Humour and satire in ancient Assamese literature, as we have seen, are wholly disproportionate to its bulk. Comedy or satire in the western sense was unknown; on the other hand, there is no evidence to show that the writers seriously cultivated the tradition of häsya-rasa in Sanskrit literature. The Vaiṣṇava aesthetics, which consciously or unconsciously dominated their thinking, hardly permitted them to cultivate the genre of comedy. The major writers were even apologetic about using Kāvya rasa. The literature was essentially derivative and the scope for introducing comic elements was limited. The comic elements were either low comedy or farce. Rāma Sarasvatī's Bhīm-carit is the only work where the facetious elements are predominant. It is a farcical poem. In a way, it proves that the great gods and puranic heroes could have been successfully parodied. Even this possibility offered by the serious Vaiṣṇava literature was not exploited earnestly. The preoccupation with bhakti-rasa was so great that the writers generally did not pay attention to writings where lesser sentiments predominate. The restrictions on the freedom of writers were thus self-imposed. Few writers thought of using contemporary life and society as subject-matters. This traditional source of comedy's subject-matter was thus not touched, except indirectly. The individual too hardly mattered to them, except as an adjunct of divine reality; this is specially true of religious literature. The literature was sentimental and the intellectual approach was not popular. The rural audience largely determined its form and character. It was
more musical than poetic, more religious than artistic, and more communal than individual. The mediaeval social and religious outlook was restrictive and it was not conducive to the growth of a plausible comic literature.

The national atmosphere changed in the early part of the 19th century, when the impact of western thoughts and ideas was felt in life and literature. The socio-economic changes created the basis for the emergence of a community of middle class that soon became, by virtue of their advanced outlook and skills, the leading social class. Among the human agencies that were instrumental in promoting the changes were government of the day, educationists, liberal thinkers and evangelicals. The educational institutions and printed journal or books became immediate media through which new literary ideas were imported. The old aristocratic classes that had patronised literature lost their status, and the old style of literature died a natural death. The ancient literature became a part of the cultural heritage, and was reassessed in light of new critical consciousness. It could no longer cater to the taste of the middle class, whose outlook was secular and human. The English-educated writers found in European science and arts a new and vigorous source of creative inspiration. While the new educated class generally followed the lead given by Rām Mohan Roy in synthesising the best elements of both the worlds, the religious conservatives responded to the western challenge by rejecting innovation.1

1. Oxford Indian History, Book VIII, Chapter 7
In Assam, the situation was not different. With the eventual abolition of Ahom monarchy, the old classes of literary patrons were gone. But the emergence of the new middle class was here however a slow process. The American Baptist missionaries brought the first printing press to the state in 1838; the first Assamese journal Arunodai was brought out in 1846 from Sibsagar, which soon became the centre of first literary awakening. By this time, schools were established in the state. The first English school was established at Guwahati in 1835. Ananda Rām Dhekiyāl Phukan (1828-1859), the foremost advocate of modernisation in Assam, was a student of this school; in 1841, he joined the Hindu College of Calcutta and studied there till 1844. His father Holirām Dhekiyāl Phukan was a religious conservative, but he was realist enough to advocate female education. Ananda Rām forcefully advocated the cause of regeneration of Assamese society on a modern basis in an article in Arunodai. Anandaram's nephew, Guṛābhīrām was a strong advocate of widow-remarriage. Hem Candra Baruva was one of the earliest writers to rebel against orthodoxy and learn English out of school from English officials and missionaries stationed in his home town of Sibsagar. He was an agnostic and inspired by the ideals of social reforms. He openly supported the movement for abolition of polygamy, widow-remarriage and rational reinterpretation of ancient knowledge. These men lived in the epoch of social reform. The attack on abuses, considered to violate the universal moral law, began in India with suppression of sacrifice of children in worship in 1803; suttee and slavery were abolished in 1829 and 1843 respectively. Widow remarriage was legalised in 1856. The Charter

2. Oxford Indian History, pp. 647-648
Act of 1833 established the principle of equality before law in matter of qualification for government service. In 1835, English and vernacular languages were made the language of administration and court. The new administration became a primary instrument of westernisation in India. The moral and material agencies of westernisation included the new education system, the Christian missions, the creative reform movements, the newspapers, the institutions of local self-government, the railways, the telegraph, the printing presses and the new technology of production. The western education, the Christian activity and the free press had their immediate impact in the development of a new outlook based on the ideas of rationalism, humanism, and justice. The introduction of European institutions, Science, knowledge and thoughts facilitated the transfer of western culture to India. The response of sensitive Indians was one of welcome to these changes, but the conservative section of society tried to oppose them. The radical tendency in social reform stimulated by Derasio, was the extreme attempt for outright rejection of Hinduism from a strict rationalist point of view; it was however short-lived. India accepted the path initiated by Rājā Rāmmohan Roy; it was a moderate path of synthesis of upanishadic wisdom and European rationalism. It wanted to change the Indian society from within by leaning on this synthetic knowledge. The satiric and reformist tendencies in the earliest phase of modern Assamese literature derived its inspiration from the reform movements.

Hem Candra Baruvā was the first major creative writer to respond to this new awakening; his satire in prose against the ecclesiastical corruption and social evils was prompted by a desire of reform. But he was not the first to do this. The evangelical movement in Assam started by the Baptist missionaries was informed
by a spirit of rationalism and humanitarianism; it was best reflected in their laying the foundation of a free press in 1846 and of a tradition of selfless service. Their concern for modernising the Assamese language and literature deeply impressed the Assamese intellectuals of the day. The earliest convert to Christianity, Nidhi Rām Farwell, wrote verse satire against the obscure practices in the Hindu temples in Assam. Rev. Nathan Brown published an Assamese grammar in 1848 and Dr Miles Brown published an Assamese dictionary in 1867; the dictionary was based on an earlier work of 1839 by J. Dekā Baruvā. The missionaries popularised the essay form, news writing, and published some story books, some of which are regarded as the first prototypes of Assamese novel. The missionaries were thus unofficial apostles of western influence in Assamese literature. Under their influence, a new religious literature beginning with the publication of the Bible in 1813 came into being; side by side they encouraged writing of text books and tracts or articles on secular subjects. Guṇābhirām Baruvā (1837–98) was the first writer to write a drama (Rām–rañami in 1857) that contained a clear advocacy of widow remarriage, a year after the Bill on it had been passed. The first modern epic Abhimanyu–badha (by R.Caudhurī) written on the technical model popularised by Michael Madhusudan Datta of Bengal, appeared in 1875. The lyrical poem began to be written from the eighties of the 19th centuries and perfected in the following decades by a number of talented poets. The romantic movement in modern Assamese poetry is the finest expression of middle class sensibility and rich imagination. It was the voice of the liberated individual with its sense of wonder and beauty, its humanism, its universalism, its subtle feelings for the past and in pity for the lowly. This serious poetry had its counterpart light
verses, as serious drama had its counterpart in light dramas including farces. Similarly the serious essays had their counterpart in the light essays and witty prose. Besbaruvā developed the comic essay into interesting form that combines by use of various comic modes, the descriptive, the analytical and the narrative elements or pieces through the thin thread of a single comic character.

The satiric poems in modern Assamese literature is a distinct genre. Nidhirām Farwell is believed to be the first poet to imbibe the modern spirit. He was the first Assamese to be converted into Christianity. In his poems he expresses the Christian view that Indian religion is superstitious and rampant with idolatry. In marginal satirical passages, he points out what he considers to be an evil in Hindu religion and blames the Brahminical priests for what he deems to be ignorance of truth. Dr W. Neog observes that Nidhirām imbibed the new spirit of Christian ideal and this is evident in his poems. But he wrote in the old pada form and showed little originality as a poet. His few poems published in Arunodai have now only historical value. In the descriptive poem on Assam's temples, he freely directs his raillery on the temple rituals. The tone of these satiric passages is entirely negative and marked by antipathy; it is destructive. In the following passage on worship of the virgin Goddess, the tone is explained in plain description:

upajukta lok cāi kanyā paṭhiyāi,
jātriaka tāira carante pujādi karay.
pujā hole tāra pāce kare āru dān,

3. Oxford Indian History, p. 647
4. ASI, p. 
His ironic remark is clear. His hatred and scorn for the tantric ritual are expressed in a casual manner. His understanding of the tantric philosophy is poor, but his norm is Christian. However, the poem as a whole is not satiric. In fact, satire is incidental and subordinate to descriptive quality of the poem. We can therefore omit it from considering as a satiric poem.

In Balinārāyaṇ Barā's (b.1852) two comic poems, dāṅgariyā and asamīyā bābu, we get an amusing caricature of two types of Assamese gentry that dominated the emerging middle class society in the 19th century. There is no attempt at personal lampooning; both the dāṅgariyā and the bābu are types. He attacks the gentic vices or follies of the two classes of persons; one is representative of the old aristocratic class that grudgingly accepted the new milieu and the other is representative of the class of educated employees in the British administrative establishment. The decadent aristocrat is a funny figure. "He parades his manliness before women and he is a terror to his slaves whom he subjects to merciless beating. He boasts before young boys, but maintains dis-
crouch silence in presence of his compatriots. He is obliging before the čāprāci and lowers his head before the shahib. He is our typical Assamese aristocrat."

tirotār āgat puruṣāli
golāmak khunda yam.
lorār āgat bar kathā
samaniyār āgat kam.
oāprācīr āgat kekorā-kekūri
cahābar āgat kuja
ēvei āmār asamar
dāngariyā bujā.

In this piece, a real moral indignation of a modern and England­returned Assamese gentleman is directed at the vain manners of the decadent aristocrat. He is an amusing and pitiable figure. Barā's merry verse is however indignant and merciless; his ridicule is joyously malicious.

The bābu is an employee of the British court; his knowledge of English is poor. He is corrupt enough to accept small bribes. His sole aim of life is to retire with credit from service and to secure a pension. He is hypocritical and does things in which he does not believe. When angry, he boils like hot oil, but when beaten, he is easily subdued.

khong uthile tapat tel
kil khāle bābu.
ēvei āmār asamar
asamīyā bābu.

6. Marahā Phular Karani, p.10
7. ibid., p.13
Bara’s premature retirement from literary life cut short his career as a promising satirist. His language is colloquial and his rhymes merry. His verse is bitter without appearing to be so, largely because his satire is impersonal.

L. N. Bezbaruva (1868-1938), a contemporary of Bara, was a versatile writer. Bezbaruva wrote more than 21 comic poems including parodies.

Bezbaruva was the first poet to introduce parody in Assamese literature. He made two parodies on Mādhavdeva’s bārgīts, "tejore kamalāpati parabhāta ninda" and "uṭhare uṭha bāpu gopāla, nisi parabhāta bhoila".

Mādhavdeva’s original bārgīt ‘uṭhare uṭha bāpu gopāla’ is a devotional song of very high order; the parody is deficient in majesty of tone and intensity of feeling found in the original song. The bārgīt is an endearing call to Kṛṣṇa to wake up from bed, while the parody is a light-hearted call to the Assamese to wake up and be enterprising. Yosadā’s place in the original poem is taken in the parody by Mother Assam. In the original poem, we get –

\[
\text{Uṭhare uṭha bāpu, gopāla he, nisi parabhāta bhoila,} \\
\text{Kamala nayana, buli ghana ghana, Yosodā dākite loila.}
\]

In the parody we have –

\[
\text{Uṭhare uṭha bāpu asamīhe, nisi parabhāta bhoila,} \\
\text{Lāhari sonāi buli mor putāi asame mātiche bol.}
\]

The parody actually imitates the metre of the original verse, and substitutes a patriotic thought in place of the devotional. It creates a burlesque effect by reversing the spiritual mood.

The other 'barṣīt' (Tejare kamalāpati parabhāṭī ninda) is parodied by the poem "puvār bargīt" (hero asamīyā kāī parabhāta). That it is a successful parody is clear from the comparison of the following passages. In the first we find:

Śatapatra bikāsita bhramara urai,
Brajabadhu dadhi mathe tuvā guna āi
Dāma sudāma dāke teriloiyā nām
Hero dekha uthiyā āsila Balarām.¹⁰

(The lotus is in blossom and the black bees are flying. The women of Braja are churning curd by singing praises of the Lord. Dāma and Sudāma are calling you. Look, Balarām has already come out of bed.)

In the second, we get its parody:

Āphu' gachār phul phuliche, bhomorā uriche
Thupariye ghar sāri kun kun ēt gāiche.
Mandalar tekelā māte tor dhari nām,
Khājanā pariche bākī, dhari loi yām.¹¹

(The hemp tree is in blossom and the black bees are flying. The short and ugly woman is sweeping floors of the house, buzzing a song. The mandal's peon is calling you. He says, "There are arrears of revenue to be collected; we shall arrest and take you away.")

¹⁰. Bargīt, p.111
The pictorial contrast is amusing although the two poems are composed in the same metre. The effect is therefore marvelous. The contrast between lotus and hemp, Sudāma (or Pāma) and mandal's peon is able to create a genuine incongruity of feelings. The scene of collection of revenue arrears is realistically contrasted with the sweet idyllic scene of cow-herds preparing to leave for the field. The gross social reality is counterpoised with the high spiritual mood. There is no malice in it and the laughter caused is genial. It is an instance of humour. Bezbaruva's parodies are pioneering but light, as all parodies are. This remark applies also to his other parodies.

Bezbaruva wrote a number of light didactic poems with the sole aim of ridiculing idiocy, bad habits and non-enterprising spirit of the Assamese youth. Assamīyā Dekār Prati Upades, Asamiyar Dukh, and Mahāpralayar Laksan are typical instances of them.

The first poem has the air of a northern classical song and lashes at the derogatory habits of young men like aversion to study, drunkenness and hemp-addiction.

Hero assamīyā dekā
puvār parā bhāng khāi
phura hero tīghilghilāi
Kāni kāpor iśvare dība
āru dība tākā.

(Oh, Assamese youths, roam about hemp-addicted from morning till sunset. God will give you clothes and money).

13. ibid., pp.1314-15
14. ibid., pp.1316-17
In the second poem the poet ridicules the false lamentation of Assamese young men at their total incapacity to face economic competition of advanced outsiders in trade, jobs and other enterprises. The third brings in the theme of mahāpralaya (the great deluge), which is to end the conventional but imane way of life of the people. The poem seems to disparage the folly of sticking to a particular way of life even when its inadequacy is quite clear. The sense of impending doom seems nevertheless to upset the no-changers, against whom a mild ridicule is directed.

The third poem digs at their craze for unmerited cheap fame, false prestige, platitude of reform, aversion to action, superficial patriotism and puerile literary ventures.

āgar tarap dāngariyāk bhemar bābe ḫāho
kintu mai dāngar hoi tāro oparat baho.
(I laugh at the ancient lords for their ostentation. But when I become myself a man of status, I excel them in it.)

The new man of status is no better than the vain feudal aristocrat.

Some other poems too caricature infantile modernism. Endhārīr Prəmpatra15 and Kabitā Devī16 are two such pieces. In the first poem we find a ridicule on a shy and unaccustomed but literate wife’s attempt at writing a letter to her husband, who is away from home. Her writing ends abruptly when her mother-in-law summons her. It is a caricature of infantile modernism that made its way into the homes of the salaried middle class at the turn of the century. The second poem is epistolary in form. Parodical imitation of Durgāvara’s Pāṃcālī,17 the comic poem ridicules hollow verbalism and cheap imitative manner displayed in some verses of contemporary poets.

Bando kabitārupini devī Suresvārī
Yār nāme thoiḷā thoiḷā tuh yāi calī.18

(A salute to the goddess Suresvārī, in whose name sack-ful of verbiage can be passed on.)

There is pun in the word 'Suresvārī', which reminds us of Bacchus as well as Mūse. One goddess seems to be the very antithesis of the other. The verbiage that passes for poetry in some adolescent circles of readers is made fun of.

15. BG, p.1315
16. ibid., p.1303
17. ASR, p.149; Pāṃcālī is Manasā-kāvya.
Bezbaruvi edited the Monthly journal called Bahi. He introduced cartoons in its pages to provide comic relief to readers. The juxtaposition of cartoons and light verses generally creates a farcical effect, though where the burlesque spirit is meaningful, it tends to be comic. One of his comic preoccupations was with abortive literary efforts. He took great delight in caricaturing the puerility of budding poets with a satiric intent. His special target was the immature love poems, bad criticism and journalistic hazards. Journalistic hazards are depicted in the following verse:

Kone sahe rakanār sudhāraṇā, kavitār aprakāśā, 
ātmagārimāt phulā sampādak hātē?
bhābi-cinti itīdhī biṣay hāu kāpuruṣ,
novāro mariba sei dekhi, sabhāsad. 
sei dekhi mūrto nipindhi peṭak baḍhābo khojō. 19

(It is difficult to put up with the way written manuscripts are corrected or poems are rejected by the self-complacent editor. The more I think about it, more I become morose; this makes me a coward, but even if I wish to die of despair, I cannot. Therefore I do not wear this head on my body, and instead, propose to increase the size of my belly.)

The cartoon accompanying the poem is that of a headless and potbellied man holding the separated head with his hands in a sitting posture. This seems to be a fantastic self-caricature or caricature. The poem is divided into three pieces. In the second piece, 20 the man fixes his head upturned as a result of which the

19. ātma-sambhāsan, BG (Vol.II), p.1669
world gets upturned and his magazine, 'Bahi' begins to emit its notes from the opposite direction. In this posture, he sees enemies as friends, friends as enemies, good as bad and vice versa. In the third piece, he refixes his head in upright direction, but unfortunately the face is turned towards the back. As a result, he doubts the authenticity of his own head and hankers after the real one. Such wrong fixing is compared to unbalanced criticism of books from an inverted view-point or to editorial correction of mistakes in a manuscript that results in fresh errors:

yene sama-ālocake kari sama-ālocanā, olotāi granthārtha byākhyile athabā dhurandhar sampādake yene aśuddhar kari śudharan, karile aśuddha punu.

(The wrong use of brain power, - for this is what the wrong fixing of head on the body implies, - has its parallel in criticism and editing. A critic in his critical discourse often explains the meaning of the text in the opposite sense or a cunning editor introduces new mistakes during editing or correction of the copy.)

The series begin with a famous line from Hamlet: 'To be, or not to be, that is the question' (Hamlet, Act III, scene I). The intention is clearly to burlesque the famous tragic monologue. His jibe at unbalanced literary judgement and editing has a note of intellectual comedy. The piece as a whole has however a farcical effect.

From the brief foregoing survey of Bezbaruva's comic poems, we can safely summarise that Bezbaruva parodied the foibles of life as it appeared to his middle class outlook. We find in his poems a curious mixture of the jest and the earnest, the trivial and the didactic. He employs burlesque, parody, epistle, and monologue etc. as devices to create the comic effect. He freely mixes comedy with farce, but maintains a balanced attitude throughout. Generally his poems are comic, because he is detached and balances the contrasts with a buoyant comic imagination.

In the formation of modern Assamese literature, the student club (kalikata Assamiyā Chātarar Sabha) held at the behest of Gāṅgā Govinda Phukan in 1872 and its direct successor, Kalikatā Asamīyā bhasār unnati sādhini sābhā established in 1888, played a crucial role. It was then the practice among the young sponsors of the 'unnati sādhini sābhā' to hold two weekly sessions of discussions; one on Wednesday, which was devoted to speech-making including the comic ones, and the other at suitable intervals to serious literary sessions. The Assamese students in Calcutta regularly attended these meetings. The serious sessions were instrumental in inducing the production of a new type of literature centring round the well-known monthly Jonākī, while the Wednesday sessions might have been devoted to the cultivation of the new spirit of humour or satire. It was about this time Bezbaruva conceived of his famous comic character, - Kripabar, the prototype of a self-centred, unsociable, alcoholic and disagreeably anglicised mess-mate. About him, we shall discuss in the next chapter.

Candradhar Baruvi (1874-1961) imbibed the spirit of satire of the age quite early. He was primarily a dramatist and a poet and came under the influence of Michael Madhusudan Datta.* But he was also a writer of light poems. The twenty poems that we come across in 'Raňjan' were originally published in Jonākī (1889-1901), Bāhi (1909-33) and Ālocanī (1910-17) magazines.

The poems, Ephēri bhul, Mai śikṣit dekā, Jarur cāhāb hom, śikṣitar kartabya jūn and Hākimī Bāgaya are satire on the early generation of English-educated Assamese. The idea is to ridicule false vanity, imitativeness, immaturity and infantile modernism of the delinquents. These native shahihs were queer and rootless.

The poems Svades 3evā, Dhīrpanthī Dhīren, Hāvā kar, Mathurār Ahimśā, Hathät Patriot and Desār Unnati are a satire on insincere persons who pose as patriots. In the first poem, Kamal, the hero, is concerned more with personal welfare than social welfare. He pursues his selfish end to its unethical limit, that of turning from a patriot into a paid Government spy. On being beaten black and blue by angry people, he gave up his career of social service with least qualm of conscience -

Kamale idare sekā pāi pāi
bhālko bhābī cāle
Śvades śevā bhāvtoke dhari
ubhālī pelāi dile.24

(Kamal began to get rebuff in this manner and then thought deeply (over his career). He gave up the very thought of rendering service to the country.)

* ASI, p.263
In Ḫaṭḥāṭ Patriot, we get the pen-picture of a turncoat, but terribly power-mad man. The opportunism and perverted egoism of the man is a clean target of ridicule in the following piece:

āmār kathāi bed
(āmi) yote yāo tote bhed
(āmi) āji extremist, kāli moderate, porohi retrograde.\textsuperscript{25}

(Our words are sacred. Wherever we go, there is division or sectarianism. We are extremists today, moderate tomorrow and retrograde the day after.)

Moderate Dhīren in Dhirpanthī Dhīren turns out to be a flatterer of powers-that-be and thus becomes an object of popular contempt.

Dhīrene dhīrere cali cali eidare
duṭī nām duphāle ghotile,
bulīle durghor bhanḍa stāvak edale
desodrohī idale bulīle.\textsuperscript{26}

(Dhīren conducted himself in this manner in measured steps and earned a dubious reputation. One group of former flatterers called him a great rogue and another group called him traitor.)

The fool in the next poem 'Ḥāvā-Kar' (tax on wind) moved a resolution in the (British Indian) Assembly for imposing a tax on wind. When the British Officials politely refused to admit it and asked him to withdraw, he bowed down to their wish in a servile manner.

\textsuperscript{26} ibid., p.14
"Prastāvat sār āche yodio niścai
etiyā tathāpi tuli lole bhāī hai.
Rafiule bole "bhāī celām huzur
Tuli lom bāru mai prastāv jarur." 27

(The shahib said, "Although there is substance in your proposal, yet it is better to withdraw it." Rafiul bowed his head and replied, "huzur, well said; I shall certainly withdraw the resolution.")

The next poem referred to is Wathurār Ahīmsā. It is a satire on a non-violent political worker who does not live up to his professions. However it is in the poem Desār Unnati that we meet with a plain but biting satire on the perverted superficial concepts of national welfare. He hits hard at the advocates of untouchability, usury, undue predilection shown to foreign dress and ceremonial kālī-pujā that is invariably accompanied by buffalo-sacrifice etc.

cāri kuri bachаратो neribā ulāh
unnati nahai eko nohale utsāh
houk bayas burhā (buḍhā)
ākou karovā biyā.
keouvā chovālī āni bārī kari marā
unnati karā desār unnati karā. 28

(Do not lose stamina even at eighty. Without stamina, there is no hope of development or welfare. Advanced age is no bar, do marry again. Bring a child-wife home to make her a widow in the long run. Thus ensure advancement to the nation.)

28. ibid., pp.18-20
In another poem, *Asamiyā Samkīrna Manar*, there is burning sense of satire directed against jaundice-eyed people. The satire is directed against those people in whose view Assam is a country which is narrow in every sense. Not only her physical features narrow, but also her very outlook. Even her roads, rail-lines, bridges, ditches, rice-pounding yards, towels, boats, pigtails, gates, and verandas in the houses—all are narrow. The sarcastic generalisation causes our laughter.

In some of his poems, like *Jarur Cāhāb Hom* and *Śikṣit Dekā*, he is up against unassimilated Europeanism practised by a section of English-educated youths. He launches a tirade against the use of anglicised Assamese jargon in everyday speech by this class in his poem *Asamiyā Bhāsā*, as it disfigures the language and spoils its spirit. Baruvā satirises this distorting trend by employing a highly exaggerated anglicised jargon to create effect—

Dem Asamiyā novāri likhiba
go to devil hak.
Ingrāsi idea express nahai
nai wordar stock
Quarter hour brain khatālo
michāte karilo try.
Katā-kutā kari epithi kāgaj
spoil karilo hai.
Leterā grammar pronounociation
Kibākibī bāngbing
Figure nāyei phrase idiom
aweefully wanting.

29. Ranjan, C.D. Barua, pp.78-81
30. ibid., pp.78-81
31. ibid.
32. ibid., pp.69-72
33. ibid., pp.69-70
(This) damned Asamīyā (Language) is unfit for writing. Let it go to the devil. It is wanting in stock of words and therefore English ideas cannot be expressed. I applied my brain for quarter of an hour (to find out words) and it was in vain. A full page was spoilt and much had to be erased out. The Assamese grammar and pronunciation are untidy. It is hotch-potch and nonsensical. It is awfully deficient in figures of speech, phrases and idioms.

Kā-kā-kāvyabīṣārodohang is a satire aimed at the neophytes who wanted to reform the Assamese language to suit their taste —

(Gadhim) Garhim sanskrit kari notun bhāśāṅg
pātak karim patra
bhaṭ guci hoba bhatra
Kāṇak karnā nākak norka bolāṃ khāṭāṅg
(oho) kāvyā bīṣārodohang.

(We will make a new language by sanskritising or refining it. We shall substitute 'pātra' in place of 'pāt' and 'bhatra' in place of 'bhaṭ'. We shall surely substitute 'karnā' for 'kāṇ' and 'narka' for 'nāk'. I am well-versed in poetry of poetics.)

The ridiculous exercise focusses our attention on the futile attempt on the part of the early generation to anglicise or sanskritise the language and exposes its dilletantism.

The comic effect of infantile modernism goes beyond the language reform. Gagan in Epheri Bhul, changes his native mode

34. Raṇjan, C.D. Baru, p.64
35. ibid., pp.47-50
of life after he becomes a Government officer and alienates himself from society by adopting the English way of life.

kāme kāīdāī calane phurane
cāhābei teō full.
bhāratvarsat upajihe khāli
karile epheri bhul. 36

(In work, style and manners, he is a full shahib; only mistake he did was to be born in India.)

The spirit of satire is directed against Padum also in the poem Dāngar Hovāto Bhul (It is mistake to be great). Padum develops an aversion to work and lives parasitically on others wallowing in his vanity, false pride, superficial knowledge and self-centredness. He pronounces a perverted verdict on the whole society, which makes him completely ridiculous –

Padume sehat khātāng bujile
Samāj khonei fool.
enē samājat jarur jarur
dāngar hovāto bhul. 37

(In the end, Padum realised that the whole society is peopled with fools. Verily, to be great in this society is a mistake.)

Baruvā, in his other poems, presents us with a few more similar fools, directing his simple satire against their follies and oddities. It was not unusual in those days for the educated and employed sons to separate from their parents and to show indifference to them. Mānabendranāth, the son of Gopināth Mahāpeć,

36. Rañjan, C.D. Baruā, p.50
37. ibid., p.29
deserts his poor father after he is securely employed and married without any qualm of conscience. When his father tries to bring about a reconciliation, he replies in an over-bearingly bourgeois manner:

Gopināthe bole hai
kiyono parhālo (paḍhālo) hai
ata dhan bhāṅgilo kiya bā?
Mahendrai bole dhar
korichili kārbār
müldhano herāl jāniba.

(Gopināth lamented for spending much money over his education. Mohendra asked him to regard it as a business in which one loses even the capital.)

In Hákimī Biyā, the object of satire is a magistrate, who using his position of power, divorces two wives within a short time and after placing them in position of utter helplessness, becomes readily entangled in a third marriage with an Amazonian lady. The Amazon however exercises full control over him and makes him see reason.

Teur hātāt eū jānība
hol nākī lagā moh
pachi bulilei paci hai pare
daḥ bulilei daḥ.

(Before her, he behaves like a harnessed buffalo. Whatever she dictates becomes the law.)


It is an apt satire. In the poem Haranāthar hardam prārthana jealousy as a base emotion comes under direct ridicule. Haranāth prays to God for ensuring his lone prosperity at the expense of that of his neighbours. His mean jealousy inspires him to seek this boon. Human self-centredness and cupidity are the targets of attack here.

Dayāmai Hari
diyā mok āru dhan āru māti-bārī
dāmār desāt karā oohākī mokei
ān sakaloke karā tenei dukhīya
sakaloṭi bandā houk mor gharatei. 40

(O Compassionate Hari, give me more wealth, land and house (orchard) plots. Make me the richest man in our land and everybody else be made abjectly poor and slaves in my house.)

This is the base urge of a perverted class of people fit for direct ridicule.

In some other poems 41 he tries to attack the religious orthodoxy and litigious habit of people. In still others, he deals with trivial objects. These poems however cannot be regarded as instances of successful satire.

Baruvā's interests are limited and he does not display much ingenuity of approach or variety of forms. His forte is direct social criticism and ability to create satiric effect through ironic exaggeration, use of burlesque and caricature. However he is vehement in his critical attitude and has a capacity to handle

40. Ranjan, C.D. Baruā, p.42
41. ibid., pp.106-110.
the language in an effective manner. His lampooning is mild and does not aim at producing hilarity; polite ridicule is enough for him. He has a passion for realistic character-drawing through description, narrative, dialogue, comment and occasional use of soliloquy. He rarely used fantasy.

Pandināth Kalitā’s (1890-1950) light poems, which were produced within the period under review, more or less fall in line with those of Baruvā. The trend is that of social and political criticism. There is reason to believe that his political and social poems were written during the height of the movement for national independence, as they bear the impress of those times. Temperamentally, Baruvā and Kalitā differ from Bezbaruvā and anyone who wants to enjoy the poems written by them should seek them primarily in ideas. Kalitā’s range of interest is too limited and he confines his attention to a few topics.

The poems in Kalitā’s Rahgharā abound in social satire. Mahādev Sarmā, in his preface to the book, remarks that the Rahgharā (honey-comb) aims simply at ‘gay beating’ (raṅgar kil). This implies that its satire is funny as well as corrective.

Medhi tirthaloi yāi (Medhi or the clerical official goes on pilgrimage) is in many ways a remarkable satirical poem in the book. In Medhi, he caricatures an old world fool.

Medhi, who is opium-addict, naive and orthodox, and an unaccustomed traveller goes on a pilgrimage aboard a steam-boat.

42. ASR, p.339;
43. Preface, Rahgharā
He is uncomfortable at the thought of touching people even at the ticket-counter. He is naive enough to ask the ticket-seller to issue him a ticket for 'pilgrimage', as if that is his destination. During the journey, Medhi is hesitant to take rice in the crowded boat for the fear of losing purity. He takes meal in a room, but when he comes to know that a lungi-clad Muslim cooks his food, his sense of sin is roused. He then gives up journey and embarks on a boat to make for the river-bank bank with a view to doing penance and getting purified. But the boat which carries him capsizes in the midstream and Medhi meets with a watery grave. The tragic touch does not however diminish the severity of Kalita's satire on orthodoxy and ignorance.

Medhiye bole "eito kon"?
Dekai bole "rândhanî bāmun"
Medhiye bole 'Bāmun yadi pondhno nāi kiya?
Dekai bole ene bāpurei Medhi tirthalai yāi,
Mekhela pindhā, -Medhiye kai "Muchalmaēn eito bujicho mai iyār hātere bhāt khuvai dehāto karile chai āruno kihar āsā kari Medhi tirthalai yāi?"

(Medhi asks in surprise: "Who is this?" The young man replies, "he is a Brahmin cook". Medhi is not convinced and therefore asks again, "if he is a Brahmin, he should wear a dhoti in the familiar manner". The youth replies, "such brahmins medhi has to accompany during pilgrimage." To this, Medhi replies, "But he wears mekhela (i.e., lungi). Now I understand that he is a Muslim and the meal he made me eat has

* Rahgharā, p.33
defiled my body. There is no hope left for
me now to go on pilgrimage.)

This conversation sounds a bit improbable as it exagger-
ates his naivete. The character lacks common sense, and his ec-
centricity is fed by his sense of caste purity.

Kalita is particularly concerned with the evils of caste
system and some of his poems are directed against these. This is
particularly evident in his poem 'Amar jat', which, in a way, takes
the form of a chorus:

bhūmandalat āmārtoei
ātāitkoi uttam jāt
ān dharmar āche yimān
apabitra hoba timān
sihate ohule asuchi hoi
āmār bāt-ghāt
bhūmandalat āmārtoei
ātāitkoi uttam jāt. 44

(Our caste is the best in the world. Those belonging
to other religions or sects are more impure mlecchas.
Even their touch makes our roads and bathing places
(ghāts) impure. Ours is the best caste in the world.)

Kalita's poems also deal with many social evils. In Deso-
dhārakar mahāsabhā, the satire on conservatism of the old Assa-
msese gurus is however mixed with a farcical episode. A liberal
Brahmin, Bhattāchāryya, pleads for abolition of the caste system at
a meeting of so-called reformers. He is attacked for his liberal
social views and in the ensuing ruffle, the meeting ends in a pan-
demonium -

44. Rahgharā, pp.74-75
Deshodharakar mahasabha kenibai uri gol;  
pandit kauk hicap kari unnati kimam hol. 45

(The great council of country's emancipators dissolved into the air. Now, let the pundit say how much did the country progress.)

The farcical incident hints at the unproductive deliberations in the meetings of patriots that ends in a fiasco, but the undertone of satire directed against the caste orthodoxy in society is evident.

He also digs at child-marriage in a didactic epigram called bibah-bidhi.

Asi

bacharibya baralai kariba  
gourire natun ghar.  
svami nou dekhotei kanya hole bari  
novare labhiba bar. 46

(A 80-year old widower shall marry a gauri, i.e., a 8-year old bride. Even if the bride becomes a widow even before she meets her husband, she should not marry again.)

Here he directs his satire against the Hindu marriage customs. In the same manner, he satirises the customary social law in another epigram, dandabidhi.

Sudrar sobhagya dayalu brahmane  
mariile bukat lathi.  
Sudire bamunak mariim bulile  
bhari-hat pelaba katii. 47

(It is a good fortune to a sudra if a compassionate Brahmin kicks in the chest. But if a sudra threatens

45. Rahghara, p.90
46. ibid., p.94
47. ibid.
to hit him back, his hands and feet should be cut off.)

This is a caustic satire on the satirical caste rules.

In his book Bahurupī too, Kalita keeps his satiric mood alive. He exposes the hypocrisy of an orthodox brahmin youth in his poem Bahurupī, through a soliloquy that is tinged with farce:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{mai bhattācharyar lorā} \\
\text{ingrāzi bāngalā parhā (padhā)} \\
\text{esa ekuri dāngar dāngar} \\
\text{kitāp mukhastha karā.} \\
\text{..} \\
\text{..} \\
\text{mor kapālat masta phot} \\
\text{mūrat tikani got} \\
\text{Dāngar mānuh dekhile āgat} \\
\text{mātit lot sot.} \\
\text{mok nābhābibā kam} \\
\text{ghoinīr oparat yam} \\
\text{strī svādhīnātār baktītāt kintu} \\
\text{kono nai mor sam.} \\
\text{..} \\
\text{..} \\
\text{mai bālya bibāh dekhi} \\
\text{karo pratibād lekhi} \\
\text{nije hole bicāro gourī} \\
\text{āngulīt bachar lekhi. 48}
\end{align*}
\]

(I am a descendant of the Bhattācārya family and well-versed in English and vernacular. I have memorised about more than hundred big volumes.

In my forehead, there is a big red mark (phot), and on my head, there is a pigtail. Yet I cringe before big men no sooner I see them.

48. Bahurupī, pp.1-2
However, do not belittle me. I am almost a god of death to my wife. Of course, there is none to excel me in speech-making on freedom of women ...

I write against child marriage. But for me, I am in search of a 8-year old bride in all seriousness.)

In the same vein, satire is directed against a hypocritical lawyer who advocates free use of wine and hemp for the welfare of the people. He also advocates banning of looms and weaving to please women; the whole manner is flippant:

tātasāle tirutābilākak diche bahuto kaṣṭa,
dinar dinto tātat bahi ceherā haiche nasta
uṭhāī dile tātar sāl.
tirutāi mok pāba bhal. 49

(The looms are a source of misery to women. Sitting the whole day by looms, has affected their complexion. By banning the looms, I would endear myself to the women.)

It is a fantastic and perverted logic the poet uses to create a satiric effect.

Kalita also wrote on political themes. His political satire is occasionally caustic. He was an acute observer of the contemporary political scene, specially during the twenties and thirties. The system of election that was introduced in the country following the recommendations of Monatago and Chelmsford on reforms were accompanied by many evils and these did not escape the eyes of an acute observer. At the time of elections, the candidates

from urban areas used to visit the villages to woo voters. The people were served with the usual diet of promises. But after the elections were over, the members do not stick to their promises and behave like bridegrooms on honeymoon trips. The following piece from his Reform-Sundarî highlights the voters' disillusionment -

Olâl sakalo râijar dhanere
nijar jolôngâ vhari.
rel-jâhâjat phurile bagãi
Honey moon ejoy kari
bheba lagi rol bhoṭâr sakal
dekhi membarar bhāo ... 50

(Everybody (the members) set out on a journey after filling his purse with people's money. They travelled in trains and steam-boats like bridegrooms on honeymoon trips. The voters were dumb-founded at the behaviour of the members.)

Kalitâ's satire on the elections is valid even today.

To Kalitâ, satire however was a minor deity to whom he turned only occasionally. By temperament, he was a serious author and devoted much time to writing novels, essays and dramas. But he seems to be the last important comic poet in Assamese literature after Bezbaruva and Baruva.

The satiric spirit in the light poems mentioned above was a natural reaction of the sensitive literary minds against the contradictory social behaviour of the emergent middle class. It is not so much against modernism as such, but against infantile modernism and superficial imitation that they directed their satire.

50. Bahurupi, p.33
The satiric poetry in Assamese has also to be judged, as all poetry should, in its historical context. In the age of inauguration of modern prose and poetry, this poetry seemed to be innovatory and had, as its aim, social criticism and reform. The taste of the readers as well as the aim of the writers were limited by the needs of the age. Their assumptions about poetry and its function are unlikely to find favour with the moderns, who are prone to believe in the imaginative seriousness of poetry. They do not seem to make sharp distinction between satire and serious poetry. Few modern Assamese poets use rhetoric of verse in the way Baruvā or Kalitā did. The satirical poets believed that they had something to say, and that includes saying something unpalatable or disagreeable, and therefore believed in its moral function. They did not pay much attention to the medium, at least in the same degree of intensity as the best of modern poets pay to it. It is also clear from the above survey that these poets mixed satire with farce freely.