Assamese poetry is rich in satire and humour. During the Romantic age a number of poets took to satirical and humorous poetry. The element of humour was present quite prominently in the old Assamese literature also. It was mainly because the Vaisnava literature was meant mainly for the laity. Sāṅkara-deva in his dramas has drawn the humorous sketches of Brahma, Bedanidhi and Bīswāmitra to the much delight of the audience. And as for poetry, Sāṅkara-deva's Śiva and Rāmasaraswati's Bhima and Bakaśura are the fine specimens of humorous personalities. Rāmasaraswati's Bhima Carita (Life and activities of Bhima) is a fine humorous composition. Bhima's strength and adventures and Bakaśura's ludicrous gait and structure often evoke a broad humour.

In the hands of the Romantic poets humour combined with satire, and sometimes, the satirical strain engulfed the humorous wholly. The satirical strain was very strong in L.N. Bezbarua and Dandinath Kalita. The social chaos of the time needed a satirical torture and the poets tried
their best to normalise the folly, the hypocrisy, the emptiness, the pride and all the ills of the then society. Two factors were mainly responsible for the condemnable aspects of the then society: firstly, the moral and social degeneration spelled out by the Burmese invasion and Movamoria rebellion was still looming large and secondly, a tendency amongst a section of the people to ape the westerners, i.e., to pose as Baboos and Sahibs grew up. Moral degeneration, foppishness and blind imitation of the westerners were to be seen mostly amongst the upper class citizens of the society. The priests and satradhikārs, the office-goers, the Mauzādārs and the newly educated gentry were the target of the satirists.

It was Hem Chandra Barua (1835-1896) who lashed an attack against the priestly class in his forceful novel Bāhire rāmaṁ bhitare kovā bhāturi ('Playing in the Parlour, empty is the larder'). His target was a Satrādhikāra (the head of a Satra institution) whose life he has unearthed in forceful prose. The hypocrisy, the deceit and the sexual extravagacy of the head of a satra is well exposed here. Hem Chandra Barua was no poet, but the little poetry that he has added to the concluding chapter of the work, shows his craftsmanship and satirical talent.
Like Hem Chandra, Satyanath Bora another forceful prose-writer has employed poetry to make his satires and humours lively and entertaining. His humorous description of grammar arouses laughter. To evoke humour Satyanath has introduced a confusion between Vyākarana (Grammar) and Viyā-karaṇa (The act of marriage). His witty descriptions express the common disinterestedness or hatred of the students towards Grammar and at the same time deride the hatred of the white for the black in the society. And particularly the practice of preferring only the fair-complexioned girls for the purpose of marriage is ridiculed. Satyanath Bora's art of narration is masterly and he has aptly used Śleṣa and Vyāja-stuti alamkāras in his humorous and satirical sketches.

"Śunā, śunā, śunā śisū śunā puti man,
Thir mane śunā kāk vole vyākarāṇ.
Vyā śabdar artha viyā karāi karaṇ,
Viyā karāleī nare jañe vyākarāṇ.
Pandite uccāre vyā, apandite viyā,
Ācalate bhēdābhēd eko nāikiyā.
Viyākarāṇar ādite varaṇa baṣā ne kalīya,
Orāṇi gucāle dekhī nīkā ne maliyā."
Listen, listen, listen, O boy: with attention,

Listen with a steady mind what is a vyākaraṇa;

The word vyā indicates viyā (marriage)

and the meaning of karana is performance.

Hence, as soon as a man gets married,

he becomes well versed in vyākaraṇa.

The scholars call it vya and others viya,

Actually there is no difference between the words.

The very first chapter of the viyakarana

is to decide the varṇa, (i.e., letters or colours)

Whether she is white or black;

With the unveiling of the face you can decide

Whether she is all clean or dirty.

BALINARAYAN BORA

Just at the dawn of Assamese Romanticism Balinarayan Bora with his sordid satiric verses lashed an attack on the petty officials of the district courts and the snobs of the time. Balinarayan was the first Assamese to receive Engineering education in London. His direct association with the British people in London made him to ponder over the immitating Indian gentry with western gaits and traits and this made him sick of them.
The tom-foolery and the foppishness of the local gentry caused a nausea to the society. Bora, in his poem — Dañariya (The Gentleman), has exposed the emptiness and artificiality of the then dañarias. The poem is rich with a fine rhetorical device. The play of the word dañar (which ordinarily means big) is enjoyable. He has used the same word with various implications to present us sabdänupras, yamaka and śles alamkāras. The poet says:

"Dañar jāpīr talat yay
Dañar pirāt bahe,
Dañar hokāt dhapāt khāy
Dañar dañar kahe.
Dañar khāhi, dañar māch
Dañar bheṭī bhār;
Gochar sodhāt jaḍar bhanāt
Sadāy lāge tār.
Dañar ghainīk culit dhari
Māre dañar car,
Dañar caular bhāṭ diye
Tatsālat ghar.***
Cuburiār māṭī kārhi
Pāte dañar bārī,
Gahanār perā dañar kare
Bārī tirutar kārhi."
He shades himself under a big umbrella,
He sits too on a big wooden seat
He smokes a big hookah.
And he coughs very loudly.
He demands a big goat
a big fish and big presents,
to settle the errands and petty disputes
of his neighbours.
He gives a big slab to his big wife,
pulling her near by catching the hair.
He gives her a dinner with very coarse rices
and compells her to live in the loom-house.
He makes a very big home-stead
by encroaching upon the land of his neighbour.
He makes his ornament box big
by snatching ornaments from the widows.

This is how the false vanity and stupidity of the Assamese
danarias were exposed by Balinarayan. The Assamese Baboos
who were none but the petty officials in the district
courts, too, were badly exposed by him. The Baboos tried
to immitate the English Sahibs to assert thereby their own
superiority over the common people. Their hypocricies
became the objects of pity and their peculiar and
irrelevant manners of life became nauseating. Balinara-yan noticed that, being a period of transition, the Baboos could not formulate a definite way of life. The Baboos therefore maintained a double standard. Sometimes they posed like pucca-sahibs being very progressive and westernized in manners and sometimes, being demanded by circumstances, had to pose as very orthodox, conservative and gentle. Their ludicrous gaits arouse laughter and pity. We present here two pictures of the Baboo in the very words of the poet.

(a) Tel khāraṇīyā inśrājir
khāṭomto kari,
Udur kathā vuduk vujāi
9
dinṭo kaṭāy ṛhūri.

= uttering some broken English words,
He wants to assert his superiority;
And thus, with his gibberish,
He tells Jack about Jill.

(b) Nak kharā tār goph pātal
dārhi pelāy tuli,
Vuku bahal, peṭṭi saru
phindāi phindāi phure
Bahirat ki, gharat ki,
10
gār cola nere.
His nose is flat and he wears a brief moustache;
And manages a clean-shaving of his beards,
His chest is expansive, the belly small;
He walks with a pause, expanding his chest.
He never parts with his shirt either at home or outside.

LAKHSMINATH BEZBARUA

Lakhsminath Bezbarua, who wrote his humorous and satiric verses under the pseudonym Kripabar Barbarua, is by far the most successful of all the authors of satiric and humorous poems. He launched direct attacks at the people around him. In doing so, he had the purpose in mind to criticise and correct the follies, hypocrisies and tom-fooleries, found in the society. Dimbeswar Neog observes that in Bezbarua the social reformer and the literary humorist combined and as such at times he became too critical of the people around him. In the poem Calani 11 āru beji (the sieve and the needle), Lakhsminath's social satire has become too pungent and piercing. The satirical sense in this poem has virtually swallowed up the humour. He has proved in this poem that a poet may play a very important part in the social and political life of the country as he has the art of pinpointing the social ills and perversions. In this poem, Bezbarua has dealt with
as many as eight social and educational problems.

(i) The problem of social perversion. An old and useless man marrying a sixteen year old girl, whose chief occupation with the grandpa - bridegroom is "to pick up his grey hairs and beards".

(ii) Teen-agers writing (artificial) love poems, thereby presenting themselves as great poets.

(iii) Students launching meaningless attacks against the elders after getting plucked in the examination.

(iv) Notorious vanity of those who are in power.

(v) Blowing one's own-trumpet.

(vi) The divided self of the opportunist once working as a reformer and once also as a bigot.

(vii) Evils of alcohol.

(viii) Repression on wife.

Undoubtedly these problems are worthy of attention for any poet with love for his society. Bezbarua was a poet with a leadership; he was ever conscious of his duties to the society. In his Vrindā-Candrāvali Samvād the poet has tried to give a local colour to the epic characters
Vrinda and Candra. With a sense of humour, here he has used English and Assamese languages side by side to evoke laughter.

"Steal the flute pay him back in his own coin:
phuta keitat mati sumay mari diya tar join.
That's the way to put an end to that nuisance
pray, have no nonsense."

The Assamese rendering of the only Assamese sentence in this stanza is: "Put some soil at the holes of the flute and thus put an end to it once for all."

Bezbarua like Hem Chandra Barua and Satyanath Bora interspersed his prose writings with casual humorous and satirical poetic pieces. *Kripābar Barbaruār ṭopolā* *Kripābar Baruār obhatani, Bhāvar burburāni* are some of his prose works wherein he has added poetry to enhance the grace. The national awakening in the country got a definite momentum by Bezbarua's time but there were a few people, who out of their self-centredness, had little leisure to think of their mother-land. Bezbarua laughed and made others too laugh heartily at their cost. In his poem on India, he satirically advises the Indians, thus:

"Sleep, sleep, ye sons of India,
Have two minds, three hearts each."
Sing the glories of your personal self
and of your wife;  
Then this land India will turn pure."

The irony in this poem is vividly clear. The poet Kripābar sometimes laughed at his own cost too. In the humorous sketch of Kripābar Barbaruā, the poet has drawn this ludicrous picture of himself.

Kripābar Barbaruā is a great archer,
With a big belly he goes,
His head dances along with the pigtail.
He is like Viṣṇu with his sudarsan
Or, Lord Siva with his trisūla,
The book kakatar topola in his hand
is the bolt of Indra.
He is the sun of pride for Assam,
With his kindness he is the very
wish-yielding tree,
And his body colour resembles
the cooking-pot.

This is indeed a satire at those who used to boast of their fancied perfection despite of deformities and draw-backs. Beabarua was the precursor of a new literary movement in the country; he was the editor of Bahī. As such he had to
encourage the new writers to begin a sincere literary career. But most of the new-comers laboured to be poets and out of their undue zeal to become poets wrote on everything from their silly love episodes to the paddy-pounding (Dheki) machine. In his poem Dheki-kavi, the poet has banteredly commented on the life of a novice taking to poetry without any preparation for it. Likewise he has satirised the mental state of a love-poet, humorously:

"The old man's daughter has attained youth
She has sent strong arrows (from her eyes)
My heart and the back are pierced by them,
Oh, I am growing restless."

CHANDRADHAR BARUA

Chandradhar Barua wrote a few poems in the satirical tone. He followed Bezbarua's ideals but could not rise to his height. His chief target was the newly educated young people. Like Bezbarua he often followed a mixed diction of English and Assamese or Assamese and Sanskrit to evoke laughter. His Ami bhakat (We are devotees) reveal the hollowness of the devotees belonging to the various satras. (The word bhakat is derived from Skt. bhakta.)
Most of these bhaktas were professedly celibates and used to get free board and lodging in the satras.

DANDINATH KALITA

Dandinath Kalita (1890-1950) further accentuated the humour and satire in Assamese poetry by his famous poetical works — Ragar (Fun), Rahghara (Treasure house of jest) and Bahurupi (The Masker). Kalita's satires, like those of L.N. Benbarua, grew out of the society. "He holds up to ridicule contemporary superstitions and foibles which were growing apace like ill weeds, without making any personal attack on or flinging mud at any individual, group or community. Some of the poems are like poniard-thrusts at old superstitions and prejudices". Dandinath was a master artist, he used not only humour and satire but also wit, epigram and nonsense in his poems. Kalita liked to satire the religious fanatics, the Brahmins, the women, the pretending patriots, the foppish young people and a lot of others. Medhi Tirthalai yay (Medhi's pilgrimage) records the pitiable state of a man who, due to his unduly serious concern over his caste had to lose his life through drowning. In this poem humour has turned into poignant pathos. The traditional
education and culture were viewed with concern by some people with modern education, and they could not appreciate the good of India's traditional civilisation. 

Kalita in his poem अमि हिंदुस्थानार प्रथाम श्रेष्ठ शभ्या (we are the first rate citizens of India) exposes the hypocrisy of the newly educated Indians. His चाह रहस्यम (Mystery of tea) is a fine epic of humour wherein he has drawn the funny characters also of शिवा and नारायण. बाबूर दारा (Bagi's bridegroom) tells the tragic aspect of an educated girl's life. In this poem Kalita's humour is mixed with sympathy and kindness. The best humour is that which is flavoured throughout with tenderness and kindness. This tenderness and kindness of feeling was really manifest in Dandinath's poems like चन्दल कुमारी (The daughter of an out-cast), कन्यामेह (The killing of a daughter), दुखिया (The poor) and पुर्णा चंद्रा. His sympathy for the characters that he delineated makes his poems all the more appealing. The poet has a deep sympathy for the religious fanatics, the newly educated snobs, the boys and girls who could not find out a definite way of life and the blind imitators of the West. The religious fanaticism and orthodoxy mixed with caste differentiation inspired even the great poet Dvijendralal of Bengal to mock at them. Dandinath like Dvijendralal had
sufficient material in the matter of dealing with orthodoxy. But while Dvijendralal's satires were so strong that the humour in them lost itself into insignificance, Dandinath Kalita was a bit cautious; he did not allow his satires to consume the humours. Dandinath's intellectual imagination helped him to present also a considerable proportion of wit. He used to cut jokes at the mannerisms of the people around him; he hated their follies and superstitions but he was not a cynic. He had immense faith on the eternal goodness of man.

MAHESH CHANDRA DEVA GOSWAMI

Mahesh Chandra Deva Goswami, who comes in the guise of Kumar Sri Madhusudan, had taken to humorous poetry through his melodious parodies. He parodied poems generally from Jatindra Nath Duara and Devkant Barua. Madhusudan's parodies cover the gaits and the economic instability of the lower middle class. The romantic love makeings of the contemporary youths too find some place in his parodies. Mai ye karām viya (I too shall marry) is Madhusudan's latest humourous poem. The pains and preparations of a youth of marriagable age is presented here with fond criticism and lively humour.
The post-romantic poets had little inclination to deal with satire and humour. Serious as they were they had less notice of the laughing aspect of life. The only conscious attempt at humourous poetry is made by Mahendra Borah in a few limmericks.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In Rukminiharana Nat
2. Ibid.
3. In the Râmiyajaya Nat
4. In the Haramohana chap. of the Kirtana
5. In Bhima Carita
6. Almost all satirists, Hem Chandra Barua, L.N. Bezbarua, Lambodar Bora, Dandinath Kalita and Chandradhar Barua lashed their attack against the Satradhikâras. The Satra institution had lost its ancient glory and the Satradhikâras too fell an easy prey to hypocrisy and deceit.
7. Satyanath Bora : Kendra Sabha, Gauhati, 1929; p 41
8. Marahâ Phular Karani, pp. 8-9
9. Maraha Phular Karani, pp. 11-12
10. Ibid., p 10
11. Sañcayana, p 86
12. Kadam Kali, p 36
13. Śovā aie śovā Bhārat santān
   Hovā dui man, hovā tini prān
   Govā tomar āru ghainīr jay
   Haok i Bhārat pavitra may.
14. Kripābar Barbaruā maha dhanurdhār,
   Barpet tikani re mir larphar,
   Sudarsan hàte Viṣṇu, śul hàte bholā
   Mahendrār vajra kripā kākatar ṭopolā
   Asam gaurav bhānu kripā kalpataru,
   Kalevar syām yen bhat randhā caru.
15. Burhār jiyek var hal
   Van marile ooka,
   Bukuve piṭhiye tān marile
   Pāicho var seka.
16. Dr. B. K. Barua : History of Assamese Literature,
   pp. 133-134
18. Ibid., pp. 49-52
19. Ibid., pp. 58-70
22. Ibid., pp. 20-24
23. Bahurupi, p 81
24. Refer to Dwijendralal's Hasir gan.

25. As the concern of this study is to discover the aspects of humour and satire in poetry only, we could not take notice of the contemporary dramatic and prose literature which abound in humour, satire and wit. Assamese dramas testify to the standard of humour as prescribed by the Sanskrit dramatists, and Assamese prose works on humour and satire match with the writings of Pope and Dryden. Moreover, Assamese dramas present such comic characters as the Vidusaka of Sanskrit drama or the comic characters of Shakespearean drama. The comic relief presented by those characters are of importance. Our scope however, does not permit us to deal with those things.