CHAPTER – VII

The Place of Phakirmohana and Lakshminath in the Roll-Call of Great Litterateurs

a. Phakirmohana’s Place as Litterateur
b. Lakshminath’s Place as Litterateur
SENAPATI'S PLACE AS A LITTERATEUR.

Phakirmohana’s catholicity of temper, insatiable urge to learn, wide-ranging knowledge, ready wit were attributes well suited to the profession of a teacher. His head mastership at Bālāsore Mission School, which that Phakirmohan was an excellent teacher, one can well imagine that he held his class enthralled. The then commissioner of Orissa T. Ravenshaw too was quite generous in his praise of Phakirimohana as a teacher. “The Mission School”, he said, “was conducted by one of the best specimens of an Oriyah(sic). I have never seen Baboo Fakeermohana Senapati. He has however, left it for the better post of Dewan to the Rajah of Neelghery(sic)”

What is a loss to the Mission School is a gain to the Oriya nation at large. The ‘better post of dewān’ initiates Phakimohana’s role as nation builder. From the small confines of the school he sets out in to the midst of people and their umpteen problems. His assignments at various princely states bring him a wealth of experience which enlarge his world view. The experiences of felt-life in later years go into the making of his literary masterpieces, mostly fiction, both short and long. But he himself had no inkling that he was destined to great glory in the world of letters.

With such illustrious contemporaries and friends like Rādhanāth Rath and Madhusudan Rao around, he could hardly convince himself that he could contribute meaningfully to the enrichment of Oriya literature. That he became one of its greatest modern exponents, in retrospect, seems to be a sheer stroke of luck. But one does not become a great writer without the ingredients that go into the making of great works of art. Phakirmohana’s fiction in particular show these ingredients in ample measure.

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1. J. V. Boulton, op. Cit., P. 141
2. Natabar Sāmantrāi: 1957; 'Vyāsakavi Phakrimohana', P. 60
One of the impetuses for writing was Phakirmohana’s desire to serve the cause of Oriya literature. His correspondence with Viswanāth Kar, the editor of *Utkal Sāhitya*, bears testimony to this fact. “I possess strength of neither body, mind, nor learning, only a constant desire to serve Sāhitya.” His diffidence about the merit of his own writings was but natural. About how he wrote ‘stories’ he says: “I did not take to writing stories voluntarily. It was you (Viswanatha Kara) who first told me to …” Phakirmohana also got his poems corrected and polished by Radhanath Ray since he believed that his language resources were inadequate to rise to the rarefied heights of poetry. It is ironical that his fictional style has started a trend which is still imitated zealously by writers of Oriya fiction.

Phakirmohana wrote poetry although they did not attract as much attention as his novels and short stories. He came to be accepted as the real founder and the greatest exponent of the fictional genre, particularly in the longer variant. He wrote about twenty short stories and four novels. This output is not prolific by any standards considering many of his short stories are standards considering many of his short stories are rudimentary in content, structure and treatment. Yet his first story *Rebati* (1898) and first novel *Chhumana Āthaguntha* alone would have been enough to place him in the pantheon of great litterateurs of Orissa.

Āthaguntha brings alive the seamless exploitation of the peasantry by the *jamidārs* and moneylenders. The ignorance, the superstitions, the sheer magnitude of human suffering is presented with great realism. The novel also underscores through allusions the colonial dispensation like the judiciary, the police and the landed gentry. In its sweep the novel assumes epic proportions. One eminent critic calls it “an epic of the ordinary people and humdrum of ordinary life,” The social realism this novel is quite amazing. While being serialized people from far off places came in droves to

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3 J. V. Boulton, op. Cit., P. 456
4 Ibid.
6 J. P. Dash quotes one of Phakirmohanu’s letters – “dear Radhanath babu please go through this poem. The language is not as beautiful as it

Phakirmohana Sahitya Parishad volume : 1983 : *Phakirmohana : His life & Literature*, the article “Phakirmohana Senapati” by ka Naa Subramanyam, P. 31
the court in Cuttack to witness the trial of Mangarāj, believing his trial to be real. Such was the impact of Phakirmohana’s narrative art on the popular imagination. It is a heady mix of light and shade, lively humour and biting satire coupled with his characteristic sympathy for the underdog. Though a moralist, in this work the novelist does not press the moral point too hard beyond what is required. He succeeds in controlling the moral aspect which is not pleaded too obviously.

A few examples from this master piece will stand testimony to Phakirmohana’s reputation as a story-teller and the immense contribution he made to Oriya literature and language. About Mangarāja’s religious fasting the author gives the following proof underlining how he used sarcasm and irony to great effect.

Every Ekādasi evening one litre of milk, puffed rice, sugar and banana are placed in Mangarāja’s bedroom. The next morning Jagā, the barber washes the empty containers.

But nobody can say for sure that it was Mangarāja who emptied those containers.

Where is the proof that it was Mangarāja who emptied the containers that had the eatable? Hearsay and suspicions we will not agree to pass for proof. The courts too agree with this point.

This episode while making stark the hypocrisy and pseudo piety of Mangaraj stark, it makes a telling commentary on the British legal system which demanded proof to punish the guilty. And proof could be tampered with, doctored or suppressed if one had the means to do so. The use of Oriya language in this novel reminds one of his two-fold contribution to it. One, he was at the forefront of the movement to save the language from being relegated to the status of a pātons of Bengali, and two, he put the language of the commonplace to most effective literary use. It comes like a revelation that Oriya could be so malleable as to express complex articulations.

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7 "Atmajibana Carita, P. 166"
8 "Chhamāga Āñhaguntha, P. 1"
Before Phakirmohana dared to use rustic Oriya it was considered unfit for literary use. Rādhānātha and Madhusudan, both poets of exceptional merit, used highly stylised and heavily Sanskritic diction which even Phakirmohana thought of highly and tried to imitate in his poetry. Fortunately for him and for Oriya literature he did not do that in his prose fiction though a marked leaning towards this is discernible in his later novel Prayascitta.10 Māyādhīr Mānsingh the poet and literary historian has this to say about the language of Phakirmohana’s fiction. “The way he put the speech of the common folk to unexpected and effective use will forever remain a literary miracle.”10 Had Phakirmohana not taken this onus on to himself the scorned common speech it would have remained scorned nobody knows for how long. With all apologies to the greatness of Bankimchandra, a contemporary who Phakirmohana greatly admired, he stuck to the over-Sanskritised style. Language comes with its associated values. Common speech would tend to focus the level of existence on which the language is spoken. Phakirmohana’s concern with the lowest wrongs of society is a pointer in this regard. It is for this reason that Mānsingh calls him the first proletariat novelist’ ahead of Premchand.11 “Senāpati, by virtue of looking at language, not from the point of correct pronunciation or grammar but as a political process, occupies a special place in the history of his time.”12 But this changed attitude towards Oriya came to Phakirmohana the hard way. His translation of Vidyāsāgar’s Jīban Carīt in to Oriya came for quite a bit of stick in Ulkala Dipikā. The journal while lauding the efforts at printing books in Oriya severely repremands the tendency to use Bengaliised Oriya. The language dispute with Bengal hastened the change in the style of Phakirmohana for obvious reasons. John Beames the linguistic scholar and benefactor of Phakirmohana held that the so called corrupted or Tadbhava words are the life-blood of a language.13 The combined impact of all these impelled Phakirmohana to abandon his earlier style for homely, folksy Oriya. This changed perception about language becomes quite manifest in Āṭhagunthha. It heralded revolutionary change in the realm of Oriya fiction in particular and literature in

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9 J. V. Boulton, op. Cit., P. 521
10 Māyādhīr Mānsingh. 1983. P. 47
11 ‘Odiyā Sāgītārā Iništā’, P-209
general. In pleasant rusticity, in nature description, in language befitting every situation Āṭhagunṭha announced a new age in the sphere of Oriya prose literature.\textsuperscript{14}

Yet Phakirmohana never allowed rustic colloquialism to come in the way of describing situations demanding language of a refined, ḫatma laden cadence. The mental condition of Mangaraj in the novel after the death of his virtuous wife required a charged up language. The novelist deftly handles the language to bring out the spiritual bankruptcy of Mangaraj. But he does not use rustic speech uniformly in the novel. He changes tack to suit character and situation. For example in the chapter \textit{Asura Dighi} the ruggedness and colloquialism of speech suits the gossip and smalltalk of the village women. In the same chapter highly-Sanskritised words like \textit{khaṇḍabāt} (speckles), \textit{suklabarnā} (white), \textit{iśat lohita} (slightly reddish), \textit{jaṭa-sauca} (washing) etc. to describe profane activities like morning ablutions, brushing and tongue-scrapping which pollute the water of the pond. The chapters dealing with the courtr, the trial of Mangaraj like ‘\textit{Okil Rāmrām Lālā},’ Cuttack Sessions Judge Court’ etc. use a language peppered with words from Persian, Hindustani and English. Considering that Persian was the language of the court before English displaced it, the language here approximates reality.

The core of Āṭhagunṭha is the defrauding of the weaver couple, Sāriā and Bhagiā, of their piece of land by Mangarāj. Around this Phakirmohana weaves other strands which bring in to stark relief the life of contemporary Orissa. Besides it equips the novel with great sweep. Colonial rule sets in motion predatory individualism which affects adversely the organic, agrarian life-style of the native society. People like Mangarāja, Dildār Miān and Rāmrām Lālā embody these traits in the novel. It is suggested in the description of Mangaraja’s house in chapter III titled ‘Bānjīye basate Lakṣmi sthādardham ḹrṣikarman—

“The uninitiated would mistake Mangaraja’s mansion, at the first look, for the house of a lawyer, who had passed a B. L. Degree, or the spoils of three-score and two broken homes.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Gopāla Pniharaj : 1918 : ‘\textit{Āma Gharara Ilācāl}’, P. 171
\textsuperscript{15} Chhamana Āṭhagunṭha, P. 8
Besides highlighting the opulence of Mangarāja, the image of broken homes bring to mind not only the rapacity and inhumanity of this man but also the role legal profession had played in the acquisition of such ill-gotten wealth. At one level the novel can be seen as a potent satire on the British legal system in India.

"The English law says- Beware; If you trespass the law and we get proof of it, we will punish you!

The other retorts, Sir, I know the trick whereby you will not be able to lay your hand on any shred of proof."\[16]

In contradistinction to this law of the courts and the police, where proof can be tampered with, suppressed or purchased, the indigenous organ of justice like the village councils can be more effective, Phakirmohana does not make it so obviously brazen. But it is present in the form of an understatement one hardly fails to see where his sympathies lay.

"Now a days the door of the law court is open to all; people have become wiser; who cares for the justice of the Panchas (village council)\[17] The intermediary between the law and the people - the lawyer, himself becomes an instrument of the degeneration of the law and alibi for exploitation.

"Don’t worry, grease my palm, I will turn black in to white and vice versa," assures the lawyer.\[18]

The proof of this is not hard to seek. Saria dies due to Mangarāja’s aggrandisement of her belongings, her cow Neta and the six acre and eight decimel of land (Therefore the title-Chhamana Āṭhagunṭha). The court admits the causal connection.

\[16\] Ibid., PP. 37-38
\[17\] Ibid., P.37
\[18\] Ibid., PP. 37-38
"We are convinced that Bhagichand’s going insane and Saria’s death by starvation were due to Mangaraja’s taking possession of their land and other belongings by the accused. But for this the accused can not be held guilty of murder."

The court was convinced of the complicity of the accused’s in the crime but unable to mete out just punishment. Nothing could be a more telling commentary on the woeful inadequacy of British legal justice. The irony was completed when Maṅgarāja was indicted of stealing the cow where he should have been of manslaughter.

That divine justice, in which Phakirmohana had great trust, catches up with Maṅgarāja is beside the point. The village council would have been more than adequate compared to the rule of the law. The money raised from the accused would have gone, as it does in the weavers quarters in the novel, to welfare schemes in the community or to raised a temple. In contrast the colonial organs of justice benefited rapacious and rich people like Maṅgarāja and Rāmrām Lālā, the lawyer. The medical report, one of the basis of objective proof, finds no sign of outward torture on Saria, there was no remains of food in her stomach, she was anaemic. Hence her could safely be assigned to starvation. The nocking tone Phakirmohana employs here corresponds to the fasting of Maṅgarāja in the first chapter.

The death of Bhagia and Saria is not simply the death of an innocent weaver couple. They are metaphors for the demise of the self-sufficient, organic, cooperative life-style of the village folk under the onslaught of British capitalist machinery. The weaver’s quarters stood for a way of life that harmonised traditional crafts (weaving here) with native way of life.

It is a tribute to Phakirmohana’s way of writing that while discussing one thing he says many other things. In Āṭhagunṭha' he attacks the so called educated for

\[19\] Ibid. P. 118
\[20\] Ibid. P. 37
\[21\] Ibid., P. 188
their negligence of native culture. Introducing the subject of caste money he make a veiled attack on the ignorance of the newly educated about the concept.

If you ask them (the English educated) about their great grand gather's name, they will grope for an answer, but asked about Charles III's answer pat will come the reply. If you know about the English or French societies. You will be counted among the educated. What is the use of knowing about one self or one's neighbour's or one's own society? 22

Not that Phakirmohana failed to see anything positive in Western culture. What he condemned was the blind imitation of Western cultural norms as well as the blind adherence to prejudice which tends to tie one to the evils of the past. He spoke in favour of progressive aspects inherent in the West. Boulton writes while discussing Prāyascitta.

The Western educated young man would have absorbed, perhaps subconsciously, a respect for science, logic and reason, admiration for social equality, political freedom and patriotism; and abhorrence towards illiteracy, stupidity, prejudice and backwardness. 23

Phakirmohana had no quarrel with Western education and thought as such. What he spoke against was what the English wanted to achieve through their scheme of education and its manifestation in the creation of a section of denationalised Indians. Simply put the mental colonisation of the Indian elite set in motion by Macaulay's Minutes of 1835. "(S)tudents across the Empire were being instructed as to the world excellence of English literature, and Western system of rationality and the deficiency of their own." 24 As a nationalist Phakirmohana strived to "develop ways of dealing with the negation and self-alienation produced by colonialist rule." 25 The novel, which allows the interplay of sarcasm, paradox, irony and satire furnishes the novelist the vantage ground to say what he wants to say. These elements make for

22 Ibid., P. 37
23 'Phakirmohana Senapati: His life & Prose fiction', P.329
24 Ellcke Bochmer, op. Cit., P. 170
25 Ibid, P. 171
‘Camouflage and subterfuge to attack colonial apparatuses and the servile anglophile. What Phakirmohana saw in his time survives this day. The contemporary relevance of Phakirmohana can be gauged from what an eminent critic says in another context in regret of ‘the residual effects of imperialist scholarship, colonially determined educational apparatuses, and colonial etiquettes of mapping our history, in culture as the political domain’ 26 It must be said to the credit of the novelist that he correctly diagnosed the disease that afflicted his time.

Phakirmohana wrote the novel as a candidly realistic picture of his time. Yet the matter and the style of its presentation have a bearing on our time. The novel enjoyed phenomenal success since it first appeared in serial form on the pages of Utkala Sāhitya. Daitāri Kar writes about its sway on the popular imagination-

Not only me but the entire reading public of Utkala Sāhitya read Chhamāṇa Āṭhagunṭha before reading essays. Many illiterates too were eager to listen to it being read to them, not to speak of the educated people. Wherever some people assembled or went in company Dhurjati (the pseudonym Phakirmohana sometimes used) went with them- be it at the bathing ghāṭa or wherever there was talk of suspense Dhurjati was the point of discussion’. Friends even playfully warned -‘behave properly otherwise Dhurjati may copiously point them in his novels.27

These remarks highlight two important facets of Phakirmohana’s genius. One is its appeal to both the illiterate masses and the educated. The writer seems to have bridged the gap between the literary preference of the literate and illiterate disproving the fact that the latter like only purāṇa literature. Two, it sent out a clear signal to the skeptics that Oriya language has the potential to create and sustain a national literature whose prerequisite is a wide reading public. On another level this novel in particular and his entire fictional work in general mark a subtle shift. ‘The fidelity of

Ahmed was writing about the difficulties in the way of a clear definition of Indian literature. But all the same he was also speaking about the typical colonised mindset of the Indian elite.
actuality involves a focussing on the immediate, the here and now, on details of the visual world, on specific human action and its verifiable consequences.” Fiction in general has its basis in spatio-temporal axis of time in contrast to the traditional Indian concept of cyclic time. Phakirmohana himself was not unaware of this subtle shift. In one of his short stories titled ‘Ajā Nāti Kathā’, he drives home the difference between pauranic literature and modern fiction in their treatment of time. While Pauranic literature, he believed, dealt with spiritual truth, novel short stories and such writings talked about truth about life as it is lived.28

More than any other writer Phakirmohana is credited with charting the course of the novel and the short story in Oriya. The realism of his fiction came to be in vogue since then. A host of eminent writers from Godabarisha Misra, Godabarisha Mahāpātra, Kālindicharanā Paṇigrāhi to Sachidānada Rātray to Gopināth Mohānty (the last two mentioned Jñānānanda Award winners) bear the imprint of Phakirmohana’s style and concerns.29

As a writer of short stories too Phakirmohana occupies a place of preeminence. His first story Rebate was published in 1898, the year after his first novel Āṭha-gunṭha got serialised in Dīpika. Subsequently he wrote about twenty short stories, many at the behest of Biswanāth Kar, the editor of to afore side journal. A few of these are so rudimentary in nature that they would not pass for short stories. For example Bāleswari Paṅgālha is really an essay mistakenly included in his short collection.30 Even then the rest bear the stamp of his genius.

As a fiction writer Phakirmohana flowered late- he was about fifty when he wrote his first short story and novel. His dewanship and various backward princely states brought him in to the thick of living at the lowest wrongs of society. Being part of the ruling machinery he understood the various forms of exploitation. While alluding to these problem he does take recourse to long descriptive sketches taking his stories to the borderline of essays. Yet in some he was able to catch the very essence.
of the rigorous medium of short story. In this regard mention can be made of *Rebati*.

often considered one of the greatest in the language, *Dākumunshi*, *Dhunṭūḥāhā* etc.

About the first story of Phakirmohana one Oriya critic writes- "Oriya short story was startlingly mature and modern at the moment of its birth- a rare promise that could not unfortunately be kept up by those who immediately followed the master". Phakirmohana’s career itself followed an uneven trajectory. The ‘surprisingly mature’ art of his first fictional works is surprisingly slackened in his subsequent works.

When Phakirmohana started writing short stories the genre was still a new phenomenon in Indian literature. Some of early Rabindranāth stories were already in print. As an avid reader of Bengali Phakirmohana is supposed to have been familiar with them. Yet he seems to be free from all kinds of external impact either in language subject matter, technique treatment. He found life to be full of stories as he once wrote to Biswanāth Kar. True to his convictions his stories grapple with the myriad problems facing life around him.

To find out where Phakirmohana stands in the pantheon of story writers it is helpful to tack Rebate, his most successful one. In its evocative power, its vividly portrayed clash of values and in its relentless march towards tragic destiny it has few equals." A story of blighted hopes and ambitions of a country girl became, at one level, pure tragedy in the classic sense." The tragic love between between Rebati and Basudev is portrayed with great sensitivity and subtlety. Before 1898 such intensity in painting love was a rarity. The story, therefore, is considered to be the first truly love story in the Oriya language.

Another remarkable aspect of the story is its use of black humour. Superficially looked the write seems to ‘justify’ the tragedy that overtook Rebati’s family. In simple the wrath of gods was due to Rebati’s decision to study, a taboo for at that time. It is Phakirmohana’s way of indicting society rather than fate. "This comment on the human condition in a given social milieu is a deadly min of irony and
intensity, which is far removed from direct authorial comment on the good and evil, or on the inscrutable ways of the gods that characterised earlier Indian literature. This shift in perspective is what marks out modern literature from the old.

The impact of the story Rehati on subsequent writers is immense. Godabrisha Misra’s Paradda, a story centred round women’s education, clearly echoes the sentiments expressed in Rehati. The picture of the oppressive money-lender in Duri Taïka by Godabrisha Mohapatra has shades of the mahajan in Phakirmohana’s story.

In Dukumunshi Phakirmohana successfully portrays the rupture that took place between the English-educated native and his cultural milieu. The colonised’s rejection of native values of moral responsibility is handled with pinching sarcasm. In a colony the essential relationship between the land (social milieu, environment, culture) and man is broken. This rupture takes several forms, not least of which is the colonised’s lover for colonial language. This affectation is not the same as the native speaker’s love for his language, as that of the subject worshipping the master. The dehumanising impact of western education is highlighted in the story when the old, ailing father Hari Singh is thrown out of the house as a nuisance by his Western educated son. While the son spurned his moral responsibility towards his father, the agrarian village community receives back the old man with open arms. This is Phakirmohana’s way of making a point that the rural, agrarian community is irreplaceable in its human and spiritual values as opposed to the predatory individualism of the West.

Phakirmohana, like his younger Assamese counterpart, did not consider the short story as an alien form. They both wrote stories for instruction and for pleasure, either way to enrich their own literature. Writing as they did in a period of transition, they were both products as well instruments of this transition. The age of the

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Ibid.

N. Sadangi, op.cit., P.118

Ibid.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez as quoted by Ajit K. Jha in The Times of India, July 20th, No. 38, Vol. VII.
The traditional tale was coming to an end while the short story was on the ascendancy. In Phakirmohana (as in Bezbaroa) the characteristic of both these forms make their presence felt in his stories. Because of this Phakirmohana’s stories, with few exceptions, lack the close-knit structure, brevity, focus and singleness of effect crucial to short story writing.

It is only rarely that one comes across a pioneer who is also a consummate artist. The look of finesse in many is due to his role as a pioneer. His successful stories are the result of genius, albeit untrained and therefore even more remarkable. But his greatest contribution to the realm of Oriya letters seems, in retrospect, his inimitable prose-style – folksy in cadence, ironic, sarcastic, humorous and oblique, it has never gone out of fashion. Down the decades it has many imitators but none surpassing the master. Even today the Oriya short story employs the language of everyday speech that Phakirmohana made so effective a medium.

As has been said earlier Phakirmohana appeared in a most crucial period of national history. He had to demonstrate the efficacy and independent identity of the Oriya language not only to the British rulers but also to a host of Bengali intellectuals who were bent on denying Oriya the status of a separate language. Senapati eminently succeeded in both. His writings, novels and short stories in particular, were partially impelled by his desire to enrich his language and literature. One Bengali literary historiographer’s words about Bankimchandra that the latter was “something more than a great novelist. He was a path-finder and path-maker” is equally applicable to Phakirmohana.

To Phakirmohana goes the credit of writing the first biography when he translated Vidyāsāgar’s Jīban Carita (a collection of biographical sketches of European scientists) in to Oriya. It has its historical merit but it is chiefly remembered for the controversy it created by the innocuous looking remark in the preface that there is but minor differences between Oriya and Bengali. Its backlash is one of the

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39 B. C. Samal, op. Cit., P. 95
31 J. B. Mahanty, op. Cit., P. 66
41 Sukumar Sen: 1960: 'History of Bengali Literature', P. 211
reasons for the momentous change in Phakirmohana’s prose-style. But his foray into autobiography writing turned out to be as remarkable as his first fictional works. His “Ātmajīhana Carita” is as interesting as any book of fiction. It may safely be taken to be one of the few great autobiographies in the whole Indian literature. The book is not merely the life of an isolated individual but a saga of the ferment and movement of a people for nearly a century (See Ch. IV)

Phakirmohana’s predominance as an exponent of the fictional genre often overshadows his other achievements. He was an essayist of merit; his topics ranged from the sweet-sour sketches of Nanānka Pāṇji to the highly philosophical Jogasāstra. In this respect he has lot in common with Bezbaroa, though the latter’s output is considerable in comparison. He does not deal Jogā in abstract terms. His style was lucid and his approach practical. It seems that he was striving to free the Sāstras from the fiefdom of Brahmins and take this to the level of common people. Look at the characteristic way he presents his point of view.

These days the neo-educated do not put the sacred marks (tilak) on their foreheads. It may due to the realisation that it was a mark of ignorance and backwardness, or due to the realisation of its true meaning. But in itself there is nothing to gain or lose. What saddens one is the gradual weakening grip of Jogā on the Hindu society.

In an oblique attack on the Brahmins, who do not live up to their assigned ideals, he writes—

Ye Brahmins! Look at the sad plight of your illiberal attitudes being driven out by the scientific temper of the modern times which heralded the ideals of equality, brotherhood and freedom. Look for yourself how many of your children can qualify to the title of Brahmins by the Vedic illustrations of Ramesh Chandra Dutt

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42 Mayādhara Mānsingh. 1989 P. 40
41 P. M. G. vol. I. P.649
41 B. B. Kar. 1993. P. 122
While highlighting his understanding of the true spirit of the sacred texts it also succeeds in bridging the gap between the old and the new. Besides it also points to the earnestness with which he took up his role as a social reformer.

Phakirmohana did not follow the same style in all his essays. It varied depending on the subject matter and his aim. For example he uses sarcasm to great effect to hit out at the obscurantist attitude of the Brahmins. The evil of casteism and untouchability, the bane of Indian society at large, does not pass his notice. His essays on literary topics, personalities and language exhibit his familiarity with the finer nuances of literary criticism. His power of logical development, aesthetic sense and his typical way of presentation characterise the essence of Phakirmohana’s style. He was an essayist before he turned to fiction. His fictional style had its grounding in his essays.

Phakirmohana’s career as a poet is more prolonged than his writing in any other genre. His poems are scattered in his anthologies like Pushpanāla, Upahāra, Abasare Bāsare etc. written as they were to let out his personal feelings and agonies they do not rise to any great heights. Yet a few of them are exquisite pieces in their sincerity of feeling and felicity of expression. To this category belong poems like ‘Shall I see her Face Again’, ‘She Departed with smiles But Left me Disconsolate’. ‘Can Anybody tell Me where She Has Gone’ etc. These pieces are vibrant with the deep felt emotion and the great love (he bore his second wife Krishna Kumāri) that only a poet’s soul is capable of.46 His subjects in verse spilled over the national boundaries. Themes like Josephine, Cleopatra, Jesus Christ, the Rape of Lucretia, Russo- Japanese War highlight his range of interests. His ‘Utkala Vramanam’ is not, as the title would suggest, a travel poem. It is actually a sweeping survey of contemporary Orissan socio-literary scene and its personalities “with praise, admiration, satire and condemnation distributed to each.” It was his first original work and the first to propel him to literary fame. In its satirical treatment of contemporary

Kazin writes about the relationship of form and subject matter—“Technique exists to facilitate what we have to say, but the manner of saying follows from what we have to say.”
Phakirmohana’s style exemplifies this critical parameter.
46 Ka Nai Subramaniam. op. Cit., P. 45
personalities, he did to Oriya literature what Dryden and Pope did to English. This work makes clear the point that Phakirmohana’s genius is typically moulded to satiric representation.

The creative confidence that Phakirmohana inspired to write in Oriya will surely stand out as one of his significant contribution to his literature. That Orissa has produced three Jiyanth Award winners-Gopinath Mahanty, Sachidanand Routray and Sitakant Mohapatra did. Though awards in themselves may not be the index of the overall prosperity of a literature, national recognition does give an indication of its strength. Probably no other contemporary man of letters had career which marked so clearly, as Phakirmohana’s did, two of the major literary developments of the 19th century Orissa- the novel and the short story.

Starting as a literary novice, Phakirmohana’s ascendency to literary eminence was long and arduous. Long practiced in the observation of men and manners upon which his genius fed, he discovered in the fictional mode a form which gave full scope to his creative power. During his time literary taste was at the cross-roads. The Kavya (long narrative poem) literature was waning; prose was on the ascendance. As a prose narrative fiction’s emphasis is on the daily relationship at home and abroad, on the adjustment of individuals to groups, on the mechanism of unspectacular life, on the achievement of average expectations. In short, on society and the here and now. This in stark contrast to the spiritual and medieval moorings of Kavya literature. He got hold of this medium to chalk out the future course of fiction in Oriya, its manner and its mater. “Owing to Phakirmohana’s influence,” remarks Boulton, “the gap between spoken and written Oriya, which was so marked in his day, has almost disappeared.” It must have worked towards broadening the readership of Oriya by freeing it from elitist inclinations. If language of the common man can become a vehicle of literary representation, the life of the common man can not remain divorced from it. And thus the democratization of the fictional form is one of Phakirmohana’s enduring contributions. Even when his themes will wear thin in the

47 J. V. Boulton. op. Cit., P. 526
48 Ibid.
course of time (they are, as of now, still hold a mirror up to life to be dated) his
language will defy the quirks of popular taste.
LAKSHMINATH’S PLACE AS A LITTERATEUR.

It may be safely accepted that Bezbaroa the man is greater than his literary output. He may not have produced what we may call a *magnum opus* by whose single merit alone his place in the literary pantheon can be made secure. For that matter even Rabindranath Tagore did not have a master piece despite of the fact that *Gechāngali* brought him international acclaim. Yet his preeminence in the world of Bengali letters in particular and of India general is beyond dispute. Bezbaroa stands in the same relationship to Assamese literature as Rabindranath is to Bengali. Therefore glossing over his literary output to concentrate on his personality will not do. His literary output is considerable. Much that he wrote was devoted to driving home a message. About the limitations of such literature one critic comments - "The limitation of reformist or revolutionary zeal in literature is that as soon as the evils complained of are remedied, the themes lose their freshness, and thus the success of propagandist literature is often self-defeating." The lasting value of such writings would ultimately rest on the harmony a writer establishes between the immediate and the eternal. It goes to the credit of Bezbaroa that he succeeded in this endeavour. There is a need to look at the literary merit of his creative artifacts against the larger background of Assamese Renaissance. As Nagen Saikia rightly points out - "Bezbaroa’s claim to greatness lies not only in his creative talent or finished craftsmanship alone, but also in his ability to create on age and govern it with his literary personality."

Bezbaroa had his roots firmly in Assam and his home in Bengal and Orissa. This gave him the advantage to work in a wider perspective. It must have brought a catholicity to bear on his writings and a comprehensive outlook on life. "This distance

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51 ‘Background of Modern Assamese Literature’, P.337.
from home gave him the freedom of spirit to evaluate things in a purely detached and dispassionate manner.  

The his college days Bezbaroa was held in thrall by Western romantic poets and by Rabindranath, according to his own admission. For example the pages of *Padum Kuwari*, is strewn with exquisite quotes from a host of English poets, to outline lyrically the themes of various chapters. The shadow of Shakespeare looms large over the novel's tragic tale of love and on characterization, so much so that Hem Barua goes to the extent of calling it 'a poor imitation'. It was, therefore, essential for Bezbaroa to unlearn the alien influence to find his own voice. It did not take him long to realise this. The genre of the short story gave him the opening to display his creative talents.

The short story is the product of India's interaction with the West. But it was new to India only in a technical sense since it has a glorious tradition of story-telling. Bezbaroa in fact blurred the distinction between the traditional folk-tale and the modern short story. Each culture throws up its own narrative forms centred round the values typical of that particular culture. Throwing away the folk-tale would mean rejection of the values they stood for. In a period that cultural pride was called to play a dominant role Bezbaroa and Senapati could hardly afford to neglect the values manifested in folk-tales.

It has become fashionable to point out the lack of technical finesse in the stories of early Indian writers like Bezbaroa and Phakirmohana. The fact of the matter is that Bezbaroa took the short story to be a continuation of the indigenous form of story-telling. Long before India is accepted as the Original home of the short story, Bezbaroa believed it to be so. It is not difficult to hear the echo of cultural nationalism in this very attitude. While assessing the place of Bezbaroa as a literary leading light.

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52 Hem Barua : 1967 : 'Lakshminath Bezbaroa', P.69
53 B. G. Vol. 1. PP. 50-51
54 Hem Borua. op. Cit., P. 59
he should be looked not from the perspective of Western critical canons like form and style but from indigenously developed critical model.\(^5\)

It is difficult to choose representative short stories, a genre in which Bezbaroa did path-breaking work, to evaluate his place in literary history. He wrote more than three score stories whose range of subject matter and moods are amazing. Of course there is general agreement about stories like *Bhadari, Pāthmugī, Nakaī illustrates, Dhowā, Khowā, Mukti Kanyā etc.* as being successful pieces in the genre. *Bhadari* is representative of the self-sacrificing spirit of Indian womanhood. Her husband's fate hinged on her testimony to the police. She does not tell the truth that her husband made life-threatening assault on her. Instead she blames herself for the serious injury she sustains. Her basic nobility of heart brings about a change of heart in her husband.

There are critics who find uncanny similarity between *Bhadari* and Tagore's story *Sāsti.*\(^6\) It is true so far as the assault on the wife is concerned. But their perspectives differ as widely as chalk from cheese. Chandarā of *Sāsti* has echoes of the New Woman. She refuses to conform to the social norm that the existence of woman should centre round her husband. She first resists, then reluctantly agrees, to testify that she killed her sister in law (her husband's elder brother's spouse) in a fit of rage. The woman was actually killed by her husband. Chandarā sticks to her line of testimony even when her husband Chidam tries to save her. It was her way of protest, a way of taking revenge on her husband. This, in the final analysis, spills beyond the confines to the larger issues of woman's place in a male dominated world. *Bhadari,* on the other hand, is not unforgiving as Chandarā on the patriarchal order and its in-built callousness towards woman. Bezbaroā's portrayal approximates the life and values of Indian womanhood. The social realism behind it is unmistakable. Tagore, in contrast, projects poetic realism- what it should ideally be than what actually is. In the words of Meenakshi Mukherjee Chandarā's action can be construed as "half" articulated.

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Kapoor makes his point by saying that "critical canons are culture-specific. Correct evaluation will not be possible if things like 'Originality', a product of Western individualism, is applied to Indian literary artefacts which are communal products."

\(^6\) P. C. Bhuyan, op. Cit., P. 246
yearnings to achieve self-hood. Bhadari believes in the negation of selfhood or rather a selfhood that believes in giving than receiving.

Bhadari’s action like that of all the self-sacrificing women in Bezbaroa, assumes significance in so far as they live for others. Tagore’s concern for the agonies of women in the 19th century makes him seek a solution, albeit on the level of idea. Therefore in spite of the superficial similarity, Bezbaroa and Rabindranath differ fundamentally. Sāsti may have been a starting point, an inspiration for Bhekutī. But Bezbaroa transforms the story in the creative forge of his own imagination. In the process the story becomes one of its kind.

It its orientation Jene Chōr Jene Tāngon does deal with the theme of a wife’s revenge. Here the wife who was being routinely beaten, on one pretext or the other, schemes to get back on her husband with a bit of help from the fish-selling woman. But its farcical treatment robs it of the seriousness one comes across in stories like Racit, Laliti Kākati, etc. In these the women succeed in escaping the stranglehold of marriage bond, considered sacrosanct in Hindu society, to find their own voice. His Lāokholā is a poignant tale of a young Bengali widow’s rape and murder, the spirit of whom comes to relive her tragic tale. Bezbaroa is not advocating the belief in spirits but unfolds the wretched life of widow’s in Bengali society.

In many ways Pātmugi is a remarkable story. For the first time Bezbaroa ventures into the realm of Freudian psychology. Its basis is the marriage and subsequent desertion of a low caste potter girl Pātmugi by a Brahmin young man. All her attempts at bringing back her husband fail. She contemplates legal action. By a sudden turn of events she gets a queer insight in to the workings of a male’s mind. He discovers deception and hypocrisy to be the name of the game among the men folk. The desire she suddenly discovers in the eye of her middle-aged benefactor makes her skeptical rather cynical about men in general. Even she loses faith in the efficacy of justice since it too was part of man’s controlling mechanisms. This is one reason why she rejects the idea of proceeding legal action against her husband.

77 ‘Realism & Reality’. P. 99
It is a story that touches the edge of a vulcano— the sexual urge of men irrespective of social relations. Therefore she decides to turn her physical charms to exert power over men. Yet ultimately what she seeks solace not in power but in love— love for those who needed it most. She squandered her affections on the man who did not realise its value. Now that she is wiser she would give it to those who valued it.

Bezbaroa was opposed to feudal values. Some critics of course think otherwise. According to them the protagonist’s calm resignation to the wiles of men leaves room to think otherwise. The desexualising of Pâtmugi in the form of her devotion entirely to social service and Vaishnavism is seen as part of the scheme of feudal values. This is only one aspect of looking at the story. What Bezbaroa wanted to show is that one can devote life to larger applications, it that gives fulfillment.

In life and literature Bezbaroa imbibed the positive aspects of his native culture. The tragic consequence of rejection of these values forms the basis of many of his stories. *Molak Guin Guin* and *Bhokendra Baruā*, to name just two, come under this category. Educated young men of the time resorted to sycophancy and obsequiousness to climb up the social ladder. They spurned traditional way of life and means of livelihood since it meant hard work. They chose slavery when the option of freedom was open before them. This is free-bondage and Bezbaroa went all out to denounce such people in his writings.

There are stories where humanity in all its nakedness is the focal point. In these Bezbaroa's characteristic humour helps heighten the pathos. To this category belong stories like *Dhowā Khowā, Dusamantar, Bhairā, Pitrabān Pitā, Mr. Phimpson* to mention only a few. Of theses *Dhowā Khowā* is the most poignant. Written in mock-heroic style it captures how the habit of hookah—smoking leads to the pauperisation of the family of the addict. The hookah here symbolises genteel vanity. Bezbaroa does not take recourse to satire as he does in other stories with unwholesome subjects. This human foible is shown as being the result of man's blind allegiance to false values considered socially respectable. Sympathy is as good an

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88 Hiren Gohain: 'Sāhitya Āru Ācetana', P. - 91

Gohain feels that 'In stories like *Bhongkerola* the new values are stabbed in the back in the name of social realism'. (tr. Mine)
instrument as satire to highlight problems. The story can be looked from various points of view. It may be taken as "a poignant sense of life’s insecurity and helplessness." It may also be treated as a tale of botched up priorities and its fatal repercussions. Hiren Gohain interprets it in terms of the defeat of free, self-sufficient and simple humanity under the dead weight of hollow and fatal vanity. Rameswar’s death on the way to a Nāmghar in a boat underscores the basic irony in the story. Dharma (piety) must accompany Karma (duty) which was sadly lacking in Rameswar.

Bezbaroa’s experience of life spawned three provinces - Assam, Bengal and Orissa. Some of his stories represent common humanity outside of Assam. For example Bhairā, Dasamantar and Bārichowā delineates sympathetically the life of Orissa at the lower rungs of society. The protagonists in these stories were men intimately known to Bezbaroa. That Bezbaroa cared to give a place to these ‘dust and scum of the earth’ in literature itself seems to be significant. It is life at the lived level, a life that was outside the ambit of literature before Bezbaroa. Of course this sort of shift was typical of the literature across Indian languages in the 19th century. The celebrated write of Umānā Jān Ādā, Mirza Mohammad Hādi Ruswā has this to say about changing perspective of literature, particularly in fiction.

The most paying and interesting subject of study in this world is what happens to human beings, not only their external behaviour, but also their inner feelings and thoughts. We should not base our novels upon the lives of persons about whom we can not know anything in detail. In our own circle of friends and relations there are bound to be many whose experiences are truly strange and fascinating.

Ruswā’s own sentiments about the realism of the novel is equally applicable to its miniature version - the short story. In Bezbaroa and Senāpati this realism comes

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"Lakshminath Bezbora - the S书写er of Assam", the article "Lakshminath Bezbaroa’s Major Achievement: His short Stories", by Bhaben Barua. P 100

Meenakshi Mukherjee, op. cit. . P. - 188
out with an added force. An overwhelming majority of Bezbaroa’s stories centre round rural characters and setting though he was quite conversant with city life.

Bezbaroa’s stories touched upon every conceivable problem of the society of his time. His subjects range from casteism to high class vanity. Opium addiction to ignorance, evils of English education to obscurantist native obsessions, corruption in public life to the materialist leanings of the Satradhikara (head of monastery) and feudal tyranny to the problems of Hindu widows. It is in this regard that his writings came to manifest fully the life and spirit of his time. This rootedness in his own socio-cultural milieu is significant. According to a critic the greatness of art does not lie alone in its internationalism and universalism; national and even group life portrayed faithfully can be an effective way to greatness.

Maheswar Neog evaluates Bezbaroa’s literary gifts as being two-pronged. One, he is one of the foremost progenitors of the romantic movement in Assamese literature as manifested in the Jomaki period, and two, his invaluable contribution to almost every literary genre. He strode like a colossus in his time giving unity of purpose to an entire age. Like Phakirmohana, Bezbaroa’s inimitable prose style never seems to go out of fashion. His infectious humour permeated almost everything he wrote barring his ethico-philosophical writings. This humour is wholesome and more often than not, tinged with human sympathy. It is not the type of black humour Phakirmohana used in Rebate. But all the same it served the moral purpose of Bezbaroa. The two types of humour phakirmohana used in Rebate. But all the same it served the moral purpose of Bezbaroa. The two types of humour that one comes across are -humour that elicits laughter for its own sake and humour that borders on irony and sometimes satire. The conception and execution of Kripabar, arguably the greatest comic creation in Assamese, are done to perfection. This character remains as lovable as its creator to the Assamese reading public.

The emergence of a new nation necessitated the eradication of those vices that stood in the path of progress. The social reformation movements in Assam and Orissa

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in the 19th century were not anywhere near that of a Bengal or Maharstra. Literature was the only viable medium to cleanse society of its evils the Kripabar belles Lettres gave Bezbaroa ample opportunity to hit out at the prevailing vices. And Bezbaroa had a unique style which chided people into reformation without antagonising them: even while showing such a reforming zeal these essays served the cause of literature. Phakirmohana too followed this two-pronged strategy. His Nanaka Pani, like Kripabar essays, strived at reforming the national character.

Bezbaroa though given to vitriolics is inclined rather to laugh with his characters than laugh at them. His moral indignation is mellowed down largely by his sympathetic humour. "Generally speaking, Bezbaroa's tone of voice does not make one think of a man burning either with indignation or shame, but of a man who is capable of laughter even in the face of grave and serious situations."64 In fact in many of his stories the humour only deepen the pathos. One such example is Mr. Phimpson. whose comic treatment in the early part of the story of the same name, serves only to heighten the sympathy of the reader when his predicament is presented.65

Bezbaroa took up the mantle of defending the Assamese language from being relegated to the status of a paloi with such force and determination that, on occasions, it seemed almost like a tirade against Bengalis (those he saw as conspiring against Assamese identity) and Bengali language. Saving the language from ignominy was a job half done. Mustering all his might to prove the efficacy of Assamese to express ideas ranging from the most mundane to the highly sophisticated needed to be proved to the world. He did it with such efficacy that in his hands Assamese assumed the rugged sweetness of a mountain stream, particularly in his particularly in his prose fiction and humorous sketches. In his ethio-philosophical writing the speech reached rarified heights. It went a long way to prove once and for all that Assamese has all the qualifications to stand on its own as a separate and sovereign entity. Whatever he wrote, the language almost always rose to the occasion. He infused new life in to Assamese by tapping the life sustaining source of language. Instead of the tutsma the heavily Sanskritised Assamese words, he preferred the tadbhava, the local words

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64 Hem Banu, op. Cit., P. 27
65 B. G. Vol., P. 605
evolved from Sanskrit but bearing no apparent resemblance to the original. The *udhava* laden speech was not considered as refined at that time. But it is these words that ensure the growth and continuity of a language.66

Assam has the proud privilege of having a prose tradition which dates as far back as the 13th century. As Upendranath Goswamy writes "The recent decipherment of the Ambari stone inscription has furnished the earliest specimen of Assamese prose in the 13th century A.D.67 Phanibara dates it back to the 12th century.68 Bhattadeva's translation of the *Bhāgavat Gītā* in the 16th century comes in for special praise by P. C. Roy in the following words- "Assamese prose literature developed to a stage in the far distant 16th century which no other literature of the world reached except the writings of Hooker and Latimer in England."69 The works of Sankaradeva and in the 17th century the *Buranjis* of the Ahom kings kept up the tradition of prose writing in Assam. In the later half of the 19th century Hemachandra's *'Bahire Rongsong* showed what Assamese prose was capable of. In Bezbaroa this long enviable prose tradition found its natural culmination.

Bezbaroa understood the simple fact that language, like everything else, is subject the evolutionary principle. Insularity can only kill the language. Therefore he not only borrowed words from other sources but also invented new expressions where necessary.70 In the absence of words to denote a thing or concept he coined two or more words to express the idea. For example *majaliya bidhar* for mediocre ability, *kūpathed i nyjita* for misdirected, *mājāmāji* for golden mean and so on.71 By infusing such dynamism in to the language he ensured its future growth.

To assess Bezbaroa's genius as a writer purely from his creative without taking into consideration the immense service he rendered as an exponent of Sankarite

68 Udayan Misra (ed.): 1991: 'Nation Building and Development in the North-East India', the article "Development and National Questio in the North-Eastern Regin", by Phani Bora. P. 9
69 As quoted by Upendranath Goswami in the article "Lakshminath Bezbaroa a Maker of Modern Assamese Prose in "Sahityarathi of Assam". P. 179.
70 Ibid. PP. 181-182.
71 Ibid, P. 182.
Vaishnavism would be unjust. His unqualified reverence for Sankarardeva is significant not purely for its spiritual significance. He imbibed many aspects besides the spiritual that were crucial for the Assamese people. A writer of considerable merit Sankardeva's writings complemented his role as a social reformer. It brought the highly abstract world of India's mythic past in a language easily comprehensible to the layman. He undoubtedly played a crucial role in bringing about a synthesis not only among the various sects within Hinduism but the different ethnic groups of Assam under the umbrella of one faith. Therefore he "was in a way a Caitanya, a Kabir and a Nanak, all in one, for Assam." The democratizing spirit of Sankardeva's faith was something that Bezbaroa understood to be important for Assamese identity. "For Bhakti had been associated, on the whole, with an enormous democratization of literary language; had pressed the cultural forms of caste hegemony in favour of the artisans and the peasantry..." Mādhavdeva's rendering of the classical texts into Assamese language the way the Pancasākha did to the Oriya language. "The translation of many of these Sanskrit texts into many of the modern Indian languages, in fact, played a considerable role in the process of the consolidation of these languages as well" Bezbaroa, like Phakimohana, apparently recognized this fact. His efforts at disseminating Assam's spiritual past also served another purpose. He made use of the antiquity of these texts to prove the antiquity of Assamese. In fact to counter the laboured logic of an article Bhāṣā Bichhed in Bhāratī Lakshmināth wrote-

If the author had been acquainted with the Assamese language, he would not have said that great literatures can not be born in this language. To suggest that the language in which the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata had been translated four or five centuries before the Bengali language had been born, is not capable of producing great literature is most unbecoming of everyone except the author of Bhāṣā Bichhed."76

72 Sumit Kumar Chatterji, "The Nineteenth Century in India and Lakshminath Bezbaroa of Assam in 'Sahityarathī of Assam', P. 7
73 Aijaz Ahmad, op. Cit., P. 273.
74 Balarām Dās, Jagannāth Dās, Ananta Dās, Jasabanta Dās and Achyutananda Dās are popularly referred to as Panchasakhās (five friends).
75 Aijaz Ahmad, op. Cit. P. 259.
76 Tilottama Misra, op. Cit., P. 164.
There might have been another explanation for the preponderance of ethico-philosophical writings— it was cultural retrieval. It was a kind of shield against missionary proselytising work and a mirror to the native to rouse self-pride.

It is sad that while discussing the role of Christian missionaries in the formation of modern Indian language and literatures, the role of classical literature is relegated to the secondary position. The role of Christian missionaries "received far greater emphasis in our literary historiography." This is not to deny their valuable contribution. That the real creators of these languages like Šankardeva and Mādhavdeva Jaganāth Dās and Balarāma Dās, are blissfully forgotten, is a sad reminder of our judgement. The way Bezbaroā and Phakirmohana recognised the centrality of the pre-modern texts holds a lesson for us. "The study of Sri Šankardeva and Mādhavdeva and other poets of the earlier times holds a lesson for us. The study of Sri Šankardeva and Mādhavdeva and other poets of the earlier times by Bezbaroā provided this confidence and vigour to the intellectual and cultural life of the Assamese people.

In Šankardeva Bezbaroā found a cultural icon to hold forth with pride against the ignorance of people about Assam and its rich cultural antecedents. In this great Vaishnavite preceptor he discovered not only a past to be Cherished but a present to be lived with and a future to be hoped for. This Privileging of Šankar-Mādhav, therefore should not be viewed from the point of view of religious affiliation alone but his multi-faceted role he assumed as a writer.

As a writer Bezbaroā found out an alternative world view. He posited this wholesome alternative against the value system that invaded Assam with English education. In story after story, in his belles lettres he employed the cutting edge of satire and sarcasm against pernicious tendencies. Particularly the value of individualism which puts self before society, is severely dealt with. Its implications on the close-knit communal living of the native community could not but be disruptive. One of the characters called Bhūdhar in the story Bāpirām exemplifies the erosion in

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Aijaz Ahmad, op. Cit., P.259.
the native value system. For the sake of power and position he was ready to barter his elder brother's daughter with the English tea garden manager. Faced with this dilemma he rationalises—

I have lost the hope of redemption in the next life. But what if I lost it, who has seen or known it, who can say? But one should not neglect the good things of this which are not inconsiderable.

Despite of the slightly exaggerated presentation it shows the degeneration of the native values under the impact of the West. Some other stories like Malak Guin Guin, Bhokendra Barua etc also highlight such erosion. Bezbaroa, with his roots in the native tradition and training in Western thought current, was in a position to see the basic dehumanising character of the West. The obvious counterpart of Bhudhara of Bāpiram is Natabara of Phakirmohana in the novel Māmu. He dupes his own widowed sister and her children for self-advancement.

Bezbaroa and Senāpati were people who contributed constructively to the nation-building efforts. In an article titled 'Asamiya Bhāṣā Āru Sāhitya' Bezbaroa's keen historical sense in quite evident. Given the choice between the nomenclatures Assam and Kāmrup, he said he said he would prefer the latter. The reason he gives is simple enough. Kāmrup conjures of past glory; its expansiveness. Which included the present Bāṅglāadesh, part of Burmā and part of Bengal, was considerable like an empire, its mythical past as exemplified by Kālikā Purāṇ and Vishnu Purāṇ and its military might were things that were crucial for a people on the throes of self-recovery. The word Assam on the other hand, lacked this evocative power. By this argument Bezbaroa was presenting culture in the form of reinterpreted history to turn into "an important front for nationalist mobilization".

The essay is also significant from the point of view of literary historiography. It attempts in a systematic manner the trajectory of the growth of Assamese language.

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78 B. G. Vol. I. p. 589
79 B. G. Vol. II. PP. 1691-1716.
80 Elleke Bochmcr. op. Cit. P. 100.
and literature. He does so by taking help of many allied fields like history, geography, anthropology and so on. It is not restrictive but transgressive. In this respect Aizaj Ahmad's words are worth quoting.

'... a full reappropriation of our older literatures, classical or medieval(is) not possible unless we are willing to wander across all sorts of boundaries that are said to separate history from philosophy, anthropology from linguistics, religion from economics and 'literature'  

From all these Bezbaroa did 'wander across' many related disciplines to construct the idea of Assamese literature and language. In his talks on Assamese language and literature too one comes across the same pattern.

His plays, particularly the three chronicle plays- *Jaymati, Chakradhwaja Simha and Belimār*, to adhere to his principal concern- his unwavering nationalism. A people without historical consciousness is likely to lose their national identity. Early nationalists therefore found in history an instrument to revive national identity. For "any tale of past bravery or heroism vindicated present servitude. This was the safest form a newly awakened nationalism could take."82 In an essay titled 'Bāngleśī Ithās Sambandhe Kayekti Kathā' Bankimchandra highlights the same truth. "The nation," said Bankimchandra, "which has memories of former greatness can preserve that greatness or if lost, try to restore it."83 Chakradhwaja Simha's reign is the zenith of Assam's military might as the marauding Moghuls suffered a debilitating defeat it the hands of the Āhom army in the battle of Sarāighat. Bezbaroa dramatises this glorious chapter of Assamese history to rouse the sagging morale of his people through the recollection of their past greatness. His historical romance *Padum Kīwari* and Phakirmohana's *Lachhamā* are also attempts in the same direction.

Bezbaroa harked back to the past in order to make the present secure and the future hopeful. Rabindranāth put this in his own inimitable way - "art is not a

81 'In Theory'. P. 281
82 Meenakshi Mukherjee. op. Cit. P. 46.
83 Ibid. P. 49.
gorgeous sepulchre, serenely brooding over a lonely and lost eternity of vanished years. It belongs rather to the procession of life, exploring unknown shrines of reality along its pilgrimage to a future which is as different from the past as the tree is from the seed. "^84 And nothing could sup up Bezbaroa's literary journey better than the words- 'pilgrimage to a future.'

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^84 Quoted from S. K. Ghosh, 'Rabindranath Tagore', p. 93.