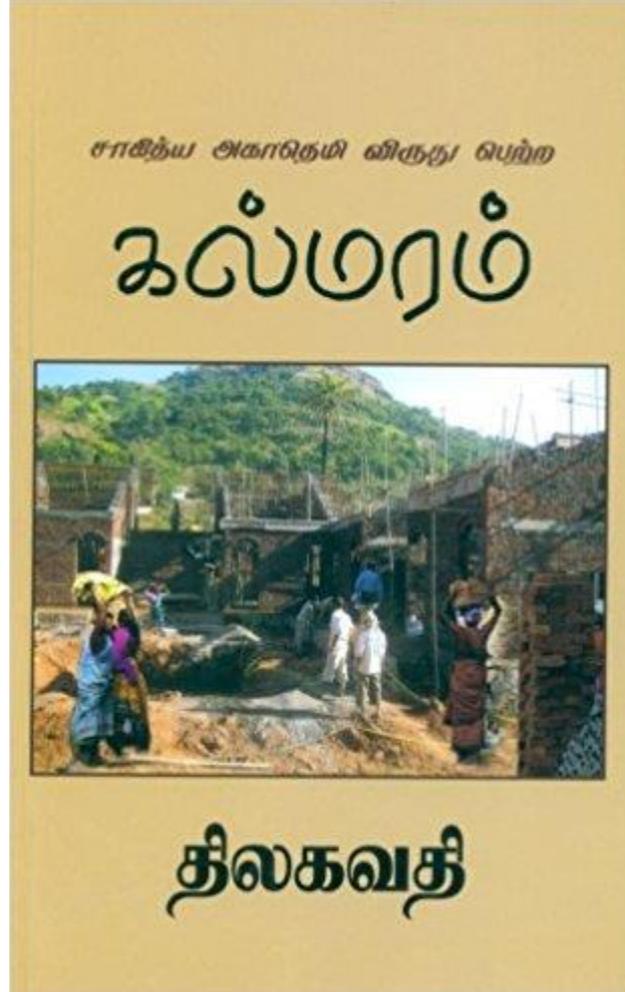


Reflection of a Dystopian Society in G. Thilakavathi's *Kalmaram*

Shanmathi. S. and Ms. J. Sridevi



Courtesy: <https://www.amazon.in/Kalmaram-Sahitya-Academy-Winner-Thilakavathi/dp/B00HWW2QH4>

Abstract

G. Thilakavathi is a former IPS Officer and writer from Tamil Nadu, India. She became the first woman to become an Indian Police Office (IPS) Officer from Tamil Nadu in 1976. She is a poet, short story writer, translator and novelist. Her collection of short stories *Theiyumo Sooriyan* and *Arasigal Aluvathillai* won the Government of Tamil Nadu's best short story prize. Her literary works have been adapted into film and television series. Her

novel *Kalmaram* was awarded Sahitya Academy Award for Tamil in 2005. Thilakavathi is much talented in merging comic and serious elements in her works. Her writing style is in colloquial slang, which invites the readers inside the huts of the plebeian. She portrayed the exact lives of the working class people as crystal clear. The novel *Kalmaram* focuses on the poverty-stricken lives of the construction labours, the cunning nature of the capitalists, careless politicians and resilience of the construction workers as well as women characters. The main aim of this paper is to prove social evils faced by the working class people.

Keywords: G. Thilakavathi, Kalmaram, Capitalism, Dystopia, Patriarchy.

Dystopian Works

The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction states that dystopian works depict a negative view of “the way the world is supposedly going in order to provide urgent propaganda for a change in direction” (360). In this novel, the author Thilakavathi has concentrated on the unrecognized hurdles and struggles faced by the working class people. She focused particularly on the construction workers. People from villages migrated to cities when the agriculture went impossible without rain. A fancy city fantasies the innocent eyes of the people to settle in urban areas. The rural people come in search for betterment in their life. Unfortunately their state of lives gets worse when they become a construction worker. They face many risks in their lives like not receiving sufficient wages, hard to get compensation from employers for unexpected accidents and there is no safety in this job. The working class people are forced to lead a miserable life in cities. The women workers have to come across the sexual harassment created by the male workers. She tried to expose their way of life to the contemporary sophisticated and middle class people. She wants to see a change in their life and as well as in the society.

Struggle of a single mother

The novel begins when Adhilakshmi reaches home after finishing her house maid job. “She brought some leftover rice and vegetables from her owner’s house” (27). This scene tells the readers that, these people are surviving with the leftover food of their masters. They rarely went to hospitals or bought medicines when they sick. The poverty did not allow them to spend money on medicines and hospitals for petty issues. When Kaveri gets Toe web infection, “she took the kerosene from the kitchen and applied in between her toes” (28). They try to cure

themselves by doing simple first aid. Adhilakshmi is the daughter of a Maistry who employed more than fifty masons under him. She fell in love with the man who worked under her father and eloped to get married. They found tough to lead the family with a single salary, so she accompanied her husband to work in construction sites. There she faced all sorts of bitter experiences as a female mason. Unluckily her husband fell down from the third floor of a building and died. He wanted to educate his son Kasi and to see him as a doctor. His death pushed the family deep into a pit called poverty. So Kasi dropped out of his school at the age of ten and worked as a child labour in various fields to raise the family. Adhilakshmi's house maid job and Kasi's salary helped them to get the elder daughter Kanniamma married. Adhilakshmi was worried whether her son too will end up with the same fate like his father, so she did not allowed him to work in construction site. As a single mother she worked hard to raise her family.

Irresponsible Male characters

Kaniamma's husband and Kasi were not ready to hold the responsibilities in the family. They lived their lives as a livestock in the beginning. Both Kaniamma's husband and Kasi lied to the bride's family that they earn sufficient salary to run a family and got married. Kaniamma's husband was diseased with HIV and ignored the medical treatment. When Kaniamma advised him, he abused her that she was not a virtuous woman. He blamed her that her immorality is the reason for his sickness. This brutal attitude deserted him from his wife. He was hospitalized and his life became miserable after Kaniamma left.

Kasi was unemployed for many months even after his marriage. His unemployment status seized his respect from his wife. He was disappointed with continuous failures and lived an unfulfilled life until he was hired by R.R.M. a wealthy business man, in his Construction site. He worked sincerely but not soulfully. The sufferings of the labours and R.R.M.'s selfish bossy attitude depressed him much.

Betrayed Marriages

Women are betrayed in terms of marriage. Most of the groom's family thinks that their son will turn responsible if they get married. So they lie to the bride's family that their sons have a permanent job with good salary and savings. Kanniamma and Ragini are the two scapegoats of betrayed marriage. Kanniamma is the second daughter of Adhilakshmi. Her

neighbours threatened her mother to get her daughter married as early as possible. They believed growing up a female child and protecting her from the wicked world is the challenging task for the parents. The sudden marriage wrapped her inside a sadistic family life. Kannamma was tortured by her husband and in-laws. They looted her jewelry and sold it in bank without her knowledge. They locked her at the backside in the name of custom and traditions.

Pregnant sister-in-law came home. Both of them are head of the childless. They should not meet each other. ‘So, they ordered me not to come outside and locked me at the back. One can be without food, one can be without water. Is it possible to remain normal without attending nature call too?’. (44)

Kannamma informed her husband that her mother-in-law is ill treats her during his absence. Her husband did not care anything about his wife or the baby inside the womb. Instead of enquiring, he scolded her back for complaining. So, without informing her husband she moved to her mother’s house. There she spent her days thinking about her painful past:

He will hit me continuously and crush me to the floor during the quarrel. I will move away to hide myself and cry. He won’t leave me for that too. He will come there and twist my hand. He scolds me that I create a big scene for a small pat. Do you think men won’t raise hand towards their wife, always?. . He beats me until my body aches, kicks until my hand and legs swell, vulgar and abusive words, rolling me wildly in the mat. (88)

Kasi’s mother exaggerated to the bride’s family that her son earns thousand to two thousand rupees, in order to hold the hands of Ragini in terms of marriage. Ragini studied till tenth standard, so everyone treated her with more care. Only after getting married she found out that her husband is unemployed and not fit for any job. In beginning she expected more from her husband and gets disappointed often. Her focus was only on the money. Her character had a transformation when she got Supervisor job under her husband’s boss R.R.M. Whenever her boss scolded the poor workers during unexpected accidents she felt pity for them. She realized that money cannot buy happiness. So she helped the workers when they were in need. Ragini encouraged her husband in all aspects.

R.R.M., the Cunning Capitalist

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R.R.M. was shown as a benevolent business man in the beginning. The man is not only rich in money but also by heart, everyone believed. He hired Ragini as the supervisor of the construction site, because he thought hiring an educated supervisor may cost him extra and may not be trustworthy. She accepted whatever he gave as a salary and did not bargained. His selfish nature is revealed when he did not show any concern towards the worker who got injured during the constructing work. When the victim's mother cried for help, R.R.M. answered her "Did I told your daughter to get injured? She must be more careful and dutiful during her work" (147). It is the responsibility of the boss to compensate the worker who got injured in the site, but R.R.M. was not ready for that. Each time he shouts at the unexpected accidents. Once he handed over jewels and currencies to Ragini when the vigilance came for raid, without knowing the upper class tricks Ragini hid them in her hut and saved him.

Unconcerned life

When Kasi went to Chinnathayi's hotel, he found a controversial argument between two different political party volunteers. Each boasted the decorations and expenditures of their own leader's political meetings. Chinnathayi shouted at them for praising the men who did not helped the poor in anyway. "The stagnant water reaches the height of knee, under the pipe. We are placing the pots above the bricks one on top. Why can't you put cement over there? Is there a street light? It went off within a week. Why can't you put light over there?" (50). It shows the government's careless attitude towards these voiceless people. The ruling party as well as the opponent is not ready to solve the queries of the poor people. The politicians walk down the road only during the time of election and gives falls promises to get vote. The sufferings of working class people are not concerned by anyone.

Suseela, a Supporting character

Suseela is a good friend of Kaveri. She done her masters in Arts and joined her Doctoral degree. In her research she decided to concentrate on the problems of the construction workers. So she stayed in the area one among the other construction workers lived. After seeing their difficulties she dropped her thesis work and helped the people around her. Everyone thought that she is here to convert them to some other religion. As days moved on, she became one among them and guided them. She even criticized the politicians for not taking proper measures on their own area problems. Her ideas were optimistic. She encouraged everyone for their good progress. Once, a man insulted Suseela that if she would have submitted her

thesis regarding their problems, the government would have given something for them. Suseela angrily replied:

See... we got independence. It is our duty to earn in this Independent country. We have rights to ask the profits according to our efforts. It is a pleasure for this Democratic country to give discounts and prizes to boost up the employees. . . The government is not a philanthropist existed during olden days, to give everything. We didn't lose our self respect like beggars and ready to accept whatever they give. (62)

Suseela encouraged her friend Kaveri and her family. She introduced the Mason Training School for Women to Kaveri and Ragini. She advised them to be independent and not to look upon others hands for finance. Without her optimistic verses neither Kaveri nor her family resisted the difficulties. Like a supporting pole, Suseela raised their thinking. She admitted them as Union Member and taught all the merits about being a member in Union. Suseela fed them strength and spirit to all.

Conclusion

Throughout this novel, the author Thilakavathi has concentrated on struggles of the working class people in this dystopian society. People suffered due to poverty and irresponsible politicians. Women suffered in terms of marriage and custom. This story has exposed the agonies of construction workers and their families. They are suppressed economically and socially. Through her writings the writer wanted to bring their life to light.

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