

**Translation as Socio-Cultural Documentation in  
Rajam Krishnan's "Lamps in the Whirlpool"**

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**Abstract**

Translations play a major role in the modern technological world. Readers are able to enjoy new insights into the different ways of life through contemporary translations. Without the translation of literature, people would not be able to read the vast majority of literary works. The first translation of the complete Bible into English was the Wycliffe Bible. Culture will influence the translation process with varying degree. With the worldwide trend of culture in translation study, Chinese translators began to pay attention to the cultural issues in translation both in theory and practice. 'Lamps in the Whirlpool' Rajam Krishnan's concern is the treatment of women in Indian society. The unwritten laws oppress the society. Translation studies will have a constant evolution in making changes for the suppressed and will pay way for the empowerment of women.

**Keywords:** Rajam Krishnan, "Lamps in the Whirlpool", Contemporary translations, literary works, culture, Indian society.

Writers make national literature, while translators make universal literature

- José Saramago

Translation is essential to know about the culture of the society. The importance of literary translation is immeasurable. It enables people to understand the world. One is able to understand politics, history and philosophy through the translated works of Sophocles and Homer. Readers are able to enjoy new insights into the different ways of life through contemporary translations. It makes one to enjoy the creative, fertile and highly imaginative minds of foreign authors. Without the translation of literature, people would not be able to read the vast majority of literary works that are available in archives and libraries around the world. Translations make us to enjoy the author's views on the many facets of life and how they express their innumerable emotions. It helps in identifying the culture and tradition followed in society. Translation allows you to travel back in time and relive such moments. It makes one understand how things were in the past and how changes are required in the modern world.

Language is the embodiment of social reality and the expression of the self. The **first translation** of the complete Bible into English was the Wycliffe Bible produced between 1380 and

1384. The Bible remained the most translated book until 1950's. *T.R Steiner*, in his *English Translation Theory*, analyses translation theory between 1650-1800, starting with Sir John Denham and ending with William Cowper. He examines the **eighteenth century concept** of translator as painter or imitator. In *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in Comparative Literature Context* (1993), *Andre Lefevere*, traces the establishment of a German tradition of translation starting with Luther and moving on through Gottsched and Goethe to the Schlegels and Schleiermacher and ultimately to Rosenzweig. Through the study of Shelley as translator, *Timothy Webb*, discusses the work of an individual translator in relation to the rest of his writings and to the contemporary concepts of the role and status of translation.

After 1970s, research findings of **translation studies** and contemporary linguistics were gradually introduced to China from America, France, Russia and many other countries. Basically in translation two points are concentrated, one being history and the other being culture. When we look at **the translation of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese**, we are sure that there was no written text. A few that was there were either written in Central Asian or Indic languages as in Sanskrit. Chinese scholars have finished the translation of almost all the major works of translation theory around the world in the later decades. With the worldwide trend of culture turn to translation study, **Chinese translators began to pay attention to the cultural issues** in translation both in theory and practice. Translation is the integration of source, language culture and target language culture. (Kong, 1995)

Every aspect of a culture will influence the **translation** process with **varying** degree **according to the degree of cultural acceptance** at that time, and affect translators' logical judgment and diction (Wang, 1998). In this way, translation is definitely influenced by native culture as well as foreign culture, and it is the product of the joint influence of the two cultures. Different living conditions, customs, institutions, religious beliefs and people's different cognitions to the same objective may give language, different meanings and implications. Indian culture with its medley of religions, traditions, languages, rituals and social systems, is a crucial catalyst in the dynamics of power in Indian society with caste, and sub-caste as its sub-structures. India's politicised religious communities integrate with many biased and callous practices still existing within the religious traditions. Stereotypes construct gender with women as vulnerable beings as compared to their powerful male counterparts. Through stereotypical unwritten social norms, complete conformity is demanded from both men and women and it is austere enforced through laws. Rebellious attitudes are curtailed and those striving to break free from the shackles of stereotypes are subjected to severe punishment.

In translating literature, the style of the author and the story's atmosphere should be preserved. You might in fact missed the point that you are enjoying a book originally written in another language due to the skills and creativity of the translator. The studies show that even though these theories are not rigid notions of the period, they seek to investigate, changing concepts of translation systematically. When it comes to translating novels, the complexity and the challenge could be even on a higher level than translating any of the other work. The translator could be faulted for taking too much for granted from his reader or, in the other extreme, underestimating the

reader. Pedagogic translations may be an exception. Too many explanations and too many footnotes might distract it. So freedom is necessary for the practitioner. The ideal thing is to encourage the reader to get the feel of the original text thus the translation should be reader-friendly.

In the novel '**Lamps in the Whirlpool**' **Rajam Krishnan's** concern is in the treatment of women in Indian society. Her works are motivated by an urge for social reform and she visualises a society based on equality and guided by the principles of enlightened spirituality, respect for individuals and awareness of responsibility as citizens. Her works are Karuppu Manigal, Kalam Thorum Pen, Pathaiyil Padintha Adigal and Suzhalil Mithakkum Deepangal. **Lamps in the Whirlpool** is the translation of the last novel. Rajam Krishnan was awarded the Sahitya Academy award for her novel Verukkuneer. She is socially conscious of the deprivation of a fair treatment for women and her works are aimed for the emancipation of women. In the novel **Lamps in the Whirlpool** **Girija, a University Graduate is made to slave in an orthodox Brahmin house-hold** as the daughter in law. Her mother in law is a staunch adherent follower of the '**madi**' rules. The rules are as housewife she has to take bath early in the morning before she enters the kitchen, she runs the risk of pollution if she touches the pillows or bed covers. It is supposed that the children coming from school have their dresses polluted and by touching them, the mother has to take bath to enter the kitchen or pooja room. Her husband is always on tour and is not sensitive to her difficulties.

Girija has become a mother of three children. Her mother in law is ever-alert to see that Girija is not committing any breach of **madi rules** in discharging her duties. The strict conservative rules followed by the family do not permit the sweeper woman Vandana to enter the house, though she is neatly dressed. In Jaya's family her elder daughter has come of age, Charu is her younger daughter, her son Bharath is waived liberally from the madi rules. Quiet against the professed ideal of giving equality to women we find them sidelined and oppressed by unwritten laws. The religious practices and social customs give woman the subordinate role. Man is considered as the bread winner of the family. Even if the woman is qualified to seek a job the opportunity is denied to her.

Ratna the granddaughter of Mamiyar and the niece of Girija's husband is a modern girl. Her arrival in the family brings out a change in Girija. Ratna notices that Mamiyar is exploiting the submissive nature of Girija. She makes Girija realise her past experience as a teacher and asks her to assert her rights. Ratna introduces Abu a research scholar to Girija. The topic of his research is about the qualified women who do not utilise their knowledge for the betterment of the society.

One day Girija's husband in a fit of rage flings his plate to the ground. That day, she had added much salt to the lunch and had forgotten to place a spoon. This incident pushed Girija to take a firm decision. **She reached the stage when she could endure no more.** She removes her diamond stud, wears a gold ring tells her Mamiyar that she is going to the market and leaves the house. She goes to Haridwar and then to Rishikesh. She finds Rishikesh has lost much of its natural beauty. The happy memories are recollected when she had visited Rishikesh during the whirlwind tour twenty five years ago that was undertaken by her colleagues. She recalls the daredevil Ganga who braved to swim in the Ganges.

“I’ll show you how well I can swim” (LWP -27)

People held the breath, but she swam to the shore safely. Ganga left her job when she got married. After five years Girija had met Ganga in the handloom exhibition in Madras at that time Girija was unmarried. Ganga introduced her three daughters and felt unhappy that she had no sons. The tragic end of Ganga was the result of the custom that demanded a male child. Such a brave girl failed miserably in her life. The currents and whirlpools of the mighty river could not subdue her but the irrational demand of the society had taken her life. Girija on returning home meets her son Bharath who shrieks out

“Amma is back, Amma is back”. (LWP -60)

Her Mamiyar and her husband thrash harsh words on her. She is sad that they have not cared to know the real cause of her going out. Her husband makes it clear that he is not prepared to take her back. She goes to Ratna’s hostel and stays with her. Girija feels unhappy when she thinks about her daughters and tears blurred her vision. This shows that **empowerment of women** can be **achieved** only through legislation or by bringing up the contentious issues open for discussion and **creating a change in the mindset of social beings** by questioning them.

There is a general agreement that translation is as conscious and spontaneous as the original composition. It is true with the Lamps in the Whirlpool. The postcolonial texts are powerful sources of Translation through which even marginalised voices can find a place in the dominant discourse. The analysis of the theories proves that translation will have a constant evolution. Translation has reduced the distance between cultures. Any literary work, irrespective of time and language, reflects the culture from which it has emerged so is the case with translations which will open the doors to an unknown cultural and linguistic world. It will help the globalised world to connect very easily and achieve its needs.

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(Kong, 1995)

### **Abbreviation**

LWP -Lamps in the Whirlpool