myth, Morality,



Think India Journal

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

National Conference on

A Modern Approach to Designing Implementation and Reinforcement of Quality Management

System Organised by

ZES's, Zeal Institute of Management and Computer Application,
Narhe, Pune, Maharashtra, India
on 21st November 2019



INTRODUCTION:

Chemmeen has become a classic because of its balanced narrative of a love story blending with the myth of fisher folk and their struggle in the realistic socio-political scenario. Among the fisher folk community the belief of woman being infidel and losing her chastity while her husband being away in the seas are the taboos which cannot be considered to have any relaxation from their norms and customs. And they believe woman loses her chastity the Kadalamma or Kadalammai (The Sea Goddess) will ruin all the fisher folk community. Karuthamma, a daughter of Hindu fisherman, Chembankunju and Pareekutty, a young Muslim trader fall in love. Chembankunju's only aim is to buy a boat and net. After buying the first boat, with the help of Pareekutty, his greed increases. Since he owes Pareekutty, he was supposed to pay him back by selling the fish in his boat, being that is the deal between them. In fact Pareekutty helped Chembankunju because of Karuthamma. At one stage Chakki, Karuthamma's mother warns her by telling the strict traditions, which was inherited through generations. Chakki often instructs Karuthamma how a fisherwoman should be and how to follow the tradition. When the fisherman rows through waves and currents and disappears in the horizon, his wife should wait for him in the seashore, preserving her fidelity and chastity. Chakki instructs Karuthamma that if the sea mother pleases on us then she gives us gold but if she hates then she would shed devastation upon and ruins them. Chakki imparted a great truth to her daughter that Virtue is the most important thing that is purity of body and mind. A fisherman's wealth is his fisher woman's virtue. Karuthamma sacrifices her love on Pareekutty and marries Palani, an orphan found in the sea by Chembankunju's one of the expedition. Following the marriage, Karuthamma accompanies her husband village. Meanwhile Pareekutty sings a melody song in the evening time which arouses his emotions to the peak and that reflects his love for the lost beloved. Later, one day Karuthamma comes back to her home to look after her sick mother. Chembankunju, being a greedy man disowns his wife and his only motive is to buy one more boat. Also, since Chembankunju did not pay the debt to Pareekutty, he is pushed into



Think India Journal

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

National Conference on

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bankruptcy. After the death of his wife, he marries Pappikunju, the widow. From her he inherits one more boat too. Panchami, Chembankunju's second daughter and on arrival of step mother, she leaves to her sister's house. Karuthamma has endeavored to be a good wife and mother with mind and body. But the scandal spread through Palani about her old love between Karuthamma and Pareekutty. Palani's friends ostracize him and refuse to take fishing with them. By the stroke of fate Karuthamma and Pareekutty meet one night and their old love is consummated. Palani, at sea alone and baiting a shark, is caught in a huge whirlpool and is swallowed by the sea. Their sudden consummation of love proves the extremity of desire, and its power to lead one to shed their staunch beliefs and fears on the taboos which are acculturated in one's psyche.

The preoccupied disposition of sea mother's wrath, no one actually violated the rules of the sea shore by falling in love with someone from other religion. The next morning, Karuthamma and Pareekutty, are also found dead hand in hand in the shore. The climax of the novel interprets the power of one's desire to break free the conceptions of mind and body confinements; that is why Karuthamma loses her even if she was brought up by instilling the rigid customs and norms of the land; her love (desire) succeeds over her inherent belief system and traditions. Thus, Karuthamma became infidel, which leads to the death of Palani in the overseas fighting with the baited shark; also the death of Pareekutty and herself. It's fully realistic but it ends in a romantic manner like the love story of KesavanKunji with Meenakshi in Marthandavarma and ThiruvikramaKumaran with Shavitri in Rama Raja Bahadur. But in these works love was not given much importance and portrays as social injustices whereas Chemmeen gives important to the love between Pareekutty with Karuthamma as well as fisher folk struggle. Thus it becomes a classic and differs in the nature of love with other romantic in realism.

Thakazhi's Chemmeen portrays the nature of Sea life as a representation of socialist and as well as modernist way in writing. The social, real and economic factors which are functioned as barriers in the flow of intense tragic love and Thakazhi as a modern artist present the story with ideologies and doctrines indirectly. The myth gives a wide appeal and an element of



Think India Journal

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

National Conference on

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Narhe, Pune, Maharashtra, India
on 21st November 2019



mystery of supernaturalism. Thakazhi successfully blends the love into the myth. In Chemmeen, the love between the Pareekutty, who is a Muslim trader and Karuthamma, the daughter of Hindu fisherman, Chembankunju. Both of themselves know that they are against social laws. The common among the fisher folk community is if the infidel woman loses her chastity while her husband in the Sea, the Kadamma (The Sea Goddess) will ruin all the fisher folk community. Kakkanadan says in his 'Reading and Rereading of Thakazhi' that the novel is true to life with attractively and gracefully. Maintaining a myth, restriction over the nature and following a tradition indicates space of uniform visibility. Myth is quite common and it will fit to all, like Ernest Hemingway and Jamaica, USA and UK (55).

Thakazhi pictures the individual response in the society that how a man's deep love leads him to be a bankrupt since he believes the girl to be married off to him. Many moneylenders were ready to offer loan for Chembankunju to buy a boat and nets. But he refused to take loan from Ousep and Govindan. But Pareekutty never asked them to repay their debts. Chakki comes to know that Chembankunju cheats Pareekutty by not paying the debts. 'At night Pareekutty came laden with several baskets of dried fish again. And Chembankunju took it from with hesitation and he didn't mention when he would return the money. At the point that she would even dare confront her father. Karuthamma knew this would be a burden that would weigh her down forever' (23). This Chembankunju's deed increases burden on Karuthamma because she is the one responsible for the debts. Pareekutty did not give money by trusting Chembankunju but by trusting Karuthamma. Karuthamma asked her mother,

'Do you think he gave the money because he trusted my father?'... Chakki asked, 'Or, do you think it's because you asked him for it?' Yes. That's why. That's only why – But Karuthamma couldn't say it. Even though she knew that Pareekutty was in love with her (21).

Another aspect in the novel is Chakki often instructs the great truth to her daughter, Karuthamma, about how to behave in the society as children of the Sea. Chakki tells that 'Virtue



is the most important thing, my daughter, will defile our seaside. There are these sluts who come from the south to peel shrimp and help hang out dry fish... What do they know of the seaside's propriety? They are not the children of the sea. But we are the ones who have to bear the brunt of their doings'(9). The life of the fisher man clearly pictures through how fisher folk or master used to mock one another. Palani's self-esteem grew and found a voice. 'Even if I have to no one or nothing, I too am a son of the sea. All of this is my wealth too. What do I lack? I am like all the other fishermen. But I have something else. I know my job. I can sail through any tide. Any avoid the suck of any whirlpool. So there was no need to insult me as he did!' (135). Palani is an orphan found in the sea, while one of Chembankunju's expeditions. Chembankunju to save money and to pay debts the family convinces Karuthamma to marry Palani. 'The wedding will take place and that will be the end of it' and continues Karuthamma that 'Unless you pay that money back, I won't agree. Or, I will kill myself... that's for sure' (92).

However marriage was fixed with no dowry because she does not have a mother-in-law and Father-in-law. Palani was actually Chembankunju's master plan for repaying his debts. Once Palani become a Chembankunju's Son-in-law then the earning will be saved and he can easily repay the debts. The fishermen were not allowed him to fish along with their boat by suspecting the Karuthamma's virtue. The fear among the fisherman is that, Palani's presence may ruin them also. Thakazhi realistic vision on Karuthamma that how and stir up the memory and talks of morality and it shows how women are spent their public gathering. Kalikunju had something else to say, 'Our men live in a sea where the waves rise and fall, daughter!' and Kunjipennu warned her, 'Daughter, women have hearts that are easily turned. So you have to be careful!' (103).

If the fisherwoman does not go to sell the fish then it will be great loss to the family. The novel also describes how covet lead to madness and isolation at the end of the life. Chembankunju being covet at the beginning first bought a boat and net. Later his, covet increases so he put all his earnings to buy another boat and the net. Karuthamma would be happily married Palani, if Chembankunju pay the debt of Pareekutty and might lead the life as a good fisherwoman by



Think India Journal

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

National Conference on

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ZES's, Zeal Institute of Management and Computer Application,
Narhe, Pune, Maharashtra, India
on 21st November 2019



body and mind. So if she led a life with virtue (by not thinking about Pareekutty) and then the Kadalamma will not be destroying them with her anger. The folk people consider respect and statues are the important in life. But Chembankunju's interest is only in buying a boat and net not definitely on marrying off his daughter. They live in certain restriction and following tradition, so the girl with tits and a bum should marry otherwise she will breakout the rules and pollute the sea shore. When the folk suspect about the Karuthamma marriage with Palani and they believe that she might be slut. The folk suspect, why the owner of two boats marrying off his daughter to a man who has no possessions.

Thakazhi highlight the orphan through the novel. Palani has no one but has a skill in fishing and the same situation was maintained to the Karuthamma, Panchami and the child at the end of the novel. Panchami, Karuthamma's sister could not stay by undergoing her step-mother humiliation, immediately after the death of her mother. Panchami said that they have no one Karuthamma said, 'The two of us don't have anyone'. And Panchami said, 'You have someone to cling to. I have no one!' (228). Thakazhi indicates that no individual is having a control on his/her emotions or desire. 'On the shore, Panchami wept, holding the baby who was screaming for its parents. Her brother-in-law who had gone out to sea the night before hadn't returned. And Karuthamma who had gone to sleep with her was not there either. She wept and tried to console the baby at the same time' (238). Through this, Thakazhi describes how the struggle of fisherman in the sea and the death is eternal. Thakazhi carefully handles the blending of the modernist situations in Chemmeen with Aesthetic elements and Marxist Ideology throughout the novel. For instance, in 'That father of mine talks of buying a boat and nets' (3), Thakazhi links Chembankunju, Chakki, Panchami, Karuthamma, Palani and Pareekutty with the money. Pareekutty was in love with Karuthamma and offers loan to her father, Chembankunju to buy boat and nets. Karuthamma refuses to marry in the beginning and Chakki convinces her for the marriage. Chakki demanded to Karuthamma who is that Muslim boy to you and her words not uttered but later realized that he was her everything.



Chakki made Pareekutty Karuthamma's brother. By thinking sister he goes to inform to Karuthamma about Chakki death. The sea breeze seemed to hum a strange tale. The waves too had something to say... where are you going? To Trikunnappuzha? Why? To inform Karuthamma of Chakki's death? But what right did he have to do that? And if someone were to question him about it, what answer did he have? If he met her, would she be his sister? (159). But informed to Kochunathan's that he is in Trikunnappuzha because to meet his sister. Kochunathan's wouldn't cease how could a Muslim man be the brother of a fisher girl? Pareekutty fumbled for the answer. However, he informed to Karuthamma and left. She managed to tell Palani about her mother's death by telling through dreams she had. The question is that aren't they any fisher folk there to inform about Chakki's death and why Pareekutty, Muslim boy has come in the midnight. Karuthamma want to go to look after her mother, while she is ill. But Karuthamma fears for his father that he won't recognize her as his daughter anymore. Grinding his teeth, Chembankunju roared, 'She isn't my daughter!' (121) Palani tells to Karuthamma 'Fine. If he thinks he doesn't have a daughter, you must think you don't have her father' (134). But at the ends of the novel Karuthamma has a request with Palani that she want to go to Neerkunnath once. Just because Panchami describes Pareekutty with pity – A Pareekutty who had lost everything in life and now wandered through the shore like a mad man singing his song. 'I will always sing this song; I will sing this song so it is heard at Trikunnappuzha' – the words pounded within her ears. 'When you have boat and nets, will you sell us your fish?' (228). Thakazhi uses the technique of myth to amalgamate the fisher folk community's beliefs, customs and superstitious and traditions. The fisher folks follow beliefs and superstitious (dark) and Karuthamma violates the restriction leads (light) her fear about the future notion. Karuthamma hides her love in front of Palani and the society. She has been a good wife and women not polluting the sea by maintaining the virtue by body and mind. The morality and myth takes a shape through forbidden. If someone breakout the tradition and want to conceal it then the fear itself will destroy us. If someone wants to hide something, then it shall indicate through their



behavior. In Chemmeen, Karuthamma is being an icon for the studying body and conversational sign through her inner and outer struggle. The comparison between the shark and love in Chemmeen is that two opposed ends of non-human iconography the divine and the animal, appear the realm of effective human action.

Chakki promised to pay the debt off one way or the other before the wedding. Karuthamma said, "He is ruined. I can't leave here seeing him ruined as he is. And if I go, he will die" (96). Karuthamma wanted to tell something that 'My Bossman, you must marry a good girl, have many children, become a big trader and live happily' and continues 'I will think of you every day, my Bossman' (107). Pareekutty regret much about her leaving and said 'Even if you don't think of me, I will sit on this shore and sing. Even when I am an old man with no teeth, I will continue to sing' (107). Psychologically, Karuthamma is isolated that she is no one whether Mother-in-law or Father-in-law. While Palani at sea Karuthamma's only in the shack it might that made her to stir up the memories of love. Karuthamma maintains a good fisher folk woman, good mother and good wife. Thakazhi's focuses on myth Karuthamma's transition from a lover, to good fisher woman, then to a wife and later again into a lover to someone other than her husband. Karuthamma forgets all the disappointment from her life at the movement she looks Pareekutty. 'Once again they are one. In rapture, she whispered sweet things into his ear. She wasn't able to break or move away from the embrace.

Meanwhile in the far seas, a shark bit the bait. Until then such a huge shark had never bitten anyone's bait! No fisherman had ever got such a big fish before. Finally he struck in the whirlpool and died. Two days later Karuthamma and Pareekutty found dead in the sea shore. Thakazhi use an image to tell the death of the lovers through shark and by revealing the idea indirectly Thakazhi as a modernist in his writing. Thakazhi skilled in portray and bring out the truth by the individual representation to the class and community. By using modernist code in the particular discourse in Karuthamma's dress a sense of taste a melmundu is widely seen in Malabar sea shore. In Indulekha also which turns away from ornamentation and jewellery to



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ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

National Conference on

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notions of a simple elegance in clothing.

Indulekhawas not very fond of jewellery. Her mother, grandmother, oruncle had to plead with her made her wear special ornaments on festive days.... However, Indulekha took particular interest in her clothes, Onnaraandmelmunduwith special weave and gold border had to bekept ready, white and clean, every morning and evening when she bathed. She was always seen with a white melmundu with gold border covering her breasts (165).

A socialist society will raise question in realistic aspects. For instancePareekutty asked, 'When you have a boat and nets, will you sell us the fish?' 'If you give us a good price, we will' (56). The waves too had something to say... where are you going? ToTrikunnapuzha? Why? To inform Karuthamma of Chakki's death? But what right did he have to do that? And if someone were to question him about it, what answer did he have? If he met her, would she be his sister? (159). Thakazhi from the above quoted sentence proves that he followed the realism by how can Muslim boy can be a brother to Hindu fisherwoman?The modernist raise questions in aesthetic way. For instance could any mother suspect or criticize her own daughter with virtue? Thakazhi raise the question,

Chakki continued to speak, 'I thought Karuthamma wouldn't say goodbye to me.'But I don't have any complaints. If Karuthamma went away without telling me, I would be sad. But I won't ever complain. How can I ever criticize my Karuthamma?' (108).

ThakazhiSivasankaraPillai is a creative artist (modernist) perhaps Chemmeen did not bring class struggle as much in ThotiyudeMakan and Randidangazhi. It shows Thakazhi as a progressive writer. There are few reasons how Thakazhi is new in his writing and followed Modernism. Firstly, Translation has emerged the World literature. Secondly, Thakazhi's in the Progressive Writers Movement. Thirdly Thakazhi's influences on Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Balzac, Flaubert, Guy deMaupassant, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Finally, Peasant's revolt in Kuttanad and serious classes from BalakrishnaPillai are helped him to catch the idea of realism and he began to write the Chemmeen in a lodge in Kottayam. The Western and Modern elements were impacted



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ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

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on Malayalam literature under the guidance of Kesari through some of the modern novelists like Thakazhi, KesavaDev, Basheer and S.K.Pottekkatt.

The influence of Modernism in Thakazhi's *Chemmeen* first sentence itself proves 'That father of mine talks of buying a boat and nets'. Karuthamma thinks she is responsible for Pareekutty's bankrupt because he loves her and even he offered the loan because of her not with trusting her father. The myth gave the wide appeal an element of mystery of supernaturalism and Thakazhi successfully blend the love into the myth.

The *Chemmeen* novel has become a classic by given an equal importance in his writing through the portrayal of realistic character of fisher folk's struggle and inter-religious love between Pareekutty and Karuthamma (Realism). Thakazhi used denotative meaning in his novel through this he tries to be a modern artist. For instance, 'That father of mine talks of buying a boat and nets' (3), Karuthamma begins the conversation to Pareekutty. Pareekutty asks Karuthamma: 'When you have boat and nets, will you sell us your fish?' (228). Thakazhi's use of image at the end of the novel as "At Cheriazhikal, a dead shark with a line still attached was found on the shore' (238). Thakazhi's works focus on social issues and we could see the socialist language in *Thotiyude Makan*, whereas, in *Chemmeen*, he projects the economic positions of the fisher folk and did not focus on the other problems of the sea side and he used the modernist language in the novel. By using the modernist language, Thakazhi tries to establish himself as a modernist through his enduring classic *Chemmeen*.

CONCLUSION:

In the Part, we can read Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* as a story that has used the sea in a metaphorical level. As an Indian modernist, he presented *Chemmeen*, with the sole aim of portraying the economic statues of the fisher folks in Kerala. Later the work became popular for its romance. This is in contradiction to the life of the fisher folk who experience the natural calamity or disaster, like tsunami. If the people had experienced tsunami in 1950s, the concern of



Think India Journal

ISSN: 0971-1260 Vol-22, Special Issue-21

National Conference on

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ZES's, Zeal Institute of Management and Computer Application,
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on 21st November 2019



the fisher folks would have been revealed through Chemmeen, which appeared in 1956. Therefore, we cannot expect Thakazhi to foreground the sea side concerns in the earlier literature and also in the cinema produced later based on his novel, Chemmeen.

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