



# Lakshminath Bezbarua and his Contributions to Assamese Drama

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## Abstract

Lakshminath Bezbarua (1864 to 1938) was a significant figure in modern Assamese literature. He was a poet, novelist, short story writer, biographer and dramatist during the Jonaki Era, a period of romanticism in Assamese literature. He contributed to the store house of Assamese literature with his pioneering works in fields of fictions, poems, dramas, short story, scholarly articles, folktale collections and other literary contributions. Bezbarua used his writings to address the issues of his time, often using satire to highlight social problems and advocate for positive change. Bezbaruah's pioneering efforts have significantly enriched the treasury of Assamese literature, making him a central and revered figure in the literary journey of Assam.

Keywords: Assamese, literature, jonaki, drama, short story.

## Introduction:

Lakshminath Bezbaruah was a prominent figure in modern Assamese literature. He was poet, novelist and playwright of modern Assamese literature. He was one of the literary stalwarts of the Jonaki Era, the age of romanticism in Assamese literature. He is regarded as the pioneering figure of the journey of modern literature and therefore, he is honoured the title of Sahityarathi –the charioteer of literature. His contributions to Assamese literature encompass a wide range of genres, including fiction, poetry, drama, scholarly articles, folktales, and various other literary works. Through his literary output, Bezbarua breathed new life into the stagnating Assamese literary scene. His writings were not just entertaining but also carried a message for positive change in society. His literature resonated with the deeper aspirations of the people in Assam. Bezbaruah's talent for satire earned him a unique title, "Roxoraj," which translates to "The King of Humor" in Assamese literature. He wrote satirical pieces under the pseudonym "Kripabar Baruah," portraying a lead character with this persona. He also composed state anthem of Assam *O Mur Apunar Dex*.

Lakshminath Bezbarua was born on the night of Lakshmi Purnima, October 14, 1864, while his family's boat was anchored on a sandbank in the Brahmaputra River at Ahatguri near Nagaon. His father, Dinanath Bezbarua, held a senior position in the British government and was relocating to Barpeta due to an official transfer.

Bezbarua spent his childhood in different places of Assam. His father brought his family with him from Barpeta to Tezpur. From Tezpur they shifted to North Lakhimpur. In between the family stayed for a brief while at Guwahati and finally they settled in Sibsagar.

Bezbarua began his formal education at Sibsagar Govt. High School. He pursued his F.A. at City College and later completed his B.A. at the General Assembly's Institution in Calcutta. Subsequently, he obtained his M.A. and B.L. degrees from the University of Calcutta. Bezbarua married Pragyasundari Devi, who happened to be a niece of the renowned poet Rabindranath Tagore. In 1938, Lakshminath Bezbarua breathed his last in Dibrugarh, Assam.

### Discussion:

Laxminath Bezbarua made a significant impact by revitalizing Assamese literature, which had been somewhat stagnant at the time. He achieved this through his essays, plays, stories, poems, and satirical works. He wrote 8 plays, 4 farces, 3 historical works and 1 one-act drama. He also penned three biographies and two autobiographies. In addition, he contributed to children's literature and enriched Assamese culture by collecting and adding new folk tales to the collection, called "Xadhukotha."

Bezbarua was not just a writer but also a sensitive artist who keenly observed and responded to the social and cultural context of his time. He used his creative talents to address and comment on the issues of his society. His writings were often laced with humour and satire, which he skillfully employed to bring about positive changes and reforms. Through his literary works, Bezbarua not only entertained but also reflected the deeper thoughts, desires, and aspirations of the people of Assam. His writings were a mirror of the collective consciousness and hopes of his community, making him a celebrated pioneer in Assamese literature.

Lakshminath Bezbarua was the pioneer short story writer in Assam. His short stories covered the different features from the Assamese society but with humorous sentiment. In fact, he is still regarded as unrivalled in the field of humorous and satirical literature, which earned him the title *Rasaraj*. Bezbarua's development of the great satiric character Kripabar Barbarua is one of his most notable accomplishments. This unique character stands as a testament to Bezbarua's creative prowess. Though he was not a poetry enthusiast, produced captivating lyrics that brought revolution to Assamese poetry. His autobiography *Mur Xibon Suwaron* is a vital historical document and a model for future works.

Bezbarua made a notable contribution to Assamese drama when original plays were scarce. His literary journey began with a farcical play, "Litikai," published in Jonaki's first edition in the year 1890. This play is based on Assamese folk-tale. The play revolves around seven brothers who, after their parents' death, try to eliminate a mosquito that bit the eldest brother. Their mosquito-hunting expedition in a jungle leads to unintended harm to each other. They later mistake a field of white sand for a water pool and swim across it, mistakenly counting themselves short. A Brahman helps them count correctly and, in gratitude, they agree to serve him. However, their actions bring more trouble than help. The Brahman's frustration mounts, and he plots revenge, leading to the demise of six brothers. His plan for the last surviving brother fails as the servant cleverly marries the Brahman's sister-in-law and returns with his new wife.

Following "Litikai," Bezbarua abstained from playwriting for a span of 24 years. In 1913, he published three farcical plays: "Nomal," "Pachani," and "Chikarpati Nikarpati," all inspired by folk tales. These plays shared similarities - they lacked a well-defined plot, featured absurd incidents and exaggerated characters, and were filled with humor. While primarily aimed at providing entertainment, Bezbarua's reformist spirit subtly shone through. Despite his light-hearted approach, he remained committed to addressing societal issues, striving for the overall development of the Assamese people through his works.

In 1915, Bezbarua wrote three historical plays based on the Ahom rule: "Jaymati Kuwari," "Chakradhvaja Simha," and "Belimar." "Jaymati Kuwari" narrates the tragic tale of Princess Jaymati, who was tortured to reveal her husband's whereabouts, leading to her death. "Chakradhvaja Singha" depicts the Ahom-Mughal conflict during King Chakradhvaja Singha's reign, culminating in the Ahom victory at the Battle of Saraighat. "Belimar" focuses on Burmese invasions that eventually led to British occupation and Assam's loss of independence.

Bezbaau remained faithful to historical facts in the main plot and principal characters of all three plays. However, he exercised creative freedom in sub-plots, episodes, and the portrayal of minor characters. Notably, the character Dalimi in "Jaymati Kuwari" exemplifies Bezbaroa's artistic prowess. Dalimi, a Naga girl, is depicted as a child of nature, innocent and untouched by the harsh realities of human society.

Following his three historical plays, Bezbarua penned another farcical play, "Gadadhar Raja," published in 1918. Unlike his previous farces, this play featured a single scene and lacked incoherent incidents or situations.

Critics have hailed the play as a precursor to modern one-act plays. Bezbaroa himself referred to it as a "drawing-room play." His contribution greatly influenced the development of Assamese drama, especially during a time when modern Assamese drama was in its early stages. While his plays are appreciated as literary works, they are seldom performed on stage, mainly due to their extended length and the numerous characters in his three historical plays.

#### Conclusion:

Lakshminath Bezbarua's contributions to Assamese literature are immense and enduring. His keen observations of society, combined with his remarkable storytelling abilities, revitalized Assamese literature during a critical period. Through his diverse works, from essays to plays and satires, Bezbarua not only entertained but also addressed pressing social issues. His influence extended beyond literature, as he played a pivotal role in shaping modern Assamese drama. While his plays may not often grace the stage today, they remain invaluable literary pieces, reflecting the rich cultural tapestry of Assam. Bezbarua's legacy as a pioneer of Assamese literature stands as a testament to his enduring impact on the literary landscape.

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