

**D. Selvaraj's *Thol*:
A Sacred Scripture on Social Realism and Angelic Womanhood**

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Tanneries in Dindigul recruit working-class people. It indicates that the people are in search of fulfilment of their basic needs which is the main reason for their hard work in leather factory. They are affected by skin diseases because they stand in the dirty water which was used to clean the skin (animals). They are unaware of the diseases which slowly kill them. They continue to work hard in these unhealthy working conditions for their survival in the cruel society. Their emotions force them to fight against the ill-treatment of the owners. In many places, the readers are shocked by the effort taken by the workers to claim their identity. They do not allow others to hurt their self esteem or their self respect.

Literature and culture are interrelated. It unlocks the hidden perspectives of a culture. In brief words, culture cannot be understood without literature. Literature reflects the incidents which happen in a society. It also plays a key role in reflecting the lifestyle, behaviour, values, history and beliefs of people who live in a society. Culture helps in moulding an individual's life and it assists in providing an identity to an individual. It has the capacity to evoke the feeling of oneness in humans and also to insist that they should lead their life in a good manner. Selvaraj, in his novel *Thol*, describes some characters that possess their true identity. Identity plays a major role in bringing out the true nature of an individual. The author takes an initiative of depicting real incidents with the author's apt choice of words.

History unfolds on how India was under the control of British and how terribly the wealth of the nation was swindled for the development of their own country. India was under the control of British people to the extent where that India was under the gunpoint of the British, the mark of British invasion in India still speaks volumes. The case is totally different in Tamil Nadu; people are ruled by their own people in the name of caste. Caste has a great impact on revealing one's self identity. An individual is identified in the society with caste as his identity. At that time, most of them are unaware of them being victims of slavery. The fact is that they misunderstand that they are being ruled by British. They do not know that they are being ruled by their own capitalists as well. The capitalists make them feel that they are illiterates and low-class people. This treatment restricts them from speaking against the evil practices of untouchability.

In the beginning, they are not respected by others as human beings. Through this novel, the author makes everyone realise the qualities and sufferings of people belonging to this side of the society. He instils the idea that each person has to show respect to their fellow human beings. He focuses on the life of the Dalit people who are working in the leather factory. Normally, in history, Dalits are portrayed as victims and not as heroes. This is the reason why some people believe that Dalit literature is one among the postmodernist literatures. History itself gives importance to the people who belong to the high-class society. Those who belong to the Dalit community are usually known as semi-proletariat.

The skin on the body is like a roof on the house. It protects the parts of the body from unwanted things. Similarly, a culture protects people from suppression without any partiality. *Thol* is a novel portraying Dalits as heroes and not as victims. People avoid Dalit people due to the colour of the skin covering their body. This story proves that they also have dignity, power and self respect just like the others.

The characters in *Thol* are not ready to accept all the insults and sufferings for the sake of survival. They change the rules and mould themselves for their growth. This story takes place in Dindigul district. The life of the workers in the leather factory, the workers similar to them and the people who belong to the locality around the leather factory are mainly focused in this novel. A cruel system called “Muri” existed in the locality to swindle the life of the people. People borrow money from the money lenders to manage their financial crisis and pay the interest for the borrowed money. The moneylenders employ some rogues to collect the money from them. The hidden motto behind ‘muri’ is not to equalise the interest but to extract the unsettled money with the cruel act of molesting women. The rogues are very cruel while torturing the innocent girls as well as women. They rape them in the street in front of everyone. No one dares enough to fight them. Sometimes the leather shop owners give sexual torture to the female workers. In spite of the all these struggles, they are not ready to lose their self respect. They have a skin which is covered by the true colour. These women lose their chastity physically, but they are rigid in their strength internally. It does not mean that only the physical abuse is considered as harassment. Abusing women with words is also considered harassment. They consider that they lose their chastity mainly because of the abusive words.

They bother about their culture rather than their outlook on life and people. People praise Madhavi for her chastity, but she is from the devadasi community. Similarly, the women characters become very powerful after realizing the truth about their ill-treatment. People are fond of leather material because of its flexibility and its gorgeous looks. They do not think about leather factory working conditions and the hardships the workers undergo while making leather out of the animal’s flesh. People are unaware of the factories in Tamil Nadu where workers harm their skins by spending their time to launder the leather in the chemical dilutes. Communal disparities add more to the social issues that have been taking place down the ages. Illegal acts like ‘muri’ are used to swindle the properties of people. Demolishing the iron gates of communal suppression, workers of the leather factory are integrated with people around their locality and fight against highly influential people. This novel clearly shows the pride imbibed in the body of suppressed people which helps them gain

their identity through their struggle with the upper-class monsters. According to Raymond Williams, “victims are not heroes”. In this novel, the author has shown victims as heroes in many aspects. People in the factory are not the ones who stay inactive and vaguely tolerate the atrocities of the high-class monsters. They fight against the violent behaviour of the upper class, grab their rights and attain their rightful position in the society. Their emotions are not only a motivation for them but it is the reason for the improvement of their entire community.

Thol is a novel based on the story of people working in the leather industry. This is not only a story but the history of Dalits who have been fighting to get their rights. This again makes an attempt to enthrall the life of people living in and around the leather industry in Dindigul district. The working-class nature of the people reflects in their use of language and their dialects. Women here are bold enough to defend anything in a positive manner. Their approach towards facing any suffering provides a sense of pride in their life. Their dignity lies in facing the difficulties they come across. Women are mentally stronger when compared to men. Each woman is portrayed as an independent thinker and actor as they do what they wish. According to the people portrayed in this novel, dignity is only confessing the truth without the slightest amount of misinformation in it. Not only women but also the people belonging to lower social status are forced to be submissive. In addition to this, Dalit women are seen as voiceless specimens while they are suppressed by their masters. Contradicting to this, women in this novel are revolutionary. They raise their voice against the injustice that happens to them as well as for the other women folk facing tyranny just like them. Characters in this novel are sketched in a realistic manner. All sorts of emotions are evoked with an aesthetic sense. Emotions play a vital role in this story. Emotions motivate them to make their next step ahead. It eradicates the ignorance that has been haunting them for a long time and eliminates the hindrance that has been suppressing them in a socio-political way. Any concept that is promulgated for the development of the backward or lower class is incorporated into the system with the help of emotions. It forces them to fight for the imbalance that prevails in the society in economic and political aspects.

Mustafa Miran is the owner of the leather factory. He is a womanizer. Chinnakili is one of the women who fall in his trap and she faces a brutal end as a result of his molestation. Being the owner and a member of the upper class society, his authority over poor people is unquestionable initially. The death of Chinnakili induces a sense of rage in Osaypu. While taking her to the cemetery, her corpse is not allowed to pass through the streets of the Brahmin households. This antagonises him even more and he seeks the help of Iruthayasami, who is a priest in the Church. Iruthayasami seeks the help of Shankar, an Advocate. Shankar, in spite of being a Brahmin, supports them and decides to fight for the justice of the suppressed class. Sundaresa Iyer is the father of Shankar. He has a good reputation in his place as well as among the people of his community.

He supports his son for the welfare of the suppressed people. Iruthayasami has influences Shankar and the IAS Officer to do deeds for the well-being of the lower-class people. At this moment, it starts raining and the people get drenched in the pouring rain. The people belong to the upper-class not ready to allow them to move around their street. Shankar argues with them for their

rights with the help of his friend. Shankar, the IAS officer, Iruthayasami and Osaypu carry the corpse to the graveyard. After finishing the rituals of funeral, Shankar goes to his house. There, his mother Ambujathammal gets angry because she is worried of what the people of her community might say about her son's activity. As a person belonging to the Brahmin community, he is not supposed to touch the dead body of a low class person. He does not heed to her words and walks away from there.

Next day, Sundharesa Iyer and his friends ask Shankar if he is willing to be the leader of the association which has been started for the welfare of the suppressed people. At first, he gets confused thinking of his ability to manage such an association. He then accepts to take up the responsibility. Shankar and other people like Osaypu start to work for the association. The association is established in the street where the workers live. Initially, Shankar feels bad while walking on the street. He asks his friend about the distance between him and the people. He suggests that he should come out of his comfort zone, come closer to the people and make them feel that he is one among them. In the beginning, he is astonished when Iruthayasami and the others eat the food given by them.

Meanwhile, the owners of the leather factory discuss among themselves on how they can torture the workers. The workers eventually became aware of their rights through the association which has been formed for their welfare. People start to question the ill-treatment that is meted out on them. The owners feel ashamed of themselves. As the working hours are not just, the workers protest to reduce the duration of working hours. This angers the owners and they decide to take revenge on the outrageous protesters. They decide to attack them. After the death of Chinnakili, Mustafa Miran leaves the place. Police search for him but they do not get any information regarding the whereabouts of the convict. After a few days, the people inform the police that a dead body has been found. After thorough investigation, the police confirm that it is the dead body of Mustafa Miran. His uncle is a wealthy man who wants to save him from these issues. Fortunately, his death is in favour of the victims and the submissive people who were tortured by him. Chittammal, wife of Poochithevar, is bold and she lives near the hills surrounded by the paddy field. She belongs to the low-class community. She enters the police station and informs that she is the one who killed Mustafa.

Mustafa Miran's dead body is found dead in the field of Chittamma. Poochithevar, husband of Chitamma finds him dead while Chitamma with her glowing eyes sits by the dead body. Poochithevar initially thinks about the incident and then realises that Chitamma has murdered Mustafa to save herself from him. The case is taken to court and she is taken to the police station. In the police station, Chitamma waits for the inspector. She wants to document the whole incident that had happened before. She fails to narrate it clearly when the constables ask various questions. She thinks of narrating the whole story to the inspector. Poochithevar is not given a chance to have a word with them. Once the inspector arrived, Chitamma narrates the incident without leaving out any detail. The people are shocked to hear that she has committed a murder. She narrates the whole incident but says nothing but the truth. On this note, it is made clear that women are free to tell the

truth about any injustice that happens to them during this era. They can voice out their problems and hope to get justice.

Another important character is Arukkani. She is an epitome of love. Her story starts with the love of Osaypu. Osaypu is a member of an association which fights for the welfare of the lower community people. Arukkani helps Osaypu whenever he is in need of anything. She helps him when he gets injured in the course of riot; she offers to cure him. This is how Arukkani helps Osaypu and his friends when they face injuries during their protest. She is also one among the women who are chased by Miran. After some days, Osaypu is found missing from the village. He visits the village after six years. By this time, Arukkani is married to a Poosari. Poosari acts as if he has God's voice within him and informs that the marriage between Poosari and Arukkani is necessary. He states that God wants this marriage to happen. As people are blinded by superstitions, they agree to everything he says. As a result, Arukkani is married to Poosari.

Shankar is the head of the association. Osaypu once offers a hiding place to a man who was being chased by the police. When they run through the streets of the village, he finds Arukkani in her house. He seeks help from her. She saves the man from police by covering him with her saree while they check her house. They leave the house assuming them to be a married couple. The man who is saved by Arukkani feels the warmth of a mother from her. A mother protects her child from difficulties. Similarly, Arukkani protects him and has kept the promise given to Osaypu.

To conclude, a woman is denoted as a saviour in the case of Arukkani. She acts as the destroyer of evil in the case of Chitamma. A woman acts as an inducer of revolt in the case of Chinnakili. These women who live in Dindugal belong to a socially suppressed class have eradicated the cruelty of society in many ways. They have proved themselves to be a devouring and scintillating projection of powerful women in the minds of readers. The conventional idea that women belonging to this community are voiceless and cannot demand their needs is shattered. They eradicate it rather than merely voicing out the problems. This is proved by these three women characters. In this novel, the author has shown that skin colour is a culture holding people together.

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