Chapter VII
The Essays of Bezbaroa

Introduction:

William J. Long has remarked that essayists are nearly all prophets or teachers, and use literature as the chief instrument of progress and education. Whenever we think of the essays of Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the picture of Kripabar Barua, later self-promoted to Kripabar Barbarua, comes to our mental vision. Lakshminath Bezbaroa had been attempting, in the guise of Kripabar, to educate the Assamese people to get rid of its socio-cultural faults. In doing this, Bezbaroa used satire as the main tool of achieving his goal. Bezbaroa's essays are remarkable insofar as their egotistic temper is concerned. Indeed, who can be that proud and self-righteousness so as to surpass the egotism of the inimitable Kripabar? In this respect, Bezbaroa deserves to be said as the true essayist. Bezbaroa's philosophy towards life and his mental reaction to the then prevailing socio-cultural state of affairs in the Assamese society have very clearly, if not emphatically, conveyed in his essays. On this feature also, Bezbaroa's essays may unhesitatingly be classified as essays proper. "The Essay Proper, Or Literary Essay, is not merely a short analysis of a subject, not a

1. Lam, Charles, Essays of Mia, edn. 1960, p. xxxii
were epitome, but rather a picture of the writer's mind as affected for the moment by the subject with which he is dealing. Its most distinctive feature is the egotistical element.\textsuperscript{1}

Therefore, in order to appreciate the spirituality of Bezbaroa's essays, the events that had been occurring during the span of his literary pursuits ought to be known first. The socio-political background that had induced Bezbaroa to wield his pen on essays has very impressively been recorded by Dibeswar Neog in the following sentences: "The tremendous popularity which Lakshminath commanded also was due to the fact that the social reformer in him was not far away from the literary humorist in him. Son of a head-physician (Bezbearuwa), he knew his business in literature, and doctored his own society with a smile on his lips. Really he came in a psychological moment of Assamese society and literature - a society just escaping the plague of Mayamara rebellion and Burmese invasions, and still looking ghastly and pale, with a literature of proud heritage but its prestige of late molested, and of self-confidence robbed. Never did the people need so badly to be taught to laugh, and Lakshminath helped at such a time of strain and stress. His was 'a rainbow humour', for he mostly smiled at us through his tears. This applies, for example, to the humour of his \textit{Litikai}, and applies generally

\textsuperscript{1} Lamé, Charles, \textit{Essays of Mía}, edn. 1960, p. xxxii
to his Kripabar. He used literature as a platform for his sermons, and he mostly laughed at his own cost.¹ To what eminence Lakshminath Bezbaroa had risen in the realm of essay writing even outside his own mother tongue is testified by the following comment of Dr. Neog: "In 1933 Bezbaroa was invited by the Maharaja of Boroda to deliver lectures on aspects of Vaishnavism. It was a rare honour, for such an invitation was extended earlier to such personalities as Rabindranath Tagore, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Sir C.V. Raman and Dr. R.C. Bhandarkar. Bezbaroa came and spoke in two lectures on the history of Vaishnavism in India and the 'rasa-lila' of Krishna. These two lectures are included in the publication, The Religion of Love and Devotion (1968), which I have edited for Asam Sahitya Sabha. About the first lecture a leading critic, Dr. Banikanta Kakoti, remarked 'It is so beautiful and penetrating in its simplicity. Everything comes from the intuitions of the soul like the simple and deeply significant writings in the Bible. Later, he delivered another lecture, 'The Cowherd of Vrindabana', to the Gujarat Division of All-India Oriental Association."² In paying tribute to Lakshminath Bezbaroa the Essayist, Padmadhar Chaliha has said, "Next to Sankaradeva, the illustrious exponent of monotheistic Vaishnavism in Assam, Bezbaroa can rightly be regarded as the second epoch-maker in

¹ Neog, D., New Light on History of Assamiya Literature, edn. 1962, p. 414
² Neog, M., 'An Outline of Lakshminath Bezbaroa's Life' in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the Sahityaratna of Assam, pp. 64–65
Assamese literature. He made Assamese a fit vehicle for modern literary expression in both prose and verse, in both serious and lighter veins.1

In order to assess the contribution of Lakshminath Bezbaroa to the modern prose literature of Assamese, a glimpse at the evolution of the latter is essential.

Assamese prose literature has an inspiringly hoary past. Dwelling on this, Acharya P.C. Ray had remarked: "Assamese prose literature developed to a stage in the far distant sixteenth century which no other literature of the world reached except the writings of Hooker and Latimer in England." The century referred in the above observation together with the preceding one was the age of renaissance in Assamese literature. Remarkable pieces of prose writings like Katha Bhagawat and Katha Gita were flowing from the masterly pens of the illustrious Vaishnava savants like Bhatta Deva and Bhikunthnath of the age. The impact of the Vaishnava movement on the Assamese literature was profound and all-pervading in nature. Commenting on this, Dineshwar Neog has remarked, "The Vaishnavite movement thus had a momentum of unusual magnitude. As a matter of fact, this is the movement of Assamese life and literature that knows no comparison. As a period, it covers almost the whole history of Assamese

1. Chaliha, Padmadhar, 'Lakshminath Bezbaroa as an Essayist' in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam, p.166
literature, at least from the twelfth century when the literature, properly so called, itself begins.\footnote{1} The publication of the monthly magazine, Arumodoi in 1846 is a milestone in the path of growth of Assamese prose literature. The magazine was a publication of the American Baptist Missionaries and was devoted basically to religion. However, in all its outward exposition, the magazine served the cause of a secular publication taking care of science, literature and general knowledge. Arumodoi's role in spreading prose literature in Assamese is profound and it had enlarged the reading horizon of Assamese prose spectacularly and inspired the common people in prose writing. Moreover, Arumodoi had initiated an era of simple vocabulary and phonetic spelling methods to avoid complexity of the sphere. The Missionaries had also written a good number of books in simple Assamese for the spread of Christianity in the province. Then, Assamese prose grew on a firm and scientific footing under the inspiring lead of personalities like Gunabhiram Barua (1838–95) and Hemchandra Barua (1835–96). \textit{Grammar of the Assamese Language} and the \textit{Hembosa}, two pioneering and standard works in lexicography, gave Assamese language a grammatical base and thus paving the way for standardised norms for Assamese prose writing. Hemchandra Barua and

\footnote{1. Neog, D., \textit{New Light on History of Assamiya Literature}, p. 275}
Gumabhiram Barua wrote several other books and essays in Assamese prose on topics like history, biography and philosophy. Moreover, both of them edited two journals of Assamese, Assam News and Assam Bandhu respectively. Several other Assamese periodicals were also published contemporarily. This spurt in literary activities had ushered in the period of modern Assamese prose literature. Lakshminath Besbaroa "drank deep at the fountain of this modern pioneer literature and cut out an individual stream of his own." Besbaroa's 'own stream' became, in course of time, so deep and wide so as to secure for him a a distinct place in the evolution of Assamese prose, as one of its makers. Besbaroa is honoured as the initiator of the second renaissance in Assamese literature.

Besbaroa knew the Assamese society thoroughly well, and his study of all sorts of Assamese literature was wide; some of which, in his own admittance, he 'swallowed and digested'. As a consequence, he could write in a spontaneous and winning style. Besbaroa's humorous way of expression has added further to the appeal and charm of his writings. In his prose writings, Besbaroa was influenced by diverse sources. The immediate influence was of his immediate predecessors like Hemchandra and Gumabhiram. However, he drew inspiration from

1. Goswami, Upendranath, "Lakshminath Besbaroa, a Maker of Modern Assamese Prose" in Lakshminath Besbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam, p. 180
the Assamese writers of the early and middle periods of Assamese literary history. Beabaroa's intimacy with the Bengali literary world was not only close, but direct and personal too. His matrimonial relationship with the Tagore family and its impact on him has already been recorded in the previous chapter. In his prose writing, Beabaroa was greatly influenced by the Bengali literature, both in style and thematic orientation. Furthermore, from the Bengali style of living and the mental attitudes of the Bengali society, Beabaroa had chosen topics of his own essays. These were mostly satires and caricature. Beabaroa's reading of western literature was also vast, and as such he could not but be influenced by the style of the western literature. All these influences have enabled Beabaroa to earn fame as a freelance writer of Assamese prose.

Another charm of Beabaroa's prose writings was his capacity to express himself in the simple vocabularies of the mass people. He used the vocabularies as used by the local populace inhabiting different regions of Assam so spontaneously that he gave each of the regional inhabiting groups the feeling that the essays have been written in its own vocabulary. Moreover, Beabaroa's prose style is unique in the sense that it could embrace into its fold any episode or theme arising in diverse spheres like Vaishnava dramas, Ahom chronicles, social belief and superstitions.
From every viewpoint, the glory of making modern Assamese prose goes to Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Dr. Banikanta Kakoti has remarked: "Injustice is done to the language if one goes to write Assamese without paying due attention to Bezbaroa's manner of composition." A generous and farsighted remark indeed!

Classification of Bezbaroa's essays:

Lakshminath Bezbaroa's essays may be classified in the following broad categories: Personal essays; formal essays; biographies; and autobiography. The most familiar of Bezbaroa's personal essays are the following: 'Kripabar Baruar Kakotor Topola'; 'Kripabar Baruar Obhatani'; 'Barbaruvar Bulani'; 'Barbaruvar Bhavar Burburani' (vol. I); 'Barbaruvar Bhavar Burburani' (vol. II); 'Barbaruvar Chintar Silguti'; 'Barbaruvar Sahityic Bahashya' and 'Kripabar Baruar Samarani'. Among the important formal essays of Bezbaroa are the following: 'Tattwa-katha'; 'Krishna Katha'; 'Kamal Krititta Lavibar Sanket'; 'Bakhor'; 'Presidential Speeches'; 'Religion of Love and Devotion'; and 'Bhagawat Katha'. Bezbaroa's biographical essays are: 'Dangariya Dinanath Bezbaroar Samkhipta Jivani'; 'Sri Sankaradeva'; 'Shri Sankaradeva and Sri Madhabadeva'; and 'Sri Chaitanya Deva'. Bezbaroa's the autobiographical essays

1. Ibid.
are contained in 'Mor Jivan Swaran'.

Personal essays:

Most of the personal essays enumerated above are humorous in tone. Bezbaroa's humorous essays were published in journals like 'Jonaki', 'Usha' and 'Bahi'. Some of his essays were published in Bengali journals like 'Punya' and 'Bharati'. Bezbaroa's eminence as an essayist is indeed unbeaten. Through his personal essays, Bezbaroa attempted to entertain his readers with lively wits and humour. The wide popularity and personal appeal of Bezbaroa's personal essays lies in the fact that the entire range of Assamese life has been portrayed in these essays. Bezbaroa's humorous essays are basically satirical in tone; and he attempted to reform the society through this satirical weapon. However, Bezbaroa's satire and caricature was not of a blunt-edged style as was the case with Hemchandra Barua. Bezbaroa's humorous essays have the characteristics of true humour which have been described in the following lines. "The chief characteristics of a true humorist are resourcefulness, knowledge of human nature, power of observation, keen sense of incongruity, and, last but not the least, human sympathy. True wit may be likened to the fine and sharp edge of a razor, cleaning all the rubbish and blemishes of society. A blunt-edged razor will simply inflict wound. True wit and true humour will sweep of and clean away all humbug, snobbery, hypocrisy, corruption and other vices of
society without any trace of personal rancour or vendetta.1

Lakshminath Besbaroa's creation of the inimitable character of Kripabar Barua, later Kripabar Barbarua, is indeed unique. Kripabar, just like the inimitable Jeeves of P.G. Wodehouse in the household affairs of his master, gets so much engrossed in the social drama of the Assamese life that without him the life-boat of the Assamese society seemed to be without the oarsman. Such was the creative genius of Lakshminath Besbaroa that to the Assamese readers Kripabar appears as a living reality, not merely a literary character. It is difficult to say how much Lakshminath Besbaroa had succeeded in reforming the Assamese society, but it is definite that had made the Assamese readers aware of their manifold shortcomings and vices. As hinted above, Besbaroa's humorous essays have earned widespread popularity because of the fact that Besbaroa knew the Assamese society well and he was earnest in cleaning it with a feeling of sympathy and compassion.

Lakshminath Besbaroa undoubtedly occupies a place of honour amongst the renown humorists of the world. Besbaroa's 'Kaktor Topola' is compared to the Pickwick Papers of Charles Dickens. Just like Pickwick, Kripabar Barua also finds

1. Chaliha, Padmadhar, 'Lakshminath Besbaroa as an Essayist' in Lakshminath Besbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam, p. 167
frequent hard moments in his assumption of unnatural sobriety. Kripabar, clad in his black suit, also resembles the character of 'Man-in-the-black' in the Citizen of the World of Oliver Goldsmith. Lot of similarities are found amongst the characters of Bezbaroa with those of Three Men in a Boat by Jerome K. Jerome. In characterisation and narration, Bezbaroa seems to be influenced by eminent Bengali humorist and satirist like Bankimchandra. In spite of all these influences, Bezbaroa has his own inimitable way of witty and humorous expression; and his humorous essays stand unique. Bezbaroa had once said in self elation: "In this world only three persons could smile. The first person was Aristophenis of ancient Greece, the second was Sir Ventice of Spain, and the third was from the country of John Bull named Swift. In addition to these, there is a fourth person well-skilled in the art of smiling, and he is no other than Barbarus himself." Indeed, Bezbaroa's skill in the art of smiling is lofty high, and his capacity to make his readers laugh and smile is rather enviable.

At the depth of Bezbaroa's humour are his deep love for the Assamese people and his bitter anguish at the hypocrisy, deception and artificiality of the Assamese society. In the words of Dr. Neog, 'Besbaroa wept through a smile'. He has very beautifully remarked: "The sorrow of such a smile is deeper than the tears, too deep for tears. Lakshminath Besbaroa, in the guise of Kripabar, laughed at someone, teased someone else, castigated others, and made clowns of some others. But, why did he do all these? Is it because he hated these
others or because he loved them? If the former, there is indeed bitterness and poison. If the latter, Besbaroa definitely is the dearest of the persons whom he has criticised and caricatured so satirically.\textsuperscript{1} While criticising the Assamese society in this humorous vein, Besbaroa did it from within the society. As a member of the Assamese society that had been suffering from a false sense of vanity and pride, Besbaroa did not spare even himself. Besbaroa has ventilated this weakness through the mouth of Kripabar Barua who aspires to rise in the social hierarchy by transforming himself to Kripabar Barbarua. Kripabar Barua has appealed to the Assamese society not to stand in the way of his social ascent.

The most fascinating element in literary essays is the way in which things have been said. In other words, the way of saying things, i.e., the style is the most important factor that decides the popularity of the literary essays. Besbaroa's style of essay writing is indeed unique and spell-bound in its impact on the readers. Besbaroa's style may be said to be his forte as a humorous writer. The most prominent feature of Besbaroa's style of essay writing is the conversational strain of the narratives which instantly inspires a tone of intimacy between himself and the readers. Besbaroa's mastery over the Assamese vocabulary, both urban and rural, is another redeeming feature of his style of essay.

\textsuperscript{1} Neog, M., \textit{Lakshminath}, p. 22
writing. Bezbaroa "is the master in the art of phrasing. His
gift for metaphores, similes and fanciful imagery is remarkable
by any standard. In his pen, popular maxims and idioms are
energised with unforeseen flavour."¹ "One prominent quality
of his style is urbanity. He is the great urbane writer of
Assamese prose. He has combined urbanity with vigour."²
Bezbaroa's imaginative insight in plot-creation and
characterisation has raised the attraction of his essays
considerably. Bezbaroa's creative ability to analyse the
environmental elements and to create the plots and characters
to suit these elements are highly remarkable. Bezbaroa gives
the individual reader the privilege to feel at home while
turning the leaves of his essays. As told earlier, Bezbaroa's
profound love, if not paternalistic, for the Assamese way of
life has enabled him to observe it intimately; and as a
consequence of his own close intimacy with the Assamese
society, Bezbaroa's essays give a live picture of the society
and thus making them appealingly fascinating.

Though saturated with fun and frivolities, Bezbaroa's
personal essays contain serious message too. In the essay
titled 'Juguli' (contained in Kripabar Baruar Kakotor Topola),
Kripabar has advertised for a proposed Assamese journal to be

¹ Dutta, Hirendronath, 'Humour and Satire in Lakshminath
Bezbaroa' in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the Sahityarathi of
Assam, p. 174
² Ibid.
christened as Jugul; the advertisement asks the readers to send their articles and other literary pieces to be published in the proposed journal at the following address: "C/O Dead letter post Office". Here Bezbaroa has lamented, in his own funny way, the indifference of the Assamese people towards literary publications. The essay is, therefore, nothing less than an indictment of the Assamese reading public for their habit of 'not-reading'. Another essay of Bezbaroa titled 'Batori Kakotar Janani' (in Kripabar Barwar Kakotar Topola) contains similar accusation of the Assamese public for their not realising the value of literary journals. Bezbaroa had never participated directly in the political affairs. Yet, he has expressed his views, through the pen of Kripabar, on serious socio-political issues like Gandhism, political independence of India and nationalism. Lakshminath Bezbaroa's political views have been expressed in essays like 'Bande Mataram', 'Gandhi Andolan', 'Swadesi Ain Osanya', 'Ghuraniya Moj Mel', 'Gandhi-Arwin Sukti', 'Picketing and Barbaruar Rajniti'. Bezbaroa's deep nationalism has been amply revealed in these essays. Bezbaroa was against the extremist elements in the political sphere, and he has expressed this view in several essays like 'Bom' contained in 'Kripabar Baruar ObMotani'. Bezbaroa has jeered the pseudo-patriots in his essay titled 'Bharatar Uddhar'. Bezbaroa's social consciousness has been emphatically expressed in essays like 'Avatar' and 'Bande Mataram' where has severely criticised the plan of Lord Curzon to divide Bengal into two parts and
annex Assam to East Bengal. Besbaroa was a strong supporter of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of Hindu-Muslim unity and brotherhood. He has expressed this view in the essay 'Dharma, Sampradaik Aikya' contained in *Kripabar Baruar Bhabor Burburani*.

Regarding Lakshminath Besbaroa's attitude towards Bengal and Bengali, Dipak Sen has remarked: "Devotion and dejection are the two key-words that we find in Besbaroa's attitude towards things related to Bengal and Bengali life. At the hour of his contact Bengal was busy creating the Indian Renaissance, and the immortal names of her sons at the hour have very naturally been quoted by him on suitable occasions." ¹

Besbaroa's understanding of Bengal and Bengalis was deep and respectful. His matrimonial relationship with as renowned a Bengali family as that of Rabindranath Tagore, had enabled Besbaroa to know the Bengali life from within it. Consequently, his exposition of the various aspects of Bengali life through his essays is revealing in nature and highly fascinating in tone. Besbaroa's appreciation of Bengali intellectuals has been revealed in essays like 'Iswar Chandra Bidyasagar', ¹

Besbaroa has given biographical portraits, through some of his essays, of a few leading personalities of Assam also. 'Anandaram Baruar Chamu Jivancharit' and 'Jagannath Barua' are two outstanding essays of this category. Besbaroa's views

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¹ Sen, Dipak, 'Lakshminath Besbaroa's Understanding of Bengal and Bengalis' in *Lakshminath Besbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam*, p. 204
on socio-economic and cultural emancipation of Indian women has been vividly expressed in his essays titled 'Stree Swadhinata' (1, 2 and 3) contained in *Barbaruar Bhabor Burburani* (vol. 1). *Barbaruar Bhabor Burburani* (vol. 2) contains a few essays of Lakshminath Bezbaroa which speak of some philosophical views of the author. Some of the essays of this type are the following: 'Hahi', 'Sahitya Utpatti', 'Buranjir Dauratnya', 'Sahitya Sabhar Sabhapati', 'Sahitya Sabha Darsan', 'Bongeetar Tarjama', 'Arthaniti', 'Bhalpoa Aru Prem', and 'Bhal Manuh, Beya Manuh'.

It has thus been seen that the personal essays of Lakshminath Bezbaroa contain themes of diverse nature, right from frivolities up to high philosophical discourses. These essays are indeed a valuable endowment not only to the Assamese literature, but also to the enrichment of the lifestyle of the Assamese people itself. In 'Kripabar Barua's Will', Bezbaroa has formally proclaimed this endowment, and it is up to the Assamese society to accept it and be benefited by the same.

Formal essays:

An idea of the high quality of Bezbaroa's formal essays may be had from the following remark of Padmadhar Chaliha: "Bezbaroa's 'Tattwa-Katha', Krishna-Katha' and 'Bhagawata-Katha' are 'formal' essays bearing eloquent
testimony to his profound erudition, penetrating insight and critical acumen. They constitute a golden link between the personality of the writer and the intellect of the reader. The vehicle of expression of lofty ideas in matters theological and spiritual is simple, chaste, easily intelligible Assamese. Bezbaroa amply demonstrated through his various writings, editorials in 'Jonaki' and 'Bahi', critical appreciations of contemporary books and presidential addresses at literary conferences and students' organisation, how illuminating thoughts can be freely expressed through the medium of simple, colloquial Assamese.¹

Formal essays are educative in spirit. Either, new light is thrown on prevailing ideas and beliefs or new ideas and beliefs are propounded in these essays. Therefore, the author's firm grip on the subject matter of the essay is the basic requisite of a formal essay. However, this grip alone does not make an essay readable and appealing. The style of writing, the words and phrases used in the narrative, and the imaginative skill of the author in understanding the reader are the other attributes of an ideal formal essay. All these virtues of a good essay writer had combined together in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, and hence the beauty of his essays. Moreover, every word of the essays bears deep conviction of

¹ Chaliha, Padmadhar, 'Lakshminath Bezbaroa as an Essayist' in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam, p. 166
the author himself in the subject matters of the essays. Bezbaroa pours his entire soul into the work.

Bezbaroa's 'Tattwa-Katha' and 'Krishna-Katha' are based on classical religious writings. For writing on such subjects, the author ought to be well-versed in the classical literature. About Bezbaroa's classical learning Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji has remarked: "We should look upon Lakshmanath as one of the great names in the history of the modern Indian literary and cultural renaissance - as a person who was fully appreciative of all great things in literature, not only in his own language, Assamese, but also in the sister-language Bengali, as well as in the great Mother and Nurse of all Indian speech, Sanskrit; and moreover, as one whose life was an embodiment of sweetness and light." 1 'Tattwa-Katha' and 'Krishna-Katha' are outstanding testimony of Lakshminath Bezbaroa's mature judgement of socio-cultural issues and his capacity to view these issues in an objective manner. These two are by far his most outstanding contributions. Dr. Neog's remark on these two literary works of Bezbaroa is worth quoting in this context. "'Tattwa-Katha' and 'Krishna-Katha' of Bezbarua, published in 'Bahi', have revealed an important aspect of Bezbaroa's thinking. Regarding Vaishnava religion in Assam, both Dr. Banikanta Kakoti and Bezbaroa got

1. Chatterji, Dr. Suniti Kumar, 'The nineteenth century renaissance in India and Lakshminath Bezbaroa of Assam' (Gauhati University, 1969, p. 14)
involved in the controversy arising out of it; and some divergence of views and bitterness was created in their writings of that period. But, in Bezbaroa's 'Krishna-Katha' and 'Tattwa-Katha' there is no divergence of this type. The broad tenets of Vaishnavism have been objectively elaborated in these writings. There is no edge of bitter controversy in them. From the point of view of style also, these essays are expected to be adorable by all. In this context, Bezbaroa's lectures delivered at Boroda in English on Vaishnavism and 'Rash-lila' may also be recalled.¹ Both 'Krishna-Katha' and 'Tattwa-Katha' are glaring testimonies of Bezbaroa's profound classical learning and its deep understanding. The theme of these two works of Bezbaroa is the elucidation of the fundamental principles of the Vaishnavism in Assam as propounded by Sankaradeva. The religious and philosophical views of Sankaradeva have been explained in these works in an attractive manner with the deep devotional attachment of the author himself. Lakshminath Bezbaroa's profound knowledge of Vedas, Gita, Upanishadas and other Vedic literature is convincingly revealed all throughout 'Tattwa-Katha' and 'Krishna-Katha'.

¹ 'Krishna-Katha' and 'Tattwa-Katha' are two collections of Bezbaroa's essays on religion, theology and philosophy. A short essay titled 'Tattwa-Katha' was published by Bezbaroa in

1. Neog, Dr. M., Tattwa-Katha, editorial comment, p. 04
'Bahi'; and keeping this essay as the nucleus, the 'Tattwa-Katha' has been published in book-form containing like essays of the author. The publication has been by Sahitya Prakash, Gauhati. 'Krishna-Katha' was also published in a similar procedure keeping two short essays of Lakshminath Bezbaroa as the nuclei.

'Bakhar' is another collection of formal essays of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Bezbaroa has explained that without some basic virtues, no individual can lead a purposeful life beneficial to the society at large. Bezbaroa has specifically emphasised the virtues like character, resistance, restraint, constructiveness, power of observation, economy, honesty, sincerity and moral courage. He has named these essays as 'Bakhar' whose literal meaning is 'gems', and the essays are indeed 'gems of thought'. Bezbaroa has advised the readers to keep 'Bakhar' as a pocket book, and how wise the counsel is!

'Kamat Kritita Labhibar Sanket' is another formal essay of Lakshminath Bezbaroa. Bezbaroa has asked himself: "Great many men plough the ocean in different trade; somebody makes double the profit and somebody loses bread. Why?" Bezbaroa has attempted to answer the question in his memorable essay of the above title. The purpose of this essay may best be described in Bezbaroa's own words: "This small book has been written with a few hints essential for human life, so
that it may be carried in the shirt-pocket as a pocket book or a note book. I shall deem my effort rewarded even if one person in a hundred is benefited by these hints. How the short path may be chosen for success of human life? I have tried to give the way in this book in easy language. How far I have succeeded in this attempt, that is to be judged by the readers. If the fifty hints given in this book are to be fully elaborated, then fifty books of large size shall be needed. Where is the time for the busy person of the twentieth century to pick up these jewels one by one from the bottom of big books! In conclusion, let me tell that most of the counsels given here are practically tasted in my small life."

A few of the hints given by Bezbaroa for attaining success in life are given below, so as to enable us to judge how wise the counsellor is. The hints are: always speak the truth; always try to keep your credibility intact; never ignore your responsibilities; be precise and to-the-point in conversation; admit your own faults immediately; always preserve your self-respect; be earnest even in small matters; make effort to earn money through honest means; spend your money wisely; be always punctual; in domestic and official matters, get engaged according to well-prepared routines; do it to-day, do not keep it for tomorrow; make good use of your rest time; do not lose your temper and many others.
Lakshminath Bezbaroa's religious and philosophical essays were published in 'Bahi' and also contained in speeches delivered by him on various occasions. Bezbaroa's famous Beroda lectures on Vaishnavism are brilliant testimony of his genius and exponent of religion and philosophy. Bezbaroa's lectures were acclaimed and appreciated by all as the brilliant exposition of Vaishnava philosophy. Bezbaroa's analysis and exposition of the monistic tenets of Vedanta and the Bhaktiyoga as propounded by Shri Sankaradeva were so brilliant and masterly that it helped acknowledging the Vaishnava period of Assam as the true era of renaissance here. The religious conviction of Lakshminath Bezbaroa may be read in the following lines of Rajanikanta Dev Sarma: "The Religion of Love and Devotion, as propounded by the Gita and the Bhagavata, as propagated by Sri Sankaradeva and other Vaishnava saints of Assam was the religion of Bezbaroa. Although he was a firm believer of his own religion, the catholicity of his outlook made him believe in the truth of all religions. Like a God-intoxicated prophet he appealed to the people, 'Ye citizens of the world, ye Indians, ye Assamese, utter the name of Rama, Krishna and Hari, surrendering yourselves to one God as taught by Sankaradeva; ye Christians, utter the name of God, the Father, following the teachings of Christ, ye Mussalmans, shout 'Allah Hu Akbar' as preached by Mohammad; you are sure to attain mukti, bhakti and peace. Krishna of Sankara and Madhava, who is the ruler over Prakriti and Purusa of Sankhya and controller of time and Mays–sakti is the God, the Father of Christ, is
Alla hu Akbar of Mahammad.¹ Besbaroa's Lectures contain observations like the following: "Knowledge is the knowledge of God", "the highest aim of human endeavour is to know his Maker, to reach Him and to enjoy His bliss", "a devotee of the highest order is above all Vedic and social injunctions" and "Bhakti is the royal road to mukti; as a matter of fact, it is more than mukti."

Biographical essays:

In his preface to Sri Sankaradeva and Sri Madhabadeva, Lakshminath Besbaroa has observed: "This book has been written with the desire that the long lives and the varied activities of Mahapurusha Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva are made known to all. We have seen that most of the people who know something about the two great saints are not fully conversant with the actual events. As a result of this, they believe as true some perverted writings written by some biographers with selfish motives. Unless the biographer is respectful towards the person whose biography he is going to write, the narratives become soulless, because the biographer looks at things with crooked eyes. The person whose biography you are going to write ought to be well known to you; you must be well

¹ Sarmas, Rajanikanta, 'Besbaroa as an Exponent of Religion and Philosophy' in Lakshminath Besbaroa, the Sahityarath and Assam, pp. 192-93
acquainted with his thought-process; you must be quite aware of the true significance of his activities; and you must be devoutly inspired by him. Otherwise you cannot draw a true portrait of that person." This observation has amply proved that Lakshminath Bezbaroa made an earnest and righteous effort to portrait these two Vaishnava saints of Assam in true perspectives. This is not a biography with a mere enumeration of events. It is a philosophical pursuit of enquiry and elucidation of the basic tenets of Vaishnava faith as propounded by Sankaradeva and Madhavadeva. In that sense it is indeed a missionary undertaking involving a good deal of enquiry and research. Upholding this aspect of Bezbaroa's writings, Dimbeswar Neog has observed: "Another essential contribution of Lakshminath is his researches on the Vaishnavite literature of Assam. His two works Sankaradeva and Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva are but a fraction of the mass of his writings on the subject. His researches may now be overcome by newer researches, but all the same, Lakshminath is bound to be remembered as the inspirer."

How loyally devoted Lakshminath Bezbaroa was towards the great Vaishnava savants of Assam is amply proved by the following comment of his own: "Sankaradeva is ours, Madhabadeva is also ours, Damodardeva is also ours, Bangshigopaldeva is

1. Neog, Dimbeswar, New Light on History of Asamiya Literature, p. 413
also ours and Haridev is also ours. They all are our superiors, commanding our loyalty, devotion and adoration. They are the greatest of the greatest. We are rich to-day because of them. It is through their grace and bequest that we have been enriched to-day by our religion, deeds, nobility, humanism and our literature. Through their incarnation, the Assamese nation had been saved from the cruel hand of extinction. Therefore, lakhs of our respectful bows at their feet."¹

Lakshminath Besbaroa may rightly be called the pioneer in the sphere of biographical literature in Assamese. As noted above, biographical essays with deep research-orientation in Assamese shall always remain associated with Besbaroa as the pioneer. Apart from acquainting the Assamese readers with the great classical writings like Gita, Upanisads and Bhagawat-purana, Besbaroa's contribution in spreading the Vaishnava faith in Assam is indeed superb. His devotion and understanding of the Vaishnava cult was so deep that he could analyse the preachings of Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhabadeva in a most enchanting manner, and make a comparative study with the Vaishnavism as propounded in Bengal by Sri Chaitanyadeva.

Lakshminath Besbaroa's autobiography of his father is indeed a fascinating and revealing piece of literary

¹. Besbaroa-Granthavali, p. 216
contribution inasmuch as it gives a spectrum of socio-literary and religious activities in which his illustrious father was involved, and thus reflecting the Assamese society as a whole.

Virtually every line of 'Dangariya Dinanath Bezbarua Sankhipta Jivan-charit' gives indication of the towering personality of Lakshminath's father and his multifaced qualities. The biography gives us the glimpse of Dinanath Bezbarua the poet. The biography virtually starts with a piece of poetic composition by Dinanath which describes the lineage of the Bezbarua family. Dinanath was born in the year 1813 at Jorhat, and was educated at a Sanskrit school. Dinanath, at the age of 16 years, had also served as the Second teacher in that very Sanskrit school. At the same time he was taught by his father and the elder brother (Krishnaram Bezbaroa and Holiram Bezbarua respectively) about Ayurveda medicine which was the professional occupation of the family, the royal physician at the court of the Ahom Swargadew. He passed the final Ayurvedic examination with credit. Dinanath was appointed the chief physician by the last Ahom Swargadeu Purandar Sinha. He was appointed the Chief Assistant Commissioner under the administration of the East India Company. Due to the honest discharge of his official responsibilities Dinanath earned the esteem and appreciation of the official superiors and had ascended the professional hierarchy in quick succession. He retired from government
service in 1873 after serving the government for long 37 years. During his service career, Dinanath Besbaroa had to live virtually in all the district headquarters of Assam. After retirement, Dinanath Besbaroa settled in Sibsagar.

The biography has highlighted the great qualities of Dinanath Besbaroa and their impact on the biographer himself. Dinanath's stature and his love and respect for traditional cultural heritage of Assam has been very impressively portrayed in the biography. This autobiography of his father had later become a source of Lakshminath Besbaroa's own autobiography, Mor Jivan Sworan.

Autobiography:

Lakshminath Besbaroa's autobiography is titled as 'Mor Jivan Sworan'. The different parts and episodes of the autobiography have been described in the previous chapters; therefore, further discussion on it is deemed unnecessary. The autobiography is a fascinating description of the entire range of Besbaroa's life; his childhood at Sibsagar; his travelling experience with his father in the various parts of Assam; his education; his experience in Calcutta; his literary contemporaries and their influence on him; his acquaintance with the Tagore family; his married life; his stay at Sambalpur and other episodes of his eventful life has been described in
a living and moving manner. This autobiography may be described as a history of Assamese literature of the late 19th to half of the 20th century, since Bezbaroa was so inseparably involved in the various aspects of Assamese literary movements of this period. These events have already been described at the relevant places of the preceding chapters.

Lakshminath Bezbaroa's autobiography, 'Mor Jivan Sowaran is a highly fascinating revealing piece of literary product. Right from his birth in a boat on the mighty Brahmaputra down to his visit to Assam at the last part of his life, Bezbaroa has recorded everything in the Autobiography; it is his life-story virtually from cradle to grave. He has recorded here his childhood and school education at Sibsagar. He has described his experiences of travelling with his father in a very captive and imaginative manner. His father Dinanath Bezbaroa had to move from place to place on official assignment and Bezbaroa with his mother and brothers had to accompanied him to different places of work centres. Bezbaroa's living in places like Barpeta, Nowgaon, Lakhimpur and Tezpur were educative and fanciful. Bezbaroa was highly fascinated by the righteousness of the Vaishnava devotees at Barpeta and it had inspired him to go deeper into the spirituality of the teachings of Mahapurusha Sri Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva. Lakshminath Bezbaroa has described in minute details his experience gathered at Calcutta and Sambalpur.
Mor Jivan Sowaran was first published in continuously in Bahi. Then it was edited by Bezbaroa's nephew Madhabchandra Bezbaroa and published in book form in the year 1888. Then the second edition of the Autobiography was brought out by Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1968 on the occasion of Bezbaroa's birth centenary. In this edition, two extra chapters were appended. These chapters are: 'Mor Mrigaya' and 'Mor Matri Mukh Darshan'. The first one records the hunting adventures of Lakshminath Bezbaroa and the second one ventilates his inner feelings when he had visited Assam at an advanced age.

'Mor Jivan Sowaran' is not an autobiography in the common sense of the term. It is not a mere chronology of dry events, nor is it an attempt of self actualisation on the part of the author. The Reminiscences give us a vivid and living picture of the socio-cultural and literary activities of Assam in the period covered by it. The Reminiscence throbs with vibrations of these activities and it makes the reader react in a lively manner. It is said that behind every book there is an author, and behind every author there is a society. No reader of the Reminiscences perhaps fails to perceive the Assamese society hidden behind it. The Reminiscences have been written in such conversational, lucid and colloquial Assamese as to impress the reader instantly and captivate his mind with a deep sense of nostalgia. Lakshminath Bezbaroa's inimitable skill in portraying the various characters has made them living entities, as if they are acting and talking to us.
in persons. Bezbaroa's portrayal of his father Dinanath Bezbaroa is so masterly that we the readers feel like personally inspired by his noble virtues of benevolence, honesty and righteousness. Lakshminath Bezbaroa has described his colourful and eventful life in such enchanting and captivating manner and with such deep attachment that the reader sees clearly not only the milestones of the biographer's life, but also the corresponding ones in the evolution of Assamese literature and culture.

Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee has highly praised the Autobiography in the following words: "To my mind, Lakshminath Bezbaroa's most intimate and most human work is his Autobiography. Here is disclosed in a very straightforward, and one might say, in a naive, artless manner, a rare personality, which was that of a great and good man with high ideals in life and thought, and who was at the same time a most loveable man."¹ About the plain but appealing manner in which the Autobiography has been written, Suniti Chatterjee has further observed: "The plain unadorned manner in which he had given an account of his marriage while a student in Calcutta with a niece of Rabindranath Tagore forms a most beautiful little romance in life and in literature."²

1. Chatterjee, Suniti Kumar, 'The Nineteenth Century Renaissance in India and Lakshminath Bezbaruwa of Assam (1864-1938)' in Lakshminath Bezbaroa, the Sahityarathi of Assam, p. 10
2. Ibid.
Apart from the socio-cultural and literary pictures of Assam, Lakshminath Bezbaroa's Autobiography has also revealed the honesty, dutifulness and earnest discharge of social obligations by government officials at that time. The cultural involvement of the mass people has been revealingly described in the pages of the Autobiography. Lakshminath Bezbaroa was a busy businessman with lot of practical experiences of life. He has very impressively upheld, through details of his own participation in the drama of real life, the virtues like honesty, benevolence, and dutifulness and their essentiality for success in life. In short, the Autobiography can safely be said as a code or philosophy of life enshrining its beauty through adoration of the above virtues.