



FISHERMAN'S SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS IN T. S. PILLAI'S *CHEMMEN*

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ABSTRACT

This article is focused on how T.S.Pillai portrays the socio Culture aspects in his novel Chemmeen. Culture is composed of things such as language, religious beliefs, tradition, ritual, knowledge, laws, music, work habits, food preferences, and child-rearing practices. Each social group have identifies its identity and values as unique and suitable to itself. These beliefs are taught to all children and members of a cultural group to differentiate their behaviour from those of surrounding social groups that behave in different ways. T. S Pillais greatly popular epic novel is Chemmeen or Prawns, it is not like his other works. It is a tragic love story, situated in a fishing village in Alappuzha. The Novel got him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958. The film version was directed by Ramu Kariat, won the National Film Award for the Best Feature Film in 1965. The novel brings him international name and fame and has been translated into 19 languages and adapted into film in 15 countries.

Key Words: Culture, T.S.Pillai, Chemmeen, religious conflicts, Caste system, Love, Hindu

INTRODUCTION

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai is known as Thakazhi was an Indian novelist and short story writer. Who used to write in the Malayalam language. He is also known as the '**Kerala Maupassant**'. His most of works translated to other Languages. His writings focus on the

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social aspects and the fight of the oppressed classes, while depicting accurately the historic details. He wrote more than 40 novels and over 600 short stories. His most famous novels are *Chemmeen*, meaning *Prawns* (1956) and *Kayar*, meaning *Coir* (1978). *Chemmeen* got him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1958. For his novel *Kayar*, he was awarded India's highest literary award the '**Jnanpith Award**' in 1984. He was also honoured with the third highest civilian award the Padma Bhushan, by the Government of India.

The Novel *Chemmeen* has been translated into English several times. Narayana Menon's translation titled *Anger of the Sea-Goddess* remains very popular even today. Another English translation is by Anita Nair titled *Chemmeen* in Malayalam. It has gone into numerous editions. The novel *Chemmeen* is about Kerala's Fisherman community and it depicts Fishermans customs, tradition and beliefs. Prof. Basavaraj Naikar's rightly said that

“Chemmeen belongs to the galaxy of very few Indian novels which are at once realistic and symbolic, simple and yet profound life of fisherman in all its ethnic variety, depth and elemental simplicity. The central thematic concern of the novel happens to be the supreme importance of chastity in married life and the dangerous consequences of adultery upon the husband of the family” (Naikar 151).

It is a tragic love story between Karuthamma, the daughter of Hindu fisherman community and a Muslim Money lender Pareekutti. The novel highlights not only love but also the various myths, customs, traditions, rituals and beliefs of the fisherman community. Who mostly belong to the Mukkuvar community. The novel begins with the romance and loves between Karuthamma and Pareekutti two young lovers. Who were neighbours and used to playmates. When they became youth they fell in love with each other. The family of Karuthamma is very poor illustrate whole she was sharing her feelings with Pareekutti “She shrank from him. Crossed her hand's in front of her bare breasts and turned around she realised she had only a single piece of bin cloth covering her” (Pillai 5). They believed that fisher women should be pure and chaste.

The Mukkuvar community culture is very different, they believe that they had their own strong and powerful Goddess called Kotalamma, she lived at the bottom of the sea. She created treacherous current and ruthlessly punished the wicked and she gives her children everything. Chakki is mother of Karuthamma, repeated the lesson to her daughter. “Purity is the great thing child. The strength and the wealth of fisherman lie in the purity of his wife”. (Pillai 9) a woman is always faithful to her husband. Karuthamma parents were worried about their daughter life.



Religion was a major problem to Karuthamma and Pareekutty's love. Karuthamma belongs to Fisherman community and Pareekutty was a Muslim. According to people of fisherman community who belongs to two different religions could not get marry or they should not be in relationship with each other. Chakki sees her daughter talking about Pareekutty she gives warning to stay away from Pareekutty because he belongs to a Muslim community. Chakki persuades her daughter by telling her that

"The life of a fisherman who goes out to sea rests in the hands of his woman on the shore. Virtue is the most important thing my daughter. Purity of the body and mind! A fishermans wealth is his fisher woman, Virtue" (Pillai 9)

Chemban Kanju is Karuthamma's father both husband and wife are worrying about their daughter's life. They are seriously thinking of a Muslim boy will trouble their daughter. According to fisher community from different caste or religion cannot be get marry. A woman having affair or marrying someone outside her caste or religion was considered a crime. Karuthamma's parents feel that her daughter must get married to a Hindu boy. Karuthamma sacrifices her love and marries to Palani, an orphan Hindu fisherman. They belongs to different villages. After marriage Karuthamma goes to Palani's house even she knows that Chakki, her mother is ill and bedridden.

The Fisherman community was divided different caste. There are four sub-castes in fisherman, Aryan, Calakkaran, Mukkauvan and Marakkan withing the community only the higher caste could own boats and nets. No other man of other caste could own it. Chambankunja decides to own a boat, the other men discuss that he is not eligible to buy any boat and net. A person belongs to Valakkaran caste should own boats and nets. The fisherman's caste division created a lot of problems in a fisherman's life.

The fisher woman's life was so miserable. They are depending on their husbands earnings. Their life was very difficult and hard. They used to take money from money lender and agreed to any condition. Small traders went from home to home and lending money to the womenfolk. Some traders used to molest and harassed fisher woman. The fisher woman at home they prayed "Oh, Goddess at the sea; when are you going to give us a proper meal" (Pillai 68) This is the condition of Fisher community where they are unable to eat full meals a day.

After the marriage Karuthamma came to Palani's house. Her new life is worst; nothing is there in her home. Palani's house was old, few pans and pots are there. She is virtuous woman. She want to share everything with him but she is unable to share. She surrendered herself completely to him. She loved someone but fulfilment of desire come from someone



else. She is Palani's wife, her body and purity is meant only for him. She had kept herself pure for her husband.

Chemabakunja does not care about his family much. He is greedy and selfish; he wanted to own a great numbers of boats and nets to make more money. In those days it's very difficult to own one boat or net. The fisherman community is also male-dominated where the woman live according to what the man wants

“Chakki suffers a lot Chembankunja's wife; Karuthamma suffers as an obedient and good daughter and weeping wife; and Panchami the younger daughter of Chakki becomes an orphan with another orphan in her hand” (Pillai 110)

The news of Karuthamma's past relationship with Pareekutty spread like wildfire, there was a big crisis in her family and she shared her childhood love affair with Pareekutti. It raises a big storm in Palani's life he started behaving like a mad. After four days Palani and Karuthamma should come to daughter in laws house this is one of the fishermen's culture. But Palani refused to come to Nirkunnam. Chakki could not recover from bedridden and she died. Chambankunja was hard hearted, he didn't inform the message to Karuthamma but Pareekutti personally went to Trikunpuzha to tell the message. Palani didn't allow Karuthamma to go to her father's house. Palani's life was very worst. Karuthamma gave him word that she would stay that seashore for test of her life as become a good fisherwoman. Palani was still disappointed with Karuthamma. Palani used to quarrel with her every day.

Karuthamm was pregnant, she was living under the protection of man. Palani advise her not go and sell any fish and he said, “You must follow, live according customs and traditions” (Pillai 161). In fisherman community woman don't have freedom woman always suffers, she is a commodity. Karuthamma painfully prayed to god, that “The baby inside her would not be a girl. She had known the suffering of a girl. It was possible that story of her life might be repeated, nothing happen again she would not let her little girl grew up with little boy. Her child should not get involved in any love affairs” (Pillia 162)

Unfortunately she gave birth to baby girl. This is one of the worst condition Pillai created and depicts the mental condition of Karuthamma that she don't want give birth baby girl; because of her own experience as a fisherwoman my daughter will be in same condition. She don't want her daughter should face all type worst customs and culture.

Pareekutti was disappointed in his life, he was leading an aimless life and no one could understand the tragedy of his love story. Pareekutty decided to meet his lover Karuthamma. Panchami told her sister about Pareekutty's tragic life. Karuthamma also decided to meet

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him. She handed over a baby to Panchami and she left home. Her husband Palani went out to the sea alone and he was fishing on the deep sea. Karuthamma mad about her lover, she was not afraid of anybody, neither community nor her husband. Karuthamma loses her chastity. Palani goes for fishing but he is swollen by the sea and never return back. Palani said that, "All the water of the sea...He was grabbing at it...and screamed Karuthamma, over the whirlwind roar" (Pillai 207). In the end Panchami stood on seashore the tears running down the chicks. The baby in her arms, it was crying bitterly for her father and mother. Karuthamma and Pareeutti decided to end their life.

"Two days later the bodies of a man and woman locked in embrace were washed on the shore. They were the bodies of Pareekutti and Karuthamma. And at the Cheriyaazikki sea front a dead shark that had been baited was also cost on the shore" (Pillai 216).

The fisherman life and various beliefs and customs followed by the people effects the love of two youth and spoiled their life. Pillia presented through love story. All the suffering was the result of lack of chastity it symbolized on much by calamitous waves as the lack of luster of Arundhati star. Finally the superstition about the virtue of chastity and the dire consequences of the violation of the some virtue turned out to be a reality.

The fisherman community has their own customs, tradition, beliefs and rituals. Pillai presented how fishermen leading their life; how their own community bindings or customs spoiling their own life. Pillai focuses on Kerala coastal people life style; how they failed to get full meals a day. It is one of best novel which depicts the condition of helpless man who surrounds with his own community customs and who is fighting with his fate. T.S. Pillai has presented a real description of fisherman life. Novelist also focused on what was the woman condition and how she was suffering because of fisherman community culture. Fisherwoman has been exploited and humalated through fictional story Pillai presented the reality of Fishermans community and its effects on their own people.

"The novel obtains the quality of a tale in which life in the fishing community is depicted with great expressive detail. The customs, the beliefs, the taboos, the rituals and the day-to-day business of living through the point of stark existence come alive magically through T.S. Pillai's Pen in this novel. Dr. Ashok Hulibandi rightly portrayed that "There are confusion and disharmony when these conventional laws and customs are breached and overstepped. The novel authenticates this by portraying the tragedy of characters who have transgressed" (Hulibandi. 92). The novel ends with tragedy.



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