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Marginalization: Girija's Struggle for Identity in Rajam Krishnan's *Lamps in the Whirlpool*

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to explore the marginalization of women in *Lamps in the Whirlpool* which was written by Rajam Krishnan, a major Tamil writer. *The Lamps in the Whirlpool* is translated from the *Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal*. Marginalization means to give no importance to a person. The word 'lamps' in the title symbolizes the situation of women in the family and the word 'whirlpool' indicates the problems that are faced by women. Specifically, the author gives an account of female experiences in the orthodox Brahmin community in this novel. She gives importance to 'madi' rules and how Brahmin women are suffered by that 'madi' rules. The present paper reveals how the protagonist, Girija struggles in an orthodox Brahmin family to

maintain her authority in her home and how she comes out by breaking the conventions in the orthodox set-up.

Keywords

Marginalization; Identity; Rajam Krishnan; *Lamps in the Whirlpool*.

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Rajam Krishnan, an excellent writer is known for writing social novels on the lives of people, such as poor farmers, salt workers and female workers and so on. Rajam Krishnan has considered and evaluating social conditions as background for her writing. She has written *Lamps in the Whirlpool*, a novel in 1997. Hence, contemporary customs and style of people of that age is reflected in her novel. Most of her works pay a special attention to feminism. In *Lamps in the Whirlpool*, the author depicted the struggle of women in Indian society. Bernard Shaw comments on the relationship between a husband and a wife as follows:

Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together; they only breakfast together, dine together and sleep in the same room. In most cases the women know nothing of the man's working life and he knows nothing of her working life [He calls it her home life]. (11)

From this point of view, it should be understood that a husband and a wife should mutually understand one another and share their views and feelings. But here, the protagonist has lost her identity and self-respect from the family members.

As she belongs to a Brahmin family, Girija is married to Swaminathan and beget three children Kavitha, Charu and Bharat. She is an educated as well as an employed woman. But soon after their marriage, she is not permitted to exhibit her talents and to express her personal views and ideas according to her desire. She is coerced to perform the traditional role and serves her mother-in-law. She engages herself in daily household tasks in order to obey

words of elders, but she is treated like a slave and unrecognized. Her physical and mental stress is not considered, due respect is not provided and priority is not given by her by the family members at any instance. Girija faces inconvenience because of her mother in law:

Kavi and Charu ran naked like slum children. If they wore clothes and touched her, she had to bathe again before cooking! She had been so ashamed of their appearances, especially when friends and students visited her. (11)

By and large, many people have education, but they do not question the traditions and culture of their ancestors. Particularly, in general, women are compelled to follow the rituals. In every community women are expected to follow the rituals and customs. For instance, Girija is a post graduate woman and worked as a teacher for eight years. But she is forced to follow 'madi' rules by her mother-in-law.

According to the Hindu law, a wife should take an early bath before entering the kitchen. She must wash her night clothes daily. Particularly, widows must wear narmadi. Girija follows this 'madi' rules, for seventeen years as per her mother-in-law's order. Girija does not like those rules, even though she follows it as the insistence her mother-in-law. Nevertheless, her mother-in-law does not help Girija in any way. Instead of that she remains free from all her responsibilities. Her foremost job is to supervise her daughter-in-law. Swaminathan pays his attention only on his business. He does not show any kind of support or love or affection for her. He denies staying or listening to her words and pretends as if he is busy with his work. Girija is always entangled with her household works and runs like a machine without ego. She feels that everything is sacrificed only for the sake of her husband and children's welfare.

The author tries to explore, how an ignored child gets into the wrong path. Krishnan introduces a character named Runo, who is ignored by her parents. She lost her mother and her father married another lady. She

becomes a drug addict and a drunkard. At last she commits suicide because of her boyfriend who cheated her. Rajam Krishnan through the character Ratna, a grand-daughter of Girija's mother-in-law symbolizes and presents her view on feminism. She stresses the need and importance of self-respect and identity that she fails to think about it. Ratna inquires Girija "Tell Girija, you are imprisoned in the four dark walls of this tiny kitchen where your education and skills are wasted. Girija, are you happy with this life? (12)". The word of Ratna makes the protagonist Girija realize and analyze the place given by her husband and mother-in-law. After realizing the situation she could understand that she is treated like a worm without any respect and recognition. Eventually, Girija decides to come out of that mechanical life so without giving prior information to anyone she steps out her home and reach Rishikesh Ashram. Before her departure from her home, she removes her 'diamond ring, earring and nose ring' that removal which is symbolized as the 'bondage of slavery'. Moreover, Girija removes her 'mangal sutra' instead of that she wears a chain because it was bought out of her own earnings.

In this novel, Rajam Krishnan gives a different view on 'mangal sutra'. It is considered as a sacred thing, but Girija considered it as 'bondage of slavery'. At last, Girija decides to stay in a hostel. Her friend Annie supports and offers her a job as a teacher for the pay of Rs. 400/-. Annie advises Girija to accept the job for the time being and appreciates her. "Very good, Girija, you have taken a great stride forward you have discarded some of our ugly customs" (72). When Ratna notices bare neck without 'mangal sutra', she appreciates her action of removing the mark of slavery. She wonders why some people are emotionally attached to this even after their husbands have disowned them. At the end, Girija accepts the job and leads her life independently.

Men and women are equal and should be given mutual respect. Lamps in the Whirlpool unquestionably represents the life of women in the contemporary

age of Rajam Krishnan. Women had no rights to express their thoughts or feelings during that period. But now that condition has drastically changed.

Women have the same feelings as same as men like, love, passion, friendship and so on. Always a woman sacrifices her life for others. For instance, in her childhood, she lives for her parents, in her later life, she lives for her husband and children and at the old age, she lives for her grandchildren.

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