

**Love and Struggle: Surveying the Subaltern Romance in Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's  
*Chemmeen***

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**Abstract**

*In this study describe the life and works of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. It introduces Malayalam literature especially the growth of the novel as a front-runner among other genres. It takes Sivasankara Pillai's novel Chemmeen as a critical device to analyse how the author's original intention to portray the economic status of fisherfolk have turned into little romantic writing. The writers from Indian regional writings also used the 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 infidelity 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 seashore 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.*

**Keywords:** Fisherman, Love, Community, Sea, Boat, Marriage, Culture, Poverty, Myth, Morality etc.

### **Introduction:**

Chemmeen has become a classic because of its balanced narrative of a love story blending with the myth of fisherfolk and their struggle in the realistic socio-political scenario. Among the fisherfolk community the belief of woman being an infidel and losing her innocence while her husband is 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 Kadamma or Kadammai (The Sea Goddess) will ruin all the fisherfolk 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 purchasing 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. 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 integrity. 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 the 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 most 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 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 a stepmother, she leaves to her sister's house. Karuthamma has endeavoured 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 shun him and refuse to take fishing with them. By the stroke of fate Karuthamma and Pareekutty meet, one night and their old love are consummated. Palani, at sea alone and baiting a shark, is caught in a massive whirlpool and is swallowed by the sea. Their immediate consummation of love proves the extremity of desire, and its power to lead one to shed their strong beliefs and fears on the taboos which are acculturated in one's psyche.

The preoccupied disposition of sea mother's wrath, no one violated the rules of the seashore by falling in love with someone from other religion. The next morning, Karuthamma and Pareekutty, are also found a 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 primary belief system and traditions. Thus, Karuthamma became an 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 entirely realistic, but it ends in a romantic manner like the love story of Kesavan Kunji with Meenakshi in Marthandavarma and Thiruvikrama Kumaran with Shavitri in Rama Raja Bahadur. But in these works love was not given much importance and portrays as social injustices whereas Chemmeen gives essential to the love between Pareekutty with Karuthamma as well as fisherfolk struggle. Thus it becomes a classic and differs like love with other romantic in realism.

Thakazhi's Chemmeen portrays the nature of Sealife as a representation of socialist and as well as the 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 broad appeal and an element of 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 fisherfolk community is if the infidel woman loses her chastity while her husband in the Sea, the Kadalamma (The Sea Goddess) will ruin all the fisherfolk 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 nature and following a tradition indicates space of uniform visibility. The myth is quite common, and it will fit 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 to him. Many moneylenders were ready to offer loan for Chembankunju to buy a boat and nets. But he refused to take a credit 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 the 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 fisherman pictures through how fisherfolk 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 Chembankunju's master plan for repaying his debts. Once Palani becomes a Chembankunju's Son-in-law, then the earning will be saved, and he can quickly 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 a significant loss to the family. The novel also describes how to covet lead to madness and isolation at the end of the life. Chembankunju being coveted at the beginning first bought a boat and net. Later his, want

increases, so he put all his earnings to buy another boat and the net. Karuthamma would be happily married Palani if Chembankunju pays the debt of Pareekutty and might lead the life as a good fisherwoman by 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 essential in life. But Chembankunju's interest is only in buying a boat and net not definitely on marrying off his daughter. They live in specific restriction and following tradition, so the girl with tits and a bum should marry otherwise she will break out the rules and pollute the seashore. The folk suspect about the Karuthamma marriage with Palani and they believe that she might be a slut. The folk suspect, why the owner of two boats is marrying off his daughter to a man who has no possessions.

Thakazhi highlights 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. I have no one!'(228). Thakazhi indicates that no individual is having control over 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. It is 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 realised 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 It informed Kochunathan's that he is in Trikunnappuzha because to meet his sister. Kochunathan's wouldn't cease how a Muslim man could 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 saying through dreams she had. The question is that isn't they any fisherfolk there to inform about Chakki's death and why Pareekutty, Muslim boy has come in the midnight and after her mother, is ill. But Karuthamma fears for his father that he won't recognise 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 wants 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 madman singing his song. 'I will always sing this song; I will sing this song, so it is heard at Trikunnapuzha' – the words pounded within her ears. 'When you have a 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 superstitions 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 take 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 behaviour. In Chemmeen, Karuthamma is 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 hi ruined as he is. And if I go, he will die" (96). Karuthamma want 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 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 fisherwoman, 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 considerable shark had never bitten anyone's bait! No fisher 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 seashore. Thakazhi uses 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 the modernist code in the particular discourse in Karuthamma's dress a sense of taste, a melmundu is widely seen in Malabar seashore. In Indulekha also which turns away from ornamentation and jewellery to notions of 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 the question in practical aspects. For instance, Pareekutty 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? 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). 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 an aesthetic way. For instance, could any mother suspect or criticise her 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).

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai is a creative artist (modernist) perhaps Chemmeen did not bring class struggle as much in Thotiyude Makan and Randidangazhi. It shows Thakazhi as a progressive writer. There are a 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 de Maupassant, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Finally, Peasant's revolt in Kuttanad and severe classes from Balakrishna Pillai 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 on Malayalam literature under the guidance of Kesari through some of the modern novelists like Thakazhi, Kesava Dev, 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 broad 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 equal importance in his writing through the portrayal of the realistic character of fisher folk's struggle and inter-religious love between Pareekutty and Karuthamma (Realism). Thakazhi uses 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 fisherfolk and did not focus on the other problems of the seaside 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 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 status of the fisher folks in Kerala. Later the work became famous for its romance. This is in contradiction to the life of the fisherfolk who experience the natural calamity or disaster, like the tsunami. If the people had experienced tsunami in the 1950s, the concern of the fisher folks would have been revealed through *Chemmeen*, which appeared in 1956. Therefore, we cannot expect Thakazhi to foreground the seaside concerns in the earlier literature and also in the cinema produced later based on his novel, *Chemmeen*.



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