



Resilience And Self-Discovery: A Woman's Psychological Journey In Rajam Krishnan's *Lamps In The Whirlpool*

Dr. R.SUDHA

Assistant Professor

Department of English

PSG College of Arts& Science, Coimbatore

Abstract

Rajam Krishnan, renowned for her socially conscious novels depicting the lives of marginalized communities such as poor farmers, salt workers, and female laborers, offers a compelling narrative in *Lamps in the Whirlpool*. This novel explores the psychological struggles and resilience of Girija, a woman navigating life within an orthodox Brahmin household. Subjected to subjugation and treated as a mere subordinate by her husband and mother-in-law, Girija undergoes a transformative journey of self-realization. Breaking free from societal conventions and familial oppression, she reclaims her agency and chooses to live life on her own terms. The present research article examines Girija's journey as a powerful representation of an empowered woman, highlighting her resilience and psychological growth amidst patriarchal constraints. The research psychological theories of Maslow's self actualisation

Key Words: Empowered Woman, Orthodox Brahmin Community, Patriarchal Oppression, Self-Realization, Psychological Resilience, Gender Equality, Social Conventions, Feminism

Introduction

Rajam Krishnan, an eminent writer known for her socially relevant novels, delves deeply into the lives of marginalized communities and the struggles of women in traditional Indian society. Her novel *Lamps in the Whirlpool* stands as a profound narrative of resilience, self-discovery, and empowerment within the confines of an orthodox Brahmin household. The story revolves around Girija, a woman who battles the oppressive conventions of her family and community to carve out her identity and reclaim her autonomy. Through vivid storytelling, Krishnan exposes the psychological turmoil faced by women trapped in patriarchal systems and highlights their journey towards liberation. Girija's character reflects the silent struggles of many women and their capacity to transform their lives when they confront the societal chains that bind them. The novel serves as both a critique of traditional gender roles and a celebration of a woman's inner strength and resilience.

This research paper explores Girija's psychological journey as she transitions from a subjugated individual to an empowered woman. It examines the intricate layers of her emotions, her fight against oppression, and the ultimate triumph of her self-realization, positioning Girija as a symbol of resilience and empowerment in a deeply patriarchal society. The psychological approach used in analyzing *Lamps in the Whirlpool* focuses on understanding the inner conflicts, emotional resilience, and self-discovery of the protagonist, Girija. The study employs a qualitative, interpretative framework to examine the text, drawing upon psychological theory of Maslow's self - actualisation theory, the process of reaching one's greatest potential via self-actualization involves pursuing self-fulfillment, creativity, and personal development. It stands for the

pinnacle of Maslow's hierarchy of requirements, where a person's attention turns from meeting their basic wants to finding their own meaning, purpose, and self-expression.

Emotional Neglect and Escape

Rajam Krishnan's *Lamps in the Whirlpool* is the English translation of *SuzhalilMithakkumDeepangal*. The title metaphorically captures the plight of women, where the "lamps" symbolize women confined within familial roles, and the "whirlpool" represents the challenges and restrictions they face. The protagonist, Girija, is a middle-class, educated woman who served as a village school teacher for eight years before marrying Swaminathan, a well-qualified and successful professional. Despite having three children—a son and two daughters—and dedicating 17 years to serving her husband and mother-in-law, Girija eventually recognizes the emptiness of her life.

Swaminathan, indifferent to Girija's emotional well-being, prioritizes his work over their relationship. After a long work trip, he shows insensitivity toward Girija's feelings, losing his temper and displaying a dominating and crude demeanor. His mother, far from acknowledging his unreasonable behavior, supports him and reinforces Girija's subservience. Faced with continuous emotional neglect, Girija decides to leave her family and spend four days in Haridwar, seeking solace. Upon returning, however, she is falsely accused of infidelity by her husband and mother-in-law, who forbid her from reentering the house. Devastated by their cruel assumptions, Girija leaves in search of refuge and eventually finds temporary shelter with Ratna and her friends. She later begins working at a home for refugee children run by a nun, determined to protect her daughters from the oppressive customs she endured.

The Burden of Traditional Customs

The novel highlights the societal rituals and rigid customs imposed on women, particularly within the orthodox Brahmin community. Girija, adhering to *madi* rules as dictated by her mother-in-law, maintains the household under strict traditional practices, such as bathing early and washing her clothes daily. Despite following these rules dutifully, Girija receives no support or appreciation. Her mother-in-law absolves herself of all responsibilities, relegating Girija to the role of an unpaid servant under her constant supervision. Swaminathan, focused entirely on his work, shows no affection or emotional support toward Girija. He treats her as a machine designed to handle household tasks, ignoring her sacrifices and contributions to the family.

Though educated and capable, Girija's individuality and aspirations are crushed under the weight of family expectations. Her husband's authoritarian nature and emotional detachment leave her feeling disillusioned and unfulfilled. The turning point in Girija's life occurs when she takes an impulsive step to leave her family and seek peace on the banks of the Ganges. In Rishikesh, she meets a spiritual widow who advises her to take charge of her life and act with clarity. Girija returns home enlightened but is met with rejection, as her husband and mother-in-law accuse her of disloyalty and bar her from entering the house. The greater tragedy lies in the unsympathetic attitude of her mother-in-law, who, as a woman, fails to empathize with Girija's plight.

The Struggle for Self-Identity

Girija's journey sheds light on the lack of mutual respect and understanding in her marriage. Swaminathan's indifference and the absence of emotional connection between them highlight the inequality in their relationship. Despite coming from the same cultural, religious, and traditional background, their lives lack love and harmony. Krishnan emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding, love, and respect in building a successful family. The novel reflects the broader societal expectations of women during Krishnan's time and critiques the patriarchal structures that undermine their individuality and agency. *Lamps in the Whirlpool* is a poignant representation of women's struggles in a traditional society, emphasizing the need for equality and respect between men and women for a balanced and fulfilling life. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's theory is used to trace Girija's progression from fulfilling basic needs (survival within a patriarchal family) to achieving self-actualization, where she reclaims her identity and independence.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs illustrates Girija's journey through various stages of human development. Initially, her survival within a patriarchal family is tied to fulfilling basic physiological and safety needs. As her situation stabilizes, Girija's focus shifts toward belongingness, seeking connection and emotional support. Progressing through esteem needs, she builds self-worth, navigating societal expectations. Finally, she reaches self-actualization, reclaiming her identity and independence. This transformation reflects her ability to transcend limiting structures, empowering her to achieve personal fulfillment, creativity, and a deeper understanding of her true potential, ultimately reshaping her role in society.

Conclusion

In the context of *Lamps in the Whirlpool*, self-actualization is a critical concept that represents the protagonist's journey toward reclaiming their true identity and finding personal fulfillment. The term "whirlpool" symbolizes the chaos and societal constraints the individual must navigate, while "lamps" represent moments of clarity or enlightenment. Through this process, the protagonist strives to rise above external pressures, such as societal expectations and familial constraints, to realize their full potential. Self-actualization in this narrative is the culmination of personal growth, where the individual becomes whole, authentic, and empowered, embracing their own uniqueness and purpose. In conclusion, *Lamps in the Whirlpool* powerfully portrays the journey of self-actualization, where the protagonist, through resilience and introspection, breaks free from the confines of societal expectations and patriarchal structures. The symbolism of lamps guiding through the whirlpool signifies moments of clarity that help the individual regain control over their identity and destiny. By navigating the turbulence of life's challenges, the protagonist ultimately achieves a state of self-fulfillment, independence, and authenticity. This journey serves as a reminder of the transformative power of personal growth and the importance of embracing one's true self in the face of adversity.

WORKS CITED

- Krishnan, Rajam. *lamps in the whirlpool*. Macmillian pub., 1997. Print.
- G.R.Sharma: *Indian Writing in English (Views and Reviews)*, Swastik Publications, New Delhi, 2013.
- Dr.B.K.Jha: *Modern Indian Writing in English*, ALP Books, 7/33, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, New Delhi, 2011, Print
- Ross Mandy: *20th Century Perspectives The Changing Role of Women*, Reed Educational and Professional publishing Ltd, 2002, Print.