

William L. Smith (1942-2009)



William Smith had come to Sweden after graduating at John Carroll University, University Heights (Ohio, USA) in 1965. At Stockholm University, he studied Sanskrit and new Indo-Aryan languages under Siegfried Lienhard, who supervised his MA thesis (licenciat, 1971) and doctorate (1976) as well. In 1981, he became “docent” at Stockholm University, “universitetslektor” in 1992 and “befordrad professor” in 2003. In 2004, he joined Uppsala University as professor of South Asian languages and culture, from which he retired in spring 2009.

Bill's special field of interest soon turned to medieval religious texts in the eastern parts of North India. His research was based on careful reading of text resources and profound philological analysis. Particularly his monographic work *Ramayana Traditions in Eastern India* (Stockholm, 1988, revised edition New Delhi, 1995) is a demonstration of his erudite scholarship. Bill devoted his life particularly to the medieval Assami, Bengali, and Oriya traditions of the never ending narration of the Ramayana, to which he also related his doctoral dissertation: *The One-Eyed Goddess of Manasa* (Stockholm 1980).

“How did one set up writing a Ramayana?”, is one of the leading questions that inspired his academic interest, as he starts off his contribution to *Ramayana Revisited* (Manakranta Bose, ed., New Delhi, 2004). *Patterns in North Indian Hagiography* (Stockholm 2000) shows a deep understanding of medieval religious literature, and particularly his interest in the Assamese saint and reformer Shankaradeva (15.-16. century AD). Bill's *Bengali Reference Grammar* (Stockholm 1997), articles and an edited book on *Maithili Studies: Papers Presented at the Stockholm Conference on Maithili Language and Literature* (Stockholm 2003) demonstrate his profound interest in the field of historical and comparative linguistics.

Bill's deep understanding of the Bengali medieval traditions was shaped during the time he had stayed in Kolkata as a young researcher. His devotion for his academic teacher Siegfried Lienhard found its expression in his co-editorship of *Sauhrdayamangalam: Studies in Honour of Siegfried Lienhard* (edited with Mirja Juntunen and Carl Suneson, Stockholm 1995). From the early 1970s onwards, he has continually published scholarly articles and reviews and participated in international conferences in his field of studies.

Bill's health turned fragile during the last six years of his life. Some months ago however, his enthusiasm was revived after the seemingly successful kidney transplantation which he had been waiting for desperately. He immediately announced another book on Mahabharata traditions in Eastern India and started looking forwards to further travels to Eastern India, the region to which he was so much attached. Some time after the operation, complications arose and he had to confront new “health problems” - this was how Bill summarized his situation in his carefree manner. I learned only today (January 5th, 2010) that God had completely other plans with him. He took him to a region of his own choice. Bill died on December 19th, 2009. May he rest in peace.

Dr. Heinz Werner Wessler

Division of Indology at the Institut für Orient- und Asienwissenschaften, University of Bonn, Germany, and currently a guest teacher at the Dept. of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University

Condolences

I join you in mourning the death of Prof. William Smith.
His memory will live on through his seminal works. May his soul rest in peace.

Partha Nath Mukherji

Chair, Professor, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi
Former President of the Indian Sociological Society

The people of South Asia have lost an important link to Stockholm and Uppsala and Indology worldwide a most eminent scholar.

May his soul rest in peace

Yours sincerely

Bo Lindblad

Professor Emeritus of International Child Health, Global Health
Division (IHCAR), Department of Public Health, Karolinska Institutet,
Nobels Väg 9, 17177 Stockholm, Sweden and Professor Emeritus of
Paediatrics, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan

With Professor William Smith's demise we feel the loss of a great scholar on South Asian studies and Indology. I personally feel the loss because I am organising a seminar in April in Delhi on the Manasa cult in Eastern India and Bangladesh. I had sent him a mail to the effect without any reply. Now I understand why. He is the scholar on the subject. His works will inspire us to lead the seminar forward.

Please convey my deepest sympathy to his family and colleagues.

Ashish Ghosh

Formerly Jt. Director, DCRC, Delhi University; currently working on Manasa Performance traditions in Eastern India, for IGNCA, New Delhi

Friends, I am really sad to hear the demise of our scholar friend Dr. William Smith.

It is a great loss to Indological Studies. My heartfelt condolences to his family.

I pray for his soul to rest in peace.

V. Balambal

Professor of History
University of Madras, Chennai, India

I really appreciate your sending out this message. My prayers for him too.

Sincerely,

Ejaz Akram

Associate Professor (Religion & Politics)
Social Sciences Department
Lahore University of Mgmt Sciences (LUMS)
Lahore, Pakistan

Sorry to know this great loss.
Hope his thoughts may enlighten our earth for years.

Mridul Bose

Professor, Dept. of Physics
Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India

It is really an extremely sad moment for all of us to hear of the departure of William Smith. I pray for the departed gentle soul for the peace and comforts in the life hereafter. My sympathies and heartfelt condolences are with his near relations and friends.
With love,

Ghulam Sabir

Founder Iqbal Academy Scandinavia

My deepest condolences to his family.

Prof. B.V. Muralidhar

Professor, Dept. of Political Science & Public Administration
Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati, India

Sorry to hear about this. My condolences.

Tabish Khair

Associate Professor, Department of English
University of Aarhus, Denmark