



Padiyadachu Pindam Vakkal- A Sort of Social Rejection in Jaishree Misra's novel "Afterwards"

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Indian culture is special- it is immensely influenced by religion, rituals, values, customs etc. People have strong faith in religion. At the same time, many of them are superstitious also. I have always felt that religious beliefs and superstitious beliefs go together. Extreme dependence upon religion induces one to follow rituals, customs etc which are closely associated with their religious faith. Even though some habits or practises are purely illogical and unreasonable, gradually, they have become part of the religious traditions. Pinda Dana is a funeral ritual followed by all the Hindus. 'Pinda' means food and 'Dana' means offering. It is done by the son of the deceased. This ceremony is held to liberate the soul. With the completion of these rituals, the soul of the deceased leaves this world forever. It is performed with the purest intention to pay homage to the departed. But the very same ritual is misinterpreted and conducted with a vicious intention, to harass innocent people. In *Afterwards*, Maya's parents are extremely orthodox. They find it highly difficult to accept her elopement with Rahul Tiwari. The inquisitive and gossip mongering neighbours irritate them with their nagging comments and hence, Maya's father considers her as a dead person. He goes to the extent of performing her death rites even when she is alive. It is called 'Padiyadachu pindam vakkal'. "It's not like performing the usual last rites, you know. It's different when.... alive." (Misra4) In fact, through this evil practise of "Padiyadachu pindam vakkal", a person is forcefully thrown out from his or her own community. It is simply because the particular person is an unfavourable one to the community as he or she goes against the main stream or rather he or she is reluctant to follow the rules and regulations imposed by the community.

"Social rejection occurs when an individual is deliberately excluded from a social relationship or social interaction. ..." It is a very cruel custom to ostracise a living daughter by performing her death rites. After the completion of this ritual, just like a dead person who keeps no relationship with the family, this ostracised daughter should live away from the family without keeping any connection with them. She has no right in the family property. Even though the poor parents are dead against such a cruel deed, they obey the rules imposed by the conservative society. The poor people blindly follow the age- old customs, rituals and traditions. Due to ignorance and illiteracy, they never dare to question the irrational rituals and customs. The superior feeling of the patriarchal society is responsible for isolating a person from his beloved ones through "Padiyadachu pindam vakkal". It is another form of violence against women. Both the victim and her parents are disrespected and insulted. In a patriarchal society, Freedman says; ".....the social construction of a woman has meant a continual oppression of women." (Freedman14)

Who are we to keep someone in and out of a system? These religious practices and customs are senseless and quite absurd. Though this wrong practise is not mentioned as compulsory in any of the Hindu scriptures, everybody in the conservative society obeys this unwritten law imposed by the patriarchal community.

Later, Rahul comes back to Kerala to float the ashes of Maya in one of the holy rivers. It is a religious custom followed by Hindus with an aim to give peace to the departed soul. They believe that the soul remains even though the physical body dies and it reincarnates.

The death rites are in the form of chants or mantras. Only a very experienced priest with special knowledge should perform them. It is believed that once the death rites are being performed, it brings ‘moksha’(peace) to the departed soul. In between the ceremonies the priest summons the crows to have rice. “..... the belief being that they carried the souls of the dead who could not be physically present....” (Misra4)

“Red rice and gingili seeds.... chanted.” (Misra70)

“It means the death rites are done and the doors are closed forever she whispered.”

(Misra178)

To Rahul, it’s a surprise to see the Muslim driver paying respect to the Hindu Goddess, Mullakkal Devi. According to the driver, Devi is “very strong.” Keralites are cultured and civilized with a secular attitude. Then why on earth the educated parents of Maya couldn’t tolerate or accept her decision to abandon her husband and live with Rahul? He wonders why so open-minded Keralites fail to consider their daughter’s happiness for the sake of false family honour?

