

FEMINISM THROUGH RAJAM KRISHNAN'S *LAMPS IN THE WHIRLPOOL*

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to demonstrate women's independence through a translation of Rajam Krishnan's *The Lamps in the Whirlpool. Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal*, or *Lamps in the Whirlpool*, was initially published in 1987 as *Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal. Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal* depicts a well-educated young woman growing up in a traditional Brahmin home. She finds her bearings and emerges from its anaesthetizing everyday existence to achieve her specific liberty by imagining herself free of painful obligations and limits. She is confronted with the novel's scenario, in which the protagonist Girija is subjected to horrors performed in the name of the family. *Lamps in the Whirlpool* is the title of a novel in which the 'lamps' represent the status of women in the household and the 'whirlpool' represents the inconveniences that women encounter. In this work, the author specifically discusses feminism and the conservative norms of the Brahmin culture. She emphasises the importance of "madi rules" and how they affect Brahmin women. The principal character, Girija, moves fiercely in an orthodox Brahmin household to preserve her dominance in her home, and how she gets out by breaching the orthodox parameter is the aim of present article. Rajam Krishnan is a famous feminist writer who uses her writings to highlight the predicament of women in Indian culture.

Keywords: Brahmin women, Tradition, Feminism, Madi.

Feminism is a collection of movements dedicated at ensuring women's moral, social, economic, and political rights, as well as equal opportunities. Over the decades, the status of women in India has undergone significant changes. But, in the past, women were victimised with lots of social discrimination. Because of male chauvinism, women faced societal inequalities. In light of the gender inequities and male dominance, the female submission occurs automatically. The Indian Women are sometimes treated as goddess, or a devi if she kills herself for the sake of her family but if she violates the customs of family, she is automatically considered as a sin to the family. These practices existed even in the beginning of twentieth century and it is continued in this current century too. Many feminist writers from India have portrayed the struggles of women, especially the plight of married women through their writings. Among them Rajam Krishnan was a pioneer as her writings special by focus on Indian Brahmin Women.

Rajam Krishnan is a well-known indigenous woman writer in Tamil Nadu. She was born in Musiri, Tiruchirapalli district, to a brahmin family. She appears to have had minimal academic schooling and was mostly self-taught. She began publishing when she was in her twenties. She is noted for creating well-researched social novels about poor farmers, salt pan workers, small-time criminals, jungle dacoits, under-trial convicts, and female labourers, who are rarely featured in contemporary Tamil literature. She is the author of almost 80 books. She has written forty books, twenty plays, two biographies, and a number of short stories. She was a translator of literature from Malayalam to Tamil in addition to her own writing. Her novel *Verukku Neer* won the Sahitya Akademi Award for Tamil in 1973. Her works were nationalised by the Tamil Nadu government in 2009 for a compensation of Rs. 300,000. It was an unusual incident because in Tamil Nadu, only the works of deceased writers are nationalised.

The novel *Lamps in the Whirlpool* (Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal) by Rajam Krishnan was published in the year 1995. The novel focuses on the lives of women and paints epic portrayals of women and their surroundings. The novel special by concentrates its attention on traditional community customs governed by clear-cut laws from an earlier era. The novel's concept, treatment, and language are all explicitly feminist. The feminism that dominates the narrative is of an indigenous

kind. It appears to be based on the writer's surroundings and culture, but it raises concerns that will resound in the hearts of many repressed women across cultures and languages.

The author depicts the woman in contemporary culture, the family's anchor, who humiliates herself as a person in order to be a wife, mother, and, most all, a daughter-in-law. Virginia Woolf was asked to make a speech on the topic of women's employment to the London National Society for Women's Service in 1931. Woolf explicitly confesses in the lecture and accompanying essay, 'Professions for Women', that although being a woman and employed, she has not experienced what many might consider "professional experiences" because she works at home, alone, in her own room. She states that:

She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of the family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all—I need not say it—she was pure. (n.p)

Through this novel, Rajam Krishnan tries to bring out the traditional customs of Brahmin Indian Women and their sufferings. She picturizes that though she sacrifices her desires, her life was treated rudely by forcing the traditional activities. The author also shows the male-dominated society in her writings. It is the voice of many depressed women cutting across language and culture.

Girija, the novel's protagonist, is treated as a draught animal by her mother-in-law and husband, with no regard for her honest efforts. Girija remembered once about her mother-in-law as, "...this woman had been treating her like an insect for the past seventeen years" (6). She was illtreated, and in order to line with her family, she must faithfully follow the madi norms. She is from a Tamil Brahmin family, which is quite religious. She is a working-class woman with good education. She has only been a faithful wife and daughter-in-law. Despite the fact that she had completed her post-graduate studies and had worked as a teacher in a rural school for nearly eight years, she was not permitted to continue working after her marriage. Though an educated woman, she sacrifices her life for the domestic harmony which the family enjoyed.

She was forced to follow the 'madi' regulations that every brahmin woman must follow after her marriage. According to Tamil Brahmins, they use the term madi to describe someone who is physically pure. In order to practise madi, a Brahmin had to wear only recently washed and dried clothes, and the clothes had to be kept away from anyone who wasn't madi. Girija's mother-in-law remarked that she had followed this madi without missing it.

The mother-in-law treated Girija like a slave, forcing her to do all of her housework without rest. On the other hand, Girija's husband regards her as a worm meant to serve him and his mother. When she inquired about a tiny briefcase, she was taken aback by her husband's rudeness. She is completely depressed and disillusioned. She realizes her state of ignorance only when Ratna, a bold girl and her husband's niece makes it clear. When Ratana meets Girija, she tells her:

You are a part of this society, not an isolated individual. You've specialised in education and have teaching experience. Should your brains and talents be sacrificed to this stupid concept of madi? This madi- which creates a schism between one person and another-difinetly has no virtue. It is arrogance which makes people feel superior and trample others underfoot. It is a senseless tradition which makes one woman the enemy of another. (31)

Ratna had a lot of questions concerning Girija's miserable life as a slave. She sparked her feelings. An uncontrollable urge and an inexplicable desire have impelled Girija to leave home. She makes the decision to travel to Haridwar in pursuit of inner serenity. She wishes to spend some time along the banks of the river Ganga.

She has the opportunity to meet an elderly couple who have come to Haridwar for pilgrimage and are staying there. After their conversation, she discovered that GowriAmmal, the elderly man's wife, had been treated terribly in the past. She, on the other hand, keeps everything about her ill

treatment hidden. Due to his older years, the elderly man was completely reliant on his wife, Gowri Ammal. These events remain imprinted on Girija's mind, and she joins them on their quest. In the sacred place, Girija also runs across one of her former students, who is assisting Swamigal with poojas.

Later, in Haridwar, Girija encounters a holy widow, "Unruly hair like puffs of cotton, a face ploughed into countless furrows by the passage of time, saffron-coloured sari with a blouse, the form of a tall elderly woman, erect and unbent" (72). She is the third wife of an elderly man, and her sad story included a stepson who was a threat to her youth. Following her husband's death, she came for a pilgrimage, and she intends to spend the rest of her days in Rishikesh. Girija was totally surprised to know about her situation. The holy widow then advised Girija, and said, "If you keep thinking of problems, problems can't bear it, get up and fight. Get Clarity. Decide what is best" (80). Girija's mind was completely transformed after meeting with the widow.

She returns home bravely with a sense of enlightenment. Girija's husband and mother-in-law accuse her of disloyalty and order her to leave the house because she had been away for four days. For the first time Girija raised her voice against her husband and said:

Look here, don't make false accusations. I didn't run away. You said that I didn't bear the entire burden of the household on my shoulders. I am not a mere wax doll. Over the years you belittled my education, my intelligence and my innate goodness. You callously forced me to work as a household drudge. Your mental abuse hurt more than a whiplash. (83)

Girija is disgusted and goes to Ratna, who is affianced in feminist studies in Delhi University. Ratna and her friends provide a safe refuge for her and treat her as if she were an offended bird. Girija looks for work with a nun who operates an expatriate children's home. Her main concern now is that the family routine does not damage her daughters' lives.

Rajam Krishnan argues through the character of Girija that when an educated lady is sunk in such slumber, society suffers more because the chances of her enlightening its members become improbable. She also depicts a society in change, particularly in terms of women's treatment, in this novel. Life will not be simple for individuals who find themselves in this situation. However, the author forces her protagonist to educate herself in order to face it, for the Indian woman's problems are far from ended. The situation of the motherless Runo from a wealthy household exemplifies Rajam Krishnan's Indian concept of feminism. She turns to drugs and sex after being neglected by her alcoholic father and eventually commits suicide. Will Girija's daughters follow her footsteps? Rajam Krishnan then introduces Ratna as, the novel's catalytic agent. Here is Rajam's ideal woman, the 'new woman': well-educated, self-assured, unafraid to speak her mind, eager to assist and engage in meaningful activity. A victory for both the writer and the translators, *Lamps in the Whirlpool* is a well-crafted novel translated into expressive English.

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