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GENDER IDENTITY LIES IN THE FREEDOM OF WOMEN

R.SHARLIE

I MA ENGLISH LITERATURE

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Rajam Krishnan was born in Musiri, Thirichirapalli district. She lacked formal education but was an autodidact which means she learned by herself. Her novels largely depict the lives of common people that are not depicted in modern Tamil literature. She has written more than 8 books that include novels, plays, biographies and short stories. In 1973, she had the pride of receiving the Sahitya Academy Award. She has also been awarded with the New York Herald Tribune International Award, Kalaimagal Award, Thiru.Vi. Ka. Award and Soviet Land Nehru Award.

Lamps in the Whirlpool is one of the most renowned works of Rajam Krishnan. The title by itself signifies the struggles faced by women during that period of time. Here, "lamps" personifies the position of women in the society and "Whirlpool" signifies the threats imposed on her. This particular piece is a translated one from Tamil, which was originally titled as *Suzhalil Midhakum Dheebangal*. This was translated into English by Narayan.

The protagonist of the story is Girija who belongs to a Brahmin family. She seems to have a very good educational background but is married to a person named Swaminathan only to perform her duties of a Hindu wife in a Brahmin family. Girija's mother-in-law is very particular about the 'madi' rules and 'acharam'. Swaminathan does not have any care or concern for his wife. Also, he stays dumb when his mother accuses Girija for petty issues. Girija after her marriage started living her life completely for her husband and his family members. She does not even spare time for any sort of relaxation.

One fine day we find Girija leaving her home uninformed. The reason for her desertion was her husband's vicious attitude towards her. He threw the plate in Girija's face just because the food prepared by her was not palatable. Girija usually tolerated all the injustice done to her but this time she was not able to digest her husband's mean behaviour and thereby left her home. Even after she had left her home she persistently thinks about her daughter and not her son knowing clearly that her son would certainly be taken care of by Swaminathan's family members. Apart from that Girija is completely satisfied with the decision she had taken. Actually, Girija does not move away from her family thinking that she should never return. She moves to Haridwar as she earnestly wanted some peace of mind.

These are the harsh words of Girija's mother-in-law. As usual Swaminathan does not show any concern for his wife. According to him she has brought a great disrepute to his family.

There are a few minor characters in the novel such as Rathna and the widow in Rishikesh. Though these characters do not come through out the novel, they play a vital role in taking the story to the next level. They are in fact the root cause for the change in Girija's mind.

Rathna is Swaminathan's niece. She is the first to get annoyed of the way her family members treat Girija. Rathna in fact goes to the extent of asking Girija to fight for her own rights. The widow at Rishikesh also plays an important role in this novel. She tries her best to make Girija feel cozy and comfortable. The widow advises her to act with clarity and make right decisions. She also stays by her side at the times of her adversity.

Every act of a human being has both its pros and cons. In this particular novel too, there are both positive and negative sides of characters. The negative part is that Girija left her family and came without thinking about her daughters who were left all alone with none to take care of. Though she regrets for it she does nothing to set things right.

Lamps in the Whirlpool has a lot of positive connotations hidden inside it. It serves as an eye-opener for all the women who are treated no better than slaves in their in-laws family. Due to the fear of society they might not come out of their home easily. This particular novel will surely stimulate the readers to search for their own identity. Sacrifice is one of the greatest traits of human beings but this should never be done at the cost of their own dignity. Even in this novel, only after Girija started to respect her own feelings and emotions, she slowly started to evolve into an empowered woman.

Thus women should know well about their needs and should stand up for it. They also have a greater responsibility of building a life for her world. This is no doubt an arduous process, but as the title goes women are lamps in the whirlpool in this caste and custom-ridden society. If women come out of this they would surely have a colorful future in the world outside.

Works Cited

1. Krishnan, Rajam. *Lamps in the Whirlpool*. Chennai:1997, Print
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