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The fall of customs in the Chemmeen

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Abstract

“*Chemmeen*” is the narrative of the fisherman’s society. Ordinary forces are severely genuine adversary or acquaintances. It is far-off from a municipality vision of living. The fundamentals can obliterate a human being and his relatives; they can also construct it probable to survive for an additional year, that is, accordingly in the insignificant fishing societies it is the uncompromising spirit Katalamma, who instructions the conviction of the persons. She lives at the conviction of the persons. She lives at the underneath of the sea and the technique to her dwelling is completed appalling by vortex and untrustworthy contemporary. Mercilessly she castigates the depraved, negligent them downwards to her dreadful kingdom and sending sea monstrous and serpents to the seashore as a caution of the anger. The men at sea must be courageous and honourable. The women on seashore must be uncontaminated and uncorrupted to assurance the protection of their men on Katalamma’s dangerous waters.

Keywords: Society, untrustworthy, dreadful, municipality.

1. Introduction

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai is among the brand of writers who ushered Malayalam literature into a new age. His place in Malayalam literature is that of a god-father. Chemmeen is Pillai’s best novel which expresses the aspirations, struggle and grief in the lives of the fisherman of Kerala. The tragedy of the poor fisherman has been depicted on the epic scale. The aim of this critical study is to study this great novel from different angles. Chemmeen has so much to offer to the readers. This critical study will help students of advanced degree courses of various universities as well as general readers to understand various aspects related to this novel.

Chemmeen is an acclaimed novel by Thakazhi Sivasankar Pillai, in which the conflict of traditionalism versus change/modernism dominates throughout. It is our view that through his novel the author favours traditionalism over modernism. Moreover, the novel serves as an important instrument for moralizing and advocating traditionalism. We base our argument on the following grounds. One of the chief characters: Chembankunju who happens to disregard not only the traditional practices of his village but at times also the moral conduct expected of any human being, is portrayed as a greedy villain, throughout. He sets about the mission of buying a boat despite the fact that as per the customs; he is ineligible to own one. Even though he bribes his way through the customs and becomes an owner of the boat, the end result is devastating, he ends up being a failure and losing his sanity. In the novel, at several instances, the author, by giving a description of traditional beliefs and customs and portraying the characters who transgress them; draws a contrast between what should be done and what should not be done. Karuthamma, who is another significant character in the novel, like Chembankunju is also portrayed as the transgressor of traditions and customs. She trespasses against laws of her society by falling in love with a Muslim man, Pareekutty. Eventually, she is racked with loss of love and scorn of the villagers including her father. The same is true for Pareekutty. The novel mentions of the traditions of the fishing village. It emphasizes the fact that peace and a certain harmony status quo is maintained as long as the traditions and customs are adhered to. There’s chaos and disharmony when these traditional laws and customs are breached and overstepped. The novel validates this by portraying the tragedy of characters who have transgressed. Karuthamma, who eventually succumbs to temptation and love, loses her husband Palani who is at sea, at the same moment as she conjoins with her lover. The fact that the author has NOT portrayed the major characters that

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stand for change and rationality traditionalism as victors but as losers and victims of a tragedy validates our argument that the author is advocating traditionalism by giving an account of consequences suffered by those who refused to conform.

Chemmeen tells the story of the relationship between Karuthamma, the daughter of a Hindu fisherman, and Pareekutty, the son of a Muslim fish wholesaler. The theme of the novel is a myth among the fishermen communities along the coastal Kerala State in the Southern India. The myth is about chastity. If the married fisher woman was infidel when her husband was in the sea, the Sea Goddess (Kadalamma literally means Mother Sea) the Goddess would consume him. It is to perpetuate this myth that Thakazhi wrote this beautiful novel. It was adapted into a film of same name, which won critical acclaim and commercial success.

Thakazhi made a departure from his vowed commitment to realism as it appeared in his works till then he brought in a fresh breeze of lyricism and romanticism. The novel acquires the quality of a fable in which life in the fishermen's community is depicted with great emotional detail. The customs, taboos, beliefs, rituals and the day-to-day business of living through the pain of stark existence come alive magically through Thakazhi's pen.

Chembankunju's only aim in life is to own a boat and a net. He finally succeeds in buying both with the help of Pareekutty, a young Muslim trader, on condition that the fish hauled by the boat will be sold to him. Chembankunju's pretty daughter Karuthamma and Pareekutty love each other. Karuthamma's mother, Chakki, knows about it and reminds her daughter about the life they lead within the boundaries of strict social tradition. Karuthamma sacrifices her love for Pareekutty and marries Palani, an orphan discovered by Chembankunju in the course of one of his fishing expeditions. Following the marriage, Karuthamma accompanies her husband to his village, despite her mother's sudden illness and her father's requests to stay. In his fury, Chembankunju disowns her. On acquiring a boat and a net and subsequently adding one more, Chembankunju becomes more greedy and heartless. With his dishonesty, he drives Pareekutty to bankruptcy. After the death of his wife, Chembankunju marries Pappikunju, the widow of the man from whom he had bought his first boat. Panchami, Chembankunju's younger daughter, leaves home to join Karuthamma, on arrival of her step mother. Meanwhile, Karuthamma has endeavoured to be a good wife and mother. But scandal about her old love for Pareekutty spreads in the village. Palani's friends ostracize him and refuse to take him fishing with them. By a stroke of fate, Karuthamma and Pareekutty meet one night and their old love is awakened. Palani, at sea alone and baiting a shark, is caught in a huge whirlpool and is swallowed by the sea. Next morning, Karuthamma and Pareekutty, are also found dead in hand, washed ashore. At a distance, there lies a baited dead shark.

Chemmeen is Pillai's best novel which expresses the aspirations, struggle and grief in the lives of the fisherman of Kerala. Chemmeen has so much to offer to the readers. This critical study will help students of advanced degree courses of various universities as well as general readers to

understand various aspects related to this novel. The tragedy of the poor fisherman has been depicted on the epic scale. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's (Malayalam) novel Chemmeen, accepted as part of the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works - Indian Series, was translated by V.K. Narayana Menon, and published by Victor Gollancz, London in 1962. It was the first significant Malayalam novel to be translated into English after Independence or, rather, during the early post-colonial era.

Conclusion

Accordingly the novel Chemmeen is a misfortune of poor fishermen, who are sufferers of an financially viable system. Rich currency lenders like Ouseph demoralized them to the top of their twisted and fishermen have no anticipate for a brilliant opportunity. When a fisherman like Chemban Kunju tries to supplementary his predictions he is pulled behind by the jealousy of the persons and communal circumstances. They are fatalists in as much as they have a unsighted conviction in the supremacy of the goddess Katalamma. Social group contemplations are conscientious for the disastrous end of the depressing relation of the leading role. All the characters consider in providence and they move violently alongside probability. Traditions and taboos are too prominent for them. When a fisherman like Chemban Kunju struggles to supplementary his prediction he is pulled downwards by the jealousy of the persons and communal circumstances. The affliction of Chemban, Chakki, Karuthamma and Pareekutty appear to be a division of the everyday life of these villagers on the ocean shoreline. Very few characters are conscious of the worthlessness and purposelessness of obsolete behaviour and philosophy. "Thus the novel is a creative sympathetic of the disintegration of traditions, communal and spiritual philosophy in a congested society."

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