

## A Study of Women Suppression and Caste Hierarchy in The work Chemmeen

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### Abstract

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's masterpiece is his novel Chemmeen. In the history of modern Malayalam literature, it has enriched a very special place. It was released on march 7,1956. It demonstrates his profound understanding of how the human mind functions. The older authors before Thakazhi portrayed the affluent and respectable classes of society, leaving the average person out of the core of their writing. However, he wrote primarily about the coastal area. The writer in the novel has shown the tradition, custom, life of fishing community residing in Kerala. The novel is based on "The Myth of Chastity". The myth in the novel is depicted in such a way that readers get a complete understanding of how the myths penetrated the minds of the people living in Kerala at that time. People living in Kerala continued to believe in old beliefs, they believed in patriarchal norms, which in turn led to oppression of women. Author beautifully portrayed the life of the protagonist Kharuthamma and her lover Pareekutty, whose love did not find success at the end of the novel due to the prevailing caste hierarchy in the society. Pareekutty belongs to the Muslim community and Kharuthamma on the other hand belongs to Hindu nation.

The research paper emphasize above selected mainly on society's hierarchical system with the reference of work. I would like to analyse the stereotyping of specific characters on their class and caste, and the overpowering male-centric female fellowships through deities.

**Keywords:** Supperasion, Male-Dominance, Caste Hierarchy, fisherman, sea.

**Introduction:** Thakazi Sivasanker Pillai wrote the Malayalam book Chemmeen, which was released in 1956. The book got the National Sahitya Akadami Award in 1958. The novel has been translated in many languages. The English-translated book achieved renown in 2011. The same title Malayalam movie was made from Chemmeen's book. The novel is about the Kerala fishing community's tradition, customs, way of life, etc. The "Myth of Chastity" is the basis for the book. The sea goddess (Katalamma, whose name roughly translates to "Mother Sea") would eat the married fisherwoman's husband if she converts to a different religion while he is at sea. The purpose of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's novel is to maintain this myth. The story of "Chemmeen" is about a young fisherwoman named Karuathamm, who falls in love with Pareekutty, the son of a Muslim whole sale fish trader. Karuthamma is the daughter of Hindu fisherman Chembankunju. Their love is put on hold as a result of the religious, social, and maritime laws of Kadalamma, and Karuthamma marries Palani, an orphan fisherman.

## **Cultural identity of the protagonists**

Karuthamma and Pareekutti are the novel's primary protagonists. Pareekutti is a moderately prosperous businessperson, while Karuthamma is the daughter of a poor fisherman. An innocent and submissive girl named Karuthamma never stops trying to get away from the "house" and "high walls" her father built to restrict her from being free. The plot's irony is that her father is an individualistic, iconoclastic man who is unable to follow social norms but nevertheless persuades his two daughters to be devout adherents of the laws encompassing the entire concept of religion. Chembankunju condemns beliefs that cause vulnerability, poverty, and stagnation. In fact, those who belong to the "Valakkaran" class can purchase angling vessels (those from lower ranks are unable to look for employment). Chemban does this despite being a member of the Mukkuran caste, which is thought to be an inferior caste. Chemban starts his pontoon when the water becomes crimson and the other fishermen stay on the shore, convinced that the Katayama (Sea Goddess) has her rules. Chemban is a system that unleashes intricate transitional powers.

## **Women Suppression**

Karuthamma fights for her dreams in Chemmeen while others wanted to kill her in order to achieve them. A critical question about modesty is posed by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai: Does this imply loyalty to one's spouse or beloved? In our culture, a woman is required to suppress her true feelings and live a false life. Gender therefore plays a key part in the personality development in the family and community since it is required to repress the sentiments for the sake of the family, for the good of society, for the protection of society, traditional norms, and traditions. The story's characters model their behaviour after that of their male counterparts. Karthumamma's father uses his daughter as a tool to carry out his selfish acts, renting a boat to Pareekutti, his daughter's lover, in order to fulfil his desire to acquire a ship. One could also view the dilemma in which the women find themselves, such as Karthumamma, who is stuck between what her fishing community expects of her as a perfect daughter, mother, and bride and what her heart desires, which is to fall more deeply in love with her life. Even though Chakki is aware that she is trying to ruin Karthumamma's life, she plays a crucial part in realising the wrong that she is driving her daughter to commit. Chemban, who has the traits of a greedy and uneducated man, continues to be a strong supporter of what his society wants him to do and makes sure that his daughters bridge the gap between their small-town community and their traditions. Chemban is aware of his failure to keep up relations with the group of fishermen, his obstinate desire to climb the social ladder, and his remarriage to the wife of a person he owes money to. The passage is a fantastic illustration of how women are used as commodities to satisfy material needs.

One can consider Karuthamma to be a liberator of women. She serves as motivation for individuals who aspire to challenge the accepted social conventions. Karuthamma dislikes the way her parents use Pareekutti to serve their purposes. She also discloses her father's criticism of Pareekutti's loan of money. She differs from other ladies because of her condition.

## **Caste Hierarchy**

The significance of Pareekutti being Muslim and Karuthamma being Hindu is clear to someone who is familiar with Indian history as well as the racial and religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Like Romeo and Juliet, the couple is young; Karuthamma was at least thirteen years old when she married. A girl was expected to get married at the age of 10 in order to avoid the possibility that she would develop feelings for an "unacceptable" guy. Pareekutti stands for a trading, exploitative class separate from the fishermen who face a hard and perilous existence, adding to the racial and religious

differences. Pareekutti and Karuthamma possess a stature that surpasses their youth and lowly social status due to the intensity of their love, which can be compared to the elements by which they live. There are established patterns of violations between their love's "sinful" end and its innocent and blissful beginning. Pareekutti is loved by Karuthamma, and she admits that she will never forget him. She remained silent about her feelings for Pareekutti—a man who was not of her race or religion—out of loyalty to her traditions and out of respect for her parents. Tragically, she cannot escape her deep love for Pareekutti even with marriage and "the fulfilment of desire" (p. 121). Karuthamma violates the love she has for Pareekutti by conforming in an effort to stay out of difficulty and embarrassment, which leads to more scandal and tragic disaster.

Karuthamma, who was young and obedient, was unable to break free from the "fort" and the "high walls" built by her parents and her community until the very end. Her father, meanwhile, is an individualistic, iconoclastic man who disregards those traditions and beliefs that impede his attempts to better his financial situation while enjoining and imposing traditional, conservative behaviour on his two daughters. The community believed that a fisherman should not practice thrift because he "makes his money by cheating and catching innocent beings moving freely in the sea . . . you cannot save money made at the cost of innocent lives" (p. 132). But Chemban rejects ideas that lead to fragility, poverty, and stagnation; he saves instead of allowing himself to fall into a state of perpetual destitution. Only people of the Valakkaran "caste" are allowed to purchase fishing boats; everyone else can only find employment on them. Chemban, however, does so despite being a member of the supposedly lower Mukkuran caste. Chemban launches his boat when the sea becomes red and the other fishermen stay on the shore because they think the sea goddess (Katalamma) is in menstruation. Some people carefully follow his example, and the fishing community starts to change its norms of behaviour, if not beliefs. Chemban acts as a catalyst to unleash the forces of transformation.

But his actions pass beyond legitimate self-improvement and become an expression of unscrupulous greed. In order to accumulate wealth, Chemban would even "empty the sea". Chemban aggressively pushes his daughter away while she tries to grab "cast-off tiny fish which children generally gather for themselves." "The catch he carried in his boat had gotten bigger in the sea. Nobody had planted any seeds for it or given it any care. That was the rule of the sea: a share of it was due to the underprivileged . Chemban, who took out a sizable loan from Pareekutti, neither pays it back nor gives the young trader a share of the day's catch. Purity does not just refer to sexual chastity, as Karuthamma points out: "Won't the sea goddess be upset if you cheat?" By refusing his devoted friend Achankunju a seat on the boat, Chemban transgresses the bounds of friendship. By prioritising the acquisition of a yacht over ensuring that his daughter gets married, he transgresses his duties as a parent. The exhilaration of adolescence and developing sexual attraction can be seen in Pareekutti and Karuthamma's helpless, seemingly unrelated laughter at the beginning of the book. Karuthamma is completely naked save for a small loincloth. Chemban permits this friendship to develop into love by ignoring his parenting responsibilities.

Chemban, written by T. S. Pillai, a socialist activist in Kerala, illustrates the strong pull of money and the sometimes brutal, competitive spirit that the free sector system can produce. In this regard, Pillai is comparable to African authors like Sembene Ousmane and Ngugi, if not Conrad and the corrupting allures of money on the *Nostromo*. Chemban sells all of his catch to the traders over the protests of his neighbours. As a result, the women are forced to pay hefty sums to the traders for the fish before trying to sell them for a meagre return. Chemban thus rejects his background and his people and works with the exploitationists instead. In times of economic hardship, Chemban purchases ornaments and household

goods from his helpless neighbours at absurdly low costs, much like the businessmen and moneylenders. Chemmeen explores the nature of collective ideas and the extent to which a person could—and perhaps ought to—stand apart from society. Chemban becomes egotistical and callous after breaking free and pursuing what at first glance appear to be justifiable objectives. His disobedience of convention is motivated by money; he has private objectives rather than public ones. He doesn't escape to raise the standard of living in the neighbourhood.

Chemmeen tackles themes of personal morality and behaviour, economic conduct, social cohesion, and religious belief in addition to being a story of tragic, young love.

## Conclusion

Even though the researcher used the novel "Chemmeen," which depicts a variety of social, cultural, and religious beliefs as well as the indigenous fishermen community and the tragic love story between the two characters Karuthamma and PateeKutty, when people follow tradition and culture, they encounter more conflicts but retain their originality, in contrast to today, when people follow modern culture, we encounter more conflicts. We misplaced who we were. When we adhere to cultural norms, it reveals a lot about who we are, where we come from, and other factors. Even though we all adhere to modern culture today, we should value and respect our own traditions and cultures as well. Most translations fail because they lose the essence of beauty, art, and literary texts, but in this novel, the translator was a Malayali herself, so she understood the context of their culture while translating in English, and it never lost the essence of the lit. Being a Malayali herself, the translator has succeeded in capturing the natural beauty of the setting as well as the tragic fate of those who belong to other castes in Kerala's traditional society.

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