CHAPTER-II

Gender and Translation

Translation activity and the engagement between women writers, their characters and women reader and her characters gives a new dimension to the process of translation. The process involves women in a way where the position of the translator is flaunted to such an extent that the act of translation has to give importance to the fact that the translated text and the translator has the sensitivity towards gender issues. The concept of gender and how it influences the translation activity is the focal area around which the argument is built up in this chapter. The process of translation as an activity appears to be an innocent one dependent upon the source text transferred to a target language text. The process is not an uncritical one in reality. The selection of the texts, the way they are translated and the target for which they are translated are predetermined. When the issue of gender is considered, the woman centered focus has to involve women in a positive way and the position of the translator has to be flaunted in the process. In the process the ultimate goal is the conveyance of the true sense of meaning in another language and it is the principal concern of the translations act involving the Assamese women's texts. The act of translation involves the work of re-writing, manipulating and communicating a text in a second language to make it available to that set of readers. In the effort of translating the stories from Assamese to English the gender specific subjects are chosen for the purpose of establishing the argument.
The transition of women from ‘things’ to ‘words’ (Barrett, 1992) marks a turn towards the ideological framework of or ‘discursive construction’ of gender. The shift from terming gender only as a sociological stratification to recognizing gender as a construct where ‘language’ and ‘culture’ are central in defining the subjective structure of gender and it also helps in conceptualizing gender. With the change in society the meaning changes thus changing the notion of gender. This complex phenomenon of gender under which we have to recognize ‘women’ leads to even more contradiction and complexities. When the ideal of ‘translation’ is paired with the idea of ‘women’ or ‘gender’ the position is doubly inferior. John Florio (1603) established his argument of making translation essentially ‘defective’ and terming translation as ‘reputed females’. We can hear a similar echo in Susanne de Lotbiniere Harwood’s self-definitions. ‘I am a translation because I am a woman’ (1991:95) at a different point of time and context. This does not change the disadvantageous position occupied by women & translation over the years in historical cultural and discursive context. The ‘feminized’ position of the translation, which is put at an inferior level to the original text resembles the ‘women centric position at the bottom of the social ladder.’

The term gender has been in use since the 1970’s to describe the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity as against the biological differences of the sex. This idea of a constructed entity, that women are made rather than born, occupies a central position in theorizing gender. The idea has a long history as Simone de Beauvoir wrote in the 1940s: “One is not born a woman, but becomes one.”
Translation studies have gained in prominence since the 1980’s and the focus has shifted in such a way that we look at translation not as mere activity, but a kind of “literary activism.” Here the focus is on gender and translation and I would like to directly go into the debates and discussions related to these areas without concentrating on the historical perspectives of translation studies as such. The fact here remains that ‘woman’ and ‘translation’ has been given the lowest position in social and literary ladder and feminist translation theory aims to decipher and problematize the concepts which are responsible for this situation. The work of translation is looked at as the ‘other’ occupying a position that is inferior to the original text in the same vein as the female counterpart is always socially recognized as the member of the society belonging to a lower strata than men. A lot of theories have emerged and feminists at different points of time have focused on issues like gender, identity and culture in regard to critical literary practice, which involve translation as well. Translation studies have been impelled by many of the central concerns of feminism: the rejection of traditional hierarchies, power roles and gendered roles; questions of fidelity, and the questioning of universal standards of meaning and value. In this process language becomes the most powerful tool of assertion and in establishing their positions in the respective hierarchies. The production and creation of meaning is central to both translation and feminism. Feminist writing and translation meet in their common area to emphasize female subjectivity in the production of meaning. According to Godard:

The feminist translator, affirming her critical difference, her delight in interminable re-reading and re-writing, flaunts the signs of her manipulation of the text.

(Godard, 1990: 91)

Historically, the gendered angle to translation has been in existence for quite a few centuries. The existence of the term ‘les belles infidèles’ from 17th
century onwards [introduced by French rhetorician Ménage(1613-1692)] confirms that like woman, translations must be either beautiful or faithful. According to Lori Chamberlaine “translation has captured cultural complicity between the issues of fidelity in translation and in marriage. In ‘les belles infidèles’, fidelity is defined by an implicit contract between translation (as woman) and the original (as husband, father or author). (Chamberlaine, 1992: 315)

Although translation is assigned a weak position historically, it has served as a strong form of expression for women — allowing them to enter the world of letters, to promote political causes and to engage in stimulating writing relationships.

(Simon, 1996: 39).

Writing and authorship was considered to be solely a male phenomenon. Translation offered women an involvement in literary culture, as both producer and consumer. It helped women to take part in some kind of creativity. The scenes have been changing over the ages and a thoughtful glance at the present situation will make it clear that after a certain point the things have not changed as much as they should have been. Lori Chamberlaine has offered a lot of observations in this regard which is useful in the discussion of translation and its relation to gender. According to her the paradigms ‘originality’ and ‘creativity’ are depicted in terms of ‘paternity’ and ‘authority’ pushing the female figure to secondary roles. She uses this distinction between ‘writing’ and ‘translating’— one ‘masculine’ and original, the other ‘feminine’ and derivative. The struggle for authority and originality is at stake at all the time. Henri Van Hoof has said that
Translation has served to discover a culture, a body of knowledge... to defend or disseminate religious, philosophical or political ideas, to struggle against an oppressor... to reveal a literature.

(quoted in Homel and Simon 1988: 44)

Feminist translation includes all of this and this struggle is not confined to translation alone but to the whole process of reading and writing. The oppressor is a compound entity—having its power over gender, culture, dominated race etc. It is difficult to refute this power, yet a careful selection of words, of works to take on—can help in the process of creating a fruitful atmosphere for the emerging women’s culture. Translation is always considered as a form of reading and writing—where a lot of deliberation and pauses are necessary in the part of the translator to do justice to the act of translating. Translation is never an individual activity, allowing the reader/translator to freely translate the source text into a target text. The translator has to carry the burden of language, time, culture, gender and race to the target text, without which the translation may appear as a mere transfer from one language to the other. When the stress is given on the question of gender, we cannot do it in a superficial level. The idea of gender is a debated one and in relation to translation it takes into account the gender of the writer/ reader/translator in order to reach a conclusion. At certain times the gender of the writer and the gender of the reader-translator contribute towards the process of writing, reading and translating. A gendered angle to translation brings about a change in the way translation is looked at. More specifically, translation of women’s texts raises different issues regarding the process of translation and also contributes towards the emerging women’s culture. Like woman, translation can also be distorted, mutilated, “betrayed, transformed, invented and created”
Gender is a constructed notion, not a physical one as it is considered sometimes. Judith Butler in her influential book *Gender Trouble* considers both sex and gender as equally constructed but presented as given. She argues that becoming a woman is not necessarily restricted to females. Gender is in fact “a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real” (Butler 1990, Preface X). Gender has an imitative structure, it is performative and contingent. It is not static but fluid. This character of gender looked at from the angle of the Western critical theory is applicable in the post-colonial context as well. The so called ‘Third World’ women are viewed as coming from backgrounds of deprivation, both economic and educational. So the act of representing these women in the world arena becomes more challenging and demanding. To represent these women, especially Indian women in this context, special emphasis is put on the act of translation. The archival work taken up by the feminists to create a canon of women’s writing, includes translations of rarely found pieces by women in Indian languages. Susie Tharu and K Lalita edited *Women Writing in India* (1991-1993) includes translations of women’s writing from different Indian languages. This anthology has inspired translations of autobiographies, journals and fiction by women. Taking this as a point of departure, the translation of the Assamese women’s fiction into English is attempted. The stories selected for translation and discussion centers round gender specific problems at a time when the social and political situation of Assam had gone through a tumultuous phase. The selections of the stories have been done in such a way to give prominence to the gender 

(Simon, 1996). Translation becomes a kind of metaphor for women writers to describe their experience. 

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issues and the scope of these stories in translation to bring out these issues to a greater audience. Liberties have been taken in selecting and deciding the way they will be translated and the issues that will be focused upon. On the surface, the whole position looks trivial and biased and subject to criticism from the dominant fields of critical discourse. But in the battle for a place of prominence, certain works have never been considered for projection to a greater audience with the help of translations. The effort here is to make a careful and conscious selection to project the kind of ideas that are addressed with immediacy. The actual process of translation gives rise to problems of articulation and the way the ideas are transferred without harming the source language text and its reproduction in the target language. Here a story translated from Assamese can be taken to look at the issues where the storyline revolves around the secret killings of the 1980’s and the social situation of Assam at that time. “Prem Gatha”, is a moving tale rendered efficiently by Manorama Das Medhi. The peculiarity of the story is the attractive style of a woman writer, using the character of a male writer to describe the process of writing a story about a female character who fails to get up from the filth into which she has fallen down. “Prem Gatha” is a story where Das Medhi describes the effort of a writer to write a story about love and affection during the time of violence and unrest. The writer looks for a plot and chooses the character from his childhood memories—a girl working as a domestic help in his household. The girl reminds the author within the story about the simple, cheerful days of his childhood when this girl used to sweep the courtyard and purify it with cow dung mixed water. This uncomplicated character and her romantic engagements with another domestic help provides the author with a plot for a
story. But the situation, within which he lives, prevents him from completing the story and ultimately, the author is confused whether the girl of his imagination really becomes a victim of the present violence. The immediate situation of terror and violence leads the writer to stop finishing his story at different moments violated by the imminent danger of the shoot outs and secret killings. The symbolic use of the fall of the woman and the kind of narrative used by the author makes the story interesting and engaging. The cultural transference of this story, the situations involved with it and the short sections(sections I to XII) used by the author to depict the discontinuity in the face of the hard pressed situation----- all this has to be reflected in the translation to achieve the desired effect. While trying to do so, the translation sometimes does not sound smooth and readable. I have taken this point as a special character of the writer who represents the woman of the time through her narrative. A situation of terror hampers creativity--- this is what comes to mind when we read the story. In the beginning of the story we encounter the character named Koli, who has been dragged and left at a stranger’s house:

Satyajit Borah is thrilled at the thought of the broom. The girl who was sweeping the courtyard with surreptitious sounds! In a flash her name also came to his mind. Koli. Once her brother had shoved her in and left her there. Whether he had pushed her throughout the way Satyajit Borah has no idea. He was too young then. Used to play marble games. Suddenly a grunting was heard. “Will you listen to me?” a lanky man was grinding his teeth, and thrusting her forward violently. She almost darted as a result of that violent push
and holds on to a post in the front veranda to keep her balance.

How she cried! [.p.155-156]

The first few lines of the story define the subject position of the central character. The creator of the character ‘Koli’ is a privileged male ‘Satyajit Bora’ who admits the fact that Koli never cried again during her stay in their house. May be the strength and simplicity of her disposition attracts him to choose her as a character for the story about ‘pure love, sheer affection, and unending fantasy’— in the times overburdened by ‘bombs and guns, wealth, greed and deception.” The protagonist of the story is pushed into a household, maybe against her wish—and the ill-treatment of her in a male dominated power structure is apparent. The free playfulness of a male child is also contrasted against the helpless plight of a girl victimized by the society first by poverty and then in the hands of terror. But even then she does not cry.

The situations are built up in a calculated way in the Assamese story by the author to reach her target reader. When a translation is made—there might be a critical loss in conveying the message, if the cultural politics, the historical moment, the author’s perspective is not taken into account. The question here is, whether the categorization of a piece of writing according to gender of the author and the translator is justifiable. The fact that one cannot ignore is that while translating, the issue of gender has to be taken into account.

In the story, the character of the ‘author’ tries to make his protagonist stand up on her own. His creation can no longer move forward if the protagonist does not stand up to the situation—
Borah suddenly felt that, not the girl named Koli but the story has fallen flat, facedown. He breathed out slowly and started thinking. Now he has to create an atmosphere of love. How will love develop if one keeps twirling on murky cow dung? She has to at least stand up. How to make her stand up? Can’t make Mahesh pull her up. It will be distasteful like a whimpering movie. If her owner is made to pull her up, the credibility is lost. Let her get up on her own! But she has fallen on her back so badly. On the other hand she had committed an offence. She has flung away the mud layered kettle. Even if she can stand up, the landlady’s scolding will make her go red in her ears. [p.166]

The meanings conveyed here are profound and has relation to the social and political situation of Assam as perceived by the author. The transfer of meaning has to be carefully carried out. Here I would like to quote Susan Bassnett who points out

> The translator cannot be the author of the source language text, but as the author of the target language text, has a clear moral responsibility to the target language readers.

(Bassnett-McGuire, 1980: 23)

The debate here is how a translator can assume the ‘moral responsibility’ of taking the text to the readers of the target language text. In this particular story the author, who has assigned the act of creation to a man who continuously fails to hold on to his creative capabilities to conjure up a story of love in the times of trouble, is a woman. The story is crucial in showing the handling of the idea of
gender as the troubled times excluded the women of that particular moment in time to get up and assert themselves, just like the central character in the story. The ‘gender roles’ assigned at most of the times by the male counterpart is highlighted and the ultimate moment is given to the female protagonist whose failure to rise up to the situation shows the enigma of the times.

Satyajit Bora slowly ran his hand over the last sentence of his unfinished story. A few words resounded in his heart—'You did get up from the slimy cow dung water. You did share love. But you could not get up from the pool of blood. Koli—! Koli of that idiom!' [p.173]

This failure of the protagonist to stand up on her own to reach a stage where her importance could be asserted involves gender in a problematic way. Here the question is whether the author fails to raise the female protagonist from her subdued position or is it the general failure of the times that has made the author to make her protagonist of the story within the story “fall flat” as there is no other way out at the end. The pool of blood symbolic of all the bloodshed of the time shows the general and most frequent outcome of the situations which makes the story an obvious selection for translation that can trigger the debates on gender.

The gender issue is not addressed directly all the time by the Assamese women writers and the oblique way of representation conveys powerful messages. The responsibility of the translator here is to carry forward that tone of representation, though at times one feels like intervening and bringing out the meaning in a firm way to cater to the reading public which understands a different
language in the target language set up. But translation as an activity involves specific social and historical forms through which women have comprehended and performed their writing activities. The objective is to reveal the gender politics through translation, and not to establish it with an insight from the translator. Translation has been in use since the European Middle Ages as the means through which women gained entry into the world of letters. The First-wave feminists were in close association with the movement of translation that took up the act to uphold social issues. The building of communication system by women had involved translation. In this regard Sherry Simon observes:

The great works of nineteenth and twentieth-century French, Russian and German modernism were translated in part by women who made translation an expression of their political convictions. They believed, as Madame de Stael had so clearly stated, that movements of literary exchange are vital to the democratic life of any nation.

(Simon: 1996, 2)

The emphasis on the use of translation as a mode of exchange needed for the democratic life of a nation has been in existence. This use of translation becomes valid for the construction of a gender specific outlook of a language and literature when we think of promoting literature by women. Usually certain kinds of texts get selected for translation on the basis of literary merit. At the same time the focus can be shifted to a work on the basis of its value in reflecting the gender specific concern. The translator can take up the responsibility of bringing out the issues that need a wider canvas with the help of translations. Translation theorist and practitioners like Harwood in her translation of Lies Gauvin’s “Letters from an Other” has clearly announced that:
My translation practice is a political activity aimed at making language speak for women. So my signature on a translation means: this translation has used every translation strategy to make the feminine visible in language.

(quoted in Simon, 1996: 15)

This act of assigning the authority to the translator of using a signature in reality can help the women to ask for equivalence with the authorship to make her statement clear.

To carry the argument of a translator asserting her authority in the selection of the text to be translated to bring out the gender politics we can consider Arupa Patangia Kalita's story "Ketiyaba Numali Edin" (Sometimes on A Day Numali) which starts with a translation of a few lines from Safdar Hasmi to sum up the idea in the story:

What is the meaning of freedom
For her or for you or for me
What is the meaning for all of us?  [p.114]

The storyteller explores the world of ‘Numali’ a young girl who “....does not like such depressing moments. She considers such moments to be a curse when one cannot smile or talk.” The gender role assigned to her and her failure to live up to the expectations of her brothers creates a world where she and her mother share a camaraderie till she falls a victim to the terror of the moment. The writer tries to enter the mind of a girl to explore her relations with the other members of her family and the analysis of the personal relationships reaches beyond the ordinary to create a world of excellent judgment. She is the person whom we can meet at
every terror torn household of Assam. When she dies she becomes an all encompassing entity.

Who will carry Numali on the bamboo bier to the crematorium by the river and how. She has spread herself over the entire village. She is there on the citron tree at Raghu’s place, she will sing out if you approach it —

“I am calling you brother, younger and elder, the cowherds of the village.

Do not extend your hands, do not pluck citron, go back home. [p.139]

The burden of the times sits heavy on the women of that period and its reflection in the stories by women provide the scope for exploring the gender politics that translation can offer. The story written by Anuradha Sharma Pujari is a fine example of the gender specific concern that can travel through translation to create an awareness of the situation of the region without much deliberation. The story called “Atmasamarpan” where the meaning of the title is more appropriate if we translate it as ‘Renunciation, instead of ‘Surrender’ which is the literal translation of the story. The story is about a surrendered militant who comes back to the mainstream life after a lot of persuasion by his friend named Sandhya who later on becomes his wife. The surrender happens carrying the hope of an established future for the man who expects to live a respectful life. But the society was not ready to accept him and forgive him for his faults. He still remained a terrorist in the eyes of the public as well as police. The moment some untoward incident happens in the city, he is summoned to the police station. The
accumulated hatred and pent up anger finds its outlet in the process of his physical assault upon his wife, Sandhya.

One single word tore him with slaps from a whip, brought back his old fury, one dead body woke up to dance. Uttering a hideous cry Dipak started towards Sandhya. “What do you say – beast, me a beast – why did you come to this beast? Why do you take meals provided by this beast? Why have you become the bedfellow of this beast? Haramjadi…. obscene words spurted out of Dipak’s mouth. Holding Moumon tightly to her breast Sandhya started running through the rooms. Chairs, table, vases made sounds falling down on the floor and Moumon howled as much. Sandhya tried to enter the bathroom and shut the door but Dipak pulled her out. Moumon was flung off at a distance. Dipak started giving severe blows to Sandhya in great fury. She started howling finding Dipak in such a terrible state. She said sobbing – “I will say, beast, hundred times, thousand times, what else but a beast? Can anyone other than a beast beat a person like this? An ancient wild bell started ringing inside Dipak’s head. He kept looking towards Sandhya like a mad man. The terrified eyes of Sandhya were about to come out of its socket. [p.119]

The treatment of the wife by the husband is just not a familiar scene of domestic violence. It carries with it larger implications of a time that does not find any expression in the literature written by many prominent writers of the time.
The violence with which the husband attacks the wife is in reality not physical. The mental pressure on the man of a previous killing looms large blurring the two moments together.

Raising both the hands Dipak advanced towards Sandhya inch by inch in an attacking gesture of an animal. Sandhya retreated. The vision of a particular woman surfaced before Dipak’s eyes. Holding on to the bullet-ridden body of her husband she also said like this – beast! You are not human, only beast. How can a man who could not save ten thousand rupees in his lifetime, give you money? You have killed an innocent man at someone’s order.” Not only that, the woman put the neck of the revolver to her breast and shouted – “Kill me, you kill me too, beast kill all of us.” [p.191]

The wife terms Dipak as a beast and the memory of a previous killing comes to his mind as a natural reaction to the same word. The link between the two women who term Dipak as the ‘beast’ is an echo of the feelings of the whole generation of women who have faced not men but ‘beasts’ at different points, after the political disturbances of the post eighties situation in Assam. The fact of a woman suffering due to the pressures of time when the male dominated political discourse leaves very little space for her to voice her protest; makes this story an interesting one to be translated to affirm the gendered position of translation. The representation comes through the process of putting the male protagonist at the centre, and the feminist concerns of projecting suffering women create a strong case of gender sensitivity. This is a very indirect way of using fiction to create the
sense of space used by the writer. The act of translating such a story has to retain the terseness of the original and through it the bitterness of the times has to come out. The act of translating a story on the basis of these assumptions definitely points to a gender bias. But translation is not an innocent activity and this gender specific approach is what has been attempted in the present study and process of translation. The theoretical support that has been taken as the basis here is proposed by Susanne de Lotbiniere-Harwood, who proclaims that bias invariably creeps in when a "woman-centred-focus" guides the act of translation. According to Harwood language cannot be neutral, either in writing or translation. In using a different language for the expression of the women specific point of view, care has to be taken so that gender bias do not result in a loss of meaning in the target language text.

The sensitivities which have guided the selection and translation of the Assamese texts have a similar theme running through the stories written by the different women writers. This aspect cannot be neglected as it forms the crux of the argument that translation has the power to struggle against an 'oppressor' and can reveal a literature. The selection is very conscious and deliberate and it helps in constructing the space needed by these women to focus on their problems highlighting the gender issues.

The character of Sandhya in 'Atmasamarpan', and Numali in 'Ketiyaba Numali Edin' bear the brunt of the violence of the times to which they are not directly subjected to. They belong to the mass of those women who does not have a voice of protest and suffer out of the context. Numali embodies innocence and
lack of awareness about the ongoing turmoil. Yet her plight is no lesser than the end of a militant.

The mother tried to get up from the bed and open the door—

Numali was lying upside down on the gravelled road, pools of blood around her. The tall and stout man was squatting by her side, rifle in hand. Blood stains on his body also. Like a wounded tiger he was roaring from time to time, “Hat Jao” (go away). The line demarcating the conscious and the subconscious state of Numali’s mother again disappeared.  [p.133]

This death not only affected Numali, but her mother was equally victimized. Two women suffer similarly in the hands of the state forces which do not see these silent sufferings as reasons to prevent violence.

Sandhya, the suffering wife in ‘Atmasamarpan’ worries about their plight at the act of confession by her husband in front of the police against the former comrades of his militant struggle:

: Now police will take you away. Do you think that they will believe your words?

: I’ve no other way out and am tired of bearing the burden of this life. .......

But you’ve revealed their names, their hideouts; would they allow you to live?

: No one allows me to live. Though one day I came out to live in my dream abode, freely like a bird, quite distinctly from others,
knitting the web of my dreams I have been hanging imprisoned in that net like a tiny Spider. I would never have the opportunity to atone. There is only one way to be released from this net. I know that the police would never take me into confidence. But how shall I be able to win their faith! Be good! I've been tired ruminating over all these.

: What sin you are atoning for? About me and Moumon! You never gave a thought? Dipak gave her a weak smile – “Why are you feeling scared? I have no grudge against anyone. I want to do penance towards my life. You used to educate me with fine vocabulary to come to a new world. Were those fake? Tear drops appeared in Sandhaya’s eyes. [p.199-200]

The silent suffering of Sandhya and her daughter and Numali and her mother is a stark reality in many households where violence has created a void, in the sense that, the loss of faith and the loss of their dear people create a fraternity of the suffering women. This solidarity of grief is what a translator as a reader has to identify and represent it in another language if it has to translate its effect into a different plane.

The postcolonial discourse puts women in a doubly inferior position as they are considered weak and deprived against the dominant white feminist discourse. The women in general are less educated, the opportunities available are insufficient – but the powers they exhibit are no less as compared to their western counterparts. This fact can be established even through translation as the writings by women from smaller language groups like Assamese demonstrate that power
of the female force. The adversities of the troubles are borne courageously by these women which has helped in keeping the seemingly volatile situation under control. So these issues should gain priority and be a reason for the texts to be translated. This emphasis on the subject content of writing has been stressed on by translation theorists. Specially in the postcolonial writing practice translation has an important role of voicing the women's concerns and the translator has play a conscious role of that

Purabi Bormudoi's story “Rajniti Nubuja Manuh” delineates the problems of a group of people torn by ethnic clashes between the Bodos and non-Bodo people in Assam. The victims of the clash are ultimately the women who without their engagement falls prey to the demands of the political upheaval. Yet it is the same womenfolk who helps each other in coming out of the situation. The story of Malati, the protagonist and her mother-in-law forms that bond of solidarity which is indestructible at the times of chaos.

Physical constraints overpowered her at that time. She had been suffering from physical as well as mental strain. What's the use of going on living, better bring it to an end- she thought. She considered it useless to prolong her life and thought of bringing it to an end. But her mother-in-law protected her with utmost care like a young chick surrounded with concern by its mother. Forgetting her own sorrow and misery, she consoled Malati, and though she herself howled a lot, and when Malati cried, she said ‘Don't cry’. [p.174-175]
The two women suffering together do not have any part to play in the political power equation and they suffer silently. But at the end of the story when these homeless women vacate their camps set up for the refugees like them, they are welcomed to their earlier homeland by the women who also lost the male members of their family in the clashes.

On that very instant Malati saw Biren Narzari’s mother coming in though the lane at the back adjoining the two houses.

“You have come?” she said.

“Yes, Biren’s mother” the mother-in-law replied.

“Go and put the house in order. I’ve thoroughly cleaned the interior. I’ll help you in coating the walls. You also shouldn’t sit here. Go inside.”

No malice in her voice. No fire in her eyes. As she had been looking at the woman another Malati came to Malati’s view on the other end. Malati found her as destitute and harassed as herself.

“Nobou, you have come.”

“Yes, I have”- Both the Malatis approached each other.

“I have kept your two goats tied at our place. The black one has given birth to a young one.” Inadvertently Malati advanced further and it was seen that a woman who does not understand politics puts into the bosom of another like her, the tiny one and half month old baby of her own. And then both the women, stranger to politics heaved a sigh of relief that got mingled in the air.  

[p.180-181]
This politics which is indecipherable by these women are actually the points a translator can highlight to establish the gender politics that translation can bring forward. The process of reading and writing that influences translation, has played a part in translating a story like this where different female voices try to join the missing links left by the political upsurge. The two births in the story, Malati’s child and the baby goat, generate that web of creation where the sense of security comes from the fraternity of women with no male counterpart playing the role of a protector. This type of translation has been termed as ideologically oriented translation by Homel and Simon and it has been established that they are in reality not tendentious or misleading. The gender sensitive translator has to take recourse to the views offered by a text while translating it and capture the essence of it to offer moral responsibility of projecting a particular kind of text before the readers.

Bormudoi’s story refers to a situation where the women question the basic tenets of class politics which always makes the women a victim of its nuances. Henri Van Hoof’s idea quoted earlier fits the text of this story as the translators job here is to ‘disseminate political ideas’ through translation to establish translation as an activity which can strengthen any woman’s foray into the literary world to assume not a secondary but a primary role of propagating gender ideals.

For what? For whose craving for power it happened like this? She does not understand politics. Neither does her mother-in-law nor Bhadreswar. And these people – such a large number of people frustrated by tribulations and suffering in relief camps – do they understand politics? No, they also don’t understand. And the others? Whenever she shuts her eyes Malati sees their faces in the
midst of fierce shouting and fire and smoke. Those who set our houses to fire----- whose houses we burnt down – those who smeared their hands with the blood of our men---whose blood reddened our hands – is it the outcome of understanding politics, or not understanding politics?   [p.175]

This repeated reference to politics is aimed towards the state run ideas of politics and the situations created by it. While translating this story the aim is not to talk about such a restricted political idea. The target language audience can clearly see that the politics is also gendered. Even without an understanding of the actual political situation and when there is no note given on the particular situation, the suffering projected here create the sense of gendered urgency which can be understood by everyone. The purpose these kinds of translation serve rests on their success to convey those gender specific notions.

On a similar line Phul Goswamis story “Sahajatri” creates that gender sensitive situation where the translation of the story becomes inevitable to put across the message through a different language. The character of the mother in the story who suffers in oblivion is understood by her son when it was too late to retrace the situation. But her suffering is again the outcome of the time in which the gendered entity of Assamese women suffered a big blow.

It has not appeared to me that my mother dies only now. She started dying since a long period of time. She became helpless at the death of my father. Though he was the teacher of a Primary school he managed somehow to look after the household and sent
me to study outside. Abandoning my study I came back home. I could not save my father even after selling all our land except the house to Dharani Mahajan. My mother shuddered when I put into her hands some money that I earned from several tuitions. Even then she had been alive. The process of dying started when Bapu started coming home at the dead of night. Leaning on the pole of our veranda mother keep waiting – to listen to some particular sounds – sound of a Bike stopping by our gate, the sound of opening the bamboo bars of the gate, the sound of heavy boots. Then, the sound of ablutions, of washing the dishes, sound of angry outbursts and many others. Later these sounds became less frequent. The sound of the motor bike was no longer heard at our gate. The process of my mother’s demise like the dying of the branches of the guava tree from one side had started then. Sometimes later, from the time of seeing the lifeless body of Mina hanging from a rope mother had forgotten to talk. Even when the post mortem report announcing the four month’s pregnancy of Mina came, no single sound came out of her mouth. When Mina had been mixing freely with Dipak I tried to make her understand, “It is not proper to roam around till late at night. People make adverse comments” – mother supported me. “Dipak would marry me. And the people are not looking after us” – she said with considerable fury. That Dipak who assured her that
they will get married did not come even to glance at her dead body.

He regularly supplied her with – dresses and cosmetics. [p.183-184]

The sense of security is lost and the continual disappearance of young boys from their homes to join the armed struggle left the female members of the family suffering in silence. Lack of employment opportunities and the protest against illegal influx influenced the mindset of the young generation bringing in its trail the sense of loss and destruction, where the worst sufferers are the women.

In the story “Sometimes on a day Numali” the mother is the victim of a loss which is irreparable, in the form of the death of her dearest daughter. Before she could come to terms with that grief, she had to be conscious of the situation, before howling out at the death. Urgency of the situation required of her to act sensibly when in reality it is difficult for a mother to control herself at the death of a child. But the imminent danger of the army people finding her stopped her, because the incidents of rape victims, which include even middle aged women and young girls, circulated quite often. In such a situation, the grief does not find a natural outlet:

The jawans who entered Sarubap’s home to search for terrorist knew only one thing – the terrorists have escaped from a place nearer to this house. They entered it at midnight. The doors were wide open. When they entered the drawing room after searching the whole place the mother of Sarubap was almost unconscious. To ascertain whether dead or alive they nudged her with the butt of the rifle and went out. She regained her lost sense at the sharp light, the
sound of heavy boots and the unaccustomed smell. She quickly came to a sitting position on the bed. The long plait of her daughter like the black serpent started moving in to her senses. Shouting- “O my dear child!” she was about to rise but saw a number of army men moving around in her yard. She wanted to call out Sarubap but her voice was muffled by something and she sat like dumb on the floor itself. She sensed as if some of them were advancing towards her, she crept under the bed like an animal. A sharp light came searching in. She cramped further in. Then the sound of heavy steps went out. The middle aged woman sat shivering and weeping silently in a horrendous fear she never felt before. The night of the month of Bohag seemed to sob with her biting its lips. [p.136]

The culmination of the story is reached at the end when with the help of a popular folk-tale Numali is incorporated into the elements of nature. She does not die at the end, rather she changes her form to come back again, as a woman.

She has a bosom full of love, she will be waiting to become a woman once again. [p.140]

In the original story the Assamese equivalent of woman was not used; it was rather the word denoting the sense of a human being. But in my translation, I have replaced the word as ‘woman’ as it appears to be the most suitable translation given the fact that the author has actually made a strong statement of the emergence of women as a source of power even after the defeat at the hands of death and destruction.
The representation of gender through fiction and the case of the women writers making a statement of their own has been the source of the process of this translation project. The analysis offered here is just a summing up of the central issues that had influenced the process of selection. The postcolonial women's texts are powerful sources of the women's voices that thrives to come out and be heard making a statement of their own. Translation proves to be the medium through which even marginalised voices can find a place in the dominant discourse. Along with gender, the cultural specificities of these works has been looked at to establish the thesis in a powerful manner which takes form in the succeeding discussions.

1. The translation of the stories are added as appendices at the end and all the page numbers mentioned hereafter will be according to the page numbers given in the appendices.