
DEPICTION OF SOCIETY IN THE NOVEL CHEMMEENBY T.S.PILLAI

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Abstract: T.S.Pillai is a famous Indian novelist. With his deft hands, the novelist depicts a real society. Depiction of a society is not new, but the details with which the novelist brings out the society needs commendation. This novel in a realistic terms stand as a social document. This paper tries to elaborate on the clear picture brought out by the novelist.

Keywords: Realistic Portrayal, Society. Social Document

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai is one of the most Prominent writers in Malayalam. He is a well-known novelist. He has written poems, stories and novels. His writings have won international acclaim and world-wide recognition. In Malayalam literature his place and status remains that of a godfather. His first novel, Parthiphallam created a sensation after its publication. Chemmeen won national and international prizes. His works have been translated into a number of languages of the world. Chemmeen shows his deep and penetrating insight into the working of human mind and heart. Chemmeen was published in 1955 and created a stir in the literary world. This novel won Sahitya Akademi Award in 1957. T.S. Pillai portrays the life in a typical village of South India where the inhabitants are poor fishermen and the life is tough and perilous. His depiction of the kind of society is of general nature and he has maintained this tone throughout the novel. Chemmeen is a novel of its own kind that shows the conflicting trends in belief in life without any prejudice and culture bias. The life of the inhabitants of the coastal villages is dominated by orthodox beliefs and social taboos. The rising discontentment and revolt among younger ones is an integral part of the theme. There are many subcastes in the fishing community. They are Arayan, Valakkaran, Mukkuvan, and Marakkam and the fifth is lower class. This division of the community on caste basis is the major factor responsible for their poor economic status. The women of the fishing community cannot marry outside their caste and even the thought of violating it is blasphemous. Because the goddess of the sea, Katalamma demands a strict observance of moral codes in life. It is this fear of the rage of goddess Katalamma that keeps the people away from such violations. The superstitious beliefs of the fishermen are typical of villagers in India. They have a firm belief in the awe-inspiring presence of the goddess Katalamma. They say that she resides in the depths of the sea and it is impossible to predict about her moods. Whenever, someone violates some moral code of conduct, she becomes angry and sends dreadful creatures on the sea. The dwelling place of goddess Katalamma is sacred to them and even the

act of fishing is a ritual for them. Early in the morning when they prepare to go into the sea, they have to take a bath. The novelist describes her presence as,

“The palace of the goddess of the sea was at the bottom of the deep sea. There the sea goddess was enshrined. Pallani had heard descriptions of that palace. He had to get there through a whirlpool, a whirlpool which made the whole sea churn round in circles, knocking at the gates of the sea goddess’s abode”.

Thus, this fear of the unseen presence of Katalamma forbids them from committing any crime. The author presents a society deep-rooted in ancient beliefs, customs and superstitious.

The author portrays the poor fishermen with their miserable plight and helplessness in improving their lot. They do not have any exposure to external world and they continue to live inside their closed society. They float with life as such but some characters like Karuthamma, Pareekutti, Chakki have some redeeming features in them. They are aware of the hollowness and weaknesses of their outdated social set up and even dare to go against social authority. The reactions on the part of Pareekutti, Karuthamma and Chakki show some transformative traits and the urge for a renewal of life in them.

“on the sea shore a chaste and pure woman was praying a steadfastly for the safety of her husband on shore—the strength and the wealth of the fisherman lie in the purity of his wife”.

They exhibit a spirit of revolt against established norms and traditional prejudices. The social set up in Chemmeen does not show any sign of ferment, it is highly suggestive on individual’s integrity and liberty. The novel holds a mirror to life on the coastal areas of Kerala. The novel has different themes such as orthodox beliefs, love-relationship, need for regeneration of the system, outdated notions of ritualistic mode of religion, superstitious and exploitation of the poor fishermen. The novel is the tragedy of Chemban Kunju, his daughter Karuthamma, Pareekutti and Pallani. The role of the Headman also establishes the authority of society over common man. Without his consent and approval, no fisherman can buy a boat. He enjoys full

participation in social life. It is based on age-old rituals and beliefs and the Headman exploits his position.

Conclusion: Thus the author gives a realistic portrayal of life on the sea-beach with fidelity and the

novel Chemmeen possesses a social and documentary value. The depiction of society with its people and their life style is convincing and natural.

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