

DIMENSIONS OF THE MOBILE THEATRE OF ASSAM

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SANGEETA KAKOTY
Associate Professor
Arya Vidyapeeth College, Guwahati

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The beauty of the Assamese culture has been the saga of the integration and assimilation of different races and tribes inhabiting here. As Sharma (2014) writes, fresh elements, both indigenous and non-indigenous, have been constantly incorporated into the folds of Assamese society making it a composite culture. It is a culture shaped by the folk traditions which retain their exclusivity even when influenced by elite sanskritized forms in the process of assimilation. The Vaishnava era witnessed development in language, literature and the performing arts (song, dance, drama and theatre) that invigorated Assamese culture with a new life and vitality (pp.xxxvii-xxviii). Even prior to that, from ancient times Performing Arts have been a part of not only festivals but also the daily life of people in Assam. Folk songs, dance and drama that has been passed on from generation to generation stands proof of this. It is said that to understand a particular community one has to look into its folk traditions and Performing Arts.

Goswami writes (Rajbangshi:1995), *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankardeva's *Ankiya Nat* was the high watermark in the cultural history of Assam. We do not find concrete evidence of drama creation in Assam prior to this (p.28).

Neog (1982) writes, the history of Assamese drama is very long and old indeed older surely than the drama of any Indian modern language by at least a century. The first Assamese drama is certainly *Cihna yatra* (pageant on painted scenes) (p.10)

Goswami writes (2007), prior to Sankardeva there was no full-fledged drama in Assamese. He is, therefore, considered to be the father of Assamese drama and stage (p.68).

With the passage of time declined the Six hundred year old Ahom dynasty and began the British administration in Assam. The cultural arena also suffered a dark phase as the popularity of *Ankiya Nat* gradually began to lessen. At this point of time, the Bengali *jatra* that entered Assam was like a breath of fresh air that invigorated the cultural arena of Assam. It was with the coming in of the British rule in Assam, that paved the path for *jatra* to spread its influence here. With the British came a flow of people from different parts of India, particularly Bengal. The reason behind this was the educated Bengalis as helpers of the British understood the administrative work of the rulers. Moreover, at this very point in time the British started the Tea industry here and required people who had the knowledge of English. It was not feasible to recruit each employee from England and so, the British preferred the English educated Bengalis.

Talukdar (2003) writes, naturally, these Bengali's who came to work here brought with them their own culture. During the various festivals like *Durga puja* (worshipping of goddess Durga), and *Kali Puja* (worshipping of goddess Kali) and sometimes just for the sake of entertainment, these people invited the *jatra* parties, which at that time was gaining a new lease of life and great popularity in Bengal (p.14). These *jatras* were great entertainers for the labourers working in the tea gardens of Assam. Gradually, these travelling troupes began to attract the curiosity of the local Assamese people and soon they too, like the Bengalis acquired a taste for *jatra*.

Bayan (1994) writes, the first, all Assamese *jatra* party was formed in 1860 by Mr. Tithiram Bayan, an actor, dancer and musician of Barpeta, with the patronage of Mr. Gobindaram Choudhury. This troupe, which was the first Assamese professional drama party, performed upto Sivsagar in Upper Assam (p.81). Bhattacharya (1988) mentions, another name that needs mention here is Mr. Jaydev Sarma, who around the same time formed his *jatra* party (p.107). In due course of time various other *jatra* parties mushroomed. The historic step from *jatra* to *Bhramyaman* (mobile theatre) was taken by actor Mr. Sadananda Lahkar, when, in 1959 he formed Nataraj Opera, a modern *jatra* troupe in Pathsala, in the district of Barpeta, Assam. It performed right upto Golaghat in upper Assam and was particularly popular in the tea gardens. It was from here that Mr. Achyut Lahkar, Sadananda's brother, had the brainstorm of creating Nataraj Theatre with the dual intent of one, providing financial security to the artists and two, modernizing the *jatra*, plus, encourage original Assamese drama. Thus was born the first mobile theatre of Assam, Nataraj Theatre in 1963.

The first thought that naturally comes to mind on reading the title of this research work would probably be, 'what is mobile theatre'? The literal meaning of 'mobile' is something that moves. Guthrie, et al. (2016) writes 'theatre', also spelled 'theater' in dramatic arts, is an art concerned almost exclusively with live performances in which the action is precisely planned to create a coherent and significant sense of drama (p.03).

Elsewhere in India commercial theatre is performed in a permanent hall but in Assam, the mobile theatre is a temporary set up that travels from place to place performing commercially. The equivalent term for mobile theatre in Assamese language is *bhramyaman*. Kalita (2011) informs, this word was coined by none other than one of the architects of modern Assam, Mr. Radha Gobinda Barua, after watching Natraj Theatre in Guwahati in 1963-64 (p.29). In a mobile theatre all the required paraphernalia, right from the temporary stage, screens, galleries, chairs, light and sound equipments, bedding and utensils, to the cooking stove, etc are carried over to where the temporary auditorium and stage is set up. As shared by mobile theatre critic, Mazumdar, the ideas that motivated the creation of mobile theatre were :

- (i) taking drama to the common man,
- (ii) to change and improvise *jatra* which was looked down on by the intelligentsia,
- (iii) to provide the artists (actors, technicians, etc.) a respectable platform where they may find not only acceptance and adulation from the society, but also financial security,

(iv) to free theatre from the city-centric shackles of performing, and

(v) to bring about a trend of commercial theatre in Assam.

(Mazumdar, A. Personal Communication. 10/01/2013)

As put by Richmond (1990) , ‘In India, as in much of the Western world, the main objective of commercial theatre is to make money, no matter what the quality of the product. Indeed, although they may wish to derive their living from theatre, many theatre artists consider it an insult to be called ‘commercial’, and prefer to be labeled ‘professional’(p.391).

Mobile theatre of Assam has travelled a journey covering half a century. It is undoubtedly one of the most popular medium of entertainment in both rural and urban areas of Assam today. Come autumn, and the carnival on wheels sets out weaving its magic enthralling thousands of enthusiastic audience with their annual shows packed with emotion and technology. The function of theatre/drama in our culture goes beyond mere entertainment. Through it, we can find the meaning of our own culture. The study of theatre/drama brings to light its importance as a vehicle of cultural renaissance in the changing society.

1.1 Problem under Study

During the span of its existence, mobile theatre of Assam has gone through a lot and survived. Today, it has an annual turnover of more than 10 crore rupees. In the present times when unemployment is a major issue, the mobile theatre employs hundreds of people, thus sustaining many. Though there has been a lot of talk about recognizing the mobile theatre as an industry

by the Government of Assam, no concrete steps have ever been taken in this direction nor has there been any efforts to introduce any policy in this connection. This aspect with its pros and cons needs to be studied.

Apart from the economic aspect, the mobile theatre, as a means of mass communication, is perhaps unparalleled and can play a vital and constructive social role, provided, utilized correctly. Cinema, drama, theatre, etc., are but reflections of our society and, therefore, this medium can be used in a constructive manner to bring about a social revolution with regard to important issues be it social, political, economic, environmental, etc. The contribution of mobile theatre to the cultural arena of Assam has many a times been underplayed. The so-called intelligentsia has always had a condescending attitude towards mobile theatre. The question naturally arises: why? Mobile theatre is where the common man gets a taste of, and learns to appreciate theatre. This is where he can connect one to one with the artists on the stage unlike cinema, which is larger than life and as such, fantastic. Mobile theatre is a complete package with acting, dance, music, action, emotion, etc., all thrown in with a liberal dose of technical gimmicks. The demand for good artists has always been there and today, when the Assamese film industry is almost nonexistent and its future uncertain, the mobile theatre has extended the vital lifeline to many artists and technicians for sustaining themselves.

1.2 Literature Review

Evaluation of the literature on the research problem is indispensable to have an idea on the problem under study and also to arrive at the right perspective. The mobile theatre is not

a common component in many societies and areas, and therefore, writings on it is not much available. Moreover books and research papers on the mobile theatres of Assam is scanty. In the following pages some literature relevant to the subject of study have been discussed to find a path on how to proceed with this research work.

Preston (2001) has written in *Opera on the Road: Travelling Opera Troupes in the U.S,1825-1860* that Travelling Opera troupes in the United States of America were seen as early as 1820's (p.35).

In the *Cambridge Paperback Guide to Theatre* edited by Sarah Stanton and Martin Banham, (1996) an account of travelling theatre has been given as such –

Tent show: American touring entertainment. These plays or variety shows, dating from 1850's were staged under canvas. By the 19th Century, travelling troupes with repertoires, extensive enough to provide weeks worth of entertainment, had become popular in the summer, when local Opera houses were too poorly ventilated to attract the public. The Chautauqua circuit, offering lecture meetings of an educational or religious nature, performed in brown tents to distinguish them from the white canvas of the show tents, which were 50-60 feet wide. With bare benches or bleachers and a platform stage designed for portability. The earliest repertoires were imitations, often pirated, of the standard domestic fare, primarily melodrama. Later Tent showmen composed their own plays, carpentered to a limited

company and familiar themes of rural life. After world war I, motor vehicles replaced rail transport, and tent shows proliferated . Some 400 shows were travelling through the U.S in 1927. But the catastrophic effects of depression, dust storms, unionisation and competition from local cinema led to closure of hundreds of companies in 1930's. The Federal Theatre Project absorbed many of these entertainers and in the 1950's only some dozen troupes survived (p.371).

In the book *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to present Day*, David Kerr (1995) has written, how in Africa, between 1961 to 1967, a travelling theater movement was organized by two spirited expatriates, Martin Banham and Geofry Axworthy, by the formation of the University College of Ibadan Dramatic Society in Nigeria. Likewise, the Makerere Free Travelling Theater (MFTT) came into being in 1965, in Uganda. The aim was to bring popular drama to the general public. A heavy logistical infrastructure and administrative preparation backed this theatre, like a fleet of Government and British Council Land Rovers, a huge backdrop, that was multi-coloured and splash-dyed, stands, trunks, props and costumes, stands, tape recorder, a transformer and even a mobile girls dressing room. Although there were obvious concessions to a notion of a flexible mobile theatre, there was a feeling that fairly elaborate resources were intended to give rural areas a feeling of polished urban art theatre. This was borne out by the rehearsals which lasted for five weeks, including language laboratory work for those learning or improving an East African language (p.133)

Kerr (1995) further writes, there were some features of the MFTT which prevented it from achieving a totally popular theater campaign amongst East African subaltern classes. The main problem was that the impressively elaborate logistics of the tours like the fleet of Land-rovers, lengthy rehearsals in Kampala, copious costumes and so on, tended to prevent a completely fluid interaction between performers and community. In these conditions the incipient elitism of urban intellectuals entertaining provincial masses is difficult to avoid. Some flavor of it comes out in Cook's observation concerning the need for travelling theater members to provide their own food on grounds 'that ordinary school diet is neither palatable nor adequate to a mixed group of East Africans under considerable physical and nervous strain.' Such special treatment, however understandable, reinforces the feeling that university players are gifted elites generously bestowing their talents on popular audiences. Peter Nazareth makes a similar complaint- 'Once a year theater descends upon the people instead of growing out of them, and disappears'. This criticism is important and influential (p.138).

In the book *Japan's Modern Theatre: A century of Change and Continuity* Brian Powell (2002), says unlike now, small towns very rarely possessed halls suitable for mounting productions planned for urban venues, particularly, as a perception that elaborate scenery was necessary, was pervasive throughout *Kabuki*, *Shimpa* and *Shingeki*. Thus, the *Johokyoku* was determined to promote a type of theater that could be taken anywhere in Japan. Some physical stamina was needed. Politically, the agenda was very different and this time the goal was not to change political opinions but to exert moral persuasion. Such theater had been part of Izuka's plan for National drama and others had developed this element of his ideas. No

form of theatre was excluded and even the entertaining conglomerates had their own touring subsidiaries but there was a feeling in articles contributing to the debate on mobile theatre that it should be anti-commercial and focus on developing new dramaturgical and performance modes to suit its new mission (p.131).

Powell (2002) further adds, both the Imperial Rule Assistance Association and the *Johokyoku* were keen to promote *ido-engeki* (mobile theater) as part of their drive towards the mobilization of all aspects of the nations life, and supported fully, the establishment of an official organization to co-ordinate mobile theater activity. This was the *Nihon ido-engeki Renmei* meeting or Japan League for mobile theater and its founding meeting took place in June 1941.(p.132).

In the book *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920*, James Von Geldern (1993) writes, perhaps pre-revolutionary Russia's finest example of popular theater was Gaideburov's mobile popular theatre located on the outskirts of Petrograd. The mobile popular theatre was the first to perform on the streets of revolutionary Russia in May 1917; Founded in 1903 as the popular theatre by Gaideburov and his wife, Nadezhda Skarskaia, a daughter of the great Komissar zhevsky acting family, it was located in the Ligovsky People's House funded by a wealthy social revolutionary, the Countess Sofia Panina. Its mission was to supplement the thin cultural fare offered by the Petrograd workers. By 1907, the popular theater had merged entirely with its alter ego, the mobile theater, which staffed by the same actors, spent summer months touring the provinces with modern repertory aimed at the local intelligentsia (p.119).

Nicolas Kanellos (2003) writes in *Hispanic Literature of United States :A comprehensive Reference*, the mission of the Puerto Rican Travelling Theatre (PRTT) is to educate and acquaint the general public with important contributions by playwrights from Latino or Hispanic extraction; to present and produce truly bilingual professional theatre; to offer artistic development to emerging and established artists; and in these ways to contribute towards the diversity of American theatre and national culture. The PRTT was founded in 1967 following the highly successful run of the OXCART, Rene Marque classic drama of Puerto Rican migration. Realizing that such a professional production was not accessible to most of the families from economically disadvantaged communities, Ms. Colon Valle, the PRTT'S founder and Artistic Director, made the decision to present the play free of charge in New York City streets with funding secured from the then Mayor, Mr. John Lindsay. This initial summer production helped launch the Spanish bilingual theatre movement and led to the creation of a major cultural legacy for New York and the United States (p.275).

The PRTT's lasting impact is felt in 39 years of continued theatre programming and audience development, including the introduction of new and significant Hispanic Voices to the professional theatre mainstream; a unique culturally diverse model for playwright development and enrichment; cultivation of an awareness of the theatre as a viable career for economically disadvantaged youths; and year-round Spanish and English language offerings. Since 1967, the Annual Summer Tour of PRTT has performed in parks, playgrounds and on street corners throughout the five boroughs of New York and areas of New Jersey, presenting free of charge productions to most neglected communities of the city. Today, PRTT remains few of the

touring theatres in New York Metro and is known for especially performing works by classic Hispanic writers and current Latino playwrights in both English and Spanish.

The Journal (2014) states that, before the production of the first indigenous film in Nigeria, the Yoruba traveling theatre had established a rich, flourishing tradition of touring plays across the nation and beyond. Adedeji and Ekwuazi (1998) comments that, the Yoruba theatre has made an indelible impression on the whole country. As a traveling theater, it has taken the theatre to the people and entertained vast and diverse audiences throughout the country. Not earning any subsidies from the government or financial support from any foundations, the artists have progressively managed to survive in a very big way. They draw their income not only from their stage shows but also from television shows, from waxing their music and plays on discs, by printing their plays as photoplays and as literature. Ogundele adds that, at its height of productivity and popularity in the 1970s and early 80s, there were at least 100 troupes of the traveling theatre in Yoruba society. From a vast and robust popular theatre base, it becomes quite easy for the Yoruba traveling theatre to hijack the industry for the furtherance of their artistic career in another medium. Secondly, the Yoruba has a long theatrical history which dates back to the Alarinjo (or Eegun Apidan) masquerade performance of the old Oyo empire, and many live in big cities and towns which allows for the formation of a vast audience pull, each time the traveling theatres visited the communities with a new play which also spread to non-Yoruba speaking areas of West African coast (Ogundele,1999:47) (p.186).

Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer (2012) has said in *Gender and popular culture* that, popular culture is a contested concept. It is vague and diffuse and can therefore be filled with different meanings. In order to investigate these meanings, we will start by looking at the more general concept of culture. Raymond Williams (1983) put forward three meanings of the word 'culture', arguing that it can refer to (a) intellectual, spiritual and esthetic development, (b) a particular way of life of a group or historical period and (c) texts and practices which produce meanings. The concept of 'popular' culture is of course different from that of culture. It has a quantitative dimension. The word popular suggests that it is liked and /or practiced by many people. And indeed many aspects of culture which we would commonly class as popular culture are widely appreciated and consumed, such as pop music and television. However, the connections are not always straight forward. There are certain aspects of culture which we would commonly class as 'high' culture but which are still 'popular' in the sense of being liked or practiced by many people, for example, classical music such as Pavarotti. Conversely, certain aspects of popular culture, for example, niche T.V channels may not have wide audiences at all. Popular and high culture is often mixed, for example, when classical literature is turned into T.V serials which are watched by millions of viewers .Is this high or popular culture? While popular culture has a quantitative dimension this alone is not necessary or sufficient to define it. The other factor to emerge as important here is that popular culture in all its definition is compared explicitly or implicitly, to some 'other' culture. Most commonly this other culture is so called 'high' culture, which is usually taken to include serious and classical forms of culture such as works of old literature, paintings, poetry or classical music (pp.83-85).

The authors also say, 'high' culture is deemed intrinsically worthy, serious, quality art, while 'popular' culture is judged superficial, simplistic and driven by profits rather than skill or quality. Often these judgments are linked to the commercialization of culture and the creation of a culture industry. While 'popular' culture is considered to be of intrinsically low artistic quality because the pursuit of profits necessitates meeting the lowest common denominator, 'high' culture is associated with a bygone golden era free of commercialization, where art thrived for the art's sake. The juxtaposition of high and popular culture is flawed in various ways - firstly, this categorization is elitist and fails to recognize that the standard by which the quality of culture is measured are not universal or neutral but themselves a product of culture. Secondly, in contemporary western culture the economic system of capitalism shapes the production of all forms of culture and art- there is no space totally free of commerce (pp.86-87).

Sailen Bharali (1985) in his book *Natak* has said, among the various branches of literature drama holds a special position. Although the scholars differ as to how drama originated, the majority agree that religious rites and rituals in due course of time gave birth to drama. It was probably in Egypt the centre of ancient civilization that drama was acted out for the first time. Osyris, the God of agriculture and his imagination by the Egyptians was the content of this drama. But unfortunately, there being no proof of this , it is the Greeks who can claim to have given birth to drama. This was connected to the religious rites and rituals to please Dionysus, the Greek God (p.23)

It was during the reign of King Pisistetus in 534 B.C, a drama competition was organized in Athens. Playwright, actor and priest Thespis is said to have been the winner of this competition. This competition later on became a grand public festival in Greece and contributed a lot to the evolution, progress and development of Greek drama. It was during this time that the need for a stage/Arena (theater hall) led to its construction and the art of 'acting' began to gain popularity among the common people. Greek drama artists were carefully selected and trained. As written by Bharali (1985), Demosthenes said, "Actors should be judged by their voices and politicians by their wisdom". Schools for voice-training were set up in which actors and singers were trained and actors had to have knowledge of all aspects of acting. The Greek drama productions were characterized by proper planning and rehearsals. Theatre definitely was one of the greatest elements of the glory that was Greece (p.32).

Bharali (1985) also informs, five playwrights dominated Greek Drama for 200 years- The Tragedians were (1) Aechylus (525-456 BC) who wrote the tragic trilogy *Oriesteia* and introduced the concept of the second actor *Diutoragonist*. (2) Sophocles (496-406 BC) who wrote the *Oedipus Rex* trilogy. (3) Euripides (480-406 BC) who actually foreshadowed the ultimate form of drama. The Comedians included (4) Aristophanes (448-380 BC) and (5) Menander (342-292 BC). Likewise, in England, drama evolved from the corridors of religion. Initially acting was confined within the four walls of the Church, but as it gained popularity various issues of Christian life began to be enacted and gradually, from the confines of the Church drama spread itself among the nook and corner of society. Thus, we can conclude

that drama was born out of religious organizations and this fact has been corroborated by the dramatic literature of various countries (p.35).

Alchin (2015) writes, the formation of Elizabethan Acting Troupes was the result of the popularity of the Elizabethan theatre. The Elizabethans enjoyed entertainment and they loved plays and the theatre. The first theatre in England was not built about 1576. Prior to that, actors travelled from one town to the other and one castle to another. But travel was difficult in the Elizabethan era. Because of frequent outbreaks of the terrifying bubonic plague, strangers were viewed with suspicion. Anyone who wished to travel in England had to obtain a license from the Bailiff in the Guild. This ensured that the spread of disease was contained as much as possible and the poor, homeless, and anti-social elements could not move easily from place to place. The major Elizabethan Acting Troupes were 'Lord Strange's Men', 'Chamberlain's Men', 'Admiral's Men' and 'King's Men'. According to the Sumptuary Laws, the Elizabethans were prohibited to wear any clothing which was above their social standing. Many Elizabethan plays were about Kings and the nobility but the actors were restricted to wear any clothes which might convey this high status. This severely restricted and spoilt the performance of the plays. The Queen herself enjoyed this form of entertainment, so, a 'get out clause' was written into the Sumptuary Law (Alchin, Elizabethan-era).

In the book *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, edited by Colin Chambers (2006) it is stated that, in the late 1940's a number of specialist companies began to tour for audiences of children in both schools and theatres with a more serious intent. These companies of which the most enduring have been Caryl Jenner's *Unicorn Theatre* (founded

in 1947) and *Theatre Centre* (founded in 1949), drew on the model of the work developing in the Soviet Union since the 1920's and after the second World War in Eastern Europe where cultural enrichment was seen to be vital adjunct to education and where major building based companies with considerable financial subsidy had been established working with the same resources and expertise as theatre for adult audiences (p.152)

In an interview published in the *New York Magazine* (1991), it is written that in 1967, Raul Julia, famous Hollywood actor met the man who jump started his career.

Joe Papp was doing the Spanish production of Macbeth in the mobile unit", says Julia, "and I auditioned and got the part of Macduff, and we travelled all over the neighbourhood with this truck, that turned into a stage. It was a wonderful experience. We were bringing theatre to people who had never gone to the theatre before (p.55).

Mahanta (2011) writes in *Natakar Katha*, ancient India is said to have been a rich treasure house of dramatic literature. Sanskrit was the language in which drama was written. The word 'Indo-Drama' has also been used by some for Sanskrit drama. Sanskrit drama dates back to some 2000 years earlier. There is no scientific proof of dramatic creations prior to this but since we do not have the biography of the playwrights or information about their timeline, we cannot establish a concrete age for Sanskrit drama. In fact, from the sources gathered, the playwright *Bhasa* has been said to be the first playwright chronologically. According to scholars, *Bhasa* belonged to the 3rd century BC but surprisingly it was only in the first part of the 20th century that 13 dramas established as his creations have come to light.

It was from Trivandrum that for the first time these 13 dramas, edited by Mahamahopadhyay Ganapati Shastri were published. Other celebrated playwrights of Sanskrit drama were *Kalidasa, Bhababhuti, Sri Harsha, Vishakhadutta and Shudraka* (pp.9-13).

In India, a popular traditional story about the birth of drama, states that *Natyashastra*, the fifth veda, was created by Brahma, (the creator, and one of the Hindu triad) himself by taking elements from the four Vedas, *Rig* (content), *Yajur* (action), *Atharva* (Ras) and *Sam* (Music), on the request of the *Devatas* (celestial beings). Indian thought has always been inclined towards connecting anything ancient and great with divine or heavenly grace and this story was also probably such an imagination . But what is to be noted here is that the ideas in *Natyashashtra* apply to drama of all age and place. Mahanta (2011) further write, the birth of drama goes back to such unknown times that it is difficult to attribute a particular date for it and that is why it is imagined to be the creation of Gods; Drama can provide both education and entertainment to all classes and section of people; Drama must never target and attack any particular class of people in the society; It is always better to perform a drama in an auditorium/stage than in an open area; For acting in a drama, practice and rehearsal is a must; An actor must always be physically fit; It is necessary for female artists to act along with male artists; There is complete connection between drama, dance and music. Here, one must mention that in ancient India, people associated with acting were considered to be low class and were looked down on by the high class Brahmins. As such, it can be said that it was the low class common people who contributed to the progress of acting (pp.9-11).

An interesting point has been made by Mahanta (2011) is, that, as against the general belief that origin of drama lies in religious rites and rituals, it was actually non-religious or secular. From time immemorial, even before religion had emerged, various forms of folk drama were in practice in different parts of the world. And it is widespread knowledge as to how folk drama traditions have impacted regular and written drama (pp.12-13).

Mahanta (2011) further states that it was in the beginning of the 16th century that in eastern part of India in Assam, a dramatic form of high quality was created. The personality behind this creation was the social reformer, poet, dramatist, musician and propagator of the neo-vaishnavite movement, *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankardeva. His main disciple *Mahapurush* Madhabdeva followed his *guru's* footsteps and wrote plays that contributed to the foundation of Assamese drama and stage. These plays created by the duo were called *Ankiya Nat* though neither Srimanta Sankardeva or Madhabdeva used this word, both instead used *Natak*, *Nat* or *Jatra*. It was a description added by people in the later times probably because these plays had no division of scenes. Both Srimanta Sankardeva and Madhabdeva aimed at the rejuvenation of a spiritually, politically and economically decadent society of Assam through the neo-vaishnavite movement. And thus, along with *Naam-kirtan* and *Borgeet*, *Ankiya nat* was also a means of propaganda (pp.58-59).

The author (2011) also says that since Sankardeva wanted to overhaul the society through religious preaching, naturally his plays were religion based. A speciality of *Ankiya nat* was its heavy dependence on songs. In fact songs and *shlokas* far exceeded the dialogues and at times, even the action. Another special characteristic of *Ankiya nat* was the *Sutradhar*,

who was the central force of medieval Assamese drama—singer, dancer, actor, stage-director all rolled into one, this character, once making his entry would not leave the stage till the end of the drama. The language used in *Ankiya nat* again was another unique characteristic because it was not the common spoken language. This language was *Brajabuli*, a mix of Assamese and Maithili, an incomparable creation of Sankardeva (pp.59-60). It may be mentioned here that *Brajawali* or *Brajabhasha* (as was used in Braj) came to be called *Brajabuli* after its fusion with Assamese.

The author (2011) further adds that the acting process of *Ankiya nat* is called *bhaona* which has come from the word *bhao* (to imitate). Before the actual play begins, a musical performance called *Dhemali* was presented by the *Gayan-Bayan*. The *Ankiya nat bhaona* is generally performed in the *Namghar* (Prayer Hall). If the *Namghar* is small then a temporary hall is created around it for expanded space. Right in the middle of the *Namghar* an area is kept clear as the ‘stage’. The audience sits around this area on the floor. On one side of this clearing is the *Manikut* (Sanctum Sanctorium) while on the opposite side a path is cleared among the audience for the entry and exit of the actors. A little space is kept segregated by a screen where the actors get ready for their performance and the necessary equipments to be used in the drama are kept. This was the *cho-ghar* i.e Green Room (p.60).

In his book *Natak: Prachin aru Adhunik*, Prafulla Kr. Nath (2001) has opined that before the creation of *Ankiya nat*, there were several folk drama styles in Assam from ancient times. Among them, *Dhuliya Nach*, *Ojapali*, *Deodhani Nach* and *Putola Nach* may be mentioned. It can also be said that these indigenous dramatic forms did influence the emergence

of *Ankiya nat*. Apart from *Putola Nach* and *Ojapali*, two other folk drama forms of Assam in the Goalpara area are *Kushan gan* and *Bhari gan*. These two forms of folk drama were popular in Western Assam and North Bengal. In fact, the ancient folk drama forms in Assam, folk drama forms of North and South India in the middle ages and Sanskrit drama—the reflection of the union of these three can be seen in the *Ankiya nat* of Srimanta Sankaradeva (p.2)

Mahanta (2011) again says in *Natakar Katha* that it is also true that although Srimanta Sankaradeva gathered sources for his *Ankiya nat* mainly from the various indigenous dances and music prevalent in Assam from ancient times, the impact of Sanskrit drama was natural in the creations of this scholar of Sanskrit, for example, introduction of the *Sutradhar*, emphasis on *Purbaranga*, use of Sanskrit *shlokas* and *Nandi*, and closing of the play by *Mukti-mangal Bhatima* are clearly impact of Sanskrit drama (p.63).

Vatsyayan (1996) opines that in various parts of India, different types of indigenous popular dramatic mediums flourished like *Yakshagaan* (Karnataka), *Kathakali* (Kerala), *Terukutu* and *Bhagavad Mela* (Tamilnadu), *Bhavai* (Gujrat), *Lalita* (Maharashtra), *Raslila* (U.P), *Ramlila* (Rajasthan) and *Jatra* (Bengal). There are some similarities between *Ankiya nat* and these indigenous drama, but this is probably because all these dramatic styles were impacted upon by Sanskrit drama and the prominence of religion in medieval society. But having said this, we cannot deny that because Sankaradeva, during his *tirtha yatra* (religious sojourn) had visited various places across India and witnessed different dramatic forms prevalent, it is not unlikely that at least some of the dramatic forms did leave an impression

upon him. The elements drawn from the folk form of music, dance and drama not only broadened the range of appeal but gave *Ankiya nat* its unmistakable Assamese character. Among the folk forms that influenced him the most were *Ojapali*- a fascinating form combining elements of balladry, dance and drama, *Dhuliya nach*- a form of group singing and dancing, *Bhaoriya*-balladry and *Putola nach*-the traditional marionette theatre of Assam. It required a rare sensitivity to mould all these diverse elements and influences into a powerful dramatic alloy, which Sankaradev possessed (pp.95-99).

In his book *Ankiya Bhaona*, Goswami (2000) has stated that a fact known to one and all is that the art of drama is an *art*. Like other art forms, it too, cannot be a neutral matter in the journey of human life. Every art is deeply connected with the cultural identity of nation or race. Judged from this angle, we can say that the art of drama has been the signature of human history (p.1)

In *Asamat Navajagaran: Ana Asamiyar Bhumika*, Barpujari (1987) writes, that although it is difficult to establish since when and how *jatra* became popular in Assam, a look into the cultural history of Assam shows that it was with the coming in of the British rule in Assam that *jatra* began to spread its influence here. With the British came into Assam a flow of people from different parts of India, particularly Bengal. The main reason behind this was, the educated Bengalis, as the helpers of the British rulers understood their administrative workings. Moreover, at this very point of time, the British had started the Tea Industry in Assam, where they required people who knew English. Therefore, the British preferred the Bengalis. Naturally, the Bengalis who came to reside here in Assam brought their culture with

them. During various festivals like Durga Puja and Kali Puja and sometimes just for the sake of their entertainment, these people organized and invited *jatra* parties, which at that point of time was gaining a new lease of life and popularity in Bengal (p.33).

Bharali (1984) in *Asomiya Lokanatyam Parampara* has opined that though this folk theatre was recognized as popular drama of the masses of Bengal, in Assam also, we have information that there was a kind of folk drama called *jatra* (p.68)

Richmond(1990) in 'Characteristics of Modern Theatre' in *Indian Theatre Traditions of Performance* has written, The Kalanilaya Vistavision Dramascope Company of Trivandrum, Kerala founded in the 1970's by Kalanilaya Krishna Nair spends most of its time on the road travelling about the state. The group rents or leases a plot of land on the outskirts of a large town or city and erects a large temporary theatre of thatch and bamboo, seating around a thousand people. A manager travels with a company of paid actors and backstage artists, arranging food and living accommodations and organizing the schedules of about seventy-five individuals. A repertory of plays is produced and when the audiences begin to dwindle and the income lessens, the company moves on. Wages are paid according to the grade and level of the actors and technicians. Because the company tours regularly and produces plays nearly everyday of the week, the people involved cannot engage in other employment.

Similarly, The Kerala People's Art Company(KPAC) and Kalidasa Kalakendra, two major Communist commercial theatre groups in Kerala begin the touring from September in modern vans, on top of which scenery is stored, performing primarily in the Malayalam speaking regions of India.

Another such example cited by Richmond is Manohar's National Theatre of Madras, one of the best-organized and slickest commercial operations anywhere in urban India. It tours from theatre to theatre within the city and also on the road and is flexible enough to make use of a variety of theatre facilities and adapt to the most challenging conditions. (pp.392-393)

In his unpublished thesis *Drama of the Mobile Theatre of Assam*, Talukdar (2003) says, the basic subject of the early *jatras* were religious, mainly, *Krishnaleela*, the merry making of Lord Krishna, but by the 19th century this trend began to change. Calcutta, around this became a commercial hub and there emerged a class of rich people who had abundant leisure in their hands. These people began to patronize the *jatra* troupes and organize shows for their own entertainment. Consequently, *jatra* lost its original objective of religious and spiritual preaching and became a tool for entertainment (p.16).

Deka (2009) writes, it was between 1860-1865 that a *jatra* troupe under the leadership of Sri Tithiram Bayan was formed in Barpeta following the Bengal model. At the same time Sri Manohari Das and Sri Haricharan Bayan also formed two separate *jatra* troupes in Barpeta. Again, Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury formed *Sanatan Sangeet Samaj* (1911) and *Dakkinhatir Jatra Dal* in Barpeta itself. Here, the Sutradhar family, Gandhiya family and Galiyahati Bayan family were the *jatra* performers. Brajanath Sarma, the legendary revolutionary artist started *Sila Kalika Opera Party* in 1912 and *Ganakgari Opera party* in 1928. It was in 1933 that Sarma inaugurated co-acting in Assam, which was indeed a historical achievement that enshrined his name forever in golden letters in the cultural history of Assam (pp.90-91).

Once this trend of *jatra* came in, various *jatra* troupes began to mushroom in Assam, particularly, lower Assam. And very soon *jatra* became a part and parcel of the cultural arena. No function or festival was complete without a *jatra*. In the Bajali area of Barpeta alone, the *jatradals* that came up were *Bhogiram Kakoti's Bhaluki Jatradal* (1888), *Bamunkusi Jatradal* (1908), *Pathsala Theatre party*(Santoram Choudhury) (1910), *Gobindapur Jatradal* (1923), *Napara Opera-Bamunkusi* (1930), *Madhya Bajali Opera* (1930), *Bogriguri Jatradal* (1953), *Bagna Jatradal* (1954) et al.

Kalita (2011) in his book *Bhramyaman Theatrerar Itihas, Vol.I* has written, the first step from *jatra* to mobile theatre was taken by Mr. Sadananda Lahkar. It was in 1959 that this talented actor formed Nataraj Opera- a modern *jatra* troupe. This troupe performed right up to Golaghat in upper Assam and was particularly popular in the tea gardens. Gradually, in the changing social scenario the neo-city dwellers began to lose connection with *jatra* and the need for a new form of entertainment was felt. Moreover, the need for commercial profit in order to give employment to the artists was also felt. Thus, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, brother of Mr. Sadananda Lahkar wanted to reshape Nataraj Opera. He wanted the art of acting to sustain the artists by providing them year long employment. Prior to this, the *jatra* troupes performed one or two times on invitations and sat idle for the rest of the year. It was with the dual intent of providing financial security to the artists as well as modernizing the *jatra* form that the first mobile theater, Nataraj Theatre, was born in 1963 (pp.18-19).

It was to be a theatre in every sense of the term, the only difference being this entire set up of hall, stage, lights, generator, sound- system, musical instruments, utensils, bedding

and other accessories would be mobile. Instead of the people coming to the theatre, the theatre would now go to the people.

From the time when *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankaradeva created *Ankiya Nat*, to the present experiments in the arena, Assamese theatre has traversed a long time of about six centuries. And in these six centuries Assamese theatre has gone through a lot of highs and lows affected naturally by the changing political, socio-economic and cultural atmosphere. A huge collection of books have been written on the traditional as well as modern Assamese theatre in Assam. Right from Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika's *Manchalekha*; Mr. Harishchandra Bhattacharya's *Asomiya Natyo Sahityor Jilingoni* and *The Origin and Development of the Assamese Drama and The Stage*; Mr. Dhiren Sarma's *Asomor Natyo Subas* and *Brajanath Sarma*; Mr. Satya Prasad Barua's *Natak Aru Abhinoy Prosongo*; Mr. Sailen Bharali's *Natak, Asomiya Lukonatyo Porompura* and *Natya Kala: Desi aru Bidesi*; Mr. Poona Mahanta's *Natak aru Natyakar* and *Natokor Kotha*; Mr. Pradip Hazarika's *Natyo Samikkhya*; Mr. Jagadish Patgiri's *Natya Kala Dese Dese*; Mr. Prafulla Kumar Nath's *Natak Prachin aru Adhunik*; Mr. Satyendranath Sarma's *Asomiya Natyo Sahityo*; Mr. Nabin Chandra Sarma's *Asomor Lukonat*, Mr. Alex Figo's (transcription) *Bhramyaman Theatre Achyut Lahkar's Autobiography*; Mr. Purandar Patgiri and Mr. Alex Figo's *Long March- Biography of Ratan Lahkar*; Mr. Atul Mazumdar's *Ei Jatra Joi Jatra* and *Bhramyaman Theatre: Protyasa, Prapti aru Aprapti*, to Mr. Kishore Kumar Kalita's *Bhramyaman Theateror Itihas Vol.I*, which has been initiated by the All Assam Mobile Theatre Producers

Association (AAMTPA), is an exhaustive list. Inspired from these writings, research scholars have also ventured into the field of mobile theatres. A few completed Research works on the subject include- (i) *Drama of the Mobile Theatre of Assam*, Mr. Bhupen Talukdar, Department of Assamese, Gauhati University, 2003. (ii) *Mobile Theatre of Assam and its Impact on the Socio-Cultural Life: A study in North Kamrup Area* by Kaushik Kumar Deka, Department of Folklore, Gauhati University, 2009. (iii) *Managerial & Economic Aspects of Mobile Theatre Establishment of Assam*, Ms. Mousumi Devi, Department of Commerce, Gauhati University, 2016, etc.

Mention may also be made of the Bhabendranath Saikia's article, *Bhramyaman: The Travelling theatre of Assam*, published in the Seagull Theatre Quarterly (Issue no.11), September, 1996. A Junior Fellowship (2006-2009) project from the Ministry of Culture, GoI was done by Ms. Ruby Barua on the topic *Aesthetics in Mobile theatre Drama*. Mr. Merajur Rahman Barua had also availed a Fellowship from *Majlis*, a culture body in Mumbai and made a 59 minute documentary on the posters of mobile theatres of Assam titled, *Pageant in Painted Scenes*, in 2008.

1.3 The Locale

The intended study will be conducted in Assam, situated in the tropical latitudes **24°3** N and **28°0** N and longitudes **89°5** E and **96°1** E. Medhi (2008) writes-

Assam is an ancient land and it has a thought provoking history. In the epic period the land was referred to as Pragjyotishpura, land of the

eastern lights, and in the *Purana* and *Tantra* periods it acquired the name 'Kamrupa', where the god Kamadeva regained his form. The name Assam is an anglicized formation of the Sanskrit term *asama*, which means unparallel or peerless (p.91)

Among all the states of the North East India, Assam is the most populous state and mobile theatre, other than the Barak valley is a popular medium of entertainment across the state. A little detail about the place where mobile theatre originated in its current *avatar* (form) has, therefore, been sketched. It was in the first part of the 20th century, the British were planning expansion of the railway in the North bank of the Brahmaputra, covered densely with *Sal* (*shorea robusta*), teak and various other trees. Amidst this forest one could find one or two remote villages. The Bajali area, inundated by the Pahumara and Kaldia rivers, was a fertile belt from where the production of grains, areca nut and betel leaf, *Eri*, a kind of indigenous cloth prepared from the yarns extracted from the *Phyllanthus ricinii* cocoon, and Bhutan-produced oranges were exported to various places.

Prior to 1909, the town of Pathsala was known as 'Souka-Panisala'. The origin of this can be traced to the '*Choudhury Vamsavali*', the geneology of the Choudhuries, of the Bajali area. It was in the reign of the Koch king Naranarayana, that Purushottama Choudhury established Souka-Panisala where many of his successors enjoyed the status of Choudhury, the landlord of an area. There is no doubt that the name 'Panisala' came from the tank dug during the time of the same Koch king.

Renowned litterateur and dramatist of Pathsala, Late Munindranath Sarma (1987) in an essay, *Aitihasik Patabhumit Pathsala* wrote thus, about the name Pathsala,

The name 'Pathsala' is old. In a copper plate recording the land grant by Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha in 1709, it is mentioned that on the North bank of the Pumara river is a village called Pathsala. That village is still there and the western side of today's Pathsala town falls within that very Pathsala village. Pathsala is situated between the railway track and the North Trunk Road. Many people say that the name Pathsala has been derived from Panisala but this is baseless. Apart from the rhyming of the two names there is no connection between them. (p.25)

There are others who opine that the name Pathsala has come from 'Pathsala Vidyalaya'. Probably during the King's reign there used to be a traditional lower primary here and in due course of time the place came to be known as Pathsala.

In the first decade of the current century, the British Government constructed the railway track followed subsequently by the rail station. And for whatever reasons the rail station was named Pathsala station. Gradually, many organizations which came up adopted the same identity. Shops and other business establishments cropped up and at one point of time the entire market came to be called Pathsala market and the name Souka-Panisala faded into oblivion.

Two incidents impacted the adoption of the name Pathsala for this mufossil town. The first was, on 10th January 1909 when the 'Pathsala Middle Vernacular School' was established and the name Pathsala was used for the first time. It was only natural that the person who established this school, Late Amritlal Choudhury wanted to immortalize the name of his birthplace. As mentioned by Dutta(2002), the second was the construction of the railway station when the Eastern Bengal Railway started the process of expansion of the railway track in the North bank of the Brahmaputra (p.15). Though there is no concrete evidence as to which came up first, the local people claim that the railway station was constructed earlier .

It was in this mufossil town of western Assam that a cultural revolution began in the same year 1909, when Mr.Santaram Choudhury established the 'Pathsala Theatre Party' . It was due to his efforts that the 'Pathsala Natyamandir', i.e. the local theatre hall, was born in 1924. Pathsala became the centre of *jatra* and modern drama and it was here in 1963, Nataraj Theatre, the first mobile theatre of Assam was created. Mr. Achyut Lahkar, the person who created Nataraj Theatre, dreamt of a travelling auditorium with a proscenium stage, i.e, a mobile set up. An equal share of credit for the birth of Nataraj Theatre is due to Mr. Achyut Lahkar's brother Mr. Sadananda Lahkar because it was he who had established Nataraj Opera Party, a modern *jatra* party in 1959. Mr. Achyut Lahkar improvised upon his brother's concept thus creating Nataraj Theatre.

Kalita (2013) states, there were certain cultural factors which contributed to the birth of mobile theatre in Pathsala. From the later part of the 19th century to the first part of the 20th century, Bajali, a place near Pathsala, saw the formation of several *jatra* parties in many

villages namely Bhagiram Kakoti's *Bhaluki Jatra Dal* (1888), *Bamunkuchi Jatra Dal* (1909), *Gobindapur Jatra Dal* (1923), *Sri Sri Sankaradeva Opera* (1930), *Bamunkuchi Napara Opera* (1930), *Madhya Bajali Opera* (1930), *Bagariguri Jatra Dal* (1953), *Bagna Jatra Dal* (1954), etc. Apart from the rise of these *jatra* parties, the person who created an atmosphere for performance and progress of drama in Pathsala was Mr.Santaram Choudhury. As mentioned earlier, with the establishment of the Pathsala Natyamandir the path became smooth for amateur drama. In May 1940 was formed the Bajali Progressive Block, which later on came to be known as Pragati Sangha, and it came forward to play an important role in the development of dramatics in Pathsala. In the later years various amateur drama groups in Pathsala could utilize this stage for their experiments. The Pathsala Sahitya Sabha established in 1962 also played an important role in the practice and progress of dramatics (p.5).

Sarma (1995) writes, on the evening of 2nd October 1963 the inaugural drama of Nataraj Theatre was Mr.Phani Sarma's *Bhogjara*. Mr.Bishnu Rabha, one of the most revered names in the cultural scenario of Assam, is said to have commented thus on the concept of Mr.Achyut Lahkar,

A huge tent which will hold a stage and an auditorium with a capacity to seat a thousand people, two dynamo engines which will light the entire set up, six microphones that will amplify the slightest whisper, a tape recorder which will help create special scenes. A luxurious affair. No one has ever dreamt of making theatre so techno-savvy in India. If

this fantasy of Achyut Lahkar becomes a reality, then the history of theatre in Assam will add a new chapter inked in gold (p.100).

Raichoudhury (2010) writes, in 1967, Mr.Hemakanta Talukdar produced the Mancharupa Theatre in Pathsala with Mr.Chandra Choudhury as director, and renowned actor-director-academic, Mr.Dharanidhar Deba Goswami. Pathsala saw the birth of Asom Star Theatre in 1970 which created quite a stir with drama presentations like *Nartaki*, *Kalankini*, *Subhajatra*, *Hitler*, etc. In 1973 Pathsala witnessed Mr.Sadananda Lahkar creating Nataraj Silpi Niketan which later took the name of Aradhana Theatre. This theatre party won the All India Critics Association (AICA) award in 1981 at the National level. In 1976, two friends, writer-actor Mr.Ratan Lahkar, and experienced lighting artist Mr.Krishna Roy created one of the most successful theatre till date, Kohinoor Theatre. Then In 1980, Pathsala got another gift in the form of Abahan Theatre which was produced individually by Mr. Krishna Roy. Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, renowned litterateur and film-maker, became an integral part of Abahan Theatre and gave some of the best dramas of mobile theatre like *Janambhumi*, *Nilakantha*, *Satabdi*, *Dinabandhu*, etc. In 1982, another mobile theatre which was born in Pathsala was Anirban Theatre. In this way, in the later years also this town was the birthplace of many other theatres like, Upasana and Chitrlekha Theatre (Producer : Mr. Rajani Patgiri), Kumar Indrajeet Theatre (Producer : Mr. Kankeswar Kalita and Mr. Jogen kalita), Natasurjya Bishnu-Jyoti Theatre (Producer : Mr. Kalpa Kakoti), Pallabi Theatre (Producer : Mr. Gopesh Talukdar), etc. Of course most of these theatres could not survive the test of time (pp.357-358).

Patgiri (1995) writes, few other reasons contributed to this region emerging as the centre of mobile theatre. The first, being the impact of the theatre movement in Bengal because of geographical proximity, religious (*Bhakti* movement) reasons, and connection through transportation. Though the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Sankaradeva had a strong impact in Barpeta, it could not make much inroads from Pathsala to Nalbari. As a result the *Satriya* culture including *bhaona*, the one act vaishnavite play, was not practiced much in this area. One can clearly see that because of this, the mobile theatre has had a huge influence of the *jatra* of Bengal as against the *bhaona*, which is almost non-existent. The second factor was, in the freedom movement, the role of Bajali in Pathsala and Barnagar in Sarbhog was glorious, and the direct impact of the patriotic presentations on the stages of Bengal, to rouse the patriotism of the common man through *jatra* plays like Mukunda Das' *Nildarpan* and *Nabanna* were clearly felt in these two areas (pp.166-170).

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This endeavour tries to examine the :

- (i) history and evolution of mobile theatre in Assam;
- (ii) composition of present day mobile theatre (man, material and life);
- (iii) role and status of the actors, musicians, workers, etc., in the mobile theatre;
- (iv) look into the position of Women in the arena of mobile theatre;
- (v) mobile theatre as a source of entertainment;

- (vi) place of mobile theatre in social, cultural and economic arenas of Assam;
- (vii) problems and prospects of the mobile theatre.

1.5 Research Questions

Keeping in mind the objectives mentioned above, this research work has attempted to explore the following research questions-

- (i) Has the commitment to the original idea of social responsibility combined with bussiness been sidelined, and is today, mobile theatre is only about bussiness?
- (ii) Is the negative trend of class difference within the mobile theatre is increasing?
- (iii) Is mobile theatre still a male domain where women have been, and still are, invisible as decision makers ?
- (iv) What has been the impact of mobile theatre on the society, cultural field and economy of Assam?
- (v) What are the future prospects of mobile theatre?

1.6 Methodology

It has been already stated that the birth place of mobile theatre is Pathsala of Assam, and therefore, the basic data for the intended study have been collected from Pathsala. True to the Snowball Method, mobile theatre has become a prime source of entertainment in Assam, both in rural and urban areas. And as such, required data has also been collected from different places of Assam. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been used in the study. Primary as well as secondary data have been used in this study, and the secondary data has been collected from books, journals, newspapers, leaflets, etc. The collected data has been systematically arranged, analyzed and interpreted and meticulously placed in the six chapters of the thesis. The tools of data collection has been through

1. Observation : This tool was employed to observe overall life in the mobile theatre camp including rehearsals of the plays, presentation of plays in various venues, what goes on in the auditorium(tent), green room, ticket counters, etc.

2. Interview : Various subjects were chosen for interview based on their association, experience and expertise in their own field in connection with mobile theatre. (a) Producers, (b) Directors, (c) Playwrights, (d) Actors, (e) Musicians and Singers, (f) Dancers, (g) Technicians (Light and Sound), (h) Manual workers, (i) Mobile theatre lovers, (j) Audiences, etc.

3. Collection of text: This included searching for the drama text and annual Souvenirs of the various mobile theatre groups, original documents like letters, contracts, tickets, invitation cards, etc.

4. Photographs: Still pictures comprise an important part of documentation and as such, collection of photographs has been done.

5. Informal chatting: Apart from formal interviews, informal chatting with people who had significant knowledge to share on the subject also helped a lot in collecting information.

The Field Study was intended to get a first-hand experience of a mobile theatre. Spending time within the mobile theatre camps gave this scholar valuable feedback about life in mobile theatre, not available in any book. Altogether around 40 people from within and without mobile theatres was interviewed. This sample size was convenient to handle and care was taken while selecting the interviewee to take into account their experience, work profile, age and sex.

1.7 Method of Data Analysis

For the data analysis of this research work,

1.Strength(S)

2.Weakness(W)

3.Opportunity(O)

4.Threat (T)

SWOT framework has been chosen. Though it is true that this method of data analysis is usually used in the Management sector, but since there is no hard and fast rule that a SWOT analysis cannot be used elsewhere, it was interesting to look into mobile theatre through the SWOT prism. The inspiration to use the SWOT framework for data analysis was derived from the unpublished thesis of Mrinal Jyoti Goswami, *Samaj Vastavad aru Mancharitir Alokot Sampratik Asamiya Natak : Eti Adhyayan (1967-2003)*, Faculty Of Arts, Gauhati University (2015). In spite of various criticism and negative feedback that it has had to digest, mobile theatre is still going strong in the state. Therefore, its various dimensions have been placed on the SWOT framework to analyse and interpret the data collected. It must be admitted that the same data, could have been analysed using other methods as well.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

It must be humbly accepted by the research scholar that this work is not an end in itself. Mobile theatre of Assam and its history of over fifty years is a vast topic. In its continuous journey, scores of mobile theatre groups could not survive and disappeared, while at the same time new groups are appearing every other year. It is very difficult to even state the exact number of mobile theatre groups in Assam at this moment. Moreover, thousands of people are directly and indirectly involved and connected with mobile theatres. To study about all these in one research work is quite not possible. That is why an amalgamative data collection, touching upon as many dimension as possible, from both established as well as newly formed mobile theatres, has been done for this study. One major inconvenience that was felt during the process of this study was the lack of any preservation efforts by the mobile

theatre groups themselves. Old original documents, photographs, manuscripts, souvenirs, etc., hardly anything can be found. Very few people could give information with any authority. Another difficulty faced was, mobile theatre being a commercial venture, the producers are more than reluctant to share authentic profit-loss data. Other than that, going to the remote areas to study the audience pattern and behaviour was also a limitation. Many times the weather also created havoc, particularly in the rainy season, in conducting field study. It must be admitted that there is a lack of books on mobile theatre of Assam. A lot of effort was needed to search out information from newspapers, magazines and journals. In spite of the above mentioned hurdles, an attempt has been made to put forth a research work, which will attract and encourage future scholars to explore the unexplored dimensions of the mobile theatre of Assam.

1.9 Scheme of Chapterization

This work titled **Dimensions of Mobile Theatre of Assam** has been taken up to explore the various dimensions of mobile theatre. A particular subject can be studied and analyzed by different people from diverse angles. The research scholar hopes that this work, when completed, will be a valuable addition with new inputs to the work already completed in this particular field. The entire subject matter has been presented in six chapters :

- The 1st Chapter is the '**Introduction**' where the scholar attempts to introduce the

subject, and establish the relevance of the study, review connected literature, present the the locale taken, chalk out the objectives of the research work, design the hypotheses sought to verify, explain the methodology and tools of data collection adopted, justify the method of data analysis, explain the limitation of the study, and present the chapters designed.

- The 2nd Chapter has been titled '**Emergence and Evolution of Mobile theatre in Assam**'. Here the scholar has tried to trace the story of how, when and from where the mobile theatre evolved, till its present status, in Assam.
- The 3rd Chapter titled '**Structure, Techniques and Management of Mobile Theatre**' attempts to reveal the inside story of the mobile theatre right from its physical attributes to the economics, passion, emotion and extreme hard work connected with it.
- The 4th Chapter has been titled '**Problems and prospects of Mobile Theatre**' where the idea is to understand the various difficulties and problems that mobile theatre has been facing since its inception, its survival against all odds and also to focus on the prospects it holds.
- The 5th Chapter, '**Impact of Mobile Theatre on the Assamese Society and Culture**' dwells upon the impact of this most popular medium of entertainment in Assam. Has this impact been positive or negative? Has the impact been strong enough? Could it have played better and different role?
- The 6th and final Chapter, '**Summary and Conclusion**', summarizes the entire discussion in the previous five chapters and then puts forth the conclusions and suggestions that the scholar reached upon while pursuing the research work.

CHAPTER II

EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF MOBILE THEATRE IN ASSAM

The *jatra* groups that acquired great popularity in Bengal found their way into Assam with the coming in of the Bengali *babus* who were employed by the British administration. Local *jatra* groups, modeled upon the Bengali visiting *jatra* groups, began to emerge. Sarma (1962) mentions three points about how *jatra* took the form of drama: at the first level, the basic meaning of the word was to travel from one place to the other particularly on a special occasion or festival, for example, *Rasajatra*, *Rathajatra*, etc. In such group travels, different kinds of entertainment and acting was done to help the travelers relax and enjoy. At the second level, it means festivity and here, the travel per se is not important. At the third level, *jatra* came to mean drama or acting. Generally, in festivals some kind of dramatic performance was organized (p.123).

Nowadays, in festivals like Durga puja, etc., play/theatre presentation has become an integral part of the festivities. Similarly, centuries earlier too, such performances were probably a special part of the festivals. As that happened, the meaning of *jatra* also became concise and primarily stood for drama or dramatic performance. According to Bannerjee (1989), the term itself denotes literally a travel, a journey or the start of a journey, but the etymological meaning is unknown. It is said to originate from the rituals of songs and dances which formed part of the religious festivals in villages (p.103).

2.1 Assamese *Jatra* Groups Emerge

Bezbarua (1968) writes, pioneer among these is said to have been the group of Mr. Tithiram Bayan of Barpeta who, with the patronage of Mr. Gobindaram Choudhury organized a *jatra* group, and travelled as far as upper Assam (p19). Hazarika(1967) corroborates, this *jatra* group organized by Mr. Tithiram Bayan in around 1860-65 had Mr. Gobindaram Das Choudhury, an advocate, as its supporter who wrote two plays in Bengali, *Ram-banabash* and *Radhikar Manbhanjan*. Bayan's group conquered not only the Barpeta region but went on a voyage up the Brahmaputra and reaching Sivasagar, in upper Assam, won the hearts of the people there as well. Bayan is said to have been an expert violinist (pp.250-251). Bhattacharya (1964) also writes on the same lines, around the same time between 1860-65, a *jatra* party was formed under the patronage of Mr. Jaidev Sarma in Murkuchi village in then Kamrup. Similarly, between 1870-1900, two Assamese brothers, Katiya and Ahina, hailing from the Kamakhya hills formed a *jatra* troupe and began to exhibit

some performances here and there. Likewise, Mr. Garga *Ustad* and Mr. Radha Satola performed manuscript dramas translated from Bengali (p.70).

Though at first the *jatra* troupes performed only Bengali drama, later Assamese translations were done and after that original Assamese plays found place on the stage. In this regard the role played by Mr. Ambikagiri Raichoudhury, who was a poet, radical thinker and nationalist, to wipe out the trend of performing Bengali dramas or in Bengali in the Barpeta region needs special mention. It was he who first wrote the Assamese play *Jayadratha-badh* and performed it on stage in 1910 thus rooting out the tradition of Bengali *jatra* performance in Assam. In the preface of the play *Jayadrath-badh*, Ambikagiri Raichoudhury (Q.I Hazarika,1967) wrote thus-

The Assamese *giteenat* (musical drama) *Jayadratha-badh* was hailed everywhere. The public began to sing praises in my name as well. From that day onwards performing Bengali *jatra* in Barpeta began to wane.....four months later I completed another Assamese play *Bhaktagaurav*....both dramas were equally popular and led to wiping out of the Bengali dramas not only in Barpeta, but Assam. These two dramas were performed in the sessions of Asam Association and Assam Sahitya Sabha, Durga puja, Laksmi puja, Saraswati puja, as well as in weddings, etc., in Barpeta, Dhubri, Gauhati, Dibrugarh, Doom dooma, Bijni, Tihu, Jania, Senga, Nalbari, etc., for the next 20 years till 1930 (p.266).

This was the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Assamese dramatics. The Assamese *jatra* troupes performed mythological and historical dramas and this led to the creation of original Assamese plays like *Purushottama*, *Maya Nari*, *Debala Debi*, *Prayachitta*, *Nagakunwar*, *Madan-Basanta*, *Nal-Damyanti*, *Harischandra*, *Sri Ramchandra*, *Kalapahar*, etc. Unfortunately lack of proper preservation led to the manuscripts as well as the names of many playwrights being lost with time. This had indeed been a huge contribution to Assamese dramatic literature.

2.2 Contribution of Brajanath Sarma-The Revolutionary Artist

A personality whose name shines apart in the history of theatre in Assam is none other than the legendary Brajanath Sarma. He was the pioneer who established professional theatre in Assam. His greatest revolutionary contribution to the field of theatre in Assam was the initiation of co-acting in 1933 in a society where the space of women was within the confines of the house. A letter written in reply to the queries of renowned litterateur Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika on 31st October 1957 is a valuable source about this artist who challenged everything that stood on his path. This letter has been incorporated in Appendix-III.

The life of Brajanath Sarma itself was no less than fiction. His love for theatre and his zeal to do something new, his courage to defy society and its norms, his patriotism and his indomitable spirit, all combined to make him a legend in the history of Assamese stage. In his own words (Q.I Sarma, 1990)

There are many talented artists spread out across the villages and cities, hills and vales, nooks and corners of Assam. My only aim is to search out these talents who will wilt untimely due to the want of opportunity, embrace them into my Kohinoor Opera Party and give them a scope to develop their latent potentiality and show them a path to earn a livelihood through the practice of Art and culture (p.32).

Sarma (1990) further mentions, sixty years after Mr. Sarat Chandra Ghose, a theatre enthusiast and organizer in the dramatic circle of Bengal in the 19th century, who, on the advice of Mr. Michael Madhusudan Dutta, the popular 19th century Bengali poet and dramatist, had introduced co-acting in Bengal by bringing three ladies, viz., Ms.Jagattarini, Ms.Elokeshi and Ms. Shyamasundari on stage, Mr. Brajanath Sarma took this revolutionary step that etched his name in golden letters forever in the history of Assamese drama (pp.43-45). This was certainly not an overnight achievement, and Mr. Sarma had to work hard for more than three years to make his dream successful. His initial attempt to rope in two temple dancers (*Devadasi*) from the Parihareshwar temple in Doobi near Pathsala, viz., Savitri and Sajani had failed. The days rolled by and Mr. Brajanath Sarma's search went on.

Sarma (1990) further narrates, how finally, after a lot of hard work, from Puranigudam, in Nagaon district of central Assam, was found Ms. Sarbeswari Das and Ms.Golapi Das, from Samuguri in Nagaon was found Ms. Phuleswari Das, from Jorhat in upper Assam was found Ms.Sailabala Devi, from North Gauhati came Ms. Labanya Das, and from Nazira in Sivasagar in upper Assam, Ms. Binoda Gogoi. Considering the plight of education, particularly

for females, it was not surprising that these girls had not seen beyond primary school, though it is said Ms. Sailabala had completed Middle Vernacular (MV) schooling. As such, it was not possible to present them on stage immediately. A lot of stage, diction, pronunciation, etc., training had to be given before they were ready. Brajanath Sarma himself tutored them in all these aspects. At last, in November 1933 *Moran Jiyori* was staged which inaugurated co-acting in the history of Assamese stage (pp.44-45).

The backlash of this daring endeavour was not surprising. Brajanath Sarma expressed the bitter experience thus to Mr. Phani Sarma (Q.I Choudhury:1983),

“You know very well how I have managed to bring out these girls to the stage from within the interiors of a conservative patriarchal society. By introducing co-acting on stage I have suffered so much humiliation, criticism and bitterness even my own brother and nephew deserted the theatre party. The newspapers have criticized that I am trying to push the society towards destruction by inaugurating co-acting. I am propagating evil. Today, they are not being able to understand what I am doing but one day, the people of Assam will understand. I am not destroying the society instead I have taken the culture of Assam and the drama movement fifty years ahead” (p.12).

Eminent stage actor Uday Bhagawati has mentioned in his book *Jatrar pora Bhramyamanoloi* (1987) how, a strong protest was staged

against Brajanath Sarma and his experiment of co-acting, in Nalbari.(p.35).

Sarma (1990) mentions, this revolutionary step of Mr. Brajanath Sarma was not without appreciators. Assamese intellectuals like Mr. Chandradhar Barua and Mr. Hemchandra Goswami encouraged and inspired him to bring about social reform through the stage. But the societal criticism of co-acting coupled with other management problems saw the closing down of the *Kohinoor Opera Party* in 1936. With that came to a standstill co-acting on the stage of mobile theater. Twenty years later in 1957, co-acting was seen on the mobile theatre stage for the second time when, Ms. Tulika Das acted in *Surjya Opera* produced by Mr. Surjya Das of Rangamati in South Kamrup. After that, it was in 1960-61, that co-acting was continued by Mr. Purandar Talukdar of Nityananda, near Pathsala, and since then, the trend of co-acting has been continuing without any break (p.53).

Das (2002) writes about Brajanath Sarma's talent as a dramatist and litterateur. Between 1930-40 he wrote four plays in Assamese meant for the stage namely, *Manomati*, *Barjita*, *Urvashi* and *Varuna*. *Urvashi* was staged in the schoolweek celebration of Gopinath Bordoloi High School, Barpeta Road in 1958, while *Barjita* was performed on the stage of Kohinoor Opera Party. One among his several articles included *Jatra aru Abhinoy*. He composed songs also, in fact, seven such compositions of Brajanath Sarma have been found. These songs have been incorporated in appendix II of this study. Though he retired from the field of dramatics after 1936, in 1954, Sarma joined the Mairamara Chaturbhuji Opera in Howly,

Barpeta, as the director and later in 1956, joined the *jatra* parties of Singimari and Kerkhabari in Goalpara (pp.77-79).

In an interview with this research scholar, Brajanath Sarma's daughter, Ms. Hiran Devi (66 yrs) shared valuable information about her father. To quote her,

“Father was a fearless man who lived life on his own terms. He was extremely hard working and never spent an idle moment at home. He even worked in the fields with our engaged labourers and that is why he would not allow us children to waste our time. He was a rebel and encouraged us, daughters to take part in all public functions through dance, drama, etc. He kept an eye on everything in the household. He was a patriot to the core of his soul”.
H.Devi (Personal Communication, January, 8th, 2018)

Ms. Devi lamented the fact that many false stories have been spread about Brajanath Sarma by people who have not bothered to collect the right facts. She refuted that Brajanath Sarma was financially broken and as such, had died without any medical care. Ms. Devi recounted how they had an affluent life with huge land property that yielded more than sufficient crops. She reminisced,

“When father had gone to Guwahati that last time, it was not for medical reasons but for the impending case regarding our property that had been confiscated by the Government. Yes, he did suffer from asthma and probably fell ill, and was admitted to the Hospital. In fact, my Brother-in-law had gone to meet him in the Hospital. He was

given a bed in the hospital verandah because they did not have any vacancy and not because of lack of money. Communication in those days was not like today and that is why we came to know about his demise two days after his cremation. And we will never know how and why he expired on that fateful night. He was not a serious patient. But these stories of his penury and death in loneliness really hurts us a lot, because it is not true". (H.Devi. Personal communication. January 8, 2018)

Talukdar (2003) adds, there is no denying the fact that the rise and development that mobile theatres have seen today can be largely attributed to the pioneering steps taken by Brajanath Sarma. His Kohinoor Opera was the first completely commercial theatre group of Assam. The very idea of establishing dramatics in a commercial way and providing payment to the people associated led to a new age in the history of Assamese cultural arena. No wonder, many mobile theatre connoisseurs argue that it was actually Brajanath Sarma who is the real father of mobile theatre in Assam (pp.267-72)

The tables 2.1,2.2 and 2.3 given below establishes the fact *jatra* groups were primarily organized centering around lower Assam, particularly in undivided Kamrup and undivided Goalpara districts but the huge popularity of this performing art took it to upper Assam also.

Table : 2.1 Some of the *jatra* groups formed in South Kamrup

Sl. no.	Name of the Jatra party	Year of establishment	Producer / Director
1	2	3	4
1.	<i>Kamakhya Jatra party</i>	1870-90 Probably	Katiya & Ahina
2.	<i>Palashbari Jatra party</i>	1907	Ganeshwar Sarma with support From <i>Ustad</i> Nandiram Kalita.
3.	<i>Pranay Sanmilani Jatrparty</i>	1913	Amritla Thakuria(Manager)
4.	<i>Kholjatra Natyadal</i>	1913	Urpu Satra Raj Gairah
5.	<i>Khidirpukhuri jatra party</i>	1912-1915	Basudev Goswami (Producer)
6.	<i>Sadilapur Natya Parishad, Palashbari</i>	1915-1916	_____
7.	<i>Palashbari Bandhab Sanmilan Jatra Party</i>	1915-1916	_____
8.	<i>Sri Sri KaliathakurJatra Party, Sikarahati</i>	1917	Public Enterprise
9.	<i>Solesala Jatra Party</i>	1918-1919	_____
10.	<i>Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party</i>	1919	Sanjay Choudhry & Nabin Choudhury
11.	<i>Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party,</i>	1919	Sanaram Mahajan, Kirtan Das, Uma Sarma, Madhab Pathak <i>et al.</i>
12.	<i>Gopinath Natya Parishad, Nahira</i>	1920	Girish Medhi (Producer)
13.	<i>Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party (Choudhurypara, Barihat)</i>	1921	Sukhuna Das, Seharam Gaonbura, <i>et al.</i>
14.	<i>Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party (Soru Heramdu)</i>	1920	Seharam Das, Chinti <i>Ustad</i> , Maniya Manager, <i>et al.</i>
15.	<i>Bhalukghata Jatra Party Boko</i>	1923	<i>Ustad</i> Suryakanta Sarma (Director)
16.	<i>Chamaria Jatra Party</i>	1923	_____
17.	<i>Jagannath Opera Dal (Rampur-Amudpur)</i>	1925	<i>Ustad</i> Suryakanta Sarma (Producer/Director)

1	2	3	4
18.	Sri Sri Bangsigopal Jatrparty (Talukdarpara Barihat)	1926	Bogaram Das
19.	Nowapara Jatra Party (Chaigaon, Nowapara)	1926	_____
20.	Shaktidas Natya Sangha (Chaigaon, Nowapara)	1926	Shakti Das
21.	Sri Sri Burhagosain Natya Parishad	1929	Nandiram Kalita, Gahin Ch. Das
22.	Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party (Bor Heramdu, Barihat)	1930	Krishnakanta Mahajan
23.	Kamrup Newsouth Opera Party (Khidirpukhuri Rampur)	_____	Chidananda Goswami (Producer)
24.	Dakkhin Jhankakata Natyadal (Alookhunda)	1931	Maniram Kakoty
25.	Mathpara Sankar Jatra Party (Chaigaon)	1933	Kamalakanta Goswami
26.	Kaliathakur Jatra Party (Amranga)	1936	Laksmiram Mahajan, Khargeswar Das, <i>et al.</i>
27.	Majirgaon Jatra Party	1938	_____
28.	Dharapur Jatra Party	1940	_____
29.	Sadilapur BandhabSanmilan Jatra Party	1940	Jogen Bharali (play director)
30.	Uparhali Jatra Party	1941	Ramdas (play director)
31.	Naradpara Burhagosain (Ashrita Jatrparty)	1944	Prabhat Sarma, Krishna Sarma, Manik Deka.
32.	Sarpara Jatra Party	1944	_____
33.	Sri Sri MahalaksmiJatra Party (Barihat)	1944	Sanjay Choudhury (Producer, Director, Playwright, Lyricist)* From this year , the party travelled as a complete commercial party.
34.	Gowalhati Jatra Party	1944	Mamat Bhakat, Bharat Kalita.
35.	Palli Jatra Party	1945	Gahin Ch. Das (Producer)

1	2	3	4
36.	Garhgarha Jatra Party	1945	Rameshwar Kumar, Soneshwar Kumar, Chandrakanta Mahanta, <i>et al.</i>
37.	Jajir JatradaI	1945	Jaji Barduar Raij Gairah
38.	Kalikachyut Bhurapara Opera Party (Bhagawatipara)	1946	Bhogewar Kalita (Producer)
39.	Majkuchi Jatra Party	1947	Homeshwar Das
40.	Nahira Nabajagaran Natya Parishad	1949	Bhabadev Goswami, Shyamdev Goswami (Producer)
41.	Rampur Jatra Party (Khidirpukhuri)	1950	Suren Das (Producer)
42.	Nowapara Jatra Party (Chaigaon)	1950	Hari Sarma (Producer)
43.	Karbhanga Jatra Party (Karbhanga-Boko)	1952	Paharu Boro (Producer)
44.	Dakkhin Kamrup Kohinoor Opera (Borphulguri)	1954	Nabin Das, Maniram Das, et al.
45.	Nahira yuvak Natya Parishad (Nahira)	1955	Bhabadev Goswami (Producer)
46.	Sujanpara Jatra Party (Sujanpara)	1955	Shiba Kalita (Producer)
47.	Kukuriya Jatra Party (Kukuriya)	1956	Public Enterprise
48.	Kendurtala Jatra Party	1956	_____
49.	Dharapur Jatra Party	1956	_____
50.	Champak Natya Parishad (Chaigaon)	1956	Public Enterprise
51.	Surjya Opera (Rangamati)	1957	Surjyamali (Producer)
52.	Bangsigopal JatradaI	1958	Jatia Raij Gairah (Bamunpara)
53.	Hakrapara Jatra Party	1960	Bhudev Sarma
54.	Palli Jatra Party(Palli)	1960	Madan Mahanta
55.	Batarhat BandhabSanmilon Natya Samiti Batarhat	1960	Naramohan Goswami
56.	Kukurmara Jelijun Jatrparty	1963	Hiren Bora

1	2	3	4
57.	Samabai Natya Parishad (Amranga)	1963	Rajani Kalita, Umesh Das, <i>et al.</i>
58.	Barhihat Jatradaal	1967	Dharmeswar Das (Manager)
59.	Chitrajyoti Natya Parishad (Dakhla)	1967	Bhubanewar Sarma, Prabhat Sarma (Producer).
60.	Natarupa Natya Parishad	1968	Dr. Haladhar Das
61.	Angipaar Jatrascop Theatre	1969	Brajen Das (Owner)
62.	Binapani Natya Parishad (Sikarhati)	1969	Rajen Das, Puspa Kalita, Purnima Das, <i>et al.</i>
63.	Barkuchi Jatra Party (Barkuchi)	1970	_____
64.	Rupjyoti Natya Parishad (Maniyeri Teeniali)	1970	Barkat Ali (Producer)
65.	Sri Madhab Natya Parishad Bijoy Nagar, Dak	1971	Prabhat Sarma
66.	Singra Jatra Party (Singra)	1972	Khirod Nath (Producer)
67.	Rajlaksmi Natya Parishad (Rampur)	1975	Jagadananda Choudhury (Producer)
68.	Nahira Basumilan Natya Parishad, (Nahira)	1978	Paresh Bhagawati
69.	Sikarhati Jatra Party(Sikarhati)	1980	Naren Das (Producer)
70.	Mancharupa Natya Parishad, Bijoy Nagar	1981	Azim Barua, Sultan Sheikh (Producer)
71.	Kamrup Natya Parishad (Dakhla)	1982	Anantaram Deka (Producer)
72.	Sarpara Bhangragosain Natya Parishad	1984	Ananda Das (Producer)
73.	Mahalaksmi Natya Parishad, Satarapara	1984	Lohit Nath (Producer)
74.	Srikrishna Natya Parishad, Rampur	1986	Suren Das (Producer)
75.	Ajanta Natya Parishad (Sikarhati)	1986	Public Enterprise
76.	Jugashree Natya Parishad Sikarhati	1987	Suren Mahanta (Producer)

Source: *Jatra party* (May 29, 2015). *Sadin Bises*, pp.1-13.

Table:2.2 Some of the Jatra groups formed in undivided Goalpara district

Sl. No	Name of the party	Year	Place
1	<i>Pachania Gaon Jatradaal</i>	n.k	Pachania
2	<i>Marnai Gaon Jatradaal</i>		Marnai
3	<i>Barbhita Gaon Jatradaal</i>		Barbhita
4	<i>Dubapara Barowari Jatra Party</i>		Dubapara
5	<i>Dakaidal Barowari Party</i>		Dakaidal
6	<i>Dahikata Jatra Party</i>		Dahikata
7	<i>Bhujmala Jatra Party</i>		
8.	<i>Lalabari Jatra Party</i>		Lalabari
9	<i>Probhat Adhikari's Jatradaal</i>	1925	Dalguma
10.	<i>Binapani Opera</i>	1932	Duhnoi

Source: Hazarika, R. (May,1989). *Aglati..* p.172

Table: 2.3 Few of the jatra groups formed in undivided Kamrup district

Sl.No	Name of the group	Year	Place
1.	<i>Palashbari Jatradaal</i>	1903	Palashbari
2.	<i>Maruwa Jatradaal</i>	1919/1941	Maruwa, Nalbari
3.	<i>Sualkuchi Jatradaal</i>	1920	Sualkuchi
4.	<i>Gobindapur Jatradaal</i>	1923	Gobindapur
5.	<i>Piplibari Jatradaal</i>	1925/1947	Piplibari, Nalbari
6.	<i>Lakhminarayan Opera party</i>	1927	Barkhala
7.	<i>Sri Sri Sankaradeva Opera party</i>	1930	Bamakhata

Source : Information collected from Mr. Atul Mazumdar.

Hazarika (1967) says, although *jatra* travelled to upper Assam as well, with Mr.Bhadra Gogoi forming the All Assam Ideal Dramatic Party in Jaypur, Naharkatiya, in 1935 and Mr. Guru Prasad Borthakur's All Assam Star Theatre in Sibasagar in 1938 (p.277), its huge

popularity in lower Assam could not be touched. This craze for *jatra* in lower Assam can be attributed to certain reasons, like, one, *jatra* was free from the religious-ritualistic shackles that bound *bhaona* and it could be performed anywhere anytime. Two, *jatra* performances were not confined to the serious presentations of *bhaona* and no artificial language like *Brajabuli* was used. Three, people could draw a parallel between the *jatra* and the indigenous popular performing arts in lower Assam like (cited from Sarma, 2013), (a) *Dhuliya naas*, a popular folk dance-cum-act which has been traditionally performed by many ethnic communities of Assam. The *dhuliya* group comprises of about 60-70 members and they perform song and dance along with the dhol (drum) recital coupled with acrobatic acts. The style of performance varies according to the locale, and (b) *Ojapali*, a very popular semi-dramatic performing art of Assam where the *Oja* (leader) and his *pali* (group) narrate stories through dancing to the beat of cymbals. *Ojapali* is of two types: *Byah Ojapali* (narrating tales from the two epics, *Ramyaana* and *Mahabharata*) and *Suknani Ojapali* (narrating tales from the *Shakti* (mother goddess) cult, particularly about *Manasa*, i.e The Serpent goddess (pp.62,81). Four, *jatra* was a novel experience for the Assamese masses and it was only natural that people were attracted to it.

With the passage of time *jatra* became an integral part of the cultural scenario of Assam. No festival or public event was complete without a *jatra* performance. For the rich and elite, a *jatra* was a must for personal celebrations like wedding, childbirth, etc. Kalita (2011) writes, as time went by many new *jatra* troupes continued to be formed in various places. Among these were *Laupara Jatradaal*, *Tihu* (1931-56), *Tihu Natya Samitee* (1949), *Murkuchi Milan Natya Samitee* (1950), *Basudeb Opera Party*, *Ghograpar* (1957-62), *Chaturbhuj Opera*

Party, Howly (1955), Bogoriguri Jatradaal (1953), Bagna Jatradaal (1954), Amrikhuwa Basudeb Jatra Party, Udayan Natya Gusthi, Sarthebari (1975), etc.(p.18).

2.3 A New Era is Born

The gigantic leap from *jatra* to mobile theatre was first initiated by popular actor Mr. Sadananda Lahkar, when he established a modern *jatra* troupe, Nataraj Opera, in 1959 in Pathsala. Had he not established Nataraj Opera, mobile theatre would have never been born in Assam. Figo (2010) transcripts, the architect of this transformation was Mr.Sadananda Lahkar's elder brother, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, who wanted to bring in something new into the scenario. He did not like certain aspects of opera, like, male actors enacting female roles, delivery of dialogues through singing, wrong pronunciations, misrepresentation of social issues in translated dramas, lack of drama based on the settings of Assamese society,etc.(p.25). Mr.Ratan Lahkar, (70 yrs), producer-proprietor of Kohinoor theatre explained in his interview, the other reason that led to creation of mobile theater was pure commerce, because Mr. Achyut Lahkar wanted to provide financial security to the artists, technicians and workers associated with dramatics. The *jatra* troupes performed only one or two dramas in a year on invitation. This income was hardly sufficient for them to sustain. Moreover, they sat idle for the rest of the time. To change both these scenarios Achyut Lahkar worked out such a plan by which *jatra* would be presented in a new modern way and financial security would be provided to the artists (Lahkar,R. Personal Communication. May, 22, 2014). This was the moment when Nataraj Theatre: the first mobile theatre of Assam was born in 1963, a unique concept unprecedented in the history of theatre.

Nataraj Theatre was to be 'mobile' in every sense of the term. Every required paraphernalia was to be movable. A proscenium stage made of wooden planks that could be set up and dismantled, an auditorium in the form of a huge tent that could sit at least a thousand people- basically a set up that would travel all over and take theatre to the masses instead of vice-versa. The performances presented would be modern drama and not *jatra* or opera. Nataraj Theatre would have its own light and sound equipments, generator for power supply, everything necessary for music and acting, like, instruments, costumes, make-up, etc. Dasarath Das, veteran singer and music director of mobile theatre (70 yrs) narrated how the best of artists were gathered from various parts of Assam- Director: Mr. Chandra Choudhury; Dance Director: Mr. Kalawanta Singh, Mr. Robin Das; Music Director: Mr. Prabhat Sarma and Mr. Chandra Choudhury; Set Design: Mr. Achyut Lahkar; Art Design: Mr. Adya Sarma; Lighting Direction : Mr. Achyut Lahkar; Lighting Control : Mr. Tushar Dasgupta and Mr. Rajani Das; Sound Control : Mr. Paresh Sarma and Mr. Jiten Das; Set Design : Mr. Sarbeswar Das; Publicity : Mr. Akshay Patgiri and Krishna Roy; Actors : Mr. Sada Lahkar, Mr. Chandra Choudhury, Mr. Dharani Barman, Mr. Rudra Choudhury, Mr. Bholu Kotoki, Mr. Baldev Saikia, Mr. Netrakamal Barthakur, Mr. Haren Deka, Mr. Akshay Patgiri, Mr. Nagen Sarma, Mr. Jiten Pal, Mr. Praneswar Kakoty, Mr. Krishna Roy, Mr. Uday Das, Mr. Mukul das, Mr. Khagen Das, et al; Actresses : Ms. Anupama Devi, Ms. Banita Borthakur, Ms. Jyotsna Devi, Ms. Manjil Bordoloi, Ms. Swarnalata Bora, et al; Playback singers : Mr. Rajkrishna Barhoi (male) and Ms. Renu Phukan (female). The plays selected for the maiden stage of Nataraj theatre were Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika's *Tikendrajit*, Mr. Uttam Barua's *Jerengar Soti*, and Mr. Phani Sarma's

Bhogjara, as well as the translated version of *Haider Ali*. The maiden presentation on the evening of 2nd October 1963 was *Bhogjara* in the courtyard of the Pathsala Harimandir, where the makeshift auditorium was set up. The atmosphere was alive with excitement. (D.Das. Personal Communication. July 09, 2014).

Figo (2010) transcripts, Mr. Achyut Lahkar used a revolving stage (trolley) in this maiden presentation to facilitate uninterrupted performance. A revolving stage basically used two stages. While the artists performed on one, the other was readied with the settings behind the curtain. As soon as the scene ended and the curtain dropped, the new stage would be pushed into position and the other pushed out. The use of vehicle tyres to support the stage created problems in the first year, and as such, next year the vehicle tyres were replaced with iron wheels. Initially the auditorium was shaped like an inverted 'V' where the frontage had a breadth of about 40 feet while the backside expanded between 90 to 100 feet. It was later on with experiments, that the present shape and set up of the auditorium came about. Folding wooden chairs were used to seat the audience. The concept of the gallery was also not there initially. It was from the Diamond Circus of Mr. Haren Das of Bajali in Barpeta district that Mr. Lahkar picked it up, and introduced the gallery in the third year of Nataraj Theatre (p.25)

This journey of Nataraj Theatre, the first mobile theater of Assam, that began in 1963, continued non-stop till 2003 for long forty years. In these forty years many mobile theatres were born and perished, but the role played by Nataraj theatre in the history of mobile theatres stands out in a class apart. Mr. Achyut Lahkar took Nataraj theatre

outside the state to Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and even Nepal, but due to the financial loss incurred in these ventures, tours outside the state had to be given up. The path that was shown by Mr. Achyut Lahkar has been treaded upon by many in this half a century. It is interesting to note that mobile theatres have never lost their commercial value and that is the reason why new mobile theatre groups have consistently been set up in spite of many being unsuccessful ventures. This fact can be seen in the table given below:

Table 2.4 : List of mobile theatres with the integral data

Sl. No	Year	Place	Name of Theater	Producer
1	2	3	4	5
1	1963	Pathasala	Nataraj	Achyut Lahkar
2	1964	Chamata	Suradebi	Dharani Barman
3	1966	Hajo	Purbajyoti	Karuna Mazumdar
4	1968	Pathsala	Mancharupa	Hemkanta Talukdar
5	1968	Barpeta	Rupanjoli	Prangopal Das
6	1970	Pathsala, Guwahati	Asom Star	Kumud Prasad Sarma
7	1972	Makhibaha	Mukunda	Atul Bhattacharya
8	1972	Pathsala	Nataraj Silpa Niketan	unknown
9	1973	Abhayapuri	Rupalim	Nripen Sarma
10	1973	Nalbari	Rupkonwar	Biren Kalita
12	1975	Nitai Pukhuri	Jyotirupa	Golap Borgohain
13	1975	Morowa	Bhagyadebi	Sarat Mazumdar
14	1976	Pathsala	Kohinoor	Ratan Lahkar
15	1977	Chamata	Bishnujyoti	Abala & Hiranya Barman
16	1977	Goalpara	Lakkhimi	Nripen Barua, Ratneswar Das
17	1977	N. Guwahati	Manchakonwar	Prabhat Bora
18	1977	Belsor	Kalpana	Jadavsen Deka

1	2	3	4	5
19	1978	Nalbari	Biswajyoti	Haren Deka
20	1979	Pathsala	Aradhana	Sadananda Lahkar
21	1980	Pathsala	Abahan	Krishna Roy
22	1982	Pathsala	Anirban	Subhash Choudhury
23	1982	Guwahati	Indradhanu	Indreswar Bujarbarua
24	1984	Pathsala	Chitralekha	Rajani Patgiri
25	1984	Pathsala	Kalpataru	Dulal Talukdar
26	1984	Panikhaiti	Aparupa	Mahananda Sarma
27	1984	Chamata	Apsara	Jiten Sarma
28	1984	Chamata	Rangghar	Robindeb Barman
29	1985	Dibrugarh	Suruj	unknown
30	1985	Patasarkuchi	Indrani	Harekrishna Das
31	1985	Morioni	Hengul	Prasanta Hazarika
32	1985	Chamata	Moon	Abala Barman
33	1986	Pathsala	Debadaxi	Nagen Lahkar
34	1987	Boniyakusi	Giriraj	Girin Das
35	1987	Singra	Radhikadebi	Upen Kalita
36	1987	Sarupeta	Joyotu Oxomi	Bipin Chetia
37	1987	Mangaldoi	Abhijan	Unknown
38	1987	Guwahati	Meghdoot	Kalyan Dey
39	1990	Pathsala	Natasurya Bishnujyoti	unknown
40	1991	Moran	Samannay	Rohini Changmai
41	1993	Morigaon	Borluit	Edhani Deka
42	1993	Sarthebari	Binapani	Ramdas Barman
43	1993	Pathsala	Pallabi	Gopesh Talukdar
44	1993	Hanhsora kujibali	Srimanta Sankaradeva	Biswa Saikia
46	1994	Sualkusi	Monalisa	Ramen Das
47	1995	Dirak	Tarangam	Gunadhar Konwar
48	1995	Makhibaha	Jai Jawan Jai Kisan	Unknown
49	1995	Guwahati	Anirban	Surya Mahanta, C.Deka
50	1995	Borbhag	Manchajyoti	Trailokya Sarma

1	2	3	4	5
151	1996	Gohpur	Srimanta Sankara Madhab	Tilak & Pulin Phukan
52	1997	Dudhnoi	Meghali	Somen Das
53	1997	Nahoroni	Amaltara	Unknown
54	1998	Nalbari	Bordoisila	Nazrul Islam, Upen Deka
55	1998	Bokota	Godapani	Mrigen Mohon
56	1998	Jajori	Saraighat	Krishnananda Tamuli
57	1999	Balipara	Madhabadeba	Naren Das
58	2000	Dibrugarh	Ma Jonaki	Unknown
59	2000	Nazira	Sewali	Unknown
60	2003	Sapekhati	Bhagyashree	Unknown
61	2005	Belsor	Anurag Movie	Unknown
62	2005	Guwahati	Rajshree	Narayan Deka
63	2005	Nalbari	Sakuntala	Unknown
64	2005	Nalbari	Chitalekha	Unknown
65	2006	Hatigaon	Karengghar	Unknown
	2006	Bagsa	Sandaw Bawdia (Bodo)	Anjana Basumatary
66	2007	Nalbari	Debraj	Unknown
67	2008	Guwahati	Rajtilak	Sushanta Biswa Sharma
68	2009	Guwahati	Rajmahal	Unknown
69	2009	Guwahati	Itihaas	Robin Neog
70	2009	Baniyakuchi	Shraddhanjali	Unknown
71	2009	Hajo	Rupantar	Unknown
72	2009	Guwahati	Brahmaputra	Unknown
73		Cinnamora, Jorhat	Purbabani	Unknown
74		Morioni	Pratiddhwani	Unknown
75		Gohpur	Dibyadhvani	Unknown
76		Dibrugarh	Bhadoi	Unknown
77		Bokakhat	Bhaskar	Unknown
78		Tinsukia	Samrat	Unknown
79		Guwahati	Pragjyotish	Unknown

1	2	3	4	5
80		Diksou, Sibsagar	Panchanan	
81		Lanka, Nagaon	Barnali	
82		Jamuguri	Panchajanya	
83		Koliabor	Mahabharat	
84		Baihata	Udaiyan	
85		Dakkhinpat	Nabarun	
86		Arikusi	Asamjyoti	
87		Sapekhati	Natasurya	
88		Naharkatiya	Srimanta	
89		Bongaon, Tihu	Kalpataru	
90		Sarupeta	Bandana	
91		Morioni Tiniali	Dhrubatara	
92		Sonitpur	Monikut	
93		Agiya	Chitrabon	
94		Sonitpur	Dibyabani	
95		South Singra	Nandini	
96	1974	Pathsala	Sourang Manju (1st Bodo Theater)	
97		Goreswar	Bordoichila	
98		Sonari	Binandini	
99		Dibrugarh	Meghdoot	
100		Dibrugarh	Himalaya	
101		Pathsala	Parihareswar	
102		Dergaon	Eagle	
103		Pathsala	Indrajeet	
104		Nagaon	Manchatirtha	
105		Nagaon	Sri Madhabadeba	
106		Jorhat	Ma Agnigarh	
107		Duliajan	Swagatam	
108		Jorhat	Rangghar	
109		Chamata	Rajlakshmi	

1	2	3	4	5
110			Rajmukut	
111	2015	Rowta	Surya	Munindra Barman
112			Binapani	

Source: Information collected from Mr. Atul Mazumdar

2.4 Love of Mobile Theatre

Once the idea of the mobile theatre caught on it led to the mushrooming of the same all over Assam but definitely the majority was in lower Assam. As can be seen in the table given above, in Pathsala alone, not less than theaters were born. Of course, it is another story that most of these theatres, as elsewhere, could not sustain themselves. The reasons will be discussed in Chapter IV, which focuses on ‘Problems and Prospects of Mobile Theatres’. Certain factors obviously were there, that has led to the huge success and popularity of this medium. Assam has a strong historical background as far as performing arts is concerned. Be it *bhaona* in upper Assam or *jatra* in lower Assam, people were very much attracted to these performances. When mobile theatre emerged as a new and improved *avatar* (incarnation) of the earlier *jatra*, it was only natural that people loved it. As admitted by Mr. Achyut Lahkar, in his interview, “the idea behind mobile theatre was to take theatre to the common people”(Lahkar.A. Personal Communication, July, 09, 2014). The social issues taken up in the dramas were such that simple villagers could connect to the mobile theatre. Initially, the major audience used to be the village people. It was much later that the urban audience caught on, and one of

the most important reason for this is the almost extinct state of the Assamese cinema industry. In fact, the field research has shown, today, mobile theatres are as popular in a metro like Guwahati, as it is in the muffed towns like Nalbari, or Chamata, that cater to the rural populace. One cannot help but observe that this popularity today is largely for reasons like the presence of glamour artists, Bollywood style of song, dance and action, cinematic stories, technological gimmicks, and so on.

It is a complete entertainment package that seeks to cater to a widely varied audience. Another reason, perhaps was, when mobile theatres first came up, there were very few cinema halls in the state and obviously majority of the village people did not have access to any. So, when mobile theatres came to them, it was only natural that it was a rage. People in the villages used to save money the year round to be able to enjoy the mobile shows. One more reason for the popularity of mobile theatre was that very talented artists who were totally devoted to the stage were engaged. Original plays were written by renowned playwrights keeping in mind the taste of the audience as well as the social relevance. Actors and actresses, knew the stage, how to deliver dialogues, the modulation and voice pitch required, how to move on stage, and how to connect with the audience. Good stories and good actors were the secret of success. With time things changed and 'glamour' artists (meaning film stars) were first introduced in mobile theatre by Purbajyoti Theatre. This brought more popularity to mobile theatres, as the attraction of the common people towards the stars of the silver screen was quite natural. Unfortunately, the negative impact of the glamour culture has been seen on the deteriorating acting

quality, except a few, of the so called ‘stars’, who are not trained for the stage. Previously, it was seen that actors from the stage went to the screen but in Assam, particularly in mobile theatres, an opposite trend has set in. Untrained novices, who feature in a couple of VCD (Video compact disc) movies, land up on the stage with practically no knowledge about it. As mentioned earlier, on stage, performance is live and unless an actor or actress understands what live theatre acting demands, they cannot deliver. Unlike cinema or television, here one cannot fall back on retakes. The audience, too, is sensitive enough to grasp the capacity of an actor or actress.

2.5 A Well-Coordinated Set up

The ‘season’ of the mobile theatres begin from mid-August till mid-April, a continuous road show of full nine months. Prior to that, for about a month or more, intense rehearsals are done in the respective camps. Light, sound, music, actors, technicians, everyone must be in perfect sync because it is a live performance and no retakes can be given. Each camp is situated in a campus that has an office and provide lodging for all associated with the particular theatre. A well-managed kitchen caters to the food. The earlier trend was, at the end of a season the theatre groups announced their next season’s plans and preparations started accordingly, but now, it is seen that the next years plans are announced much earlier with the process of roping in artists, technicians, playwrights, and most importantly the ‘stars’, midway of one season. Nowadays the advertisements through television, you-tube, Facebook, etc., has also increased the competition level. Video Compact Discs featuring the songs of

the mobile theatres, shot in a cinematic style are also released much earlier in an elaborate style to attract viewers.

The smooth management of the mobile theatres can be a lesson for students of management. Ironically people who manage the theatres are no management graduates. Right from the moment the inaugural sacred ritual of a theatre group is held on an auspicious day in July, the rehearsals begin, and so does the management responsibilities. Catering to around a 100 people on a daily basis is not an easy task. Lodging, food, any kind of problem, not to speak of emergencies, etc., has to be taken care of. Then, when in mid-August the travelling starts, the entire set up has to be moved. Right from the auditorium in a gigantic tent that can seat 1500-2000 people, the same number of chairs, wooden planks and bamboos to set up the stage, stage settings, costumes, lights, sound equipment, music instruments, the entire kitchen paraphernalia, bedding, etc., are loaded on 4 to 5 trucks which belong to the theatre group, or are hired. The people travel by bus to the scheduled destination. It is amazing that in spite of the long distance between two venues there is no break in the schedule of the theatre group. This is because most of the established theatre groups own two sets of stage-auditorium settings which can be sent off earlier for the required preparations. The others fix up dates keeping all logistics in mind. Everything runs on clockwork precision.

As written by Paul (2013), when producer Mr. Ratan Lahkar's Kohinoor Theatre was invited by the National School of Drama (NSD), New Delhi, in 2010 to stage plays in the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, Ms. Anuradha Kapur, then

Director of NSD, was overwhelmed by the kind of discipline and management that the people working in mobile theatres of Assam follow (p.24).

To quote from Mr.Lahkar's interview ad verbatim, "She stated before the media, a crew of 150 members travel all the way from Assam in six trucks and has the record of setting a dual stage measuring 60 feet in five hours.That is incredible! Ms. Kapur also mentioned that NSD had plans to interact with the Assamese actors to learn the tactics of running the whole scene and, they were trying to archive and document the plays for reference material. The three plays Kohinoor theatre presented were, *Asimat Jar Heral Sima, O, Moi Munnai Koisu* and *Sitorey Semeka Rati*"(Lahkar.R. Personal Communication, 22/05/2014).

2.6 The Inviting or Organizing Committee

Mobile theatres perform all over Assam on the invitations received. The inviting or organizing committees that invite mobile theatres are usually local socio-cultural organizations and clubs or during Durga and Kali puja, the puja committees of an area, etc. The purpose behind inviting the theatre groups, apart from entertainment, is to fulfill some social requirement of the area like establishment of schools, colleges, *Namghars* i.e. Vaishnavite community prayer hall, cultural or sports club, etc. There are numerous such examples of how funds generated through mobile theatre shows have been utilized for social development.

Earlier, the invitations to the mobile theatres used to come in from organizing committees of different places around April. However, that trend has changed now and become preponed

depending on the 'stars' in the cast. The moment one mobile theatre can announce their 'star' artists for the season, the invitations pour in. Every season, the theatre producer signs a contract with each inviting committee on one hand, while on the other hand, he signs a contract each, with the various individual artists, technicians, workers, etc., engaged by the theatre. Once all preparations are complete, the theatre group sets out for the season to perform all over the state, as per the invitations. In each station the group performs for three to four days. Two shows, first and second, per evening is the common norm which sometimes can be extended to a third show depending on the popularity of a particular drama. To quote Mr. Ratan Lahkar (70 yrs) producer of Kohinoor Theatre, "there has been instances of 4 shows in a day also". (Lahkar.R, Personal Communication, 22/05/2014). One can imagine how gruelling this routine can be, since these are all live shows we are referring to. Any personal problem or even sickness, unless very serious, has to take a backstage for the people involved in a theatre. Commenting on such situations, former mobile theatre actress, Ms.Moni Bordoloi narrated how, when popular actor Mr. Jatin Bora was under contract with a particular mobile theatre group, he had to honour it even when the news of his father's demise reached him (Bodoloi.M, Personal communication, October, 05, 2012). Once the theatre group reach their scheduled destination, the role of the inviting committee becomes visible. All this while also, they had been working, but from a distance. We must understand the very important role played by the inviting/convening committees in the story of the mobile theatres. It is because of these invitations to perform that the theatre groups are sustaining themselves. Das (2015) explains, according to the traditional norm, the inviting or convening committees make an agreement with a particular theatre group almost one year earlier by

paying a booking amount of not less than Rupees One Lakh. From then, till the time of the show, that is the next nine months, the committee does a lot of homework like putting up posters for the publicity of the theatre, selling season tickets, arranging for the venue to pitch tent, getting the permission of the Deputy Commissioner and the Superintendent of Police, setting up of counters to sell tickets, and most important, arrange for the accommodation of the theatre group, etc.(pp.38-39).

Nowadays the star performers are accommodated in hotels and Inspection Bungalows or, if near home, they travel to the venue themselves. Once the shows are over, comes the time of complete payment to the theatre group. If the shows are successful and the collection is good no problems arise. There is a ratio of division of the collected amount between the mobile theatre group and the convening committee. All these details have been discussed in the subsequent chapter. The convening committee also has to meet expenses amounting to almost a lakh for organizing the theatre. This money also needs to come out from the ticket collection. In Assam there are many structures constructed by the convening committees from profits of organizing theatres. In fact, many times it is to fulfill such social needs of a particular area, that mobile theatres are invited. Therefore, in an indirect way the mobile theatres contribute to the social benefit. The inviting Committees are the sustainers of mobile theatre in Assam. Without these committees, the entire business will come to a stop.

A few Organizing Committees selected on the basis of Simple Random Sampling (SRS) that the research scholar approached for information are:

Table 2.5: Mobile theatre organizing Committees in various parts of Assam				
Sl.No	Name of Committee	Location	Contact person	Association with mobile theatre
1	Everest Club	Azara, near Guwahati	Mr.Abani Barua 65yrs	Since 1997
2	Hari MandirCommittee	Baharghat, Demow	Mr.Munindra Lahkar,58 yrs	Since 1988
3	Vibyor SportsClub	Phulaguri, Nagaon	Mr. Jonmoni Sarma,45 yrs	Since 2002
4	Sports StarClub	Jagi Bhakatgaon	Mr. Mintu Bora 42 yrs	Since 1999
5	Ganeshguri Barowari PujaCommittee	Ganeshguri, Guwahati	Mr. Jatin Das 58 yrs	Since 1977

The interviews with the contact persons mentioned in the foregoing table revealed that around numerous organizing committees are there all over Assam. This fact can be corroborated from the travelling schedule of the mobile theatre groups published in their yearly souvenirs. This has been given in appendix III of this study. These committees and the mobile theatres share a very special relationship. They depend on each other.

As mentioned by Mr. Jatin Das (58 yrs) of Ganeshguri Barowari Committee, ‘we do not even need a formal contract to be signed with the mobile groups and a lot of things happen verbally because that is the credibility we have managed to establish’. He elaborated how the booking amount (show money) is collected from committee members and patrons, as well as, the well-wishers. Thereafter, the major collection comes from sale of tickets during the shows. The ticket rates, currently-Rs.300/, Rs.200/ and Rs.100/, are decided

by the committee. 'We do not need to go for pushing sale or season tickets', he also added (J.Das. Personal Communication, July 05, 2017).

Mr. Abani Barua (65 yrs) of Everest Club, Azara, near Guwahati explained that, it is a wrong perception that the organizing committees rake in huge amount of money as profit by inviting mobile theatres every year. Mobile theatre is business and like all business, here also, the dynamics of profit and loss works equally. Sometimes we see profit and sometimes it becomes a struggle to even clear payment of the contractual amount to the theatre party. Natural calamities can happen anytime. Then, we have to renegotiate. Things are worked out because both the mobile theatre parties and we, the organizers, understand that this is business (Barua,A. Telephonic interview. July, 05,2017).

Mr. Jonmoni Sarma (45 yrs) of Vibgyor club, Phulaguri, Nagaon admitted to, and lamented the fact that it is true that organizing committees today invite mobile theatres based on the 'star' actors, We are compelled because the crowd pulling factor is the presence of the 'stars'. When we invite a particular mobile theatre party, we, as the organizers, have certain duties and responsibilities which entail certain expenses. Where will we meet those from, plus the payment to the party itself, if the show is not successful? 'Star' presence

ensures that success (Sarma,J. Telephonic interview. October, 22, 2016)

2.7 The Audience

One of the most important subject, when we are discussing any performing art, is the audience. A performance is presented for the audience. Naturally the importance of the audience is immense. Relationship between the audience and the actors is equally important. Capturing the audience' interests and not simply soliciting their goodwill was presumably the concern of everyone involved in the theatre industry, from stage-property managers to star actors. To quote Roselli (2012),

the audience is, then, not a mere object of information and amusement, but it is always engaged in real social interaction, overt or imaginary. One of the most common phenomena is the vicarious experience of the audience in the drama. We live in the play in a way which we do not live in a lecture. The more complete our identification, the more intense our satisfaction.(p.24) .

Children often construct their own day-dreams, and work them out into dramas but adults do not do such things very often. So, it is the theatre that provides them such fantasies in socially acceptable emotional and esthetic forms. Drama provides an imaginary expression of all our desires. An interesting part of theatre is the reaction of the actors to the audience. It is said that most actors can feel the responses of the audience. They sense whether the

audience is connecting or not, and are influenced by the slightest noise of the audience. They are certainly affected by the laughter or tears of the audience.(Theatre Psychology:2015)

In his article, Walmsey (2011) lists out what needs and motivation drives audiences to the theatre :

Table 2.6 : Factors that drive audiences to the theatres

Audiences' needs and motivations	Driver & type of engagement
1	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling part of a special community of interest. • Ritual • Escapism and immersion • Reflection • Access to creative people and development • Passing on a legacy to children & grandchildren • Quality me-time. 	Spiritual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tingle-down-the-spine-moments • Having a visceral response • Feeling the chemistry and buzz 	Sensual
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empathy • Getting an emotional hit • Being moved • Being drawn in and engaged • Mimesis and personal relevance • Explaining human relationships • Nostalgia • Celebrating cultural identity • Story-telling 	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing world view • Being intellectually challenged • Self- improvement • Learning about history/current issues • Stimulating others 	Intellectual

1	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced socialization • Quality time with friends and family • Partaking in a live experience • Entertainment: “a good night out” • Dinner with a show • Comfortable seating & good sight lines • Good customer service & venue facilities 	<p>Social</p> <p>(pp.14-15)</p>

The above table 2.6 makes it clear that the audience is driven by different factors to go to the theatre ranging from spiritual, to sensual, to emotional, to intellectual, to social. Every person could have a different need or motivation.

Richmond (1990) writes, ‘Why do people attend theatre?’ Without probing the complexity that such a question raises, the standard answers to this question, found elsewhere in the world, also apply to Indian audiences. People attend modern plays in India to be entertained, a social occasion, and perhaps for prestige (one of the amenities of modern life), and to reinforce social or political convictions.(p.423)

Other than oratory and certain forms of music, drama is the only art that is designed to appeal to a crowd instead of to an individual. The mightiest masters of the drama, recognized the popular character of its appeal and wrote for the multitude. The crowd, therefore, has exercised a potent influence upon the dramatist in every era of the theatre. The psychology of the crowd was little understood until late in the nineteenth century, when a great deal of attention was turned to it by a group of French philosophers. The subject has been most fully studied by M. Gustave Le Bon, who devoted some two hundred pages to his work, *Psychologie des Foules*, first published in 1895.(Theatre Psychology: 2015)

Hence, drama, to interest at all, must cater to certain basic instincts of the crowd, like, i) need for contention, ii) partisanship, iii) credulity, and iv) vulnerability to emotional contagion. The great successful dramatists always thought of the crowd on all essential questions. Shakespeare tried to think from the common man's position. He was neither radical, nor progressive. He understood people and so, he could write for them. He never tried to play the role of a reformer, and simply accepted the religion, the politics, and the social ethics of his time without trying to question them.

A theatre audience is composed of heterogeneous individuals. It contains the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, the old and the young, the native and the naturalized. The same play, therefore, must be liked by all these people. Therefore, the dramatist must have a broader appeal. He cannot confine his message to any single section of the society. In that one creation of his, he must put in elements that will interest all classes of humankind. One of the most important differences between a theatre audience and other gathered crowd lies in the 'reason' for which it is convened. The audience does not come to be edified or educated; it has no desire to be taught, what it seeks is recreation. It wants amusement through laughter, sympathy, terror, and tears. And these these are the very emotions on which the great dramatists play upon.

Mobile theatre is also no different. It is the audience who ultimately decides whether a show is a success or a failure. Mobile theatres cater to an audience that cuts across all barriers between the classes and the masses. This, by itself is no mean feat. From the educated to the illiterate, mobile theatre has attracted all. As against this, the amateur theatre

presents drama for only one section of the society, usually the intelligentsia, where serious thought provoking issues, and not entertainment, is the priority. Mobile theatre on the other hand, focuses mainly on entertainment through which social issues are presented. It aims to be a complete *masala* (spice) package, because the major part of the audience comprises of the masses. Once, when Bengali *jatras* were in vogue people loved the mythological and historical stories which were usually sung. With the passage of time the social dramas became more popular and so did the Assamese dramas in prose. When mobile theatre came about, the audience welcomed it with open arms. Where once, women were as invisible in the audience as on the stage, today, they have gradually come to form an equal proportion of the audience. It is alleged by the producers that the changing taste and choice of the audience has compelled them to take up very 'filmy' scripts nowadays. The counter allegation from a section of the audience is that they are compelled to see whatever is dished out by the producers in the name of mobile theatre. This section says that mobile theatre has lost the earlier glory where the story and acting used to be the main focus unlike today, when the technological gimmicks and song-dance sequences have taken the limelight. Renowned veteran actor-director of mobile theatre Mr. Mahananda Sarma (76 yrs) lamented in an interview with this researcher that he, as a part of audience, could not connect with the dramas anymore because everything has become too artificial. To quote him, 'I have stopped watching bhramyaman because I cannot connect anymore to what is shown' (Sarma, M. Personal Communication. June, 04, 2014).

A question that arises here is, if we take the above opinions to be true, then how is it that mobile theatres every year produce such 'superhit' dramas to packed auditoriums? Is it true then that the tastes of the audience has really changed? Everything changes in due course and the composition of the mobile theatre audience has also undergone change. Today, a substantial section of the audience is the semi-urban/urban youth who flock to the theatres with expectations of being entertained in the 'filmy style'. This section also has to be captivated by the producers if their shows are to be 'hits'. Organizing committee Secretary of Vibgyor Club, Phulaguri, Mr. Jonmoni Sarma (45 yrs) agreed, 'The audience today is the young generation and their taste is different, very filmy. Producers have to cater to this taste to have a successful run' (Sarma, J. Telephonic interview. October 22, 2016). While doing so, the easy way is to resort to the typical filmy approach. Nothing heavy to poke the grey cells but loads of songs and dance, with technical gimmicks thrown in. The entire focus is on how to be commercially successful. Having said so, a social message is attempted at, but how much importance is given to it is a different story.

Then, another question emerges as to how the actors shall carry the meaning towards the audience. Herein comes the role and importance of communication. Bhattacharya and Dasgupta (2013) explains, communication refers to the act of transmission of ideas between individuals through the use of significant symbols. Thus, communication essentially refers to the process of establishing commonness among the participants involved in the act of communication through the act of information sharing. Emphasizing the importance of communication in building up of relationships, Raymond Williams asserts that men and societies are tied together to relationships

in describing, learning, persuading and exchanging experiences. This exchange of experience is facilitated by communication. Thus, it is only fair that theatre is seen as a medium of establishing a relationship of commonness between the actor (communicator) and the audience (communicated) that hinges on the art of communication (p.3).

A brave experiment set to test by Mr. Achyut Lahkar in a small town in Assam led to a revolution in the field of theatre in Assam. Everything changes with time, new things take the place of the old. Mobile theatre being a product of the society, for the society and by the society, also has had to go through the changing process. What is important is the way it has sustained itself. Positive and healthy criticism will help correct the mistakes made and improve it better. What needs to be appreciated by everyone connected with mobile theatres, that is, producers, playwrights, actors, technicians, convening committees and the audience is that, it is upon us to keep the mobile theatre of Assam alive. It should not be allowed to deteriorate into a cheap consumer product only. Mobile theatre should be a strong and distinct signature of the cultural wealth of Assam.

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE, TECHNIQUE AND MANAGEMENT IN MOBILE THEATRE

The emergence and subsequent development of Assamese theatre now leads this study into this third chapter, where it has been attempted to explore the entire structure of the mobile theatre along with the various techniques used for presentation of plays on stage, as well as the aspects of management involved in running this nine-month show, that is mobile in every sense of the term. The tripod on which this structure stands upon, is basically the producer (finance and overall management), playwright (provides the raw material) and the director (utilizes the raw material), supported by the rest of the entourage that includes right from the actors, technicians, workers, both skilled and unskilled, management personnel, to the gatekeeper. Earlier, the three main persons, i.e., producer, director and playwright were three different people, but nowadays, most playwrights are also the directors of their own plays.

3.1 The Producers

A theatre producer is the person who oversees all aspects of a theatre production. The producer is the one who starts the entire process. He is the person who finds the director and playwrights, and works towards the commercial success of the business trying to juggle many balls in the air, which include casting, securing funds for the production, negotiating with the inviting committees (most times through the secretary) and taking care of everyday details of the cast and crew, et al. Proper marketing and advertising strategy, with the help of the concerned departments, is one of the most important responsibilities of a producer.

In the mobile theatre scenario, producers are mostly the sole proprietors of the theatre (though partnership is also seen) and as such, they are the captain of the ship. Each mobile unit employs around 100-150 people right from the director, actors, dancers, singers, musicians, technicians to the workers, etc. Assuming that every said member has four family members at an average we have around 400-600 people for whom the producer is directly responsible. It is for the producer to chalk out the budget for a season and also arrange that money. Today, for a theatre to begin business, the budget touches at least a few crores. Mobile theatres are private set ups and as such involve a huge amount of risk. In such a situation the producer has to rely on his own resources, bank loan, private financing, help from friends and well-wishers, plus the advance amount taken from the inviting committees to make all ends meet. Apart from that, it is also his headache to rope in the best playwrights and the “star” actors because without ‘saleable’ names, committees are reluctant to invite theatre groups. This is definitely not an enviable position.

Late Ratan Lahkar (70 yrs) producer and propretor of Kohinoor Theatre, while sharing his long experience said, 'One cannot imagine the tension and hard work that a producer has to go through every year to sustain the theatre. It is not just about me, I am responsible for every person associated with my theatre' (Lahkar,R. Personal Communication. May 22, 2014). The producer has to keep a tab on every single detail and requirement of the theatre. Any kind of emergency situation has to be dealt with by him. To fix up a deal for the next season with the various committees who invite them, the producer is generally represented by the Secretary of the theatre. The producer is the person who decides the plays to be presented in a season and employs every person required by the theatre. Nowadays it is often heard that producers (on the suggestion of the playwright) first decide the 'star' for the season and then, scripts are penned based on the capacity of these 'stars'. This trend has led to an unannounced competition amongst all mobile theatre producers to catch the best saleable stars at atrocious costs.

Mobile theatre is a commercial venture and naturally every producer's aim is a successful season. The AAMTPA (All Assam Mobile Theatre Producers Association) has time and again voiced their concern against this 'catch the best star' trend, but ironically, they themselves are the people who are responsible for this competition. The responsibility of the mobile theatre producer is quite heavy. If a producer understands and respect culture, is socially aware, and have the ability to be a pathfinder for the society, then mobile theatre in Assam will never see its sunset. Today, when this medium has gained so much popularity among all sections of people, both is the rural and urban space, the producers need to be even more careful about

what they are offering to the public in the name of entertainment. When a lot of criticism has also been aimed at the mobile theatre set up regarding dependence on glamour stars, lack of original plays, overuse of technical gimmicks, dearth of new acting talents etc., it is the producers who are answerable. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience, the glorious tradition of mobile theatre that has seen producers like Mr. Achyut Lahkar, Mr. Biren Kalita, Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee Mr. Dharani Barman, Mr. Mahendra Sarma, Mr. Sada Lahkar, Mr. Sarat Mazumdar, Mr. Prashanta Hazarika, Mr. Ratan Lahkar, et al., to name only a few, now needs able shoulders to carry forward this legacy. The next generation of producers must never forget that apart from being business, mobile theatre must reflect the cultural essence of Assam.

3.2 The Directors

If the producer is the CEO of a mobile theatre, the director is the Managing Director. He is the person who leads the team of workers towards the realization of a goal. That goal being, a successful presentation on stage every night in each show. We must remember here that we are talking about 'live' theatre. To meet this responsibility, the director must have a vision. It is the director who gives an interpretation to the play staged and for that he/she has to sit in discussion with the playwright, light and sound people, music and dance directors and technicians in planning the production. This creative intercourse naturally brings in great feedback. A play is essentially a director's baby and as such he/she must have complete understanding of its structure and meaning without which, he/she will fail to understand the characters in the script and what demands a particular character will put on an actor. The director must have

keen knowledge of the mood of the audience and how it may affect the performance. It is the director who finalizes the cast and rehearsal schedule. Cohen (1981) describes,

The director's most time-consuming task is to rehearse the actors.

The director must be organized, for he or she focuses the entire cast during this time. The director's medium is the actor in space and time. Space is defined by the acting area and the setting while time is defined by the duration of the production and the dynamics of the drama. The director must be able to see the actor as a person and strive to draw out that person's potential. Consequently, the director constantly must be sensitive to both the needs of an actor and at the same time think of ways to meet those needs in positive ways (p.52)

Therefore, the director is the stone that polishes a theatrical production to perfection. He/she is the pilot of the airplane that belongs to the Producer. And when the show actually begins, all that the Director can do is watch as one among the audience.

3.3 The Playwrights

Drama is the written text of a story, while a play/theatre is the stage presentation of the same. The version of the drama which has to be scripted for presentation on stage, is done by the playwright. A playwright can write his or her own original creation, or take a story written by another and adapt it for stage. In mobile theatres, right from the very

beginning, the producer, playwright and director's role has been seen to have overlapped, for instance, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, the producer of Nataraj Theatre, also wrote many of the plays. Even then, there was a distinct line up of playwrights down the years who contributed immensely to the rise and popularity of mobile theatre in Assam with their creations. Every theatre had a trend of staging three to four plays per season. If we assume that twenty theatre groups, big and small, perform in a season, that means sixty to eighty plays were required. Forget writing originals, it is a daunting task for playwrights to script this number of plays. Every theatre group engages at least two playwrights per season. Many times, the same playwright pens plays for different theatres at the same time. Arranged alphabetically for the sake of convenience only, the history of mobile theatre stands witness to the presentation of the plays of some of the most applauded playwrights in Assam like Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, Mr. Arun Sarma, Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika, Mr. Bhaben Barua, Mr. Hemanta Dutta, Mr. Mahananda Sarma, Mr. Mahendra Barthakur, , Mr. Mahesh Kalita, Mr. Munin Barua, Mr. Mridul Chutiya, Mr. Pabitra Kumar Deka, Mr. Phani Sarma, Mr. Seababrata Barua, Mr. Ugra Mena, Mr. Uttam Barua, et al. The point that one cannot miss here is that, in this long journey of half a century of mobile theatre, only one female playwright is seen, Ms. Minoti Acharya, who wrote *Lakhimee Bowari* for Abahan Theatre in 1991. This was informed by Mr. Krishna Roy, producer of Abahan Theatre. (Roy, K. Telephonic interview. March 10, 2015). Kalita (2011) informs, prior to that, Ms. Arati Das Bairagi had written and directed, and Ms. Nalini Bala Hazarika had written *nritya-natikas* (dance-drama) for Hengul Theatre between 1986-89 (pp.166-167).

Award winning Assamese film-maker Ms. Manju Borah (61yrs) in an interview with this Researcher laments about the scarcity of quality playwrights/scriptwriters in the Assamese cinema-theatre scenario, 'If I find better scripts I am sure my work will improve manifold. It was the paucity of scriptwriters that compelled me to do my own scripting. Same is the case in Assamese theatre' (Borah, M. Personal Communication. May 22, 2016). A dramatist is the creator on whose imagination the director gets to work. A good story that carries a strong social message is the ideal ingredient needed for a good theatre production. If one looks back on the history of the plays presented on the mobile stage, one comes across a humongous list. Mobile theatres in its existence of fifty plus years have staged not less than 6000 plays, that is, if we assume 40 theatre groups per year staging 3 plays each. That would be $40 \times 3 = 120$ plays per year $\times 50$ years = 6000 plays. This is indeed a great contribution to Assamese drama literature considering the fact that mobile theatre plays are always written in Assamese language. To give credit to the playwrights/dramatists of mobile theatre, they have to churn out creations suitable for the mobile stage and that too, within a stipulated deadline.

3.4 The Actors

Schechner (1990) writes, "a good actor is the one who understands the character very well, thus becoming the character. [.....But] we should not forget ourselves while acting. While acting, half the actor is the role he does and half will be himself. The half actor 'who does not forget' himself is the knower, and the half who 'becomes the character' is the feeler" (pp.36-37)

To quote (in Kumar, 2014) acclaimed playwright and director of mobile theatres, Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya, 'It is an actor's media, acting is primary. I may write something great but how the actors present it on the stage matters the most, because that is what the audience gets to see. Even the ratings of the three plays we present in each mobile theatre has come to be decided by the audience based on the acting caliber of the actors. I cannot decide which play will be number one. For me all my plays are of equal importance to me. The audience decides'(p.13).Once, the mobile theatre artists were a distinct group apart. Not everybody knew them, except the mobile theatre-lovers. In a theatre everyone was equal, no preferential treatment was given to anyone. Right from lodging, food, transport everything was shared. It would be another thesis in itself if we try to list all the actors, both male and female, who enriched the mobile stage with their hard work in this long journey of half a century. Film stars were not unknown in mobile, for instance, Mr. Nipon Goswami, popular actor of Assamese cinema, was in Suradevi Theatre as early as 1977-78 and also in Kohinoor in 1980-81. Mr. Biju Phukan, popular star of Assamese cinema, joined Suradevi for 1992-93, Mr. Jatin Bora, popular cine artist of Assamese cinema joined Ashirbad Theatre for 2004-2005 followed by Mr. Kapil Bora, popular Assamese film actor, in 2005-2006. Today, when the Assamese cinema industry is almost non-existent, mobile theatres have become the alternate means of livelihood for the hundreds of people who have been a part of this industry.

The word 'glamour' was brought into mobile theatre by Kohinoor Theatre and the idea was to attract people from all social strata. Mazumdar (2015) writes, a new trend was started by Sakuntala Theatre to get the so called 'glamorous' VCD (Video Compact Disc) starlets into mobile theatre (p.23).Theatre critics feel that though this has definitely popularized mobile

theatre through salability (advertisement) of these stars, but on the downside, it has resulted in compromising on strong stories and acting. Another fact of this star culture has led to a competition among the various theatre groups to get the 'glamour stars' by paying atrocious amounts of 60-65 lakhs for a season. Moreover, the stars nowadays get a preferential treatment and this has definitely brought in a gap in the earlier family set up that used to be there, though theatre producers deny this fact. This was expressed by some artists of mobile theatre on terms of anonymity during field study of the scholar. Today, if anyone has been benefited maximum from mobile theatres, it is this small group of 'star/glamour' artists because it is on their names that the business of the season depends. Hence, the race to rope in the most bankable stars at whatever amount of money they charge is on.

A dearth of good actors has also been felt within the field. A new generation of talent must come out for good plays to be staged on mobile theatre. After all, it is an actor's medium. Arranged in the alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, some of the stalwarts in the department of acting in mobile theatre who started their career and carved out special place because of their talent include Ms.Amina Dewan, Mr.Anup Hazarika, Mr. Bhabesh Barua, Mr. Bhola Kotoki, Mr.Champak Sarma, Mr.Dharani Barman, Mr. Jibeswar Deka, Ms. Juri Sarma, Mr. Mahananda Sarma, Ms.Minoti Bharali, Ms.Minoti Das, Ms.Moni Bordoloi, , Ms Moni Devi, Mr.Mridul Bhuyan, Mr.Mridul Chutiya, Ms. Niru Phukan, Mr.Pankaj Pujari, Ms Pakiza Begum, Mr.Praneswar Pathak, Mr.Pranjit Das, Ms. Pratima Bhuyan, Ms. Pushpa Devi, Ms.Rupa Barua, Mr.Tapan Das, Mr.Upakul Bordoli,et al., to name a few.

3.5 The Auditorium

(a) Stage and Seating Arrangement

Macintosh (1993) says, 'theatre architecture is more than the frame to a picture. The audience is generally less aware of the contribution of theatre architecture to the theatre experience'.(p.1)

Mobile theatre has been all about innovation. It was an attempt to bring in new ideas and experiment with them. As mentioned above, the proscenium stage was chosen for performance because of certain advantages. A backdrop, the wings, the screen, etc., was much more convenient than the open performing area's in *jatra*. Kalita (2011) states that, Mr. Achyut Lahkar used a revolving stage (trolley) in this maiden presentation to facilitate uninterrupted performance (pp.31-58). There is a misconception among people that the revolving stage was Mr. Achyut Lahkar's creation. In fact, as written by Richmond, et al. (1990) turntable stages gained currency in Calcutta during the 1930's when they were introduced in the Rangmahal Theatre by Mr. Chatu Sen, a Bengali, who first saw them in New York (p.443). Mr. Achyut Lahkar had witnessed this during his tenure in Calcutta, and borrowed the idea for Nataraj theatre. Kalita (2011) further writes, the use of tyres underneath to support the stage created problems in the first year, as the entire stage shook when the artists walked around. As such, next year tyres were replaced with iron wheels. Initially the auditorium was shaped like an inverted V where the frontage had a breadth of about 40ft while the backside expanded to 90-100 ft. It was later on with experiments that the present shape and set up of the auditorium came about (pp.31-58).

Figo (2010) transcripts, folding wooden chairs were used to seat the audience. The concept of the gallery was also not there. It was from the Diamond Circus of Mr. Haren Das of Bajali that Mr. Achyut Lahkar picked up and introduced this idea in the third year of Nataraj theatre. In 1966-67 Lahkar tried a new innovation called the 'Theatre scope' on the stage of Nataraj theatre where some cinematic methods like 'fade in', 'fade out', 'intercut' etc were tried, though no camera or reel was used. Then in 1968-69, Lahkar introduced the historic "Cine-theatre" where certain scenes which were difficult to perform on stage were shot using camera and then projected on stage as a part of the play unfolding. For this, the camera was rented from Calcutta. In 1970-71, Mr. Dharani Barman, producer of Suradebi Theatre introduced the three dimension stage which was the idea of his art director, Mr. Gobinda Choudhury. (pp.32-33). Mr. Ratan Lahkar informed in his interview that Mr. Achyut Lahkar also tried the three stage idea in Nataraj Theatre for the first time that same year. Ever experimental, Lahkar attempted another innovation in 1990-1991 when he introduced the revolving stage giving it the name 'Alsom'. The stage was divided into three parts where three different sets could be shown. Each set could be changed as soon as the screen dropped, with the show going on in the other two, and then simply revolved back as required. This idea was an improvised version of his maiden attempt in 1963 when he used the trolley on tyres. (Lahkar, R. Personal Communication. May, 22, 2014). In his interview with this researcher, Mr. Mahananda Sarma reminisced how it was Mancharupa Theatre (1969) that first introduced the concept of the two dimension stage, that is, static twin stages. This was conceived by himself and Mr. Bhaben Barua, two stalwarts of mobile theatre. This innovation of Mancharupa

Theatre was so successful that even today all mobile theatres of Assam use the twin stage set up.(Sarma,M. Personal Communication. July,04, 2014).

(b) Lighting

Light is a medium to express the theme and style of drama. To quote McCandless (1958), 'Visibility, naturalism, composition and atmosphere are the objectives for lighting, no matter what form of theatre or type of production'(p.8). Some of the most revered names in the history of theatre lighting include Sebastiano Serlio, Inigo Jones, Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. When the proscenium stage came into vogue in Assam, gas light was used for lighting. Bhattacharya (2008) mentions that, it was in 1921, that a new chapter began in the history of theatre in Assam, when the famous Ban Theatre of Tezpur was electrified and the play *Nilambar* was staged (p.17). De (1995) describes, initially in mobile theatres, the only objective of lighting was to light up the stage properly. They had to be switched off to help change scenes. When required, coloured filter was placed in front of lights to create coloured lights. In 1968-69, when Nataraj Theatre tried the 'cine-theatre' experiment, lighting was used intelligently to establish a balance and continuity between the projected screen shots and the live stage scenes.(pp.65-67). Sarma (1995) mentions it was only in 1974 that Rupkonwar Theatre gave a new meaning to the word 'lighting' for the first time in mobile theatre (p.101).

De (2008) further writes, in 1979-80, Kohinoor Theatre first used ultra-violet light and for the first time 'double-acting' was made possible on stage with its clever use. In 1980-81, Abahan Theatre staged a scene of an aeroplane crash, and in 1981-82, Theatre Bhagyadevi

showed a helicopter flying. All such scenes were done with proper planning and experimentation of lighting. It is a matter of great pride that renowned lighting director, Mr. Tapan Sen, was also associated with mobile theatres of Assam and he admitted how difficult and dangerous it is to work in the temporary set up of mobile, where one is vulnerable to the wrath of nature (pp.55-158).

Gradually, with time the importance of lighting in theatre has increased and various new tools and electronic equipments have been developed. Goswami has written, to increase or decrease the depth of light, the journey from water dimmers have reached the DMX Console today. Similarly, from the ordinary bulb to Plano Convex (PC), Profile, Fresnel, LED, Intelligent lights, PAR, Multi-ten, etc., have come into use (Goswami,2012:175). Though experiments are still going on, one cannot help but admit that the equipments in use in Assam for lighting in theatre is still of a much lower standard. Even today, the lighting assistants who work on the stage, particularly up in the ceiling, with no protection gear, risk their limb and life. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, some of the people who contributed, and some still contributing their skills through lights to mobile theatre include, Mr.Achyut Lahkar, Mr. Adya Goswami, Mr. Arabinda Kalita, Mr. Arunabh, Mr. Ashok Deka, Mr. Ashu Roy, Mr. Bidya Hazarika, Mr. Bhubaneswar Bhagawati, Mr. Chakra Talukdar, Mr. Dharani Kalita, Mr. Dinesh Deka, Mr. Dipak Roy, Mr. Hiramoni Goswami, Mr. Kalyan De, Mr. Kamal Sarma, Mr. Kamini Talukdar, Mr. Karuna Pathak, Mr. Krishna Roy, Mr. Kshitij Sarma, Mr. Nirmal Lahkar, Mr. O.P Nayar, Mr. Pramod Barman, Mr. Rajesh Saha, Mr.Tiken Das, Mr.Uma Thakuria,et al. The interesting thing here is, these people learnt their skills through socialization process.

Mobile theatre, that way, has been a school that has given the opportunity for its students, particularly the technical employees, to learn, experiment, innovate and develop.

(c) Sound

In theatre, sound is the medium of connection with the audience. It may be dialogue, it may be music, or it may be any other 'noise', like birds chirping, wind howling, vehicle starting, etc. Without sound no theatre is possible. 'Mime' is of course, a performing art, where dialogue is not there, but music and other sound effects are used to put across the meaning of what is being conveyed.

It was after the 1930's, that the sound recording industry expanded rapidly throughout the world with new innovations. In the early 1950's there were several simultaneous developments in the audio industry that ushered in the modern era of sound in the theatre. Advances in electronic engineering greatly enhanced the recording and playback equipment. Additionally, for the first time the effects and the music needed during a production could be played from a central location. The playback deck as well as the amplifiers and mixing and equalization equipment were typically housed in a booth at the back of the auditorium. Portable loudspeakers were placed wherever needed on the stage or in the auditorium. Through the use of a playback mixing console (mixer/mixing desk), the sound operator could direct the sound for a particular cue to its appropriate location at a specific loudness level. It, therefore, became possible for one operator to run all of the sound cues from the sound booth during a production (Stagecraft :2016). It was common in productions of musicals to

use microphones by the early 1960's. These microphones were placed across the front of the stage and hung down from above. But these systems had problems-one, the singers had to stand directly in front or just below the microphones for best results, and two, the cables that connected the microphones to the mixing console were disturbed by radio-frequency interference from the stage lighting system.

A new development that came in the 1980's was the affordable miniaturized wireless microphones. Wireless microphones send their signal to the mixing desk via a small low-power FM radio transmitter hidden somewhere on the actor. The microphone is often placed in the actor's hair or mounted on a flesh-coloured headset mouthpiece. The accuracy of sound reproduction (sometimes referred to as "presence") that is obtained by placing the microphone in close proximity to an actor's mouth is extremely high. The use of wireless microphones soon expanded beyond musical theatre to every type of theatrical presentation. The advantages of audiences' being able to clearly hear actors were obvious. The ability to modulate the loudness of an actor's voice also allowed directors and sound designers to begin experimenting with the use of background music and effects throughout entire scenes in much the same way that movies and television used sound. The other significant technological development to affect the sound industry in the 1980's was digitization. Digital sound equipment like, pre-amplifiers, amplifiers, mixing consoles, and so forth, began appearing early in the decade, although only in the late 1980's did such equipment become sufficiently affordable that it was adopted widely (stagecraft:2016).

The mobile theatre of Assam has also journeyed through various stages of development in the department of sound. Once, when sound system (the technology) was not there, actors and singers depended on the strength of their vocal chords. Time saw the coming in of the microphone and loudspeaker. In a mobile theatre auditorium (tent), the sound system plays a great part in appealing to the 1500-2000 audience. What is being said on stage must be clearly audible till the last gallery. 'Surround sound', as in permanent halls or movie theatres, is not possible in the mobile theatre, though sound systems have been improvised a lot, and today, quite sophisticated consoles are used. Special effects of sound create an ambience for the scene unfolding on stage. Yet, it is still a trend in mobile theatres to deliver dialogues in a very high octave, which sounds very unnatural. Using powerful wireless microphones and proper planning of sound equipment in the mobile tent can surely change this. In its glorious history of half a century, people who have contributed in the field of sound control to enhance the appeal of a play in mobile theatres include Mr. Aghuna Das, Mr. Dipak Bharali, Mr. Dipak Das, Mr. Ganga Kalita, Mr. Girish Haloi, Mr. Hitesh Das, Mr. Jiten Das, Mr. Karna Rai, Mr. M.C Chauhan, Mr. Mathura Rai, Mr. Paresh Sarma, the first sound controller of mobile theatre (Figo:2010:40), Mr. Ramen Kakoty, Mr. Rinku Kalita, Mr. Samar Rabha, et al., to name only a few. These names have been arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone.

3.6 Set

Ottley(1953) describes, 'The simplest description of a set is a background in front of which primary motion or action (that is action which is definitely controlled) takes place' (p.5).

In an interview taken by this investigator, Sri Upakul Bordoloi, popular actor-director of films, amateur theatre and mobile theatre, said, 'Stage settings create the atmosphere of what is being shown. With the coming in the proscenium stage, set designing also gained importance. The correct stage set adds to the quality of the play presented'(Bordoloi,U.Personal Communication.03/10/2012). Once again, it was Nataraj Theatre that had paved the path and in the long journey of fifty-three years that mobile theatre travelled, art direction and settings underwent various experimentation and transformation.

Quite a few number of people are engaged by the mobile theatres for the creation of the sets known as *mancha sajja*, which is done under the supervision of the set designer. Depiction of the environ of a scene is known as *drishya sajja*, where care is taken to put the right object in the right place as required in the different scenes. The process of creating a set design begins with the designer closely studying the script for the information it contains about the period, country, locale, mood, spirit of the play, socio-economic status of the characters etc., that will help develop the design. The settings must express the mood and spirit of the play. The mood refers to the overall emotional quality of the play which may be happy or sad or tragic or comic etc., while spirit means the style in which a particular production is to be presented. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, the stage settings of mobile theatre has seen the expertise of people like Mr.Arjun Kalita, Mr. Arun Rai, Mr. Bhaben Deka, Mr.Bhumi Rai, Mr. Bhupen Boro, Mr. Binoy Rai, Mr. Chandramohan Baishya, Mr. Dhani Haloi, Mr. Dharma Rai, Mr. Dilip Deka, Mr. Dipak Saikia, Mr. Dipen Rai, Mr. Dwijen Choudhury, Ms. Garima Hazarika, Mr. Girish Das, Mr. Gobinda Rai, Mr. Gopal Rai, Mr.

Harish Patgiri, Mr. Kamaleswar Kalita, Mr. Lakkhi Das, Mr. Montu Das, Mr. Nuruddin Ahmad, Mr. Phani Sarma, Mr. Raben Rai, Mr. Sarbeswar Das, Mr. Siben Sutadhar, Mr. Singha Sarkar, Mr. Suren Rai, Mr. Sushil Das, et al.

3.7 Music and Dance

Ranade (1990) says, 'theatre music is deliberate, planned and art oriented in conception. It is performed in consciously controlled condition'(pp.8-19).

When Mr.Achyut Lahkar dreamt of Nataraj Theatre, he saw a complete entertainment package. As mentioned earlier, he got the best people in the business. Music, under the supervision of Mr. Prabhat Sarma and Mr. Chandra Choudhury, both renowned music directors, while dance was to be directed by Mr. Kalawanta Singh, a renowned exponent of Manipuri dance, and Mr. Rabin Das, another excellent dancer. From Nataraj Theatre till today, music and dance in mobile theatre has come a long way. Earlier, all music played and songs rendered, was live. The musicians and singers sat in front of the stage and performed. With time that trend changed. renowned music director, Mr. Nanda Bannerjee who has been associated with both cinema and mobile theatre informed that, recorded songs were first used in 1984 by Chitrallekha Theatre, Pathsala (Bannerjee, N.Telephonic interview. June 15,2015). Bhagawati (2004) writes, after its very first successful year, Abahan Theatre brought out a cassette of the songs that were used in their plays.This was 'Hits of Abahan', the first audio cassette of mobile theatre. It created a sensation in the music world of Assam (P.45). Veteran singer and music director of mobile theatre, Mr. Dasarath Das informed that the first lip-sync of songs in mobile theatre

was done in 1974 by Asom Star Theatre in the play *Nartaki*, wherein the popular song *Jil jil jilmil/ Sil sil silmil /junakare pahi o junakare pahi* was rendered by Mr. Dasarath Das and Ms. Bina Bora.(Personal Communication.July 07,2014).Today, song recordings are done in sophisticated studios by famous music directors and equally popular singers render the songs.

The music scenario of mobile theatre had touched a new level when the internationally reputed maestro, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika took the responsibility as music director for the 1966-67 season of Purbajyoti Theatre established by Sri Karuna Mazumdar at Hajo. This was a new high for the entire mobile theatre world. The compositions of Dr. Hazarika in the play *Sonitkonwari* brought in the flood of Assamese indigenous musical flavor into mobile theatre. He was assisted by personalities like Mr. Jayanta Hazarika, Dost Habibur Rehman and Mr. Prabhat Sarma, each, a luminary in the music world of Assam. The second mobile theatre that Dr. Hazarika chose to work for, as music director in 1984-85, was Aradhana Theatre established by Sri Sadananda Lahkar, the same person who had been the brain behind Nataraj Opera, and the inspiration for his brother, Achyut, to experiment with Nataraj Theatre. Once again, in his inimitable style Dr. Hazarika left his mark in the play *Srimanta Sankaradeva* by experimenting with the *totoi*, a type of devotional song composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva, *Madhu Danava Danava Deva Barang*. The third and last mobile theatre that Dr. Hazarika had been directly associated with, as music director for the play *Sakuntala*, was Indradhanu Theatre in the eighties.

Das (2016) writes, it goes to the credit of Abahan theatre, that they could present Bhabendranath Saikia, one of the most acclaimed litterateur, film-maker, dramatist

and playwright of Assam, as a lyricist and music composer as well. He was particularly careful that background music should not make the dialogues inaudible for the gallery audiences. Saikia used songs in only three of his plays, *Pratibimba*, *Nilakantha* and *Deenabandhu*. He wrote the songs himself and also composed their music. In *Nilakantha* (1984-85), the songs were, (i) *Kumal pator koponi dekhilu/dekhilu kotona gabharu pator/botahor sotey nibir gobhir khela/Moi najanu eiya godhuli ne puwa*, and, (ii) *Ses hol aji ejugor itihaas/nokoriba maan nokoriba abhimaan/anumati diya gaun mur ses gaan*. In *Pratibimba* (1989-90) the short song was, *Kije nirab ei rati/mar gol tapta beli/jirani bisari ubhatey niraley klanta pokhi*, while in *Deenabandhu*, the two songs were, (i) *Kor ejaak sopun jen borosun*, and, (ii) *Diya muk diya, akashor dorey eti mon* (pp.25-30).

Kalita (2011) informs, the first playback singers of mobile theatre were Mr. Rajkrishna Barhoi and Ms. Renu Phukan, both in Nataraj (p.52). It has become a fashion now to put in song and dance sequences in the typical 'Bollywood' style to attract the audience. It was the norm to perform a dance-drama (*nritya-natika*) before the actual play was presented by every mobile theatre. These dance-dramas were as important as the main play. The dance-dramas gained as much acclaim because they carried a relevant social message. However, with time, this preliminary performance is now being neglected. Many theatre groups are even doing away with them. In the field of music direction, mobile theatres have a long list of great talents. For the sake of convenience alone, the names are being arranged in alphabetical order. Mr. Ananda Narayan Deb, Mr. Apurba Das, Mr. Basistha Mazumdar, Mr. Basanta Thakuria, Mr. Brajen Barua,, Mr. Chandra Choudhury, Mr. Dasarath Das, Mr. Debeswar

Sarma, Mr. Dibakar Deka, Mr. Gobinda Choudhry, Mr. Mukul Barua, Mr. Nanda Bannerjee, Mr. Narayan Barua, Mr. Prabhat Sarma, Mr. Raj Krishna Barhoi, Mr. Ramen Barua, Mr. Ridip Dutta, Mr. Sujit Singha, et al. Among the younger generation working now, are Mr. Ajay Phukan, Mr. Arupjyoti Barua, Mr. Palash Gogoi, Mr. Sibabrata Sarma, Ms. Tarali Sarma, Mr. Tirtha Saharia, et al.

The dance director has been an important part of mobile theatre right from its inception. The job of the dance director is to conceptualize the dance sequences that helped to take the story forward while the choreographer is the person who executes it. The dance director of course worked in complete tandem with the director and playwright of the drama. Dance sequences that reflected the Assamese folk culture and music was presented. For example, *Bihu* dance was first presented on the stage of mobile theatre by Mr. Achyut Lahkar in Nataraj theatre, because he wanted to promote the indigenous culture and its knowledge in Assam. *Bihu* is the most important festival of the Assamese community and is celebrated thrice in connection with three different seasons, viz., *Magh Bihu* (January), *Bohag Bihu* (April) and *Kati Bihu* (October). The Bohag bihu is the new year which is welcomed with song and dance. Bihu songs and dance is thus a reflection of the Assamese community's affinity with nature, depicted through love and romance. Figo (2010) writes, Lahkar specially invited *Bihu* expert Mr. Lila Saikia from Chapalaghat in Nagaon to Nataraj Theatre to train the artists (P.53). As mentioned earlier, dance directors and music directors were separately engaged for the season for the dance drama (*nritya natika*) that preceded the actual play. These dance dramas were carefully chosen. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, names of dance directors like Mr. Ajit Talukdar, Ms. Arati Das Bairagi,

the first female dance drama playwright and director in mobile theatre, Hengul, 1986-87 season, Mr. Bhupesh Sarma, Ms. Garima Hazarika, Mr. Gunakar Dev Goswami, Mr. Guneswar Bhuyan, Mr. Hemkanta Barua, Mr. Jatin Goswami, Mr. Jiten Das, Mr. Kalawanta Singh, Mr. Khagen Barman, Mr. Nabin Bora, Mr. Naren Das, Mr. Prafulla Haloi, Mr. Rajanikanta Patgiri, Mr. Ranjeet Singh, Mr. Robin Das, Mr. Tilak Baishya, Mr. Uday Das, et al., has been etched in the history of mobile theatres.

A changing trend has come in where, nowadays, the choreographers have taken over, and free lancers in this field are engaged by the producers, not necessarily for the entire season. Some of the choreographers making their presence felt in the mobile theatre scene today, in alphabetical order, are Mr. Ashim Baishya, Mr. Dhanjit Nath, Mr. Gautam Baishya, Mr. Jitu Roy, Ms. Jolly Bora, Mr. Pankaj Ingti, Mr. Pranju Prince, Mr. Ratul Das, Mr. Santumoni Sarma, Mr. Uday Shankar, et al.

3.8 Make up and Costume

Make up refers to the products applied to the face or body of an actor to change or enhance their appearances. While costume means the dresses/clothes donned by the actors to bring out the essence of the character, time and situation they portray.

Medhi (1948) writes make up and costume are essential part of any theatrical performance. It helps create a character. During Sankaradeva's time the actors wore specially prepared costumes of various designs representing various characters. These characters also wore all kinds of Assamese ornaments appropriate to their age and sex, including *ghunghura*

(tinkling bells) and *nepur* (anklets). Colours had a special significance in the *Ankiya bhaona*. For example, Krishna, the full incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, the preserver and restorer, always wears yellow, and black was always used to depict the *rakhasa* (demon). It was a remarkable part of *Ankiya bhaona* to use effigies and masks. Pioneered by Sankaradeva, the tradition still continues. Effigies were made with bamboo and cloth while masks were made of wood, bamboo, clay and cloth painted using natural colours like indigo (*nil*), lamp black (*chai*), lime vermillion (*hengul*), yellow arsenic (*haital*), etc. The actors used make up to bring out their characters properly. Krishna was painted blue to adhere to the descriptions in the scriptures. Natural dyes and colours were used for make up. False hair, beard, etc., were also used as per the characters portrayed (pp.Lvi-Lvii).

Sarma (1990) writes, the early Assamese *jatra* parties had to face a lot of difficulties because it was not easy to get the required materials in Assam. It was Brajanath Sarma who took great pains to get the costumes and make-up from Calcutta when he started his Kalika Opera Party. He wanted development in these areas so that the dramatic presentations could be more authentic and attractive (p.101). Make up was done by the actors themselves using amber grease, white lead and lamp soot. Various types of wigs and false beard were used. Jewellery was also an essential part of the get up of the characters.

When the mobile theatre era began, make up and costume remained as important as ever. The mythological and historical plays entailed quite an expense as far as the get up was concerned. Each mobile theatre had its tailor master who stitched the costumes as required.

Mr. Khagendra Talukdar, (40 yrs) a mobile theatre enthusiast shared, today, it has become a fashion to engage a costume designer in each mobile theatre. Earlier the ‘tailor master’ was good enough (Talukdar, K. Personal Communication. August, 06, 2012). Smt. Moni Bordoloi, (48 yrs) former actress of mobile theatre informed that one interesting trait which has not changed in its history of half a century is, mobile theatres do not employ a make up artist. Though it is a very important part for any stage performance, and make up as a department is given great importance, in mobile theatre, the actors still do their own make up. The make up stuff is provided by the theatre and today, the same products as in movie make up are used. (Bordoloi, M. Personal Communication. October, 05, 2012).

3.9 Technology to Tantalize : Impact of Globalization

Theatre in Assam has come a long way from the open air, seed-oil lit performances. The mobile theatres have experimented a lot in the attempt to bring in new innovations as mentioned above. The use of technology in the modern age has helped break new grounds. Mr. Achyut Lahkar had already shown the path for innovations and experimentation in Nataraj theatre. In 2007-08, Hengul Theatre attracted attention by using a ropeway on stage. In 2008-09 they showed a war tank and used a lift on live stage. Mr. Ratan Lahkar, (70 yrs) erstwhile produce-proprietor of Kohinoor Theatre, in his interview narrated how, when Kohinoor presented *Tarzan* in 1989-90, for the first time, a direct impact of cinema was felt on mobile theatre. This was followed by staging *Ben-Hur*, 1992-93. When *Titanic*, Mr. James Cameron’s Hollywood blockbuster, was presented on Kohinoor’s stage in 1998-99, it created

such a stir that Star Television, UK, came to Assam to cover that performance. In 2004-05, Kohinoor staged *Jurassic Park (Dinosaurar Atanka)*, another Hollywood superhit. (Lahkar,R. Personal Communication. July 09, 2014) Kohinoor Theatre, thus, set a trend of performing unbelievable technological stunts on live stage.

Nowadays, it is very common to show cars, bikes, trucks and even helicopter landing on the live mobile stage. This attracts huge crowds no doubt, but many theatre lovers feel too much of importance on these superficial aspects has led to compromising on good story and acting. The more technological gimmicks one can use, the better. It needs mention here that even today, both *bhaona* and *jatra* still exist in Assam. Both forms have been touched by modern technological developments no doubt. Mobile theatre is a commercial venture and so, it is natural that producers will try all means to retrieve their investments with the best profits. Having said that, one must not forget the aim with which Mr. Achyut Lahkar had founded Nataraj Theatre - to take theatre to the masses. Theatre being an excellent medium of mass communication, its role in society is of great importance. Everything changes with time and so has the journey of Assamese theatre. Technology, as in cinema, has come to play a crucial role in mobile theatre as well.

As shared by Mr. Upakul Bordoloi, (61yrs), one of the most revered name in the field of art direction in mobile theatre was Adya Sarma. He was the man who sank the *Titanic* on the stage of Kohinoor without a single drop of water. Associated with mobile theatre right from Nataraj Theatre, Mr.Adya Sarma took art direction and technical expertise in mobile theatres to a different level and set the benchmark that others are still trying to touch (Bordoloi,U.

Personal Communication. 03/10/2012). Mr. Pulu Kr. Sarma, (58 yrs), eminent cultural activist and journalist, in his interview stated,

The unique expertise and sensitive intellectual efforts of this revered man, Adya Sarma, in the technical and artistic presentations of the mobile theatre plays has taken its reputation beyond the boundaries of India to a world platform. A renowned and respected teacher of Art, who was at the same time a painter, a sculptor, a tabla player, a scene-designer, and an actor, this creative talented idealist was loved by all as *Guruji*. His contribution to the enrichment and development of Art in Assam through his school Rang-ghar and later, New Art School, in Nalbari, is beyond words. He was the undisputed father of the art of scene- settings, art and painting departments in the mobile theatres. He could create magic within the limited facilities available and make possible what seemed almost impossible. (Sarma,P.K., Personal Communication. July 07, 2017).

Cultural activist and businessman, Mr. Gopal Jalan, (49 yrs) in his interview said, without Adya Sarma's creativity it is impossible for us to imagine the stage of the mobile theatre. He had all the skills to bring alive the mobile theatre stage. He could anticipate very well what kind of artistic innovations the audience would like to see on stage. He understood people. That is why he is called *Jivansilpi*.

What his creative genius did for successive plays for the mobile theatre in Assam, would have been probably unthinkable for many renowned artists of the world. He was in no way any less than ten other world famous artists. He never craved publicity and that is why most people think he was just a stage artist. We have failed to give him the recognition that was due. (Jalan, G. Personal Communication. April, 02, 2015)

Mr. Atul Mazumdar, (72 yrs), mobile theatre critic and writer, lamented that this man of exceptional creative genius, who dedicated his entire life to Art and its development, has never been considered by the State government to be nominated for the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award (Mazumdar, A. Personal Communication. July 15, 2016)

Mr. Ratan Lahkar, (70 yrs) producer of Kohinoor reminisced during his interview, *Titanic* was the best creation of Adya *ka's* artistic life. It has left him immortalized in the annals of stage history of Assam. He was a persona without any comparison. He was unique. He did not save a single penny for himself and yet, he was rich beyond imagination-rich with the love of the people. His talent and artistic genius was unbelievable. (Lahkar, R. Personal Communication. May, 22, 2014).

When I went to watch *Titanic* staged by Kohinoor Theatre, I was not particularly excited because the Hollywood blockbuster was fresh in mind. But when the play began and the scenes unfolded, Mr. James Cameron's mega movie faded away. Adya Sarma's

exceptional stage creations under the direction of Mr. Hemanta Dutta brought the stage alive. That scene where the helicopter lands on the deck of the ship was unbelievable! Again, when water gushes into the ship after it hits the iceberg, people forgot they were watching a live stage presentation! Thus wrote Mr. Kamal Medhi, a mobile theatre connoisseur (Medhi, 1998)

An important comparison between renowned light and stage settings expert from Kolkata, Mr. Tapas Sen and Mr. Adya Sarma has been brought up by eminent scholar of Assam, Mr. Udaiyaditya Bharali (2015) who writes, Do we Assamese know that two decades before Tapasda created sensation on the theatre stage of Kolkata, in Nalbari and its adjoining areas, deer's ran, huge serpents opened their hoods, and *Garuda* flew on stage? These were events of the fifties. In 1963, the miracle that the audience had seen in the Nataraj Theatre presentation, *Beula*, has remained unforgettable. Later, on the stage of Kohinoor Theatre, the sinking of the *Titanic* was unbelievable. The great artist who made all this possible was Adya Sarma. He was a genius but never got the proper facilities to showcase that genius. We all know about Mr. Tapas Sen, but how much do we know about Adya Sarma? Stalwarts like Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Shobha Brahma of Assam and eminent artists of West Bengal like Jamini Roy and Ram Kingkor Baiz recognized him for what he was and therefore frequented his dilapidated house. But we, the Assamese people, do not know, what we should have, about this great man. (pp.13-17)

Some of the other names who have contributed immensely to the field of art direction in mobile theatres from its inception include, in alphabetical order, Md. Abdul Majid, Mr.

Ajit Das, Mr. Anil Boro, Mr. Anjan Barua, Mr. Biren Das, Mr. Brajen Koch, Mr. Chandan Chutiya, Mr. Dhiren Das, Mr. Gobinda Choudhury, Mr. Golok Saha, Mr. Harjeet Singh, Md. Harun Ali, Mr. Hemen Das, Mr. Joon Deka, Mr. Kalpa Kakoty, Mr. Khagen Das, Mr. Moon Baishya, Mr. Mridul Boro, Md. Nuruddin Ahmad, Mr. Ranjit Shil, Mr. Paplu Papul, Mr. Pramathesh Chakraborty, Mr. Pramod Kakoty, Mr. Rajib Ahmad, Mr. Rinku Baishya, Mr. Rupak Das, Mr. Rupen Das, et al . The buzz is making rounds that Kohinoor Theatre will be experimenting with 3D in the next theatre season 2017-18 (*The Telegraph*, 09/07/2016). Innovation has led to transformation of form, content and presentation styles. It is a feat in itself that in this age of hi-tech cinema, television, internet, etc., mobile theatre has been able to not only sustain but also establish itself almost as an alternative to cinema industry in Assam. This journey of Assamese theatre which was started by Srimanta Sankaradeva with his *Chihna yatra* in the 15th century has been a vibrant process which will continue to bring in new transitions in the future.

3.10 Management Matters

Though it is the Producer, with the help of the Assistant Producer, who looks after all aspects of the theatre, there are the posts of the, Overall Planner (*Samagrik Parikalpana*), the Secretary (*Sampadak*), the Representative (*Pratinidhi*) and the Organizer (*Byabasthapak*) who actually look after the management aspects. Like all other employees of a mobile theatre these posts are also contractual for nine months, but in many cases it has been seen that the persons in these posts have continued working in the same theatre for years. This is because

the most important requirement of these posts is experience. The Overall planner is present in the theatre on behalf of the Producer, who may not be able to devote full time. The Secretary works in close coordination with him, discussing all matters. The Representative is more or less the Public Relation Officer though many theatres do not have this post anymore, while the fourth post in this hierarchy is the Organizer who may be assisted by one or two assistants. The duties and responsibilities are clearly chalked out for each post. Collection of money, payments, venue bookings, lodging, food, solving all kinds of problems, not to speak of emergency, etc., has to be taken care of.

One of the most important aspect of management in a theatre is its successful marketing. Every theatre group presents shows in about 77-79 venues in a theatre season and these venues are decided and booked from about October-December (for next mobile theatre season) till the beginning of rehearsals in June-July. This is where the Inviting Committees come in and enters into an agreement with the theatre on a proper stamp paper and payment of an amount as advance after bargaining over the terms and conditions put forth by the Secretary, whose skill and experience is tested here. A number of factors are kept in mind by the Inviting Committees also when they decide to invite a theatre, like- (i) the reputation of the theatre itself, (ii) the 'star' artist for that season, (iii) the kind of business done by the theatre during the previous season, (iv) the playwrights and the plays, e.g., nowadays, Abhijeet Bhattacharya is almost a must for writing dramas for all mobile theatres and (v) the public's response to the theatre group. Mr. Ramen Sarma (55 yrs), Secretary, Sankardev Theatre, 2015-16 informed, the Secretary of the theatre carries out the responsibility of the Marketing

Manager, i.e., book the venues by dealing with the Invitation Committees. (Sarma, R. Telephonic interview. December,16, 2016). In case of the reputed 'A' category theatre groups, it is the Invitation Committees who make a beeline to get agreements. But in case of 'B' category and newly established theatres, getting bookings is a challenge. That is why, many times they try to cover up the time between two venues (if available) as well as earn some more by performing in a fill-in-the-gap venue. This is an important responsibility of the Secretary, which he must plan out properly with the Inviting Committee of the new venue.

Padma Chetia, (35 yrs), Secretary, Bridaban Theatre, 2015-16 said, that, the Secretary of the theatre also has the prime responsibility of keeping all accounts. For this, he needs to keep the correct count of the agreed per day collection as well as the collection from the 2nd show and 3rd show (if any) which comes from the sale of tickets through the counters or door to door sale of season tickets (Chetia, P. Personal Communication. December,15, 2016). It should be noted here that a season ticket is a ticket which allows the purchaser to watch all shows on all three days of a theatre's performance in a particular venue. Apart from this, he must also maintain a daily record of all payments made to every employee whether in advance or per venue (*pandal*) payment or on daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis as had been agreed upon. A per day expenditure account also needs to be kept for all kinds of daily expenses incurred. Of course, for the auditing and Income Tax matters, the theatres take professional help of Chartered Accountants. The final accounts record is usually completed only at the end of the theatre season when the group returns to the base camp after nine months. Most theatres engage 2-3 persons just for the proper account keeping. In some

theatres the Secretary deposits all accounts to the Producer-owner after each venue (*pandal*), that is, every three days.

Mr. Ramen Sarma, (55 yrs) further informed that once the agreement is signed with an Invitation Committee, the Organizer with his assistants, must check that the Inviting Committee has provided for, (i) proper facilities for the advance party, which comes before the theatre arrives, to prepare the auditorium and stage. These must have living quarters, cooking and dining area, fuel (for cooking), potable water and hygienic toilets-bathrooms, (ii) proper accommodation must be arranged separately for the 'star' artist in a hotel, Guesthouse, Inspection Bungalow or in the residence of an affluent person of that locality, (iii) proper arrangement is made for the Producer to stay, (iv) accommodation for the entire cast and crew of the theatre group, between 100-150 people, with separate quarters for the female members and hygienic toilets-bathrooms, (v) whether conveyance facility is there, in case the venue of the show is away from the provided accommodation, (vi) additional security arrangement around the venue of the show to help the security people of the theatre group, (vii) separate dressing rooms for the artists, facility to keep the make-up and costumes properly, (viii) a well-lit green room to put on the make-up with sufficient mirrors and a toilet nearby, (ix) electricity connection in the venue which should be checked properly by the organizer, at least a couple of days before the show. Where no electricity is there, the inviting committee must provide a generator and 20 litres of diesel per day for the shows to be staged (x) proper seating arrangements in the auditorium with chairs, numbering around 1000 belonging to the theatre group plus 500 seats in the galleries, additional seats about 400-500, can done

by the Inviting Committee. Around 2000 people are seated in a proper auditorium. (Sarma, R. Telephonic interview. December 16, 2016). A copy of the agreement signed between mobile theatre units and the organizing committee has been given in Appendix II.

3.11 Publicity and Advertising

In the earlier days, the theatres used to print a pamphlet called the 'programme' which was rolled into balls and thrown into the audience to give information about the plays to be performed. As written by Sarma, (2004), those childhood memories can still excite us. Just before the last concert someone from the puja committee would come on stage with lots of coloured leaflets in hand. Then, those leaflets were rolled into 'balls' and thrown to the crowd, that went into a frenzy to catch those balls. At that age, we never understood the value of those leaflets as advertisements or pamphlets. And probably that is why till much later, we could never gauge the abundant possibilities hidden in those coloured papers distributed before very *pala* (pp.8-15).

Gradually with time this system of throwing 'balls' disappeared. Then came the fashion when publicity of the mobile theatre was done by announcing the details from a vehicle, which was decorated with posters, with the help of a public address system. This has not gone out of practice completely. Even now, some theatres use it to attract people. Today, the entire advertisement for the coming season is based on the promotional songs, both audio and video. Publicity entails quite a big expenditure for the theatre as it means engaging (i) a printing house for the banners and posters, (ii) graphic designers, (iii) Video editors and editing

studios, (iv) a still photographer and his studio, (v) Newspapers, (vi) Local television channels, and (vii) publishing the souvenir of the theatre.

The following table 3.1 shows how mobile theatres, nowadays, outsource the responsibilities of publicity for each season to various agencies. Naturally, this process has made publicity, not only a very expensive affair but also quite competitive. Each party tries

Sl.No	Name of the mobile theatre	Outsourced Agency	Agency's responsibility
1	Surya	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K.D Computech / Destiny / Ma Studio / Now-It: All in Guwahati / Devi Parbati Offset Press : Samata. Still Photography • Local Television & FM Radio • Website/Facebook/Whatsapp 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics • Photographs for publicity
2	Itihaas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors • Information uploaded • Destiny:Guwahati • Media Partner : DY 365 recording, editing, graphics • Photographs for publicity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing Banners & Posters, Video

1	2	3	4
3	Rajshri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors • Information uploaded • ChoudhuryPrinters : Nalbari / Destiny : Guwahati. • Media Partner: DY 365 • Radio Partner : 92.7 BIG FM / Gup-Shup • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics • Photographs for publicity.
4	Rajtilak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors • Information uploaded • Destiny : Guwahati • Media Partner : NewsLive / Pratidin / NewsTime Assam • Radio Partner : Red FM / 92.7BIG FM / Gup Shup • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics • Photographs for publicity.
5	Hengul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors • Information uploaded • DreamsFeatures / RedAV Studio / Gyanam : Guwahati • Media Partner : NewsLive / DY365 • Radio Partner : 92.7 / Gup Shup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics • Photographs for publicity.

- promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors
- Information uploaded

Source: *Managerial & Economic Aspects of Mobile Theatre Establishment of Assam*, unpublished thesis, Mousumi Devi, G.U, Commerce Department, 2016.

Theatre connoisseur Mr. Rabendra Kumar Das (72 yrs), a retired bureaucrat, feels that one particular aspect of mobile theatre which has never really received much attention is the importance of the souvenirs (mouth piece of the theatre) brought out by the theatre groups (pp.90-93). Mr. Atul Mazumdar (72yrs) mobile theatre critic and connoisseur in an interview with this researcher informed that the first theatre that brought out a souvenir was Kohinoor Theatre in 1976, named *Karani* (Mazumdar, A. Personal Communication. July 09, 2013). It is still published every year. The souvenir not only gives information about the particular theatre, its plays, people associated, schedule of performance for the entire season, etc., but also carries various articles and write ups on theatre or relevant social issues. These souvenirs provide important material for research work on theatre. But many times, it is seen that articles are repetitive and some are written just for the sake of writing. The producers must understand that the souvenir is an important treasure as it reflects not only the theatre but is, also a contribution to the literature on mobile theatre. As written by Sarma, (2004), compared to the amateur theatre groups, the mobile theatres have an advantage as far as the sale of souvenir is concerned. A mobile theatre runs for a period of at least six months in various corners of Assam. The well established theatre groups are generally packed houses. This is a great opportunity for 'pushing sale' of the souvenir. If this can be done, the mobile theatre souvenir can have a permanent market. These souvenirs should be taken up as literary work, instead of temporary means of collecting advertisements (pp.8-15).

Unfortunately, the theatre groups themselves have not cared to preserve the copies of their own souvenirs of all the earlier years. A compilation of the souvenirs of different theatres, every five years, if done by the AAMTPA, will definitely lead to the creation of a rich treasure

house of information on mobile theatre. Another step that can be taken to improve the quality

SL. No	Name of the Mobile Theatre	The Souvenir
1	Kohinoor	<i>Karani</i>
2	Theatre Bhagyadevi	<i>Sangeeta</i>
3	Abahan	<i>Rangabedika</i>
4	Hengul	<i>Hengul</i>
5	Indrani	<i>Rangarupa</i>
6	Bordoisila	<i>Aamaar Bordoisila</i>

7	Itihaas	<i>Itihaas</i>
8	Srimanta Sankaradeva	<i>Manikut</i>
9	Mukunda	<i>Nirmali</i>
10	Brindaban	<i>Brindaban</i>
11	Rajtilak	<i>Rajtilak</i>
12	Ashirbad	<i>Ashirbad</i>
13	Surya	<i>Kiran</i>

The souvenirs listed above in table 3.2, are only of ten very popular and successful mobile theatres. Every mobile theatre group brings out such a mouthpiece. As has been mentioned above, the souvenir is a record of the mobile theatre for every season. As such, it is very important that the souvenirs are brought out seriously and the standard of the material published therein is

screened properly. If preserved chronologically with care, a souvenir can become an immensely valuable source material for any scholar studying mobile theatre.

3.12 Food and Transport

Prior to the beginning of the touring season, for about a month and a half or two, intense rehearsals are done in the respective camps. Light, sound, music, actors, technicians, everyone must be in perfect sync because it is a live performance and no retakes can be given. Each camp has an office, a rehearsal hall and lodging for all associated with the particular theatre. A well-managed kitchen caters to the food. The smooth management of the mobile theaters can be a lesson for students of management. Catering to around a 100 people on a daily basis is not an easy task. Breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner everything is provided for every single employee of the theatre. A huge dining hall, with the required number of desks and benches, is where everyone eats together. The kitchen has a total of 5-6 staff (cook plus helpers). Talking of food, the theatre has to feed its employees during the nine-month touring. Every night after the show, the cast and crew dine together which is cooked in the venue itself. Breakfast and lunch too, is provided in the accommodated lodgings. 'The entire expenditure on food varies from theatre to theatre. For our theatre, about 7-8 lakhs covers it', says Mr. Ramen Sarma (55 yrs), Secretary, Sankardev Theatre, 2015-16 (Sarma, R. Telephonic interview. December 16, 2016).

When the travelling starts, the entire set up has to be moved right from the auditorium, in a gigantic tent, that can seat 1500-2000 people, the same number of chairs, wooden planks

and bamboos to set up the stage, stage-settings, costumes, lights, sound equipments, music instruments, the entire kitchen, beddings, etc., are loaded on 4 to 5 trucks, which belongs to the theatre group, or are hired sometimes. The people travel by bus to the destination. It is amazing that in spite of the long distance between two venues there is no break in the schedule of the theater group. This is because most of the theatre groups own two sets of stage-auditorium settings which can be sent off in advance for the required preparations. The others fix up dates keeping all logistics in mind. In their above mentioned interviews, while Mr. Ramen Sharma (55 yrs), Secretary, Sankardev Theatre quoted the expenditure on transportation as Rs.18,22,000/- in a season that covered 78 venues, Mr. Padma Chetia (35 yrs) Secretary, Brindaban Theatre, 2017-18 quoted a sum of Rs.22,80,000/- while covering 79 venues.

3.13 Economic Matters

When we talk about the mobile theatre structure, we can compare it to any other industry. This is an industry. Bhattacharya (2015) writes that since 1963 at least 200 mobile theatre groups have been formed in Assam (pp.205-211). At present around 40 mobile theatres are fully active in Assam . From August to April these groups perform about 500 shows. The mathematics is clear: 9 months, i.e, 270 days, 3 plays per venue with 2 shows each day, i.e, 6 shows per venue (3rd show is exceptional). Thus, 6 shows in 79 venues adds up to 474 shows. If 40 mobile theatres are actively performing, that means $474 \times 40 = 18,960$ shows are being performed every year in Assam. This is surely unparalleled statistics in the entire world. In a state (not country), every year nearly 19000 plays are

being staged. If on an average 130 persons are taken to be associated with every mobile theatre, and we take 40 numbers of mobile theatres as actively functioning right now, then, $130 \times 40 = 5200$ persons are directly employed in this industry. Again, if we assume that of the average 130 persons employed by each theatre, has an average family of four members each, then, $130 \times 4 = 520$ people are sustaining from one mobile theatre, and $520 \times 40 = 20,800$ persons are being fed by the mobile theatres of Assam as a whole. In today's times, when employment is not very easily available, this is a major contribution of mobile theatre to the socio-economic set up of Assam. Since skill, and not, educational qualifications matter here, it gives opportunity to such people who would have otherwise remained unemployed. From here, we can now look into the economics of mobile theatres. Where does the money come from? What is the budget for a season? How much earning is generated? What are the expenditures? What kind of profit are we talking about? What is the share of the inviting committee as against the producer? These are questions that will help us understand mobile theatre better.

Apart from a bank loan which a producer can avail, help from friends and family, his most important source of investment for the season comes from the Inviting Committees in the form of advance payment, which is agreed upon through a formal contract. It must be understood that there is no fixed rules and regulations in the mobile business. So, this advance payment varies in the market. Patgiri (2009) has pointed out that the mobile theatre of Assam can be established as a 'Human Industry' unparalleled in the world. To understand the accounts of its income-expenditure, 10 mobile theatre groups can be taken as model. 10 groups mean around 1000 employees @ of 100 per theatre. Each established

mobile theatre performs 230-240 days in a season and such a theatre has a seat capacity of 2000 per show. Each group earns about 90,000/-1,00,000/ rupees per 1st show. That means 10 groups collect 9,00,000/ rupees, which when multiplied by 230 1st shows amounts to 20, 27,00,000/ (Twenty crore twenty-seven lakh) rupees. With this amount, if we add only 100 2nd shows we have an additional 9,0000000/ (Nine crore) rupees. Thus, the total collection of 10 theatre groups in a season would amount to Rs,(20,27,00,000/+9,0000000/=29,27,000000/)(Twenty-nine crores twenty-seven lakh) (pp.100-102). If we assume that 40 mobile theatre groups are actively doing business, one can easily calculate the amount of money we are talking about. Keeping in mind this huge economic dimension, there is every reason to demand that the government should recognize mobile theatre as an industry for its long life.

Now, nine years later from Patgiri's above calculation, for the season of 2017-18, Abahan Theatre is charging 2 lakh rupees per committee while most mobile theatre groups are taking 1.50 lakh rupees. This was informed by Mr. Jon Barua, Secretary, Chiranjeeb Theatre, 2016-17 (Barua, J. Telephonic interview. December,17, 2016). In its itinerary, a theatre performs in 77-79 venues. That means Abahan Theatre has a collection of $200,000 \times 79 = 15,800,000$ rupees to invest. This is from the advance payment. The rest of the payment has its own equation. The Inviting Committee must pay a fixed (agreed) amount for the first show of each evening. For 2017-18, Abahan has charged Rs.1,26,000/ per 1st show each evening, in every venue, which means $Rs.1,26,000 \times 79 = 9,95,4000$ /. In addition, the 2nd and 3rd show collection is usually divided between

the theatre and Invitation Committee on the ratio of 70:30 or 65:35. One must also understand that a season of nine months also entails huge expenditure.

3.14 Marketing

According to the Oxford Compact Dictionary, marketing literally refers to 'activity or process involving research, promotion, sale, and distribution of a product or service' (p.430). Mobile theatre is 'product' that needs marketing. Without proper promotion, and sales, this 'product' will not sustain. Without the official stamp of an industry, mobile theatre is still functioning like an industry. Bread and butter for hundreds of people come out of this 'industry'. Thus, when we talk about marketing of mobile theatre, it is a process that begins with the choice of the most 'saleable' plays to the fiercely competitive publicity drive. The 'star' artist component has also become a major part of the marketing strategy, because, bigger the star, better the business. Moreover, the Inviting Committees also invite the mobile theatres on the basis of the 'star' of the season. Referring to marketing of theatres, Richmond (1990) writes, touring is the only means by which a substantial profit may be realized by a theatre organization. Among the many ways in which theatre organizations produce revenue, the most common is through ticket sales. Many amateur theatres distribute a special souvenir program, which they usually print once a year. The program is filled with advertisements and often include short articles about various aspects of theatre in general or historical information about the group. These programs

often provide a substantial income for organizations that would not survive on ticket sale

alone. The advertisements are used as a tax deduction by the contributors (pp.432-434). This observation of Richmond fits in with mobile theatres marketing as well.

Mobile theatre, as is clear from the above, is big business and this becomes even more clear from the latest data given below which has been collected by the scholar from a successful mobile theatre group, Brindaban Theatre, in its sixth year of business.

Table 3.3 : Annual income of Brindaban Theatre(2015-16)

Sl.No.	Total number of venues a year	78 venues
	(Average)	
1	Advance taken from each venue	Rs.1,50,000/
2	Advance Collection from all venues	78 @ Rs.1,50,000/= Rs.1,17,00,000/
3	Total number of shows per year (Average)	156 @ of 2 shows per day
4	Income per show (1st + 2nd)	Rs.1,00,000/(fixed)+70:30
5	Income per day	Rs.1,00,000/ +70,000/= 1,70,000/ (fixed)
6	Total income per venue (3 days) (Maximum, assumed)	Rs.1,70,000/x 3= 5,10,000/
7	Gross Income from 78 venues in 9 months	Rs.5,10,000/x78=3,97,80,000/
8	Net Income (after advance deducted from gross income)	Rs.3,97,80,000/- 1,17,00,000/ = Rs.3,86,10,000/(Three crore eighty sixlakh and ten thousand) only.

The table 3.3 above shows that, if 2nd show takes place, the collection is divided

between the mobile theatre and Inviting Committee at the ratio of 70:30. Assuming that the venues had 2nd show, earning Rs.1,00,000/ per show, the mobile theatre gets Rs.70,000/ and Inviting Committee gets Rs.30,000/ @70:30 ratio. 3rd shows are very rare and as such, has been excluded from the income calculation. A mobile theatre earns a huge sum of money every season. It must be mentioned here, that the table above is specific to one particular theatre in one season. But, from it, we can get a fair idea of the income of the entire mobile theatre industry (if we may use the word).

Table 3.4: Annual expenditure of Brindaban theatre(2015-16)

Sl. No.	Head of expense	Amount in Rs.(for 9 months)
1	Director - playwright	3,00,000/--
2	Music Director	5,00,000/
3	Art Director	5,00,000/
4	Choreographer	@ of 20,000/per song: 5 songs: 1,00,000/
5	Singers:@2:1 male,1 female(regular) Guest singer:	1,60,000/x2= 3,20,000/ @ 20,000/ per song: for 5 songs: 1,00,000/ (average)
6	Dancers: 6 male,6 female	@8000/per head/month= 8,96,000/
7	Instrumentalist (5)+Assistant(1)	9,50,000/+72,000/= 10,22,000
8	Transportation+ salary + fuel	22,80,000/
9	Food+ salary of this dept.	21,03,000/
10	Make up stuff + costume designer	1,00,000+3,00,000/= 4,00,000/
11	Light + sound (salary of technicians)	12,32,000+ 3,14,000/= 15,46,000/
12	Auditorium and stage (salary of manual workers)	16,11,000/

13	Publicity (Printing Banners, Posters, Souvenir, Photoshoot, Videorecording, Graphics, Electronic and Print media ads., etc.)	20,00,000/
14	Miscellaneous	15,00,000/
15	Total	1,51,78,000/(One crore Fifty one lakh and Seventy eight thousand) only

Source: All data has been collected during Field Study from the Secretary of Brindaban Theatre, Mr. Padma Chetia (35 yrs).

Table 3.4 above shows the expenditures incurred by Brindaban Theatre in the year 2015-16. It is clear from the table that just as the income is a substantial amount of money, so is the expenditure of the theatre.

Difference between the income and expenditure of Brindaban theatre for the year 2015-16, thus stands at, Rs.3,86,10,000/-Rs.1,51,78,000/=Rs.2,34,32000/ (Two Crore Thirty Four Lakh and Thirty Two Thousand) only. This is big money indeed, but as mentioned above, this is not uniform. The well-established mobile theatre groups can arrange such huge budgets banking on their experience and reputation but what has been termed as dangerous by many theatre connoisseurs, is the fact, that in the recent years, many people have suddenly turned into mobile theatre producers without any understanding or love for the medium. This is the black money brigade whose sole purpose is money. These people can dish out any amount to buy the 'star' artists, without whom the organizing committees hesitate to invite the groups. Economic benefits must have a proportion of justice as well. The equal hard work, if not more, done by a regular theatre artist earns him/her not more than rupees 3-4 lakh

in a season whereas a 'star' can demand rupees 50-60 lakhs. Is this fair? Mobile theatre is a business venture and the producer must think of profit if he has to sustain the hundred plus people and their families who depend on him. But this unhealthy development is not at all encouraging for the future of Mobile Theatre. By properly planning the yearly remuneration for the mobile theatre producers and artists, monthly salary of the various employees, provision for bonus, arrear, provident fund, pension after retirement etc., the State or Central government can set an unprecedented example in the world. It may be mentioned here that the Assam Legislative Assembly has passed the Mobile Theatre (Regulation & Artist Welfare Fund) Act on 2010 and it has been issued for public information on 7th September 2010 in the official Gazette. This Act has been discussed in the subsequent chapter of this research work and a copy of the same has been given in Appendix III.

CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF MOBILE THEATRE

Culture is transmitted from one generation to the next, and in this process a culture discards some of the elements and acquires some new traits. Mobile theatre has become an integral part of Assamese culture and in this art form also we can see many additions and omissions. In its journey of more than fifty years, this popular form of performing art has seen many changes. From the trend of mythological and historical plays, to social plays, to staging of plays based on stories from foreign land and cinema screenplay, from use of minimum technology, to this age of technical gimmicks, from a time when ‘glamour’ did not mean costly movie stars to this day, when Invitation Committees first check on the ‘star’ artists before inviting a theatre, the changing attitude of the audience, etc. ‘Nothing but change is true’ - we have all heard this saying and keeping in mind this truth, it is only natural that with time changes have come into mobile theatre as well. But, the question is, the kind of changes that have come in, are they positive or negative? Are these changes taking mobile theatre forward? Have these changes contributed in developing the aesthetic quality of mobile theatre or reduced it to a mere moneymaking commodity? This chapter seeks to look into the problems and challenges that are

being faced by mobile theatre in Assam today and how these are being dealt with as well as the prospects on which it can bank upon for a secure future.

To conduct the study of this chapter, the SWOT framework has been put into use .

4.1 Globalization and its impact

Barua (2015) opines that plays are of two types- one, a couple of hours time pass which has no impact on our thoughts and two, those plays which compel us to think, brings up many questions and issues and stays with us for a long time after we exit the auditorium. It is a sad truth that today, most of the plays staged by the mobile theatres belong to type number one- a complete package that has all the ingredients for full entertainment and the value for money (pp.14-18).

This trend came into mobile theatres post 1990 with the concept of globalization. Acharya (2004) has stated globalization refers to the growth in international flows of goods, services and especially capital that has taken place since the 1970's. Between 1990 – 2000 some important developments took place as a result of globalization that changed the world forever are-

1991 : Cable and satellite television comes to India following the Gulf War.

1991 : Free market restructuring carried out under the tutelage of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

1992 : The launch of Zee TV and Star TV.

1992 : The government greatly liberalized the requirements, resulting in a great increase in foreign films being released domestically.

1994 : North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) passed.

1995 : VSNL introduced Internet services in India.

1998 : India conducts nuclear tests (p.15)

As a result of these developments mobile theatres post 1990 has had to face a threat from satellite television and cinema, which became easily available. So, it was felt by some that the package now offered to entice the mobile theatre audience had to be a complete entertainer.

4.2 Challenges to Mobile Theatre

Based on the above background, we will discuss the challenges faced by these mobile theatre groups emerging in the post globalization times. In fact, solutions and challenges will be considered both from the point of view of the society and the theatre groups. Bhattacharya (2015) says, in this age of Hi Fi technology when peoples' aspirations regarding entertainment is becoming very high due to the availability of internet, social networking media, dish antennas, different kinds of TV channels, the fact that the mobile theatre groups of Assam are not only surviving but has also surpassed the popularity of cinema and compact discs (CD) really deserve acclamation. Though started long ago, in 1935, and though it has earned several recognitions at national level, yet the Assamese cine industry is still striving for survival (p.208)

The mobile theatres of Assam are running successfully, no doubt, but in the long run, how will they deal with the threats arising from:

- presentation of the current type of ‘filmy’ adaptation of plays with no new experimentation;
- stiff monopolistic competition;
- over-dependence on glamour stars;
- growth of a ‘Syndicate syndrome’;
- unchecked emergence of new mobile theatres;
- entry of black money;
- lack of emergence of new acting talent;
- lack of adequate playwrights;
- constraint of space;
- non-industry status .

Challenges are not new to mobile theatres. They have adapted themselves accordingly. The variation in subject matter of the plays chosen over the years, shows how they have tried to keep in mind the changing taste of the audience. Bhattacharya (2015) further adds, that when the *jatras* first came into Assam from Bengal, they staged stories from mythology and history(p.209). Mobile theatres, as the new improved *avatar* (incarnation) of *jatra*, initially followed suit and then, gradually with time, shifted to the social plays, which became very popular. Some such plays were, *Rana Pratap*, *Shakti Singh*, *Baji Rao*, *Jayadeva*,

Dhatri Panna, Avaja Devi, Basaspati, Kalapahar, Mewar Kumari, Kundil Kunwari, Chandragupta, Niyati, Akalor Desh, Dharar Devata, etc. As time flew, and the Classics became hugely popular in television, mobile theatres also experimented with adaptation of classics like *Mrichchakatikam, Mahabharata, Ramayana, Cleopatra, Illiad, Odyssey, Ben-Hur, Hamlet, Othello, etc.* With globalization coming in, they started staging hollywood and bollywood adaptations like *Titanic, Dinasarar Atanko, Abuj Dara Achin Kaina, etc.*

(a) Lack of Dramatists/Playwrights

There was a time when only a few mobile theatre groups were there in Assam and just four or five playwrights wrote plays for these groups. One or two plays were written that gave the audience a fine taste because it reflected a sense of social responsibility through the story, the characters and the dialogues. Since the target audience was the rural masses, these plays could establish a connection with the viewer who found their own society and life on stage. Times changed and new playwrights came out who, on the plea of changing interest of the audience, began to dish out copies of Hindi, Bengali or South Indian movies or other translated works, in the name of plays. This has become the norm in mobile theatre now.

An even more dangerous and unfortunate fact is that today, the entire mobile theatre scenario has come to depend on, basically, one dramatist, Mr. Abhijit Bhattacharya. We acknowledge Mr. Bhattacharya's hard work, but is it possible for one man to write 15 to 20 plays in a year, and that too, every year in succession? This must be an unprecedented feat

anywhere in the world in the history of drama and theatre. Every mobile theatre worth its salt must have one play written by Mr. Bhattacharya. The question is-why?! Has the Assamese cultural world become so poor as far as dramatists/playwrights are concerned? No wonder the quality of mobile theatre plays staged has plummeted so badly. If a person works under this kind of pressure where he has to churn out more than a dozen plays, where is the time to even think about any kind of quality? As remarked by a particular producer, on the request of anonymity, ‘today if Abhijit Bhattacharya decides to stop writing plays for mobile theatres, the entire set up will come to a standstill’. Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya penned 18 plays for 10 mobile theatre groups during 2016-17.

Table 4.2: Abhijeet Bhattacharya’s plays written in 2016-17

Sl.No	Mobile Theatre Group	Name of the Play
1	Sudarshan Theatre	<i>i. Badmas Suwali</i>
2	Rajashree Theatre	<i>ii. Kalangkini Nayeekaiiii. Jeevan Sangram</i>
3	Brindaban Theatre	<i>iv. Romancev. Raj Attalikavi. Rajanigandha</i>
4	Bordoisila Theatre	<i>vii. Koydi</i>
5	Chiranjeeb Theatre	<i>viii. Dhuniya Suwalijoni</i>
6	Itihaas Theatre	<i>ix. Circusor Suwalix. Duranta Premik</i>
7	Kohinoor Theatre	<i>xi. Radha ebar hanhi de</i>
8	Rajtilak Theatre	<i>xii. Mahatmar Sokupanixiii. Dangor Dada</i>
9	Abahan Theatre	<i>xiv. Ma Kalixv. Morom Diya Muk</i>
10	Theatre Surya	<i>xvi. Bodyguardxvii. Tejyoputraxviii. Mantri Mahoday</i>

Source:[file:///D:/Mobile Theatre Season 2016-17_Complete Guide-Axomiya.html](file:///D:/Mobile%20Theatre%20Season%202016-17/Complete%20Guide-Axomiya.html)

The above table, 4.2, is proof of the unholy trend that has come into mobile theatres, the monopoly of playwriting clubbed with direction. Is this humanly possible for one single person to churn out 18 original stories in one season? No wonder the mobile theatre plays have become the cut and paste ground from Hindi, south Indian and Bengali movies. In the SWOT analysis, this can be counted as a major weakness of mobile theatres.

Recently in an interview in a private local television channel Mr. Bhattacharya himself announced that in the coming season, that is, 2017-18, the number of plays that he has taken up to deliver in various mobile theatre units, has gone up to 24. (Television Programme. May, 05, 2017.8 p.m).The question that automatically arises here is, is it really the dearth of playwrights or is it a lobby system which is managing things in their own way for their own gain? Is this a positive trend? A noticeable fact here is, as mentioned in the discussion of the connection between literature and mobile theatre, a stalwart of Bhabendranth Saikia's stature, penned 26 plays in his entire career of 22 years with mobile theatre, while Abhijeet Bhattacharya writes 24 plays in one year. In connection to this trend that has come into mobile theatre, Bora (2017) has written that, the mobile theatre of Assam has been shadowed by the 'syndicate' system. Since the last couple of years, we have been hearing about this from the various artists and workers associated with mobile theatres. But lately, the matter is being openly brought out in the various discussions as well as write-ups and articles on mobile theatre. Who is running this 'syndicate'? Where and how is it being run? It may sound unpalatable, but some producers are responsible for this. They shoulder the responsibility of the mobile theatre's yearlong budget in crores of rupees, but they cannot

take independent decisions on how to plan and go ahead. This is done by the 'third party'. From the so called 'star' to the cook, the salary of the artists-workers, which play will be staged on the second evening, etc., everything is decided by the 'third party' (p.14) .

In the last few years, some people of doubtful credentials are emerging in the arena of mobile theatres as producers. Among them, if someone is related to land-mafia, someone is a corrupt police officer or a former extremist. These are people who never had any connection with mobile theatre or the cultural field as a whole. They are not here to earn more from the mobile theatres, it is a means of turning black money into white and, to gain a status in the society. Since they do not have any knowledge about mobile theatres, they have handed over the reins to the 'third party'. This is how the syndicate reign is now running. It is important to note that some of the so called 'star' artists are contributing to, and instigating this syndicate system indirectly. These people, for their own benefit, resort to unethical means by towing the lines of the syndicate mafia. An established cine actor, who had been in mobile theatres for three years earlier, wanted to go for mobile theatres again and went to meet some producers in this regard. But, apparently, he was told, 'please go and talk to 'so and so'. He knows everything'. This actor, (on conditions of anonymity), lamented, 'after working for so many years in cinema, serials and drama, now, to work in mobile theatres again, I will have to request 'someone' else?!'

This is apparently the real picture of the mobile theatre world now. Just as the syndicates for various commodities has led to the benefit of only a certain few, while weakening the economy of the state, similarly, the syndicate in mobile theatre will benefit only a certain

section of spineless opportunists, while ruining this industry. The mobile theatre ticket prices are rising rapidly. The producers are under immense pressure to stay in the run. While the 'stars' have nothing to lose, the other artists, technicians, workers etc., are mostly neglected. Forget about an increase in salary, many at times they do not get even their proper dues. There is no one to raise voice for them. This is not a very good sign for the mobile theatres.

It is high time the producers realize the consequences of this trend, which they will have to face very soon. This has led to staging of plays which people cannot connect to. Assamese literature is a treasure house. Why cannot our playwrights script plays from that treasure house? Of course, here, one would need to understand literature which again, is not everyone's cup of tea. Another solution could be re-staging old original Assamese popular plays. This will not only revive the old plays but also stop the plagiarism from English, Hindi, Bengali and the South Indian movies. There are several other names in the current list of dramatists/playwrights in the mobile theatre arena. Arranged in alphabetical order for convenience alone, it includes Mr. Avtar Singh, renowned veteran playwright, Mr. Champak Sarma, Mr. Hemanta Dutta another veteran stalwart, Mr. Hillol kr. Pathak, Mr. Mridul Chutiya, Mr. Pranabjyoti Bharali, Mr. Pol.ch. Azad, Mr. Rajdweep, Mr. Satish Das, Mr. Shyamsundar Jalan, et al. The problem of shortage of playwrights is directly connected to the fact that too many theatre groups have come into existence now. It is a classic example of demand and supply. Plays will have to be presented if a theatre has to live, and that too, plays that will be commercially successful. so, naturally, the bet is put on the best horse.

Put into the SWOT analysis, this lack of dramatists/playwrights can be termed both as a weakness and a threat, because, lack of dramatists will mean more 'cut-paste' stories lifted from various sources. This will obviously weaken the quality of mobile theatre further, while the threat will be to the very survival of mobile theatre.

(b) Where are the Play Directors

Bhagawati (2015) has said that a dramatist with his creative thinking writes a drama while a director presents that creation on stage by, one, understanding the emotions of the dramatist and two, adding his own vision as a director. Both are people who remain behind the scene. There is a lot of difference between the presentation of amateur theatre and mobile theatre. The dramatist and director of the mobile theatre is answerable not only to the audience, but also to the theatre group. In mobile theatre, a director has to complete 3-4 plays within one and half month time for presentation. Although this sounds impossible, this is what is going on in the mobile theatres (p.13)

Once, the most important post in a mobile theatre was that of a director. It was the director who used to discuss every aspect of the play with the dramatist, producer and the actors. Every theatre group had a regular director. But nowadays this trend has changed- it has been replaced by the dramatists/playwrights directing their own plays in spite of the fact that they do not have much knowledge about the art of direction. Moreover, since most of these dramatists churn out plays for the theatres, where is the time to concentrate on direction? These dramatists-cum-directors take it for granted that since the actors in mobile theatre are

professional, they will understand everything themselves, once the rehearsals begin. In a couple of such rehearsals, as soon as the actors mug up their lines, the direction work is over. The result of such a trend is also becoming clear. Acting is taking a backstage because powerful theatre performers are not being brought out. Those actors and actresses who are talented may be able to deliver from their experience but what about new artists who come to the mobile stage? Who will teach them the fine nuances of stage acting other than a director? A major share of the plays time is, therefore, killed with unnecessary song and dance sequences which is neither required in the story nor of any appreciable standard. This unholy trend is leading to the fact that today, a director's importance has gone down in the mobile theatre. The dramatists have become self-proclaimed directors. If the ability to 'act' as a major requirement is being compromised on, what will the director do anyway, in the mobile theatres?

Once again, according to the SWOT analysis, the gradual disappearance of the exclusive play director is a major weakness as well as threat to mobile theatres and is probably one of the prime cause of some very poor presentations.

(c) Dearth of Acting Talent

In an interview taken by this researcher, Mr. Jon Barua, 45 yrs, Secretary, Chiranjeev Theatre, 2016-17 said that, the mobile theatre arena today has become hostage to a handful of 'star' performers on whose name the business is being run. The Inviting Committees insists on the presence of these 'stars' to invite the theatre groups since their version is that,

otherwise the audience cannot be attracted. This dangerous trend has benefitted only these 'stars' and no one else in the mobile set up because now they can demand atrocious amounts as remuneration, which the producers are not only willing to pay, but are even competing with each other every year, so that business is successful. This reminds one of the words of Sardana (2012) who has written, in the star-centric Bollywood films, for a particular time a handful of male and female star actors had been and have been playing a dominant role in mainstream cinema than in contemporary Hollywood system. The fees charged by the handful of stars have been on the rise continuously and in today's mainstream films, such salaries account for well over half the production budget (p.10)

What the producers should try, is to hunt out new acting talents mobile theatre because this is a performing art which is completely based on acting. A new generation of stage actors is a very important necessity for the sustenance of mobile theatre in the long run. A strong story can be shouldered only by experienced and talented actors. Even a mediocre plot can be taken to another level if the actors know their art completely. Today, one allegation against mobile theatre is that playwrights are compelled to write plays keeping in mind the ability of the actors. Unfortunately, those actors who belong to the mobile theatre world, but are not glamorous 'stars', are accorded a secondary position and this has naturally created an invisible line of demarcation, which, of course the producers deny.

Chakraborty (2015) opines for an actor three 'D's are very important, namely, determination, dedication and discipline. Moreover, it must be a passion, not a job. Only then will an actor have the inclination to educate oneself with the *Natyashastra*, the ancient Indian

treatise on drama, and the various other literature on theatre, to delve into language and grammar, understand various cultures, read up Rabindranath Tagore, Stanislavski, Brecht and Shakespeare, et al. An actor must keep in mind some duties like, understanding the play properly before trying to portray the particular character given, to by-heart the dialogues and understand every word with the correct pronunciations, avoid any unnecessary stammering and pause, clean one's teeth properly, exercise facial expressions as well as other free hand exercises. It is absolutely essential for an actor to have good health, a flexible body, a strong clear voice, realization, and observation capacity along with sincerity and good concentration power. A good actor may not be a good director, but a good director must be a good actor, only then can he teach the actors what is actually required. World famous director-actor Stanislavski opined that actors are of three kinds, the creative, the mimic and the over-actor. The creative actor looks for inspiration to improve himself, the mimic basically blindly does whatever is shown by the director and the over-actor just does that, over-acts unnecessarily (p.16).

Analysed through SWOT, the fact of the dearth of actors is again, both a weakness and threat for mobile theatres, because actors bring to life a script penned by the playwright and envisioned by the director. Theatre is an actors medium. If the actor fails to deliver, mobile theatres will gradually fade away.

4.3 Gimmicks Galore

Saikia (2014) writes that nowadays, more importance is laid on technical gimmicks than the strength of the story of the play - flowing rivers, flying helicopters and airplanes, ships

sinking, rains and vehicles running, dinosaurs romping all over the stage. This has led to the difference between cinema and mobile theatre becoming lesser. But, can only technical gimmicks make up for weak plays filled up with filmy song and dance sequences that has no connection to, or necessity in, the plot? (p.23)

Mobile theatre cannot become cinema. Cinema is a completely different medium. The two cannot, and should not even be compared. But in their race to present 'super hits', the mobile theatre producers are borrowing too much from cinema. The stories portrayed have no connection to the Assamese society and culture, because they have been taken from somewhere else, simply using Assamese names cannot bring in the ethos of the society. It fails ones understanding how the irritating and absolutely unnecessary song and dance sequences stolen from cinema contributes to the play at all. Technological gimmicks are fine as long as the story has such needs. A ship sinking in *Titanic* or dinosaurs running in *Dinasarar Atanka*, adaptation of the Hollywood blockbuster, *Jurassic Park*, had justifications in using technological illusions. But most plays on the mobile stage are infused with gimmicks just for the sake of gimmick, which is quite funny, and it contributes in no way to the aesthetic quality of a play. Kohinoor Theatre is planning to use 3-D technology in the coming season. It needs to be seen how it will be done for stage production.

Looked through the SWOT framework, this can be analysed as a weakness, because clearly, poor story, poor acting, and poor quality of overall presentation, has to be made up with something that will surprise and shock the audience while keeping them curious enough to sit through the play. This is why gimmicks are being relied upon.

4.4 Method of Publicity

Mazumdar (2015) has opined that a strange trend which has come into mobile theatre is in the method of publicity. Earlier, a play gained popularity after it was staged. The audience and critics gave it the certificate of being successful or a failure post-performance. All three or four plays taken up by the theatre group was of equal importance. But now, the producer declares which play will be a hit with the audience and that too, while it is still in the rehearsal stage. One particular play is the focus of all publicity. The ‘records’ created by the mobile theatres are blatantly advertised on both print and electronic media to attract audience. If entertainment tax had been levied on mobile theatres, will this kind of ‘records’ be advertised? (p.21) This kind of publicity has deprived the audience from being able to choose which play to enjoy. For example, in 2014-15 season, Rajtilak Theatre staged two plays, namely, *Maharani* (The Empress) and *Abhinetri* (The Actress). For reasons best known to them, the producer hyped up *Maharani*, which had nothing much to offer, so much, that people missed out on *Abhinetri*, which comparatively, was a far better production from all sides.

A huge amount of money is spent on publicity by the mobile theatre groups to attract the audience. Promotion, like in cinema, and videos of songs are shown through the satellite television channels and the social media. As a result, the ticket prices have also gone up. Every theatre claims to have created ‘unprecedented records’ in the same year through their publicity. Once again, the entire publicity is centered around the ‘star’ performer with no mention of the other artists. Another change that has been noticed is the coming in of the

corporate houses with products like alcohol and *pan masala* (mouth freshner) being advertised as sponsors before the show.

The SWOT analysis of the publicity methods and results of mobile theatre shows that in spite of the criticism that has been done, it is a strength, which has been utilised well to the maximum benefit. This is the age of publicity and advertisement, so, to attract the common people through glamour and media is but very natural. The tool of publicity is being utilised in the same manner for all sectors, be it entertainment, product endorsement or even politics.

4.5 Keeping the Audience Enticed

Das (2016) says that since the last few years the advance booking system of the theatre shows has undergone a change in the sense that many times this booking is not confirmed. The reason being, fewer audience. As such, the Inviting Committee collection is lesser compared to their expenses. A committee has to pay a fixed sum of Rupees 70-80 thousand to the mobile theatre group for the first show of each evening. In this scenario, the Committees are becoming reluctant to invite the mobile theatre groups. The theatres have to send their representative to search out new venues for performance and in many cases have been compelled to perform without any advance payment. Non-payment or less-than-agreed payment by many Committees have financially harmed the theatre groups (p.5)

An associated cause for the above scenario is the mushrooming of mobile theatre groups all around. With no knowledge of theatre management, new theatres are being established by people with money. As mentioned earlier, persons of dubious background or those who

want to convert their black money to white, have started theatre groups. The increase in the rate of tickets is another reason of fewer audience. This hike in ticket price is basically because of the huge amount that the mobile theatre has to spend on the glamour artists as well as on publicity. Another factor now, is the easy availability of the satellite television channels for just Rupees 200/ to 300/ per month in the rural areas also.

Devchoudhury (2011) states that a factor in this regard is that, in the present times the producers of mobile theatre claim that it is the audience who wants these 'circus' type of plays and that is why they are compelled to stage them (p.33). But is this true? Have the producers been able to assess what the audience really wants? Immense publicity leads people to see a particular play but most times they come out with great dissatisfaction. Media, and the so-called critics, for their own interest, project a low standard play in such a way that the audience is misled. And then, to label this as the 'taste of the audience' is not acceptable at all because even the young generation has loved plays like *Asimat Jar Heral Sima*, *Rudrasagar*, *Swarnajayanti*, and *Astapath*, etc. Another issue is that of remuneration of the 'star' artists. It has become an open bargaining game. Whoever can bid the highest gets the most bankable star. A 'star' artist is paid a huge amount and the audience has to suffer the consequence in the form of enhanced ticket price. On the other hand, the same mobile theatre employs many people for whom making two ends meet is still a headache.

Yet another trend which has come into mobile theatre is use of cine-scope and playing recorded songs and music. Theatre is different from cinema and its essence lies in it being 'live' in every sense of the term. Why else would one go to a mobile theatre? Producers must

realize that these new additions are in fact harming the medium more than helping it. The producers will have to give special importance to understand what the audience really wants and not make blind assumptions. Mobile theatre should not be presented like cinema. It has its unique identity and that should be kept intact. The new generation of the audience should be taught to appreciate theatre and not look for replicas of cinema. In the current trend of plays that is being staged, this danger is becoming evident.

As per the SWOT analysis, the danger of losing the audience on account of the various factors discussed above, is of course a big threat that mobile theatre face today. The producers need to address the issues and take care to find means of attracting more and more audience of all age groups towards mobile theatre.

4.6 Government's Role in The Development of Mobile Theatre: Has There Been One

Richmond (1990) mentions, relatively little is known and virtually nothing is published about the government support of theatre, or for that matter, of any of the arts in India. Considering the vast population of India, the multiple demands of contemporary and traditional theatres, India's political complexity and limited financial resources, it is no wonder that the public has little information about the extent to which central and state governments support the arts (p.435).

Talking about government blessings, it may be mentioned here, that Bollywood too, has had to face the government's apathy for a long period. As Acharya (2004) states, despite its popularity among the masses for its entertainment value, for a long time it did not receive any encouragement from the government and leadership so much so that it had to traverse a period of eight decades before it was recognized as an industry eligible for availing loans from financial institutions. The state targeted it as a source of revenue by imposing excessive entertainment tax and other taxes including on raw stocks and essential imports. Consequently, the industry had to fend for itself. (p.18).

Today, the unique mobile theatre of Assam has established itself as one of the best means of mass communication. Through hard work and discipline, it has taken drama, which is recognized as one of the most effective socio-cultural tool, to the various nooks and corners of the society. Apart from that, mobile theatre has been playing a crucial role in the economic arena of Assam, with each theatre providing means of livelihood to not less than 150 families, thus contributing to social development. Consequently, mobile theatre has carved a special niche in the cultural world of Assam. However, in the last few years this medium has become the focus of a lot of discussion and criticism. To put it in another way, it is seen that certain theatre groups and a section of artists-technicians have lost the sense of values that should be there in a strong medium of mass communication. As such, maybe the time has come that the government of Assam should interfere in mobile theatre. The theatre groups have also been complaining that the government has always neglected them and this complaint is not totally baseless. Though it is true that former Chief Minister of Assam, Sri Prafulla Kumar Mahanta had exempted the mobile theatres from the entertainment tax, but thereafter, no help

or assistance has come from the government for the development or improvement of the medium. In the last few years it has been noticed that a couple of mobile theatre groups have gained the benefit of some advertisements and too, through some agencies who act as middlemen. Naturally, the lion's share of any profit is taken by these agencies. In 2012, the then Assam government had supported the implementation of a new Act, The Assam Mobile Theatre (Regulation and Artist Welfare Fund) Act, 2010, which had been incorporated in the Gazette notification as on 7th September 2010, bearing the No. LGL/174/2008/13. A copy of the Gazette Notification has been attached in the appendix III. Containing 25 sections in all, this elaborate Act has provisions that would lead to better regulation of the mobile units, curtail the mushrooming of mobile units, establishment of an Artists Welfare Fund for mobile theatres. But how far this Act has been implemented is, of course another story.

Mr. Pulu Kr. Sarma (55 yrs), editor of *Rangabedika*, annual souvenir of Abahan Theatre, informed that in 1987 the state government announced two awards, one, *Sahityacharya* Atul Chandra Hazarika Award (exclusively for mobile theatres) which was won by Sri Mahendra Barthakur for the playwriting of *Mukhya Mantri* (Chief Minister) staged by Hengul theatre and, two, *Natasurya* Phani Sarma Award (General) for the best actor-actress, which was won jointly by Sri Jibeswar Deka (Mukunda theatre) and Sri Suren Mahanta (Kohinoor Theatre) (Sarma, P.K, Personal Communication. August 10, 2014). However, the directorate of Cultural Affairs, GoA, sources officially states that it was from 2004 that the *Natasurya* Phani Sarma Award has been given by the state government. The stalwarts associated with mobile theatre who won this honour include:

Table 4.3: Recipients of the *Natasurya Phani Sarma Award*(2004-2017)

Sl. No	Year of Award	Name of the Recipients
1	2004	Tulsi Das
2	2005	Ratna Oja
3	2006	Dharanidhar Choudhury
4	2007	Jnanada Bora/ Mahananda Sarma
5	2008	Bidya Rao Nayar
6	2009	O. P Nayar
7	2010	Indra Baniya
8	2011	Hasan Sharif Ahmad
9	2012	Bishnu Khargharia
10	2013	Uday Shankar Saikia
11	2014	Nipon Goswami
12	2015	Bholanath Kalita
13	2016	Bhola Kotoki
14	2017	Not given

Source: Directorate of Cultural Affairs, GoA.

Similarly, the Cultural Affairs official status is that the *Sahityacharya* Atul Chandra Hazarika Award (exclusively for mobile theatre) has been awarded since 2008 and the recipients from the mobile theatre arena till 2017 are:

Table 4.4: *Sahityacharya* Atul Chandra Hazarika Award

Sl. No	Year of Award	Name of the Recipients
1.	2008	Achyut Lahkar
2.	2009	Hemanta Dutta
3.	2010	Ratan Lahkar
4.	2011	Bina Prasad
5	2012	Krishna Roy
6	2013	Not known
7	2014	Not Known
8	2015	Dharani Barman
9	2016	Not known
10	2017	Not given

Source: Directorate of Cultural Affairs, GoA.

Apart from the award mentioned in table 4.4, the state government has also been providing artists pension to people connected with various art, craft, music, cinema and theatre, etc., since 1988. Some of the renowned personalities of mobile theatre who has received the artist pension from the government of Assam are:

Table 4.5: Recipients of GoA Artist Pension for mobile theatre, 1988-2017

Sl.No	Year	No. of recipient	Name of the recipient
1	2	3	4
1	1988	01	Karuna Kanta Mazumdar
2	1989	01	Kalawanta Singh
3	1990	01	Ratna Oja
4	1991	01	Jatin Goswami
5	1992	N.K	N.K
6	1993	01	Anupama Bhattacharya
7	1994	01	Adya Sarma
8	1996	02	a. Dharani Barman b. Sadananda Lahkar
9	1997	N.K	N.K
10	1998	02	a. Prabhat Sarma. b. Uday Bhagawati
11	1999	N.K	N.K
12	2000	01	Sarat Mazumdar
13	2001	N.K	N.K
14	2002	N.K	N.K
15	2003	02	a. Abdul Majidb. b. Ila Kakati
16	2004	01	Mahananda Sarma
17	2005	01	Nipon Goswami
18	2006	01	Ugra Mena
19	2007 to 2009	N.K	N.K

1	2	3	4
20	2010	01	Brajanath Sarma
21	2011-12	N.K	N.K
22	2013	01	Hemanta Dutta
23	2014 -15	N.K	N.K
24	2016	01	Towfiqur Rehman
25	2017	07	a. Jyoti Lahkar . b. Hariprasad Barthakur. c. Rina Bora. d. Kamala Kalita. e. Nanda Bannerjee. f. Kartik Bora. g. Parul Bora.

Source: Directorate of Cultural Affairs, GoA

Table 4.6: Recipients of other grants/pension by the artists of mobile theatre (2011-2017)

Sl.No	Year	Ex-gratia grantwith name of recipient	Special financial Assistancewith	Family pensionwith name of recipient
1	2	3	4	5
1	2011	Dasarath Das	_____	_____
2	2012	a. Boroda Mena b. Geetanjali Ahmad Nayar	_____ _____	_____ _____
3	2013	_____	_____	Bharati Devi
4	2014	_____	_____	_____
5	2015	_____	a. Heera Neog b. Preeti Saikia	a. Prabha Devi b. Khiroda Sarma.

1	2	3	4	5
6	2016	Upakul Bordoloi	_____	Kiran Lahkar
7	2017	a. Renu Dutta Phukan. b.Heera Neog (family).		a. Pakhila Das b. Kamini Das c. Kiran Lahkar

Source: Directorate of Cultural Affairs, GoA

It is heartening to see that social organizations have been keeping up the effort to encourage mobile theatre artists, time and now, by announcing certain awards and honours. Two such organizations that may be mentioned are the ‘Y’s Men’ and ‘Nebcos’. Dalmia India (Bharat) Cement has taken up a laudable step as a part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR), by starting “Udiyaman Bhramyaman” an annual award ceremony exclusively for the recognition of the artists of the mobile theatre of Assam. For the first time held a glittering function was held in Guwahati on 23rd June 2017 to felicitate mobile theatre artists in twenty-three different categories. Mr. Dasarath Das, veteran singer and music director, was conferred the Aditi Sarma Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award for his contribution to mobile theatres (*Amar Asom*,2017:13). In its second edition held on 20th June 2018, apart from awards given away in twenty-eight various categories, the Aditi Sarma Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award was conferred on veteran playwright, director and lyricist, Mr Hemanta Dutta (*The Assam Tribune*,2018:5)

If the government so wishes, it can do a lot the development and progress of mobile theatre. As pointed out by Saikia (2013), we can take up the example of the Chinese

Dramatic Association, CDA (renamed in 1953), which was originally named National Theatre Workers Association and formed in 1949 with the blessings of the Chinese government. Since the last 60 years, this association has been working to strengthen the socialist literature and arts in the country by associating the playwrights and theatre workers with the government. With its main objective of guiding the common man towards the ideals of socialism, the CDA has adopted the theme- 'Let a hundred flowers bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend'. The CDA works to enrich creation of plays; healthy criticism of theatre; bring together theatre associations and professional theatre workers to take theatre forward; work for the welfare, security and interests of the theatre workers, and educate people about this; create drama literature like books, magazines, journals, etc., along with the plays; and, strengthen theatre exchange programmes with foreign countries. CDA has also been bringing out a monthly magazine titled, *The Script* since 1952 with the main purpose of publishing selected manuscripts and screenplay, apart from encouraging new playwrights (pp.14-16).

Thus, if such political patronage in the real sense is there, then there is no limit to how the theatre can be utilized for the betterment of the society. Mobile theatre of Assam is a special identity in the cultural arena of the world. If this treasure is to sustain for generations to come, it is the duty and responsibility of the entire Assamese society as well as the State Government to help, support, criticize and guide the future path of the most popular medium of mass communication and entertainment of Assam. One day, history will definitely measure mobile theatre of Assam on a different scale.

4.7 Future Prospects of Mobile Theatre

In this half a century of its existence mobile theatre has been able to establish itself as one of the most popular medium of entertainment and mass media. Though not comparable, because both mediums are different, mobile theatre has filled the void left by the lack of a flourishing cinema industry in Assam. It has provided a lifeline to hundreds of artists, technicians and workers who faced a dark future when the Assamese cinema industry began to dwindle. Apart from that, the contribution of mobile theatre to the socio-economic arena of the state is something that cannot be denied. As in case of all things, mobile theatre has also seen a lot of changes, some for its betterment and some,debatable. The earlier generation of people associated with the medium, either as worker or audience, lament, that today, mobile theatre has lost its previous glory. They even doubt the survival of the medium. But, on the other hand, the new generation of producer-directors and mobile theatre lovers feel that the medium will always thrive in Assam. One mobile theatre enthusiast went on to say, ‘as long as Assamese society is there, mobile theatre will live on (Choudhury, R. Personal Communication. September 13, 2014). Here, one wonders if this is true. In this age of hi-fi technology, what are the future prospects of mobile theatre?

As written by Goswami (2015), certain important points can be noted with regard to the world of Assamese theatre, like, (a) Assam has a long and ancient history of Assamese drama; (b) Assam has a huge treasure house of folk-drama and a rich tradition of music and dance; (c) Assam has a strong dramatic base on which modern Assamese theatre can be developed; (d) Assam has a significant force of dramatic-societies and theatre enthusiasts

(workers), which is the most important factor; (e) Assam also has innumerable audiences who love theatre and with whose support Assamese theatre will live on (p.264).

Putting this picture into the SWOT analysis, the opportunities that can be explored by the mobile theatres include:

(a) Workshop for Playwriting and Acting

Keeping in mind the scarcity of playwrights for mobile theatres in relation to the number of mobile theatre groups mushrooming all over, it is of great importance that workshops to find people with potential to be trained up as playwrights, are organized. Talents, that have not been tapped or even found, will also find a platform. Similar workshops for finding and honing acting talents is also the need of the hour, as far mobile theatre is concerned. Acting on the stage, which is live, is very different form acting in front of the camera. Though new actors are foraying into mobile theatres attracted by its huge popularity and heavy pay packet, they are hardly acquainted with the knowledge of the stage, and as such fail to deliver the goods. Proper training and experience will go a well way in filling the void.

(b) Industry Status for Mobile Theatre

The controversial question of whether mobile theatre should be declared an industry by the government with an official stamp has been going on since years. This question can be best answered by people within the mobile theatre scenario and one must understand that every situation has its positives and negatives. All pros and cons will have to be chalked out

before any decision in this regard can be taken. Moreover, every person associated with mobile theatre must understand the full implications of an industry and only thereafter vote for it. Mobile theatres have survived all these years without an official stamp of being an 'industry' and flourished well. In the future also, this successful roll will continue, provided, the producers think for the benefit of mobile theatre as a whole and not just one's 'own' theatre while taking decisions about plays, playwrights, artists and 'stars'. Keeping in mind the current status of mobile theatre in Assam, its prospects are bright no doubt, but in the coming years who knows what is in store? Did anyone imagine this pathetic condition of Assamese cinema back in the 80's? The question of industry status for mobile theatre must be preceded by strong policy decisions by the government.

(c) Importance of Digitization

This is the age of digitization. Every available data can be saved electronically. Mobile theatre is a cultural icon of Assam. But is all information and data related to it, like, its presentation style, record of presentations, details of the plays and songs, etc., available on the internet? Is it not necessary for us to tell the world about such a theatre industry? Moreover, this is very important for our own future generations. Lack of an initiative to preserve has led to the loss of more than 50% of our Assamese cinema prints which is a huge loss for the Assamese people. Mobile theatres have led to the creation of thousands of plays but have we been able to preserve them? We have never given much importance to preservation of the manuscripts of the plays or video recording the performance of the plays. Of course,

one thing must be admitted that this was not possible till the 80's or early 90's, but now, in the last decade information technology has soared to an unbelievable height. We must make the most of it. Unfortunately, the will within the mobile theatre community seems to be lacking in this direction. Certain steps can be taken by the theatre groups in this direction, like-

- i) Each theatre group must have its own website where apart from the history of mobile theatre, all information about the group itself, past and present, shall be put up.
- ii) Data of all plays, old (as available) and new, should be digitally preserved.
- iii) If possible, the video recorded version of the plays should be uploaded by the theatre groups on their own website.
- iv) Keeping in mind the commercial side of mobile theatre, internet platforms like Youtube, Facebook and Whatsapp can be used for business purpose. This will, of course, require proper planning and commercial research.

(d) Space

A mobile theatre is makeshift and therefore, needs space to put up its auditorium(tent). The problem of space is sure to confront the mobile theatres in the future. The fast depletion of open spaces for putting up the mobile theatre tents, not only in the urban, but also in the rural areas, is already a major concern. The mobile theatre community should get together with

the local bodies of an area and preserve the available space (open field) for future. This should be done now, even if it entails some monetary donations, otherwise a day will come when lack of open space will sound the death knell for mobile theatres. Mobile theatre is the most coveted medium of entertainment in Assam and its future should be the concern of all the stakeholders, producer, artists-technicians as well as the audience (public).

(e) Publication of Plays Staged

It is very surprising that the mobile theatre producers have never given importance to the publication of plays they stage. The manuscripts of the plays are hardly available in any theatre. Had a concerted effort been made by each theatre to publish the three-four plays they staged every season, a huge treasure house of plays would have been created by now. Another sad fact is, even the souvenirs brought out every season by the mobile theatres are not preserved by the theatre groups themselves. This scholar had to run from pillar to post to gather the souvenirs, particularly old copies.

(f) Intellectual Acceptance

In Assam, whatever has been written about drama or mobile theatre or ,if any film has been made on these subjects, it has been done by people who have been associated in some way or the other with amateur or mobile theatre. If we wish to give a different shape to mobile theatre through intellectual acceptability, then, the first step will be to organize seminars,

lectures, and discussions to find the means and ways to help guide mobile theatre tread in the correct path, wherein active participation will be taken by the intellectuals, thinkers and researchers, who are generally, from outside the world of mobile theatre. A well established mobile theatre group or any other association of mobile theatres (if there is any), can organize such seminars, lectures, etc., in the name of an eminent personality from the mobile theatres every year. Such an endeavour may not give immediate results, but its effects will definitely be seen in the long run. This will not only bring about the intellectual acceptance of mobile theatre, but also create pressure on the mobile theatres to move on the right track, so that its historical character remains intact. This pressure will not be like the current trend of irresponsible criticism, but it will be like a helpful hand extended by a well-wisher.

A laudable step in this direction has been taken by the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam from 2017 by organising a 'drama evening' on 12th June every year, to commemorate the death anniversary of Achyut Lahkar, the father of modern mobile theatre in Assam.

Problems will always be there for any enterprise. Mobile theatre of Assam in, with all its share of problems and struggles, has survived and flourished. The dream project of Achyut Lahkar has, today, acquired for itself a special niche in the theatres of the world as a 'one of a kind' theatre. The future prospects of this enterprise depends on all the stakeholders of mobile theatres, namely, producers, artists, workers, organizing committees, audience and, also on the attitude of the government. Heathy criticism is very important for anything to be improved. The producers and playwrights must have the mentality to listen to criticism and go for introspection. The media too, should refrain from unnecessary hype when advertising for the mobile theatres. Mobile theatre is truly a cultural asset of Assam and this fact must be appreciated by every Assamese and, considering its popularity even today, hopefully, we

CHAPTER V

IMPACT OF MOBILE THEATRE ON THE ASSAMESE SOCIETY AND CULTURE

The popularity of the mobile theatre of Assam, among the masses, cutting across all classes and sections of the society, is phenomenal. No doubt, the first and foremost objective of the producer is to entertain, and the audience also comes seeking the same. Through entertainment, mobile theatre has been able to leave its impact on various important fields, which can be broadly divided into social, economic and cultural. One particular fact that needs to be kept in mind here is that ‘impact’ in this context has been both ways. If mobile theatre has impacted on the society, economics and culture of Assam, the changes and developments in these spheres have impacted mobile theatres also. This becomes crystal clear when one looks at the mobile theatres before and after the coming in of globalization.

5.1 The Assamese Society

As has been said by Knower (2006), Assam is a land of varied socio-cultural elements. It has a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-lingual society. Linguistically, the

Assamese society contains diverse linguistic people, both tribal and non-tribal, such as Assamese, Bengali, Nepali, Bodo, Rabha, Mishing, Tiwa, Karbi and such other linguistic groups (p.8). Hussain (1995) opines, a wide range of ethnic groups are also present in the region and they have contributed a lot towards the socio-cultural development of the state. A good number of these ethnic groups belong to the tribal community. The tribal population living in the state can be widely divided into the Hill tribes and the Plain tribes. The Hill tribes are Chakma, Dimasa, Garo, Hajong, Hmar, Karbi, Khasi, Lakher, Mizo, Maan, Naga, Pawi, Synteng, etc., while the plain tribes are Bodo, Barman, Deori, Hojai, Mech, Mishing, Rabha, Sonowal, Tiwa, etc.(p.46)

Sharma (2014) mentions present day Assam has a total area of 78,523 square kilometres. According to the 2011 census, its population is 3,11,69,272 consisting of the Assamese speaking population and the ethno-linguistic communities living in the hills and plains. Assam's historical contact with Bengal has also led to the existence of a sizeable Bengali population, predominantly, in its western and southern parts. Assam also has a considerable presence of religious minorities whose existence can be traced to the early thirteenth century. The contribution of such minority groups towards the socio-cultural environment of Assam is significant. This heterogeneous composition of the population of Assam has led to the development of a unique, distinctive composite culture which is based on interaction, assimilation and integration (pp.2-3).

Thus, as opined by Dasgupta (2000), the story of the formation of Assamese society is essentially a story of the continuous flow of migrants into the region. A varied population

from different ethnicities, topographies and histories, speaking different languages came together to form the core of an Assamese society, making diversity an important constituent.....It is impossible, therefore, in a dialogue between the plural and the singular, to brush aside the first term.....Assam is not one society then, but many 'societies' whether one analyzes them 'vertically' in the usual way, or 'horizontally'(p.41).

As has already been traced in the second chapter, the history of Assamese theatre is a glorious saga with its roots firmly embedded in the folk traditions of this remote part of India. What is sought now, is to look into the impact of a mass medium like mobile theatre, over the years, on the Assamese society. Theatre is a primordial aesthetic practice. All existing evidences point to the fact that theatre existed in the Indian subcontinent from the beginning of civilization. According to Kurtz (1988), the *Rig Veda* suggests that dramatic theatre in India came into being around the eighth century B.C. *Jataka* stories illustrating Indian life between 600 B.C. and 300 B.C. contain evidences of theatre (p.66). However, according to Kane (1994), for a number of reasons the *Natyashastra* of Bharata, an exhaustive memoir on the art of performance which is an earliest form of Indian drama is to be considered as the oldest extant work on the Sanskrit poetics of drama (p.10) As put by Brecht (Q.I Willet 1948), 'theatre is about representing a certain understanding or interpretation of social life or reported or invented happenings between human beings'(p.180).

5.2. Impact of Mobile Theatre on the Society of Assam

It is a fact that to a large extent the entertainment industry shapes our social structure. It influences our way of thinking, behaving and doing things. Many revolutionary innovations have been experimented with in the recent times to entertain various segments of society, but this has also led to a lot of undesirable trends coming in. This has definitely impacted society in some way or another, especially because of the accompanied upsurge in media. Herein lies its significance.

As said by Kasturi and Vardhan (2013), in-depth insight into the rich heritage and culture of the country is required in order to understand the prevailing social evils in India. The gravest social problems faced by India, at present are poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, caste discrimination, dowry, child labour, drug abuse, forced prostitution, domestic violence, female infanticide, and so on. This list is augmented by other social evils like corruption, urbanization and illiteracy. The prime scenario where these evils are rooted is in rural India. One fact is that, despite the vast opening out of the electronic media, theatre remains the predominant mass medium. Hence, in addressing the social evils, this medium can play a very important role. The message that needs to be disseminated to the target audience should be scripted and narrated well in a simple manner, so that it makes the rural audiences think about the problem presented. Theatre is often the perfect vehicle to provide education about current social issues and to inspire social and political change (p.1). The Assamese society today, more or less is prey to the same social evils mentioned above. These issues

require a careful analysis and rational solution to help the society grow in all ways. And what better means to do this than to communicate through theatre?

Another impact of cinema and theatre which is often undermined is the therapeutic impact. Well known Bollywood film maker, Mr. Mahesh Bhatt says,

How often has one heard people say that sometimes the answers to life's problems are in good movies? In the United States of America, a psychotherapist, Dr. Gordon Solomon, has been successfully prescribing movies for his mentally disturbed clients for over five years. Solomon believes that a right story which shows us how others have coped with life's challenges helps us heal. In his *The Motion Picture Prescription*, which has become a landmark healing guide to the movies, he says that everything from addiction, abuse, abandonment, alienation, bigotry, marital conflicts and physical illness can be magically resolved by watching movies which effectively deal with these living issues (Bhatt: 2001).

Mobile theatres have impacted the society through the social responsibilities they carry out. As mentioned earlier, mobile theatres are invited by the Inviting Committees to fulfill certain social needs, like construction of a school building, temple, *Naamghar* (community prayer hall), cultural-sports club, etc., of the local area, from the expected profit. That apart, many times the mobile theatre themselves also contribute to help for such

social causes. To quote Mr.Tilak Baishya (54 yrs), editing advisor of Brindaban theatre ,ad verbatim, from an interview with this Researcher,

‘Brindaban theatre takes its social responsibilities very seriously. Mr.Ganesh Raimedhi, the producer had announced at the launching of this theatre in 2010 that he will establish a home for children and the aged in Morua, Nalbari. For that objective, a multipurpose eco-social organization called ‘Rainbow’ has been established, through which Mr. Raimedhi has purchased a plot of 4bighas of land at the cost of about 8lakh rupees from his theatre profits. Not only that, he has also handed over a sum of 3lakh rupees to the officials of Rainbow for the home to be called ‘Brindaban Ashram’. In 2014-15 ,Mr. Raimedhi donated a sum of 1lakh rupees to the Nalbari Hari Mandir Committee at the conclusion of the Raas festival. He also contributed a sum of 50 thousand rupees to the Deputy Commissioner’s Fund ,Nalbari for the Swachch Bharat Mission. Through Rainbow, the under privileged meritorious children, the crisis ridden farmers, and the financially weak patients are also being offered respite’(Baishya,T. Telephonic interview. September 14, 2015)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Sri Jatin Das (58 yrs), President of the Ganeshguri Baruwari Puja Committee, that has been inviting mobile theatres since the last four decades. He narrated how, the Committee has been trying to contribute to the society by doing

charity work for the BPL families, encouraging sports personalities like internationally reputed pugilist from Assam, Mr. Shiva Thapa by a felicitation of rupees 50,000/, construction of the Laksmi Mandir in Ganeshguri, etc. (Das, J. Personal Communication. July,10, 2017).Sri Junmoni Sarma (45 yrs) Secretary of Vibyor club, Phulaguri, in Nagaon informed about how the various organisations in the area like the High school, Lower primary school, the youth club, Nehru club, etc., has formed a *Samannay Sammitte* (Harmonious body) and decided to invite mobile theatres by rotation each year. (Sarma, J.Telephonic interview. September, 26, 2016). Sri Abani Barua (65 yrs) of Everest Club, Azara, near Guwahati, that has been inviting theatres since decades, also emphasized that mobile theatres did contribute indirectly through the inviting committees, whose objective was always a social cause (Barua,A. Telephonic interview. July,05, 2017).

While discussing the social impact of mobile theatre from its popularity point of view, a question that comes to mind is,has mobile theatres ever been able to set any trend in Assam? For example, when the Assamese superhit movie *Ajali Nabou* hit the screen in the 80's, it created a stir and the *Ajali nabou mekhela-chadors*, the traditional attire of the heroine, became a craze among Assamese ladies, much like the *Chandni Sarees*, when superstar Ms. Sridevi starrer Bollywood superhit movie, *Chandni* had taken India by storm in the early 1990's. Another Bollywood blockbuster, starring superstar, Ms.Madhuri Dixit, *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* introduced the *Purple Madhuri Saree* that became a rage. Even in the 60's, the *Sadhna Haircut* named after the popular Bollywood film star Ms. Sadhna, caught the fancy of young girls all over India. The two superstars of Bollywood, Mr. Dev Anand's *Dev Bouffant*

Hairstyle, and Mr.Rajesh Khanna's *Guru Shirts* were no less. It is interesting to hear from the earlier generation how in their hey days when Mr.Dilip Kumar and Ms.Meena Kumari, both superstars, were the heart throb of Hindi films, people actually named their children after these stars. In fact, 'Dilip' and 'Meena' were the most preferred names at that time. Talking about setting trends, Bollywood superstar Ms.Rekha was the pioneer who brought in a revolution with the concept of physical fitness and wellbeing through yoga, with her amazing transformation from an ugly duckling to a beautiful swan, in the early 80's. Megastar of Bollywood, Mr. Amitabh Bachchan also brought in a hairstyle, the *Amitabh Cut*, during the 70's-80's, which took the country by storm. However, it is interesting to note that in case of the mobile theatres, no such trend setting examples can be found in spite of its huge popularity.

An interesting incident recounted by Das (2016), is how in 1993-94 when, a particular insurgent groups' activities were at its peak in Assam, Dr.Bhabenrdanath Saikia's play *Swargar Duwar* depicting the contemporary social scenario, was creating ripples everywhere. Two members of the Nalbari unit of the said organization came to Saikia and asked for the CD (Compact Disc) of the above mentioned play, for those members of their unit who could not get to see it. This incident has been mentioned by Dr. Saikia in the pages of *Prantik*, which he edited once. Can there be a better example of how plays/theatre impact the society? (p.28).

(a) Literature and Mobile Theatre

During the course of the research work for information on the various dimensions of mobile theatre, one aspect caught the eye of the Researcher and that was the connection of

literature and mobile theatre. In fact, when we are talking about the impact of mobile theatre on our society, one of the most important contribution is how mobile theatre introduced the common man, comprising of both literate and illiterate people, to the world of literature and the literature of the world. There is no doubt that creation and presentation of original drama is one of the prime objectives with which late Mr. Achyut Lahkar had established the first mobile theatre, Nataraj Theatre. Having said that, it cannot be denied that facilitating the presentation of renowned literary creations from regional, national and international level, for the common masses who do not or cannot have access to such literary creations is one of the most significant contributions of mobile theatre to our society. Many people cannot afford to buy books for the pleasure of reading, many others are not literate and so, cannot enjoy reading a literary creation. For such common people, the mobile theatre presentations based on famous and popular literary creations open up a whole new world of knowledge and information through entertainment. A look at the past years brings out how literature has been a part of this long and successful journey of mobile theatre.

This connection with Assamese literature was first established in the very first year 1963 by Nataraj theatre when they took eminent Literrateur, Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika's drama *Beula*, which is a famous Hindu mythological tale that has been passed from one generation to the other. Such was the appeal of this presentation, that *Beula* went on to create the unsurpassed record of being staged continuously for the next forty years, by Nataraj theatre. This play fascinated the audience in such a way that, *Beula* was never taken down from the itinerary of Nataraj Theatre. *Beula* can, therefore, be compared to longest running

Broadway musicals like, *The Fiddler on the Roof*, *Grease*, *A chorus Line*, and, the topper, *The Phantom of the Opera*. Figo (2010) quotes Achyut Lahkar's confession that 'it was the instrumentalist from Barpeta, Mr.Gopi Das, who had convinced me to take up *Beula* in the maiden venture of Nataraj' (p.30). In 2003-04, Natraj Theatre took up the novel penned by journalist-writer, Mr.Nilesh Misra, *End of the Line*, staged as *Kathmandu'r Debojani*. It was scripted and directed by Mr. Sebabrata Barua.

Theatre Bhagyadevi in 1970-71, presented a dance drama based on the renowned creation, *Miri Jiyori*, penned by Mr. Rajani Kanta Bordoloi, one of the most revered stalwarts of Assamese literature. In 2001-02, they presented the dramatic version of noted Assamese writer, Dr. Rita Choudhury's novel, *Jalapadma*, which was scripted by Mr. Kannauj Baishya with the same title. In 2003-04, a new experiment with literature was seen on the stage of Bhagyadevi, when, Mr.Sebabrata Barua scripted and directed *Soisabatey Dhemalitey*, a play based on some of the immortal lyrics of internationally acclaimed music maestro, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika. In 2004-05, they presented *Mamatar Chithi*, the famous creation of Mr.Hem Barua, a doyen of Assamese literature.

In 1976-77, Kohinoor theatre, in its very first year presented *Tejimala*, the legendary creation of Mr.Lakshminath Bezbarua, one of the most revered Assamese litterateur. In fact, Kohinoor took up this healthy trend and continued it in the following years. In 1980-81, popular Assamese novelist, Mr. Kanchan Barua's romantic thriller, *Asimat Jar Heral Sima* was a superhit presentation of Kohinoor. The playwright was Mr. Mahananda Sarma and director was Mr. Hemanta Dutta. In 1981-82, they presented the stage adaptation of the

Bengali writer, Mr. Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay's novel, *Devi Sanyasini*. In 1982-83, they presented the first ever foreign literary adaptation on the mobile stage. This was Mr. H.R Haggard's *Cleopatra*, which was scripted by Mr. Padma Barkotoki, eminent litterateur of Assam. In 1986-87, this theatre took up two stories from different parts of the globe. One, was R.L Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was named *Kal Shatru* by the playwright and director of the play, Mr. Atul Bordoloi. The other, was the world famous creation of Greek poet Homer, *Illiad-Odyssey*. Once again, it was Mr. Atul Bordoloi who scripted and directed the play. Eminent Assamese litterateur, Dr. Laksminandan Bora's novel *Patal Bhairavi* was presented in 1987-88 with Mr. Atul Bordoloi's script and direction. The following year, in 1988-89, Kohinoor took up the sensational storyteller, Ms. Agatha Christi's creation and staged it as *Rakta Adalat*, with Mr. Atul Bordoloi's script and direction. Another play, this very year was *Prarthana*, which was the mobile stage adaptation of world famous writer, Thomas Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. This play was scripted and directed by Mr. Sutradhar.

In 1989-90, Kohinoor presented on stage the world famous *Tarzan*, created by American writer, Mr. Edgar Rice Borroughs. It must be mentioned here that this play was inspired more by the Hollywood version than the book itself. This play was also the first direct impact of Hollywood on the mobile stage presentation. In 1992-93, *Ben-Hur*, the renowned creation of American author Mr. Lewis 'Lew' Wallace was scripted for Kohinoor by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed by Mr. Hemanta Dutta. The very next year, in 1993-94, the same duo presented William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* on Kohinoor's stage. Consecutively,

1994-95 saw Mr. Seababrata Barua script the play *Pabitra Paapi*, which was adapted from the Greek tragedian Sophocles' creation, *Edipus the King*. It was directed by renowned NSD alumnus actor-director of Assamese stage and cinema, Mr. Baharul Islam. In 1996-97, this theatre took up Assamese writer Mr. Manuram Gogoi's famous novel, *Sagoroloi Bahu Dur*, which had already been made into an award winning movie by the renowned film maker of Assam, Mr. Jahnu Barua. The mobile stage version with the same title was scripted by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed by Mr. Atul Bordoloi. Then, in 2000-01, in its silver jubilee year, Kohinoor took up two Assamese literary works, one, writer Mr. Phanindra Kumar Dev Choudhury's popular novel *Anuradhar Desh*, which was scripted and directed by Mr. Hemanta Dutta, and two, writer Mr. Ranjeet Sarma's story, *Priya Shatru*, which was scripted by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed by Mr. Hemanta Dutta.

The next year, in 2001-02, Kohinoor presented Dr. Pranabjyoti Deka's novel *Tejpiya Gosani*, which was scripted by Mr. Pankajyoti Bhuyan and directed by Mr. Hemanta Dutta. An adaptation of renowned author, Mr. Thomas Hardy, which was scripted as *Abelir Rang* by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed by Mr. Hemanta Dutta was staged in 2002-03. This play had created quite a stir in the society. Then, in 2003-04, they not only staged writer Mr. Kanchan Barua's popular novel *Ashanta Prahar*, scripted by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed jointly Mr. Hemanta Dutta and Mr. Suren Mahanta, but also presented two dance-dramas, based on famous literary creations of revered Assamese litterateurs. These were, Mr. Rajanikanta Bordoloi's *Miri Jiyori* named as *Ghuna Xuti'r Sokulu*, and the renowned poet, Mr. Raghunath Choudhury's composition, *Bohagi'r Biya*. In 2005-06, this

theatre presented William Shakespear's *Othello*, which was scripted Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed by eminent theatre personality of Assam, Mr. Kulada Kumar Bhattacharya. In 2009-10, writer Mr. Kanchan Barua's *Asimat Jar Herai Sima* was restaged to packed houses with Mr. Hemanta Dutta's script and direction.

A mobile theatre, that eventually could not survive, was Radhikadebi Theatre. In 1977-78 this theatre presented the famous German playwright and poet, Bertolt Brecht's *Three Penny Opera*. Eminent theatre personality of Assam, Mr. Dulal Roy had already created the Assamese version of this play. The mobile stage script was done by Mr. Prafulla Bora.

Aradhana Theatre, which was established by Mr. Sadananda Lahkar, the man who was the original brain behind Nataraj Opera, and the inspiration for his brother, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, took up Mr. Rajanikanta Bordoloi's renowned creation *Miri Jiyori* in 1978-79. It was scripted by Mr. Mahesh Kalita and directed jointly by Mr. Bhabesh Barua and Mr. Rudra Choudhury. In 1981-82, this theatre presented Assamese writer Mr. Phani Talukdar's novel *Prithibi'r Prem*, which was scripted and directed by Mr. Sujit Singha. This play went on to win the AICA (All India Critics Association) Award for the best play of the year. It must be mentioned that this is the only mobile theatre play to have won this award. That same year, another treasure from the Assamese literary basket was staged by Aradhana Theatre, and this was renowned Assamese litterateur, Mr. Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya's Gyanpeeth Award winning novel, *Mrityunjay*, which was scripted by Mr. Phulen Barman and directed by Mr. Rudra Choudhury.

The next year, in 1982-83, Aradhana Theatre continued their connection with literary creations and staged Assamese novelist Mr. Kumar Kishor's novel, *Kabar aru Kangkal*. Scripted by the novelist himself, the play was directed jointly by Mr. Rudra Choudhury and Mr. Prashanta Hazarika. The other play they staged was *Manthan*, based on the Bengali writer Mr. Ashutosh Mukherjee's novel, *Aar Ekjon*. It was scripted by Mr. Prafulla Bora and directed by Mr. Rudra Choudhury and Mr. Prashanta Hazarika jointly.

Chitralekha Theatre, which was subsequently closed down, had staged the famous Charles Dickens creation, *Oliver Twist* in 1985-86. Information could not be gathered as to who scripted and directed this play. Similarly, Pragjyotish Theatre and Jyotirupa Theatre, in 2001-02, presented plays adapted from literature. The former staged Assamese writer Mr. Kumar Kishor's novel, *Emuthi Tarar Jilmil*, scripted by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and directed by Mr. Sanjiv Hazarika, as well as, another play, *Gaonor Manuh*, adapted from writer Mr. Hitesh Deka's novel, scripted by Mr. Reba Bora.

In 2003-04, Nandini Theatre, subsequently closed down, staged writer Mr. Kanchan Barua's popular novel, *Puwati Tora*, for which, the script and direction was done by Mr. Umesh Sarma.

Mention must be made of the special contribution of Abahan Theatre to the society when producer, Mr. Krishna Roy convinced one of the most revered litterateur of Assam, Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, also a renowned film maker and dramatist, to join their group in 1981. Dr. Saikia remained with Abahan Theatre till he breathed his last in 2003. He undoubtedly

scripted and directed some of the best plays staged by Abahan theatre. In 1981-82, Abahan also staged a play, *Preyasi*, which was adapted from Bengali writer Mr. Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay's novel. In 1984-85, Abahan Theatre again took up another Bengali literary figure, Mr. Tarun Bhaduri's creation, *Bilkis Begum*, for which the script was done by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and direction was done Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia.

Das (2016) writes, with Dr. Saikia's entry on the mobile stage, it was established that, with a unique thinking capacity and, as much importance given to light and sound, as to the actors, with the correct pronunciation of dialogue, Assamese literature can be presented on the commercial stage of mobile theatre. People who bought Bhabendranath Saikia's literary creations and people who bought tickets to watch his plays were now on the same plane. From 1981-82 to 2003-04, Saikia scripted 24 plays for Abahan, namely, namely, *Ramdheni*, *Andhakup*, *Bandisaal*, *Manikut*, *Amrapali*, *Nilakantha*, *Vishkumbha*, *Amrit*, *Janambhumi*, *Deenabandhu*, *Pratibimba*, *Digambar*, *Godhuli*, *Brindaban*, *Swargar Duar*, *Paramananda*, *Samudra Manthan*, *Pandulipi*, *Swarnajayanti*, *Barnamala*, *Ramyabhumi*, *Shatabdi*, *Subha-Sangbad*, *Aranyat Godhuli* and *Junak Rati* (incomplete). Kohinoor theatre was the only other mobile theatre, for which he scripted, two plays, *Gahbar* (1991-92) and *Maharanya* (1992-93) (pp.25-30). It must be mentioned that in the 22 years of his association with mobile theatre, all his plays were directed by Saikia himself. The aesthetics reflected in his plays appealed to one and all. As quoted in Das (2016), Saikia said,

‘I believe that even in the plays created for entertainment and business, the beauty and original character of the plays can be secured. Drama

written for the commercial stage can be considered as literary work’

(Q.I. pp.25-30).

As a mark of respect to this great doyen, in 2003, on his demise, Abahan theatre staged his last script, the incomplete (only eight scenes) *Junak Rati*. This is probably the only instance in the history of mobile theatre of Assam, where an incomplete play was staged.

In 2000-01, Abahan theatre presented on stage Assamese writer, Mr. Manoj Goswami’s famous creation, *Samiran Barua Ahi Ase*, for which Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya was the playwright and Mr. Hem Bhattacharya was the director. In 2001-02, based on Assamese writer Mr. Bhubaneshwar Deka’s literary creation, *Arabinda Kalita Zindabad*, Abahan Theatre presented the play with the same name, for which, the script was done by Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya. In 2002-03, they staged Bengali writer Ms. Sushmita Bandopadhyay’s creation, *Kabuliwalar Bangali Bou*, scripted by Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya as *Kabuliwala’r Bidexi Kaina* and directed by Mr. Hem Bhattacharya. 2004-05 saw Abahan stage Mr. Bimal Mitra’s famous story, *Saheb Bibi Ghulam*, scripted by Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya and directed by Mr. Pranjit Das. Thereafter, in 2007-08, Mr. Ashutosh Mukhopadhyay’s creation was presented, scripted by Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya as *Sundari Sanyasini*. In 2009-10, a very successful play staged by Abahan Theatre, which, though not directly based on any novelist or writers work, was, *Bhul Nubujiba Bhupenda*, based on the songs, lyrics and music of the internationally acclaimed Assamese music maestro, Bhupen Hazarika.

The presentation of famous literary works was also taken up by the now extinct, Indradhanu Theatre. In 1983-83, they staged William Shakespeare’s *Othello*, which was

scripted by litterateur, Mr. Padma Barkotoki and directed by Mr. Abdul Majid. The other play presented that year was writer Mr. Kanchan Barua's novel, *Ashanta Prahar*. Again, in 1984-85, this theatre took up one of ancient India's renowned litterateur, Kalidasa's magnum opus, *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam* as well as Shakespeare's *Macbeth* for their stage.

One of the most successful mobile theatre group since its establishment is Hengool Theatre. This theatre has also taken up stage adaptations based on famous literary creations. In 1986-87, they presented renowned Assamese litterateur, Mr. Homen Borgohain's novel, *Haladhiya Charaiye Baodhan Khai* (with the same name) for which, the script was written by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and direction was by Mr. Prashanta Hazarika. Thereafter, in 1988-89 they staged *Priya aru Police*, which was the stage adaptation of Assamese poet-storywriter Mr. Harekrishna Deka's novel, *Mukta Bandi*. Once again, the script was done by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and direction, by Mr. Prashanta Hazarika. In 1989-90 they staged a dance-drama, *Champabati* based on an Assamese folktale from the famous folktale collection entitled *Burhi Air Sadhu* knitted by renowned litterateur, Mr. Lakhsminath Bezbarua. The songs and dance drama form was composed by eminent dance exponent, Mr. Jatin Goswami. In 1990-91, another creation of Mr. Lakhsminath Bezbarua, *Nachani Saliki* was staged as a dance-drama, which was composed by Mr. Guneshwar Bhuyan. Along with it, the adaptation of a Greek story, *Barasa Rani* was also presented as a dance-drama, composed by Mr. Guneshwar Bhuyan. In 1992-93, they took up the popular Assamese folktale *Latkan* as a dance-drama which was composed by Mr. Babul Das. Then, in 1995-96, Hengool theatre took up journalist Mr. Parag Das' controversial political novel *Sanglat Phenla*, for which, the script was written by Mr. Mahendra Barthakur and direction was Mr. Sanjib

Hazarika. This play was restaged the next year also. In 1998-99, a dance-drama, *Unnesan*, based on the original story of Assamese writer, Mr. Dharma Singha Deka was presented. 2000-01 saw world famous author, Mr. H.G Wells' renowned creation, *The Invisible Man*, which was scripted by Dr. Sushil Goswami as *Adrishya Manab* and *Alibaba aru Chollis Chor*, adapted from the famous *Alibaba and the Forty Thieves* from the Arabian Nights, which was scripted by Mr. Bipul Barua, on the stage of Hengool theatre. In 2002-03, they presented renowned Assamese writer Ms. Anuradha Sarma Pujari's novel, *Kanchan*, which was scripted by Mr. Utpal Dutta. In 2004-05, renowned litterateur Mr Lakhsminath Bezbarua's story *Bhadari Bai*, was presented as a dance-drama, with Mr. Niranjan Das as the composer. The next year, in 2005-06 also, Mr. Niranjan Das composed two dance-drama's, based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Mr. Lakhsminath Bezbarua's *Panesoi*.

Yet another theatre group, Bordoichila Theatre, had also established connection with literature when they presented on stage, Assamese novelist Mr. Ranju Hazarika's novel, *Hant*, scripted and directed by Mr. Seababrata Barua in 1999-2000. The next year also, in 2000-01, the same author's another novel, *Eta Dwip Satta Kabar*, scripted and directed by Mr. Seababrata Barua, was presented.

From the information gathered above, it is laudable that mobile theatre has played a great role in uniting literature and stage, bringing world famous literature to the simple common man, who is the main audience of mobile theatre. Once, ignored as the 'poor man's entertainment' by a section of the elite connoisseurs of theatre, it is ironical that mobile theatre, from the very beginning had been blessed by renowned cultural and literary stalwarts of

Assam, like, Mr. Bishnuprasad Rabha, Mr. Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Mr. Phani Sarma, Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, Mr. Ratna Oja, Mr. Padma Barkatoki, Mr. Arun Sarma, et al. The literary creations from across the world, which were adapted and presented on stage refutes the allegation that mobile theatre was only about cheap entertainment. However, reality cannot be denied and the truth is, today, gradually this association of mobile theatre and literature is fading. The trend of plays now is Bollywood *masala* (spicy) cinema inspired. Popular English, Hindi, Bengali, even South Indian cinema is quite often reflected on the mobile stage. It is unfortunate that world famous literary creations are being ignored by the mobile theatres in favour of light, frivolous presentations. Commerce seems to have overshadowed the sense of aesthetics in mobile theatre.

(b) Mobile Theatre among the Ethnic Communities

Another question that comes to mind as far as social impact of mobile theatre is concerned is- has it been able to make any inroads into the ethnic population of Assam? Sarma (1991) informs, among the various ethnic groups of the state, only the Bodo's were found to have attempted to establish mobile theatre in their language, when Mr. Harikanta Muchahary and Mr. Chandrakanta Muchahary established two mobile theatres, *Sowza Phaoni Apath* at Dalgaon in 1974, and *Shourang Manju Theatre* at Lechra, Pathasala, in 1975. The latter performed for 16 years. The other Bodo mobile theatre groups, more like the *jatra*, were *Lembro*, *Hemshree*, *Maina*, *Anchi*, *Nirmali*, *Angfaury*, et al., could not survive for long due to financial crises. Producer of Kohinoor Theatre, Mr. Ratan Lahkar contributed a lot in making *Sourang Manju Theatre* successful. Mr. Padmadhar Basumatary was the

most successful actor-director of this theatre. Mr. Haren Daimari, Mr. Aniruddha Basumatary, Mr. Gajen Baro, Mr. Golok Brahma, Ms. Basanti Brahma, Ms. Nilima Daimari and Ms. Rupahi Basumatary were the other popular artists (pp.36-38). Deka (2009) mentions in his thesis that in 2006, Ms. Anjana Basumatary opened the *Sandaw Bawdia Theatre* in Masalpur, Barga district (p.88). The fact that Bodo mobile theatres were limited to these few was but natural, because the arena of performance was limited, sustainable income from the shows was not always guaranteed. Moreover, the bigger popular Assamese mobile theatre groups were too strong a competition to face. No information has been found regarding any other ethnic community of Assam ever having formed any such mobile theatre groups. Though some people say that a Nepali mobile theatre had been formed, no detailed information could be found about it.

5.3 Economic Impact of Mobile Theatre

Konwar (2006) has pointed out, the pre-colonial economy of Assam was semi tribal and semi feudal in nature. The economy was largely traditional economy which did not witness any sort of modern economic development such as industrialization, trade and commerce and currency. Therefore the mode of exchange was based on barter system (p.20). Again, as Barua (1985) points out, the economy of Assam was mainly rural- agricultural and villages were largely self-sufficient. In course of time, however, there grew a class of wealthy people, who carried on considerable amount of trade, both internal and external. Apart from the wealthy few, the rest of the people lived neither in plenty nor poverty because

their wants were very few and the existing social conditions stunted their economic conditions (p.432).

Radical change was brought into the economy of Assam through colonization. Colonial Assam saw many significant economic changes like the transformation of mode of exchange from barter to money economy, discovery of local resources, and establishment of industries, introduction of new mode of communication like railways and roads, etc. Knowler (2006) writes, after the discovery of tea, the British started plantations in Assam, particularly under the Assam Tea Company, to capture the international market and to break down the monopoly of China in the tea market (pp.40-42). Two other important discoveries during the colonial period were that of coal and petroleum which changed the economic scenario of Assam.

One of the most important cause of slow economic growth in post-colonial Assam was the constantly increasing population. Apart from natural growth, migration was a very strong factor that impregnated this picture. To quote Barua (1994), 'As South Asia's last frontier, the area has attracted exceptionally high immigration from other parts of South Asia, especially from the densely populated region of East Bengal that now constitutes the sovereign state of Bangladesh' (pp.649-671). There is no denying the fact that the massive unemployment and lower living standards in Assam is a direct consequence of the illegal immigration in millions. As such, the reasons that can be counted for the lack of economic development in Assam in the postcolonial period are, location of the state in the periphery; growth of population, naturally, as well as due to illegal migration; insurgency problems; lack of able political leadership; drainage of wealth; natural calamities (like annual floods) which has resulted in poor infrastructure development and

slow pace of Industrial growth thus leading to unemployment. Mr. Chandra Mohan Patowary, Minister, GoA, himself admitted on the floor of the assembly that today, there are 15 lakh educated unemployed in Assam (*The Hindu*, 2017:7).

(a) The Male-Female Equation in Employment

In such a scenario, an enterprise that provides employment to people, that too, to uneducated, but skilled people, is like god's gift. The positive role that has been played by mobile theatres as far as the employment is concerned, is unquestionable. As mentioned earlier in chapter II, each mobile unit employs from 80 to 100-150 people. This is all the more important because these people who get employed are mostly indigenous people of Assam. One may belong to any corner of the state and can be employed in any one of the mobile theatre groups. Since it is about livelihood, it is only natural that the employees of the mobile theatre groups shift from one group to the other. A greener pasture always is more attractive. While discussing the employment offered by the mobile theatres, one fact catches attention and that is the wide disparity in the ratio of male and female employees. The table

below explains the situation clearly:					
Table 5.1: Employment status of male and female employees in mobile theatres (2012-2017)					
Sl.No	Name of mobile theatre	Year of employment	Total no. of employees	No of male employees	No. of female employees
1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Rajshree	2012-13	110	98	12

1	2	3	4	5	6
2	Bordoisila	2013-14	123	112	11
3	Rajtilak	2014-15	104	92	12
4	Bhagyadebi	2015-16	109	96	13
5	Hengool	2015-16	120	100	20
6.	Itihaas	2015-16	126	110	16
7	Surya	2015-16	175	158	17

(1st year)

8 Abahan 2016-17 179 169 19

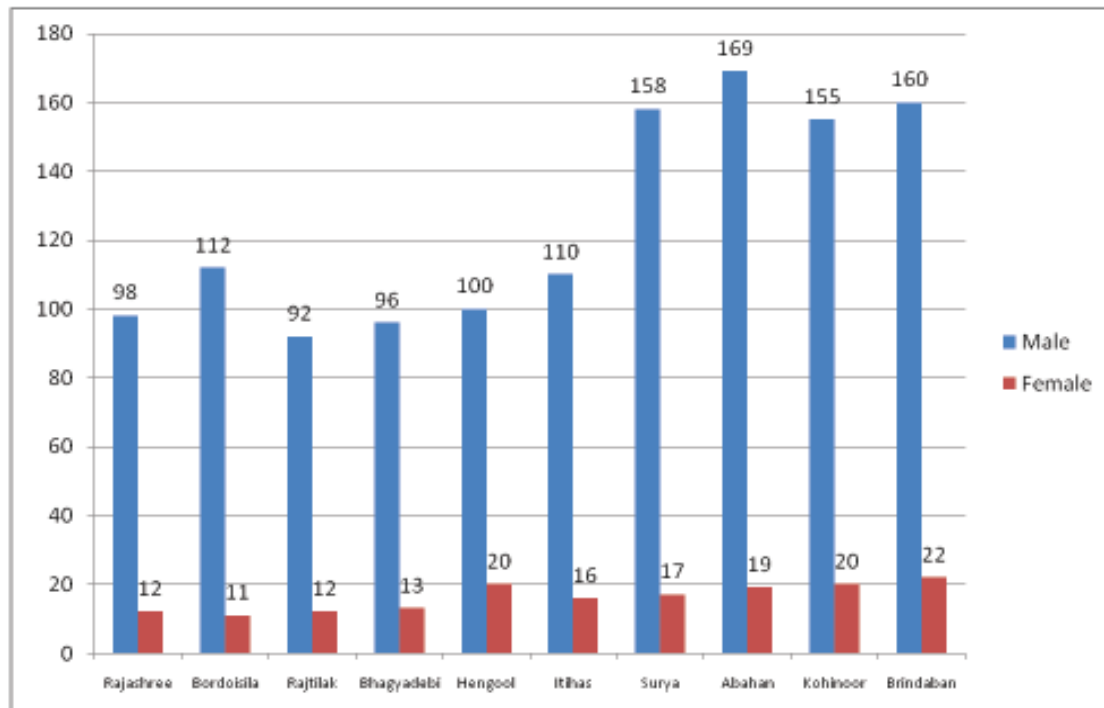


Fig 1: Graphical representation of employment status of male and female employees in mobile theatres (2012-2017)

9 Kohinoor 2016-17 175 155 20

10 Brindaban 2016-17 182 160 22

Source: Annual Souvenirs of the respective mobile theatres named in the list.

The table:5.1 above, with the graphical representation in fig.1, clearly shows that mobile theatre is basically a male domain. Female employment, though increasing, is happening at a snail's pace as compared to the male employment. The producers say, that the kind of work in mobile theatre entails very hard physical labour and long hours of work, particularly for the people behind the stage, which cannot be expected from women. Moreover, the security aspect is also of prime importance as far as employing women goes.

(b) The Industry Status: Why Yes and Why Not

Another important issue that has dogged this medium is, should it be given an industry status? Mobile theatre has travelled a glorious journey to reach where it is today. Down the years, scores of people have found livelihood in mobile theatre. Today, it has become a huge entertainment industry in Assam but, an 'industry', which is not run on any industrial policy. That is why there is no security of livelihood in this industry. The inequality that exists in the salary structure of the artists, technicians, workers in the mobile theatre scenario is actually a blatant reality. If a new trend of thinking comes into this medium which provides entertainment to hundreds of people across the state, then the sky would be the limit for the mobile theatre industry in Assam. Mobile theatre can become the envy of many other countries if developed properly. Unfortunately, the Government of Assam has never drafted any policy for it. The government could have utilized this industry, which can provide employment to hundreds of people in the state, to solve unemployment issues. If the government takes the responsibility of developing this industry, the perpetual job insecurity of the artists, technicians, and workers

will be minimized to a large extent, and a demand can be placed before the government to create a fund for the assistance of the artists in times of necessity. Moreover, life insurance, accident insurance, medical allowance, pension, etc., are facilities that are not feasible, and hence missing, in this current set up of mobile theatres.

Regarding the industry status conundrum, Kalita (2013) states, it will bring relief to the producers and owners of the mobile theatres plagued by the fear of loss because availing bank loans on minimum rate of interest for the theatres will also become easier (pp.21-22). Government help can also be sought if and when required. Ironically, it is said that many producers actually do not want that the government should give industry status to mobile theatre. Their arguments being, (a) government rules and regulations will be clamped on the theatres and (b) some profit-driven businessmen will easily avail bank loans and open new theatres which will harm the essence of the medium.

These arguments lead to two questions, first, what is the harm in running a theatre on government rules and regulations? Second, has the essence of mobile theatre not been harmed already by people (producers/owners) who are doing things whimsically only for commercial gains? If the mobile theatre producers give a strong united stand, the government will, in due course of time, take the necessary advice from seasoned and experienced producers. Moreover, the experienced mobile theatre groups facing financial crisis will be able to avail loans from nationalized banks in low rate of interest or even claim help from the government. On the other hand, once industry status is declared, welfare measures for the artists-workers will automatically have to be brought in.

Renowned cinema, theatre and mobile theatre superstar, Ms. Prastuti Parashar (43 yrs), as well as mobile theatre connoisseur, Mr.Pulu Kr. Sarma (55 yrs), seem to have different views as far as industry status for mobile theatre goes. Ms.Parashar opined that ‘for an industry status, mobile theatre will have to undergo some reforms because in its present *avatar* (incarnation), considering the fact that it is a very temporary nine-month contract system on which the entire set up is functioning, an ‘industry’ status seems unfeasible. No one is a permanent employee here. For an industry and its benefits to be availed, certain reforms and changes will be required and that will not really be an easy task. This is because, since its birth, mobile theatre has made its own system of functioning’ (Parashar,P. Personal Communication. July,07, 2017). Mr. Sarma also expressed his views on, stating, ‘who wants an industry status for mobile theatre? Maybe, those artists and workers who are hoping that such a move will bring them greater job security and benefits. The people who do not want the running system to change are, of course, the producers. How can one blame them? This is professional theatre and its reality is ultimately commerce. Profit and success sustains this business of performing art. The huge money involved here, with producers calling all the shots, naturally makes them abhorrent towards the idea of an Industry, wherein government interference will come in’ (Sarma, P. Personal Communication. July, 07, 2017)

There seems to be a lot of farce as far as the issue of an industry status for mobile theatre is concerned. The producers say one thing in support of industry status, but their actions convey the opposite.

	Bhattacharya (2015) has charted the options available for mobile theatres in the following	
manner-		
Table 5.2: Industry status versus social enterprise for mobile theatre		
Sl.No	Industry status	Social enterprise
1	Purpose will be maximum profit	Profit will be for social benefit
2	Stiff competition will lead to	Social purpose will lure viewers
	huge advertisement costs	
3	Competition will lead to cultural	Cultural and social values will be protected
	degeneration	
4	Discrimination among artists will be there	Discrimination and exploitation of artists will be discouraged.
5	Profit and social responsibility	Investment of 2% of profit on social
	are two sides of the same coin	responsibility will be a legal obligation
6	Increase the managerial efficiency and specialization	Increase the managerial efficiency and specialization
7	Lose identity in the long run	Identity will be retained and protected
8	Commercial Bank investors will come forward to provide funds	Funds from private investors, International N.G.O's, and Social Enterprise will be available

Source: Bhattacharya, 2015: 211

5.4 Cultural Impact of Mobile Theatre

Culture is the flow of life. It reflects the thoughts, imagination and actions of a particular society. A person's personality is shaped by the culture he or she bears in. Culture includes the language, literature, rituals, religion, knowledge, art, sculpture, customs, morals, beliefs and any other habits and capabilities acquired by man as a member of society. Assamese culture is the melting pot of the various ethnic communities, who have coexisted since yore. In this journey of the development of Assamese culture, a significant part was played by the Six hundred years of the Ahom rule. However, there is no doubt that the contribution to Assamese society and culture by Srimanta Sankaradeva was unprecedented and stands unparalleled even today. Centered around neo-Vaishnavism that he propagated, a new age was brought in by Srimanta Sankaradeva through his revolutionary contributions to the Assamese society, religion, art and culture. He gave a new meaning to Assamese song and dance, music including instruments, acting (theatre), sculpture, painting, etc. It was Sankaradeva who gave a new life to Assamese culture and put it on a high pedestal.

To quote Agarwala (1986),

Assamese culture is the eastern Indian expression of the great Indian culture. Assamese culture is nothing but the development of the medieval Indian tradition reflected in the eastern

Indian culture. The fullest moulding of this Assamese culture had been brought about by Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradev. Assamese culture grew out of the medieval cultural movement as reflected in the genius of Srimanta Sankaradeva, and out of that reflection Assamese culture has developed with leaves and buds' (p.469).

One can love or hate mobile theatre but no one can deny its very strong presence in the cultural scenario of Assam. As such, the impact of mobile theatres on the cultural scenario of Assam cannot be denied. Though there has been a lot of controversial discussion and debate about mobile theatre, it cannot be negated that this medium has contributed immensely to the theatre movement in Assam. The very idea with which Mr. Achyut Lahkar had started Nataraj Theatre, was to 'take theatre to the people' and thus, create a rich cultural consciousness among the common man through theatre. Apart from strengthening the financial status of the artists-workers, he also felt that this was one of the best means to educate the masses about the different cultures, be it, Indian or even European. It was also the means to promote a culture of unity because people from various walks of life, different social status, from different religion sat down together in the mobile theatre tent to enjoy a play together.

There is no refuting the fact that mobile theatres have established themselves as the most popular medium in the cultural scenario in Assam today. In the absence of a healthy cinema industry, mobile theatres have filled up that void, though as opined earlier, it is absolutely unfair to compare these two mediums. If one tries to assess the impact of mobile theatre on the cultural arena of Assam, one will have to agree that it was mobile theatre that started a theatre movement in Assam. Though at one point of time mobile theatre was looked

down on by the elite intellectuals as the 'poor man's entertainment', in due course of time that has changed. The lines that strictly demarcated cinema, amateur theatre and mobile theatre have now overlapped.

When one looks back at the fifty-four years of the history of mobile theatre, the number of plays that has been written is staggering. If we assume that at any given point in time, from 1963 to 2017 (2nd October), an average 40 mobile theatre units have been performing consistently, that means, $40 \times 3 = 120$ plays per year. Thus, $120 \times 54 = 6480$ plays have been written so far and presented through the medium of mobile theatre in Assam. If investigated, this would probably turn out to be an unheard of, unprecedented record in the world. Ranging from mythical, historical and social to adaptations of world classics and Hollywood, not to speak of the Indian movies, mobile theatres have done it all. Does this mean that in Assam, we have a huge treasure of the mobile theatre plays? Unfortunately, no. Though these plays were written and staged, they were never published. The mobile theatre units have never realized the importance of the collection and preservation of the manuscripts of these plays, many of which are now lost. If every mobile unit had taken this responsibility to publish their plays each year, one can imagine what a collection it would have made. The stock of drama literature would have been very rich. Add to that the annual souvenir collection of the mobile units. A central library would have been a treasure house. But who will take the initiative?

Like the plays, the songs penned exclusively for mobile theatres has been a great contribution for enriching the cultural field of Assam. Das (2016) writes, it goes to the credit

of Abahan theatre, that they could present Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, one of the most acclaimed litterateur, film-maker, dramatist and playwright of Assam, as a lyricist and music composer as well. He was particularly careful that background music should not make the dialogues inaudible for the gallery audiences. Saikia used songs in only three of his plays, *Pratibimba*, *Nilakantha* and *Deenabandhu*. He wrote the songs himself and also composed their music. In *Nilakantha* (1984-85), the songs were, (i) *Kumal pator koponi dekhilu/dekhilu kotona gabharu pator/botahor sotey nibir gobhir khela/Moi najanu eiya godhuli ne puwa*, and (ii) *Ses hol aji ejugor itihaas/nokoriba maan nokoriba abhimaan/anumati diya gaun mur ses gaan*. In *Pratibimba* (1989-90) the short song was, *Kije nirab ei rati/mar gol tapta beli/jirani bisari ubhatey niraley klanta pokhi*, while in *Deenabandhu*, the two songs were, (i) *Kor ejaak sopun jen borosun*, and (ii) *Diya muk diya,akashor dorey eti mon* (pp.5-30).

Many songs composed for mobile theatres have become very popular, for example, the song *Chandra O Chandrawali*, sung by renowned singer and music director of mobile theatre, Mr.Dasarath Das (75 yrs), for the play *Milan Mala* in Bhagyadevi Theatre in 1971-72, had created quite a stir. Then, the song from the play *Sneha Bandhan*, staged by Abahan in 1980-81, *Snehabandhan chingi jai* rendered by Mr.Dasarath Das, was a superhit. Similarly, the song *Kiyono patili kamanar mayajal* from the play *Samrat aru Sundari* by Kohinoor Theatre in 1988-89 gained great popularity. Even now, some songs attain great popularity, like the song *Lipstick kajal ani dibi* sung by popular singer Ms. Priyanka Bharali (33 yrs) in the play *Rangkukur* staged by Rajtilak theatre in 2014-15. This year, in 2017-18, the song

O'ma rendered by the heart-throb celebrity singer-composer-musician of Assam, Mr. Zubeen Garg (45 yrs), for the play, *Mai Mar Suwali* staged by Abahan Theatre has caught the fancy of the audience, thanks to the social media promotion.

Like the plays, the digital preservation of the mobile theatre songs had not been thought of. Now, of late, a change is seen here, as some the plays and songs of mobile theatre can be found on Youtube, a popular internet vehicle. This, of course, is more for publicity than preservation. The preservation system will have to be more organized and chronological. Same is the story of the dance numbers choreographed for mobile theatres. The dance-drama, unique to the mobile theatres, has been a very popular means of disseminating relevant social messages through music, dance and drama. The trend of beginning the theatre show with a dance-drama is now just a ritual. The theatre units probably do not realize that they have given up a part of what makes them unique. Their argument is the audience do not have the time, so they prefer to concentrate on the main drama. What happened to all the dance-dramas that had been staged? Do we have a chronological record of them? Were they not a rich contribution to the cultural scenario of Assam?

There is no doubt that the mobile theatre of Assam is a treasure house as far as the cultural arena is concerned. Its contribution to drama literature (manuscripts), plays (staged), music, songs (lyrics), dance, dance-drama, development of technical craft, light and sound for stage, has been immense. It is our misfortune that we have not been able to preserve the creations of the past half a century of mobile theatre due to the want of a proper archive. A museum to showcase the journey of mobile theatre can be a part of this archive, showcasing

the various artifacts that had created history, like, the dynamo used by Mr. Achyut Lahkar in Nataraj, the model of *Titanic*, replica of the dinosaurs, model of revolving stage, etc. Once again, the producer's association and the government will have to take the key initiative in this direction, if proper scientific and digital preservation of mobile history and record is at all wanted. Another important impact of mobile theatre on the cultural arena of Assam is the platform it provides to the new talents in all fields be it acting, music, dance, playwriting, etc. If one has the inclination and dedication, mobile theatre provides great career prospects.

5.5 Other Relevant Issues Integral to Mobile Theatre

(a) Space for Women in the Mobile Theatre Arena

Apart from the impact areas discussed above, there are several other relevant issues connected to mobile theatres. One such issues that the research scholar felt, needed to be taken up in this research work is, the space of women in mobile theatre in this journey of half a century that has been traversed by mobile theatre of Assam. As said by renowned theatre personality Augusto Boal (Quoted in, Schechner, 2002),

Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution (p.154)

Talking of revolution, in the light of this statement by Boal, another dimension has been sought to be explored here, and that is, women's space in mobile theatre. An interesting fact that caught the attention of this research scholar during the various field studies conducted was, the position of women in the arena of mobile theatre right from its inception. This led to the exploring of this particular dimension of mobile theatre of Assam. Nataraj Theatre pioneered a journey that has completed 54 years. Among the many questions that automatically come up like what developments took place in this half century? What has changed in the most popular Assamese form of theatre? What has been the socio-economic impact of mobile theatre on Assam? One particular question that this research work seeks an answer to is, what is the space of women today in mobile theatre vis-à-vis fifty years back?

When Nataraj Theatre, the first mobile theatre of Assam, was established by Mr. Achyut Lahkar, women had already made their foray into the Assamese stage and cinema. So, finding actresses and female dancers was not a challenge that Mr Lahkar had to face unlike Mr. Brajanath Sarma, who introduced co-acting in Assam, and Mr. Jyotiprasad Agarwala, the pioneer of Assamese cinema. In fact, when he advertised for artists in the newspapers in 1963-64, the first female playback singer of mobile theatre, Ms. Renu Phukan, who later on went on to become the first lady police officer of Assam, came out from a remote village of Sivasagar, in upper Assam, to join Nataraj Theatre in Pathsala, in lower Assam, in its second year. As was narrated by Ms. Phukan, this was not as easy as it sounds back then. Kalita (2011) informs, in that historic first venture of Nataraj Theatre, the female cast, in alphabetical order, included names like Ms. Anupama Bhattacharya, Ms. Banita

Borthakur, Ms. Bina Borthakur, Ms. Jyotsna Devi, Ms. Manjil Bordoloi, Ms.Pabitri Kakoty(dancer), Ms. Swarnalata Bora , et al.(p.31)

The path that was shown by Nataraj Theatre has been followed by almost a hundred mobile theatre groups in the next fifty years of its existence, though not all of them survived the vagaries of time. It needs mention here that the participation of women in three departments only, viz., acting, dancing and singing are still largely the norm in the mobile theatres. It is not only surprising, but sad that only one female director, and one female playwright can be named in this entire history of mobile theatre of Assam. The production scenario is as poor, though one saving grace, if one may call it that, was when in 1977, an all-female mobile theatre named 'Moon Theatre', was established by Ms. Abala Barman under the patronage of her husband Mr. Dharani Dhar Barman, renowned actor-director and proprietor of Suradevi Theatre. Kalita mentions(2011), on 8th June 1977 Moon Theatre presented their maiden performance. The direction of the four chosen plays *Maju Baideu*, *Ilar Binani*, *Kanikar Sapon* and *Pushpalata*, was done by Ms.Pushpa Devi, the first graduate actress in the mobile theatre of Assam and the only female director till date in the history of mobile theatre. She was also the female playback singer. Interestingly, the single male character in the play *Pushpalata* was enacted by an actress (p.31) This was the antithesis of what had been going on in Assamese drama since ages, males portraying female characters but unfortunately 'Moon Theatre' never lived to see a second season.

Kalita (2011) further informs that the only other such attempt of an all-female mobile theatre named 'Kalpana Womens Theatre' was made by producer Mr. Jadab Sen Deka in

Nalbari town of lower Assam, where Ms. Mukta Barman was a director along with Mr. Bhairab Barman. Here too, the male characters of King Dushyanta in the play *Sakuntala* and Ahom Prince Gadapani in the play *Jerengar Sati* was enacted by Ms. Bhagyabani Pathak .The theatre did not survive for a second year (p.120).

These, it must be admitted, had been daring ventures way back in the seventies, something producers today, have never dared to try. It is ironical that if one goes through the list of plays performed on the stage of mobile theatres in the last fifty years, or at least whatever is available, there are many plays based on strong female protagonists. Mr. Achyut Lahkar (84 yrs) in his interview, had proudly mentioned how the play *Beula* created records as the longest running show in the history of mobile theatre and that, it was staged by Nataraj Theatre for 40 years (Lahkar, A. Personal Communication. July 09, 2014). But the question is, what was the lens through which these female characters were looked at? Obviously, the male directors in a male dominant medium sketched the parameters of the female characters to suit the existing norms of the patriarchal society. Here one can draw a parallel from Sarkar (2012), who writes about the Indian cinema industry that, in an industry that has very few women working behind the camera, the portrayal of women onscreen by male directors and other male professionals will naturally have constraints and be gender biased. Moreover, such portrayal may not always convey the world views, the subjective realities or perceptions of the women. The roles portrayed by women onscreen are mostly the male directors notion of what role women ‘ought’ to be playing, and it is based on the director’s beliefs, attitudes and values, plus his perception of the viewers’ demand (p.3).

The Huffington Post in association with *The Times of India Group* focused on work written and, often, also performed by women at the 2015 Fringe Festival in New York City. Here, some of the playwrights who featured included Ms. Tessa Keimes, Ms. Christine Howey and Ms. Ann Starbuck. Reacting to the question, how to combat the gender gap in the field of theatre, each of these ladies had their say. Keimes mentioned, the way to go about it is giving women the chance. It's not often women are given the opportunities. There are tons of actresses out there, but in terms of taking the reins, we are definitely way behind. So, in the community called 'Shooting Jane', women will be given the chance to do that, i.e., tell stories that women want to hear, but it will speak to everybody. It's not anti-men, it's just about the quality of work that is produced. Similarly, Howey, who changed sex to become a woman, opined, that many men who run theatres don't take female playwrights seriously. They often can't relate to stories told from a female perspective. Commenting on the reality of the gender gap in theatre in the US, Ann Starbuck added that in the writer's rooms, the ratio of men to women is a joke. It's probably one of the most sexist businesses out there (*The Huffington Post*, Gender gap in Theatre :2015).

If this is the scene in the US in 2015, then, is it surprising that we are in the same boat? Women playwrights, directors and producers across the world probably will have similar stories to share. Here we can look into some case studies which were taken up during the research for this paper-

Ms. Pakiza Begum (45 yrs) renowned award-winning actress of Assam, who has experience in both amateur and mobile theatre, radio, as well as the screen, and has also

ventured into direction in her own proscenium theatre group *Ba* (breeze) in an interview with this researcher opined that, ‘changing the mindset of a society is not an easy task. We, women, got our opportunity quite late in time, so no wonder it will take time for us to get there. Change is taking place, no doubt, but very gradually’ (Begum, P. Personal Communication. May 09, 2016).

Another prominent female director in the amateur theatre scenario in Assam today, is Ms. Rabijita Gogoi (45 yrs), who has carved out a space with her distinct style of work. In an interview with this research scholar, on the issue of the gender divide, she accepted the fact that theatre is a male dominated sphere in Assam and as in most areas of work, a woman has to make that extra effort to prove her worth and talent. She narrated her own experiences about how she had to ‘act like a male’ to make the people she was working with, listen to her and take her seriously. Ms. Gogoi opined that, ‘gender division in the arena of theatre is as much a reality as in any other field of work. The mindset of the society at large must change’ (Gogoi, R. Telephonic interview. May 12, 2016)

Veteran Odissi dance exponent, Ms. Garima Hazarika (74 yrs), who was associated with mobile theatres as dance director, settings director and costume designer, in her interview with the research scholar, also stated that, ‘the gender division is there in mobile theatre. The reins are never given in the hands of women’ (Hazarika, G. Personal Communication. June 10, 2014).

When questioned about the gender division by the research scholar in an interview, acclaimed Assamese film maker, Ms. Manju Borah (62 yrs) replied that, ‘gender division is there in every field, so why single out cinema and theatre? In spite of being an independent woman working on my terms, I am also bound by the social terms and conditions. For example, I try that much more to be a good wife and mother also. Our entire conditioning is such that it is very difficult for us to break out.’ On the question of very few women in decision making positions in Assamese cinema and theatre, Ms. Borah explained, ‘See, in Assamese films my predecessors were Ms. Suprabha Devi, Ms. Kuntala Devi and Ms (Dr.) Santana Bordoloi .This is a very time consuming field of work with no fixed working hours. Add to that the fact that it is a male dominant scenario. How many women get the support from their spouse to venture into and sustain in this line of work? Let us be realistic. Look at the field of politics also, the thirty-three per cent reservation which has been given to us, is it utilized? Ground reality is very harsh. The patriarchal mindset is there, no point denying it. Even in Bollywood and Hollywood, in the big league, how many women producer-directors can you count? However, if a woman wants to make herself visible, she will have to take up the challenge and never compromise on anything on the pretext of being a woman. From physical fitness to indepth study about her field is a must. Otherwise she will not be taken seriously’(Borah, M. Personal Communication. May 22, 2016).

Ms. Prastuti Parashar (43 yrs) the current superstar of Assamese cinema and mobile theatre, who is also seen on the amateur stage, however, had a different version. In her interview with the research scholar, she opined that, ‘Women need to be confident and sure

of themselves. Yes, ours is a patriarchal society but I refuse to believe that women can be kept down against their will. Even in the case of cinema, stage and mobile theatre in Assam, if women want to, they can make their mark as playwrights or directors. Maybe, the effort is lacking somewhere. Where there is a will, there is a way'(Parashar, P. Personal Communication. July 07, 2017).

It is heartening to see that with time several women have ventured out to make a space for herself in the arena of direction of cinema and theatre in Assam. Apart from the established names, arranged in alphabetical order for convenience alone, like , Ms.Bhagirathi , Ms. Manju Borah , Ms.Pakiza Begum , Ms.Prerona Barbarooah, Ms. Rabijita Gogoi and Dr. Santana Bordoloi, a new generation of female directors have come up like (in alphabetical order) Ms.Bidyabati Phukan, Ms.Enisha Sarma, Ms.Dipika Deka, Ms.Kismat Bano, Ms.Manimala Das, Ms. Moni Bordoloi, Ms. Papari Medhi, Ms. Pari Saraniya, Ms. Pranami Bora, Ms. Rayanti Rabha, Ms. Rima Das, Ms. Sanchita Talukdar, Ms. Ujjala Barman, et al.

Gender disparity is a fact, and the real challenge is how to wipe it off. Almost all male producer/directors prefer to shy away from this topic. Replying to the question about women missing as decision makers in mobile theatre, Mr. Ratan Lahkar (72 yrs) producer of Kohinoor Theatre, pushed the ball onto the women's court by saying, 'Women themselves will have to come out'(Lahkar, R. Personal Communication. July 09, 2013).This is precisely what 'The Kilroys', a Los Angeles based group of women producers and playwrights, which was formed in 2013, feel, that, they are done with talking about gender parity and are taking action.They have opted to funnel their distaste with the industry into an annual project titled

The List, that brings together the names of female and trans playwrights who have written plays in the past year. To do so, the Kilroys' survey artistic directors, literary managers, professors, producers, directors and dramaturges who nominate plays they have seen, specially works written by female or trans-authors, that have yet to be produced. *The List* (2015), which narrowed down a field of 755 suggested plays to 53, is meant primarily as a tool for those contemporary producers who claim they want to showcase under-represented writers, but believe female playwrights are hard to find.

In the course of their interviews mentioned previously, both Ms. Pakiza Begum (45 yrs) (Personal Communication. May 09, 2016) and Ms. Rabijita Gogoi, (42 yrs) (Personal Communication. May 12, 2016) lamented about the lack of a common platform like the 'Kilroys', for women producers, directors, dramatists, scriptwriters, music directors, singers, dancers and actresses, in Assam, where various issues related to these arenas may be voiced. The idea of 'The Kilroys' stated in the preceding paragraph is a fine example that can be adopted here in Assam also. While talking of women playwrights in mobile theatre, Mr. Krishna Roy (72 yrs) proprietor-producer of Abahan Theatre informed that the only name that can be mentioned is that of Ms. Minoti Acharjee, who wrote the play *Lakhimee Bowari* for Abahan Theatre in 1991, directed by Mr. Sebarata Barua. (Roy, K. Personal Communication. May 11, 2014). The question that automatically comes up is, when we have so many prolific female litterateurs in Assam, why this dearth of female playwrights? No doubt, that writing literature and scripting a play are two completely varied fields, but if we have had male litterateurs like the Bhabendranath Saikia, who took up playwrighting, what

has stopped the ladies, litterateur or not, from venturing into this area? Mr. Krishna Roy (72 yrs), opined that, 'writing a stage fit play is a very time consuming job and one must have the knowledge of the stage. Maybe this could also be a reason that we do not find women playwrights in mobile theatre'(Roy, K. Personal Communication. May11, 2014). This opinion of Mr. Roy brings up another question, if scripting plays for mobile theatre is so tough and time consuming, how is it that today a single male playwright has almost monopolized the mobile theatre scenario, churning out dozens of plays each season? Is it humanly possible? Is that the reason why now most mobile plays remind us of some or the other Hindi, Bengali or south Indian movies? This can probably be another study in itself.

Talking about women in mobile theatres as a whole, few names, apart from the long list of actresses and dancers, can be counted for leaving their indelible mark. This include, in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, Ms.Abala Barman (first producer), Ms. Arati Das Bairagi (playwright and director of dance drama), Ms.Garima Hazarika (dance director/ settings designer/costume designer), Ms.Pushpa Devi (only director), Ms. Renu Phukan (first female singer), and Ms. Tarali Sarma (music director). But the question remains were these women decision makers in the real sense of the term? Or did they simply adhere to the norms set by the male producer/director of whichever mobile theatre group they worked with? In our society the female has always been defined through the 'male gaze'. Mulvey(1989) has elaborately explained about the 'male gaze' in her work and argues that 'scopophilia' which means, 'taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling

and curious gaze’, is one of the numerous pleasures offered by cinema (p.16). Consequently, the self-sacrificing silent (voiceless), dependent, virtuous ‘heroine’ versus the bold, self-confident,

independent (with a voice), bold ‘vamp’. Theatre, too, is no different. As Sarkar (2012) mentions, commercial Hindi films have constantly glorified the image of the ideal Indian woman as accepting the injustice and violence meted out towards her by men and society (p.4). Who, then, sketches these images of the female?

It may be mentioned here, that while there is this visible absence of women playwrights in the mobile theatre scenario, it is interesting to note that we see a long list of original Assamese plays penned by women playwrights/dramatists in the drama section of All India Radio Guwahati. Given below is a list that has been compiled by Saharia (2015):-

Table 5.3: Plays written by female playwrights for All India Radio, Guwahati

(1948-1973)			
Sl.No	Name of the Playwright	No. of plays	Name of plays written
1	2	3	4
1	Anuradha Medhi	03	(a) <i>Ashru Hanhi'r sangamat</i> (b) <i>Dongson</i> (c) <i>Sighason</i>
2	Arati Das Bairagi	08	(a) <i>Janani</i> / (b) <i>Baidehi</i> / (c) <i>Apotya</i> / (d) <i>Durbeen</i> / (e) <i>Phul Jodi Bhul hoi</i> / (f) <i>Boja</i> / (g) <i>Brindaban</i> / (h) <i>Sendur.</i>

1	2	3	4
3	Arati Devi	01	(a) <i>Prajapataye Swaha.</i>
4	Bina Das	02	(a) <i>Jala-Kata / (b) Sat Bhai.</i>
5	Bhon Saikia	01	(a) <i>Dutiya Morar Kena</i>
6	Hemalata Barua	01	(a) <i>Shes Upahar</i>
7	Kusum Bora	01	(a) <i>Kheli Meli (Natika)</i>
8	Lakhyahira Das	01	(a) <i>Agnidagdha</i>
9	Nalinibala Devi	02	(a) <i>Janmastami / (b) Puberun.</i>
10	Nilima Das	02	(a) <i>Eri Aha Gaon / (b) Tripitak</i>
11	Nirupama Borgohain	02	(a) <i>Jui chain Dam / (b) Rupahi.</i>
12	Nirupama Barua	02	(a) <i>Bikramar Swarga Prapti/</i> (b) <i>Jonaki Desh (probably)</i>
13	Nirupama Hazarika	01	(a) <i>Amrit Prabha</i>
14.	Nirmal Prabha Bordoloi	01	a) <i>Chandra Kumar /</i> b) <i>Daktar Surya Kumar Bhuyan.</i>
15	Priti Barua	02	(a) <i>Sowarani Bhetiba Koney/</i> (b) <i>Fill up the Gap.</i>
16	Premalata Barua	02	(a) <i>Jibanar Khala bama/</i> (b) <i>Shes Upahar.</i>
17	Preeti Bhattacharya	02	(a) <i>Mai Pakhilee/</i> (b) <i>Baliya Burhar chahmel (probably)</i>
18	Pratibha Barua	02	(a) <i>Jonalir Arat Sonali</i> (b) <i>Deshar Katha</i>
19	Senehi Begum	01	(a) <i>Dighal Nak</i>
20	Sneha Devi	01	(a) <i>Shes Tripti</i>
21	Suchibrata Rai Choudhury	01	(a) <i>Herowa Sapon</i>
22	Suchitra Barua	01	(a) <i>Daworar Duwari Bhara</i>

Source : Saharia (2015, pp.244-253)

The table, 5.2 above is a source of inspiration for women wannabe dramatists. If this was possible then, what is stopping the women writers now? However, an interview by this research scholar with Mr. Nayan Prasad (58 yrs), who was the producer of the drama section of All India Radio, Guwahati for a long time, revealed that now, the conditions have changed. To quote Mr.Prasad, 'With so many means of entertainment available now, people are not really attracted to radio plays anymore and that is why dramatists/playwrights, male and female, are very difficult to find. Among the handful of currently writing female dramatists in AIR, Guwahati are, in alphabetical order, Ms.Arati Das Bairagi, Ms.Arupa Patangia Kalita Ms. Jimani Choudhury, Ms.Manikuntala Bhattacharya, Ms.Rehana Hussain, and Ms. Subhadra Devi Bhattacharyya. New talents are hard to find' (Prasad,N. Personal Communication. May 15, 2017).

Mobile theatres of Assam have come a long way. It is time that new concepts, ideas and perceptions are experimented with. Feminist theatre can also be such an experiment. But the question is will the producers dare to take up such experiments? As Ms. Rabijita Gogoi,(42 yrs) amateur theatre director, mentioned in her interview, 'mobile theatre of Assam is a topic of great curiosity for theatre lovers outside the state'(Gogoi, R.Telephonic interview.May 12, 2016). As such, it is the duty of the producers to keep up its standards and what it has to offer to society at large. If earning profits become the only motive of mobile theatre (the trend nowadays), will mobile theatre of Assam be able to preserve its unique identity? Will it be able to claim to be the reflection of Assamese society? Thus, the social relevance of mobile

theatre in Assam is definitely there because they entertain, educate and inspire the audience. They have become a part and parcel of the Assamese society and culture. Like films, plays which give out a strong social message and comment on important social issues leave an impact on the people. It is true that the 'star' culture in mobile theatre is not a very healthy trend but on the contrary, it cannot be negated that it is because of the presence of these cine stars that mobile theatre has reached this height of popularity among the masses.

In the last few years, many stalwarts of mobile theatre, including the man who is said to have given birth to mobile theatre Mr. Achyut Lahkar has passed on. The other noted names in alphabetical order being, Mr. Adya Sarma, Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, Mr. Dharani Dhar Barman, Mr. Mahananda Sarma, Mr. Mahendra Barthakur, Mr. Prasanta Hazarika, Mr. Ratan Lahkar, et al. With these stalwarts gone, the generation that gave birth to, and established mobile theatre of Assam in an elevated pedestal, has now almost passed on. It is now the duty of the second generation of producers to shoulder the responsibility of sustaining mobile theatre as the most popular medium of entertainment and bring back its glory that is being questioned. It is also the duty of this generation to train the future generation of producer/playwrights that mobile theatre is not merely business, rather, mobile theatre is a powerful mass medium that has, and can play a significant role in voicing the society's issues. It is truly a unique treasure of Assam.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The discussion in the previous five chapters of this research work has made one fact clear that mobile theatre of Assam, since its very inception, has been holding fort on its own. It has managed to carve out a very special place in the arena of Assam's performing arts. As mentioned previously, once, looked down on by the elite drama connoisseurs as the 'poor man's entertainment', today mobile theatre is the most popular medium of entertainment in Assam, cutting across all social classes. Mobile theatre has gone through its share of trials and travails, but it has survived. The interesting thing is, in this age of digital media, with all its facilities and easy access, mobile theatre is still going strong. It is true that there is a whole lot of allegations against mobile theatre today, like loss of originality, over-commercialization, dependence on technical gimmicks and 'filmy' presentation, rise of ticket price, etc., but one must understand the struggle that mobile theatre has had to face with the changing times and tastes, to sustain itself.

Performing arts is for the audience. If the mobile theatre presentations are to be accepted by the audience today, they must cater to their expectations. The older generation of mobile theatre people, as well as theatre lovers lament that mobile theatre has lost its original character. While the producers try to refute this allegation and claim that they are simply adapting to the changing socio-economic environ. The question has often been asked- who is correct? Looking at the success of the mobile theatres every season, one has to admit that there is no doubt about its popularity in Assam today. It is an undeclared industry that is doing business in crores. In spite of all its negative aspects, pointed out by the critics, there has to be something positive in this medium, that it has still managed to attract the masses in huge numbers.

The first **introductory** chapter of this research work has sought to establish the relevance of the subject of this research work titled, '**Dimensions of the Mobile Theatre of Assam**'. It gives an idea of what mobile theatre of Assam is all about. This is one performing art that can claim the distinction of being unique in the world because, though a lot has been written and said about travelling theatres around the globe, nowhere is there something akin to the mobile theatre that was devised by Mr. Achyut Lahkar in Pathsala, in Barpeta district of Assam in 1963, following in the footsteps of his preceding adventurers like, Mr. Tithiram Bayan, Mr. Santa Ram Choudhury, Mr. Brajanath Sarma and his own brother, Mr. Sadananda Lahkar. The literature review, the locale of the research work, the objectives of the work, the hypotheses to be explored, along with the methodology adopted, and limitations of the study has been established in this chapter.

The second chapter, '**Emergence and Evolution of Mobile Theatre in Assam**', while searching for the history of mobile theatre, tries to follow the rich history of performing arts as a whole in Assam. The importance of Barpeta as a cultural hub since the time Srimanta Sankaradeva arrived and resided there, is a well-established fact. The historical and cultural influences upon Barpeta, and the contributions of this place as the birthplace of mobile theatre, has also been explored in this chapter. Thereafter, the changes in the political history that is, the end of the Ahom dynasty and how it impacted cultural history, coming in of the British rule and with them, the import of the Bengali *babu*, who brought the *jatra* performances into Assam has been explored. The changing content of the *jatras* from Bengali mythological *geetinaats* (song based drama) to translated Assamese presentations and, thereafter, the original Assamese dramas, the historical moment when Assamese women stepped on stage for the first time, and the ensuing journey that led to the birth of Nataraj Theatre, the first mobile theatre of Assam in 1963, has been the content of the second chapter.

In the third chapter, '**Structure, Technique and Management in Mobile Theatre**', the entire set up of the mobile theatre that includes the producer, director, playwright, actors, technicians, etc., has been elaborated along with the structural details of how the mobile theatres prepare and perform in a nine-month long journey across the length and breadth of Assam. The techniques of presenting the plays on a double stage with no intervals at all, with helicopters landing, trains running, ships sinking, dinosaurs roaring, double-acting by one actor and more, that are reflections of the changing business as well as taste of the audience have been delved into. A season of nine months entails a huge preparation and logistics for boarding,

rehearsals, food, travelling, performances and many unseen situations. The superb management of the mobile theatre groups is a model that can be studied separately. These dimensions of mobile theatre has also been explored in this chapter.

The fourth chapter is titled '**Problems and Prospects of Mobile Theatre**'. As the title suggests, in this chapter the various problems and challenges that the mobile theatre of Assam have encountered right from the beginning have been taken up. The problems and challenges have also changed with the changing times. One allegation that has dogged mobile theatre since the last decade is that the quality of the plays presented has lost their ethos, which, according to the Oxford dictionary means, 'the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature or guiding beliefs of a person, group or institution'. Connected with this, are various issues like dearth of playwrights, the 'star-culture', lack of growth of acting talent, increasing influence of cinema, changing character of the audience, competition among the mobile theatre groups, mushrooming of too many new mobile theatre groups, consequent lessening of audience, gradually vanishing space in the urban areas, etc., have been discussed here. The role of the State Government as well as the Central Government, rather the lack of it, and its necessity in the development and preservation of this medium, unique in the world, has also been taken up. Apart from that, the future prospects of this 'industry' is also being imagined here. Importance of preservation of the manuscripts, publication of the dramas written for mobile theatre, digital preservation of the plays as well as songs and music and the importance of an archive, has also been taken up in this chapter. No doubt there are

problems, but the larger section of theatre lovers opined that mobile theatres will continue its journey gloriously.

The fifth chapter has been an attempt to look into the '**Impact of Mobile Theatre on the Assamese Society and Culture**'. This popular medium of mass communication, that has completed 54 years, could not have done so without some amount of impact upon the society. The impact measure has been sought by dividing the areas into social, economic, cultural and others. The economic impact of mobile theatre of Assam that cannot be denied is the fact that, it has provided direct employment to hundreds of people, both skilled and unskilled, some even illiterate. Indirectly, this employment has helped to sustain the families and dependents of these employees. Apart from that, the mobile shows during their nine month roadshow help the people of a particular area, especially in the rural locations, earn a few dollars more. The social impact is a very broad arena and an attempt has been made to cover aspects like, the importance of theatre, how literature is being reflected on the mobile stage, and how it can be a tool for social change, if mobile theatre has been a trendsetter in any way, etc. The cultural impact has been analyzed keeping in view the historically assimilating character of the Assamese society. How in the post-globalization era, various external and commercial factors are impacting upon mobile theatre. Apart from this, the important issue of the space of women in mobile theatres also has been discussed here.

The final chapter, '**Summary and Conclusion**' is a collective summary of what has been discussed in the previous five chapters. This final chapter has tried to revisit the hypotheses which were taken up in the first chapter and analyze whether they have been proven true or

false. This chapter is also the platform to put forth certain recommendations which may help this mass medium of communication unique to Assam, not only strengthen its position but also ensure its future. The hypotheses that were taken up in this research work were: (a) The commitment to the original idea with which mobile theatre had been born, to enrich Assamese culturally along with the establishment of a well-organized professional theatre has been lost, (b) class difference within the mobile theatre set up is increasing and this is not a positive change, and, (c) mobile theatre is a male dominated arena where women have been invisible as decision makers. After the elaborate discussion in the five previous chapters, the researcher has come to the conclusion that all the three above stated hypotheses have been proven true.

Taking up the first hypothesis, apart from the fact that mobile theatre has sustained the trend of professional theatre which was the primary objective of Mr. Achyut Lahkar to provide financial security and stability to people associated with theatre, its other main objective to enrich Assamese culture has been overshadowed by the commercial demands. Today, the plays staged are hardly reflection of the Assamese society or ethos, rather, Bollywood blockbusters are stitched and tacked and passed off as original Assamese drama. The justification being, this is what the audience wants to see. Adaptations of great literary creations are also dwindling just as original plays that once was the hallmark of mobile theatre.

As for the second hypothesis, though the producers and 'stars' do not like it when the issue of class difference is brought up, the junior artists, workers, technicians, even Inviting Committee members and people closely associated with mobile theatres agree that the 'one family' concept that once existed in mobile theatre, has changed to a large extent. Sri Jonmoni

Sarma (45 yrs), Secretary, Vibgyor Club, of Phulaguri in Nagaon, in his interview stated that, 'class difference is a fact. Earlier, even the lead actor-actress used to be accommodated in the same place as the other people. Mr. Pranjit Das, one of the most talented actors of the medium has spent nights on school benches just like the other boys. Similar examples can be cited about people like, Mr. Mahananda Sarma, Mr. Upakul Bordoloi, Mr. Robin Neog, all stalwart actors of mobile theatres. Even the leading ladies back then, had no qualms about sharing accommodation with junior artists. Will the 'star' artists of today agree to do that? Separate special accommodations have to be arranged for them. Is this not class difference? Disparity in the payment scale is definitely the cause of this' (Sarma, J. Telephonic interview. October 26, 2016). The fact of class difference was corroborated by many junior artists and workers of the medium on conditions of anonymity.

Coming to the third hypothesis, as far as mobile theatre being a male dominated arena is concerned, the earlier discussions, particularly where the space of women in mobile theatre has been explored, and the economic impact of mobile theatre has been taken up, it becomes quite clear that this fact is true. Probably because of the nature of the set-up of the medium, and its emergence from a history when women had no space at all in performing arts, the change that is happening has been very gradual. Women are still missing from the decision-making positions. As opined by celebrated film and mobile theatre star, Ms. Prastuti Parashar (43 yrs), (Parashar, P. Personal Communication. July 07, 2017) and producer of Kohinoor theatre, Mr. Ratan Lahkar (72 yrs), (Lahkar, R. Personal Communication. May 22, 2014), 'women will have to come out themselves'. Though such statements are very easy to make,

reality is often not as easy. The question remains- will women be given the opportunity? But, for that to be answered, women will really have to come out and try to make themselves visible. Simply portraying 'strong' female characters that has been imagined, conceptualised and directed by men cannot be the end of women empowerment within mobile theatres. The day the reins are equally handled by women, a new chapter will begin in the history of mobile theatre of Assam.

During the entire period of this research work, interaction with people within the mobile theatre as well as people from different backgrounds and walks of life, but with one common love-mobile theatre, was a very positive experience. The common man, who is the real connoisseur of this medium, had many things to say about how they want to see mobile theatres become world famous. On the basis of those thoughts and ideas shared by these lovers of mobile theatre, a few suggestions are being put in here with the hope that somewhere this research work will contribute a tiny drop in the study and development of this most popular art form of Assam:

- Preservation of manuscripts, plays, songs, dance-dramas year wise by the AAMTPA centrally. The lack of scientific and technically sound preservation has resulted in the loss of the major portion of historical data of the last 50 years.
- For preservation, a state- of- the- art- Archive in Assam, like the National Film Archive where the renowned films of the world are preserved, is the need of the hour. Not just the drama- literature, but the actual theatre presentations through digital technology

should be preserved. This will not only be a great treasure for posterity, but will also inspire and facilitate further research work in the field.

- With regard to the above mentioned archive, government support, either state or central, is a must. As discussed earlier, goodwill of the government can do a lot. The pressure needs to be built up and here, the mobile theatre producers, both mobile and amateur drama workers, bodies like the *Asam Natya Sanmilani* and *Bhramyaman Theatre Dasak Forum*, as well as all mobile theatre lovers have great responsibility.
- Each mobile theatre group must realise the importance of preservation of the manuscripts, songs, souvenirs, income-expense details and other documents yearwise in a systematic manner.
- The annual souvenirs brought out by the mobile theatres should be taken more seriously, with better contents published, which are not repeated after a couple of years. Moreover, the editors of the souvenirs must be careful in monitoring the information given through the articles.
- Another recommendation is that mobile theatre groups should coordinate with the inviting committees of the urban areas and take steps to ensure that open space will be available in the future to present their shows, considering the fact that such open spaces in the urban sphere is fast disappearing. If need be, petitions can be presented before the government in this regard.

- As mentioned in the last part of the fifth chapter, examples like the Chinese Dramatic Association are great inspirations and should be considered, if it can be emulated in any manner.
- The *Bhramyaman Theatre Darsak Forum* (Mobile Theatre Audience Forum) should play a more active role in monitoring what is being dished out by the mobile theatre groups, and raise its voice with opinions and suggestions accordingly.
- We, the Assamese people, must realize and understand our own responsibility to help preserve and sustain our mobile theatre. Simply turning away, because we are not liking certain things about it, is certainly not any solution of rectifying the loop holes that has crept into mobile theatre. As mobile theatre lovers, audience or simply as a layperson, it is our duty to voice our concerns and do our bit to keep the flag of mobile theatre of Assam

There are no two ways about the fact that mobile theatre is a commercial venture. Having said that, the producers should never misuse or under-utilise the potential of this hugely popular medium in contributing to the betterment, information and reformation of the society at large. At the same time, it must keep its identity as a unique performing art of Assam, intact. This research work is a humble attempt to look into the various dimensions of mobile theatre of Assam but it may have overlooked aspects that should have been and could have been incorporated here. It is therefore hoped that this endeavour will encourage other researchers in this field which will bring out more and more information, raise more questions and find answers to those questions and thus help contribute to the future journey of mobile theatres in Assam.

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