

## **Analysis of the Lost Mythological Character Lilith in Biblical Translation**

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### **Abstract**

The Bible is a great confused novel. You may say, it is about God.  
But it is really about man alive.

- *Why the Novel Matters*, D. H. Lawrence

Intralingual Translation involves in the transformations or interpretations from one linguistic code to another. It is very difficult to attain the complete equivalence due to the complication of the codes tangled in the source language (SL) to target language (TL) and the cultural difference in two languages. Bible had been translated from the biblical language like Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek to many languages. According to the Hebrew and Greek bible, there is a reference of the character called Lilith or Lillith who was considered as the first wife of Adam. In the Jewish folklore and Mesopotamian mythology, there are many references for the presence of Lilith character who is rebellious and considered herself as equal to Adam. The character's presence is mysterious and reinterpreted as screeched owl or demon in the later Latin and English Bible. The paper focuses on the loss of the mythological character Lilith who is unknowingly or deliberately in the biblical translations of European languages. Thought the character might be real or misinterpreted, Bible is always viewed from the European Eyes, but we forget to analyse the original content of it from its own source languages.

**Keywords:** Intralingual Translation, Adam's first wife, Jewish & Mesopotamian mythology, European Languages.

### **Analysis of the Lost Mythological Character Lilith in Biblical Translation**

Translation Studies is an interdisciplinary academic study focuses on the methodical analysis of theory, explanation and application of paraphrasing, interpretation and localization. There are three types of translation that are Interlingual Translation, Intralingual Translation and Intersemiotic Translation. In Interlingual Translation, it occurs within one language by explanation or paraphrasing the contest. Intralingual Translation involves in the transformations or interpretations from one linguistic code to another. It is very difficult to attain the complete equivalence due to the complication of the codes tangled in the source language (SL) to target language (TL) and the cultural difference in two languages.

Bible is a collection of sacred manuscripts or scriptures of Jews and Christians which is the creation of God's divine inspiration. It describes the creation of biotic and abiotic components of the universe by God and the centre of these creations is human race. It also describes the relationship between God and Humans. The original manuscript was written in three archaic languages like Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek which are now considered as dead languages. The modern bible is based on the translation of Vulgate Latin which dominated the western Christianity. Bible is always viewed from the European Eyes but we forget to analyse the original content of it from its own source languages.

According to the Hebrew and Greek bible, there was a reference of the character called Lilith or Lillith who was considered as the first wife of Adam. In the Jewish folklore and Mesopotamian mythology, there were many references for the presence of Lilith character who was rebellious and considered herself as equal to Adam. In the beginning of creations God created both Adam and Lilith from the dust. When Adam insisted her to obey his commands, she flew away from him. Adam requested God to get her back, but she was not willing to dominant to Adam which let her to get God's curse and forgotten by all. Later she was portrayed as Child-killing witch, demon and demonic mother and screeched owl

The character's presence is mysterious and reinterpreted as screeched owl or demon in the later Latin and English Bible. The paper focuses on the loss of the mythological character Lilith who is unknowingly or deliberately in the biblical translations of European languages. Thought the character might be real or misinterpreted, Bible Translation from the biblical language to the European languages created a vast space to reinterpret or misinterpret the presence of such mythologies and mythological characters.

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In King James Version of Genesis, in the verse 1.27 stated both man and woman are created at the same time from the dust which is contrasted to the verse 2.22 that Eve is created from one of the ribs of Adam. In the Hebrew Bible, Book of Isaiah 34:14 stated "And shall-meet desert creatures with jackal the goat he-calls his-fellow *lilit* (*lilith*) she rests and finds rest" described Lilith as the goddess of night. Then in the vulgate Latin translation of 5<sup>th</sup> century, the word was changed into

*Lamia*. Then in the Wycliffe's Bible (1395) followed the Latin interpretation of *Lamya*. In the William Madison Whittington's Geneva Bible (1587) and King James Version (1611) as same in Isaiah 34:14 it was found as "screech owl". The single word of Lilith is replaced as Lamia and Screeched owl deliberately or unintentionally made a vast space for the creation of Lilith mythological character.

In the one side, there might be some possibilities for the mythological character Lilith and the other side, Jewish and Mesopotamian myths and folklores there was many reference to Lilith as Adam's wife and later it was served as content for many feministic writers and artists. The earliest manuscript which had the mention of Lilith name is *Gilgamesh* and *Huluppu Tree* dated 2000 BCE. In the apocryphal book of Genesis which described the separation of Adam and Lilith In the *Alphabet of Ben Sirach* dated 700 and 1000 CE had the open statement of Lilith as Adam's first wife who was rebellious, "Why should I lie beneath you? She asked: I was also made with dust, and therefore I am your equal ... As Adam tried to force her to obey, Lilith, angry, pronounced the name of God, and left". And many references in the contemporary literature like Goethe's *Faust*, D. G. Rossetti's "Lady Lilith" painting and a sonnet recorded Adam's first wife as Lilith and Victorian poet Robert Browning.

The bible translations held at different periods of the history through different people or different group of people. In the compilation of the verses in translation, translators deliberately left few things at the same time, it might misinterpret. The original biblical language of Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek were considered as dead languages which lost the equivalence in the Medieval Translations. In the beginning of 5<sup>th</sup> BCE, bible translation was dominated by one particular Vulgate Latin language. The other European Bible translations were translated from the Vulgate Latin which was predominant at that period. The original manuscripts were not used in the translation, rather the translated versions of Bible were again translated into European languages which controlled the Western Christianity.

In the Midrashic Literature and Jewish folklore had the reference of the myth of Lilith as Adam's wife. From the New Historicist point of view, the historicity of the text in bible translation focused on the social and cultural embedment of the writing. The character was hidden for the social and cultural principles that she might be rebellious and not subjugated to Adam which was again viewed as patriarchal translation. The ideas of social structures were constructed by the dominant discursive practices in which there could not be space for women's liberation. The literary theoretical aspects of New Historicism and Hermeneutics gave a huge space to these types unheard voices lost in the macrocosmic translation.

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