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Sahitya Akademi



India International Centre

invite you to

**meet the author**

Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai





Thakazhi receiving the Sahitya Akademi Award from Jawaharlal Nehru, 1958; also in the picture are S. Radhakrishnan, Krishna Kripalani and Prabhakar Machwe

Thirty years ago, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai received the Sahitya Akademi Award from the Akademi President Jawaharlal Nehru. The Akademi published his Award winning novel *Chemmeen* in Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu, and recommended it for translation into foreign languages under UNESCO's Major Project of Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values. The English translation of the novel was rejected by so many publishers in England and America that UNESCO almost despaired of its finding a publisher. Ultimately when Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, and Harpers, New York, published it in 1962, *Chemmeen* became an instant hit and translations appeared in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Russian, Czech, Slav, Polish, Hungarian, Arabic, Sinhalese and Vietnamese.

Twenty-two years after the publication of *Chemmeen* came Thakazhi's masterpiece *Kayar*, spanning three cen-

turies and six generations. Both these novels were cited for the Jnanpith Award, which Thakazhi received in 1985 from the Spanish poet Octavio Paz.

In the Jnanpith Award brochure, V.K. Narayana Menon says:

"Thakazhi is a prolific writer, thirty-five novels and some five hundred short stories, not to mention essays, travelogues and other miscellaneous writing... He is now in his early seventies, but is still changing, developing, development such as his is a measure not only of his creativity, but of his character. And there can be no limits to what one can expect from a pen that is so fluent, so tense, so inventive."

Even three decades before, Thakazhi had secured an abiding place in the history of Malayalam literature. In *Malayala Sahitya Charitram* published in 1958, P.K. Parameswaran Nair wrote:

"Attracted by the realistic approach of authors like Maupassant, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai wrote his first

novelettes *Patita Pankajam* and *Pratiphalam* which, by their candid treatment of themes long held taboo in literature and the refutation of conventional norms of morality, offended the tastes of orthodox circles as nothing else had done before. Later he turned to the class question and produced works like *Talayodu... Totiyute Makan...* and *Tendi-vargam...*

"In *Randidangazhi...* the reader is prone to suspect an element of the romantic in the story... but what the author seems to be more concerned about is the atmosphere of the novel, charged as it is with the disquiet of class conflicts and the realism of his characters which, to say the least, is intense.

"*Chemmeen*, a later and more famous work, is also conceived from this angle; in spite of the romantic features of the tale, the scenes and characters are undeniably true. The events have their setting in the huts of the fisher-folk who inhabit the Ambalapuzha-Trikunnappuzha area of coastal Travancore... The story itself is built upon one of their many superstitions: they believe, it is said, that a wife who commits adultery while her husband is away at sea

brings down the wrath of Kadalamma (Mother Sea) on the innocent man. Whether the notion, by itself, is too romantic to be believed is another question, but we know that the conviction which the realism of its atmosphere carries is powerful enough to persuade the reader to suspend any disbelief in its denouement. Besides, the criticism that the mixing up of the raw realism of life with such irrational conceptions involves an element of self-contradiction and is not compatible with the norms of the modern novel would seem to lose much of its validity when we note that the tale concerns a people to whom superstitions are real and inescapable and the tragedy of its characters which they would interpret in terms of the wrath of 'Mother Sea' can also be interpreted, if we so choose, in terms of chance or of psychical forces which make the effect inevitable when the cause is there...

"What Thakazhi seeks to impress on his readers through his portrayals of the life of the community, governed as it is with conventions and superstitions and all those passions which man is heir to, is its disconcerting reality. And his success is due as



Thakazhi with Sugathakumari, Padma Sachadev and Vishnu Prabhakar

much to the suggestive capacities of his style and ability to invest a tale with an authentic and appropriate atmosphere as to his subtle use of even superstitions to enhance its poignancy...

The distinguishing feature of Thakazhi's (short) fiction is his ability to create a whole atmosphere with a few broad strokes of his pen... His mastery in creating a climate for his story is admirably sustained by an engaging style which disarms any scepticism his readers may have in believing in him. Oftentimes

we come across perverted specimens among his creations, but the psychology behind their doings is convincing enough. He knows no reservations and is blunt when he holds the torch along the labyrinths of sex, so much so that the puritans among his readers may frown on him, may find his accounts rather morbid and even repulsive, but there is no gainsaying their power and realism. It is no gentle breeze that fans his creations, but tornados of a mysterious force..."

## A Select Bibliography

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Thakazhi at his home



Indra Nath Choudhuri welcoming Thakazhi at Rabindra Bhavan

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### SHORT STORIES

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### DRAMA

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### MEMOIRS AND TRAVELOGUES

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- ORMAYUTE TIRANGALLI. Kottayam: SPCS, 1985. 339 p. 20 cm.

## A Chronology

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| <p>1912 Birth</p> <p>1930 E.S.L.C<br/>First literary work,<br/>a short story published</p> <p>1933 First novel published<br/><i>Tyagattinu Pratiphalam</i></p> <p>1934 Pledership from<br/>Trivandrum Law College</p> <p>1935 Set up practice as a lawyer</p> <p>1956 Member,<br/>Kerala Sahitya Akademi</p> <p>1957 Sahitya Akademi Award<br/>for <i>Chemmeen</i><br/>Visited South East Asian<br/>Countries including Japan</p> <p>1959 First visit to U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1962 First visit to U.S.A., U.K.<br/>and France</p> <p>1965 Kerala Sahitya Akademi<br/>Award for <i>Enipatikal</i></p> <p>1966 Member, General Council<br/>and Executive Board of<br/>Sahitya Akademi.</p> <p>1970 Visited U.K. and France</p> | <p>1973 Member of the Jury,<br/>National Film Awards<br/>Committee</p> <p>1974 Soviet Land Nehru Award<br/>Second visit to U.S.S.R.</p> <p>1978 Member of the Jury,<br/>National Film Awards<br/>Committee</p> <p>1979 President,<br/>Kerala Sahitya Akademi</p> <p>1980 Vayalar Award for <i>Kayar</i></p> <p>1984 Jnanpith Award<br/>Award from the 3rd World<br/>Hindi Conference</p> <p>1985 Padma Bhushan</p> <p>1986 Fellow of the Kerala<br/>Sahitya Akademi<br/>D.Litt. <i>Honoris Causa</i> of<br/>the Kerala University,<br/>Second visit to U.S.A.<br/>Visited West Germany</p> <p>1987 D.Litt. <i>Honoris Causa</i> of<br/>the Gandhiji University,<br/>Kottayam</p> |
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Thakazhi receiving the Jnanpith Award from Octavio Paz