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PARADIGMATIC SHIFT OF GIRIJA IN RAJAM KRISHNAN'S
LAMPS IN THE WHIRLPOOL

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"A If I am not for myself who is for me?

And if I am for myself what am I?

And if not now, when?"

-Hillel

Nature consists of equal participation of all the living and non living organisms. Formation of separate set of communities results in the emergence of diversity among the world people. Each and every community has its own universally similar rules and norms for women. Considering this similarity it is known that women are placed a step under men depending upon the physical strength, emotional strength and financial necessity. It is considered that women are meant to sacrifice, to look after, and to feed their family and relations which results in the loss of self-identity and self-respect. Women must realize their own strength, likings and ability to achieve things as their men do. The novel *Lamps in the Whirlpool* (1997) by Rajam Krishnan portrays a picture of women community which is oppressed under the patriarchal and rule dominated society. The novelist brings a vivid conclusion at the end of the novel by developing self-respect and self-dignity in the character of the female protagonist Girija.

Rajam Krishnan is born in Tirchirapalli district in Tamil Nadu. She is well known for writing social novels that tells about the lives of the ordinary people that are not usually depicted in modern Tamil literature. She has written more than eighty books including novels, short stories and biographies and moreover she is an excellent translator from Malayalam to Tamil. She is the recipient of Sarhiya Akaademi award in 1973 for her Tamil novel *Verukku Neer*.

The status of a woman is always dependent on a man. The self identity and symbol of women is suppressed by the orthodox society that lays some strict restrictions to keep them under control. The freedom of thought, action, wish and choosing in women fades away after the marriage ceremony. There are certain conventions and suggestions that make a woman humiliated and disturbed. In the novel *Lamps in the Whirlpool*, Rajam Krishnan shows different phases of women in their life time that includes childhood, female adolescence and marital life through the character Girija. She represents a typical girl who sacrifices her whole life for the sack her family by hiding her own whims and wishes in all aspects. But in contrary the character of Ratana pictured as an independent and self-possessed girl in her early thirties. Towards the end the novel the novelist brings out the different kinds of women with different kinds of attitudes towards life with the motif of being self-dependent.

Lamps in the Whirlpool is totally a character based novel. The story moves along with the development of the female protagonist Girija who is a well educated woman with the degrees M.A., B.ed and has eight years of experience as a school teacher with a comfortable life possessing both financial and mental strength. But after her marriage to Swaminathan who is a Chartered Accountant made her life miserable through sacrificing her desires, ambitions and talents and more than all she becomes stoical person. After seventeen

years of her married life she realizes that her selfless contribution to her family is of no use because everyone in her family is not very much happy and contented with her. No one in her family understands her including her children, they are least aware of her state of mind and they never felt that she too has a heart in her with its own wishes and likings. But she worries about her family members all the time. Before marriage she is very much contented with herself, and she is peaceful and happy. An American writer Blackstone says that by marriage is a legal existence of woman is suspended or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything, her life and she are one and she is him.

After the marriage ceremony Girija move from her home town Chingleput to Delhi where she oppressed and suppressed by her mother-in-law who follows strict and orthodox Brahminical mudi rules. Every meal that is served to her mother in law needs to be very clean and to be prepared by Girija after her bath. Girija is restricted to touch few things sometimes even her own children because she has to prepare food for her mother-in-law. She manipulates herself to adapt herself to the mudi rules by oppressing all her feeling and wishes. This makes her a submissive creature in the family. She consoles herself by hides her inner self just for the welfare of the members of her family, in return she gets only disrespect and ignored by everyone in the family.

There is gender discrimination seen throughout the novel. Girija has three children, the eldest is Kavitha, elder is Charu and the youngest is Bharath. Any issues regarding Kavitha and Charu is considered as an ill-offence but whereas Bharath has a special place of forgiveness and excuses. This makes the girls to be aware of gender difference since their childhood. Moreover the girls are trained to be more responsible than the boy. Even Girija feels this kind of distinction with her husband Swaminathan. Being a Chartered Account he is used to travel often, whenever he sets up his travel it is Girija who packs his cloths and does every necessary works for her husband, but she dare not enquire about his trip. Once she questioned about the secret box that always kept haunting her mind, as a result of which her husband behaved violently by throwing his plate and glasses on the ground.

Every self-oppressed woman needs to face a turning point to bring back their actual strength and identity. Girija feels this point when she meets her husband's niece Ratna, who symbolizes a perfectly independent girl who is on her research in social work. Girija is very much impressed by Ratna and admires her. She gets a sense of self-observation when Ratna introduces her classmate Abu to her. Abu is a social worker who researches on the education of women gives a questioner to Girija to be answered. Each and every question in the sheet makes her to observe her life keenly and makes her to emphasize herself and to feel the transformation from an independent and respectable woman with self respect and equality to a dependent and non-considered human being in an orthodox family with self-oppression and sacrifice. She questions herself about her life and introspect it as a whole and feels that she sacrifices her whole life for her family for seventeen long years since her marriage and as a result she gets a reward of losing her own self.

Did she belong to a joint family or a nuclear family? What were her views on the family system? Was a dowry given at the time of her marriage? How would she bring up her sons, her daughters? What did she thinks about fidelity in marriage? How did running a home affect her social life? (26)

Girija typically analyzed herself and came to a decision to leave her house to somewhere as a break in her fast moving selfless life. All she needs is to spend time for her. So she decides to leave her house, her family for few days and goes out without any destinations with some money in her bag. As she travels she meets an old couple with the essence of old age. The old lady Gowri Ammal becomes a close friend to Girija. She resembles her mother to a certain extent. From her Girija came to know that all men treat their women as a mere slave to a satisfy their needs, but once their strength weakens they will bend their knee to their women and become fully dependent for everything. And the old lady illustrates her own story to Girija. This made her wonder that even her husband will be the same as this old man one day.

After spending time with the old couple, Girija encounters a spiritual lady whom she calls Patti in an ashram. This Patti is the light bringer to Girija, she narrates her own story of getting into the spiritual life. This story makes Girija to bring her emotions out as a flow. After spending few days there she returns to her house. As soon as she enters her house with mental independence, her husband busted out like anything, and

suspected her with her chastity. Once in all these seventeen years Girija's words raged against her husband and her family. As a result her husband forced her to leave their house. And he also made their children under his control by frightening them.

Girija started to hear her heart, and then she decides to go to Ratna who could help her. She visits her hostel and she witnesses different kinds of women with different kinds of background. She then realizes her role in her life and she finally struggles between motherhood and selfhood. She saw a girl named Runo staying in the hostel who commits suicide just because her beloved betrayed her. Then she meets Annie who is self-dependent in everything who lives a life of dignity and happiness. So through these stories she realizes that freedom of women is necessary, but too much anything may spoil or it may lift a woman to certain heights. This depends on how a woman uses her freedom. "On the one hand your Mamiyar, with her mudi rules and on the other Runo with no rules." (76)

Through Girija's character it is known that a woman plays a dual role in the society. On one hand a role of perfect woman who always looks after her family, who is designed like an angel to take care of her people and maintain the harmony within the family. "Money is all that matters. I see women who have a dual role to play as housewives as well as bread winners". (54) On the other hand, she has an ambition and desires of her own which contributes to her self-identity and self-respect. A woman has to struggle a lot to play both the role. In the former case a woman will be a submissive character in the family by oppressing her own feeling and thoughts and in the latter she will choose a wrong way if proper guidance is not provided to her. Being over ruled or being incredibly independent is not good for a woman. So the novelist conveys that a woman must express herself with freedom with self-responsibility.

To conclude, there is certain prohibition which prevents women from developing intellectually and spiritually, on the other hand certain restriction that limits them materially that is acquiring money and power. Women have two phases in their life, the first phase where she is respected and treated well, independent and devoid with any restrictions, second one where she is wholly responsible for everything and everyone. So they undergo changes in her which kills her courage and mould her as a sacrificed being. They have to realize their own self and must be clear enough to balance between her inner mind and the outer world.

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