Chapter III
Besbaroa as a Dramatist

Introduction:

The flowing current of the traditional dramatic literature in Assam was obstructed from its even forward course at the end of the eighteenth century when the Ahom kingdom was faced with unprecedented crisis resulting from the gathering clouds of uncertainties in the political horizon of Assam. The socio-cultural life was also darkened by absence of literary genius or dramatist worth the name. In the beginning of the nineteenth century when the kingdom was laid waste by the Burmese invasion, the decadence in the dramatic literature was almost complete, and the traditional current of dramatic literature almost dried up. However, the performance of the traditional plays (bhaona) continued to enjoy popularity, though in a subdued state.

The break with the tradition was almost complete when with the coming of the British, the newly educated Assamese youths moulded by the western education made determined efforts to recreate the language and literature under the western influence. Incidentally the literature of the neighbouring province of Bengal exercised tremendous influence, since at the second half of the nineteenth century Calcutta was the only centre of higher education in the entire Eastern India. Under the impact of western influence which
many much earlier in Bengal than in Assam, the newly educated elite of Calcutta established a stage in western style and began to stage dramas written in the fashion of English dramas. The Assamese youth coming to Calcutta for the purpose of education were profoundly influenced by the Calcutta stage and Bengali theatrical performance; and some theatre enthusiasts amongst them were mainly instrumental in setting up stages in the growing urban areas of Assam at the end of the nineteenth century. At the initial stage the Assamese theatre had the plain technique, having only one drop scene, some decorated background scenes and three or four wings.

Before the last decade of the last century the dramatic stage in modern sense of the term was conspicuous by its absence; and, as such, there was no dramatic activity in the sense as it is understood to-day; and the few dramas that were written during the period were mainly meant for the reading public, and almost all of them had some pioneering zeal for reforming the society or curing it of some of its vices. The Ram-Navami (1857) of Gunabhiram was a crusade for widow marriage, the Kaniya Kirtan (1851) of Hemohandra raised a cry against the evils of opium addiction while Bengal-Bengalani (1872) of Rudra Ram Bardoloi, as the name indicates, appealed to the people to shake off the vices of Bengali imitation.  

2. Barua, B.K. : Modern Assamese Literature, p. 52 f
The Dramatic Genius of Bezbaroa:

Various factors combined to shape Lakshminath into a dramatic artist. In his childhood days he was profoundly influenced by the Bhaonas of the nature of the morality plays of England. In his reminiscences in Mor Jivan Sowaran he had mentioned the 'Bhaonas' namely Jarasandha-vadha and Nrisimha Jatra which had left an indelible impression of his artistic mind. Later on, as a student at Calcutta, his acquaintances with the Shakespearean play opened up new horizons for him; and the theatrical revolution of Bengal in those days soon drew him to its fold, opening up a new vista for dramatic literature of Assam. His associates were also under the spell of the Bengali stage; and they were inspired to draw the attention of the people to the need for development of Assamese language and literature through the medium of the stage. Soon the sponsors of the Asamiya Bhasa-Unnati-Sadhini Sabha set their hands to this mass-communication branch of literature; and out of these inspired efforts Bhramaranga the first Assamese stage play was born out of the translation of Shakespeare's Comed.</p><p>1. Bezbaroa, L.N. : Mor Jivan Sowaran, p. 113
it repeatedly. Lakshmînath was one of the principal enthusiasts who took pains to translate the Shakespearean dramas into Assamese; and he also took active part in staging the drama by playing roles.

Lakshmînath's dramatic imagination was fired through his close association with the Tagores after his marriage into the family. At that time the Thakurbari stage at Jorasanko was famous; and Lakshmînath himself, his wife and Aruna, their first daughter, displayed the historionic talent in the dramatic performances of the Thakurbari stage. Lakshmînath's performance of the role of Dashu Sardar in Valmîki Pratibha at the Minerva stage was an unforgettable experience of the audience in those days.¹

However, Lakshmînath's talent as an actor was limited by the non-existence of a permanent stage in Assam; and, even when he took to writing dramas, he could not visualise any stage; and the dialogues he could write only keeping in view the reading public. It must, however, be admitted here that he was not a man to be daunted by the absence of the stage, and in spite of this hurdle, he dashed out to make a permanent contribution to Assamese literature by creating a new branch of modern drama by writing farces and historical plays; and herein lies the greatness of Beabaroa as a literary artist.

¹. Ibid., pp. 174-75
Though Besbaroa's genius was particularly suited to humorous writings and essays, yet he could rise occasionally to dramatic heights and take romantic flights. His was a facile pen and whatever he touched, he did to produce gold. In the domain of dramas he wielded his pen equally with inspiration and a purpose; and his success here as elsewhere was profound.

Indeed, Besbaroa could understand the potentiality of drama to rouse the people to right senses and enthuse them to nobler action; and in his dedication to Assamese literature, he found drama next to journalism to rouse the people to the desired level of consciousness; and this mostly explains why his first attempt in the first volume of *Jonaki* was a drama called *Litikai*, later on published in bookform in 1901.

In the first drama Besbaroa was an apprentice to the great art; and he did well to wait for long twenty years to allow his penmanship to mature to produce the maturer plays such as *Nomal, Pachani, Chikarpati Nikarpati* in 1913; and now when he found that he had mastered the craft of dramatic writing he set his hands to writing of serious plays and produced three of them - *Jaymati Kowari, Chakradhvajsimha, and Belimar* in 1915.  

2. Ibid., p. 303
In his four farces and three chronicle plays, Laksminath was under composite influences of the English Dramatists of the Elizabethan period and the Bengali dramatists of his own day, foremost amongst the either categories were Shakespeare and Dwijendralal.

Soon, however, he overthrew the outside influences and began to experiment with a novel technique of writing small plays concentrating on a simple incident in which different characters are involved and allowed to express themselves. These are distinct from farces and may be called the forerunner of modern Assamese One Act plays. Laksminath himself called them drawing room plays. All these plays were published in Bahi which he edited; and one of them was published in book form named Gadadhar Raja in 1918.

Research into various aspects of Assamese literature is just in the beginning and no serious study has yet been made of the drawing room plays of Bezbaroa, and it is believed that Bezbaroa is bound to be reckoned as the path finder of the modern Assamese One Act Play.

Types of Bezbaroa's Dramas:

The dramas of Bezbaroa fall into three distinct groups: (I) Farces: Litikai, Nomal, Pachani and Chikarpati Nikarpati; (II) Chronicle Plays: Jaymati Kumari, Chakradhvaja-simha and Belimer; (III) Funny Plays: Gadadhar Raja and several unpublished plays.
Farces:

Farces were first introduced by Bezbaroa in Assamese literature. It is very difficult to give a satisfactory definition of farce. Discussing at length on the various aspects of farce, Leo Huges in his book *A Century of English Farce* remarks that Dryden who first treated farce fully in English ended in disparaging rather than defining farce. He however finds the definition of farce embodied in Wilkes' 'General View of the Stage' more or less satisfactory and quotes the same which runs as follows: "Farce is founded on chimera and improbability; the events are unnatural, the humour forced, and it is, in the opinion of Dryden, a compound extravagancies, fit only to entertain such people as are judges of neither men nor manners; it appeals entirely to fancy; delights with oddity, and unexpected turns; it has in one thing indeed the same effect as comedy, viz., it produces laughter founded upon reason, excited by the check given to folly, the reproof to ignorance, or the lash to corruption."¹ But the best definition has been given in the Encyclopaedia Britannica in the following words: "Farce is a form of the comic in dramatic art, the object of which is to excite laughter by ridiculous situations and incidents rather than by imitation with intent to ridicule, which is the province of the burlesque, or by delineation of the play of character

¹ Huges, L. *op.cit.*, p. 17
upon character." Considered in the light of the above definition, Litikal, Nomal, Pachani, and Chikarpati Nikarpati are farces intended to produce laughter and fun like comedies but not comedies proper. These have no well knit plots. These are full of incoherent episodes and incidents. Idiosyncrasies are exaggerated. Dialogues provoke laughter.

Chronicle Plays:

Jaymati, Chakradhvajasimha and Belimar are the historical plays of Bezbaroa; and in the last of the trilogy, i.e., in the preface to Belimar, he has given his own views of an historical play. "The duty of an historical play is to reflect the historical past by reanimating the dead personalities and their deeds without materially altering the facts, incidents and characters." In these plays, therefore, Bezbaroa drew from historical sources. As contended by him in the said preface, he portrayed the characters of heroes and heroines as he found them represented in history. He never tried to embellish the historical figures so as to make them ideal heroes and heroines, and as such there is no deviation from historical play in the case of Bezbaroa. He, however, advocated introduction of imaginary characters only as support

1. Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edn. s.v., farce
2. Translated from the Preface to Belimar, B.G. vol. II, p. 1175
and embellishment of the historical personages. It was also his view that the dramatist should be conscious of the fact that at the characters, historical or imaginary, belong to a particular age of history and should be judged accordingly.¹

The above view of Bezbaroa is the outcome of his close study of the historical plays of Shakespeare to which it conforms; and although he considered drama to be a poetic expression, he did not follow the same method and composed his dramas in prose, but in respect of other viewpoints he was a close adherent of Shakespearean model. Indeed, the historical milieu is conjured up in the trilogy covering three epochs of the history of Assam.

Funny Plays:

Besides writing the four farces and the chronicle plays, Bezbaroa set his hand to composing some small plays, which himself levelled as "drawing-room plays". All these plays were published in the Bahl which he edited; and of the plays Gadadhar Raja has been published in 1966 in book form; and the unpublished drawing room plays include, not published in book form, Bade Motora, Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La, and Mangala. All these plays are small comic plays. Hamlet, another unpublished play, is an attempted translation from the Shakespearean

¹. Ibid., B.G. vol. II, p. 1176
original.

Plot Construction:

Farces:

(a) Litikai: Litikai is full of incongruities and trivial incidents. There is much of horseplay in this drama. Seven brothers fight against mosquitoes with staves in hand and take a sundried hard earth to be a big tank of water and swim across it. Obviously they are fools, and none can mistake them to be so when each of them counting themselves in turn finds the number six invariably since the fool engaged in counting omits himself. However, they are lucky to meet an intelligent Brahmin who at once solves the difficult numerical problem for them. The fools then follow the Brahmin to his house to work for him, and here we find them creating one trouble after another by making a mess of errands. The old mother of the master becomes disgusted with their foolishness; and it so happens that one day the fools ask her where to keep large bundles of harvested paddy, to which the infuriated woman replies that these be kept on her head. Without grasping the meaning of her words, they obey her literally and thereby kill her. The tragedy is too much for the Brahmin to bear; he becomes desperate in anger, and in a gruesome plot takes the life of six. To complete the plan of revenge he sends the surviving one to his brother-in-law's house with a letter
instructing that the person carrying it is to be killed. But
the last lesson in the master's house has made Titai more
conscious and careful, and suspecting a foul play reads the
letter and learns the horrible end he is going to meet as his
destination. To protect himself from the disaster he replaces
the death warrant with a marriage proposal with the master's
sister-in-law. The plan materialises and the play ends in
anti-climax. Litikai is a farce. It is a short play with
weak plot and indifferent characterisation.

(b) Nomal: An illiterate and ignorant man in his late
life is blessed with a son after he has lost as many as five
sons earlier. As entreated by his anxious wife, Nahar-
Phutuka goes to sattra to obtain blessings as well as a name
for the new-born baby. For a commoner like Nahar-Phutuka, the
entry to the sattra proved to be a formidable task.
Bihangabilahdeva, the pontiff of Athiyabari, is ante-diluvian,
full of pomp and pelf. Through him Besbaroa satires the
exploitation of disciples and subjugation of lower castes by
higher castes. However, Nahar Phutuka could overcome the odds,
meets the Sattradhikar, and gets both the blessings and a name
for his son. But coming out of the sattra, Nahar Phutuka
forgets the real name given to his son and remembers only a
distorted portion of it; and "Nomal" becomes "Nemal" in his
lips. As he moves on chanting "Nemal" which means "do not
sail" he encounters a merchant who is about to sail. The
latter takes it to be an open insult and beats up Nahar-Phutuka.
Ill treated so, he again moves on repeating loudly "nohabar
hol ou* (meaning "something unusual has happened"). The cry wounds the pride of the feudal Ahom lord who happens to be crossing the way in a palanquin. Nahar-Phutuka is again beaten up. Obviously, this is a satire on the false sense of vanity of the aristocrats. The miserable wretch now cries out in agony that the one is more oppressive than the other which utterance offends two diseased travellers, and they also misbehave with Nahar-Phutuka. Exhausted thus both physically and mentally, Nahar-Phutuka forgets the name completely and even the distorted portion of it went out of his memory when he reaches his home. When his wife is about to open his bag, the chance association of "Nemul" with his wife's act of opening the bag ('Nemul' means not to open) brings back to his mind the name given to his son. In this drama Bezbaroa lashes satire on the prevailing system of sattras depriving the people of lower castes of the privilege of religious rights. Moreover, the pontiff's love of Bengali drama is brought up to ridicule. Nomul is thus a drama with a light plot with absurdities and incongruities, while the satire in Sattra scene is full of physical sensationalism and course laughter.¹

(c) Pachani: There is abundance of hilarity and fun in Pachani as well as contrast of ideas. Satire is also

¹ Bhattacharyya, B.K.: Humour and Satire in Assamese Literature, p. 195
Interwined with fun. Divided into five scenes, Pachani is in a better shape than the earlier two farces, and the plot is neither weak nor light. The hero of the play is Darmai Pachani, a childless man in the habit of sharing his meals with guests. The habit has developed into a mania. His wife does not like his idea and wants to cure him of his mania.

One day while Pachani is busy in preparing a "dheki-thora" (grinding rod) two guests arrive. Leaving them in the care of his wife he goes for shopping. Now, the wife, who is also seized with the equally strong mania to drive out the guests, shows them the 'dheki-thora' and tells them that her husband will give them a good threshing with it. Soon the two guests run away. When Pachani returns home, the sly wife tells him that the guests have left because she has refused to hand over the 'dheki-thora' to them as asked for. At this, Pachani takes the 'dheki-thora' in his hand and runs after the guests with the intention of handing it over to them. At the sight of the dreaded object the guests become terrified and run away for life.

But Pachani is not cured of his mania. When he brings another guest in the next scene, and goes for shopping as before, the wife starts basting a cub of cat in front of the guest. Asked by the guest, she replies that they would feed him with the meat of the cat since they could not procure anything better for him. At this the guest takes exception to their misbehaviour and goes away.
The contrasting manias of the husband and wife which are the sources of so much of fun and laughter spring from two contrasting ideas. According to Pachani, one who takes food without sharing it with a guest comits the gravest sin.¹ But his wife never considers it to be a virtue and she is ready to go to hell without that.² But this juxtaposition to low comedy was never treated and developed seriously and the play remains predominantly farcical.³

(d) Chikarpati Nikarpati: This play consists of One Act only with fourteen scenes. Most of the scenes are superimposed on the main plot which consists of few scenes only. There is hardly any development of the main plot which centres round the extraordinary skill of a thief named Chikarpati. His thieving genius is appreciated by the king who throws Chikarpati a challenge to steal his ring from his finger. Chikarpati wins the challenge and the king sends him an errand to find out a groom for his daughter. Performing various feats of thefts in another kingdom, at last he is successful in capturing a prince and presenting him before the king. This bridegroom, who becomes the king designate, at last declares that he will make Chikarpati his minister. But the

2. Ibid., p. 1037
drama is loose in structure and is full of improbables and incongruities. It is really funny that a brass pot stealer is acclaimed as the arch thief; and an arch thief of this calibre is engaged to find out the bridegroom for the king's marriageable daughter and at last he is selected as a minister. Such things happen only in story, not in real life. To this absurdity and incongruity is added the anachronism when modern trial scenes are added to an atmosphere of folk lore.

Drawing room plays:

Gadadhar Raja: Gadadhar Raja, is a playlet of one scene only; and in the few pages of the play we notice the marks of maturity of Besbaroa's comic art. This small play has been acclaimed as the first One Act play in Assamese literature. The scene of the play is set at a time of Ahom history when Prince Gadapani, the real heir to the throne, is hiding in disguise for fear of cruel treatment in the hands of the usurper Lara Raja. Two sisters, Kamala and Vimala and their father were eager to do something for the prince. The father goes out to meet him. Vimala becomes impatient while Kamala consoles her saying that since the prince is reported to be living in disguise, he may even come to their house.

1. Ibid., p. 193
2. Shah, R. 'Besbaroar Natakavali' in Lakshminath Besbaroa, ed. C.P. Saikia, p. 205
Soon a young man named Gendhela reaches their house with a letter from their father. The sisters, over anxious for the safety and security of the prince, mistake him for the prince in disguise and do their best to make him comfortable in the most sophisticated way. The ignorant and illiterate young man becomes puzzled and he was at his wits end as to what to do. Suddenly he finds the letter from the father and delivers it to the sisters. The sisters allow him to go only when convinced thus that the young man is not the prince in disguise. The plot is well constructed; but fun and laughter are sought to be created out of crude situations. The uncouth villager creates a scene in gulping curd and plastering his black moustache with white curd developed such a situation. Another similar situation of crudity is covering the villager with 'edi ohadar' so as to protect the prince from the chasing mob. The villager is driven to near suffocation.

 Chronicle plays:

**Jaymati:** Appeared in 1915, *Jaymati* is built up on the faithfulness and self-sacrifice of Jaymati, the Ahom princes who defies even death only to protect her husband Gadapani. It is based on historical events as described in *Assam Buranji*.  

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With the principal characters, Bezbaroa has also successfully introduces some imaginary character. During the second half of seventeenth century, Shulikpha ascended the Ahom throne, and because of his tender age he became known as Lora Raja (Boy King). Those were the days of political turmoil and intrigues in Assam. Instigated by Burhagohain, the Prime Minister, Lora Raja started maiming and killing all potential claimants to the throne. Such cruel action was prompted by the Ahom tradition that a crippled prince has no claim to the throne. Fearing that Lora Raja would maim him, Godapani managed to escape with the advice of his wife Jayamat. Not finding Godapani, the Lora Raja became angry and arrested Jayamat, and tortured her for sixteen days to elicit information from her about her husband, but all in vain. Jayamat died a tragic death; her selfless sacrifice roused public support which helped Godapani to overthrow the oppressive regime. The Godapani-Dalimi episode which developed during the period of Godapani's hiding at Nagaperth, is an imaginary but lovely creation of Bezbaroa, which has coloured the plot immensely.

Chakradhvajasimha: Chakradhvajasimha, which followed Jayamat is based on a glorious chapter of Ahom rule. The sources of the plot are the articles published in Usha, a monthly journal edited by Hemchandra Goswami and from Asam

Buranji. The same sources are also exploited by Padmanath Gohain Baroa, a contemporary of Bezbaroa, in his drama Lachit Barphukan. Chakradhvajasimha threw to the winds the terms of the treaty between his predecessor Jayadhvajasimha and the Mughals after he ascended the throne. An army of liberation under the able generalship of Lachit Barphukan was built up to shelve off the Mughal tutelage. The Mughal outposts were ransacked and the Mughal soldiers were defeated at Bahbari and Kajalimukh outposts. After this the second phase of war begins when the Emperor Aurangzeb sends as retaliation a vast army under Raw Singh of Amber. A great battle ensured between the Mughals and the Ahoms; and the Ahoms became finally victorious inflicting a crushing defeat on the Mughals in the battle of Saralghat. This glorious event has been recorded in history. The plot of Chakradhvajasimha is weak with loose ends; only few scenes are depiction of the main plot, while rest is loosely connected with it, two of them being dominated by imaginary character interwoven with the main plot.

1. Barua, B.K. : Modern Assamese Literature, p. 55 f
2. Gohain Baroa, P. : Assam Buraonji, p. 53; The treaty was signed on January 9, 1663 between Jayadhvajasimha and Mirzumla.
3. (i) E. A. Gait : A History of Assam, pp. 153-155
   (ii) Bhuyan, S.K. : Assam Buraonji, pp. 91-99
   (iii) Gohain Baroa, P. : Assam Buraonji, pp. 54-56
4. Barua, B.K. : Modern Assamese Literature, p. 56
Belmar: The main plot is based on the loss of sovereignty of Assam from 1818-1826 leading to the advent of the British. The main historical incidents are found in details in *A History of Assam*. The play, however, devotes more time to the Prime Minister on the one hand, and Badanchandra on the other. Satran is banished, whereas Badan escapes, but returns with a vast Burmese army to invade Assam. Meanwhile Purnananda dies and Badanchandra becomes the chief counsellor of the king. Soon Badanchandra is assassinated; and Ruchinath overthrows Chandrakanta and places Purenarinsima to the throne. The dethroned Chandrakanta gets back his throne with the help of the Burmese. But when the ungrateful Chandrakanta plans to frustrate any further Burmese invasion, the enraged Burmese king invades Assam for the third time. Finding himself in tight corner, Chandrakanta seeks British protection and help. The plot spread over eight years in too incompact and diffused a manner. It is quite understandable that the intention of the dramatist is to depict the national tragedy rather than to create a one man tragedy.

2. Dutt, Kessy Narayan : 'The national struggle for freedom and Assam's contribution to it' in *Pragjyotisha*, ed. M. Neog, p. 46
Unpublished plays:

**Barematera**: It is a small comic play of three Acts with common theme of mistaken identity. An Assamese young man Gunanath went to Calcutta and introduced himself at the house of an affluent Assamese Engineer-businessman Naranath as his nephew. Meanwhile, Naranath's real nephew Siddinath arrived and the confusion was created. There being no dearth of qualities in Gunanath, as the very name indicates, the confession of guilt was immediate; and more quick was his absolvence. The drama ends in mirth and laughter.

**Ha-Ja-Ba-Re-La**: This drama, having for its central theme the conflict between the love of literature and worldly worries, has interesting characters. The reputed Headmaster Golap Chandra Bora was a man of letters as well. His wife Rukhmini was educated and was the Secretary of Women's Association. This couple is contrasted from that of Golap's friend Sitaram and his educated wife Lalita. Rukhmini is humorously portrayed as she lacks in inner promptings for social works, but finds absorbing engagement in tracing out the lost dog of Lalita.

2. Ibid., p. 1081
It is an incomplete drama depicting interference from Mongala in hours of relaxation by tired kings given to boisterous songs.

Besbaroa attempted at translating the Shakespearean tragedy Hamlet, but the work remained incomplete and the translated version introduced the entry of the Ghost in the first Act. Though incomplete, the translation shows the dramatic genius of the master artist Besbaroa.

Characterisation:

In farces there is little scope for characterisation. Generally speaking farces are characterised by absorbing episodes, exaggerated idiosyncrasies of dramatic persons, and laughter-provoking dialogue. In fact, it is the dynamism of the incidents and episodes that makes the characters move and express themselves; and the characters in farces hardly dominate or control situations, rather they are controlled by the former. An atmosphere of fun, hilarity and mirth is created in farces through laughter-provoking absurdities.

2. Ibid., p. 1086
3. Das, S.C. : Sahitya-sandarsan, p. 113
In the dramas of Bezbaroa we find that the appearance, dialogues, dress and behaviour of the characters have been presented in equally humorous conformity with the incidents. In Litikai, we are made to laugh equally by the absurd thoughts and dialogues of the seven brothers as well by their foolish activities in the house of Bapuram. Likewise, in Pachani the diametrically opposite characters of Pachani and his wife has created mirth-provoking situations. The husband's weakness for entertainment of guests is humorously contrasted with the wife's aversion to them. Indeed, Bezbaroa has upheld the Assamese sense of hospitality through Pachani. Moreover Bezbaroa has also exploited the human weakness for enjoying the scenes of husband-wife quarrels.

In Momal, Naharputuka represents the simple rustic Assamese folk; and through this drama Bezbaroa has brought to focus the corruption and deterioration of Sattras and, moreover, he has brought to ridicule the Sattradhikar's love of Bengali dramas. These characters are more types than individuals; this remark is truer when we come to discuss the characters of Chikarpati Nikarpati which is mainly a situation-dominated drama in which the characters taken from the folklore just appear to play the roles assigned to them by the dramatist.

3. Ibid; vol. II, pp. 1044-1047
From the above discussion, it is evident that the farces of Besbaroa are only experimental in nature. But, those farces being initial attempts in Assamese literature in the realm of drama, a great historical value has centred round them. Moreover, we must also remember that the main values of literature is to be found in the after effects upon the mind; and it is here, i.e., in opening up a window for the succeeding generation of literatures that the greatness of Besbaroa as literary artist lies which must be acknowledged by all lovers of Assamese literature. The two sisters of Gadadhar Raja are presented to us in their simple maidenhood preoccupied for the moment in family titbits and anxiety for the fugitive prince and their humorous hospitality for the mistaken person.

Regarding Besbaroa's characterisation in his farces, we may conclude that Besbaroa has failed to depict lovely characters of which there is much scope in farces. When we compare him in this regard to his contemporary Padmanath Gohainbaroa we find that the characters of the farces of the latter were lovely and real. Indeed, we laugh at the characters as well as with them and not with situations in the farces of Gohainbaroa; and these characters are even today capable of attracting the readers and drawing sympathy towards them.

1. Wimsatt, William K Jr. Brooks Clean etc.: Literary Criticism, p. 617
Historical Plays:

The principal historical figures of Bezbaroa's chronicle plays do not show any development of character but his minor characters are more or less well portrayed. In Chakradhvajasisma, various historical personalities crowd around the hero king Chakradhvajasisma. The king's valour and firmness of character have been widely acclaimed by Gait and Gohainbaroa. Of course, there are occasions when Chakradhvajasisma has been portrayed in true colours of a hero. Indeed, he was mainly instrumental in winning the glory for Assam in the battle of Saraighat. But Bezbaroa fails to portray him as the motive force behind in driving out the Mughals which he really was. The character of Lachit appears to be more vividly portrayed with his daredevil nature, extraordinary military genius, greatness as naval commander, a loving father and responsible husband. The characters of Aurangzeb, Jaysingh, Ramsingh, Nasid Khan, Nasarat Khan are all minor characters introduced in the drama just to play the assigned roles; and among these, Ramsingh

   (b) Gohainbaroa, P. : Assam Buranji, p. 54
3. Ibid., p. 1113
4. Ibid., pp. 1104, 1108
deserves special mention for his appreciation of the national qualities of the Assamese.

Jaymati has been eulogised as a successful dramatic creation of Bezbaroa. It has the qualities of a tragedy. The incidents connected with Jaymati are found in the various historical writings. Following the historical details, Bezbaroa has aptly portrayed the selfless sacrifice, purity of character, self respect and patriotism of Jaymati. The character of Godapani pales into insignificance before the extraordinary greatness of Jaymati. We see him in three phases before quitting home, at Nagaparbat, and being enamoured of Dalimi. The news of the misfortune suffered by his beloved wife at the hand of royal executioners, he rises to his true self. All other minor characters are underdeveloped except that of Dalimi, referring to which Dr. Neog has remarked that the character of Dalimi is an idealistic creation of Bezbaroa representing the simplicity and beauty of the Naga Hills, while Ratnakanta Barkakati has described

1. Neog, D.: *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha*, p. 303
2. (a) Gohainbaroa, P.: *Asamor Buranji*, pp. 118-120
   (b) Bhuyan, S.K.: *Asom Buranji*, p. 40
4. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 1159-40, 1151
5. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 1170, 1173-74
her as an ideo-realistic creation of Bezbaroa. She rejects maturity if it brings sorrows in its trace. The Godapani-Dalimi episode, an imaginative creation of Bezbaroa, not found in history, has imported an added charm of the drama Jaymati.

Belimer depicts the decadence of Ahom rule spreading over a gloriously long period. The jealousy and intrigues of the nobles, such as Purnananda, Badanchandra, Satram, Chandrakanta Simha, and Rucinath besides others, brought about the national tragedy of Assam. The drama is a drama of national tragedy; and many heroes contributed to the national disaster; and as such the dramatist has little scope to develop the characters fully. The principal character Chandrakanta Simha is weak, selfish and jealous. The Prime Minister Purnananda is a great diplomat and sound politician; Badanchandra of Guwahati plans to throw him out from power. Bezbaroa has successfully portrayed the pride, meanness and arrogance of Badanchandra who goes to Calcutta to invite the Burmese to invade Assam. If Badan is a national shame, Rajmoo (Rajmata) shows that Assamese woman can rise to the occasion and take initiative to protect the nation from desaster. Pijau is one of the best creations of Bezbaroa,

2. Ibid., vol. II, pp.1180-90
3. Ibid., vol. II, pp. 1184-86
4. Ibid., vol. II, p. 1208
she is devoted to her father Badan, but she gets mental shock at the shameful betrayal of her father. Here is a lovely character adapting to changing and reacting with the movements of incidents in the drama. Bezbaroa has been successful in revealing the inherent qualities of pride and atrocity of the Burmese General Mingimaha through a small scene.¹

Influence of Shakespeare:

There is a profound influence of Shakespeare in the dramas of Bezbaroa, especially in his historical plays where he seems to be guided by an idealism in his character creation, and this idealism bears affinity to Shakespearean ideals. Regarding Shakespearean characterisation William Henry Hudson has said, "In the vitality of his characterisation in particular he is unparalleled; no one else has created so many men and women whom we accept and treat, not as a figments of a poet's brain, but as completely and absolutely alive."² In his historical plays Bezbaroa has tried to create such lovely characters.

In his farces Bezbaroa appears to be more influenced by Johnson in portraying the indiosyncracies of characters. Johnson seizes upon master passions, or humour as he called it,

¹ Bezbaroa Granthavali, vol. II, p. 1217
² Hudson, W.H. : An Outline History of English Literature, p. 64
and made a whole character out of it, with the result that his men and women are not complex individuals but rather types, while reverting to the old morality method he often levelled them with names which at once indicated their special humours.\(^{1}\) Like Johnson Besbaroa also created types in his farces although he did not go to the extreme by manifesting his types into humours.

Of course, Besbaroa himself admits the influence of Shakespeare on him in his autobiography Mor Jivan Sowaran.\(^{2}\) He was introduced to Shakespeare through the reading of dramas like Hamlet, King John, Henry the Eighth, Mid Summer's Night's Dream as text books in his college. He was profoundly influenced by these Shakespearean plays and dreamt of enriching Assamese literature with such immortal works. The result was his attempts at Hemohendra and Dinar Sapon designed after Hamlet and Mid Summer's Night's Dream. But these attempts at translation remained incomplete.

However, Shakespeare continued to influence Besbaroa in the composition of his dramas. He himself acknowledged his indebtedness to Shakespeare in the introduction of Chakradhvajasisma. Indeed, the Shakespearean influence is unmistakably found in the characters of Gajapuriya and Priyaram. Not only in characterisation but also in adoption

\(^{1}\) Ibid., p. 16  
\(^{2}\) Besbaroa, L.N. : Mor Jivan Sowaran, p. 113
of dramatic technique Bezbaroa seems to have followed Shakespeare. "In the development of plot and arrangement of scenes, the writer has followed the pattern of Shakespeare by interposition of comic and rustic scenes either immediately before or after highly-strung tragic scenes."¹ The character of Bhumuk Bahuwa of Belimer is strongly reminiscent of Shakespeare.²

Bezbaroa seems to have been influenced by Shakespeare in the delineation of his female characters such as Pijau Aideu, Gajpuriyani, and other female characters which bear striking resemblance to the wide Shakespearean variety, especially in their angelic beauty, simplicity, charm and loveliness.

The comic characters of Bezbaroa are modelled on Shakespeare's Prince Hall, Falstaff and their associates of the Eastcheap Tavern.³ Lachit's son Priyarem visits Gajpuriya's opium eating den frequented by the boisterous Takaru, Tokora, Japara and Sindhiram who resemble Peto, Poins, Bardolph and Gadshill. Mrs. Gajpuriya bears likeness to Mistress Quickly. It needs be pointed out here that the character of Falstaff is inimitable and Bezbaroa only makes an apparent imitation of English wit through Gajpuriya.⁴

³. Hazarika, Atulchandra : Asomer Natya Jagatat Bezbaroa, p. 179 f
Influence of Bengali Dramatists:

The formative period of the literary artist Besbaroa was spent at Calcutta where he picked intimate connections with some Bengali literary artists. He also gathered intimate knowledge of Bengali stage through his close association with the Tagore family. All these have been acknowledged by Besbaroa in his autobiography Mor Jivan Sowaran.¹

When Besbaroa took to writing Assamese dramas, there was no Assamese stage. However, Jatras, 'Bhawanas' and 'Namkirtans' were performed at Naughars. Of course, temporary Bengali stages grew up in Assam at the initiative of the Bengali settlers and in those stages Calcutta-based opera parties were invited to show their plays. These Bengali theatres seemed to have profoundly influenced the Assamese dramas.²

There was predominance of dance and song in Bengali dramas; and Lakshminath was probably influenced by these elements of dramatic entertainments, and he too introduced music and dance in his dramas.³ He himself was conscious of the influence of Bengali drama in Assam and ridiculed it through the Satradhikar portrayed in Nonal who gets self

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¹ Mor Jivan Sowaran, p. 142 f
³ Besbaroa Granthesvāli, vol. II, p. 1125
satisfaction in composing Bengali dramas. However, he himself was not outside the influence, and made most of music and dance in Belimar.

Folklore Elements:

The farces of Besbaroa, namely, Litikai, Nomal, Pachani and Chikarpati Nikarpati are based on folklore. The dramatist has used the folklore as subject matter of his farces. In Litikai, the plot is taken from the folklore regarding a Brahmin and his foolish servants. There are two different versions of the same story in Assamese and Bengali. In the Bengali story there is only one servant, while in the Assamese version the number of servants is four. But Besbaroa has made the number seven. Nomal is based on the folk story that a simple Gosai finds out a name for his son, forgets the name and distorts it in the process and suffers as a consequence. Both the stories which serve as the theme for Pachani is that a devotee develops the habits of entertaining guests thinking that the guest who comes at night is the very Lord himself while his wife one day drives out the guest in disgust with 'dheki thora'. Besbaroa, however, adds that God

1. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 1047
2. Shah, R. J 'Besbaroar Natakavali' in Lakshminath Besbaroa, p. 203
3. Ibid., p. 203
is also present in animals.¹ All the characters of Chikarpati Nikarpati as well as the incident of theft itself, are also based on folk-lore.²

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1. Ibid., p. 204
2. Ibid., pp. 204-5