

## APPENDIX I

### In Conversation with Manika Devee

**Q:** How would you like to assess the contribution of women writers in Assamese? Have they created a new trend or are they simply carrying forward the previous trend set by the writers of the Ramdhenu period?

**Answer:** When I read a book, the gender of the writer does not concern me. In the context of the recent trend in Assamese literature as well, rather than classifying the writers as male and female, I would like to take into account the writings of all the writers in general. I believe in this regard that the new generation of writers are doing remarkably well in making various experiments with the form of the short story along with fresh and unconventional ways of treatment of the subject matter. The past trend is unquestionably an enriching one with grandeur of its own that does not fade or get stale. The new writers are endowing a new dimension to an already available resource, adding some sort of novelty to the flowing trend.

2. Do you think that your writings are getting due publicity and recognition?

**Ans:** Yes, my stories are getting publicity, but it is difficult to say that they are always receiving critical attention. One of my contemporaries once regretted that some of his/her short stories written in an experimental vein could not draw critics' attention, while a few others from his pen which s/he himself did not rate high received critical acclaim of some sort which was not expected at all. This instance, however, is a relative one and it is difficult to draw a general inference about critical neglect on its basis. Critics have immense responsibility in identifying and assessing the standard of writing by the new generation of writers. There are writers who, despite having talent, are not getting adequate recognition they deserve and this is an area where the critics can play a very supportive and constructive role. The editors of the literary journals also can create a platform for the new writers.

3. Serious writings are expected on such burning problems of our society as witch hunting, women trafficking and flesh trade. Contemporary writers do not seem to be very interested in taking up these issues, which obviously need intensive research on the ground reality and direct interaction with the victims. Novels may effectively address these issues but this is an area where we notice dearth of serious work. How would you like to respond to it?

**Ans:** The new generation of writers are not indifferent to these issues and concerns as I have seen that some of them have created, through their genuine focus and research, serious writings on these subjects. Amongst them I would like to mention the names of Rashmirekha Borah and Juri Borah Borgohain. Juri has recently published a novel named “Bhook” ( The Hunger) the subject matter of which is women trafficking and flesh trade. To write a novel on such a burning issue entails intensive field study and Juri, as I have come to know, had to face lots of difficulties while meeting the victims and other people involved in this matter. But that could not dampen her spirit as a writer. This might be taken as only one example amongst many others.

4. Do you believe that women writers can represent the lives of women more convincingly than male writers? If so, then would you like to call Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia an exception in the portrayal of women’s issues?

**Ans:** No, it is not correct to say that only the female writers can effectively deal with women-centric issues and areas of life. Writers are privileged to have an intuitive understanding, a sort of inner power that enables them to identify and explore those aspects of life, which normally escape common men and women’s observation. When a writer takes to writing, s/he transcends all the limitations including gender. One does not have to take the taste of death if s/he wishes to write on a subject like ‘afterlife’. I do not endorse the view that only a female author can write upon the female ways of life and thinking or a male author upon those of the male. It is for this reason that I would like to call Dr Bhabendra Nath Saikia a writer with a very strong power of creative insight that can delve deep into the inner world of human beings, whether male or female.

5. Motherhood is a major theme in your short stories. But while projecting woman in the glorious image of motherhood, your stories sometime appear to ignore the other aspects of women’s identity, especially sisterhood. Do you think that motherhood is the only essence of womanhood which subsumes all the other dimensions and attributes of woman?

**Ans:** Women, I believe, are glorious in each of their roles. Each of her role is suffused with the aura and essence of motherhood.....mother, sister, wife, daughter, each of these identities is bathed and embedded in the fountain of maternal care and compassion. If my stories give the impression of neglecting the power of sisterhood that is my limitation.