Translation has not been regarded favourably by many people throughout the ages. Dante believed that "nothing which is harmonized by the bond of the Muses can be changed from its own to another language without destroying all its sweetness."\(^1\) Shelley, speaking of "the vanity of translation", said, "it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet."\(^2\) Among the Italians there is a popular saying that a translator is a traitor.\(^3\) It is true that translation cannot take the place of the original as something is apt to be lost in the process of transfusion from one language to another, but truer still that everything cannot be enjoyed in the original by everybody owing to the babel of tongues in the world. So translations have been there for more than two thousand years,\(^4\) and whether one likes it or not one has to admit that translation is indispensable in a world where people speak languages so very different from one another. So, we find that

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4. The earliest literary translation, that of Homer's Odyssey into Latin by Livius Andronicus was made about 250 BC. On Translation, p. 271
there is hardly a great writer who has not been translated to or adapted in other languages.

To Assamese writers and readers, translation is nothing new: medieval Vaisnavá poets translated from Sanskrit, sometimes converting Sanskrit verses into Assamese prose; but it is after the British occupation of Assam that translation received a new impetus under the impact of the West. Many English-educated young writers of Assam took to translating English authors—poets, playwrights and novelists,—so that by the turn of the last century there were quite a few good translations, particularly of poetry and drama. Among dramatists to be translated Shakespeare was naturally the first and the most favourite, followed by Ibsen and other modern playwrights in the post-War and post-Independence period.

Shakespeare

To Ben Jonson Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time." He could have very well said that the great dramatist was not of a country, but for all countries. Shakespeare is dead over three and a half centuries, but his works have not dated. They are enjoying external youth not only in the English-speaking world but also outside, in their originals as well as through translations and adaptations. As has been pointed out in the preceding chapter, Shakespeare enjoyed a great vogue in India in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth, and almost all his works were
translated to or adapted in different Indian languages during the period. It is true that nowhere else outside the English-speaking world is Shakespeare read and appreciated in the original as much as in India, yet he had to be translated to the different Indian tongues as the great majority of the people were unable to have direct access to the treasures of his work. The Indian student of Shakespeare knew it quite well that the people, who were experiencing a renaissance in every walk of life, would appreciate the works of Shakespeare with their emphasis on such ideals as belief in the greatness of man, patriotism, nationalism and the Renaissance craving for a greater and fuller life. So, he undertook the great task of translating Shakespeare to his own language, and as a result of this the languages of India abound in translations and adaptations of Shakespeare. The Assamese writer, too, did not lag behind in this respect, and since 1887 the year the first adaptation of The Comedy of Errors was brought out, there has been quite a good number of translations and adaptations of Shakespeare some of which, unfortunately, have not seen the light of day. In this section, an attempt is being made to examine the available translations and adaptations of Shakespearean plays, and to see how far, if at all, they have contributed to the growth and development of modern Assamese drama.

5. Shakespeare's Impact on Hindi Literature, p. 30
The first Shakespearean play to be done into Assamese was *The Comedy of Errors*. *Bhramaranga* (1887), the Assamese version of the play, is rather an adaptation than a translation as the story is wholly recast to an Indianized background. The four students studying at Calcutta, Ratnadhar Barua, Gunjanan Barua, Ghanshyam Barua and Ramakanta Barkakati, who did this pioneering work, wrote in their preface:

There are many difficulties in translating Shakespeare into Assamese. In the first place, Shakespeare's language and thought are so difficult that let alone a foreigner even British scholars have not been able to determine their precise meaning. Besides, it is not easy to transfer the thoughts, customs and behaviour of an alien people to an adapted version, and so something of these has to be left out. While we have tried all our best to maintain the poet's thoughts and ideas without loss, we have sometimes been constrained to change even some ideas of the great poet in order to fit them into the changed background. We have been very careful to see that the poetic quality of the piece is not destroyed, yet we do not dare to say that it is not strained since we have undertaken to translate it.

6. Preface to *Bhrama-raṅga*, 1888
It has already been pointed out that farces and light comedies were very popular during the initial years of the Western impact, and it was in keeping with the literary temperament of the time that the first Shakespearean play to be rendered into Assamese was *The Comedy of Errors*. In *The Comedy of Errors*, Shakespeare does not seem to have any philosophy to propound, nor is he serious in tone or intention. An atmosphere of fun and gaiety pervades the whole play, which does not seem to belong to any particular place or time. What matters most here is the different situations in which confusions are created leading to the hilarious fun, and once the translator is able to create similar situations in the new background that he adopts, the rest of his work becomes easy. This is what our translators have done, or at least tried to do. They have discarded the blank verse in favour of prose in order to make it down-to-earth and appealing to their audience. The names of the dramatis personae are aptly chosen: Solinus, Duke of Ephesus, becomes Ajitsimba, king of Māyāpur; Aeneon, merchant of Smyrneus, becomes Dhanbar, a merchant of Kamrup, while the two pairs of twins are the two Niranjans (one is 'Māyāpūriyā', the other is 'Kāmpūriyā', meaning 'from Māyāpur' and 'from Kāmpur' respectively). Ephesus, the scene of the original story, becomes Māyāpur in the Assamese version, which is certainly an apt name for a place where such incidents happen. (The word 'Māyāpur' literally means 'a city of magic'). Pinch, the schoolmaster, is transformed into a village quack so that he fits well into the local situation. All the female characters except Luce have been retained, and their names are appropriately chosen:
Sumthirā, Mālati, Tārā, Sonpāhi, and all these names sound very Assamese indeed.

The use of colloquial prose in the dialogue throughout the play, except in the incantation blabbed out by the quack, Takaru Bej, lends more local colour to the story. The language is so nicely colloquialized and the sentiments localized that the translated piece reads almost like an original work. One example alone will prove this point. Pinch, thinking that Antipholus of Ephesus, is possessed by the devil, takes hold of his hand and utters:

I charge thee, Satan, hous’d within this man,
To yield possession to my holy prayers,
And to thy state of darkness hie thee straight
I conjure thee by all the saints in heaven

(IV, iv, 50-54)

In the Assamese version, Pinch becomes a village quack who tries to dispel the evil spirit thus:

namo chakravāk utapatī bhailā,
tridarsha dāityara māya saṁhāribe lailā
chausasti jokinīr bān kāti khanda khanda karilā
hum hum gir gir sāgarar mālā.

(Bhrama-raṅga, IV, iv, p. 60)

Such a quack and such a 'mantra' or incantation must have been very appealing to the Assamese audience in the 1890s, many of whom actually believed in evil spirits as well as in the ability of a quack to drive them off from a human being. Commenting on
Bhrama-raṅga, Satyen Sarma says that as the first attempt at translating Shakespeare it is undoubtedly a successful work. Professor Sarma further opines that anybody unfamiliar with the Shakespeare play cannot say that it is a translation, so skilfully is the rendering done. There is no doubt that the play was very popular during the closing years of the last century, and the popularity was certainly due to the fact that it appeared more like a play originally written in Assamese with a native background than a translation of an alien work. "There was a time in Assam", says Hariprasad Burua in his 'Publisher's Note' to a later edition of Bhrama-raṅga "when Bhrama-raṅga was the only play available to be enacted on the stage."  

An adaptation of Romeo and Juliet by Padmadhar Chaliha appeared in 1919. An M.A. in English Literature from Calcutta University, playwright and actor, the late Chaliha was very much a lover of Shakespeare. So he ventured to make Shakespeare known to the Assamese audience through this romantic comedy noted for its lyrical beauty and passionate love. Yet he was aware of the limitations of such a work, and observes, "It is near impossible to translate the play keeping the beauty of the original intact. Yet considering that such deep thoughts and touching feelings should be part of our own literature, I have endeavoured to write this piece in imitation of Shakespeare's play." The play is called Amar-Līlā, Amar (Amarsimha) and

7. Sāhityar ābhās, p. 7
8. Publisher's Note to Bhrama-raṅga, Sakābdā 1859, p. 2
Lilā (Lilāvatī), standing for Romeo and Juliet, respectively. The story is Indianized and recast to a Rajput background with Rajput names for the major characters, although the minor ones sound very much Assamese. The scene of the story is Udaypur, a Rajput country, and instead of the age-old enmity between the two families in the original play, two Rajput clans are presented to be at variance with each other. Rūmsimha and Govindasimha, standing for Montague and Capulet respectively, are represented as military chiefs belonging to the two inimical clans.

While the author has not tampered with the main stream of the story, he makes certain changes, as he himself admits in his preface, in some situations in order to fit them into the Indianized background. In Shakespeare's drama, Romeo meets Juliet at a feast in Capulet's house, praises her beauty, and imprints kisses on her. As such a scene would be taboo on an Indian stage, our playwright makes a shrewd alteration, which are very much in keeping with the traditional Indian dramatic art. He makes Amar meet Lilā in her father's orchard where he offers her a garland as a token of his love. Another change is to be found in the fifth scene of the fifth Act where our playwright presents a crematorium in place of the churchyard. In the original play, Romeo, thinking Juliet to be dead, kisses her and then drinks the poison, whereas in the Assamese version, Amar immediately kills himself by supping the poison that he carries with him. Besides such changes, the writer of Amar-Lilā makes a few additions to and subtractions from the original play. For example, Romeo's dialogue made at the first sight of
Juliet is quite short consisting of some ten lines of blank verse, whereas Amar's soliloquy made as he watches Līlā from a distance is nearly three times longer. Again Amar, as he comes closer to Līlā, makes quite a long eulogy of her, which is not to be found in Shakespeare. Both these pieces of dialogue given to Amar are much in the tradition of Indian drama and reminiscent of a play like the Sakuntalā. Amar's long soliloquy in Act V, sc. v where a horrible description of the crematorium is given, is our playwright's own creation, and must be due to the fact that such narrative soliloquies were quite popular with our playwrights of the first few decades of the present century. Besides these, there are few more minor changes both in the dialogue and situations introduced in order to suit the play to the new cultural background.

As has been noted already, the author of Amar-Līlā has chosen a Rajput background for the story, but very often the dramatis personae talk and behave more like natives of Assam than Rajputs. This is particularly true in the case of minor characters like the nurse, the quack, servants, citizens etc., whose actions, manners and even names are very much Assamese. Of course, the author has been able to give Rajput characteristics to the major characters like Amarsimha and Ananta, who unfailingly exhibit a warlike nature typical of the Rajputs.

10. Amar-Līlā, Act II, sc. i, p. 26
11. ibid., Act II, sc. iii, p. 36
The translation is scarcely literal; often a thought is expressed in our author's own way. There is lyrical beauty in the blank verse, as can be seen in the rendering of Romeo's famous speech about "a name",

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

(II, ii, 43-44)

It is done into Assamese blank verse thus:

kino katha ācheno nāmat,
golāpak golāp nubuli
ān nāme mātileo
madhur gondhti tār thākiba ekei.

(II, v, p. 44)

And the prose dialogues are rendered into Assamese in such a way as to make them appear like original composition. In fact, the author of Amar Līlā seems to be at his best when he translates the prose dialogue of the 'low' characters. Broadly speaking, Amar-Līlā is an agreeable rendering of Romeo and Juliet. On the stage, too, it was popular during its time, and the writer himself informs us that it was performed several times on the Sibsagar Stage alone.¹⁹

A rendering of The Taming of the Shrew was done by Nabinchandra Bardalai in 1932. The title of the Assamese

¹² Preface to Amar-Līlā, 1920
version of the play, Panduri-daman is surely aptly chosen, 'danduri' meaning a quarrelsome woman, a shrew. Except the figures appearing in the Induction, which has been dropped, all the others are retained and given suitable names with the same initial sounds as in the originals: Baptista Minola is Baputi Baruā; Vincentio is Bhānukānta; Lucentio is Lakshmikānta; Katherina, the shrew, is Keturi; Bianca is Bīnāpānī, and so on. Although the translator has not tampered with the main story, he appears to be trying his best to localize the place in his own land as is evident in the selection of names both of persons and of places. Shakespeare's play begins with an Induction, where a joke is played upon a beggar with whom a lord and his court have great sport to the extent of dressing a page as the beggar's rich and beautiful wife and presenting the supposed woman to him as his dutiful and obedient spouse. The beggar is completely fooled, assumes his new rôle and settles down with the supposed wife to watch a play prepared for their enjoyment. Our author has dropped this Induction thinking perhaps that it would not only be out of place, but the joke would be too coarse to please his audience. So he makes an altogether different beginning. The first Act of The Taming of the Shrew starts with Lucentio and his man Tranio talking at a public place where a few lines later appears Baptista with the two suitors to Bianca. But Panduri-daman opens with a scene where the contrasting characters of Keturi (Katherina) and Bīnā (Bianca) are presented in a very homely background, and the stage-directions are reminiscent of a modern naturalistic play rather than of Shakespeare. They run as follows:
A part of Baputi Barua's house. Dina is spinning very attentively. Keturi is reading a book. Ahini enters with a cup of milk and a tray full of betel nuts and leaves.  

Thus the translator is trying to present the picture of an Assamese household before he unfolds the story, which, of course, goes on much in the way of the original with only minor changes made here and there.

The translation is sometimes literal, sometimes free, done according to situations and feelings expressed. Occasionally, a piece of dialogue is found dropped or added, but no liberty is taken with the main ideas of the original play. The translation is done all in prose, and our author seems to have done well by discarding the blank verse, because such a light comedy as this in verse would not be suitable for a modern stage, nor would it appeal to our audience. The use of prose gives a realistic touch to the story, and makes the play come closer to those farces and light comedies which were originally written during the first few decades of this century. The story must have been quite appealing to an Assamese audience some fifty years ago, because a termagant like Keturi (Katherina) and a woman-tamer like Padmapani (Petruñchio), who would marry even the most quarrelsome woman for a big dowry, would not be unknown in an Assam village at that time.

13. Danduri Daman, Bardalai Rachanāvali, p. 105
Nabinchandra Bardalai also translated *King Lear* (1675) which he named *Visād kāhīni*, meaning a story of sorrow and grief. The play, as it is found now, is incomplete, and we do not know if Bardalai translated the whole play or left it unfinished. The second possibility seems to be stronger as *Visād kāhīni* was written when the author was in prison. It may very well be that Bardalai was released when he was doing the translation, and the work was abandoned as he jumped again into the turmoil of the freedom struggle. Be that as it may, the play as we get it now, is fragmentary; the style, too, is rather coarse and without finish. The story is placed in an Indianized background at a point of time in the historical past; the names sound Rajput with the term "simha" tagged to most of the male characters; but the translation is so labouriously literal that even Shakespearean structures and turns of expression are sometimes forced into the Assamese. In fact, as a translation, *Visād-kāhīni* is far from agreeable. It might have been written in haste in jail, of which there are many traces; but that can hardly be an excuse for its being poor. So, except being historically of some importance, *Visād-kāhīni* as a Shakespearean play in Assamese, seems to count but little.

*Ashru-tirtha* (1948) by Atulchandra Hazarika, a leading playwright and teacher of literature, is a better rendering of...
King Lear. True that tragedy is less translatable than comedy, and truer still that a great tragic drama like King Lear nearly defies translation. Yet it has been translated to so many different languages of the world, and our author, too, seems to have tried as best he can to make it a really good work, despite the limitations that translation imposes. The story is placed in ancient Assam with Pratapsimha (King Lear) as king of Vāmrup, while the Dukes of Albany, Cornwall and Burgandy, and the king of France become kings of Darrang, Kundil, Jayantapur and Kamatāpur, respectively. The Earls of Kent and Glouchester become Abhaypurī and Jaypurī, representatives of the kings of Abhaypur and Jaypur, respectively. These changes had to be made because earls and dukes would be inconsistent with the political and social system of Assam. But what is important in King Lear is not so much the story as the expression of elemental passions and the ultimate purging of emotions by terror and pity. No translation, however good it is, can pretend to recreate a Shakespearean play, least of all King Lear. What he can best do is perhaps to take the outline of the story and put it in the way that he thinks best suits his language and the background that he adopts for his play.

Play not included should be called Tarun Kāñchan, and the one included is undoubtedly Viṣād kāhīni. This will be clear to any reader familiar with King Lear. Satyen Sarma is right when he mentions Viṣād-kāhīni as a translation of King Lear (Sāhityar Ābhās, p. 3).
This is what our author seems to be endeavouring to do. *King Lear* begins with a scene where the Earl of Gloucester introduces his illegitimate son, Edmund, to the Earl of Kent. Thinking this to be out of tune with our culture, he leaves this out, and instead introduces Pratāpsimha with a map talking straight of his intention of dividing the kingdom. Edmund's heinous conspiracy against his brother, the scheming of the two sisters to procure his love, and his endless machinations to obtain power—all this is retained, although much of the horridness of the three characters involved is lost in the process of transfusion. It is nearly impossible to recreate the storm that rages in Lear's mind, however best one tries to reproduce the storm outside. Yet our author seems to utilize all the resources of his language at his command to translate Lear's.

*Blow winds and crack your cheeks: rage: blow: You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks: You sulph'rous and thought executing fires, Vount-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts, Synge my white head:*

*(King Lear, III, ii, 1-6)*

**thus**

bowā, bowā mattahege bhima parabhānjan, rudra-rose bāhu dāngi karā āsphālan, suhi lai jala stambha nirian-prapāt, dhārāsāre bāridhār dhālā dharanit sikta karā samunnata mandirar shir, kāreṅgar jaydhvaiā, dalar kalachi
pānit burāi diyā churnākrita kari,  
gandhakāgni: nāmi āhā bajrapāt hai  
palakate pralayar tuli kalarol  
tāl nārikal vakshya bhedi muhurttate  
subra shir, subhra kesh tolā jalakāi.

(Ashru-tirtha, III, ii, pp. 81-82)

This is not a literal translation of the original, nor does it conjure up the heart-rending storm within and without King Lear, yet with its Sanskritized overtone it gives some idea, within the confines of translation, of the intense suffering, both physical and mental, that the old king undergoes. Another difficulty that our translator faces is with the Fool whose seemingly silly comments are so full of meaning that translation can hardly do justice to them. Consequently, the Bahuā in the Assamese play is quite removed from Shakespeare's Fool; what he says only faintly echoes what the Fool says, yet the Bahuā is very much with Pratāpsimha providing fun to the suffering king as well as the audience. Ashru-tirtha cannot claim to have reproduced the beauty and grandeur of King Lear, yet the reader (or spectator) in Assam, who is unable to read Shakespeare in the original, is made familiar through Ashru-tirtha, at least partly, with one of the greatest plays of the world.

Two years later (1950), Hazarika brought out another play, Banij-kowar, an adaptation of The Merchant of Venice. The story of Shylock and his pound of flesh was already known to the educated section of the people of Assam as it was often included in school and college courses. It was Jyanadabhiram
Barua who first introduced *The Merchant of Venice* into Assamese in the form of a story, but none else before Mazari had attempted to translate or adapt it as a play. The story is placed in a medieval Assamese background with Amiyakumār (Antonio) as a famous merchant of Gauhati, Rasantakumār (Rassanio) his friend, and Pratibhā (Portia) as a beautiful and rich heiress of Rangpur, once capital of Assam during the Ahom regime. But our author faces the greatest difficulty in Indianizing the conflict between the Jews and the Christians as embodied in Shylock and Antonio. He seems to find a way out by representing Shylock as Chandanmal, a rich businessman belonging to an exploiting class. It may be noted that Chandanmal does not belong to a particular community; he belongs to the exploiting class from outside, while Amiyakumār (Antonio) symbolizes the liberal humanist. Thus "with the unerring instinct of a true born Assamese, Mazari succeeds in finding a close local parallel of the Jew-Christian conflict that is the crux of the original." Other details are also nicely put across: Gauhati, although it does not have the aroma that surrounds the name of Venice, was still a centre of business in medieval Assam, and the traditional story of Chāndo Sadāzar (Chāndo, the merchant) and his ship is still current there; and Pratibhā of Rangpur, too, is an apt substitute for Portia of Belmont.

15. Intro. to Banij-kowar, p. 8

16. Banikanta Roy in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Sept., 27, 1970. See also Mazarikār Sāhitya Pratibhā, p. 34?

17. Intro. to Banij-kowar, p. 8
Hazarika uses both blank verse and prose in accordance with the original play. The translation is often free; the situations are Indianized, but he is trying to maintain the thoughts and feelings of the original as far as possible.

Speaking of the quality of mercy Portia says:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest,
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes ...

(The Merchant of Venice, IV, i, 170-180)

This is done into Assamese as follows:

dayā āru karunā āche dutā kathā :
jenekai oparar ākāshar parā
talalai dhārāsāre nāme baraṣun
māhuhar antarato thik seidare
bāi īāi suvima karunār dhārā
karunā kalyānmayī dui pakshalai,
jijane karunā pāi teo upakrita,
jijane karunā kare teoro maṅgal.

(Bani)kowar, IV, i, p. 135)

This is not a literal translation of the original; but the ideas expressed in it are almost truthfully conveyed. Sometimes the translation appears somewhat removed from the original, especially when the translator tries to Indianize Western classical allusions as in the following speech of Portia:

Now he goes
with no less presence but with much more love,
Than young Alcides when he did redeem
The virgin tribute paid by howling Troy
To the sea monster, I stand for sacrifice;
The rest aloof are the Dardinian wives,
With bleared visages come forth to view
The issue of the exploit, Go, Hercules:
Live thou, I live with much much more dismay.
I view the fight than thou that mak'st the fray.

(The Merchant of Venice, III, ii, 53-69)

In Banij-kowar, Pratibhā speaks thus:

योवाय योवाहे मोहन:
प्रेम जादी सत्य है
सत्य है अन्तरर करुणा अमर,
हरा-धानु भाह्गा करी विधेह साह्त
जिबादरे रामचंद्रे लाभिले सिताक
सीदारे प्रियातम तुम्ह मिश्चिता
पिंडिहिबा विजय-माला तोमर शिरत।
कंपिता बक्षारे तुमी योवाहें सुंदर:
मान दिया रान दिवा भाग्यय लगत:
ततौकारी बेचिकाइ कापी कापी माइ
अनिमेस नयानेरे चाओ तोमालाई।

(III, ii, p. 90)

Go, go, O' you, the Charmer: If our love is true,
and our hearts' yearning is sincere, then you are
sure to wear the garland of victory on your head
like Ramchandra, who won Sita at the court of Videh.
Go you o' the Beautiful, with shaking breast, and
fight with fate heart and soul, while I, with much
more trembling, look at you with tearful eyes.

Not only the allusion to Rāma and Sīta, but the entire tone is
so Indianized that it reads more like an original piece of
composition than translation. And the Indianization of the
classical allusions in the speeches of Lorenzo and Jessica in the famous moonlit scene in the garden is laudable indeed. For instance, Lorenzo says to Jessica:

In such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea-banks, and waft her love
To come again to Carthage

(The Merchant of Venice, V, i, 10-12)

And this is how our translator renders it:

enuwā jonali nishā tāhāni edin
samudra tirat bahi srirāmchandrai
kechuā larār dare mātile bināi -
'ādarinī priyā mor janak nandini:
āhā priye: āhā ghuri more bukulai
jāo punu janambhumi ayodhyaīr phāle'.

(Ranij-kowar, V, i, pp. 158-159)

In such a moonlit night long long ago, Sri Rāmchandra, sitting on the sea-shore, cried out like a child:
"O' my darling, daughter of Janak:
Come back: come back to me:
Let us go back to Ayodhya again".

It is doubtful if such renderings convey agreeably the feelings of the original—and, in fact, no translation can—but a literal translation, too, would be dull and cumbersome. True that the classical allusions in the speeches of Portia, Lorenzo and the others are hardly analogous with the ones from Indian mythology referred to by our author, yet it has to be admitted that the feelings evoked in the particular situations are
skilfully conveyed in an Indianized framework through an easy flow of the blank verse natural to Hazarika. "In adapting the play in Assamese", writes Birinchikumar Barua, "the Assamese playwright has brought to bear a wealth of racy phrases and idioms which gives the work the dignity and strength of almost an original work." In presenting the minor characters like Lancelot Gobbo (Memerâ Medhi) Old Gobbo (Bhakatrâm Medhi), and Balthazar (Kerpâi Sâjtolâ) also, Hazarika gives the illusion of originality. They are so skilfully transformed into Assamese rustics that it would not be difficult for a reader or spectator to come across such people in a village of Assam.

Târâ by Ambikaprasad Goswami, an adaptation of Cymbeline, appeared in print in 1935, but it had been performed as early as 1915 by the Kâmrup Nâtya Samity. The story is adapted in an Indianized setting with the Rajputs and the Mughals standing for the British and the Romans, respectively. Cymbeline, king of Britain, becomes Ajitsimha, king of Jaypur, Caius Lucius, general of Roman forces, becomes Ramsimha, general of the Mughal forces attacking the Rajput country. Relarius, the banished lord is represented as Vikramsimha, a banished general disguised as a Bhil with Guiderius and Arviragus as two Bhil youths, called Jaysimha and Vikramsimha respectively. The story need not be retold as it is much the same as the original with only minor changes made here and there. For

18. H.A.L., p. 157
19. Preface to Târâ, 1935, P.1
instance, Cloten, who is son to the Queen by a former husband, is transformed into a brother of hers, Raghupati; and this is done in order to suit the relationship in the new cultural background. Again, the scene where ghosts appear before the sleeping Posthumous is dropped; consequently, there is no message from Jove, nor is there a sooth-sayer. This seems to have been done in order to make the play seem realistic. But the most important innovation is to be found in the importance given to the character of Tārā (Imogen) from whom the play takes its name, whereas Shakespeare's play is named after the king, Cymbeline.

Tārā is all in prose, and as the translation is free it reads nearly like an original piece. It appears to have been written with an eye to the contemporary stage conditions and tastes and capabilities of the actors. Long speeches in the original are often cut short: sometimes just the bare idea is taken from the original and expressed in our author's own way. Goswami knew the taste of his audience, and so he includes more songs in his version than Shakespeare. In fact, Tārā was a stage success, and the author himself informs us of this in his preface. 20

Besides these, there were other translations and adaptations like Chandrāvati (As You Like It), Bhimādarpa (Macbeth), Ranjit (Othello), Chandravir (Hamlet), Pañmavati

20. loc.cit.
(Cymbeline) but these plays, except the first two, have not seen the light of day. Chandrāvati, named after the heroine, is rather an adaptation than a translation of As You Like It. Blank verse is used, but changes are made in events and situations in order to Indianize the spirit of the play.

Devananda Bharali's Bhimadarpa is about a king of the Vaishāki dynasty, who actually ruled in the seventeenth century, and his wife both of whom are presented after Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. A detailed discussion of these two plays are not possible as copies of the texts are not available now. According to Satyen Sarma, Bhimadarpa is rather a play written in imitation of Macbeth than a translation of it. Lakshminath Bezbaro attempted a very close rendering of Hamlet, but the work was never completed. This is perhaps the only attempt in Assamese at a closely literal translation of a Shakespearean drama, all the others being adaptations in some way or other. But a purely literal translation of a Shakespearean play into an Indian language—least of all Hamlet—with all its cultural overtones and peculiarities of style and diction, is a near impossibility. Bezbaro seems to have realized it as he went on with his work, and so left it unfinished. Yet it shows Bezbaro's great love of Shakespeare whom he wanted to implant in the Assamese soil. When he found that direct implanting would neither be possible nor desirable, he took to writing plays in Assamese in imitation of Shakespeare.

21. Sāhityar Ābhās, p. 3
22. ibid., p. 9
23. Granthāvalī, II, pp. 1086-1089
24. Granthāvalī, I, pp. 53-54
After Shakespeare, Ibsen appears to be the most popular of Western dramatists with his keen observation of social problems and an out-spokenness that threatens to shake the entire base of a convention-ridden society. This is precisely why his plays appealed to our writers, who, with growing social awareness, tried to focus on the many-fold problems confronting an emerging society as theirs, through plays. Ibsen has been a leavening influence in the world of the drama, and like Shakespeare he has been translated to different languages of the world. Although not many plays of Ibsen have been translated to or adapted in Assamese, his influence on the style and technique of modern Assamese drama and theatre has been great indeed.

So far, four translations and adaptations of Ibsen have appeared in print: *Runumi* (The Warriors at Helgeland), *Patalaghur* (A Doll's House), *Vana hamsi* (The Wild Duck) and *Bhut* (Ghosts).

*Runumi* (1946) by Suresh Goswami is an adaptation of *The Warriors at Helgeland*. This play that belongs to Ibsen's earlier period, is a romantic fantasy based on a Scandinavian saga, or as a critic in *The Times* of 16 April, 1903, calls it, "a hodge-podge of sagas turned to dramatic uses." 25 The play is noted for its dramatization of elemental passions that rage

through the veins of a group of warlike people, who, although they settle their issues at the point of the sword, nevertheless, have their own ethics of behaviour. There is a good deal of violence in the play with brandishing of swords, shedding of blood, burning of houses as well as deaths. And it is significant that such a play as this, and not any of the mature social plays for which Ibsen is more famous, happens to be the first to be adapted in Assamese. Ibsen's play depicts the life of a people, who, although they live in a far colder country and consequently develop a sort of cold sternness of temperament, are somewhat akin to the hill tribes of Assam like the Abors and the Daflas. And so our playwright has transformed The Warriors at Helgeland into a play in which the arrogant and pugnacious passions of these tribal people are dramatized. Only the bare framework of the story is taken from Ibsen, and in place of the Scandinavian vikers we find in the Assamese Runumí a group of tribal warriors, who are strong-willed by temperament and elemental in passions.

The play centres upon Runumí (Hjordis) from whom it takes its name. Runumí is the adopted daughter of a tribal chief of Mārkangcheleek in the Abor hills, who also has a daughter of his own, named Demy (Dagny). Both of them are charming girls, but Runumí far outdoes the other in beauty as well as strength of will, which is almost unwomanly. Her

26. After the creation of Arunachal Pradesh, these tribes no longer belong to the State of Assam.
declared desire is that she will marry the man who kills a white bear that lives in a jungle not far from her house. One Dufia young man, Mural (Sigurd), kills the beast, but sacrifices the prized Runumî in favour of Garan (Gunnar), his very close friend but by all means a weaker person. So Garan carries Runumî away, while Mural takes Demy for his wife. But the couples are never happy, because they prove to be incompatible, and the truth ultimately comes out. Learning that it was Mural and not Garan who actually killed the bear, Runumî becomes ferocious and revengeful. She determines to kill Mural whom she actually loves in the hope that they will live together in the after life. Failing to persuade her husband, Garan, to kill Mural, Runumî herself shoots him with a deadly arrow, and then herself jumps to death from a cliff. Briefly, this is the story of Runumî, and it shows that it is basically the same as Ibsen's. But our playwright has made some significant changes in certain situations in order to fit them into the changed background. The Ibsen's play, the white bear "stood chained at her door", 27 and as an unsigned notice in Reference, 19 April, 1903 asserts, it was not such a wonderful brave thing to have killed the brute. 28 But in the Assamese play the bear strays in a jungle nearby, and to kill a wild bear is no mean feat indeed. This change is perfectly in keeping with the life of the tribal people with whom testing of physical strength by

27. The Warriors at Helgeland, Everyman Paperback, Act I, p. 21
killing wild animals was often a custom. In Ibsen's play, the killing of the bear is only referred to in conversation, but in Runumî, Mural, disguised as Garan, physically appears before Runumî in her bed-chamber, and proves the killing of the bear by producing before her the dead animal's teeth and claws.

The Warriors at Helgeland begins with a confrontation between Ornulf and Sigurd, the former demanding compensation from the latter for illegally carrying away his daughter. In Runumî, this is shown in the fourth scene of the first Act, the first three scenes being devoted to the meeting of the four young people, the killing of the bear and their running away. In the original play, Sigurd is killed by Hjordis, and so the proposed duel between him and Gunnar does not take place, but in the Assamese version, the fight is performed, and Demy is killed while trying to separate the fighters. The performance of the duel between Mural and Garan and the death of Demy on the stage is a significant enough departure from the original, and this undoubtedly makes a shift in the total impression of the play.

The atmosphere of Ibsen's play is almost totally grim, there being hardly any character or situation that is of the nature of the comic, while the author of Runumî gives us two scenes where two characters, Wujjabang and Tuluêz, offer us something like comic relief. This is presumably done to satisfy the taste of a section of the audience who would not sit through a play if it was totally grim and serious. Yet these scenes are not just forced into the play; they are used, almost in a Shakespearean way, as a comic commentary on the
marriage by killing the bear; and characters like Hujjabang and Tuluung would not be wanting in the tribal society the play depicts, or in any other human society for that matter. In fact, the author of Runumi appears to be trying to give a truthful picture of the tribal society. This is evident in the elaborate setting, long stage-directions and the detailed descriptions of costumes, weapons and other paraphernalia to be used by the different characters. True, the Scandinavian vikings of Ibsen's play and the tribal warriors of the Assamese version have some temperamental affinity in acting according to the dictates of elemental passions, yet it cannot be said that the tribals are exact substitutes for the vikings. Nor does Runumi give the same final impression as the original play. In the process of adaptation much is apt to be lost, and this is more so when the work is adapted not directly from the language of the original, but through another language, English. Yet Runumi as a play was popular on the stage: its theatrical quality is beyond question, and it was made into a film in 1947.

After The Warriors at Helgeland it was A Doll's House, and quite naturally indeed, that caught the eyes of a young writer, Padma Barkataki who rendered it into Assamese and called it Putilaghar (1959). The unique European fame Ibsen achieved in the nineteenth century was to a considerable extent due to A Doll's House, and at a time when the playwright was

29. W.C. Bradbrook comments: "The nineteenth century dramatic tradition is Ibsen: and Ibsen for many years, and to some people even today, means the author of A Doll's House" (Ibsen The Norwegian, p. 78).
becoming a favourite with readers and writers of Assam, this play must have been the one most read and imitated. The first Modern Tragedy, as Ibsen originally named it, A Doll's House is a classic example of the theme of woman's rights, and this was one of the many reasons why it appealed to our younger generation of readers and writers. The years following the attainment of Independence of the country were marked, among other things, by activities for the emancipation of women, and this Norwegian play with a universal theme stirred up the imagination of those who strove to secure a better place for women. And so, the writer of Putalâghar hears in the original play a clarion-call for self-realization and self-assertion of women, and claims that anybody in sympathy with the woman's cause cannot help reading the play.

Patalâghar is not a close translation of A Doll's House; it is, as the author prefers to call it, rather an adaptation with the plot recast in an Assamese background. The unforgettable Nora appears as Trishnâ Baruâ, while Torvald Helmer, Dr Rank, Nils Krogestad and Mrs Linde appear as Tarijji Baruâ, Dr Duara, Nabin Datta and Gauri Hâzarikâ, respectively. The housemaid is replaced by a manservant called Maghu, and instead of the three children of Ibsen's Helmer, the Assamese writer prefers to present two, and calls them Bulu and Mitu. The environment is that of a town in Assam, and the action takes place in a room in Tarun Baruâ's house.

30. ibid., p. 76
31. Preface to Patalâghar, 1959, p. 10
Our author appears to be trying as best he can to give an appearance of Indianness to the action of the play, and this is evident at the very opening. The action of A Doll's House takes place on the day before Christmas, and the first Act begins with Nora appearing with an armful of parcels including a Christmas tree. Our playwright substitutes Christmas with Raṅgāli Bihu (meaning literally 'a festival of merry-making'), the greatest community festival of the Assamese people that falls on the day before the Indian New Year's Day. This festival is especially marked by giving presents to near and dear ones, merry-making and dances and songs. So, the picture of a woman like Trishnā Baruā busying herself in shopping on the day before such a festival, particularly when the family is going to have enough money now that her husband has been made a bank manager, is natural indeed. Besides, Trishnā's few words to the Porter in broken Hindi is a trick used by our author to create an atmosphere of Indianness at the very opening of the play. In the second Act of Ibsen's play, we find Nora desperately trying to direct her husband's attention from the mailbox outside, and her desperation comes to a point when she tries to prolong her practice of the tarantella before Torvald and their friend, Dr Rank. In Putalāghar, Trishnā Baruā behaves in much the same way, and instead of the fancy dress ball Nora goes to, she is scheduled to attend a Bihu-meet at her aunt's, where singing, dancing and recitals are to take place. Trishnā practises reciting a poem before her husband and Dr Durā, and in her attempt to prolong the recitation, she becomes desperate not knowing which way to turn. The poem she
recites is a sort of dramatic monologue addressed, as it were, to her husband, and it reflects unmistakably the intense mental agony that she has been suffering from:

My life is full of pains and heaped-up agonies; Yet at your feet do I lay my heart's appeals. Though my life has been vain and useless, Yet you are my husband. I hardly understand anything; My heart is full of grief and woe.

(Putalāghar, sc. ii, p. 87)

In fact, this scene appears to conjure up nearly a mystic atmosphere with Trishnā transfigured to a sort of martyr and her husband and their friend stupefied at what they think her most unusual behaviour. No doubt, it takes us far away from Nora's tarantella and fancy dress show, yet our author appears to have achieved his purpose: the scene is not only dramatically conceived, it fits well in the changed cultural background, so that the spectator or the reader, even if he is familiar with the Ibsen play, thinks for the time being that he is watching or reading not a translation but a play originally written in the author's language.

Yet Putalāghar betrays the drawbacks that a translation or an adaptation usually suffers from. The theme of A Doll's House is still relevant in our situation, and so a Nora with an Indian name and in Indian dress would not be unlike the most sensitive and alert of our women, at least ideally; but how much of the original Ibsen remains after such a transformation it is
hard to say. The author of Putalaghar is aware of this and admits that he has found his work hard, particularly when it comes to translating the dialogue. "What Ibsen says is all woven together as in a wreath of beads, and taking one of these out will upset the whole thing." Indeed, as Allardyce Nicoll observes, "the skill in the use of words" is one of the elements wherein A Doll's House "soars beyond all previous attempts at the creation of realistic drama." He goes on to say that in this play "Ibsen has conquered what, after all, is the basic problem of the realistic playwright—the problem of combining language which shall at once seem natural and be dramatically appropriate." To translate such language retaining the thought that is typical of Ibsen is no easy matter indeed, and it is particularly so when the translation is done not from the original language but from an English rendering. Yet Putalaghar, granting the limitations that a work of this nature inherently suffers from, is a good enough play, and it played some part in popularizing Ibsen in the sixties.

Vana-hamsi (1962) by Satyaprasad Barua is a rendering of The Wild Duck. The setting and the background are Indianized, but the plot remains unchanged. Bhimshekhar (Werle) is a timber merchant; Biren Barua (Ekdal) was a military officer before he

32. ibid., p. 9
33. World Drama, p. 536
became partner in Bhimshekhar's business; Hemen (Hjalmar Ekdal) is a photographer, while Ramen (Relling) and Mahendra (Volvik) are doctor and parson, respectively. There seems to be no need to Indianize the plot since there is hardly anything Indian either about the characters or their professions. Defining in timber is a lucrative business in Assam, and so a person like Bhimshekhar is not unfamiliar here, while a military officer in the situation of Biren Barua would not be a stranger to a post-War audience.

Some additions and alterations are, of course, made — albeit minor — so that the play suits the local atmosphere. It is noticed at the opening of the play when the two servants, Pitmal (Pettersen) and Jaymādhav (Jensen) talk about the party that is going on inside and the relationship between Bhimshekhar (Haakon Verle) and Seemā (Mrs Sorby). A comparison of the two texts will make the point clear:

**The Wild Duck**

Pettersen (lights a lamp on the mantelpiece and puts on the shade): Aye, just listen to them. Jensen. There is the old man at it, now, off on a long toast to Mrs Sorby.

Jensen (moving an armchair forward): Is it right what people say — that there is something between them?

Pettersen: God knows.

(Act I, sc. i)
Vana-hamsi

Pitmal : Hallow : Jaymādhav : Do you hear the laughter inside? our old master must be having a nice time with Mrs Chaliha. Ha: ha: ha:

Jaymādhav (coming closer to Pitmal) : Some talk is going on about them. Is it true, Pitmal, brother?

Pitmal : Only the Unseen One knows.

(Act I, pp. 1-2)

The alterations here seem to be ingeniously done: a toast is alien to Pitmal, and yet he is made to talk in such a way as to convey nearly the same feeling as Pettersen's. Again 'the Unseen One' ('Nedekhājan') is a common enough term for God among the village folk of Assam, and its use here is in keeping with the servant's character and upbringing. To take another example:

The Wild Duck

Gina (putting her sewing down and taking a pencil and a little note-book on the table) : Can you remember what we paid for the butter today?

Hedvig : It was one crown sixty-five.

Gina : That's right (Makes a note). The amount of butter we go through in this house : And then there was the salami and the cheese ... let me see (Notes it down). Then there was the ham... hm. (Adds it up). Yes, that already comes to ...

Hedvig : And then there was the bear.
And this is how it is done into Assamese:

Mīnā: How much did we pay for the vegetables today, Hemā?

Hemā: Two rupees and twenty five nayā paise.34

Mīnā (Makes a note): Vegetable prices are shooting up like anything, really: And then there were the eggs and the oil. That comes to a rupee and ten naye paise.

Hemā: And then there was the pulse. That adds thirty seven naye paise again.

(Act II, p. 25)

Now, in an Indian family headed by a poor photographer, buying of butter and cheese every day would be impossible, nor are these things part of a daily meal in an average Assamese household. So, vegetables, eggs and oil are certainly apt substitutes, and these help to make the picture of the family of Hemen (Hjalmar) and Mīnā (Gina) with their little daughter more realistic.

These are small additions and alterations; but they are essential, nevertheless. Indeed, beer will have to be substituted either by a glass of water or a cup of tea if the Norwegian climate is to be turned into Indian. And for the same purpose our author introduces an important addition towards the end of

34. At the time Vana-hamsi was written the Nayā Paisā was in vogue in our country.
the play. When Hemi (Hedvig) lies dead with the pistol in her grip, Mahen (Molvik) covers the dead child with a white sheet and puts flowers on it; Minā (Gina) kneels beside her and looks at her for the last time; incense starts burning and the whole room suddenly turns, as it were, into a place of worship. The play ends with Girishekhar crying:

This death is not for nothing, Hemen. Hema's self-sacrifice has shown us the way for a better life by removing the dirt from our minds.

(Act V, p. 144)

The Wild Duck concludes with Gregers declaring that his "destiny" is "To be thirtieth at table" and Relling retorting "The devil it is". The ideas expressed in these two sentences are deeply rooted in a particular culture, and a literal translation of these into an Indian language will sound absurd. This seems to be the reason why our author has omitted these, and ends the play with Girishekhar's surmonizing comment just quoted. But this gives the play too much of a moral tone, so that the final impression conveyed by Vana-hamsi is hardly the same as The Wild Duck.

Bhut (1965) by Mahendra Bora is a translation of Ghosts. It is a close rendering from English, there being no attempt to Indianize either the characters or the situations. The translation is almost literal, and in his attempt to be as close to the English as possible, the translator sometimes lets even English idioms and turns of expression slip into the
Assamese with the inevitable result that his style often appears stilted and laboured. Yet as a close translation of *Ghosts*, Bhut plays some part in familiarizing the Assamese reader with one of the most famous of European plays, and also acquainting him with the style and technique of Ibsenian drama, which has influenced so much of the post-war dramatic literature of Assam.

As has been noted earlier, in a translation or adaptation, it is difficult or even nearly impossible, to maintain the qualities of the original. And this is more so in the case of an artist like Ibsen. "Although Ibsen's plays are universal in their content", observes one translator of Ibsen, "in their detail they are essentially Norwegian, so that a translation that is really a transplantation is bound to bristle with improbabilities and inconsistencies." 35 Ibsen, it is true, is more difficult to translate into an Indian language than Shakespeare. For obvious reasons an Indian student of European literature is more at home with the Elizabethan Shakespeare than the nineteenth-century Norwegian dramatist. Ibsen's plays, as James Joyce observes, are "packed with thought", 36 and how much of the original thought remains in a translation of a translation it is difficult to say. Again, even among English translations, there is so much of variation that an Indian translator, unacquainted with Ibsen's language, does not know which one to

35. Peter Watts in Intro, to *A Doll's House and Other Plays*, Penguin, 1965, p. 20

36. *Fortnightly Review*, April, 1900, quoted by M.C. Bradbrook in *Ibsen The Norwegian*, 1966, p. 149
choose. For example, a speech of Helling towards the close of The Wild Duck runs in William Archer's version:

Oh, life would be quite tolerable after all, if only we could get rid of the confounded duns that keep on pestering us, in our poverty, with the claim of the ideal.

J.M. McFarlane renders it:

Oh, life wouldn't be too bad if only these blessed people who come canvassing their ideals round everybody's door would leave us poor souls in peace.

And Rolf Fjelde's translation reads:

Oh, life would be good, in spite of all, if we could only have some peace from those damned shysters who come badgering us poor people with their "summons to the ideal." 37

In the circumstances, a translation of an Ibsen play done from English is bound to be in some measure removed from the original, yet it is not without its good points. It not only introduces a great writer to a people having an altogether different culture, but also enriches the literature of that people by adding his work to it and by offering him as a model to look to. Ibsen is one of the greatest influences on Assamese drama after Shakespeare, 38 and although modern Assamese playwrights read

37. Quoted by M.C. Bradbrook, Ibsen The Norwegian, p. 156
38. Sâhityar Ābhās, p. 25
Ibsen mostly in English, these few translations and adaptations must have played some part in channelling the influence.

Oscar Wilde

Two plays based on Oscar Wilde have so far appeared: Vibhrāt and Bārhāuliñ Bhut (1967) by Prafullachandra Barua. The former is an adaptation of Wilde's famous play, The Importance of Being Earnest, and the latter is a dramatization of his story, The Canterville Ghost.

The Importance of Being Earnest is built on a nun, and the plot turns on a misunderstanding over the name Earnest. Algernon Moncrieff, nephew of the aristocratic Lady Bracknell, was compelled, in order to avoid the Lady's dull dinner-parties, to invent a wholly fictitious friend, named Bunbury, whose precarious state of health necessitated Algyn's frequent absence from London. In the same way, his friend Jack Worthing, who had under his care a young ward, named Cecily Cardew, was compelled by circumstances to invent an imaginary brother, named Earnest, so that he could occasionally escape from an atmosphere of restraint required of him as a guardian. Through a series of complications centring on the name Earnest, the play progresses till the final resolution when the problem about the name is solved and the young lovers are happily married. In the Assamese version, only the bare story is taken, and all other important things—characters, situations, feelings—are given a local
tinge. Ajitkumār (Algernon) has a fictitious friend, Buruj Prasād, and he goes on, as he says, "Buruji Prasadi" in the same way as Algernon goes "Burburying". Nirmal (Jack Worthing) has an invented friend, Hirānandan, and like Earnest, the Assamese version turns on a misunderstanding over the name 'Hirā' (Diamond). Other characters are Mrs Chetia (Lady Augusta), Miss Karunā Chetia (Gwendolen), Saroj Sarmā (Letitia Prism), Meerā Patowary (Cecily), Headmaster Phukan (Dr Chasuble) Lalsing (Lane) and Jadu (Merriman). Ajitkumār, learning that his friend, Nirmal, has a fictitious brother, named Heerānandan, who is a reprobate, and also a niece named Meerā, appears before her during Ajitkumār's absence and introduces himself as her guardian's brother. The two instantly fall in love, Meerā confiding to him that she has always loved someone called Heerā. Meanwhile Nirmalkumār, declaring his brother to be dead and adopting his name as a sign of love for the deceased brother, gets engaged to Karunā, niece to Mrs Chetia. When Meerā and Karunā meet over a cup of tea, they come to know that they have got engaged to the same man, named Heerānandan. Eventually, the mystery over the name is clarified, and it is revealed that Nirmalkumār, alias Heerānandan, who as a baby was left in a railway coach and afterwards found in the Howrah station, is actually Ajitkumār's elder brother. So, the confusion ('vibhrāt') over names is over, and the play ends happily.

The Importance of Being Earnest is a comedy of manners, and an atmosphere of fun and humour pervades the whole play. Our playwright informs us that when he first read it he was highly
impressed by what he calls the "happy humour" of the play, and he made this adaptation in order that the Assamese reader and audience could also enjoy this comedy. Yet in spite of his being a poet and playwright of "art's for art's sake school", Wilde in this play "shocks comfortable respectability." The theme is an attack on "earnestness" that is, the Victorian solemnity of a false seriousness which is another name for hypocrisy and priggishness. In Vibhṛat, Wilde's humour arising from the manners of the characters is very much there, but the attack here is on the false sense of pride and social position of the upper classes as represented by Mrs Chetīā, a woman, who would not be uncommon among rich families of Assam owning tea gardens and other big business. Occasionally our author hits at the hypocrisy of ladies belonging to such well-to-do families, and the irony is that such criticisms come from a no less hypocritical character. This is what Aunt Chetīā (Mrs Chetīā) says about one Mrs Baruā, a close friend of hers.

You should learn from her. See how busy she is. Now that Bhāveji is here, she walks with him from five in the morning. At ten, you'll find her at a coffee party; at noon in a co-operative store; and in the afternoon she attends the meeting of the 'Protect the Country Committee'. If you want to meet her in the evening, go to the cocktail party there. Can you work so much?

(Vibhṛat, sc. i, p. 39)

39. Preface to Vibhṛat, p. 4

40. World Drama, p. 743
The other play, Barhāulir Bhut is a dramatization of the story, The Canterville Ghost. One Prasādhan Barua, a rich dealer in cosmetics, who has his business base in Bombay, buys a big antiquated building in a town in Assam, believed to be haunted by a ghost. He has a business motive in buying the house: he hopes to boost up the sale of his products by advertising them with a "photograph" of the ghost. The ghost has been there in the house for three hundred years. Gumadhar Barua, a prince of the Ahom dynasty, murdered his wife because she was believed to be unfaithful, but the prince himself was starved to death by his brother-in-law in revenge; and since then the murdered prince has been living in the house as a spirit awaiting salvation through love which he never had when he was a human being. Prasādham Barua and his son Bānsāl play all kinds of tricks on the ghost; but the little girl, Ranlana, feels for the ghost, prays for it and ultimately frees it from the bondage of ghostly existence.

This is, briefly, the story of the play, and it has basically no difference from The Canterville Ghost. In Wilde's story, an American minister, Mr Hiram B. Otis, buys Canterville Chase and comes to stay there with his family. The ghost of Canterville is freed by Virginia, the minister's little daughter, through love. In Wilde's story, the ghost says to Virginia:

"... you can open for me the portals of Death's house, for love is always with you, and Love is stronger than Death is."

This is how our playwright dramatizes it: replying to Ranjanā's (Virginia) question as to how she can give him eternal rest, the ghost says:

Through love, through affection. Through love you can open for me the doors of heaven. The power of love is greater than that of death.\(^4\)

And towards the end of the play, Ranjanā informs her father:

The Ghost is no more here, father. Its soul has been freed and it has gone up to heaven.\(^4\)

There is much of dramatic element in the story of the Canterville Ghost; yet additions and alterations have to be made when a story is transformed into a drama, and this is more so when it is adapted to a different cultural background. Consequently, in the Assamese dramatic version, we do not find the housekeeper, Mrs Umney, of the original story, nor do we find the little Duke, who loves Virginia so much. Instead, we find Kanrām, the servant in charge of the house; Mohan, Prasādhan Barua's driver; and Bāputi, a quack, who are almost stock characters in Assamese comedy. Wilde's story begins almost dramatically with a conversation between Lord Canterville and Mr Otis; but the Assamese drama opens with the housekeeper Kanrām arranging the furniture in the drawing room of the house,

\(^4\) Vibhrāt, p. 18

Vibhrāt is the common title of the book that includes both the plays, Vibhrāt and Barhāulir Bhut.

\(^4\) ibid., p. 19
The drawing-room of a palatial but dilapidated building. Antiquated things are arranged in proper places. Kanrām, a middle-aged servant, is seen cleaning and arranging the furniture and pictures on the walls. In one of the corners of the room stands a decorated flower vase. Kanrām mumbles to himself while at work.

This is much like stage-directions in a naturalistic play, and Barhāulīr Bhut turns out to be just another light or farcical comedy usually found in Assamese. The emphasis seems to be more on fun and laughter accruing from the characters, Kanrām, Mohan and Bāputi. Kanrām's rustic manners, Mohan's boastful talk, and Bāputi's ridiculous attempt to drive off the ghost by incantations, are all creations of our author. But in Assamese comedy, such characters and actions are nothing new; they are rather stereotyped.

As the dramatization of a story, Barhāulīr Bhut is undoubtedly a good work. With a ghost as the central figure, it is likely to appeal to all sections of the audience many of whom still believe in the existence of such incorporeal beings. It was first staged in 1967, the year it was written, by the A.S.L. Club of Calcutta. We do not know if it has been performed since then, nor do we know if it will be performed at all in the future; but there is no doubt that as a comedy with

44. ibid., p. 3
45. Preface, Vibhrāt, p. 4
Wildean flavour it has its importance in the history of modern Assamese drama.

One-act Plays and Others

Some other plays, including one-act plays, were translated and adapted during the fifties and the early sixties; but only a few of them, mostly one-acters, have come out in book form. Stanley Houghton's *The Dear Departed* appears to have been a favourite with our writers, and at least three renderings of the play are known to have been brought out: *Pretatmar Paridarshan* (1950) by Suren Saikia, *Chenehar Sota* by Joren Chetia, and *Pitri Viyog* (1962) by Prafulla Barua. But only the last one is available at present. The story is set against a local background with Assamese Christian characters, so that not much change has to be made of the manners and customs of the dramatis personae. Of the changes, the one made towards the end of the play is likely to draw our attention quickly. In Houghton's play, the old man, Abel Merryweather, surprises his daughters and sons-in-law by announcing his decision to marry again; but in the Assamese version, Abel declares that he is going to spend the rest of his life in an old man's home, and that when he dies all his property goes to that organization. The dialogue is nearly a close translation of the original with only very minor changes made here and there. With the ironic humour that is so much part of the play and the final discomfiture of the hypocritical daughters, *Pitri Viyog* must
have been a popular piece both to the spectator and the reader.

A collection of four one-act plays was published by the Publication Board, Assam, in 1962. They are *Soponar Ghar* and *Bändarar Hátórā Māthon* by Abul Lais, and *Jonar Poharat* and *Sāgarar Abhimukhe* by Praṭulladatta Goswami. The first two are adaptations of Constance Home's *The Home of Vision* and Lewis Napoleon Parker's dramatized version of W.W. Jacob's *The Monkey's Paw*, respectively. The story of an old man's love of the old things and the efforts of his son and daughter-in-law to satisfy him is very likely to have much appeal for an Indian audience. The characters and situations are Indianized and the translation is skilfully done, so that we are given the illusion of an original play rather than an adaptation.

In the other play, *Bändarar Hátórā Māthon*, characters and situations are Indianized, but care seems to have been taken not to tamper with the peculiar atmosphere that pervades the story. The elaborate stage-directions are left out, presumably to give free scope to a producer to arrange the setting in accordance with his choice and the prevalent stage conditions. In the original play, at the rise of the curtain, we discover Mrs White sitting in an armchair and attending to a kettle on the fire, while Mr White and their son, Herbert, are playing chess. The Assamese version, on the other hand, begins with the following simplified stage-directions:

The drawing-room of a happy, middle-class family.

At the rise of the curtain Mrs Chaudhuri (Mrs White)
is seen seated in a chair, sewing. It is winter.
A fire burns in one of the corners of the room.
At a little distance from the fire Mr Chaudhuri (Mr White) and his son, Dipak (Herbert) are
discovered standing, talking to each other.

(ekaṅkikā, p. 37)

Other changes are made here and there in order to fit the play into the local situation; but the total impression of mystery and awe that the original play gives remains unaffected. The play with its atmosphere of mystery and magic and the contrast between the quiet humdrum life of the Chaudhuris (the Whites) and the retired military officer with his stories about supernatural powers of oriental mystics is sure to appeal to a post-War Assamese audience, many of whom, although Western education has rationalized their outlook, are not yet quite free from superstitions and beliefs in other-worldly powers, and among whom a wartime officer like the Sergeant-Major would not be a stranger.

Saṅgarar Abhimukhe by Prafulladatta Goswami is a close translation of J.M. Synge's Riders to the Sea. Justifying close translation rather than adaptation of this famous one-act play, Dr Goswami says that any attempt to transfer the story to a different setting is likely to destroy the beauty that is unique to the play. 46 The play is based on the life of the

46. Preface, Ekaṅkikā, p. 2
simple folk of the Aran Island to whom "the life of a young man" is "to be going on the sea." In fact, as Una Ellis Fermor says, "It is the sea that is the real theme of the play." True that such an experience, of living with the sea, is alien to the people of Assam; and yet the play with its rural setting and with both the men and women putting in hard work for mere existence comes close to the experience of our people. But as the translation is close and as no changes are made in the situations and sentiments expressed, it is unlikely to do well on the stage.

The other play, Jonar Poharat, is an adaptation of Lady Gregory's The Rising of the Moon. Lady Gregory's play tells of a political refugee, who, disguising himself as a ballad-singer, hoodwinks the policeman appointed to catch him, and makes good his escape with the help of a folk song from his native country, which proves to be the birthplace of the policeman, who allows him, even helps him, to escape. In this one-act play, poetry and patriotism mingle in order to give us an enthralling play, and our author characteristically enough, concentrates on the patriotism expressed in the piece. So, he sets the play in the background of the 1942 movement, during which freedom fighters, in order to escape prosecution, had to use tricks much in the same way as the hero in The Rising of the Moon does. Everything in the play—characters, situations, feelings—are Indianized;

47. Twenty-four One-act Plays, Everyman Paperback, 1962, p. 17
but the playwright tries not to tamper with the original story. Yet by putting the story against a concretely political background and by using modern patriotic songs in place of the folk songs of the original, the author of the Assamese version gives a distinctly political flavour to the play, where in the original it is suggested in a very subtle manner.

In recent years, some other plays have been adapted and performed. Of these mention may be made of Anton Chekhov's *The Bear* (Bondāpar), *The Proposal* (Prastāv), *The Anniversary* (Mahālakshmi Benkar Pancham Bārsīki), and *The Chery Orchard* (Cheri Bāgichā), George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (Preyasi) and Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (Nātyakārār Sandhānat Chatā Charitra). But these plays have not come out in book form: they are mostly lying scattered in different journals and periodicals. It may be mentioned that most of these plays did well when they were put on the boards, and Pirandello's technique has been imitated by quite a few young enthusiasts in recent years.