



Proto-postcolonial Translation: Vernacular Resistance in Neo-Vaishnavite Writings of Assam

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Abstract:

Translation implies more than a linguistic act and involves aspects like culture, ideology, power and context. No translation is an honest endeavour; it is rather a political one. This political standpoint of translation has emerged with the postcolonial discourse in translation. Nevertheless, the practice of translation in the pre-colonial era itself demonstrates the fact that translation carries a political purpose. There are numerous examples of translation being used to serve certain ideological agendas. Using a qualitative and comparative investigation, this paper discusses the concept of proto-postcolonial translation in the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam, to establish that the vernacular translation practice during the period foresees postcolonial concerns like power and cultural identity. Further, it discusses that such practice could be read as proto-postcolonial translation prefiguring future theoretical offshoots like vernacular agency, resistance to linguistic domination and the politics of epistemological creation. Finally, the study concludes that the Neo-Vaishnavite translation strategy is quintessentially similar to the postcolonial translation practice in resisting the dominant language.

Keywords: Proto-postcolonialism, Neo-Vaishnavism, Vernacular Translation, Bhakti Tradition, Assamese Cultural Identity, Knowledge Politics.

1. Introduction:

Translation, in its most basic sense, is an act of transferring meaning from one language to another. However, this is not purely a linguistic act; it is a social, cultural, ideological and political act as well. The history of translation in India depicts that certain decisions in this act involve the question of power, ideology and purpose. For instance, determining the source language and the target language, picking up the texts for translation and ascertaining the functions that the translation works would serve are deeply entangled with questions of authority and power. In pre-colonial India, Sanskrit serves not merely as a medium of communication but as a tool of social control- its accessibility confined largely to the upper castes and scholarly elite. In this context, the vernacular turn of the Bhakti movement results in cultural and religious democratisation. The Neo-Vaishnavite reformatory zeal in Assam during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries reverberates the same decentralising spirit in the epistemological realm.

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement, pioneered by the grand duo Srimanta Sankardeva (1449–1568) and Sri Sri Madhavdeva (1489–1596), takes up translating and adapting Sanskrit sacred texts into Assamese. They, being the principal media, transmit Vaishnav religious knowledge and tradition to the Assamese folk. Other contemporaries follow suit, and thus, the hoard of Vaishnav texts constitutes the body of Assamese literature. The significance of this literature lies not only in its educating and spiritualising function, but also in making the Assamese language evolve into a systematic, rich and widely communicable code of writing as well as speaking. Speaking here basically points to the recitable, chantable and referable verses that come to be in every follower's mouth. The language used in such literature is known as the Brajavali (alternatively known as Brajabuli) which is a carefully created fusion of a couple of original languages like existing Assamese and Maithili. Being a lingua franca between places

like Odisha, Bengal and Assam, this language serves as a code for literary and religious purposes along with paving ways for the modern Assamese language.

The translational practices of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement can be examined through the lens of the theoretical framework called 'proto-postcolonial translation.' Although the theoretical terminology of postcolonialism appears in the late twentieth century with the work of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Assamese religious translation practice can be called to have been already executing a postcolonial purpose. The Vaishnavite movement privileges the vernacular language by incorporating indigenous aesthetic and performative forms with a view to serving the majority mass. Thus, it forms an inclusive spiritual community that echoes a postcolonial critique of linguistic imperialism, epistemic hierarchy, and cultural hegemony.

2. Historical and Socio-religious Context: The Bhakti Tradition and Assam:

The Bhakti movement that spans between approximately the seventh and seventeenth centuries has a sweeping impact across the Indian subcontinent. It stands as one of the most transformative religious and literary movements in South Asian history. Emerging originally from Tamil Nadu with the poet-saints of the Alvars and Nayanmars, the movement gradually spreads northward, taking distinctive regional forms as it engages with local languages, social conditions and spiritual traditions. Fundamentally signifying intimate and personal devotion, 'bhakti' literally stands for 'participation' or 'sharing' and for a thorough and unflinching devotion to a personal deity, most commonly Vishnu or Krishna and Shiva. The Bhakti devotees seek spiritual liberation through mere intense devotion rather than the rituals of Vedic sacrifice and elaborate religious performance.

The Bhakti movement in general coincides with a vernacular revolution in literature and religious expression. Poets such as Kabir, Mirabai, Tukaram, Namdev, Eknath, Surdas, and Tulsidas compose in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and other regional languages rather than Sanskrit. All these poets write in vernacular languages so that common men and women can understand the knowledge of religion. This is not only a stylistic choice but a political one; the Bhakti saints have dismantled the priestly monopoly on sacred knowledge. As Sheldon Pollock has argued, the emergence of vernacular literary cultures in medieval India represents a fundamental reconstruction of cultural and political power or a “vernacular millennium.” (23) Interestingly, the Bhakti movement is both an outcome of and a catalyst for this restructuring.

The movement's democratising drive is propelled by its distinctive design of song, performance and communal gathering. Bhakti devotion is primarily oral and performative; *kirtan* (congregational singing), *pravachan* (discursive teaching) and theatrical presentation replace the closed rituals of the temple sanctum as the primary sites of spiritual life. These performative practices have obvious implications for translation and linguistic mediation for both illiterate and educated audiences.

Assam, in the period of Sankardeva's birth, is a complex society with its multi-religious and multi-lingual forms. The Ahom kingdom which has dominated the Brahmaputra Valley from the thirteenth century, has developed a sophisticated political culture that absorbed diverse ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions. The Ahom rulers are themselves originally followers of a distinct Tai religious tradition, but over generations has adopted elements of Hinduism, particularly Shaivism, while maintaining their own spiritual practices. Alongside the Ahoms, various indigenous communities such as Bodo, Mising, Karbi, and others maintain their own religious and linguistic identities. Even in such a context, Brahminical Hinduism, represented

primarily by the Shakta and Shaiva traditions, holds considerable influence among the upper strata of Assamese society. Sanskrit learning is guarded by the Brahmin priestly class, and access to the Puranic scriptures is largely restricted to those with the requisite caste status and education. For the vast majority of the population, including most peasants, artisans, women, and members of tribes and lower castes, direct access to Sanskrit scripture is practically impossible.

It is into this milieu that Srimanta Sankardeva is born in 1449 in Alipukhuri (current Nagaon district in Assam) to a Kayastha family with connections to both scholarship and political influence. Sankardeva's intellectual formation combines Sanskrit learning with deep engagement with vernacular culture, and his eventual turn toward Vaishnav devotion is fuelled by a long transformative pilgrimage to the major Hindu holy sites of India. Upon his return to Assam, he begins composing devotional literature and establishing the institutional framework called *namghar* (community prayer hall) and *satra* (Vaishnavite monastery) that would anchor the Neo-Vaishnavite movement for centuries to come.

3. Translational Practices during Neo-Vaishnavite Movement:

The magnum opus of Sankardeva's translational work is his rendition of the most revered text of the Vaishnav tradition, i. e., the *Bhagavata Purana* from Sanskrit into Assamese. The *Bhagavata*, particularly its Tenth Book narrating the life and adventures of Lord Krishna, serves as the devotional foundation of Neo-Vaishnavism across India. Sankardeva's Assamese *Bhagavata* does not aim at a word-for-word correspondence with the Sanskrit original but rather at a liberal, creative and adaptive rendering that makes the text spiritually and aesthetically receivable to an Assamese-speaking audience.

This adaptive approach to translation is paradigmatically significant. Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva have a clear knowledge that transmission of meaning requires not merely lexical substitution but cultural and aesthetic transformation. The meters, imagery, narrative description and devotional tone of the Assamese *Bhagavata* are shaped by local sensibilities. Assamese folk poetic traditions, regional background and setting with indigenous geographical intricacies, and the rhythmic patterns of Assamese music exemplify that the translation does not rely on direct equivalents of its Sanskrit counterpart in the target text. It is rather a new creation—a text that is simultaneously faithful to its source and rooted in its receptor culture.

Translation theorist Lawrence Venuti distinguishes between “domestication” and “foreignisation” (20) as translation strategies, either of which finds expression in any translation work. A domesticating translation assimilates the source text to the cultural norms of the target language, making it turn native and familiar whereas a foreignising translation preserves the strangeness of the source, reminding the reader of its peculiarity. Sankardeva's *Bhagavata* is neither a straightforward domestication nor foreignisation, but something more complex. It appropriates the Sanskrit prestige while transforming its cultural currency, making the divine both transcendently other and intimately Assamese. This translation framework is characteristic of proto-postcolonial translation.

Another masterpiece, the *Kirtan Ghoxa*, is Sankardeva's most celebrated composition and one of the greatest works of medieval Assamese literature. Composed across several years, it is a compilation of devotional songs glorifying Lord Krishna; it is inspired mainly by *the Bhagavata Purana*. However, the rendition draws on multiple lyric registers and performative traditions. The text is designed not primarily for private reading but for communal singing in

namghars and as a part of religious rites at home. Thus, an egalitarian purpose is served by this translation work in the Neo-Vaishnavite religious practice.

The musicality of the *Kirtan Ghoxa* is inseparable from its translational and ideological significance. By encoding theology in song, a form accessible to non-literate audiences regardless of caste or gender, Sankardeva transforms the medium of religious knowledge transmission. The sacred could be carried in memory, embodied in performance and experienced emotionally by communities gathered in devotion, bypassing entirely the textual infrastructure of Sanskrit learning. This is what Walter Ong, writing in a different context, would call the “oral residue” (36) of a culture finding accommodation in a new literacy. Though in this case, the oral is not a residue but a deliberate and sophisticated communicative choice which is largely constructed by these Vaishnav luminaries.

In addition, the *Kirtan Ghoxa* incorporates elements from multiple Assamese performative traditions including *ojapali*, a form of narrative performance combining song, dance and recitation associated with both folk and Brahminical contexts, thereby weaving vernacular aesthetic heritage into devotional expression. This integration of local performative forms constitutes what Homi Bhabha would later call mimicry with a difference—“Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognisable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”(86) The Neo-Vaishnavite movement appropriates and transforms existing cultural forms, redeploying them in the service of a theological project that simultaneously honors and transcends their origins. Thus, translation works in this period can be called and experienced more as originals than mere transfer from Sanskrit to Assamese. This stands as a major reason why the Neo-Vaishnav translators are mostly considered as original authors and not translators.

Alongside Sankardeva's works, Madhavdeva's *Naam Ghoxa* is perhaps the most philosophically sophisticated text produced by the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. It represents a distinctive development of the translational and devotional project inaugurated by his guru Sankardeva. The text is organised around the principle of 'naam-kirtan', the devotional chanting of divine names as the supreme spiritual practice for the present age i.e., Kali Yuga. Its language is dense with devotional intensity, philosophical precision and lyrical beauty. Although Sanskrit theological knowledge is the core element of the text, the vernacular idioms and stylistic expressions do not reflect literal translation. The translator is not disturbed by ideas like formal faithfulness; instead, he is more occupied to practically making knowledge available as well as making the knowledge cloaked in the target (Assamese) soil.

The *Naam Ghoxa* is particularly significant for its radical caste politics; it expands Sankardeva's inclusive vision. Madhavdeva constantly insists that divine grace is accessible to all—regardless of caste, gender, or social position. The text firmly challenges the Brahminical exclusivity in religious gain by asserting that sincere devotion is the only requisite, not high-caste privilege. This idea of inclusivity stands alongside with the text's linguistic medium. By composing it in Assamese rather than Sanskrit, Madhavdeva executes this very inclusivity. Use of Assamese is a powerful argument in itself which enables a democratic access to the divine.

In addition, the *Naam Ghoxa* is an example of 'conceptual translation'. It is a transposition of the entire Vaishnavite conceptual framework in Assamese. Sanskrit religious lexicon is not simply borrowed but recontextualised in the target language and culture that gives them new nuances, associations and resonance. Concepts such as *maya* (illusion), *moksha* (liberation) and *bhakti* (devotion) are introduced in a manner that the Assamese audience could make them a way of life and not just revere as words with religious weight. The outcome is an

ambivalent or hybrid theological vocabulary that defies a one-to-one transaction between Sanskrit and Assamese. The most crucially observable aspect of this type of translation is the liberty Indian translators privilege. Had it been a Western setting, no translators could have been as flexible as to be able to twist the source content and create and evolve the target language to serve the politics of purpose of the translation work being made. William Tyndale and Étienne Dolet testify to this polarity between the Western and Indian practices of translation. Tyndale translates the *New Testament* from Greek into English in 1526 and is strangled to death followed by burning at stake for profanation of the Holy Writ in 1536. Similarly, the French humanist Dolet is accused of ‘mis-translating’ one of Plato’s dialogues that implies mistrust in immortality and is executed by strangulation in 1546. Conversely, these Assamese translators including Sankardeva and Madhavdeva are not bothered by the ideas like heresy, dissent, profanation or sacrilege, thereby enabling their renditions to serve the Vaishnavite purpose.

4. Ankiya Naat: The Performative Genre in Neo-Vaishnavite Translation Practice:

The Neo-Vaishnavite movement's translational project goes beyond mere linguistic transfer and includes theatrical performance. Sankardeva invents the Ankiya Naat tradition, a form of one-act devotional drama that combines Sanskrit dramatic conventions with vernacular Assamese dialogues, local musical traditions and elaborate costume and staging. The Ankiya Naat draws on Puranic narratives- featuring the lives and deeds of Lord Krishna, Lord Rama and other divine figures—and is performed to a mass audience through vernacular language, spectacular performance and communal participation.

The Ankiya Naat tradition represents a particularly rich instance of what we might call ‘multi-modal translation’—the transposition of textual meaning into multiple sensory and performative registers simultaneously. Sacred narratives are translated not only from Sanskrit to Assamese but from written scripture to embodied performance, from the domain of elite learning to the domain of communal celebration. The namghar where these performances take place is a deliberately egalitarian space—all castes sit together, all participate in the kirtan, all witness the divine drama. The theatrical translation of sacred texts is, thus, inseparable from a social translation of religious community.

5. Neo-Vaishnavite Translation through Proto-Postcolonial Prism:

5.1. Enumerating Proto-Postcolonial Translation:

The concept of ‘proto-postcolonial translation’ requires careful explanation as it carries anachronistic implications. Sankardeva and Madhavdeva have no knowledge of postcolonial theory as they precede the British colonialism that provides the immediate context for postcolonial theory's emergence. Nevertheless, this revelation has a methodological purpose and function in presenting the paper's point. As Fredric Jameson puts it, historical analysis always involves reading the past through the lens of the present, and a retrospective theoretical engagement can illuminate aspects of historical phenomena that were invisible to their contemporaries. (xi)

The prefix ‘proto-’ has nothing to do with any interaction of colonial practice with the Neo-Vaishnavite movement as such. It rather implies that the translation policy and politics in the Vaishnavite era structurally anticipates and prefigures the concerns of postcolonial translation theory. A proto-postcolonial translation practice is one that, without the benefit of the

theoretical framework later provided by postcolonialism, enacts as a resistance. The prioritising of the vernacular over a hegemonic and prestige language, the defying of the Brahminical monopolies on knowledge and spiritual authority, recreating dominant texts for the cause of the masses and instrumentalising translation as a medium of cultural identity formation in themselves reverberate a postcolonial tendency. This tendency strives for preserving the minor or colonised people's language and literature, and thus prevent them from getting erased under the pressure of English or any other powerful languages.

This discussion draws on several threads of postcolonial translation theory. Tejaswini Niranjana's *Siting Translation* argues that colonial translation practices in India serve to fix and subordinate indigenous cultures, producing dehistoricised and decontextualised representations that serve “within the asymmetrical relations of power that operate under colonialism.”(2) Inspired by Benjamin, Derrida, and Bhabha, Niranjana offers an antidote—a translation act should attend to the politics of representation and commit to resisting linguistic and cultural domination by the language of the coloniser so that the Indian linguistic plurality can survive and thrive. Harish Trivedi identifies the translation practice in colonial India as “transactions” that “serve to indicate the precise nature of the dominance and hegemony which formed the central fact of British rule in India”, and then shifts his attention to address this asymmetry by suggesting “some strategies for liberating them [Indians] from [their] colonial burden.” (16) The Neo-Vaishnavite movement, centuries before colonialism, enacts similar strategies of resistance vis-à-vis the Sanskrit-Brahminical relationship.

5.2. Vernacular Agency and Resistance to Linguistic Chauvinism:

The very basic aspect of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement's proto-postcolonial character is its affirmation of vernacular agency in the face of Sanskrit linguistic domination. Sanskrit, in medieval India, has a prestigious and monopolistic privilege over regional languages. This hierarchy can be compared to the relation between English—the language of the ruler—and Indian regional languages. Both Sanskrit and English are the language of power, prestige and authority, and the mastery of these is confined to a small circle of elite whose social control is partly operated by their linguistic privilege. The translational environment in Assam in particular and in India in general is liberal and not confined by the demand for a linguistically equivalent rendition, allowing the practitioners to be more creative. All the same, to translate Sanskrit sacred texts into Assamese is, in this context, a rebellious act; it is not a plain linguistic act but a challenge to the entire social order organised greatly by linguistic power dynamics.

Postcolonial theorists of language like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Raja Rao and Chinua Achebe have contested the politics of writing in colonial versus indigenous languages, arguing about whether the colonial language can be appropriated for anti-colonial purposes or whether such appropriation inevitably reinscribes colonial power relations. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement navigates a parallel dilemma with considerable complexity. Instead of rejecting Sanskrit which could mean rejecting the sacred tradition itself, Sankardeva and Madhavdeva appropriate Sanskrit learning and Puranic content while domesticating, nay, adapting them in the vernacular. Sanskrit remains the prestige source from which authority is drawn, but Assamese becomes the medium through which that authority is distributed.

This strategic adoption echoes Homi Bhabha's concept of "colonial mimicry" (89) from a critical standpoint. According to Bhabha, mimicry explains the colonised subject's partial adoption of colonial culture, which both approximates and subtly undermines the colonial ideal. Likewise, the Neo-Vaishnavite translation mimics Sanskrit theological discourse; however, it inflects the original linguistic and religious features through vernacular form, resulting in a progressive displacement of Sanskrit exclusivity. The Assamese texts not only acknowledge Sanskrit prestige but also demonstrate that Sanskrit's sacred content can be adequately and rather more powerfully conveyed in the vernacular, and this is a more functional way for the whole Assamese community to have access to religious practices.

5.3. Dismantling of Epistemic Hierarchies:

Postcolonial theory, particularly as developed by Gayatri C. Spivak, has deeply interacted with the politics of knowledge production. Spivak comments on how the language of the then British ruler is still holding the authority to speak, how knowledge presented through English counts, and how knowledge hierarchies are formed and maintained as a whole. Indigenous knowledge, while written or translated, is under a homogenising tendency that erases the local flavours and linguistic exclusivity as well as diversity. She calls this occurrence as "translate" (2000, 400) and asserts for a culturally oriented linguistic transfer that preserves the source language peculiarities, especially in a multi-lingual country like India. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement's translational practice participates in a similar resistance by challenging the knowledge hierarchies. Although this is in the context of caste and religious authority rather than colonial power, it has to muster a degree of rebellious spirit in the contemporary time of Sanskrit and Brahminical autonomy.

Authority of the Brahminical tradition is constructed partially by controlling the availability of the scriptures that store cosmological and ethical knowledge. This control is executed through the institution of Sanskrit learning—allowing only those with the caste status and social resources to acquire Sanskrit education. Rests were considered as either ineligible for the high-knowledge or too profane to touch the sacred texts, restricting them to access the knowledge of the Puranas, the Upanishads or the Vedas. For the infinite majority such as the *shudras*, women, tribal communities and the poor, such knowledge is mediated through the Brahmin priest, who interprets, summarises and selectively transmits the sacred learning. This intervention is not innocent or neutral but utilised to reinforce priestly authority, caste hierarchy and ideological imposition.

The Neo-Vaishnavite translation practice, however, directly dismantles this long-existing knowledge politics. By making the Bhagavata, the Kirtan Ghoxa and the Naam Ghoxa available in Assamese, Sankardeva and Madhavdeva enable both literate and non-literate Assamese speakers—through oral transmission and performance—to access sacred knowledge without priestly mediation. The namghar, as an institution, helps this discontinuation of religious mediation. This community centre is governed by devotional rather than ritual norms and is open to all castes, and organised around performance of the Hindu scriptures and easy devotional practices rather than Brahminical ceremony.

This democratisation of holy knowledge reminds of Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of “conscientização (conscientisation) by means of which the people, through a true praxis, leave behind the status of *objects* to assume the status of historical *Subjects*.” (160) This is the method by which marginalised sections in a society develop a critical consciousness through education. Although the Neo-Vaishnavite movement operates within a religious rather than explicit political

structure, the acquisition of sacred literacy, or access to sacred performance, enables a form of subjective empowerment in the Assamese people. This empowerment is equally spiritual and social in which the Neo-Vaishnavite translation practice bestows the people dignity that the caste system denies with its dismissal of caste hierarchy and caste-mediated access to religious knowledge and practices.

5.4. Formation of Cultural Identity and Common Literature:

Another aspect of the proto-postcolonial character of the Neo-Vaishnavite translation is its function in cultural identity formation. Ranging from Frantz Fanon's take on 'national consciousness' (148–205) to Benedict Anderson's discussion on 'print capitalism' (36–43) and 'imagined communities' (44–45), the postcolonial discourse has meditated how cultural production influences the creation of collective identities in relation to the colonial and postcolonial issues. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement is noteworthy for forming an exclusive Assamese cultural identity. Although the backdrop is not colonial, it is an equivalent situation—a complicated negotiation between a regional culture and the Sanskrit tradition privileging a pan-Indian hold.

Prior to the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, Assamese cultural identity is diverse and fragmented without a common literary form which is due to the presence of multiple ethnic communities with their individual languages and cultures. Therefore, the movement's inclusive agenda to embrace the existing communities into the religious practice is greatly performed by the translational means. In providing a common tongue and a body of divine literature brings the peoples together under the umbrella of a singular identity. It is a vernacular public space—a

sphere of shared cultural expression, emotional belonging and common identity constructed via a literary and devotional practice.

This facet of language-building in the Neo-Vaishnavite translation is a candid resonance with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's assertion about the relationship between language, culture and identity in postcolonial contexts. Ngugi claims that his writing in African languages rather than English- the colonial language- is not just a sensible choice but a basic act of cultural self-affirmation. (27–28) Sankardeva's choice to write in the vernacular language is a tremendously herculean job, as the language is still in its primary phase of formation. The whole body of the Neo-Vaishnavite literature is an act of such cultural self-assertion in which the agency of both language and culture anticipates the postcolonial resistance in its reliance on the subordinate group's own language for cultural expression—asserting a voice and decolonising the ideology.

5.5. Limitations of Proto-postcolonial Analogy:

While postcolonial theory addresses the aftermath of European colonialism, which is a historical construction marked by racial prejudice, economic exploitation and systematic cultural elimination, the Sanskrit-vernacular power relation in medieval India is not controlled by racial hierarchy or a coercive apparatus of any colonial reign. Brahminical power is drilled through socio-religious norms rather than the systematic violence of colonial administration.

Moreover, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement does not work against the Sanskrit tradition. Sankardeva himself is an effortless scholar in Sanskrit. The whole epistemology of the movement, established in Assamese, takes its base from its original in Sanskrit. As such, the translations presume and depend upon Sanskrit authority while they challenge Sanskrit exclusivity. While the postcolonial writer confronts a foreign language that is considered as an

imposition or coercion upon the native, the status of Sanskrit in the Neo-Vaishnavite movement is more critical. The movement's treatises do not totally defy the place and worth of the hegemonic Sanskrit; it rather is a concoction of deep respect to the knowledge in the source and an acknowledgement of the language that is as classical as to be called 'the language of the Gods'. In short, the primary purpose of this knowledge creation in the vernacular is grounded on a firm determination to democratise and decentralise its learning rather than a radical resistance of the once-colonised subject to the colonial language. Moreover, the resistance in the Assamese context is against an internal hierarchy within a geographical territory—the present Indian state is yet to be formed—as against the colonial condition where power politics is formed from outside.

6. The Legacy of Neo-Vaishnavite Translation for Assamese Cultural Identity:

The Neo-Vaishnavite translational corpus has a deep cultural significance—not only in its production of a body of religious texts but also constructing the linguistic, aesthetic, performative and institutional culture. The *satra* tradition continues to operate as hubs of devotional life, and the *Bhaona* (dramatic performance) tradition has been proliferating as a medium for spreading not only devotion to Lord Krishna or Vishnu, but also imparting art and culture intergenerationally. The *Kirtan Ghoxa* and the *Naam Ghoxa* are regularly sung in *namghars* and homes as a devotional practice across Assam. The whole Sanskritic *Karmakanda* (religious rites and ceremonies) has been replaced with the Neo-Vaishnavite convention, which is not elaborate but plain and practicable.

From the perspective of cultural identity formation, the Neo-Vaishnavite movement has constructed a shared vernacular culture that has permeated through the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Assamese people. While the Ahom kingdom politically combines the indigenous

communities like Mishing, Bodo, Sonowal Kachari and others that speak languages other than Assamese for their mother tongue, the Neo-Vaishnavite saints provide them a shared anti-caste religio-cultural framework to participate within. However, the whole framework does not escape Hinduism and caste structures. Its worth and functionality, therefore, lies in its inclusive aspiration which has a cultural consequence in Assam's history of bringing all the ethnic groups under one community identity, i. e., Assamese.

The nineteenth and twentieth century nationalist map-making heavily draws on Srimanta Sankardeva and his contemporaries as a symbol of Assamese cultural unification. This appropriation transcends from Neo-Vaishnavite heritage to nationalist identity—the movement's religious mission is translated into a secular one, a cultural nationalism. Likewise, its devotional democracy is looked back on as proto-nationalist harmony.

7. Conclusion:

This discussion has tried to assert that the translational practices of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement in Assam constitute a proto-postcolonial involvement that envisages later theoretical emergence of narratives that talk about the politics of language, episteme, and cultural selfhood. Through the rendition of Sanskrit sacred texts into Assamese, integration of local idioms and performative traditions, democratisation of spiritual knowledge across caste and class limits and contribution to creating a distinct Assamese cultural identity, Sankardeva and Madhavdeva have advanced a translational politics. This shows much in common with the postcolonial translation resistance, although this translational practice occurs centuries before the advent of European colonialism.

Finally, the Neo-Vaishnavite example solidifies the fact that translation is never a purely linguistic act; it is rather a site of power, negotiation and ideology. It constantly oscillates between choices about linguistic hierarchy, cultural negotiation and the sharing of knowledge, which is impacted by the very purpose of the translation. The Neo-Vaishnavite movement, although not theoretical, is a postcolonial forerunner. It does not only provide a body of fine literature but also establish the fact that translation is an act of justice—a medium of bestowing divinity to the Assamese, as well as a sense of unity and belonging to the multiple races of the land.

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