Comedy, as fully formed art-form, appeared first in Greece in fifth century B.C. The choral song chanted round the altar of the god developed along two lines of tragic and comic (or satirical) expression. The old comedy, which flourished roughly between 470 B.C. and 390 B.C. and saw its prominent representative in Aristophanes, is distinguished from later social comedy and comedy of manners by its broad range. As in all creative periods, comedy then maintained its closest affinity to tragedy and fed on the latter. There was harmonious juxtaposition between the two types of drama. The size of the hero in tragedy produced the oversize of the clown. Comedy has a long history, and it shows that in the subsequent two thousand years, it developed different types. Some of the well-known types are (1) farce, (2) comedy of 'humours' or satire, (3) comedy of humour or romance, (4) comedy of manners or wit, (5) genteel comedy, (6) comedy of sentiment and (7) comedy of intrigue. Of these, the first four are more important and distinct. Comedy of satire is, as the name suggests, primarily dependent on satire; its type characters are based generally on natural idiosyncrasies and it is marked off from the rest by its note of intense realism. The comedy of humour is mainly dependent on humour; its setting is in natural surroundings, and the sharp divergence between the scene and the characters are harmonised by its characteristic subdued tone. The tone is often melancholy, but never bitter as in comedy of satire. Comedy of manners is, on the other hand,
is mainly dependent on wit that is essentially intellectual, urbane, and gives us largely the laughter of society against certain abnormalities or eccentricities. Farce stands by itself and is marked by certain definite characteristics; characters and dialogue in it are heavily dependent on the situation, and the situation is usually of the most exaggerated and impossible kind. It is generally a short humorous play based on coarsest and rudest kind of incongruities and with frequent resort to horseplay. It has little common with fine comedy. Farce, as Nicoll points out, may approximate in tone to any of the main types of comedy or it may appear as a debased form of any of those types. It is distinct from each in the quality of exaggerated situation, while the latter differ from it in their insistence upon something broader and larger than mere incident (IPT, p.177).

The Assamese literature seems to be deficient in main types of comic expression in drama. In the period we are dealing with, the type which is predominant, is farce. There are exceptions no doubt, but these too seem to approximate in tone to farce, when we examine its features closely. The first Assamese modern drama Kānīyār Kirtan by Hem Candra Baruva contains both satire, wit and farce, but its tone is farcical.

Before we discuss it, some observations regarding the introduction of the modern comic spirit in Assamese drama are necessary. Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors was translated into Assamese in 1888 by four young Assamese students studying in Calcutta. This translated play, Bhramaranga, was staged in due course and Satyanāth Barā, who was extremely delighted to witness the performance, made a very significant comment upon it. He wrote in Jonākī (1st year
"I have read the book thoroughly, and I have also witnessed its performance. The book is small in size, but of unique qualities ... our ideas are not always similar to those of Englishmen. Not only this, they are sometimes the very opposite of ours. The translators are aware that the very things that set the Englishmen to laughter may fail to impress us and may rouse in us the pathetic or the furious sentiment ... The writers have adapted the English thoughts to the needs of the Assamese speech; therefore while the thoughts are intact, the book is Assamese in spirit ... For a long time, I was under the impression that the Assamese literature is deficient in heroic and comic sentiment. I have read many Assamese books, both ancient and modern. Till now, I do not remember to have come across a single book dealing with these two sentiments. In the dramas of Sāṅkardeva, a character is often found to speak in a proud vein, but it is not pure heroic sentiment. There are no doubt some books of comic sentiment in Assamese. Kāññāyār Kirtan and Bahire Rāng Cāṅg Bhitare Kovābhāturi, etc. are no doubt books of comic sentiment, but in these books, the risible elements are in the ideas; in the manner of speech or style, this sentiment is absent. Bhramaraṅga has dispelled my doubts. This book has convinced me that in Assamese too, books, where the comic sentiment is expressed through style or manner of speech, can be written successfully ... If any one
witnesses this play in the stage, one will realise that books of quality (comic sentiment?) can be also produced in Assamese. 1

Barā evidently felt that (1) Assamese literature was deficient in humour of the type displayed in Shakespeare’s drama; (2) Kāniyār Kīrtan and Kovābhātūri, written by Hem Candra Baruva, are exceptions, but in them the laughter is caused only through manipulation of ideas; (3) Bhramaraṅga introduces a new consciousness in literary circles about the possibility of development of a comic literature that is mainly expressed through the manner of speech or style. Evidently, he hinted at the emergence of a new consciousness of comic literature in Assamese in the Jonākī period. He particularly drew attention of the writers and the audience to the role style plays in comedy. One has however to note that he makes no difference between farce or hāsya rasa.

Legouis and Cazamian observe that Shakespeare had a "keen sense of the comic and inexhaustible, almost excessive of words". The Comedy of Errors* is a farce (a free adaptation of Mānaschmi of Plautus) that was probably written for the rabble lacking sophisticated taste. In order that the laughter may be louder, he added to its plot, inventing two servants exactly alike to balance the close resemblance between two masters. What these critics say on his style is interesting. They write: “In this play he indulged in Rabelaisian mock-lyricism, the like of which had hardly yet been


*According to Gilbert Murray, it is the only work of Shakespeare where Menanderian influence is prominent. (Aristophanes, p.260).
heard on the English stage."^2 By 'Rabelaisian' was probably meant "of or like Rabelais and his writings marked by coarse humour and satire"^3 Rabelais's style "behaves like a paint-gun in the hands of a child of genius,"^4 a historian of French Literature adds.

Hem Candra's Kañīyār Kīrtan pre-dates Bhramarānga and therefore it was, as Barā says, not influenced by the new trend.

It is satiric in intent; the intention was to draw public attention to the evils of opium-eating. In those days, the habit of opium-eating was the cause of ruination of many families of means and also of moral degradation.^5 Baruva directs his satire primarily against Kīrtikānta, the son of a mouzādār, who joins the opium-club and neglects his duties. The centre of attraction in the opium-club is a lewd girl, named Pān. This is significantly chosen, for it means opium-eating. The punning is implied. Kīrtikānta is reduced to such a state of poverty that he is unable to pay his dues to the government as a mouzādār. Ultimately he resorts to theft to collect his dues and dies in jail repentent.

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2. AHFL, pp.412-13

3. The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, p.799

4. ASHFL, p.59, Geoffrey Brereton; Rabelais (1490-1553) who was the author of Gargantua and Pantagruel, "occupies a high place as a comic story-teller" in French literature. He wrote also as a philosopher and a satirist passionately interested in the theories and institutions of the age. He attacked the lazy and stupid pedants, the garbler of Latinised French, the over-subtle scholastic intellectuals, the corrupt and rapacious lawyers (pp.57-59). ASHFL = A Short History Of French Literature.

5. Dr S. K. Bhuyān refers to a book called Rasikpurāṇ by Dutirām Hazarikā (1806-1901), in which evils of opium-eating in Assamese society has been depicted (Asamat Kāni, an article published in Arunacal magazine, Bohāg, 1878 Saka).
Although the drama is divided into Acts, there is little dramatic action or dramatic conflict in the drama. It lacks also a well-knit plot. Satire is mainly expressed through dialogue written in a plain style. Some scenes are clearly farcical. But his style lacks the characteristic comic tone. The risible elements are to be found in the contrast of ideas, not in the manner of style.

In the 1st scene (1st act), the mahapurusīyā clergy, Padmapāni asks Bhadresvār Baruvā, the mousādār for a bit of opium. Bhadresvār is surprised at the behaviour of the priest, and says to himself: "How hypocrite is this mahājan?" (mahājan ki bhandal). This remark alone gives us an idea of the author's intention. In the second scene of the same Act, Kīrtikānta repeats the charge against the man:

"Ki bhanda tapasvī, bāhirat sādācār sadaśār kari mare, bhitarat yata akarma etāibor kare."6

(What a hypocrite is this penance-maker! Outwardly he adheres to the rules of good conduct alright, but he does all sorts of prohibited deeds.)

In the very next scene, this hypocritical clergy advises without a qualm of conscience his newly initiated disciples to practise good conduct and not to take opium. He says,

"kāniyā mānuhar bhakati nisije, kiyano kāniyāi sakaloke eri kānikhe māthon bhaje."7

6. ANS, p.299
7. Kāniyār Kīrtān, p.10
8. ibid., p.14
9. ibid., p.20
(The opium-eater's devotion does not become fruitful.  
For an opium-eater worships only opium.)

The clergy does not see any flaw in this double dealing;  
neither does it prick his conscience, for he quotes a couplet from  
Kirtan in self-defence:

\[
\text{Sarvabhaksa agani yena savako sose} \\
\text{mahantaka ki kariba isaba dose.}^{10}
\]

(As all-devouring fire absorbs everything, so does  
a mahanta. He is undefiled by such blemishes.)

The quotation is not exact, as we have shown in the notes  
and references under foot-note 10. This shows that the clergy is  
not even familiar with the śāstric text and did not hesitate to  
deceive his followers by misquotation and misinterpretation. This  
is a case of malapropism.

In the first Act, the author thus exposes the hypocrisy  
of the mahājan in direct and biting satire. The second Act begins  
in the young men's opium club. Here he introduces a lewd maid  
named Pān who serves opium to its members. Pān means opium-eating  
and the author appears to make her the symbol and centre of the act.  
Kirtikānta becomes by then so confirmed an opium-addict along with  
his colleagues that he cannot do without it.

\[
\text{tomalokatkoi Pānak erā tān. yi tār ras bujiche,} \\
\text{si sakaloke eriba pāre, teō tāk novāre.}^{11}
\]

10. Kāniyār Kīrtan, p.17. It appears to be a quotation from Rasa-  
llā chapter of Kīrtan by Śāṅkaradeva (SSBM, p.154). The second  
line however seems to be Mahanta's own invention. The original  
lines are: "Sarvabhaksa bahni savāko sose, tathāpito kīchu no-  
chovei dose."

11. Kāniyār Kīrtan, p.31
(It is easy to forsake you. But it is not easy to give up opium-eating. Whoever has tasted its flavour can give up everything except this.)

The second Act clearly shows the all round degeneration brought about in society by opium-eating. Kirtikānta is painted as the symbol of this degeneration; he resorts to lying, stealing, and other vices. Even the village quack prescribes a sumptuous ritualistic dinner for opium-eaters as one of remedies for bringing the degenerate and emaciated Kirtikānta to health and sense. This is the height of irony.12

The drama is full of witty dialogue. It is best seen in the following pieces:

(1) Rati - Dekā Baruvā, tumi bhāleman din jībā he, nāo koutei olālāhi.
    Pān - gāli parā hole sūnilei heten.
    Kirti - Kuṭ muti, ene komal mukhar gāliye jeth mahīyā kharat sukān mātit barāsun parātkoivo gā sītal kare.
    Rati - etebeli sabhākhan bāji hoi āchil, etiyā he guṭi dhariba ...13

(Rati - Dekā Baruvā, you will live long, for we were talking of you when you have entered.

Pān - Had I blamed you, you would have overheard.

Kirti - Oh dear, blames emanating from your sweet mouth would have cooled my body just as the rain cools the earth made dry by drought of Jeth.

12. Kāniyār Kirtan, p.31

13. ibid., p.25, Act II, Scene I.)
Rati - Till now the assembly has been barren, now it is beginning to bear fruit.)

(2) Pan - āmi akou Longar gharat rās hoichil bulihe bhābhichilo. āji kāli tomār sei phālaloī bar dhāuti hoiohe.

Kirti- (micikīyā ṭāhi), prān, rādhā nohovākoi rās haine? rāseśvārī Rādhā āche iyāt, tāt rās hai kenekoī?¹⁴

(Pān - We thought that you were at the Rāsa ceremony at Long's house. Your infatuation towards her is increasing of late.

Kirti- (smiling) O my life, can there be a Rāsa ceremony without Rādhā? Rādhā, the goddess of rāsa, is here.
   How can we have rāsa ceremony there?)

Here we find how cleverly and aptly the author suggests of Vṛndāvana to highlight the degeneration of the contemporary Vaiṣṇava religion that simply thrived on empty ritualism and pedantry. We remember that he brings in the same feeling of contrast to describe the grotesque relationship between Korkhanīyā and his female disciple.

The piyādā or the court-peon gives us some occasion for low laughter by his fragile and pidgin Hindi (Scene II, Act III). Laughter is also sought to be created through the almost impossible scene of Rāma, in his fit of opium, scratching the back of Śiva, equally seized of opiate, when he actually wanted to ease the itching on his own back (Scene II, Act III). These are plebeian elements of humour.

The drama ends with a tragic note. Kirtikanta dies repentent. And the author moralises on his ignobily lived life. While it cannot be denied that the drama has some social implication, the spirit and the structure of the drama approximate to a satirical farce, as Dr S. N. Sarma points out.  

Written in 1871, Rudraram Bardoloi’s (1834-1894) Bangle Bangalani, was intended to be a social drama. The author opines that "the book was written with a view to putting an end to some evil social practices of the country". But the drama, which centres round the character of a fallen woman, Tabhuli, is grotesque and obscene, and has no comic elements in it. Neither in language nor in dramatic action, the author displays any inclination for satire or humour.

Bezbaruva wrote four comic dramas, Litikai (1890), Nomal (1913), Pacani (1913) and Cikarpati Nikarpati (1913), which are regarded rightly as farces. Dr S. N. Sarma points out that the dramas are deficient in dramatic action and based mostly on laughter of situations and incongruity of words. The story elements of these dramas are derived from folk-stories, which the author modifies to suit his needs. Their remotness from reality as well as the improbable nature of the incidents leave little doubt as to the nature of these dramas.

15. ANS, p.300
16. Bangle Bangalani,
17. ANS, p.300
18. ibid., pp.301-02
In Litikāi, we find seven arch fools, who, being orphaned, serve in a Brahmin home. They have queer ways of doing things and in one of their foolish acts, they kill the Brahmin's mother. This goads the Brahmin to kill them in turn. But one of them escapes death, and by way of revenge, marries the Brahmin's sister-in-law by a trickery. However as characters in a drama, the seven arch fools hardly impress us with their garrulity. Their plebeian character is emphasised in the funny manner of speech and naivete. They are illiterate, extremely lazy, gullible, superstitious and parasitic. One gets the impression that the characters live in a mock-world; they speak in a queer manner and do absurd deeds honestly.

The scenes of fighting with mosquitoes that bite them in the Dikhoumukh forest, and the swimming on a tilled rice-field in a moon-lit night, mistaking it for a big tank, gives us occasion for amusing laughter. All of them appear to be mentally undeveloped or even ignorantly cunning. Titāi, one of the fools, declares in the scene II (Act I):

"mohe ranat hārili buli hāhība lāgile nāk kāti marl yāba lāgība. Sāctarat koiche, hāriyā jinaya keho jinivyā hāraya, konokale ksatriyara nāhi parajaya." 21

(If the mosquitoes laugh at us for accepting defeat in our fight with them, we shall have no alternative but to die in shame. The śāstra says, "some become victorious after defeat, while others become defeated after victory. The Ksatriyas do not know defeat").

21. BG, Litikāi, p.1015
This quotation\(^{22}\) is from Śāṅkaradeva. The speech in a nutshell shows that the author, besides using an absurd situation, also uses verbal devices like apt quotations and wrong pronunciation of words (śācīrāt instead of śāstrat) to create a funny atmosphere. This is also a case of malapropism.

Sometimes the fools follow the literal meaning of the words and their very serious mood causes laughter. The word 'ekathā' means either 'a measure of rice' or 'a measure of land'. Each fool is asked by the Brahmin to hoe a kathā of land, but the fools dodge the assigned work and each of them hoes a bit of earth weighing a kathā.

In Scene III, Act IV, similar action by the boys results in killing of Subhadrā, the Brahmin's mother.


Subhadrā - (khongere) thoboloi thāi povā nāi yadi mor mūrār oparate tha.\(^{23}\)

(All the seven brothers - Mother, where shall we put these bundles of paddy? Our shoulders are bruised. Tell us —

Subhadrā (getting angry)— If you have not got any place to keep those bundles, place them on my head.)

They actually do so and the woman dies.

The Brahmin now feels that they are mere burdens to him and therefore decides to get rid of them. He manages to get six of them

\(^{22}\) SSEM, p.308; Rukminī-haran. The quotation has not been exactly reproduced.

\(^{23}\) BG, Litikāi, p.1026, Scene III, Act IV.
killed, but the seventh escapes. ... curiously enough the surviving feel suddenly behaves as a cunning man and manages to marry the Brahmin's sister-in-law by a trickery. The end, as S. B. Devas points out, is somewhat improbable and therefore the Fifth Act appears to be rather out of tune with the spirit of the whole drama.

There is plenty of horseplay in the drama and it consists from the improbable inconsistencies and most trivial incidents. It is a short play with a weak plot and indifferent characterisation. It is a pure farce.

Namsa is a very weak story; Nāharphūṭakā goes to his grave in Āthiyābāři sattva in order to ask him to give a name for his son. The sāttva of Āthiyābāři, Rāmaśirasved vana is then introduced to us. He lives in an atmosphere of pulp and pompa but is totally out of tune with the modern world and therefore somewhat anti-diluvian. For Nāharphūṭakā's son, he gives a name, - 'Nasal'. Because of his defective pronunciation, the word 'nasal' is uttered by him as 'nasal' (do not sail). Last he forgets the name, he begins continuously to utter it on the way back home. A merchant who is about to sail his boat considers it to be an effrontery and Nāharphūṭakā gets a sound beating. He then ruefully remarks that 'achābar haal ou' (something unusual has happened). As he walks on, he repeats these words. An Āhen aristocrat, who is passing that way in a palancin with usual pomp and pageantry, feels that thecry really means an adverse comment upon his lordly status. He gives a second beating. Nāharphūṭakā then cries out in agony ....
more oppressive than the other". This again offends a pair of diseased travellers; one of them suffers from elephantiasis and the other from goitre. They too behave roughly with him. Shocked and dejected, the poor man reaches home only to find that he has forgotten the name. He however remembers it (Nemel) when his wife is about to open his bag. (The word 'Nemel' also means 'do not open'). The association of the word with the act of opening helped him in remembering the name. It is thus verbal and accidental misunderstanding that causes this farcical story to move on. There is an element of satire, but this is inconsequent. The element of satire is directed against the pontiff, who exploits his disciples, and his feudal sense of prestige. An interesting conversation take place in the sattra parlour between an upholder of Śūdra's right to read Vedas and the pontiff, who holds the opposite view; it is about to end in a scuffle when the pontiff's followers get themselves ready to drive out the contender physically. The pontiff cries out in despair: "Bodh avatarar pacat Kalki avatar hoi ki karib, yadi eibor nāthākiba?" (If these things do not exist, then what will Kalki, the incarnation that will come after Buddha, do?).

There is some fun in the pontiff's exercises in the composition of a Bengali drama; the following couplet shows his knowledge of Bengali and skill in poetry:

āre Nanda āila Nanda āila Nanda āila huvā
āre lok dujan dārāi āche khāi ki nākhāi guvā.

(And Nanda has come here; I do not know whether the two persons standing here take guvā (betel-nut) or not.)

26. BG, Nomal, p.1047
The use of the words 'huva', 'khāi ki nekhāi' and 'guvā' in the composition shows his scant knowledge of Bengali. And the couplet is bare of all poetry and any meaning.

Muhi Rāyan, the flatterer, brings the satire to the fore when he says, "iśvar śakti, iśvar śakti, iśvar śakti nahale ene racanā nolāy"27 (Indeed this is power of God; such composition is not possible without it). But the effect the drama, as a whole, produces is farcical.

|or upon
There is much play with the word 'Nomal'. A kind of punning effect is produced when he pronounces it in the rustic manner. The scenes of beating Nāharphuṭukā are short and simply absurd. These absurd fancies are amusing; even the satire in the sattra scene is full of physical sensationalism and coarse laughter.

There is much fun in the farce Cikarpāti Āru Nikarpāti. However, as Rāihān Sāh points out, there is a curious confusion of time and anachronism in the drama.28 Cikarpāti Āru Nikarpāti begins with scenes of trial where Cikarpati is tried for stealing a brasspot. It ends in his release. The trials are held in the modern court, but as Cikarpati's country is ruled by a King, the trial scenes are anachronistic. The king, in order to test the capacity of the renowned thief, engages him in stealing a ring from his hand while he is asleep in his bed chamber. In this, he comes out successful. Then he engages him to fetch him a bridegroom for his daughter. This also he does successfully. The bridegroom, who

27. BG, Nomal, p.1047
28. Laksmināth Bezbaruvā, p.205
becomes the King-designate, later declares that the thief will be his minister.

The absurd atmosphere of folk-story is obvious in the drama except in the trial scenes, which however seem anachronistic.

The drama is not only loose in structure, but full of improbable incongruities. A thief who steals a brass-pot is introduced as the great thief. Then the king uses his services for procuring for his daughter a bridegroom, who again promises him to make him his minister. All these are very amusing, as the identical appearance of the two thieves, Cikarpati and Nikarpati, creates a comic situation based on chance. The very air of this play is however farcical. The trial scenes and the scene of conversation between the pleaders of opposite parties in the Cikarpati case are a reflection of manners of Bezbaruva's time and the trial scenes are full of plebeian laughter. But the scene of conversation between the pair of lovers, Rongdoi and Cikarpati is improbable, extremely light and farcical. There is much playfulness and little dramatic significance in the following conversation of the jovial maid and her lover:

Cikarpati - Kiya nokovā? eito khoṅg neki?
Rongdoi - khaṅgar pehāk.
Cikarpati - pehīek koloī gol?
Rongdoi - mākar gharat bihu khābaloi.
Cikarpati - ketiyā ubhati āhiba?
Rongdoi - bāṭ padunicode sukāle.
Cikarpati - bāṭ padunicode ketiyā sukāba?
Rongdoi - mok diu buli ājiloike nidiyā tutuvāi thakā kānar loka-parayor dile.

29. BG, Cikarpati-Nikarpati, p.1066, Fifth Scene.
(Cikarpati - Why don't you speak? Is it due to anger?
Roängdoi - More than that. It is anger's uncle.
Cikarpati - Where did the aunt go?
Roängdoi - To celebrate Rihu in mother's place.
Cikarpati - When will she return?
Roängdoi - When the roads become dry.
Cikarpati - When will the roads be dry?
Roängdoi - You promised me to give a pair of lokāpāras (a pair of ear ornaments), but until today it remains unfulfilled.

The jovial strain is evocative of light laughter.

Bezbaruva however gives a slightly better account of himself in Pācani. It is a tolerably neat farce, where there are juxtaposition of opposite attitudes and intertwining of fun and satire.

The farce is divided into five scenes; in the first scene, childless Dharmāi Pācani, whose religious regard for guests and desire to have one guest each night develop into a mania, returns home after a vain search for them. He is busy preparing a 'dheki-thorā' (grinding arm of a dheki or a pounding machine), when two guests arrive. Delighted, Pācani goes for shopping. The wife, who has equally strong mania for driving out guests, points to the grinding arm or dheki-thorā and remarks that it is for beating them. At this, the guests flee. Pācani returns and is disappointed at this curious turn of events. The wily wife informs him that the greedy guests have taken offence at her refusal to handover the dheki-thorā to them. Pācani then takes the piece of wood in his hand and runs after the fleeing guests with the intention of handing it over to them as a present and of bringing them back. No sooner the guests see him run-
ning with the dreaded object, they run on their heels (Scene III). The gullible host comes back morose and the witty wife provides him with an animal guest, -a domestic cat,- as a substitute, adding, in good humour, the following words of consolation:

"Tumiyei dekhon kīrtan śāstrar baik mānā :
Kukura sīrkāla gādharo ātmā rām
jāni jāni sakaloke karibā parnām
mor manere khāi pāt phalā mānuh ālahīt koi
āmār mekuri kukurakhe emuthi khuovā bhāl.
Mekuri kukure khāiyo alap, guṇo lai sarah.
mānuhe khāiyo sarah, guṇo lai yadi, lai alap." 30

(You abide by the precept given in the sacred book Kīrtana. It says, "Even the soul of a dog or a jackal or an ass is God Himself. Knowing this, you salute them all". I also feel that it is better to feed our dogs and cats than these ungrateful human guests. The dogs and cats take very little, but their appreciation of this charity is greater than what it actually deserves. Human guests, on the other hand, eat more, and yet appreciation is much less than what the charity would actually justify.)

Pācani however does not give up his mania. Another guest arrives next evening. The old scene is repeated with a slight variation. The resourceful wife makes a pretense of killing the domestic cat with the ostensible purpose of serving the guest with its meat. He is ast at this breach of manners and runs away. The gullible husband however is unable to see through his wife's game (Scene VI).

30. BG, Pācani, p.1038, Scene V. The quotation in the passage appears to be a garbled version of Sākhyardeva's famous lines: kukura sīrgāla gādhābhāro ātmā rām jāniyā savāko pari karibā pranām. (SSF, Kīrtan, p.225).
This farce is full of absurdity as well as fun, specially in the scene in which Pācani runs after the frightened guests with the dreaded object in hand. Pācani shouts at the top of his voice, "come back, my gods. Here is the grinding wood. Please stop. The dhekī-thorā is not more valuable than devotees (like you)". But the guests are not convinced, for one of them says: "His wife has told us the very truth, — we will be finished today. See how that old man is chasing us with the grinding wood! Let us run fast." (sei girihataniye kova katha sacā, āji āmar phāle patang. souto burhāi (budhāi) dhekī-thorāto hātat loi lori khedi āhiche. palovā, palovā.)

Then there is a contrast of ideas. We have already quoted the wife's views on serving human guests. Pācani believes that by serving guests one can acquire the highest virtue; in fact he asserts that "one who takes food without sharing it with a guest commits the gravest sin." The wife does not consider it to be a virtue; and even if it is a virtue, she is prepared to forego it and even go to hell. These two contrasting outlooks, one heavenly and the other earthly, gives rise in juxtaposition to low comedy, but it is never treated and developed seriously, so that the spirit of the play is predominantly farcical.

31. BG, Pācani, p.1037, Scene III.
32. ibid.
33. ibid., p.1033, Scene I.
34. ibid., p.1037, Scene II.
Bezbarva's dramatic talent is less evident in the farces. In his serious historical dramas, he occasionally introduces comic reliefs successfully. It however appears that Bezbarva is aware of the importance and necessity of creating viable comic characters and situations in serious dramas. Bezbarva refers to his interests in Shakespeare's dramas in his autobiography. This is clear from his creation of the character of Gajpuriya in imitation for Falstaff in Caoradvaja Singha, which is a drama based on the epic fight of the Assamese against the Mughal Army in Saraiqhat in 1668. But Falstaff, as Legouls and Cazanlan say, is a sort of popular philosopher, and is a conscious humourist:

Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me. The brain of this foolish compounded clay, man, is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter, more than I invent or invented on me.

No such claim can be made on behalf of Gajpuriya. He is not so distinguished in his utterances. The tavern and the battle scenes in Henry the Fourth are similar to the scenes of drinking (Scene II, Act I) and battle (Scene IV, Act II) of Caoradvaja Singha only externally. We find in Falstaff what George Lukacs call inner ignorant perfection. Falstaff further says, "I am as melancholy as the gib-cat or a lugged bear." Gajpuriya is no doubt a

35. BG, Mor Jivan-sovaran, pp.57-68
36. AHEL, p.418
37. Shakespeare, Complete Works, p.517; Henry IV, Part II, Scene II, Act I
38. Solezhenitsyan, p.82
effect; even as a farce its effect is not obvious.

Maharî by Durgāprasad Majumdar Baruva was written in 1893 though it came out in print a little later.

It is a satirical farce based on the life in the tea garden where the European Manager Mr Fox lives like a tiny lord. The plot is trivial. Bhābirām comes to Mr Fox's bungalow which with an introductory letter from his brother in search of a job. Mr Fox takes offence at his effrontery in coming there riding on horseback, and also at his superficial knowledge of English. However for being recommended by a pleader whom Mr Fox knew very well, he is taken in as a mohurer. Their relationship is funny, unequal and unregulated. To curry his favour, Bhābirām stoops so low as to approach his concubine Mākari with the request that she should plead with Mr Fox on his behalf for granting him a promotion. Ultimately, however, a funny incident makes Bhābirām relinquish his job and leave the garden in haste. The Head Bābu, who is very influential, manages to put his nominee in his place. The funny incident that makes Bhābirām to give up his job is as follows:

Mr Fox asks Bhābirām to give him a hammer, and Bhābirām sends him a saw. This infuriates Mr Fox very much and Bhābirām fearing the worst leaves the tea garden for good.

The book is divided into three Acts. Here attempts are made to create comic effects through various devices like incongruity of dress and speech. In Act III, Scene III, we find Mākari's brother Bhekolā actually dressed in her sister's apparel. Throughout the drama an element of incongruity of words is used as a means of
causing laughter. Mr Fox speaks a mixed jargon consisting of Hindi, Assamese and English words with affected pronunciation. Mākarī pronounces the word 'khaba' as 'sāba'. The effect of deformity of words is however farcical. It lies apart from the plot, which is trivial. The drama is full of physical sensationalism and this completely inhibits the satiric possibilities of the theme.

Mākarī is a low character, whose chief aim is to extract money, pecks and gifts from her lusty paramour, Mr Fox. Her advice to her brother Bhekolā to wear female dress and appear before Mr Fox is simply ridiculous (Act III, Scene III). Mākarī is also morally unscrupulous. The author treats her degradation and Mr Fox's perversions in the most improbable manner. Mākarī advises her incongruously dressed brother (Act III, Scene III) in the following manner:

"bhinihiere dhemālihe kariche
tok jāno kāti sāba khujiche?
Akarāto ou?"

(Your brother-in-law is simply cutting jokes with you. He does not want to do you any harm; you are naive.)

Mr Fox actually cut jokes with the boy in girl's apparel.

The farce is full of low satire. The conversation between Mr Fox and Mākarī is grotesque. The author's intention here is to paint the picture of their degradation and to satirise lust. However satire is overcome by the spirit of mirth. Similar slight satire is directed against the perverse colonial mentality of Mr Fox.
In scene V, Act I, he admonishes Bhābirām for riding a horse; a hint of satire may be here directed against the arbitrary rule made by the tea-garden managers against freedom of movement of travellers within the garden area, but it is not clear. Bhābirām's ready compliance with the rule highlights his demoralisation and inferiority complex. In the following conversation, we clearly see the author's farcical manner of treatment of the satirical situation:

Fox - tumi jāne mor bāgichāt gorāt uti āhibar hukum nāi āche.
Bhābirām - hai huzur, jāno.
Fox - tenehole tumi kelei gorāt uti āhichile?
Bhābirām - huzur golāme pāharilo.
Fox - kelei pāharile?
Bhābirām - manat naparile.
Fox - tumi bhāt khāi āhiche?
Bhābirām - hai huzur, golāme bhāt khāi āhicho.
Fox - bhāt khābaloi manat tākiche?
Bhābirām - hai huzur, bhāt khābaloi manat āchil. (p.22-23)

(Fox - Do you know there is order not to come to my tea-garden riding on a horse?
Bhābirām- Yes huzur, I know.
Fox - Then why did you come riding a horse?
Bhābirām- Huzur, your slave has forgotten the rule.
Fox - Why did you forget?
Bhābirām- I did not remember.
Fox - Had you had your food before you came here?
Bhābirām- Yes huzur, your slave had food before coming.
Fox - So you did not forget to take food!
Satire is apparent in the piece and even in the drama. But the effect created by the somewhat unreal situation, the funny dialogue, sensational scenes and rough-and-tumble characters is purely farcical.

Benudhar Rajkhova (1872-1955) wrote seven comic dramas of which two were written before 1930, and the rest around 1930-31. Benudhar had a keen mind and in Kuri Satikār Sabhyata (1908), there is evidence of his awareness of the impact of the twentieth century on the Assamese mind. Niladvaj, the main character of the drama, realises that there is something wrong in our morality, beliefs, caste system, social customs and religious practices, - in fact in our living itself; yet he just cannot get out of these and acting contrary to his realisations, turns a hypocrite. The book is however deficient in art, as the drama lacks action and conflict. But if we follow the undeveloped character carefully, we find an incomplete picture of a weak educated young man meekly submitting to irrational tradition against his conscience. He frankly admits this at the end (Act V, Scene I): "Now I fully realise that the rural religion (or way of life) is the best religion (or way of life). If science and philosophy bring us to grief, then none can say that these have any value ... If peace is the aim of life, then we must learn to value superstition."  

(mai etiyā beckoi bujilo, gāvaliẏā dharmai sreṣṭha dharma. Yadi darsan āru bijñānar para asānti hai,

53. Kurisatikār Sabhyata, p.21
In the first Act (first scene), Niladvaj advises the thief, who is caught red-handed, not to steal in the name of sāstras, which holds stealing as a vice. But he does not believe in it at all, for in one of his soliloquies, he thus confesses: "Really speaking, sin and virtue are meaningless words. These are lies invented (by men) to enforce discipline in society. If, on the other hand, the lie is exposed, the society may be faced with a revolution. So the common people should be made to understand things in a manner that is familiar to them, and one should not try to communicate one's true views dictated by one's conscience (or own knowledge and beliefs)."

(Darācāle pāp-puṇya artha sūnya kathā. ebīlāk keval sāmājik śrṅgkhalār nimitte sṛṣṭi karā mānuhar phāki. sei kathā phāki buli samājak bujāi dile, samājat bīraplav ghatībar sambhav. eteke sādhāraṇ mānuhe yenekoi buje, sihatsāk sei dare bujāba lāge, āru nijar jñān-ṛisvās lokak bujāba nelāge.)

In the second scene of the said Act, he urges his friends to believe in God as the source of all see actions, but this is hypocritical, as he rightly later on admits: "I too have great doubts about the existence of God, yet if I preach atheism, anarchy would befall the country. Therefore I am thinking in one manner, and doing

54. Kūrisatikār Sabhyatā, p.4
just in the opposite."\(^{55}\)

(isvarar astitvar hisaye moro ghor sandeh ñche, 
tatrace isvar mai buli lokak siksa dile, desat 
ghor arajakata hob, eteke bhabhicho ek rakame, 
karicho an rakame.)

Then he accepts a religious office from his guru and com-
mits himself to the belief in the caste system. Yet as soon as he 
comes out from the guru's place, he says to himself: "I have become 
a bar medhi (a holder of religious office) ... I have acquiesced 
in the superstition of the caste system."\(^{56}\)

(mai harmedhi holo, mai jati bibhagar kusamskar 
samarthan karilo.)

Next we find him acquiescing in the performance of his 
father's annual sraddha ceremony, although he believes that the soul 
died with the body. He does this in the belief that "the twentieth 
century grows or thrives on hypocritical words and messages."\(^{57}\)

(kapat kathat-kapat bartat kuri satikar brdhi)

By the third act, we find him repentent, but in honest 
dilemma: "I have lost my humanity by practising hypocrisy" he con-
fesses; yet he is afraid that to behave according to his belief 
is to invite ruin, for his respect, honour, wealth and property 
would vanish the moment he does so."\(^{58}\)

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55. Kurisatikar Sabhyata, p.6
56. ibid., p.9
57. ibid., p.10
58. ibid., p.12
The weakminded man cannot resist his mother's request to him to take her on pilgrimage and his wife's insistence on consulting astrologers regarding the cause of his son's illness, even though he does not believe in these superstitious practices.  

It must be said to the credit to Benudhar that he conceives his character as a type and he aims high in trying to produce a comical effect out of his hypocritical behaviour by means of internal comedy. But his drama is weak in structure, and while the disparity between his words and deeds tends to produce a situation of comic contrast, it is never exploited fully from the artistic viewpoint. The dialogue is weak and the pattern needed for a successful comedy is absent. However there is an element of inner comedy in the underdeveloped character of Niladvaja.

Although Rajkhova called Darbār (1902) a comic drama, it is very loose in structure. It has been rightly called an assemblage of isolated scenes, faintly connected with each other by a thread of passing events against the setting of coronation ceremony of Edward the VII. There is a carnival spirit in the whole show, and we see men of various castes and communities visiting the place of rejoicings. There seem to be neither humour nor satire worth the name in this book, but only some amusing conversations and songs. The use of miscellaneous dialects is the chief means of causing this amusement. There is no doubt some fun in the naivete of Tikira Pundit (in the scene of an Assamese village) who opines that "she (Queen Victoria) ascended to heaven in her earthly form" (tep ho-harile)

59. Kuriśatikār Sabhyatā, Act IV
60. Darbār, Scene II, Act I, p.2
Kaliyuga (1904) is co-authored by Rajkhova and Durgaprasad Dutta. It has a fantastic setting, in which gods are indistinguishable from man. We find in the second scene of the Act V, Kali defending the age inaugurated by him in the following words: "every subject is happy under my administration. I have oppressed none. I have given everybody equal rights. I have not interfered with the national religions of other groups. I allow everybody to conduct himself in a rational manner and according to his own wishes. In my kingdom, Brahmans do not keep the Sudras in selfish bondage in deference to the injunctions of the biased sāstras; similarly men also do not keep women in bondage. I have given man the right to have healthy drink and food. I have not disallowed men to go abroad (on sea voyage) in the interest of his own progress." 61

(mor sāmsanat sakalo praśā sukhi. mai kāko atyācār karā nai. sakaloke samān adhikār dicho. kāro jātiya dharmat hāt diyā nai. icchā anusari nj jukti mate yenekoi caliba khoje, tāt mor hakā-badhā nai. mor rājyat pakṣapātī sāstrar bidhān mate bāmune śūḍirak, matai tirotāk svārthar jārire bāndhi thovā nai. sakalo bidh svāṣṭhyakar pān-bhojanat mānuhak adhikār dicho. atmonnatir bābe sāgar jātra nisedh karā nai).

This clearly is a gospel of Assamese middle class liberalism. Kali is therefore confident that no popular rebellion on behalf of feudalism can succeed. This theme is however given a

61. Kaliyuga, Scene II, Act V, p.30
farcical treatment in the first four acts. The drama is divided into five Acts. In the first four Acts, we find the Gods including the holy-Trio, - Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, concerned at loosening of the hold of religion over mankind. A meeting is held to discuss this problem and ultimately, it is decided to approach Kṛṣṇa in Golokdham for concrete advice. Kṛṣṇa advises them to be reborn as men and to propagate the cause of right morality and the traditional religion. Indra declares that he will be reborn as an Englishman; he feels sure that he will be able to convert them into the traditional religion. The three Gods, - Sun, Moon and Brhaspati, decided to be ministers of the king. Kuber rightly chooses to become a Mārvārī trader with his eye on usury. Baruṅ wants to be a fisherman, while Viśvakarmā, Vāyu, Yama, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva, - choose respectively the professions of goldsmith, sweeper, washerman, priest, pontiff of a sattra and Fakir. Dhanvantvarī, Citragupta, Agni and Aśvinī Kumār, who significantly enough speaks Bengali, aspires to become a vaidya, a kāyastha, a Brāhma and a pedant respectively. The choices of Kārtic, Ganes and Nārada fall respectively on the professions of a Bābu (who preaches what he actually does not practice), a quack and a Teton (a knave or villain).

There is least doubt that these gods desire to be reborn in the modern Assamese society. But as we move to the Act V, we find the gods disappearing. We meet only a Mahanta, Bīṣṇu Dev, who explains a śāstric couplet to his English-educated disciples (scene I, Act I). The explanation of the couplet is wrong and highly misleading. The educated disciples challenge him and the Mahanta, being unable to withstand it, withdraws from the place on the pretext of illness. While there is fun in conceiving of Gods being reborn as
men of a familiar society, it is freely but thinly mixed with intermittent satire which is created around the ignorant and degenerated clergy of the period. The main target of fun is ignorance and greed.

The discourse starts with the explanation of the following couplet:

"yi thāne thāke sito symantaka
nāhike durbhikṣa māri-marakā
nāhike byādhi byāghra-sarpa-bhaya
eko upasarga nopaje taya." ⁶²

(From the place in which there is the Symantaka gem, famine, epidemic, disease, fear from tigers and serpent, and also the 'upasargas' (the accompanying ailments) simply disappear.)

The Mahanta explains it conveniently to justify the practice of depositing valuable gifts of the disciples to him. His explanation is highly malapropos: "If any one brings the Symantaka gem and keeps it at the sacred altar belonging to Sadhus and Mahantas, no famine or disease can befall him." ⁶³

(Symantaka mani āni yadi konove āmār sādu-mahantar thānat thoi diye, tenehole teôr ākāl bā rog-byādhi eko nahi.)

This is not mere sophistry, but an expression of greedy and exploiting mentality. This is a perverse explanation of the passage from Kirtan.

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63. Kaliyuga, Scene II, Act V, p.23
There is word-humour in the punning of the word, 'upasar-gas'. On being questioned by a disciple, the Mahanta explains that according to the Ratna-mālā Grammar, there are twenty prefixes, which are nothing else but evil spirits. Evidently, these evil spirits punish mostly those who fail to pay their dues or to serve the clergy. Take the following instances:

(1) "The sinner, who does not bow before the Mahanta and the sādhus, are seized by the 'pra' spirit." 64

(yi sādhu-mahantak praṇām nakare, sei pāpīsthak 'pra' bhūte dhare.)

(2) "That who fails to pay the guru his dues, is seized by the 'parā' bhūt and his wealth is destroyed." 65

(yi guru-kar diboloi parāmmukh, tāk 'parā' bhūte pāi dhan-bit nāś kare.)

There is a reference to an evil spirit, which punishes those who learn or read English beyond the limit. Such a man becomes atheist. (Atikoi ingrājī parhile (paḍhile) 'ati' bhūte nāstik kare: "Any one who reads or learns English beyond the limit is seized by 'ati' spirit and he becomes an atheist" - the pontiff boasts.

The list of sins is rather long and monotonous. But the Mahanta's sophistry is thoroughly exposed and his selfish greed and exploitation are subject to pungent satire. Padmadhar calihā, commenting on the scene, writes in the preface that there is originality

64. Kaliyuga, Scene II, Act V, p.24
65. ibid.
in the sophistical expounding of the meaning and definitions of the upasargases. He says: "It has been so admirably and ingeniously ar-
ranged that it is more than sufficient to show how credulous and
simple people steeped in ignorance and deep-rooted superstition are
easily exploited by the unscrupulous mahantas and made to believe
that anything and everything explained to them are really the mean-
ing and spirit of the sāstras." 66

This is true and all the more evident in the perverse ex-
planation of the popular verse from Madhavdeva's Nāmghosa "muktita
nisprāha yito sehi bhakatake namo, rasamāvī māgoho bhakati." 67 It
actually means: "whose is thirstless after salvation, I bow unto
that devotee; I crave blissful faith." 68

The Mahanta on the other hand gives a sexy explanation of
it. He says, "The female devotee who has no thirst for 'mukuti' or
in other words, who is not inclined to get a blow on the face,bows
to the devotee and seek 'rasa'." 69

(yi garākī bhakatānīr muktīt sprāhā nāī, arthāt mukūti
khābaloi man nāī, teō bhakatake namaśkār kari ras
bichāre.)

The word, 'mukuti' in Assamese is a variant of the word
when 'mukti' is stressed,
'mukti'; it also means a blow on the face. The 'rasa' is explained

66. Kaliyuga, Preface
67. ibid., p.28
68. The translation is taken from Rājkhova's Holy Nāmghosa which is
a rendering into English of Madhavdeva's Nāmghosa.
69. Kaliyuga, p.28
by the Mahanta as 'bhaktir ras'. But his suggestion that the female devotee should be young and should seek the preceptor like a gopini seeking Krsna in forests of Vrndaban has a sexy connotation. This shows that the Mahanta actually means the enjoyment denoted by 'rasa' should be sensual. The intention of the authors is to ridicule ignorance and lust. This is clearly indicated by what a disciple gives out in disgust: "the days of pretensions are over. The bund has eroded and it is difficult to save (or repair) it."  

(bhuvā diyā din hale ukaliche. bheta bhāgibaloi dharile yetiā āru tāk rakhā tān.)

His companion further declares that "the Mahantas have ruined the country in this manner." (eidarei mahanta bilāke des bhāṅgile).

The contrast between the feudal and liberal orders is vivid in Kali's speech, but this contrast is given a jovial treatment in the first four Acts. There is incongruity of words and malapropism in the explanation of the meaning of the upasargas and the scene hinders the development of theme contained in the Kali's confident assertion that the rebellion of feudalism would not succeed. It must be pointed out that Kaliyuga has a disparate structure and the last Act seems to have little connection with the preceding ones. The discontinuity of the main theme mars the effect.

Benudhar had a passion for social reform and this he believed to be one of objectives that a drama should aim at. In

70. Kaliyuga, p.29
71. ibid.
72. Preface, Tini Ghoinū.
Tint Ghoipi, he pursues this objective in the same liberal spirit that he displays in Kaliyuga. Here laughter is mainly caused by breach of social conventions, and therefore is social.\(^{73}\) It appears that laughter here is conscious and therefore can be termed as satirical also.\(^{74}\) Most of Rājkhovā's comic dramas present us only with type characters and situations appropriate to them, but they seem generally deficient in a plot well-knit, intriguing, full of interest, and artistically conceived.\(^{75}\) Only one of them, it seems, contains elements of internal comedy. In Darbār, there is no inwardness at all and laughter is sought to be roused by remotely connected outward sources such as variations of manners of speech. Even that is hardly recognisable. It is the weakest of his dramas.

There is an element of potential universalism in Assamese comedy too; this is expressed in treating gods, feudalism and conflict of sexes etc. — as a theme in drama. Yet this element of universalism does not get proper artistic treatment and greatness is absent in them all. As Nicoll says, "There are in high comedy two main suggestions: first, that the characters are not the characters peculiar to one age or to one place; and second, that the comedy as a whole, is but a part or a mere symbol of, the larger world of society beyond it."\(^{76}\) In Hem Candra Baruvā's Kāniyār Kīrtan, the characters are peculiar to the nineteenth century transitional Assam. Bhogman in Gāôbudhā or the pontiff in Nomal is similarly a creature

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73. IDT, p.151
74. ibid., pp.151-52
75. ibid., pp.33-34
76. ibid., p.136.
of their age. Benudhar, who deals with Gods, feudalism and elements of sex, too fails to outgrow the limitations set by his milieu. The dramas do not attain that symbolic value which Nicoll suggests.

Tini Ghoinī is a seven Act drama which deals with the problem of co-wives. Alirām, whose first wife Phuleśvarī proves to be a shrew, is tired of her and on his friend Kaliman's advice and with the priest's consent, marries an uneducated girl, Rangdai. Phuleśvarī has some education, but she is not cultured. Rangdai lacks both and she is unable to meet the emotional needs of Alirām. Again he seeks advice of his friend and his priest and obtaining their concurrence, he marries a graduate girl named Paduml. She meets his emotional requirements, but gives offence to his tastes by her free manners and libertine behaviour. Disappointment leads him to surrender to God and to give up the world. He is about to leave for Kāśi, but his three wives prevent him from going. A mood of repentance overwhelms him and in a fit of disgust, he declares: "one has to revolve like a potter's wheel, if one falls in love with three wives" (Tini Ghoinī premat parile kumār cākar dare ghūrība lāge).

The emotional needs of Alirām seem to be highly superficial; he does not seem to rise above the gross sensual or worldly level. While his dissatisfaction with the shrew's offensive behaviour is genuine, it is not a sufficient cause for re-marriage. Although the priest prescribes that "the wife should regard her husband as God, even though the husband be of dirty character" (Purusar caritra yene ki bibhatsa houk, tirotāi teōke isvār buli māniba lāge), Alirām knows

77. Tini Ghoinī, Scene V, Act VI, p.50
78. ibid., Scene II, Act II, p.9
that it is an advice procured by influence of money. He therefore cynically comments: "one can make a Brahmin do any and everything by payment of money" (dhan dēlāi bāmuṇar hatuvāi sakalo kām karāi loba pāri). This shows that he is a disillusioned man.

The farcical love scene with Raṅgdoi (Scene I, Act III) reminds us of the equally farcical scene of love-making in Bezbaruvā's Jagarāmandalār Premābhīnaya. All sophisticated words of love falls flat on Raṅgdoi's ears and an anti-romantic effect is created. This however causes low laughter. Even Padumī, with her sophistication, is a bore and hardly impresses. The fantastic scene at the end, in which Alirām is made to fall flat and move around owing to his hands and legs being pulled in opposite directions, has too a farcical note about it. But drama as a whole lack sustained humour. However occasional witty flashes are found here and there in the dialogue:

Alirām - tomār gānat pāmi golo
Padumī - yene jokto cūnar pāṅīt
Alirām - tomār kathāt mugdha holo
Padumī - yene pahuto byādhār bāṅīt. 80

(Alirām - I dissolve in your love.
Padumī - As does the leech in lime.
Alirām - I am enchanted by your words.
Padumī - As the deer is (enchanted) by the tune of hunter's flute.)

80. ibid., Scene I, Act IV, p.25
This is however found in a rare and hilarious love-scene. The total effect of the drama is farcical. There is much fun on sex and occasional satire, but no durable comic effect. Towards the end, it is all horseplay.

In his other comic dramas, Ṭopanir Parinām (1932), Yampurī (1931), and Corar Srsti (1931), which fall outside our period of inquiry, can however be briefly touched here to note the development of comic art in his later works.

In Ṭopanir Parinām, we find his art almost ebbing out. To be brief, the only element of laughter in it centres round the verbal misunderstanding created by the accidental use of the idiomatic Assamese expression "ṭopaniye jokāiche" (feeling sleepy). Ājali is a marriageable but innocent girl, for whom her parents are in search of a bridegroom. Ṭopani knows about her and one day, when her father actually was out on a search for bridegroom, he comes to Ājali's house and becomes their guest. She is asked by her mother to attend to the guest. At bed time, the young guest sees her entering the guest room with a jug of drinking water meant for his night's needs, he begins to tease her. Feeling uneasy, the girl complains aloud to her mother: "āi, ṭopaniye jokāiche" 81 (mother, Ṭopani is teasing me). The mother however does not take it literally as she does not know the name of the guest. Thinking that her daughter is feeling sleepy, she replies that if she is feeling sleepy, she should go to bed. 82 The naive girl follows mother's advice literally and sleeps with the boy. After this, the marriage takes place with the consent of the parents.

81. Ṭopanir Parinām, Scene I, Act IV, p.18
82. ibid.
Topanir Pariṇām is thus a light farce. Compared to this, Yampūrī, is better. It has a fantastic plot and reminds us of Bezbaruva's Samājik. The god of death prays to Nārāyana that his arid land should be bestowed with love and its medium, the songs. Lord Nārāyana grants him this boon. Then the god of death goes to his chamber and tries a number of sinners and other persons brought to his land after death. Among them, we meet a religious hypocrite, a thief, a jealous person, an angry man, a being deeply attached to the world, and finally a beautiful dancer. The god punishes all the dead souls except one according to the laws of his land for their respective crimes. He falls in love (at the first sight) with the beautiful dancer and becomes so deeply attached to her that he transfers her sins to himself and absolves her of all crimes under the influence of drink. The dancer then wishes to go back to earth and live with the God of death, as man and wife. The god takes leave for forty years and decides to go to the world to enjoy life as a man, leaving his office to be managed by his assistant, Citragupta.

The fantastic plot is similar to that of Kaliyuga; the earlier five scenes focus our attention on the sinners, against whom punishment is meted out. But the satiric intent displayed in them is negated in the sixth scene, where the beautiful dancer overpowers the unfailing law-giver by sheer force of sensuous and worldly love. The scene gives us the impression of the world of justice being subverted by the erotic propensity of man. If a lustful debauch can be condemned to become a goat, a cunning thief to become a jackal, a jealous wretch to become a fish-eating 'kanuvā' bird, a proud human being to become an elephant, an angry man to become a buffalo and a man deeply attached to his wife to become a ruddy shieldrake bird,
why should not the beautiful dancer, charged with murder, be not similarly punished?

But it is not a world of morality, but a world of fun that is we are in. In this drama, we notice a certain changes in the author's attitude to the function of drama, which he outlined in his preface to Tini Ghoiñî. The urge for social reform is diluted and his moral urge seems to be outstripped by his instinct for fun and laughter. However, his earlier dramas, as we have seen, are neither problem plays nor satirical. He tried to treat certain social situations marked by dualities and contrasts as a base for his dramatic works. He selected probably unconsciously only those aspects of it that helped him in creating farcical situations. As we have seen, in both Kurisatikār Sabhyata and Kaliyuga, he fails to utilise social materials properly; and in Tini Ghoiñî, he treats a characteristically comic social theme farcically. From Yamplũrũ, where the setting is purely fantastic, he makes no pretension of any preoccupation with society. Dr S. N. Šarma calls it a fantastic farce.83 Farce in the seventeenth century Europe meant simply a short humorous play. "As, however, in a short play", says A Nicoll, "there is usually no time or opportunity for the broader display of character and of plot, farces came rapidly to deal only with exaggerated, and hence often impossible comic incidents with frequent resort to mere horseplay. With this significance, the word has endured to modern times."84 The drama lacks significance and the apparent satire inherent in the fantastic trial scene is diluted by the overall farcical overtone.

83. ANS, p.308
84. IDT, p.31
Rājkhovā’s Corar Srsti (1931) is an elegant farce. Here he transcends his sense of moral justice and invests the drama with a pure farcical spirit. It is a seven Act drama, with a fanciful and highly amusing story. The main character of the drama is an expert thief with a high social philosophy. He says, “there is least doubt that the thief is a great man, only his greatness has not been revealed”⁸⁵ (cor ye mahat lok, tāt epherio sandeh nāī, keval sei maha-tva abyakta hoi ñche). His philosophy can be gauged from his utterances - (1) cahakīr atirikta dhan āni dukhiyār nātani purāō ⁸⁶ (I steal the surplus wealth of the rich and use them to remove the wants of the poor), (2) “yi cahakī dhan sāce, kiya sāce koba novāre, tār dhan ān niu”⁸⁷ (I steal the wealth of those rich men, who save money, but do not know why they are saving it).

This thief, Dhurandhar, is confronted with a peculiar problem in this drama. He finds that though the marriages are made in heaven, they do not always lead to conjugal happiness of the married pairs. A shrew, named Batāhi, was married duly to Mourām, a mild-mannered husband. And again Batāhi’s friend, Cenidoi, a meek and mild-mannered girl, was married to a quarrelsome husband named Dhumuhā. The pairings were thus defective, even though the priest had put his seal on these. Dhurandhar undoes these wrong marriages in an ingenious manner. Casting a spell of deep sleep by incantation over them, he rearranges the pairs by transferring Batāhi to Dhumuhā’s bed-room and Cenidoi to Mourām’s sleeping chamber one night. This he does with best of motives, for he declares: “Why should God (Bidhātā)
arrange these unjust pairings? That is why I want to create thieves. I cannot say that God's (Bidhātā) creation is good" (bidhātāi bārune anyāy jorā pātī dibā pāine? sei dekhi, sakhi, mai corar sṛṣṭi kariba khujicho. Bidhātār sṛṣṭi mai bhāl buliba novārilo). This brings happiness for the new pairs; but this being against social conventions, religious sanction has to be obtained and this is received from the pontiff of the new-styled udārpanthī sattra - (A liberal sattra). The thief thus earns praise and gratitude of the married persons as well as the pontiff.

The drama breathes in an atmosphere of fun and joviality. Laughter here arises out of the fine airs that the characters put on and the artificial mode of life. In earlier light dramas of Benudhar, we find heroes laughing at their own hypocrisy (Niladvaj), or at the awkward ignorance of others (the pontiff in Kaliyuga). But here there is something more than the moral tone; there is a laughter that exists for its own sake, even though the tendency to laugh at the follies of conventions and human nature exists. As S. N. Šarmā points out, Rājkhowā does not wield a witty style like Bezbaruva.88 In this drama too we find his language somewhat deficient, but the plot is improbable yet enjoyable and characters or incidents are dependent on the fantastical situation. The drama is written with the intention of creating laughter.89

Dr S. N. Šarmā has pointed out that Bhāgya-parīkṣā (1916) by Candradhar Baruvā (1874-1961) is a pure farce.90 Improbable happenings and co-incidences predominate in the play and make it amusing.

88. ANS, p.309
89. IDT, pp.176-77; Comedy, p.137
90. ANS, p.310
The story, taken originally from an Arabian folk tale, runs as follows: Paniram is blessed by Dhanakanya and offers some money to do business and become prosperous. But as he has no luck, he loses the sum. Subsequently his fortune begins to shine and he becomes a prosperous trader. With prosperity, the lost money is also recovered. He also receives a valuable piece of diamond accidentally from the belly of a fish. On being sold to the king, this fetches him several lakhs of rupees and makes him rich overnight.

The elements of supernaturalism are found in the magical powers of the two goddesses, which bring lucks to Paniram. Then there are the improbable happenings, in one of which a kite takes away money from the head-dress of Paniram and leaves it deposited in her nest, and in another, a lost sum, hidden inside a basket of husk, which was sold to a man, is brought back in the same basket of husk. Similarly a fish, caught from the river, brings within its belly a piece of rare diamond. All these are amusing. Then there are elements of joviality mainly expressed through dialogue and song of the pair, Paniram and his wife (Scene II, Act I). An attempt is being made to introduce mild satire (in the Scene III, Act IV), in the manner of the author's comic poems, against the contemporary habit of showing off one's knowledge of English. This is evident in the character of Mohancandra. His poor knowledge of English is best seen in the advertisement he put up in a newspaper:

"Wanted occupation as a school master private tutor or office clerk, by a highly respectable Assamese twice plucked F A, very strong in English." 91

91. Bhāgya Parikṣā, p.67
He is as ignorant of English as he is of secrets of worldly success.

The drama cannot be called a well-contrived farce on the strength of these elements. They are amusing no doubt, but the drama as a whole lack sustained and artistically well-conceived humour.

Before we conclude this chapter, two more writers deserve mention. They are Mitradeva Mahanta (b-1893) and Padmadhar Calihā (1895-1968). Mahanta's reputation mainly rests on his highly successful stage dramas, Kukuri kapār Ārthamaṅgalā (1917) and Biyā-biparjyaya (1924). Calihā has, to his credit, Kene Majā (1923) and Nimantran (1915). All these comic dramas fall within the period under review. Mahanta has written a few more light dramas; but as these were written long after 1930 (the year upto which our survey covers) and as no distinct development of his comic art, apart from what may be noticed in his earlier pieces, is found in them, we have decided not to include them in the present survey. Dr B. K. Baruva observes that "in dramatic and literary values, his earlier farces are definitely much better." 92

Among all the writers of comic dramas, Mitradeva occupies a distinct place for his realistic portrayal of village life and his mastery of the colloquial Assamese. We have already seen how several writers take folk-stories as themes for their farces. Mitradeva's Kukuri-kapār Ārthamaṅgalā also has a folk-story as its theme. But in rendering it into a drama, he has very successfully brought the village life and culture to the fore.

92. MAL, p.59
'Kukurīkana' means a night-blind person, and 'āthmanāgala' denotes a prevailing Assamese marriage-custom according to which a son-in-law, on the eighth day of the marriage, has to pay a ceremonial visit to his father-in-law's place. Ceṅgelī, the hero, brings a 'collar' and 'a scent', and starts for his destination towards evening. He reaches there by holding the tail of a cow (belonging to his father-in-law) and being night-blind has to go with the cow to the cow-shed of his father-in-law. There he is discovered in a pitiable condition, after he has been given a sound beating by his brother-in-law, Phanalī, who was unaware of his presence and mistook him for a thief. He is escorted to the sitting room, where he also behaves queerly. He bows to a post, taking it to be his father-in-law. In the dining room, he slaps his mother-in-law in her face mistaking her for a cat. Then he cuts unpalatable jokes with her in the after-dinner chat - being again unable to distinguish her identity from the sister-in-law's. This enrages the mother-in-law and she goes out to report to her husband about his misbehaviour. Ceṅgelī, fearing the worst, goes out in a huff and hides himself in the place meant for throwing leavings from dinner plates (cuva-pātani). When the leavings are thrown on his body soon after, he thinks that it is raining and mumbles a prayer to the rain god. He is then discovered in that ludicrous situation by the whole family and is asked to prove that he is not night-blind by bowing to her mother-in-law. He bows alright, but not to his mother-in-law, but to his sister-in-law. This brings humiliation and loss of face. He returns home and behaves rudely to his wife, who, getting angry, exchanges hot words with him. The mother is then called, and she too joins the son in rebuking the innocent daughter-in-law. Ceṅgelī rushes
towards his wife in anger to beat her, but being unable to identify, he catches hold of his mother in tight grip. Cengeli is rebuked by his mother and feels ashamed. At this, Meci, the wife, cuts a joke on him by reciting the following popular but sarcastic couplet:

"Hide the story discreetly (without making it public). Indeed one who does not have any defect in eye-sight can only beat his mother, mistaking her for his wife" (Kathāsār thorate dhāk, tirotā bulihe mākak kobale, cakut nāi ekani pak).

Cengeli is cunning but simpleton too. In the shopping scene (Scene II, Act I), he bargains with the Sylhetee shop-keeper assiduously for buying a collar (which he pronounced as 'cholera') and bouquet (which he pronounced as 'bheket': a perfume) at reduced price, but actually pays in excess due to faulty reckoning. The scene at the cowshed, where he tries to hide himself as a cow by putting some sack-cloth over his body, is simply hilarious (Scene I, Act II). The brother-in-law is confounded by his lowing and says: "Have the cows also learnt now-a-days to sleep with wrapper on their bodies? (Garueno ājikāli gāt kāpor loi 'uba para holne?)".

The main source of low humour however lies in Cengeli's self-deception. He wants to behave as if he is not night-blind before his new relatives, who has not known till that day that he suffers from night-blindness. Every time he fails to identify a thing or behave ludicrously, he tries to say something in self-defence. This makes him more ludicrous. The scenes at the dining room (Scene III, Act II) and at the (garbage) dumping place where leavings are thrown (Scene V, Act II) are very meticulously drawn. What he says particularly in self-defence for justifying his unintentional slapping of the mother-in-law is typical and sophistic. He says, "If
It is not an offence to take wine by calling it medicine, then it is also not an offence to slap the mother-in-law by mistaking her for a cat" (ousadh buli yadi mad khāle dāi nahay, tente mekuri buli sāhuk carāoteo dāi nahay). In the latter scene, his hiding behind the arum leaves is itself a highly ludicrous act in a ludicrous situation, but the laughter does not reach its farcical climax till the brother-in-law asks him to bow to the mother-in-law in order to disprove his night-blindness. The fool still deludes himself with the possibilities of passing the ordeal successfully. It is like a blind man trying to hit a mango in the tree with his stick. But alas! he cannot identify his mother-in-law properly and bow to his sister-in-law, who exclaims out of discomfiture: “brother-in-law, it is I” (bhinhi, mai he). Cengeli is a perfect clown and his clowning is beautifully portrayed. The source of the farcical here is mainly the defective eyesight of the purblind son-in-law.

His Biyā-biparjaya is a satirical farce on child-marriage, dowry and superstitions. Associated with this main theme, is a subplot, in which much fun is being made on sexual jealousy. The septuagenarian widower Bhubanchandra, father of a grown-up son and a daughter, deludes himself as an eligible bridegroom and urged on by flatterers, marries a teenaged girl. It brings him miseries. His lust grows, but his child-wife's aversion to him grows hundred fold. He drives out his protestant son before the marriage takes place, and thinks it wise to send his daughter away to her maternal uncle's home. Gradually his health fails and he becomes short of hearing and bed-ridden. At this moment, the child-wife leaves him and goes with his uncle to her original home non-chalantly. Happily, his son and daughter return in time to nurse him at the hour of death. Bhubanchandra then confesses that he committed a mistake (Scene IV, Act II).
When the child-wife becomes widow, Mohan, Bhubanchandra’s son, advises her guardian to give her in marriage again (Scene II, Act III). The whole episode is dramatised in satiric cum farcical vein. The subtle hint at social reform is there, but the purpose of the dramatist is to create mirth.

The author however ingeniously introduces a farcical episode to focus our attention on other evils standing in the way of married happiness. Mānikī’s marriage is arranged with Jagara, who is a stammerer. It involves payment on the part of the bridegroom of a large sum of money as dowry along with ornaments, dress and other things. This increases the indebtedness of Jagara’s family and, as a result, the family begins to suffer from want and poverty. Another hurdle appears in their married life and it affects their happiness. Jagara begins to look with suspicion the relationship between Mānikī and Pohar, who is her relative and well-wisher. Pohar’s wife also has similar suspicion about Pohar. By a clever intrigue, Mānikī brings both Jagara and Cēngdoi, Pohar’s wife, to their senses and ultimately they get rid of their suspicions. At the same time, Mānikī persuades her uncle to return the dowry money to her husband and this eases their poverty to some extent.

Bhubanchandra’s folly in marrying a child-wife and his degradation shown in lusty behaviour towards his adolescent teen-aged wife are the main sources of the comic in the first episode. This laughter is low and outward. Sometimes it is expressed wittily too. Even the bride’s uncle Viśvanāth, who actually wants to dispose off his cousin for a petty sum, comments cynically on the old man’s desire for marriage thus: “When an old vulture is caught in the breeze,
it becomes young" (burhā (budhā) ēagunar gāt malayā ēāgile dekā hay). Bhubanchandra however soon realises that it is not easy for an old man to become young again, for he says to himself (in Scene I, Act II): "It is as if an aged black-bee is falling on an extremely tender flower ..."93 (jānibā kāṭh kali phular oparat ēkharuvā bhomorā pari ...).

The second episode runs parallel to this. But it is highly amusing. Jagarā is a stammerer, but also is prone to a natural folly, in being unduly suspicious and jealous. He degrades himself twice, firstly by acquiescing in the superstitious practice of applying magic vermilion on his wife's forehead with the ultimate aim of detecting her supposed adulterous behaviour, and secondly, by spying on his wife in the dark bed-room by hiding himself there and thus falling into her trap (Scene III, Act III). But our merriment is not completely aroused till the wily wife outwits him in his game. To arouse his suspicions she is engaged in conversation with a cat inside the dark-room and asks it to hide itself in a large pan containing juices of molasses. She also advises the cat to enter into a basket (japā), if it feels that its presence in the pan will be detected. This imaginary conversation is the part of an intrigue to goad Jagarā, who is prying on her, into a trap. The intrigue works according to plan and Jagara dips himself into the pan of molasses; later on he enters into the basket of cotton and his whole body is fastened with cotton. He is detected in this ridiculous state by the other plotters but even then, his suspicion does not leave him. He opens the basket to get hold of the imagined adulterer, but to his utter surprise he sees the cat coming out (Scene III, 93. Biyā Biparjyay, Scene I, Act II, p.42.
Act III). In the fifth scene of the same Act, we find the jealous wife of Pohar, Cengdoi being tamed in another intrigue master-minded by Mānikī. Cengdoi herself is cleverly charged of adultery and unchastity. This makes her humble, and ultimately she gives up suspecting that her husband Pohar was in love with Mānikī.

These are instances of laughter arising out of farcical situation, in which the characters strip themselves of their dignity. A Nicoll says, "countless are the situations based upon the principle of degradation ... Stripping the dignity from a set of circumstances, dragging down the seriousness of a situation to trivial realms will always awaken our laughter." Mitradeva Mahanta adds to this the catalytic power of his colloquial Assamese and his intimate knowledge of the ways of people's life. These things are however difficult to convey in descriptive language and can only be felt.

*Kene Mājā* (1919) by Calihā has a fanciful theme in which Kācim and Julekha arrange a fake dance-show, chief attraction of which is a Bāijī from Lucknow. Julekha, in disguise, sells tickets worth Rs 745 to a number of rich men in the town on this false pretext and invites them to Kācim's house. They come on the appointed day one after another and Julekha manages to hide all of them under covers various/concealing the presence of one from the other. Ultimately a fantastic collective dance ensues and the gay pair of clowns ultimately derive satisfaction out of the amassed sum. It is a farce, approximating in form to a common-place revue, with dance, songs and medley of dialogue. The elite, consisting of the alchoholic

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94. *IDT*, p.164
Navāb, the anglicised fool, Mr Kergerīya (Khārghariya), the vain Bābus, and the dishonest Mārvāri trader etc. is caricatured with a sense of inane satire. Mr Kergerīya, who never bought an Assamese book or a newspaper in his life, comes as a handy target for caricaturing. He confesses: "Literature! Damn your 'bloody' literature. What 'concert' have I with literature? ... What is there in Assamese language to read? It is devilish and there is nothing in it fit for reading."95

(Cāhitya! Damn your bloddy cāhitya. Cāhityar lagat mor ki concert āche? ... āmār devil Assamese languagar palcā di reading karibalagīyā kito āche?)

Note the wrong use of the word "concert". The right word should have been "concern".

There is enough fun in the dancing pair's jolly titbits of nonsensical songs.

Kācim - dil mor jān mor mor piyārī
Julekha - nojokābā -eidore dim siyārī.
Kācim - tumī āsār sambal
Julekha - tumī jārar kambal.96

(Kācim - My heart, my life, my beloved.
Julekha - Do not vex me like this. I would make face at you.
Kācim - You are the means of my hopes.
Julekha - You are the kambal (rug) at my winter.)

95. Kene Majā, Scene IV, Act I, p.14
96. ibid., Scene I, Act I, p.2
Rightly Julekhā claims in the end that she sets in motion the clowning. 97

Nmāntran is, in a way, more interesting and significant; this three act play satirises pedantry in a high witty manner that causes delight in the cultured mind also. A philosopher, a grammarian, an astrologer and a physician from a western country come to the King's court for attending a feast. The guests are provided with a meagre ration consisting of rice. The rest they are to buy or collect themselves. On being asked by the grammarian, the philosopher goes to the oil-presser to buy mustard oil and speaks in a highly affected and sophisticated language. The oil-presser does not understand the word "Toila", which is the Sanskrit word for Assamese 'Tel'.

However he buys some oil and then begins to ponder over the reason for hanging a bell round the neck of the oil-presser's bull. The oil-presser takes him to be a fool and explains why the bell was put around the neck. The oil-presser replies: "Even when he remains inside his house, he can tell by the ringing of the bell whether the bull is working or not." But the philosopher is not satisfied with this explanation. What will happen if the bull stands still and makes the bell to ring by motion of his head, the philosopher asks. The oil-presser replies that the bull does not possess intelligence. The philosopher refutes the argument saying that the bull possesses keener intelligence than a human being like the oil-presser. At this, the oil-presser gets angry and rushes at him with a stick in hand. The philosopher runs away. After saying a prayer, he begins to meditate on the oil-can itself. He examines

97. Kene Majā, Scene VII, Act I, p.26
whether the oil contains the can or vice-versa. To resolve this riddle, he holds the can upside down. The oil comes out and the can becomes empty. He proves that it is the can that contained the oil, but lack of oil becomes a still bigger problem; for without oil, no curry can be prepared (Scene I, Act II). These ontological or philosophical inquiries ill befits the market-place, where the physical and gross reality reigns, and his experiment with oil-can is simply ridiculous and incongruous. This intellectual incongruity causes genuine laughter. Here the clowns question the intelligence of man itself and creates a fine contrast with the gross material world.

The physician on the other hand goes to the market to buy vegetables, but to his dismay, he finds everything adulterated or rotten and the prices appear to him too high. At the end, he buys a cucumber and comes back (Scene III, Act II) only to find that the grammarian, who volunteered to cook rice, has broken the cooking pot and thrown away the rice. It so happened that the boiling rice was emitting some mleccha words (bhut, bhut, bhut). At this, the grammarian, fearing pollution, broke the pot and threw away everything with it. The situation is precarious, for there is no rice left and all of them are hungry (Scene I, Act III). The feast turns into its very opposite, fast. There is a balanced contrast between the ideal and the real, as well as the mental and the physical in the eccentric actions of the clowns.

At this critical moment, it is discovered that the astrologer who was sent to fetch firewood from the forest, has not returned. They all go at night in search of him. He is found out at the top of a tree with an axe in his hand. On inquiry, it is found
that the astrologer did not cut the branches of the tree as the stars were yet to be in their proper spheres and was therefore looking towards heaven with his eyes fixed on the stars. His colleagues request him to come down (Scene II, Act III).

The hungry philosopher then remarks: "We have enjoyed the festival in the best manner possible"98 (utsavar ānanda uttām rupe upabhog karā gol). They then go to wait upon the King, who out of repentence give them fresh and full rations. After the meal, they leave the kingdom. It is the Vidūṣaka who then reveals that the King's Minister did not provide the guests with full ration which include: oil, vegetables and firewood. But at the same time, he adds pungently: "these scholars were reduced to such straightened circumstances by their own scholariiness" (pandit sakalak nijar panditāliēi thekat pelāle).

The humour in the drama primarily rests on the eccentricity of characters. They are pedants. There is an incongruity between their world and that of the ordinary world and this is more clearly evident in the conversation between the philosopher and the oil-presser. While the philosopher appears to the oil-presser as a fool, who does not understand even ordinary things that every common man knows, the oil-presser appears to the philosopher as a greater fool (gaja-mūrkha) who does not understand the meaning of 'toila', and is not conversant with the rules of conversation; in the philosopher's eye, the oil-presser is less intelligent than the bull. The incongruity between two outlooks causes a humorous situation, which sets us smiling.

98. Nimāntrana, Scene II, Act III, p.31
The astrologer and the two local wood-cutters go simultaneously to the woods in the forest. The astrologer gazes at the stars which are not in their allotted spheres. He is guided by the stars even in such an ordinary act of cutting woods. He requests the wood-cutters to provide him with some firewood. But the wood-cutters take him to be an evil spirit and therefore flee in haste. The eccentric astrologer does not abandon his vigil and waits for the propitious moment when the stars would reach their allotted places (Scene II, Act II).

The incongruity of outlooks is made more pointed by affected manners of speech. The highly artificial manners of speech of the pedants is again dependent on play of words. A. Nicoll writes: "countless are the situations in comedies, ancient and modern, where two humorous characters have failed to understand each other." The real fun arises out of the incongruity of words or affected speech used by each. The following pieces of conversation illustrate this.

(1) Vaidya - Pohāri, tumi alap avalamban kari thākāchon matsyabilāk uttam rupe parikśā karibaloi avasar diyā.

Ketekī - eitovēki dovān māte oi? Naga ne Michimi?

(Physician - Fish-seller, please have patience for some time. Give me some respite to examine the fish in the best manner.

Ketekī - In what dialect are you speaking? Is it Naga or Michimi?)

99. IDT, p.170
100. Nimantran, p.170
(2) Dārśanik - (Telīk) Hei, toila kot povā yāi?
Telī - Toila kyā bo?
Dārśanik - Oho, toila, Sarisa toila, annar lagat
byavahār karā toila.
Telī - (mane mane) e beyākub kyā baktā hei, bābu tumi
ki kahiohe hāmi kuc nāi buji pāiche.

(Philosopher - (to the oil-presser) well, where shall I
get 'toila'?
Oil-presser - What does 'toila' mean?
Philosopher - Well. Toila is toila. Toila prepared from
mustard seeds. Toila is used with 'anna'.
Oil-presser - (to himself) What does this fool say?
Bābu, I have not understood a single word
spoken by you.)

Even Vidūsaka, the King's clown, complains twice against their af-
fected manner of speech:

(1) "eikhon rājsabhāte āmukāi katano bhabya-gabya
pandit dekhilo, kinto ene akāi-pakāi, dighal-
bahal kathā kovā pandit hole āmār bhāgyat
noghotichil. Teobilāke bodhkarā "bhāta'k 'bhatra' 
and māchak 'masya' he bole hobalā."102

(I have seen many respectable (or eminent) scholars
in this royal court, but I have never met such

101. Nimantran, p.15
102. ibid., Scene III, Act III, p.33
scholars before. They speak involved and long-winding sentences. Perhaps they use 'bhatra' for 'bhat' and 'masya' for fish.)

(2) Commenting on their manner of speech, he further says:

"Sunāmakcon, kathār ki bāhār, etāibor anusār, 
bisarga, anunāsik varna lagā kathā, cidhāoidhi
mukhāt kathā nolāyei." 103

(Their manner of speech is peculiar. Every sentence abounds in of nasal letters and soft aspirates. They cannot speak in a straight manner.)

Along with this highly artificial mode of speech, the characters also use some words mechanically to enhance the comic effect. In the physician's speeches, the word "bārham" (bādham) occurs again and again. The astrologer also uses the word "Parantu" in the same way. The philosopher is also wont to repeat the word "bidāmbanā" in his speeches. Nicoll observes that "occasionally in a comedy one word or one phrase occurs again and again in varying senses and forms as if it were a machine with a motion of its own driving over the characters themselves. Mere automatism of this sort, however, is rare, and usually it is bound up with incongruity and kindred sources of risible." 104 In Nimantran also this kind of automatism in the use of word is bound up with other sources of the comic. The main

103. Nimantran, Scene III, Act III, p.35
104. IPT, p.117
source of humour is the incongruity between two sets of outlooks, one scholarly and the other pedestrian. Use of one word again and again in the speeches enhances the comic effect the characters produce on the audience. But there is however one limitation in Nimantrap. The use is not varied.

Vidūsaka in Nimantrap is King's constant companion and provides a comic relief in the arid court scenes. He leads a parasitic existence and has a gastronomic sensibility. Kānjilāl observes that in Prahasanas Vidūsaka is almost absent; with the setting in of the process of decline of monarchy in India, his decline has also begun. Moreover, Vidūsaka in Sanskrit drama is usually associated with the erotic sentiment; one of his functions is supposed to be to augment and enhance this sentiment. The humour is usually caused when impropriety of the erotic sentiment is caused through incongruity. Vidūsaka usually creates humour by means of incongruity or deformity of dress, behaviour, speech and limbs of the body. He is the King's 'narmasahacara' and is sharp-witted, simple and of refined taste.

The King in Nimantran is not a hero; he is a passive figure. His jester is also less prominent as a comic character than the scholars. In fact he is not only insignificant before the scholars, but also appears as an anachronism. He however shows incongruity of behaviour when he slaps his own cheek in a mood of self-reproach.

105. SSHR, p.136
106. ibid., pp.106-107
107. ibid., p.138
108. ibid., p.139
109. ibid., p.141
(Scene III, Act III). He says "bhal mor apadīya mukhkhan hoi; ye-
tiyāi-tetiyāi jagar lagāi phure."\(^{110}\) (woe be to my mischievous
tongue. It offends everybody now and then). He is also witty as a
comic companion of King, for he comments beautifully on the scholars'
clownishness: "mānuhe kai bole alpa bidyā bhayaṅkarī, etiyā dekhile
nahai svargadeu, ketiyābā ketiyābā maha bidyā bhayaṅkarī"\(^{111}\)(It is
said that little knowledge is a dangerous thing. Now you must have
noticed, O Lord of heaven (i.e., the king), sometimes great knowledge
too becomes dangerous). He adds: "enekūva caṅg satakai kot dekhi-
boloi pāba?"\(^{112}\) (Such clowning is rare). At the same time, he never
forgets to display his vulgar appetite for royal dinner, "bāru bhā-
lei hoiche, moro peṭar poranito bechi hoiche, eibār teō udar devatāk
alap santusta kariba parā hobā"\(^{113}\) (God, I am very hungry; the god
of belly would be appeased this time in a grand manner.). He like,
all proverbial clowns, never forgets about the needs of his body.
He also warns the king against his Minister, who promises to carry
out King's order diligently, but fails to live up to it. "Yot svār-
tha āche tot akou helā kihar? haōte gotei jagatkhanei svārthar jarī-
rehe kaṭkatiyākoi bandhā"\(^{114}\) (Yes, there is no negligence of duty
where there is interest to advance or serve. The whole world is
tightly bound by the thread of selfish interests). He also indulges
in conscious sophistry or malapropism. He explains the meaning of

\(^{110}\) Nīmantrāṇ, p.33

\(^{111}\) ibid., p.37

\(^{112}\) ibid.

\(^{113}\) ibid., p.2

\(^{114}\) ibid., p.3
the line, "parihāsen bijalpitam bacah na paramārthena grhitam sakha" - in the perverse manner: "pari pari ḫāhi ḫāhi kovā kathā āru jalpān khaōte kovā kathā paramārththat laba nāpāi"¹¹⁵ (words uttered during hours of light refreshment in jest and in an extreme feat of laughter should not be taken as real or in the literal sense). 'Pari' in Assamese means 'lying on the ground'. The meaning is thus distorted to cause laughter. The line reminds us of Duṣmanta's speech to Vidūṣaka in the second Act of Abhijñāna-Śakuntalam.

With all these traditional features in him, he is still no better than an ordinary jester, hardly superior to the eccentric scholars.

Nimantrap can be viewed as a farce, for it is a short play where there is no opportunity for broader display of character and plot and where improbable and exaggerated comic incidents are dealt with. But as we have seen, laughter here is not merely rough and noisy fun. It is not caused by physical sensationalism, or by the fantastic setting in which the pedantic scholars live. The characters have mental deformity; the scholars are certainly conceited; their conceit is contrasted with human common sense. The four fools are eccentric; but they appear en masse to create a mental situation that is in itself incongruous. The verbal misunderstanding between the

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¹¹⁵. Nimantrap, p.3. This line is from Abhijñāna-Śakuntalam (Act II, last but one line). The love-lorn King Duṣmanta, being unwilling to leave the hermitage entrusted Vidūṣaka to go in his stead to his kingdom and to report that he was engaged in some work on behalf of the hermits. But suddenly he felt that the fickle-minded Brahmin would disclose his love-affair in the women in the harem. So he said "parihās-bijalpitam sakhe, paramārthena na grhyatām bacah"(He thus says that words uttered in jest or light mood should not be taken as really true). Here the line is slightly changed. (p.856, Kālidāser Granthāvalī).
philosopher and the oil-presser due to use of affected speech, or of wrong or fallacious argument causes a situation of mental incongruity. The philosopher and the physician again repeat some words mechanically and create a situation of mental automatism. There is then inner incongruity within each character; the philosopher uses his intelligence wrongly to prove that the can contains oil; at least it is malapropos. Similarly the astrologer's use of astrological knowledge in wood-cutting is inopportune: so is the grammarian's detection of omen in the inanimate sound emitted by boiling rice in the cooking pot. These are not cases of physical sensation, but intellectual incongruity which, as Walter Kerr points out, are elements of low comedy or lowest form of high comedy. This lowest form of high comedy includes cases of verbal elements of speech: puns, malapropisms, verbal misunderstandings and faulty intellectual connections of every sort. Here the deepest seriousness is thus suspect. Improbable probabilities are emphasised in every type of comedy; it is not merely a property of farce in the modern meaning of the word. In Aristophanes' time, farce had a broader range and it was called comedy. He used intellect as a delightfully valuable weapon for overriding, rather than discovering, truth; the case of Socrates is before us. Comedy here uses mind to mock at the values of the mind. But Nimantran has not the broad range of The Cherry Orchard; its dramatic structure is limited, its theme is trivial and its tone is low.

There is then elements of low comedy in Nimantran. Even the glutton and parasite, Vidūṣaka, speaks in the tone of low comedy.

116. ANS, p.311
It does not arouse in us merely the hilarious laughter that farce aims at, but also creates a sense of mental incongruity that appeals to the intellect. This incongruity of words is not entirely meaningless, when we remember that mental deformity itself is a means of questioning the intellectual or mental process itself. The comic misery of the four pedants just remind us of that.

Dr S. N. Sarmā calls Nimantran a prahasana, ¹¹⁷ while Dr M. N. Neog adds to it a significant adjective 'perfect'. ¹¹⁸ According to Sarmā, we find here a comic picture of distress of four scholarly fools who lack common sense. We also claims that it is highly entertaining. The words 'perfect' and 'highly' both suggest that the farce has a distinct quality which distinguishes it from other farces. We venture to suggest that this distinct quality is supplied by the intellectual elements. Satire is hinted at in the exaggerated scenes of comic contrast between the mentality of the scholars and the mentality of the common man; the intellect is suspect. But satire is not insisted on. There is no malice in it and no outraging of our moral sense is suggested. There is a sense of proportion in the presentation of the contrast which make the polite satire look comic. This situation of delightful distress belongs to the world of comedy, and raises our smile more than hilarious laughter. This quality not only differentiate the farce from other farces, but also makes it in specific moments approximate that form of comedy we call comedy of humour. That such a possibility exists is admitted by Nicoll who opines that a farce may approximate in tone to any of the major types

¹¹⁷ ASR, p.362
¹¹⁸ IDT, p.77
of comedy or rather it may appear as a debased form of any type. \(^{119}\) Nicoll also admits that except in the flimsiest of the farcical pieces, it is rare to find a play that depends upon nothing but farcical elements. This is true. A writer has to appeal to his audiences at different levels and so adopts different devices to create dramatic and theatrical effect. In almost all Assamese comic dramas, the farcical elements were used for provoking an immediate response from the audience, and we know from Satyanāth Barā's remark quoted in the beginning, they were inclined to accept comedy at the level of farce; Bhramaranga already impressed them. But later authors made the fullest use of the form and raised its tone. Nimāntraṇ bears witness to such deliberate or unconscious efforts.

Farce is the first form of comedy to appear as a distinct genre in the modern Assamese literature. We do not have high comedies. This is explained partly by absence of a tradition of high tragic dramas that always maintain a symbiotic relationship with comedies and induce their creation and growth. The early historical and mythological plays too contain no high comedy elements in them. The writers were romantic and therefore found in Shakespeare a model to imitate. But Shakespeare is inimitable. Farce, being the only form of comic expression popularised through Bhramaranga, had therefore a ready appeal both to the writers and the audience. Being the only form, its range had to be broadened to include satiric elements and where possible, low comedy elements as in Nimāntraṇ. It was the first creative phase of modern literature, and no strict sense of comedy was developed in critical writings. Bezbaruvā too had only a broad view of wit and humour, which he often unconsciously mixed with the
idea of farce as well as of hāsyā rasa in Vaiṣṇava aesthetics. Pure farce was rare, as the writers often freely introduced meaningful satire or elements of comedy to appeal to audiences at various levels. This specific feature of Assamese farces cannot be lost sight of.