

# AN APPROACH TO ROMANCE, REALISM AND MYTH IN THAKAZHI SIVASANKARA PILLAI'S *CHEMMEEN*

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**Abstract:** Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's magnum opus is his novel *Chemmeen*. It has enriched in a very special place in the annals of contemporary Malayalam literature. It was published on March 7, 1956. It shows his deep and penetrating insight into the working of human mind. The earlier writers before Thakazhi portrayed the upper and respectable classes of the society there by eliminating common man in the essence of their work. But he focussed mostly on the coastal area mass in his writings. *Chemmeen* is a compelling study of human passions, taboo violated relationship, ancient myths and allusions employed to heighten the tragic note in the present context in the narrative. *Chemmeen* is a tragic love story of forbidden love. On the other hand, it proves that true love recognizes no religious, culture or geographical boundaries. It illustrates the deeply rooted nature of superstition in Hindu psyche and presents the typical Kerala fishing community of Alapuzha. The fiction *Chemmeen* is a tale in multilayer. It is analysed for its romantic approach, realistic description, mythical belief and humanitarian values.

**Keywords:** Ancient myths, Romance, Realism, Taboo violated relationship.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai was born in April 1914 at Thakazhi, a little village called kuttanad some ten miles south of Allapetty in state of Kerala. Sivasankara Pillai is known by the name of the village he comes from, Thakazhi. He is a legendary writer, father of modern novels and he won the Gynapith award. In March 1956, came his famous novel *Chemmeen* which won him president's award. His other works are *Thottiyude Makan* (1947), *Randidangazhi* (1948), *Ousepinte makkal* (1959), *Enipadikal* (1964), *Chukku* (1967), *kayar* (1978). All his literary works have been translated in to major modern languages. Narayana Menon has translated *Chemmeen* with great care and precision. This translated version of *Chemmeen* has been accepted in the Indian Translation series of the UNESCO collection of representative works. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Chemmeen* is preciously that strange and wonderful thing. His ability as a novelist was never questioned in his own province from the beginning of his writing career as he was known, read and loved.

In an age of scientific iconoclasm, reading a fiction like *Chemmeen* based on old myths, realism and romance is a relief to the mind. Analysing such a novel like *Chemmeen* is a rich experience. It is quite remarkable that Thakazhi ranks as one of the greatest twentieth century writers in Malayalam. His work *Chemmeen* can be placed in the tradition of love story of *Romeo and Juliet* or *Laila and Majnu*. As a romantic writer Thakazhi has proved his mettle in the creation of the love story between Karuthamma and Pareekutti and made them immortal. The adaptation of the fiction into a film by Ramukariat, that has brought world fame and the coveted gold medal for the best film from the President to Thakazhi, adds another feather to his cap. He has created a beautiful majestic epic out of the simple love story, and the theme of human relationship thwarted by suspicion and distrust.

It is against such realistic backdrop; Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai has presented the romantic episode of Karuthamma and Pareekutti. Karuthamma's father Chembankunju's only aim is to own a boat and a net. He finally succeeds in buying

both, with the help of Pareekutti, a young Muslim trader. Pareekutti gives the required amount to Chembankunju, out of his love for Karuthamma, Chakki, Karuthamma's mother knows about her daughter's love for Pareekutti and warns her about the life they lead within the boundaries of strict social tradition. Karuthamma sacrifices her love for Pareekutti and marries Palani, an orphan selected by her father, at the time of Chakara. Following the marriage Karuthamma accompanies her husband to his village, despite her mother's sudden illness and her father's request to stay. In his fury, Chembankunju disowns her. On acquiring a boat and subsequently adding one more, Chembankunju becomes more greedy and heartless. He marries Pappikunju, the widow of the man from whom he had bought his first boat. Panchami, his younger daughter, leaves home to join Karuthamma, on arrival of her step mother.

In due course, he becomes a mad man. Meanwhile, Karuthamma has endeavoured to be a good wife and mother. But scandal about her old love for Pareekutti spreads in the village. Palani's friends ostracize him and refuse to take him fishing with him. By a stroke of fate, Karuthamma and Pareekutti meet one night and their old love story is awakened, while Palani is at the stormy sea alone and baiting a shark. Palani cries for Karuthamma and he is caught in a huge whirlpool and is swallowed by the sea. Two days later the lover's bodies, locked in embrace, washed ashore and at the sea front a dead shark that has been baited was cast on the shore.

This incident is attributed to the wrath of Katalamma, the goddess of the sea, who takes vengeance for breaking the chastity codes among the fisher folk. T.S.Pillai combines the myth of Katalamma and the love story to make his novel unique.

The sea serves as a symbol of the unrelenting fate. Karuthamma and Pareekutti grows up on the beach, their first love scene is blessed by calm, Moonlight Sea, murmuring love songs. The furious sea marks her marriage day. A similar furious sea marks the end of the story, the tragic night of their death. The storm that rages in the sea outside represents the storm of passion which rages in the hearts of the lovers who sacrifice their lives to fulfil their love in death. Death unites the two lovers whose union is prohibited by the characters. Thus Thakazhi makes use of the sea as a powerful symbol in interweaving the theme in the narrative of Chemmeen in an artistic manner.

The novelist employs the symbol of the 'Arundhati' star to heighten the tragic effect of the narrative. In Hindu mythology, Arundhati is the wife of a great sage and she herself is a symbol of chastity. The symbol of chastity has been employed ironically hinting at the love-fulfilled and tragically thwarted in the end of the novel:

One single star came out and shone. It was the fisherman's Arundhati, the star which showed them their way, but that night the star seemed to lack in luster.

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's use of symbol is highly convincing. The natural objects and other things like a boat, flower, sea water, the seasonal cycle, fish, moon, flute, and beach have been used as powerful symbols further intensifying the agony and the tragedy of tradition and love.

By the use of the myths and symbols, the novelist is able to probe deeper into the inner ponderings and passions of his protagonists in particular and other character in general. The myths serve as a raw material to the back – drop of the novel and add meaning and form to his characters. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai uses the myths and symbols for a comprehensive interpretation of life, to evoke structure that restores meaning to life and affords artistic freedom to explore his novel and to reveal these absolute truths which can be universally applicable to mankind.

## 2. CONCLUSION

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai also presents a vivid picture of the community of the fisher folk and their way of life is dictated by orthodox and superstitious beliefs and myths. Their little joys and sorrows, ambition to possess a boat and a net, the happiness in getting a good haul of fish, enjoying the 'Chakara' season and their beliefs are all dealt throughout the novel and they are pointed out in the project. Human weakness like greed, jealousy, disobedience, infidelity, theft, neglect, scandal mongering, suspense and temptation are also brought out in this novel.

Myths and reality coalesce in Chemmeen facilitating a deeper understanding of life in all its complexities. The present paper has created an interest to read more translations of Malayalam novels in English and also to make a comparative study of such works dealing with same themes and myths.

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