

**CHAPTER -VI**

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UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM**

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Once Assamese theatre was considered as a leisure time enterprise, which had neither a professional troupe nor a central playhouse with regular performances, by the best of the available talent.<sup>1</sup> This absence of theatrical environment of the state often made an artist uncertain about his career. As a result most of the artist instead of cultivating their real talent in the dramatic field painfully obliged to seek work and security in some other sphere of activities where his dramatic talent was least required.

But it is pleasurable to see that time has changed many changes in the theatrical field of Assam. To day theatre, mainly the mobile theatre of the state has attained a position of prestige and consequently it has attracted new talent to vitalize this unique form of dramatic presentation which is rarely found outside the state. Presently around forty mobile theatres are performing plays in different corners of the state. However all of them are not of equal standard. These mobile theatres are not considered as a leisure time enterprise now, rather, a well developed cultural organization, which is deeply rooted in the heart of the people of Assam. This organization not only imparts cultural entertainment but

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<sup>1</sup> Chandra Kanta Phookan: *Assamese Theater in Indian Drama in Retrospect* (Gurgaon: Sangeet Natak Academi, Hope IndiaPub.,2007) p-47.

also provides food, clothes and shelter to a number of families. The actors, the actresses, the musicians and the technicians working in mobile theatre for years, accepted their work as a helpful profession. Because, inside their working field, they receive prestige as well as financial security.

It has already been mentioned that Achyut Lahakar formed first commercial mobile theatre- Nataraj Theatre in Assam in 1963. Formation of Nataraj Theatre was unquestionably a bold step, as it has made a rapid change in the dramatic field of Assam. After that, formation of Purbajyoti Theatre at Hajo and Suradevi Theatre at Chamata boosted a new dimension to this movement. Gradually many new mobile theatres were formed in the state and that have strengthened this unique dramatic organization to reach its maturity. Today mobile theatre of Assam is appreciated not only in the state but also in outside. The advent of cinema industries and TV programmes badly affected theatre all over the world. But in Assam, it is the contrary witnessed by the people. Recently a group of foreigners had enjoyed the staging of *Titanic* by Kohinoor Theatre, *Anaconda* by Hengool Theatre and *Lady Diana* by Awahan Theatre and they highly praised all the people connected with these shows for their innovative presentations of western themes on stage. It is true that a new comer just after entering inside a make shift theatre hall, amazingly feels if he is inside a temporary make shift theater hall or not. This is because of the decoration and use of sophisticated light and sound mechanism inside the theatre hall.

Now to provide such a beautiful environment inside a theatre hall, the producer who is considered as the owner of the whole party had to take lots of responsibilities. On the one hand he invest a huge amount of money (approximately Rs. 70 to 90 Lakhs) every year and appoints around 150 employees for staging three to four plays around 70 different places for eight months. This is unquestionably a Herculean task for an inexperienced producer.

Now let us see how a mobile theatre moves from place to place. Usually the whole troupe of a theatre party may be divided into two groups. The first group consists of 10 to 15 labours or workers, arrive the place of performance nearly four to five days before the staging of the play with all accessories like tent bamboo, wooden stages etc. and build the make shift theatre hall for performance in time. It is painful to see that these workers always keep themselves busy in making the make shift theatre hall to its completion in every place a theatre troupe moves and receive the lowest salary compared to the other workers of the troupe. The second group consists of producer, directors, actors, actresses, technicians, musicians and workers and others except the stage constructing workers of the first group.

A busy schedule of a renowned theatre party is given for convenience.

# THEATRE BHAGYADEVVI

## Programme for the Session 2007-08

SL NO	DATE OF PERFORMANCE	PLACE OF PERFORMANCE
1	AUG 19 TO AUG 26	MAROWA
2	AUG 27 TO AUG 30	BARITOPA
3	AUG 31 TO SEP 2	LOHAR KATHA
4	SEP 3 TO SEP 5	BAHARI
5	SEP 6 TO SEP 8	RAMPUR
6	SEP 9 TO SEP 11	SALBARI
7	SEP 12 TO SEP 14	CHANGSARI
8	SEP 15 TO SEP 18	HASTHINAPUR
9	SEP 19 TO SEP 21	GOBARDHANA
10	SEP 22 TO SEP 24	THAMNA
11	SEP 25 TO SEP 27	NATHKUCHI
12	SEP 28 TO SEP 30	SARTHEBARI
13	OCT 1 TO OCT 3	HAJO
14	OCT 4 TO OCT 37	MULAGAON
15	OCT 8 TO OCT 10	DRANGIRI
16	OCT 11 TO OCT 13	BOKO
17	OCT 14 TO OCT 16	BARKOLA
18	OCT 17 TO OCT 19	PUTHIMARI
19	OCT 20 TO OCT 22	KULBIL
20	OCT 23 TO OCT 25	KAYA
21	OCT 26 TO OCT 28	NITYANANDA
22	OCT 29 TO OCT 31	LANGERIYAJAR
23	NOV 1 TO NOV 4	GANESHGURI
24	NOV 5 TO NOV 8	GITANAGAR
25	NOV 9 TO NOV 11	BAMUNDI
26	NOV 12 TO NOV 14	KALAG
27	NOV 15 TO NOV 17	MANTYARI
28	NOV 18 TO NOV 20	LAUJAN
29	NOV 21 TO NOV 23	BIHDIYA
30	NOV 24 TO NOV 26	BARPETA
31	NOV 27 TO NOV 30	KATHALGURI
32	DEC 1 TO DEC 6	NALBARI
33	DEC 7 TO DEC 9	KHANMUKH
34	DEC 10 TO DEC 12	BURHA
35	DEC 13 TO DEC 15	BHABANIPUR
36	DEC 16 TO DEC 18	BANGRA
37	DEC 19 TO DEC 21	PAIKAN
38	DEC 22 TO DEC 24	BAPUJINAGAR
39	DEC 25 TO DEC 27	RAMPUR

40	DEC 28 TO DEC 30	NAGARBERA
41	DEC 31 TO JAN 2	SONTALI
42	JAN 3 TO JAN 5	MAJJAKHELI
43	JAN 6 TO JAN 8	JOGIGHOPA
44	JAN 9 TO JAN 11	BAHALPUR
45	JAN 12 TO JAN 17	KATHALGURI
46	JAN 16 TO JAN 18	SARPARA
47	JAN 19 TO JAN 22	HARIBHANGA
48	JAN 23 TO JAN 26	GERUAGAON
49	JAN 27 TO JAN 29	BATADRABA
50	JAN 30 TO FEB 2	ARJUNTAL
51	FEB 3 TO FEB 5	LUKUMAI
52	FEB 6 TO FEB 8	JAYRAPARA
53	FEB 9 TO FEB 12	BARHAT
54	FEB 13 TO FEB 16	SONARI
55	FEB 17 TO FEB 19	RAJGARH
56	FEB 20 TO FEB 22	DULIJAJAN
57	FEB 23 TO FEB 26	NAHARKATTYA
58	FEB 27 TO FEB 29	OUPHULIYA
59	MAR 1 TO MAR 4	MARANHAT
60	MAR 5 TO MAR 8	NEMGURI
61	MAR 9 TO MAR 11	AMGURI
62	MAR 12 TO MAR 15	MAHURAMUKH
63	MAR 16 TO MAR 19	MERAPANI
64	MAR 20 TO MAR 22	MELAMARA
65	MAR 23 TO MAR 25	BANGAON
66	MAR 26 TO MAR 28	KOPATHERA
67	MAR 29 TO APR 1	JALAH
68	APR 2 TO APR 5	BARNADDI
69	APR 6 TO APR 8	BADRUKUCHI
70	APR 9 TO APR 12	KARIA

**Total Number of performing days 237**

The second group usually arrive the place of performance on the day of staging the play. These players and the musician had to accommodate themselves either in the schools, colleges, clubs or sometimes with selected families under the proper guidance of the inviting committee. This group performs its shows for three to four nights and is again shifted to another place. This activity is not always enjoyable as the facility of food and lodging provided by the committee vary from

place to place. But it provides a unique experience to share the feelings and emotions of the people belonging to different cultures and traditions. Before starting their journey the whole troupe prepare four to five plays and four dance dramas. The rehearsal continues for 40 to 50 days. Usually the rehearsal of all the mobile theatres starts in the last week of June. The preparations are conducted in a rehearsal hall, which is called *Akhara Griha*. After full preparation the troupe starts the journey usually in the mid of August and continued it till the mid of April, next year. The whole troupe moves under the proper guidance of the producer. The producer has to control around 150 people staging plays in 70 different places of the state. Unquestionably the job of a producer demands an extraordinary skill to maintain all these aspects. As make shift theatre halls are not weather friendly- during rainy season these theatres have to face innumerable troubles. Here we may mention the name of some of the producers who by their excellent skill have already established in the wide field of mobile theatre : Achyut Lahakar, the producer of Nataraj Theatre; Dharani Barman, the producer of Suradevi Theatre; Karuna Mazumdar, the producer of Purbajyoti Theatre; Sarat Mazumdar, the producer of Bhagyadevi Theatre; Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Rishipad Bhattacharya, the producers of Makunda Theatre; Ratan Lahkar, the producer of Kohinoor Theatre; Golap Borgohain the producer of Jyoti Rupa Theatre; Sada Lahkar, the producer of Aradhana Theatre; Krishna Roy, the producer of Awahan Theatre; Subhash Choudhury the producer of Anirban Theatre; Prasanta Hazarika, the producer of Hengool Theatre; Biswa Saikia, the producer of Srimanta Sankardev Theatre and Najrul Islam, the producer of Bordoishila Theatre.

In generating employment, mobile theatre of Assam is endeavouring an appreciable effort. Usually in a class one mobile theatre like 'Kohinoor' or 'Awahan', about one hundred and fifty workers worked together under one producer. These workers can be divided into different categories. A list of the approximate total members of workers is given below :

Sl. No.	Name / Category	Total No. of Worker
1.	Producer	1
2.	Chief Manager	1
3.	Managers	4
4.	Aesthetic Thinkers	3
5.	Secretary	1
6.	Chief Publicity Secy.	1
7.	Asst. Publicity Secy.	10
8.	Chief Organizer	1
9.	Lyricist	3
10.	Souvenir Editor	1
11.	Group Manager	1
12.	Music	3
13.	Prompter	2
14.	Lady In-charge	1
15.	Instrumentalist	10
16.	Singer	4
17.	Art Director	1
18.	Artist	5
19.	Choreographer	1
20.	Sound Engineer	6
21.	Setting Master	5
22.	Make up Master	2
23.	Costume director	2
24.	Actors and Actress	20
25.	Dance Artist	14
26.	Light Directors	10
27.	Stage and Hall Makers	20
28.	Still Photographer	1
29.	Transportation	5
30.	Cook and Marketing Officers	5
31.	Gate Keeper	2
32.	Others	4
<b>Total No. Workers</b>		<b>150</b>



At present about forty mobile theatres are running in different places of Assam, out of which more than thirty mobile theatres are from North Kamrup area. Therefore, approximately  $(40 \times 150 = 6,000)$  six thousand people from the total population of the state are directly engaged with these mobile theatres. It is really a significant event for a state like Assam where thousands and thousands of educated unemployed youths move from one place to another in search of job. Mobile theatre, from this point of view, definitely serve an important role in solving unemployment problem of the state. For this noble job mobile theatres may be considered as an industry. It is a matter to be discussed whether this industry can fulfill all the requirements of an industry. But it is a fact that like an industry mobile theatres appoint a large number of employees and produce many new talents like – actors, actresses, technicians, musicians, playwrights and even producers. People engaging in mobile theatre get all the requirements for their survival. It is surprising to see that an actor or actress of a mobile theatre can earn rupees twenty to thirty lakhs for one session. The producers of course hesitate to disclose the real fact as he could not maintain the same amount to other players as well.

At present a mobile theatre had to spend approximately Rs. 90,40,000.00 in the beginning year. To understand the whole issue an approximate comparative list of total expenditure in three different periods is given below.

An approximate expenditure of a mobile theatre in the starting  
year –

Sl. No.	Name of the items	Approximate Expenditure in 1980 <sup>2</sup>	Approximate Expenditure in 2002	Approximate Expenditure in 2008
1	Tent (1900 meters.)	75,000	1,25,000	2,25,000
2	Chair	75,000	2,00,000	2,75,000
3	Sound	75,000	1,50,000	3,50,000
4	Musical instruments	20,000	1,50,000	3,25,000
5	Food	110,000	4,00,000	8,00,000
6	Generator	25,000	50,000	2,00,000
7	Light	35,000	70,000	1,25,000
8	Stage and Gallery	75,000	2,00,000	5,00,000
9	Transportation	100,000	4,00,000	8,00,000
10	Poster and Publication	50,000	1,50,000	3,00,000
11	Playwright and director	80,000	2,00,000	4,00,000
12	Dress and Makeup	75,000	1,50,000	3,25,000
13	Settings	40,000	1,50,000	3,50,000
14	Bamboo	1,50,000	2,00,000	3,00,000
15	Salary of the players and workers	6,25,000	15,00,000	40,00,000
16	Repairing	5,000	15,000	40,000
17	Others	5,000	20,000	75,000
	<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>16,20,000</b>	<b>39,50,000</b>	<b>90,40,000</b>

<sup>2</sup> Krishna Roy : *Swaniyojita Udgogaloi Rupantarita Hoise Bhramyaman Theatre*, in *Natun Samay*, (Vol. – 5, No. 27), 30 July, 2002, p.4.

Now let us see how a mobile theatre can earn money. Usually a theatre party perform shows for 237 days as it is seen going through the busy schedule of a mobile theatre (See schedule list of mobile theatre). If 7 days are deducted for unexpected natural or man made calamities total performing days will be 230. Now a theatre party earn Rs 50,000.00 (average) per show i.e. (230x50,000.00= 1,15,00,000.00). However some theater parties may perform second show or matinee show, that income is not included here. From this it becomes clear that a mobile theatre can earn Rupees Twenty Four Lakhs Sixty Thousand :

Income : Rs.	1,15,00,000.00	(Approx.)
Expenditure	90,40,000.00	„
Total Surplus	24,60,000.00	(Approx.)

Looking into this matter a group of critics like to blame mobile theatre a money making organization. These critics believe that mobile theatres, in present time, are trying to manage their business entirely on commercial basis. They are not conscious of making any progressive innovations in their plays. They performe plays only of those playwrights who has already established in mobile theatre. New actors and actresses or playwrights are often neglected in mobile theatre. They select plays neither on literary merits nor on aesthetic values but for financial benefits. They pay a huge amount to the glamour artist and often neglect the artists who have already devoted half of his/her life in the name of mobile

theatre. Theatre involves a democratic spirit. But it is unfortunate to see that inside mobile theater everything is against it. These critics also believe that security of common artist and workers in mobile theatre is very low. They also blame the producers for not providing any CPF or GPF to their employees.

In this context when we met the producers their responses are very much positive and thought provoking. According to them<sup>3</sup> the producer of a mobile theatre had to spend a huge amount of money (approximately Rs. 70 to 90 Lakhs) every year. Usually the producer borrows this amount either from bank or from other NGO's or Organizations paying high rate of interest to meet up the needful expenditure. That is why every producer of mobile theatre first of all thinks of profit. 'Profit is a must. Ours is not a charity organization. Our goal is to reach the satisfaction of the audience and we are keeping glamour artist to achieve that', says Subodh Majumdar, the producer of Theatre Bhagyadevi.

In many cases mobile theatre fails to perform on stage because of heavy rainfall and flood, and sometimes the troubles viz. bomb blast firing, bandh etc., created by the insurgent groups of the state. Besides, they have to compromise or to donate some amount to every inviting

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<sup>3</sup> Informant : Ratan Lahakar, Male, Age 75, Producer of Kohinoor Theatre and Krishna Roy, Male, Age 74, Producer of Awahan Theatre, Pathsala, Barpeta, Assam

organization. Considering all these aspects a producer has to proceed in his venture. It is really a difficult job. And that may be the reason, the producer hesitates to depend directly upon new actors or technicians or playwrights. They of course encourage new faces but subsequently they prefer a few old and well established artist mainly glamour artists and technicians. Regarding a glamour artist Sarat Majumdar, the producer of *Bhagyadevi Theatre* says 'As we spend money we have to think about its collection. We borrow film artists and accommodate them in mobile theatre because people like it. Besides, every inviting committee raise the same question 'which artist you keep this year?' and we feel helpless.' 'Glamour artists are treated separately because they deserve it. If we treat a glamour artist like an ordinary one why people will show interest to them', says Ratan Lahakar, the producer of Kohinoor Theatre. Regarding the providend fund of the workers, the producer of a mobile theatre says : *in mobile theatre no workers are permanent so opening provident fund is not possible.*<sup>4</sup> However it is seen that the workers of a mobile theatre during their stay receive all sorts of aids from the producer.

Still mobile theatres can not be placed as flawless. Sometimes it is seen that these theatres try to focus only the mechanical activities on stage. Using gimmick on stage they want to create a boom. The producers know better than others that these are short lived and sometimes against

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<sup>4</sup> Informant : Krishna Roy

the culture of Assamese people. Money or profit may be desirable but theatre is connected with a novel concept to guide the masses. Drama is not merely a means to earn money, it is education, entertainment as well as recreation. The producers of mobile theatre will have to remember this spirit. If they consider mobile theatre simply as money making organization then there will be no difference between the gamblers of a casino and the producers of mobile theatres. Without artistic presentation mobile theatre will definitely witness a darker future. No Assamese is willing to see the ruin of the mobile theatre in the pages of history. Therefore it is advisable to all the theatre troupes to be more conscious in selecting their plays and performing it on stage. Otherwise people will have to wait not for long to see the closing of all the theatre troupes in the coming days.

Again to create a peaceful as well as comfortable atmosphere inside a mobile theatre the producers have to pay a handsome salary even to the ordinary workers so that they can meet up their necessary needs.

Another important aspect that the producer of a mobile theatre has to consider is the health problem of an artist or a worker. If a worker or a player suffers from certain diseases during their tour of performance he never gets leave and in spite of his trouble he has to perform on stage. He is bound to travel along with the troupe like a lifeless object from one place to another. It is really painful. To do justice these players or workers should be given rest at least for two to three nights.

To avoid all these problems the workers of a mobile theatre should have a constitution to establish their rights. Besides, there should have a 'Financial Trust' for every workers of a mobile theatre so that in their rainy days they can get money from it.

Now what the government of Assam is doing for the development of mobile theatre is a big question. At present the state government of Assam has taken no step for the improvement of mobile theatres of Assam. In 1987 Govt. of Assam, to encourage the playwrights and actors and actresses of mobile theatres announced two awards. One is 'Atul Ch. Hazarika best playwright award' and the other is 'Natasurya Phani Sarma best actor / actress award'. In 1987 the prestigious Atul Ch. Hazarika best playwright award was awarded to the renowned playwright, director Mahendra Barthakur for his play *Mukhya Mantri* performed by *Hengool Theatre*, while the prestigious Natasurya Phani Sarma best actor / actress award was awarded jointly to Jibeswar Deka for his excellent acting in the play *Dadhisi* performed by *Makunda Theatre* and to Suren Mahanta for his excellent acting in the play *Illiad and Odyssey* performed by *Kohinoor Theatre* respectively. These awards were awarded by the then Chief Minister Prafulla Kr. Mahanta. After a long interval in 2009 this award was given to Achuyut Lahkar and others by Tarun Gogoi, Chief Minister of Assam. It is pathetic to feel that the govt. of Assam is ignoring an industry where six thousand families are directly or indirectly involved.

However many NGO's or organizations are doing their level best for the uplift of these theatre parties by announcing prizes for their excellent performance. One such organization is Y's Men's and Y's Menette's Club of Guwahati. Every year this unique organization gives more than sixty awards in twenty one events to every mobile theatre organizations. Besides, they felicitate a number of workers of mobile theatre who glorified this industry to reach today's position. This is unquestionably a novel step taken up by the members of Y's Men's and Y's Menette's Club of Guwahati. *'Mobile theatre of Assam has played a very vital role in enriching the cause of performing arts and cultures. It is the mobile theatre industry of Assam which has given exposure to so many talents in the field of theatre and drama. A number of playwrights in Assam have sharpened their skill through mobile theatres. In this background our club has taken a vow to encourage the persons involved in this industry through recognizing their talent and felicitating them publicly'* says, Asok Pansari, President, Y's Men's and Y's Menette's Club, Guwahati.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of all these problems, we are hopeful about the future of mobile theatres of Assam. In the coming days more mobile theatres will emerge. They will solve all their drawbacks and will provide more job opportunities for the educated youths of the state.

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5 Asok Panari : *Natya Silpa*, a souvenir of Y's Mens Bhramayaman Theatre Bata Pradan Anusthan 2005