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UNVEILING THE SPIRITUAL ESSENCE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WILLIAM L. SMITH'S TRANSLATION OF SANKARADEVA'S "PARIJAT HARANA"

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ABSTRACT:

This paper explores the translation of Parijata Harana, a play written by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva, by William L. Smith. The play is an integral part of Ankia Nata, a dramatic genre in Assamese literature. The paper discusses the originality and significance of the translated work, its position in world literature, and the plot of Parijata Harana, which revolves around Lord Krishna and the Parijata flower.

This article delves into the nuances of William L. Smith's translation of Sankaradeva's iconic Assamese text, "Parijat Harana". A critical examination of Smith's translation reveals his efforts to preserve the spiritual and cultural essence of the original text. This article explores the challenges faced by Smith in translating the 16th-century text, his methodology, and the implications of his translation on the global understanding of Assamese literature and culture.

Key words: Parijata Harana, Srimanta Sankaradeva, William L. Smith, Ankia Nata, Assamese literature

INTRODUCTION:

Parijata Harana is an artistic and popular play written by Mahapurush Srimanta Sankaradeva. Sankaradeva was a social reformer, playwright, social coordinator, poet extraordinaire, and versatile genius. He was a prolific author who wrote various genres of literature in different languages, including Assamese, Brajawali, and Sanskrit. His immortal creations include the rendering of Bhagavata Purana from the Sanskrit text, the translation of Uttarakanda Ramayan from Valmiki Ramayan, and the composition of Rukmini Harana Kavya and Harishchandra Upakyhana in narrative poems. He also composed devotional lyrics known as Bargeet. Kirtan-Ghosa is considered his best creation, referred to as a "honeycomb" by Laxminath Bezborooah in Assamese literature. He wrote six plays known as Ankiya Nata, a dramatic genre, viz. Patni Prasada, Kali Damana, Keli Gopala, Rukmini Harana, Parijata Harana, and Ramvijay. The main feature of Ankiya Nata is that the prose, verse, and dialogues of the dramas are in Brajawali, with some slokas written in Sanskrit.

Dr. William L. Smith, a renowned Indologist, passed away in December 2009. He was a leading expert on Srimanta Sankaradeva and made significant contributions to understanding the saint's literature, language, and outlook. Smith's work focused on medieval Indian religious traditions, particularly in Eastern India. His notable works include "Patterns in Indian Hagiography" and studies on Sankaradeva's plays and language.

Smith was the first Western scholar to give Sankaradeva's life the attention it deserved, and his writings were free from scholarly bias. He had a deep interest in the Ramayana and wrote extensively on the topic. Despite fragile health in his later years, Smith continued his research, announcing a project on Mahabharata traditions in Eastern India, which he completed before his passing.

Smith's academic journey began at John Carroll University, and he later studied at Stockholm University under Siegfried Lienhard. He held various positions at Stockholm University and joined Uppsala University as a professor in 2004, retiring in 2009. Throughout his career, Smith published numerous scholarly articles and participated in international conferences, leaving a lasting legacy in his field. William L. Smith, renowned as the 'maxmuller of Sankaradeva studies' European Indologist, translated Parijata Harana, a theatre work by Sankaradeva. This paper attempts to discuss the translated creation, its originality, and the position of Ankiya Nata and Parijata Harana drama in world literature. Sankaradeva's "Parijat Harana" is a revered Assamese text that embodies the spiritual and cultural heritage of the region. William L. Smith's translation of this text marks a significant milestone in making Assamese literature accessible to a global audience.

THE PLOT OF PARIJATA HARANA:

One day, Lord Krishna was sitting with his first wife, Rukmini, in his palace. At that moment, the celestial sage Narada arrived at Krishna's place. He placed a Parijata flower in Krishna's hand and told him about the wonderful qualities of the Parijata flower. Narada expressed that the perfume of the Parijata flower can be sensed six kilometers away. Wealth, family, and glory never leave the home of a person who possesses a Parijata flower. The woman who wears Parijata is exceptionally lucky; her husband will never leave her. When Rukmini heard the qualities of Parijata, she prayed with clasped hands to Krishna to gift her Parijata flower. Krishna gifted it to her.

On the other side, Narada told Satyabhama, Krishna's another wife, about the wonderful qualities of Parijata and what Krishna had done. Hearing this incident from Narada, Satyabhama felt unfortunate, thinking that her co-wife was luckier than her and that she was going to die of humiliation. Narada expressed this incident to Lord Krishna. Krishna promised Satyabhama that he would uproot the Parijata tree with its roots and gift it to her. Satyabhama accepted it but suspected her husband. So, she wished to go with Krishna to Amravati, the capital of heaven, where the Parijata was planted.

After this incident, Indra, the ruler of heaven, came to meet Lord Krishna to appeal to him to kill Naraka, the evil one on earth, so that the gods and goddesses of heaven could stay in peace. Krishna heard him and promised to kill Naraka. They left Krishna's place.

Krishna returned to Indra's capital, Amravati, and restored the crown and royal dresses with all the signs of kingship that had been taken away by the evil Naraka. Indra and the other gods, along with their mother Aditi, met Krishna, worshiped, and praised Lord Krishna for returning their respective realms.

The next task for Krishna was to steal the Parijata flower, also known as the Heaven flower. The keepers of the garden informed Indra and his wife, Sachi, about this. Indra, the ruler of heaven, came with his wife, Sachi, and fought against Krishna. Krishna emerged victorious in the battle against Indra and subsequently uprooted the Parijata tree, transporting it to Dwaraka, his residence, where he lived with his wives. The uprooted flower tree parijat was planted in front of the doorstep of Satyabhama the another wife of Krishna who strikes for the heaven flower.

TRANSLATION OF PARIJAT HARANA BY WILLIAM L. SMITH:

Sankaradeva's "Parijat Harana" is a revered Assamese text that embodies the spiritual and cultural heritage of the region. William L. Smith's translation of this text marks a significant milestone in making Assamese literature accessible to a global audience.

William L. Smith's translation is notable for its fidelity to the original text, incorporating some original words and phrases while adopting a straightforward and systematic approach. His translation is characterized by a word-for-word rendering, blended with his unique style, and retains the original sequence and organization.

In the foreword to his translation, William L. Smith presents a significant contribution to the study of Sankaradeva's theatre. He elaborates on the processes and procedures involved in Sankari theatre, or Ankia Nata, thereby shedding light on the distinctive characteristics of this ancient theatrical tradition. William L. Smith sought the expertise of two renowned scholars of Assamese literature, Kaliaram Medhi and Dr. Satyendranath Sarma, to aid him in his translation. Their guidance and insights were invaluable in helping him navigate the nuances of the original text and ensure the accuracy and authenticity of his translation.

Smith's translation is characterized by a deep understanding of the original text's cultural and spiritual context. He employs a nuanced approach, balancing fidelity to the source text with the need for clarity and readability. Smith faced challenges in translating the text's poetic and symbolic language, ensuring that the spiritual essence was preserved. Smith's translation has far-reaching implications for the global understanding of Assamese literature and culture, facilitating cross-cultural exchange and appreciation.

Finding and Discussion:

The vocabulary and writing style of the paragraph are reminiscent of ancient Indian literature, particularly Hindu scriptures and devotional texts. Here are some key features and non-English words used in this translation. While Smith employs the spelling 'Shankaradeva', other Assamese scholars prefer 'Sankaradeva' or 'Sankardeva'

Non-English words used by Smith they are -

Hail - an exclamation of praise or greeting. Vishnu - a name, referring to the Hindu deity. Achyuta - a name, meaning "infallible" or "unfailing". Lila - means "play" or "divine sport". Parijata - a type of flower. Shankaradeva - a name, likely referring to a person or saint. Krishna - a name, referring to the Hindu deity. Garuda - a mythical bird-like creature. Devaki - a name, referring to Krishna's mother. SUTRA - a narrator or guide. Harana - means "carrying away" or "abduction". Yatra - means "journey" or "pilgrimage". Airavata - a name, referring to Indra's elephant. Shachi - a name, referring to Indra's wife. Rukmini - a name, referring to Krishna's wife. Parameshvara - a title, meaning "Lord of the World" or "Supreme Lord". Guru - means "teacher" or "spiritual guide". Narada - a name, referring to a celestial sage. Narayana - a name, referring to the Hindu deity Vishnu or Krishna. Rasa - means "emotion" or "sentiment". Agha - a name, referring to a demon. Baka - a name, referring to a demon. Dhenuka - a name, referring to a demon. Kamsa - a name, referring to a demon king. Avatara - means "incarnation" or "descent" of a deity. Muniraj - a title, meaning "king of sages". Indumati - a name, referring to Satyabhama's friend. Jambuvati - a name, referring to Krishna's wife. Keshava - a name, referring to Krishna. Saranga - a name, likely referring to Krishna's bow. Satyabhama - a name, referring to Krishna's wife. Naraka - a name, referring to a demon. Kamrup - a name, likely referring to a place or region. Dvaraka - a name, referring to Krishna's kingdom. Hari - a name, referring to the Hindu deity Vishnu or Krishna. Madhava - a name, referring to Krishna. Jagannath - a name, referring to Krishna or Vishnu. Jaya - a term, meaning "victory". Vasumati - a name, referring to Naraka's mother (earth). Darshan - a term, meaning "sight" or "vision". Rama - a name, referring to the Hindu deity. Kamrupa - a name, likely referring to a place or region. Indrani - a name, referring to Indra's wife. Amaravati - a name, referring to the heavenly city of the gods. Ahalya - a name, referring to a mythological figure. Gautama - a name, referring to a sage. Govinda - a name, referring to Krishna. Danava - a term, referring to

a demon. Purandara - a name, referring to Indra. Murari - a name, referring to Krishna. Narakasura - a name, referring to a demon. Yadava - a name, referring to Krishna's clan or dynasty. Danuja - a term, referring to a demon. Brahma - a name, referring to the Hindu deity. Shiva - a name, referring to the Hindu deity. Kali - a name, referring to a goddess and an age of time. Dharma - a term, referring to duty or righteousness.

Smith employs a literal translation approach, whereas Sankardeva utilizes various names to refer to Lord Krishna. Likewise, Indra Smith also adopts the same terminology." Smith uses the phrase 'good people' to translate 'samajik lok' or 'savasada', which refers to respectable or noble individuals in society.

Analyzing the Writing Style:

A Blend of Poetic and Formal Elements:

The writing style of this play is characterized by a unique blend of poetic and formal elements, making it accessible to a wide range of readers. The key features of this style can be summarized as follows:

Poetic Elements:

1. Rich sensory details and vivid descriptions
2. Use of metaphors and similes to create vivid imagery
3. Repetition and rhythm to emphasize importance and create musicality
4. Emphasis on emotions and relationships between characters

Formal Elements:

1. Formal and ceremonial tone, suitable for a religious or mythological context
2. Use of epithets and honorifics to show reverence and respect
3. Assumed familiarity with Hindu mythology and cultural practices
4. Simple and direct sentence structure to create clarity and accessibility

Overall Impression:

The writing style is reminiscent of traditional Hindu devotional literature, such as the Puranas or the Bhagavata Purana. The blend of poetic and formal elements creates a unique and captivating narrative voice, making the text engaging and accessible to readers. The writing or translation style is reminiscent of traditional Hindu devotional literature, such as the Puranas or the Bhagavata Purana, with a focus on poetic language, dramatic tone, and emphasis on emotions and relationships. The writing and translation style of this passage can be analyzed as follows:

1. *Poetic and descriptive language:* The text features poetic descriptions, such as "lotus-like eyes", "body grew exhausted from sobbing", and "heart burned".
2. *Emotional tone:* The play conveys strong emotions, including grief, pain, and desperation tenderness, and anger.
3. *Formal and ceremonial tone:* The language is formal, with a sense of reverence and respect, particularly in the dialogue between Krishna and Satyabhama.
4. *Use of metaphors and similes:* The text features metaphors (e.g., "her body grew exhausted from sobbing", "her frail frame cannot bear her grief") and similes (e.g., "like an enemy", "like a new rain cloud").
5. *Repetition and rhythm:* The play has a repetitive structure, with a focus on emotional expressions and dialogue.
6. *Cultural and contextual influences:* The text assumes a familiarity with Hindu mythology and cultural practices, particularly the significance of the Parijata flower and the character of Narada.
7. *Translation choices:* The translation appears to prioritize fidelity to the original text, with a focus on conveying the emotional intensity and poetic language of the play.
8. *Dialogue-driven narrative:* The story unfolds through dialogue, creating a sense of immediacy and emotional intimacy.
9. *Use of honorifics and epithets:* Characters are addressed with honorifics (e.g., "Shri Krishna", "Keshava") and epithets (e.g., "trouble-loving Narada"), emphasizing their status and reverence.
10. *Simple and direct sentence structure:* Despite the poetic language, the sentence structure is relatively simple and direct, creating a sense of clarity and accessibility.

Overall, the writing and translation style is reminiscent of traditional Hindu devotional literature, such as the Puranas or the Bhagavata Purana, with a focus on poetic language, emotional intensity, and cultural context.

Unveiling the Devotional Literary Style of Parijat Harana:

As we explore the literary landscape of this play, we find ourselves immersed in a distinctive fusion of poetic and formal elements, echo in revered traditions of Hindu devotional literature, such as the Puranas and the Bhagavata Purana. This blend of stylistic features is marked by:

1. Poetic and descriptive language
2. Emotional tone, conveying strong emotions like grief, desperation, and tenderness.
3. Formal and ceremonial tone, with a sense of reverence and respect
4. Use of metaphors and similes to create vivid imagery
5. Repetition and rhythm, emphasizing emotional expressions and dialogue
6. Cultural and contextual influences, assuming familiarity with Hindu mythology and practices
7. Translation choices prioritizing fidelity to the original text
8. Dialogue-driven narrative, creating immediacy and emotional intimacy

9. Use of honorifics and epithets, emphasizing status and reverence
10. Simple and direct sentence structure, ensuring clarity and accessibility.

Additional Literary Features:

Analyzing the Dramatic Translation: Key Features

- A strong sense of drama and dialogue, with a focus on conveying the emotions and interactions of the characters.
- An emphasis on devotion and worship, particularly in the dialogue between Rukmini and Satyabhama.
- A use of rhetorical devices, such as repetition and rhyme, to create a sense of musicality and rhythm.
- A focus on the theme of devotion and the importance of worshipping Krishna.

Literary Style and Context :

Overall, the writing and translation style is reminiscent of traditional Hindu devotional literature, such as the Puranas or the Bhagavata Purana, with a focus on poetic language, emotional intensity, and cultural context. This style effectively conveys the spiritual and emotional significance of the passage, making it a compelling and meaningful read.

Conclusion:

William L. Smith's masterful translation of "Parijat Harana" stands as a shining testament to his unwavering dedication to preserving the spiritual and cultural essence of Sankaradeva's iconic text. Through his meticulous work, Smith not only breathes new life into this revered classic but also paves the way for further exploration and appreciation of Assamese literature, a treasure trove of cultural and philosophical wisdom. As a result, his translation enriches our understanding of the region's rich cultural heritage, allowing readers to delve deeper into the nuances of Assamese thought and tradition. By making this seminal work accessible to a broader audience, Smith's translation fosters greater cross-cultural understanding and appreciation, ensuring the timeless relevance of Sankaradeva's vision for generations to come.

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