

## **Women's Responsibilities in T.S. Pillai's Chemmeen**

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### **Abstract**

Women play a very vital role in human progress and have a significant place in the society. The main responsibility of a woman is to preserve the human race. Women are marginalized by compelling them to lead the life of dependence and they are made to sacrifice their 'life' and 'self' for the sake of others. Woman plays an important role in the society. Woman is the central figure when one considers the family. Absence of women in family structure clearly shows the incompleteness of any family T.S. Pillai tells the responsibilities of women through the female characters in the novel *chemmeen*.

### **Keywords**

Mistress, duty, responsible, tolerate, discipline.

Chakki who is one of the strongest woman in *chemmeen*. She is the source of inspiration to Chembankunju for high endeavour and worth achievements in life. "Chakki is going to sell fish in the east(4). It can be noted that when the fishing boats come ashore in the afternoon, the women go to the seashore with their basket. Chakki, a dutiful wife who helps her husband in earning and saving money to make his ambition blossom.

Chakki says, "All these days, for the sake of your boat and net, I went selling fish in the east"(18). This shows that the fisherwomen, besides performing their domestic chores, occupies an important position in contributing to the family's income. According to the Holy Bible, "A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones (prov. 12:4).

As a manager of family income woman is very calculating loss and gain while spending money. She distributes judiciously the income an different heads such as necessities, comforts and luxuries. Chakki is the woman who also contributes to the

family income through her own earning within or outside the home. She has positive contribution to the family income by the work. Kalikunju asks, “Chakki Chedathi, the boat and nets after all came from some of your earnings too. The money you made by luggish around in a basket”!(54).

Take a look at the plight of the wives of today. A loveless state exists where the woman wants to lead a life of her own as she pleases. It is not good. But to be patient, an loving with her husband and live together peacefully. Problems and sufferings will come in life. But the woman who puts up patiently with troubles changes her husband and his nature, is a veritable crown to her husband. Chembankunju considering a life without Chakki. That sort of a life would be incomplete and has no future. Chembankunju declares, “All the prosperity and grace in his life had come from Chakki. There wasn’t another fisherwoman as capable as she was”(190).

The honour of the woman lies in living with her husband. When a husband is honoured in the presence of everyone, it is certainly an honour to the spouse also. Nallapennu asked to Achakunju, “How did chembankunju Chettan buy his boat and nets? He gave everything to Chakki”(76).

God makes men and women different on purpose. The female whom God designs to bear children. She is the “heart” of the home, the nurturer, the caretaker. To a woman, childbearing and rearing is a very important experience in her married life. Parenting teen girls in the twenty-first century is a challenge! Too many negative outside influences rob our daughters of innocence at an early age.

Chembankunju’s pretty daughter Karuthamma and Pareekutty love each other. Klaruthamma’s mother, Chakki knows about it and reminds her daughter about the life they lead within the boundaries of strict social tradition. “Chakki’s mother too must have told her about the tradition of the sea, the demands it made on its women”(8).

Mother, who occupies the central place in the family, is make to lead the life of sacrifice and dependence. Their main obligation is fostering children and showing a better way for them in their life. The society imposes the responsibility of protecting and taking care of children and family.

Chakki is a very strong and capable mother who never cares about her life, but is concerning about her children's future life. As a mother, she is primarily responsible for the child's habit of self-control, orderliness, industriousness, theft or honesty. She is the first teacher of the child. She transmits social heritage to the child. It is from mother that the child learns the laws of the race, the manner of men, moral code and ideals. "Chakki is a fisherwoman born and bred on the seaside and an inheritor of a long tradition of sealore"(7).

Chakki advises her daughter Karuthamma just like all other mothers on the shore. They believe firmly that the prosperity of shore heavily depends on the values of woman there. Chakki says to Karuthamma, "The life of the man who goes out to sea rests in the hands of his woman on the shore"(8).

Chakki imparts a great truth to her daughter then, "virtue is the most important thing, my daughter purity of the body and mind! A fisherman's wealth is his fisherwoman's virtue"(9). Teach the children only that which is good. This is the hallmark of a good mother. Bringing up children in the right or wrong path lies in mother's hands. "Chakki scrutinized Karuthamma from head to toe"(7).

Chakki is also fiercely protective of her daughter and though she forbids Karuthamma's union with Pareekutty, she helps to ease her daughter's pain. Oneday Karuthamma tells her mother, "My body can't bear this burden any more"(72). At first Chakki doesn't comprehend why Karuthamma is weeping. Chakki understands the inner conflicts of her daughter and consoles her.

*The Atharva Veda* asserts that, "the success of women in her married life depends upon her proper training during the Brahmacharya. Marriage is looked upon as a religious and social duty. In those days girls are not educated. Early marriages become common. Girls are married soon after puberty. As a responsible mother, Chakki has reminded Chembankunju that they have a grown up daughter at home. "Every night when he counted the day's earnings, Chakki would say, 'wo need to get the girl married'(61).

A good mother loves her family and provides an atmosphere where each member can find acceptance, security and understanding. Chakki Speaks to the daughter, “Daughter your father has big ideas. With the big catch this year, he will buy land and a house of our own. And then he’ll get you married off”(33).

Chakki is a deeply pious woman. She believes that the fisherman survives only through the chaste wife stands on the seaside, praying and waiting for her husband’s safe return. And that was the lode of hope the women of the seaside clung to “on a mere plank of wood, the first fisherman had rowed through waves and currents to a point beyond the horizon. While on the shore his faithful wife had stood facing the west, waiting”(7).

The nugget of faith that Chakki melds into her everyday life and makes it her very own. “Chakki once again folded her palms in a gesture of invocation and called out her prayers”(50). According to Oscar Wilde, “Women are meant to be loved, not to be understood”. Karuthamma a young woman who bravely battles every adversity thrown at her, despite suffering in the pain of separation from her beloved. Karuthamma is a sound girl; not gives to reckless impulses. Even if she is left alone, she asks, “Am I the one who is tainted”?(34).

Swami Vivekananda says, “That country and that nation which did not respect women have never become great nor will ever be in the future”. He emphasizes the ideal that through education, women should be enabled to solve their own problems by thinking independently. Women are forced to suppress their emotions in a male dominated society. Teach the women to think independently by themselves and arrive at decisions on the basis of their own judgement instead of depending on man or blindly following the custom.

Most women in the rural as well as in the urban areas are not fully participating in the economic, political and social fields since they are not being educated and since the old social values are continuing to operate, inhibiting them. The educated woman would get the ability and confidence to form her own judgement and may not subscribe to the old ideal of looking upon the husband as a God. The character Karuthamma predicts:

“Now she had reasons to lose herself in thought. So she began to fathom herself. And with it began an understanding of the gravity of life. She would have to watch out for herself. Each step had to be carefully considered. In which case, would she ever be able to ski and run without a care?”(15).

Karuthamma falls in love with a muslim fish trader whom she is unable to marry. She marries a person chosen by her parents and lives her life as a good wife and mother. She was the factor most responsible for a life of discipline(156). Karuthamma is the mistress of a house. She has many things to do. Karuthamma has been taught many lessons at her home. She knows how to bring prosperity into a house. She will turn the orphan, destitute Palani into fisherman Palani. She decides to turn him around. “Her determination to discipline their lifestyle had to be put into effect”(141). As if Palani is a guileless child who has no knowledge of life or living. Karuthamma describes what it will be to lead a regulated life. The old woman in the northern house says, ‘we have entrusted a young man to you. You are responsible now’!(126).

All women desires their husbands love. Chakki has to put up with so much. That is what it meant to be a mother. Chembankunju blames Chakki for not having anyone around to even boil him a cup of water. All of that her mother will tolerate. And she will endure even more for her sake. Karuthamma has a role model to leads her on. That is her mother.

Karuthamma falls prostrate at Chembankunju’s feet. He shakes her off and turns away. She lays there for a long while and then rise. Her mother blesses Karuthamma. “Heed my words”, her mother advises. “But her mother had blessed her. It was with her consent that she left home”(127).

Karuthamma is Palani’s wife. Even if she has no rights, she has her responsibilities. Karuthamma endures any hardship. All she wants to be is one of these countless fisherwoman who lives their lives out willing to put up with anything and everything.

Marriage becomes an irrevocable union as far as the wife is concerned. The smriti writers preaching that the wife should looks upon her husband as a God. The

position of women in the Indian society has been a very complicated one. The Gandian era and the decades after independence have seen tremendous changes in the status and the position of the women in Indian society.

Thus all the female characters in the novel live according to the duties assigned to them by their male counterparts. Chakki has a responsible a lot as Chemban Kunju's wife. Karuthamma suffers as an obedient daughter and a weeping wife. Nallapennu suffers because of her poverty due to the irresponsible ways of Achakunju, who spends his earnings on drinks. The novel *Chemmeen* qualifies the woman performs the role of wife, partner, organizer, administrator, director, re-creator, economist, mother, disciplinarian, teacher, health officer, artist and queen in the family at the same time.

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