

THE FALL OF TRADITIONS IN *THE CHAMMEEN*

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ABSTRACT

"*Chemmeen*" is the story of the fisherman's community. Natural forces are grimly real enemies or friends. It is far from a city view of life. The elements can destroy a person and his family; they can also make it possible to live... live for another year, that is, consequently in the tiny fishing communities it is the stern goddess Katalamma, who orders the faith of the people. She lives at the faith of the people. She lives at the bottom of the sea and the way to her abode is made terrible by whirlpools and treacherous currents. Ruthlessly she punishes the wicked, dragging them down to her terrible realm and sending sea monsters and serpents to the beach as a warning of the wrath. The men at sea must be brave and moral. The women on shore must be pure and chaste to guarantee the safety of their men on Katalamma's risky waters.

Key words:-

Community, Treacherous, dragging, warning, terrible, guarantee, punishes, wicked, stern

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INTRODUCTION

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai is a prolific writer and a fast writer. This novel *Chammeen* was written in less than three weeks. Santha Rama Rao tells us that the CHAKARA is the big event of the year. This is the season of *chammeen*- shrimp. The *chakara* is usually about July, during the middle of the monsoon. This is a period of real prosperity for fishermen. Every one wait for the *chakara*. The whole sea coast throbs with life. Trade is brisk and the fishermen have money in their pockets. There are, besides the in or joys and pleasures: a local dance, a drink of palm beer, a smoke of a cheap handmade cigarette, a flirtation. Or there are the deeper rewards of love, marriage, children, philosophy. As always, India offers its people a poor living, but a rich life, and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai must be congratulated for capturing that quality in the microcosmic but enormous world he describes.

"And there can be no limits to what one might expect from a pen(of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai) that is so fluent, so prolific, so inventive."

Thakazhi Siva sankara Pillai was born in April 1914 at Thakazhi, a village , ten miles south of Alleppey in the Kerala state. His father was a farmer, and a Scholar and a connoisseur of the famous Kathakal dance. After dusk, his father used to read the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana and Thakazhi would listen to his father spell bound. As a little boy, he went to Thakazhi school and after wards to the middle school at Ambalapuzha. The school was right in the middle of the fishermen's community and thus he came in contact with the lives of fishermen and fisher women as his clients. The Pareekuttis and the Karuthammas are thus real figures he has met and known and whose lives and tribulations he intimately understood.

After finishing school. Thakazhi left for Trivandrum to study Law. A number of young writers including Thakazhi came under the influence of Balakrishna Pillai, the editor of *Kesari* in Trivandrum he read

widely both English and European literature, not to mention Freud and Marx. In 1934, when he was just 20 years old, he brought out his first volume of short stories called Puthumalar.

His other works include Prahiphalam (Reward), Patithapankam (Fallen Lotus), Atiozhukkukal(Undercurrent), Nityakannika(Spinster), Changathikal(Comrades). These stories had a strong social content. Social criticism was implicit in many, and they also revealed left wing political sympathies, Thottiyude makan (The Scavenger's Son), Rentitangazhi(Two measures), *Chemmeen*(Shrimp), *Chemmeen* won its author the President's award, the most coveted literary honour in India, *Chemmeen* has the quality of a fable in which the lives, the superstitions, the inner beliefs, the traditions and the sufferings of the community of fishermen are portrayed as a way of life with a deep and significant moral. In 1959 Thakazhi wrote one more novel, The Children of Ouseph.

Chemmeen is the story of the fisherman's community, it is the story of Chemban Kunu's life and fall, it is the pure love story of karuthamma, it is the story of Pareekkutti who never realizes that his action is a sacrifice, it is the story of Chakki who is the embodiment of encouragement and enthusiasm, it is the story of palani a young man of manliness, it is the tragic story of many young men and women of any fishing community in Kerala.

Narayana Menon comments thus, "Thakazi Tempers his realism with a new romanticism. This novel has the quality of fable in which the lives, the superstitions, the inner beliefs, the traditions and the sufferings of the community of fishermen are portrayed as a way of life with a deep and significant moral."

Karuthamma is the girl and Pareekkutti is a Muslim boy are playmates since their childhood. They like each other and this develops into a kind of romantic love. Karuthamma belongs to the fishing community and she cannot be married to any outside her caste. Chemban kunju, karuthamma's father is a bit ambitious in life. Karuthamma has to sacrifice her love for pareekkutti and is married to a poor sailor palani.

Palani is assailed by rumours of karuthamma's past. When pareekkutti comes to tell karuthamma of the news of the latter's mother's death suspicion gets confirmed. A daughter is born to palani and karuthamma, but she does not forget pareekkutti. One night when palani goes out, Pareekkutti comes and the lovers have a stroll on the beach at midnight. "Worn out by the tragic life they decide to sacrifice their lives for their pure love. They embrace each other and jump into the violent sea. Palani too drowns in the sea while fishing". This is what we read at the end of the novel. "Some of the fishermen said that there had been a great storm in mid-ocean during the night. The waves came right up to the front of some of the houses. Pancham (the younger sister of karuthamma) stood on the sea-shore, the tears running down her cheeks. The baby in her arms was crying bitterly for her father and mother. Palani, who had gone out fishing the evening before, had not come home. Karuthamma was not to be seen. Pancham wept and as she wept she tried to comfort the baby. Two days later the bodies of a man and a woman locked in embrace were washed on the shore. They were the bodies of pareekkutti and karuthamma. And at the Cheriyazhikki sea front a dead shark that had been baited was also cast on the shore".

CONCLUSION

Thus the novel *Chemmeen* is a tragedy of poor fishermen, who are victims of an economic system. Rich money lenders like Ouseph exploited them to the top of their bent and fishermen have no hope for a bright future. When a fisherman like Chemban Kunju tries to further his prospects he is pulled down by the envy of the people and social conditions. They are fatalists in as much as they have a blind faith in the power of the goddess Katalamma. Caste considerations are responsible for the tragic end of the sad tale of the protagonists. All the characters believe in destiny and they struggle against odds. Traditions and taboos are too powerful for them. When a fisherman like Chemban Kunju tries to further his prospects he is pulled down by the envy of the people and social conditions. The suffering of Chemban, Chakki, Karuthamma and Pareekkutti seem to be a part of the daily life of these villagers on the sea coast. Very few characters are aware of the hollowness and meaninglessness of outdated traditions and beliefs. "Thus the novel is an imaginative understanding of the disintegration of traditions, social and religious beliefs in a closed society."

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