

**AWAKENING OF A WOMAN NAMED THETHI TO ATTAIN COMPLETE
SELF- EXAMINING THE NOVEL *AGNISAKSHI* BY LALITHAMBIKA
ANTHARJANAM**

Sreeshambhavi.S,

Ph.D. Research Scholar,

Hindusthan College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, India

Abstract

The term “female phase” generally speaks about the writings created by women writers and the thoughts and feelings of the main female characters. The struggle of the female characters to come out of their conventional familial roles and to establish a new identity in their life is not a new theme in the works of English literature. Many female writers like Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Sarah Joseph, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Lalithambika Antharjanam all has beautifully portrayed many female characters as the main protagonists in their works and how they live up to their dignity as individuals in society. This paper focuses on how the female characters play the leading role in the work of Lalithambika Antharjanam. In the process of redefining their roles and status in society, they combat all the patriarchal manifestations that exist in society.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Suppression, Oppression

Many critics like Virginia Woolf and Elaine Showalter has rightly described the pathetic condition that a woman has to undergo in a society in all their critical works. Virginia Woolf in her book *A Room of One's Own*, (2009) describes how men socially and psychologically dominate women. Woolf has rightly analyzed the social restrictions on women in society and she used literature as a strong and powerful weapon to uplift the condition of women in society in general. The social, economic, and political conditions of her time clearly prove that all women are subjected to oppression, suppression, and suffering from the male in every nook and corner of their life. Many questions arose in Woolf's mind like, "Why did men drink wine and women water? Why was one sex so prosperous and the other so poor?" (27).

Women never have a half hour...that they can call their own'- she was always interrupted... 'is' surprising, for she has no separate study to repair to, and most of the work must have been done in the general sitting-room, subject to all kinds of casual interruptions. (67)

Elaine Showalter, another greatest critic in the field of feminism focused her attention on andro texts to gyno texts. As analyzed by Showalter in her famous work, *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, (1989) "Women reject both imitation and protest- two forms of dependency-and turn instead to the female experience." (405). It is this idea that the present paper actually focuses on. The present paper concentrates on how a female character plays the leading role and later combat with all the patriarchal manifestations that exist within the society.

Lalithambika Antharjanam, a renowned writer belongs to South India. She generally speaks about women and their brutal and harsh experiences that they had to undergo in their life. Their writings focus on the thoughts and feelings of women whose ideas are totally rejected by the society in which they live. Lalithambika Antharjanam's first and only novel *Agnisakshi* generally speaks about a married woman named Thethi who is the main character in the novel. *Agnisakshi* literally means "witness by fire" speaks about the struggle of the main character Thethi from her married life until her old age.

Lalithambika Antharjanam is one of the most popular literary figure and a renowned Malayalam short story writer. Born in a rich namboodiri family in Kerala, she has beautifully portrayed the oppression and suppression faced by namboodiri women. The famous novel *Agnisakshi* deals with the sufferings of marginalized women of the whole namboodiri community. The novel broadly researches about the trauma and agony faced by the namboodiri women in the context of long and eloquent silence. Lalithambika Antharjanam was also a byproduct of this inhuman culture and community. The Namboothiri community developed its own culture in the long run. Although their culture was a mix of Hindu tradition and custom, it followed a parallel path from the actual Hindu traditions. Her writings expressed the miseries of humans, their unusual customs, traditions, and taboos that restrict the women in the Namboothiri community.

The Hindu Brahmins in Kerala are generally known as Namboodiris. They are considered as the most orthodox Brahmins in Kerala as well as in India. In this community, all the women are compelled to wear a veil (*ghosha*) while they are present in public places. People who go against the rules and regulations are excommunicated. It is generally known as *Brashtu*.

The thematic analysis of the novel *Agnisakshi* includes many things. It generally symbolizes the picture of Indian culture through the eyes of female characters. The women are presented as a perfect representation of deep and abiding love, silent pain bearers, a sense of responsibility towards the family, doing household activities, etc. Another major problem faced by namboodiri women was their marriage system. Women were considered as childbearing machines, a machine to satisfy men's sexual urges. The concept of marriage becomes a business like an approach. No bonding was there between husband and wife. As compelled by the

customs and traditions of the patriarchal society women should live according to the interest of me. They should not voice against the followed customs.

Another pathetic or miserable condition faced by namboodiri women is based on their caste. They were always compelled to remain inside the house (Kanchipuram). They were forced to keep half-naked with their breast exposed and they were not allowed to look at the sunlight. In public, they should cover their body with a shawl and screen their faces with a palm leaf umbrella (marakuda). The only male that an antharjanam may look at was her husband that too in their bedroom. *Agnisakshi* generally deals with the struggle of the heroine named Thethi, from the time of her married life until her old age. That, a well-read and intelligent woman had the ability to think freely and to act according to the situation. Being an educated woman she was able to understand the world around her and she finally decided to break the taboos that circled her and decided to serve the society in which she lives in.

Thethi suffered a lot during her married life. She is totally unrecognized. She is always threatened by others in her community. Later as readers, we can see that Thethi finally decides to leave her husband Unni and the world called *illam* (house). Life at the *villa* with its unhuman principles and traditions made her a transformed personality. Finally, Thethi decided to change her name from Thethi to Devaki which shows her courage to change herself from incomplete self to complete self. Thethi became a great success after she left the *illam* (house). She gradually became a renowned and well-known leader in the struggle for the freedom of women. From Thethi (a young silent bride at the Manapillyillam) to Devaki- Devaki Behan (the great social worker and follower of Gandhian philosophy) - a change from dependant women to an independent woman.

Thethi is represented as a character with high courage and self-determination. Thethi's life and her important decision to leave the house shows the strength of her character. It was her education (ability to read) and thinking ability that made her a star later in her life. Her unhappy married life with her husband Unni (a typical namboodiri) is really one of the main factors for her transformation from a typical home marker to a social reformer. To Thethi service to society as a means of liberating herself. I gave up life's pleasure for certain, useless beliefs" (109).

In a typical and traditional Indian family, one can see so many female characters like Thethi who submit to the misfortunes that life heaps upon them. The male always dominates women and show their supremacy over the women. Women, the synonyms for suffering, pain bearers, watchdogs in the family, unpaid servants, etc suffer at their hands and silently tries to fight back to achieve freedom and fulfillment. They even try to explore the values which have not been adequately probed ever. In the novel, it is clearly said that

Men suppressed women. Younger people were tortured by the head of the family. Customs suffocated society. The country, under all these burdens, was further ill-treated by the white rulers. Everyone tolerated everything. (97)

This general idea provides us with the fact that society was suffering totally and not just individuals. By showing an example of Thethi (Devaki) who from a homemaker later changed to a social worker, Lalithambika Antharjanam shows the multiple kinds of mental trauma and physical torture that women suffer during their entire life.

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