CHAPTER III

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF MOBILE THEATRE IN ASSAM, SPECIALLY IN NORTH KAMRUP AREA
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YATRA

After the Treaty of Yandaboo (1826) the political power of Assam went into the hands of the British. At first the British were strangers to the land as well as to the people. As they were totally ignorant about the local tongue, they borrowed some people from the other provinces of India as interpreters. Gradually a flow of people had started to come Assam and they settled down as interpreters. The British also found comfortable to these people, as they could communicate with them in English and soon they were being appointed against various administrative jobs, like clerks in their newly established administration. Under the influence of these men, especially the people recruited from Bengal, the British administrators in 1836 made Bengali as the language of the court and the medium of instructions in the schools and colleges of Assam.

In 1873 though Assamese language was reintroduced in the schools and colleges and the courts of Assam, for administrative advantage Assam was combined with East Bengal till 1911. As a result some people

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particularly of the priest class used to go to some interior parts of Bengal and naturally embedded some cultural and other social practices of Bengalis.

Besides, during that period most of the educational institutions were under the jurisdiction of the Calcutta University. And a large number of students went to Calcutta for higher education. These students also came in contact with the culture and tradition of Bengalis.

Another important factor for the practices of Bengali culture in Assam was the tea garden workers' interest on it. Most of the workers of the tea gardens of Assam were mainly from Bengal, Bihar and Orissa and they were very much interested in Non-Assamese programmes.

Moreover Assam was a land of attraction for the pilgrims specially for the Hindus for a long time. These pilgrims often visited pilgrimages like Kamakhya, Hajo or Umananda and a few of them permanently settled in these places forever. These people also helped in the development of non Assamese culture and tradition.²

As a result, the existing popularity of Assamese bhaona or ankiya nat gradually declined specially in the urban areas. Eminent scholar H. Bhattacharya writes “Along with the progress of time and varying circumstances, the bhaona began to undergo some changes in the nature

² Lop Cit.
of their performances; the long standing religious fervour gradually declined...".

This declined popularity of *bhaona* inspired (specially in North Kamrup area of Assam) for the development of another performing art called *yatra*. The people who went to Bengal for various reasons came in touch with Bengali *yatras* and they were so much attracted by this *yatra* that they encouraged for the development of this art form in their native places. And gradually *yatra* developed in Assam.

Meanwhile the traditional Bengali theatre, commonly known as *yatra* also underwent a rapid change owing to the spread of English education, growing affluence of trading families and the rise of the middle class. The *yatra* (literally means a journey or the starts of a journey) of Bengal originated as an associative ritual of religion. It evolved like folk theatres in other parts of India, along distinctive lines and developed its distinctive features suited the native genius of the people of the region. But in the mid nineteenth century a major transformation occurred in these *yatras* of Bengal. The role of the *Adhikari*, the owner and final arbiter in all matters concerning the functioning of a *yatra* troupe was getting slowly undermined by the intrusion of quite a few among the new and growing class of baboos- in Calcutta, who found in forming amateur *yatra*, a new avenue of pleasurable indulgence.

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3 Ibid, p. 63.

Besides, when Lebedeff, a musician and composer, linguist, geographer and tireless traveller from Russia, coming to Calcutta first performed the Bengali version of the English play *Kalpanik Sangbadal* on 27th November 1795, the people of Bengal witnessed an extra taste in theatre. Gradually Bengali theatres developed and many new theatre halls were emerged. Ramnarain Tarkaratna, Michael Madhusudhan Dutta, Dinabandhu Mitra and others composed many new Bengali plays and these were performed on the stage successfully.5

During that period the students of Assam who were studying in Calcutta were attracted by this *yatra*. At the same time the Bengali people who were staying in Assam were also attracted by these Bengali *yatra* and took initiative to perform Bengali *yatra* in Assam. In the beginning their activities rest upon some religious ceremonies like Durga Puja, Kali Puja etc. Meanwhile some enthusiastic native youths also formed a new kind of make shift theatre halls and performed Bengali mixed Assamese plays. Sometimes they invited some Bengali Ostad to look after their performance and sometimes they performed themselves too. And gradually Assamese *yatra* developed.6

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Before going to discuss Assamese yatra, let us see the origin of the word ‘yatra’. Some critics opined that Assamese yatra, a very prominent genre of folk theatre, had originated under the direct influence of the Bengali yatra. They believed that although this powerful medium of folk entertainment is prevalent in Assam, Bihar and Orissa, Bengal is its real birthplace. Eminent scholar Balwant Gargi in his book Theatre in India writes "— though the yatra is equally popular in Orissa and eastern parts of Bihar, it originated in Bengal.”

Again noted scholar M.L. Varadpande in his book History of Indian Theatre writes ‘Historically the yatra as a dramatic form owes its existence to the Krishna Bhakti cult of Bengal. The dramatic poems such as Jaydev’s Gita Govinda and Babu Chandidas’ Krishna Kirtan set the background.’

Bengali yatra actually originated during the advent of Saint Chaitanya Dev. After returning from Gaya in 1507 AD Chaitanya Dev arranged a yatra play called Rukmini Haran (Abduction of Rukmini) in the house of one Chandra Sekhar, where he himself took the role of Rukmini. The performance was successful and it was hailed by the audience. It is true that Jaydev’s famous romantic poetry Gita Govinda provided the real foundations of yatra. A.B. Keith in his book Sanskrit Drama writes, “As in Jaydev’s Gita Govinda we have the literary form of the expression

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of the substance of the yatra, lyric songs, and to do this must be added the claims of the music and dance.”

In Assamese, it is difficult to say if anybody had used the term *yatra* before Sankardeva. Dr. Maheswar Neog writes What type of yatra, if any, was prevalent in Kamrupa Assam before Sankara cannot definitely be known. But he uses the term yatra to describe such of his full fledged dramas as the Kali Damana and the Parijat Harana, which suggests an impress of this Non Classical popular type of play, whether Sankara saw its representation in his own province or outside. Sankardeva, after visiting some religious places over Orissa and Bengal conceived *ankiya nat* at his own land and performed his first play called *Chinnayatra*. About Sankardeva’s plays Varadpande opines, Sankardeva seems to have been influenced by the earlier Krishna Theatre that flourished particularly in the Utkal and Mithila regions

While *bhaona* as a medium of entertainment and instruction remained quite popular all over Assam, a few enthusiastic people developed a new type of bhaona called *gayan bayan* in South Assam and West Assam. The word *gayan* literally means a singer and *bayan* means a skilled musical instrument player. Both *gayan* and *bayan* play an


11 M.L. Varadpande, op.cit. p.76.
important role in Sankardeva’s Bhaona performances. Their number is never less than five, it increases even up to some twenty or more. The greater the number, the more gorgeous the show.\textsuperscript{12}

However the \textit{gayan bayan} is not like the \textit{bhaona} of Sankardeva. Though it carries a lot of features of \textit{bhaona}, it also touches Bengali \textit{yatra}, specially in music. There were several persons in a \textit{gayan bayan} troupe. The chief of the troupe is called \textit{gayan}. Here \textit{gayan} in the beginning entertained the audience with music, dance and sloka. Use of harmonium, tabla, khol and cymbal is another important feature of \textit{gayan bayan} troupe. However a few parties performing \textit{ankiya nats} in South and West of Assam were known as \textit{gayan bayan} parties and their performance was known as \textit{Sabha}. Towards the middle of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century a renowned \textit{bayan}, named Jina Bayan performed \textit{gayan bayan} at the village Palla in the district Kamrup. Besides, there were some other \textit{gayan bayan} troupes quite popular in Bajali Area. These were Bamakhata Gayan Bayan Dal, Akaya Gayan Bayan Dal, Kaljirapara Gayan Bayan Dal and Bhaluki Gayan Bayan Dal. Most of these \textit{gayan bayan} troupes performed plays based on the episodes of the two great Indian epics: \textit{The Ramayana} and \textit{The Mahabharata}, viz. \textit{Bali Badha}, \textit{Sita Haran}, \textit{Parijat Haran}, \textit{Samundra Manthan} and others.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{12} H.Bhattacharya, op. cit., p.42.

\textsuperscript{13} Dhirendra Talukdar: \textit{Bajalit Natya Sarsar Dharabahikata}, in \textit{Bajali Darpan}(Pathssala: Reception Committee, 53\textsuperscript{rd} Asom sahitya Sabha, 1987) pp- 72-74
The members of the *gayan bayan* troupe put on a special kind of dress white in colour, called *bacowal* fastened to a cloth girdle round the waist. On the head they put on a white turban, the front portion of which is pointed upwards, but this turban was different from that of *sutradhra* of Sankardeva’s *bhaona*.¹⁴

After the arrival of the British the popularity of *ankiya bhaona* and *gayan bayan* gradually fell down and a new form of *yatra* developed under the initiative of some people who had visited Bengal and enjoyed Bengali *yatra*.

This new type of *yatra* first developed in the second half of the nineteenth century in Lower Assam, specially in North Kamrup Area. In between 1860-80, the first commercial *yatra* dal of Assam was established in a small village called Murkuchi in the undivided Kaprup District (now in Nalbari District), under the initiative of Jaydev Sarma.¹⁵ However much is not known about this *yatra* troupe.

In the autobiography of Lakshmi Nath Bezbaruah too we find some references of Bengali Yatra parties that were formed by some Assamese people. In his autobiography ‘*Mor Jivan Sowaran*’ it is stated

¹⁴ H. Bhattacharya, op. cit., p.41

that sometimes before he left for Sivasagar from Lakhimpur, during his childhood days, in about 1870-75, the famous Tithi Ram Bayan of Barpeta travelled in upper Assam with his tropes and performed some Begali plays like *Radhar Man Bhanjan*.\(^{16}\)

Meanwhile Monhari Das and Haricharan Das, two of Tithi Ram Bayan’s contemporaries, also formed two other *yatra* parties at Barpeta. These *yatra* parties had followed the tradition of Bengali *yatras* and performed Bengali plays.

In about 1875, a Bengali gentleman named Gopal Ostad happened to come to Kamakhya temple in Guwahati. As he was proficient in the art of music and dramaturgy, under his initiative another *yatra* dal was formed at Kamakhya. The most popular play they performed was *Jayadrath Badh*. However a devastating fire one night accidently caught the whole house of Gopal Ostad and the poor Ostad was burnt to death. After his death the whole party was shattered.\(^{17}\)

In 1888 Bhogi Ram Kakati had taken the initiative to form a new *yatra* dal at Bhaluki, a small village, 10 kms away from Pathsala. Following the tradition of Bengal, this *yatra* dal performed many mythological plays, such as *Surath Uddhar, Parasuramar Matri Hatya, Nal Damayanti*,

\(^{16}\) Lop. cit.

\(^{17}\) Lop. cit.
Harichandra Raja, Gayasurar Harisadhana etc. But in 1903 owing to financial difficulty this yatra dal was closed down. Introduction of Chokora and Bibek character is a significant event of this yatra troupe.\(^{18}\)

In 1910 Bhadiram Kalita started another yatra dal again at Bhaluki. This yatra dal had performed their shows for twenty years in different places of Lower Assam. In 1908 ‘Bamunkuchi Yatra Dal’ was formed. The manager of this yatra dal was Krishna Sarma. This yatra dal had performed a few historical plays probably written in Bengali. These were Kisak Badha, Uttara Parinaya, Lava Kusha, Meghnad Badha, Raja Harichandra & Lakshya Bali. Krishna Sarma, popularly known as Krishna Mahajan was the manager while Jagat Sarma, a man from Bengal was the director (Ostad) of this party. In 1910 under the leadership of Santa Ram Choudhury ‘Pathsala Theatre Party’ was formed. In 1917 this party was renamed as ‘Pathsala Natya Samiti’, Dhrubacharit was one of the most popular plays performed by this party. In 1916, Makunda Deka formed ‘Helana yatra Dal’ at Helana, a small village located seven kms away from Pathsala. From 1916 to 1950 this yatra dal performed different plays in different areas of undivided Kamrup district. Some of its famous plays were Radhar Man Bhanjan, Surath Uddhar and Ananta Mahatma. Later on this yatra dal was renamed as ‘Nataguru Opera’. The organizer of ‘Nataguru Opera’ was Harekrishna Deka, son of

\(^{18}\) Informant: Narayan Ch. Goswami, Male, Age 87, VIII+ PO - Helana, Dist-Barpeta, Assam.
Makunda Deka. In the beginning year Nataguru Opera performed three plays namely *Milan Tirtha, Kapilir Bukut* and *Louha Manab*, along with three dance dramas viz. *Britrasur Badh, Raktabiz Badh* and *Durgamasur Badh*. Renowned actors – Rajani Sarma, Adya Sarma, Kanak Sarma and Prabhat Sarma had acted on the stage of Nataguru Opera for many years. A copy of the original poster of Nataguru Opera is attached in this study.\(^{19}\)

In 1921 under the leadership of Braja Nath Sarma ‘Kalika Opera Party’ was formed at Barpeta. Braja Nath Sarma came up with a number of dramatic qualities that broke the ground not only in acting but in form and technique. He translated a number of plays from Bengali to Assamese, besides his novel composition of Assamese plays. A young artist named Uday Bhagawati had been the director of ‘Kalika Opera Party’ for a many years. Some of its famous plays were – *Meghnad Badh, Lava-Kusha, Smasan, Mayamtta, Chandragupta* and *Bhaskar Pandit*. Gouri Sarma, Somnath Sarma, Sarbeswar Sarma, Daiba Bharali, Rajani Bhattacharya and Uday Bhagawati had been the actors of this party. After a few years of survival The Kalika Opera Party began to be disintegrated. Lastly his brother Krishna Sarma also deserted this party and the Kalika Opera Party was forced to close down in 1924.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) Informant: Narayan Ch. Goswami

In 1930 Braja Nath Sarma started his first commercial theatre party called ‘Assam Kahinoor Theatre Party’. Naga Konwar, ‘Maran Jiari’ and Banraja were some of the novel Assamese plays performed by this party. In 1931 ‘Assam Kohinoor Theatre Party’ was renamed as ‘Union Kohinoor Opera Party’. In 1933 Braja Nath Sarma for the first time introduced co-acting in a theatre party at Doomdooma. During that period acting by any woman was considered as an offence by the contemporary society and the role of a female actress was done by a male actor wearing female dresses with broken voice. This resulted in poor depiction of the women characters on stage. That is why Braja Nath Sarma first took a bold step by introducing female characters as actresses on stage. Most of the women first hesitated but a few among them were courageous enough to perform on stage. However, Braja Nath Sarma always stood behind them as their prime source of inspiration. Some of the female actresses of that party were Golapi Das from Puranigudam (Nagaon), Phuleswari Das from Chamuguri, Saila Bala Devi from Jorhat, Binoda Gogoi from Nazira and Labanya Das from North Guwahati. The name of these courageous ladies will always remain in the history of Mobile Theatre of Assam for their tremendous endeavour in female acting on stage. In 1936 owing to financial crisis this party was closed down.21

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In 1920-21 Rabi Ram Das, Baliram Peon and Bandhu Rajmistri formed ‘Anandamai Opera Party’. Indreswar Barthakur, the famous dancer was the coordinator of this party. Some of the famous plays performed by ‘Anandamai Opera Party’ were Ananta Mahatma, Sansar Chakra, Maratar Yagua. The chief coordinator of this party was Krishna Sarma, who was the main source of inspiration for the establishment of Nalbari Natya Mandir.22

In 1923 under the leadership of Dr. Dina Nath Sarma, the editor of an Assamese Journal Awahan, and with the help of ‘Ajan Milan Sangha’ of Bamunkuchi (near Pathsala), a new type of theatre party was formed. The name of this party was ‘Nirbak Theatre’. Here ‘Nirbak’ an Assamese word means acting with gestures, without words. The introduction of Nirbak Theatre, is unquestionably a significant event in the history of Assamese dramatic tradition. Though the real source of inspiration of this type of theatre is not known it can be assumed that the producer Dr. Dina Nath Sarma might be dissatisfied with the contemporary Bengali mixed Assamese yatras. Dr. Sarma selected two plays viz Lava Kusha & Raja Harichandra for the performance of first two years and performed it successfully without dialogue. ‘Nirbak Theatre’ was similar to a mime show.23

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23 Basanta Kr. Sarma (1996) : Dr. Dina Nath Sarma : Jivan aru Kriti, pp-53-54

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In 1924 Krishna Nath Sarma formed Dakshin Ganak Bari Opera at Dakshin Ganak Bari, near Sarabhog. *Dhatri Panna, Rakhi Bandhan, Ranjit Singha* and *Kalapahar* were some popular plays performed by this opera.24

In 1925 Surya Kt. Sarma formed Jagannath Opera at Rampur, Dakshin Kamrup. *Pasanda Mardan, Kalapahar* and *Niyati* were some popular plays performed by this opera. It introduced for the first time some Assamese songs in place of Bengali songs on stage.

In 1925 Piplibari Natya Samiti was formed at Piplibari, in Nalbari district, under the leadership of Kamal Kt. Baishya. Rajani Bhatta, Kalicharan Sarma and Ram Charan Sarma were some popular actors of this party.

In 1925 Sanatan Opera party was formed at Bhatipara, Suwalkuchi. Bhuban Chandra manager was the producer of this party.

In 1927 ‘Sri Sri Lakhmi Narayan Opera party’ was formed. The producers of this party were Haladhar Goswami and Puspa Sarma. Two of its popular plays were *Kalapahar* and *Surath Uddhar*.25

In 1927 ‘Gonagaon Binapani Opera’ was formed at Gonagaon, a small village, 8 kms away from Pathsala. It ran for four years. The

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24 Informant: Chana Ram Kalita: Male, Age 63, Vill- Ranakuchi, P.O.-Kalag, Dist- Nalbari, Assam

25 Informant: Narayan Ch. Goswami
'Gobindapur Yatra Dal' was born in 1923 at Gobindapur near Pathsala. 'Jurir Gan' was the main attraction of this troupe. Here like the Sutradhar of an ankia nat four persons sung chorus and gave an idea about the play just before the commencement of the main action of the play. But after three or four years of its birth, this popular yatra dal was closed down. In 1932 'Syamray Opera Party' was formed. After thirteen years owing to poor management system of the producer, of 'Syamray Opera Party' was also closed down. In 1936 'Madhya Bajali Opera' was formed. In the first eight years Naramlal Das and Kahiram Gaonburha made this opera a successful one. After 1941 Ramdev Goswami and Puwaram Pathak took the leadership of this opera.26

In 1928 both Ranjit Sarma and Bhuban Bhuyan formed an opera at Dubi, the birthplace of Devadashi Dance near Pathsala. During that period it was known as 'Natar Gan'. The performance of the two most popular plays namely Ghorasur Badha and Ananta Mahatma made 'Natar Gan' the best among the contemporary troupes. Some famous Devadashi dancers like Baiyabala, Sandehi and Akehari were actresses of this opera. It was the first party to introduce co-acting on the stage of yatra but it was not fully successful for the conservative mind set up of the contemporary audience.27

26 Informant: Naraya Ch. Goswami

27 Dhiraj Kr. Deka, op.cit, p. 92.
In 1930 ‘Sri Sri Sankardeva Opera’ was formed at Bamakhata near Pathsala. It was successful in imparting visual entertainment in the entire Bajali area.

In 1930 ‘Sandha Yatra Party’ was formed by Gopal Bhagawati at Sandha, near Nalbari. *Rukmini Haran, Basanta Bijay* and *Harichandra* were some of its well known plays. In 1939 Mahendra Deka formed another yatra party at Sandha. The name of this party was ‘Bharat Mata Opera Party’. *Swadesh* was its most popular play. In 1930 ‘Gurudev Natya Sangha’ was formed at Haldhibari, near Tihu. The main actor of this party was Sarbeswar Goswami. In 1940, after ten years, Sarbeswar Goswami himself formed a party called ‘Medhipara Milan Opera Party’. The most popular plays of this party were *Swarnamoi* and *Birpuja*.

In 1936 Guru Prasad Barthakur formed Assam Star Theatre at Kujibali, Hahsara, and Sivasagar. Reknowned artists Natasurya Phani Sarma and Satish Sarma from Barpeta acted in this party. Probably it was the first well developed yatra party of Upper Assam. But owing to poor management system this party could not run successfully.

In 1936 at the birth place of Devadashi Dance (Dubi, Pathsala), Parihareswar Yatra dal was formed. Bali Ram Bharali was the producer

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28 Informant: Kali Kt. Das: Male, Age 91, Vill- Barbari, P.O.-Barbari, Dist- Nalbari, Assam
of this party. It performed many novel Assamese plays successfully and continued for a long period of time. Later on it was renamed as Parihareswar Theatre.

In 1936 Ambika Nath Goswami formed Jagadamba Opera at Dhurkuchi, Nalbari. *Bhagya Parinam, Tarabati* and *Hangsha Bahan* were some popular plays they performed. Introduction of well decorated settings was one of the special features of this party.

In 1941 Aran Baishya, popularly known as Urro Bayan formed Sankar Sangha Aran Opera at Marowa, 10 kms. away from Nalbari PS. Earlier it was known as Uror Party or Uror Gan. Arun Baishya's 'Sankar Sangha Opera' was the first party to introduce dance drama in yatra. Now a days it became a tradition to perform dance drama before the main play. In the beginning well known Ostad Uday Bhagawati was the director of this party. A few popular artists of this party were Rajani Bhatta, Dharma Das Misra, Kamala Chakraborty, Prasanna Sarma and Ram Mohan Majumdar. Orchestral concert was performed and looked after mainly by Hangsha Ram Bayan, Naren Sheal and Dharani Bayan.

In 1945 Sarat Talukdar and Sarbeswar Deka formed Tihu Natya Sangha at Tihu. It had been continued for four years.

In 1944 Prabhat Sarma, Manik Deka and Krishna Sarma formed Naradpara Burha Goshain Ashrita Natya Dal at village Naradpara of South
Kamrup. It had been continued for long eleven years. Some of the popular artists were Prabhat Sarma, Manik Deka, Madhab Goswami, Hari Goswami, Mahendra Deka and Bhogiram Das.

In 1946 Bhogeswar Kalita formed another yatra party Kalika Shuyata Bhurapara Opera at Bhurapara village, South Kamrup. The tremendous popularity that it received from the audience helped this troupe to complete long eighteen years of performance. This opera was looked after by the renowned actor cum director Surya Kt. Sarma. Two of its most popular plays were *Manikmala* and *Swadhinata*. Nagen Kakati, Pushpa Kalita, Indra Kalita, Haren Sarma were some well known actors of this opera.29

In 1947 while India was celebrating Independence, Gajendra Majumdar of Belsor formed another *yatra* party at Belsor. Renowned actors Kamala Chakraborty, Dharma Das Misra, Kanak Sarma, Rajani Bhatta, and Uday Bhagawati acted in this party. *Parashmani* and *Dashiputra* were two of its most popular plays. Owing to poor management it could not continue for long time.30

In 1950 ‘Milan Natya Samiti’ was formed by Gobinda Haloi at Murkuchi. Surya Baishya was the chief director of this party. In 1957

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29 Informant: Naraya Ch. Goswami

30 Informant: Mohendra Mohan Lahakara: Male, Age 59, Vill- Pandula, P.O.-Kalag, Dist- Nalbari, Assam
Mauzadar Jogendra Dutta Choudhury formed ‘Basudev Opera Party’ at Ghograpar, 15 kms away from Nalbari town. It ran for only three years. But within this short span of time it occupied a permanent place among the contemporary audience. The most popular plays they performed were *Puspanjali, Mukti, Jay Yatra, Premar Samadhi* and *Sakuntala*.

In 1959 ‘Nataraj Opera’ was formed at Pathsala by a young artist of Bagribari Opera Party – Sada Lahkar. From 1953-55, with the well known play director Chandra Choudhury, he acted in ‘Bagribari Opera Party’. It is said that in two plays namely, *Kohinoor and Bandir Santan* performed by Bagribari Opera Party Sada Lahkar’s performance was so good that the people who enjoyed those plays remembered his acting for a long period of time. Sada Lahkar’s Nataraj Opera gained tremendous popularity for its acting, settings and management. This opera was quite different from other yatra parties especially in light, music and sound. Suren Patgiri, Bhabananda Patgiri, Basanta Sarma, Rudra Choudhury and Dharani Barman were some of the main actors of this party, while *Kalapahar, Kohinoor, Bhakatar Ahban, and Kuruksetra* were some of its famous plays. Chandra Choudhury and Kamala Baishya were the main directors of this party.

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31 Informant: Kali Kt. Das

32 Achyut Lahkar: Male, Age 79, Producer of Nataraj Theatre, Pathsala, Assam
After Nataraj Opera many new parties were formed in different parts of the state. But most of them failed to perform their shows successfully for a long period. In 1963 when Nataraj Theatre, the first mobile theatre of Assam was formed by Achyut Lahakar, people came in contact with an extra taste in performance. The popularity of yatra parties gradually declined mainly due to its extreme use of traditional music, over acting and lack of well decorated stage. It is true that yatra had provided an extra ordinary visual entertainment when the people of Assam were not fully aware of it. That is why every Assamese, even today, remembers the unique and artistic techniques as well as performance of yatra parties of Assam.

**DRAMATIC ART AND TECHNIQUE OF YATRA**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the flowering of Assamese yatra with the formation of numerous yatra parties in different parts, especially in North Kamrup area of Assam. The men, who moulded and shaped Assamese yatra to a particular height were Braja Nath Sarma, Krishna Sarma, Harendra Nath Sarma, Uday Sarma, Rajani Bhattacharya, Uday Bhagawati, Har Narayan Baishya, Sanatan Hazarika, Dharma Das Mishra, Pushpa Mishra, Kalicharan Sarma, Gopal Mishra, Kamala Adhikari, Srikanta Sarma, Kanak Sarma, Jogesh Sarma and Chandra Choudhury. These renowned personalities not only
established the foundation of mobile theatre but also introduced many new dramatic art and technique in yatras.

Stage

It has already been mentioned that in the days of Sankardeva there was no stage in modern concept. Sankardeva’s bhaona was performed in an open space under a wide and high temporary shade called rabha to protect the audience from the foul weather. Usually these bhaonas were performed inside the namgharas and satras. The stage of a yatra is quite different from that of bhaona. The stage of a yatra was prepared by the people who usually invited these yatra parties. The total height of this stage is about 2.5 ft. while its breadth and length is about 16 sq. ft. and it is built up with the help of clay or soil. However the measurement of the stage is not fixed, it varies depending upon the performing area. The performing area is normally defined by bamboo or wooden poles, connected at the top by simple but decorative banana leaves or coconut leaves. Usually in the performing arena no scenery is introduced. Actors and singers are allowed to define the space in words and to suggest a change of place quickly through their songs, speeches or conventional movement patterns. Later on this clay made stage was transformed into wooden stage. Compared to a clay made stage, a wooden stage has certain advantages as it is easier to carry from place to place. Moreover wooden stage is more comfortable for performance.
Robert Cohen in his book ‘Theatre a brief version’ describes four different types of stage, viz. ARENA, BLACK BOX, PROCENIUM and THRUST. The stage of yatra can be placed into the ARENA format of stage. Here audience gets a special privilege to enjoy the action of the play sitting on any one of the four sides. For musical orchestra, special cabin was arranged nearby the stage. Pieces of bamboos were also used for the sitting arrangement of the audience. A green room is also set up at one corner of the field with the help of cloths and bamboos. This green room was connected through a narrow path among the audience to the stage. A Green Room is a place of rest for actors. For the entry and exit of the actors two or three separate corridors were made up connecting to the green room with the help of bamboo and rope. Place of orchestra was just in front of the stage. The prompter usually sat with the orchestra. Usually the performance of a yatra starts with the musical orchestra. They perform music for twenty to thirty minutes. After that a sutradhara like character entering the stage threw programme. A programme or a leaflet carries all the information of the play which was going to be enacted on the stage. According to tradition, the first programme was given to the chief guest. Earlier this tradition of throwing programme was not in a yatra.

34 Informant: Narayan Ch. Goswami
Performing yatra for a whole night was not always enjoyable for the producer as well as the actors. Poor communication and transportation system often forced the whole troupe to feel tired and to arrive late to their destination. Besides, they got little time to spare for rest as the waiting crowd forced them to start their shows. As the tradition was to perform a play till dawn, it turned into headache if they had to perform a short play and finished early. Because, in that situation, they had to perform another play on the same night. And it was really a problematic matter for the producer as well as the workers of the whole troupe. To solve this problem Dani Haloi, the producer of Piplibari Yatra Party introduced a new system. Breaking the tradition Dani Haloi introduced a system of agreement and accordingly at the time of agreement with the host institutions or villages, the producer distinctly mentioned that at any cost they would not perform two plays at one night. At first it was a very difficult job for him to maintain this tradition but later on it was well established. This tradition helped both the producers and the actors to enjoy their activities as well as to perform their show better.

**Music and Orchestra**

Music was an indispensable adjunct of yatra. Before the commencement of a play it provides an atmosphere to perform the play in a peaceful way. Besides, music helps in enhancing the feelings and

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35 Uday Bhagabati: *Yatrar Para Bhramyamanalo*, (Ghy : Bani Prakash, 1987) pp.36-38
emotions of the characters and the situations. It should be mentioned that in a *yatra* some special dance programmes like, Kathak dance, Miri dance, Daphala dance, Jumur dance, Bihu dance, Bhojpuri dance and others, were always performed within the play though it is not directly connected with the main plot. A *yatra* party used both the traditional and the western musical instruments. Use of harmonium was quite common in *yatra*. Besides, other instruments like Dhalak, Tabla, Cymbals of different types, Clarinet Cornet, and Violin were also used.

**Settings**

Setting plays a vital role in every performance of a play on stage as it forms the background of the action. But in traditional Assamese *yatra* no setting is used as all the four sides of the stage were opened for the audience. And acting in that situation was a great trouble. Simple undecorated light wooden stools, chairs, and tables were employed over and over again to represent a throne, a mountain peak, an aerial cart, a tree or any other elevated place required. The royal figures usually used wooden sword, knife, and bows and arrows. As the onlookers were very much interested in fighting, a few scenes of that type were also introduced. It had provided short time relief as well as entertainment to the spectators. But with the development of Procenium stage, settings get more importance. Earlier in *yatra* when there was no setting the actors through their acting and speech had to create an environment where audience themselves imagined of a scenery.
Lighting

The very word *theatre* means seeing place, implies the crucial function of light. Light is the basic condition for theatrical appearance, without it nothing will be visible. The use of light for dramatic effect can be traced back to the earliest plays. During that time as there was no electricity or gas lights people used some special type of lanterns made of seed oils. The inventions of gas lights and electricity are the blessings of mankind and it provides a better environment for performance on stage. In Assamese *yattra* mainly gas lights and seed oil lamps or kerosene lamps were used. It served the purpose of light at night but could not provide better focus to draw the attention of the audience.

Costume and Make up

Costume design has always been considered as a major components of theatrical performance. It is the design of the appearance of the characters in a theatre. These usually involve designing or choosing clothes, footwear, hats and head dresses for the actors to wear. But it may also include designing masks, make up and other unusual forms such as full body animal suits or animal skin etc. Though the tradition of costume is as old as the theatre itself, in its early stage *yattra* parties could not provide appropriate costume to match the character from all sides. Use of make up was quite common in *yattra* and it helps to make a
young actor look older or an old one look younger. Besides, costume and make up help the actors to play the role of actresses as acting by women was strictly prohibited in the early part of yatra performance. It was Braja Nath Sarma, the producer of Kalika Opera Party, who brought a massive change in costume and make up. He brought suitable dresses for every character and other materials for make up from Calcutta. He also arranged Royal dresses of the Hindu Kings and Muslim Emperors from different sources.

**Bibek Character**

Introduction of *Bibek* charater is another important feature of Assamese yatra. Here *bibek* is an Assamese word meaning a power who can understand both the virtue and the vice, legal and illegal. The main purpose behind the introduction of *Bibek* character may be didactic. A *Bibek* character is often portrayed as an imaginative character who is omnipresent and well aware of the past, present and future. On stage whatever he expressed, expressed not through dialogue but through songs or lores. In a yatra performance *Bibek* character is considered as an indispensable element. Kapila Vatsyayan in *Traditional Indian Theatre* speaks about this character ‘.... *He could appear when he liked, where he liked, and could stand apart and comment on the dramatic action,*'
enter into dialogue with the actor as if in reply to the actor's internal questionings and conflicts, and was the voice of justice, moral order and conscience. Usually this character wore a special type of white or grey coloured garment called Dhuti Piran (traditional Assamese dress) covering the whole body and a white turban and entered into the stage singing some melodious didactic song. The Bibek character always caught the attention of the audience as he stood against all the vices and established truth humanity and virtue.

Chokra

Chokra was considered as an essential character of a yatra party. The concept of chokra may be borrowed from Bengal. The main purpose of chokra is to entertain all classes of spectators of a yatra. Usually the role of chokra was played by teenage boys. Wearing female costumes, these chokras performed dances which were introduced in between the scenes and acts of the main play. The tradition of chokra had been continued for a long period of time. But with the introduction of co-acting on stage under the initiative of abhinaya acharya Braja Nath Sarma, the popularity of chokra declined and a new wave of multifaceted performing technique developed.

MOBILE THEATRE

While yatra parties were blooming in every corner of Assam, a few passionate youths took special initiative to make yatra parties sophisticated, commercial and realistic, and transformed it into mobile theatre. Among these Achyut Lahkar, the brother of Sada Lahkar, was the pathfinder.

In 1963 Achyut Lahkar with the help of his brother Sada Lahkar formed Nataraj Theatre and created a boom in the performing tradition of Assam. Introduction of female actresses, decorated lighting system, comfortable theatre hall, comfortable seating arrangement for the audience, scientific sound and music, forced the people to consider ‘Nataraj Theatre’ as the first mobile theatre of Assam. The four plays performed by Nataraj Theatre in its first year, were Bhogjora by Natasurya Phani Sarma, Jerengar Sati by Uttam Baruah, Tikendrajit by Atul Ch. Hazarika and Haidar Ali by Mahendra Gupta. The directors of these plays were Chandra Choudhury and Dharanidhar Goswami. Some of the well known actors and actresses of that year were Dharani Barman, Chandra Choudhury, Rudra Choudhury, Anupama Bhattacharya, Sada Lahkar, Netrakamal Barthakur and Nagen Sarma. The most popular play of that year was Haidar Ali. After that without any pause Nataraj Theatre had performed innumerable plays. Some of its famous plays were: Beula (by Atul Ch. Hazarika), Angar (by Utapl Dutta), Karabala, Sabitri

In 1965 Nataraj Theatre performed a social play named Bandita. It is the first social play performed by a mobile theatre.

In 1966-67 Nataraj Theatre first introduced a new technique which is known as 'theatre scope'. In its next year the introduction of both the 'theatre scope' and 'projector' helped the director to present some dramatic scenes more realistically on stage. This 'theatre scope' technique was controlled by Achyut Lahkar, the producer himself. In 1970-71 Nataraj Theatre used triple stage system for the entertainment of the audience. In 1973 with the help of some theatre artists Nataraj Theatre, under the banner of 'Nataraj Cine Production', made a full length Assamese film named Blackmoney. It is the first 'Assamese film' produced by a mobile theatre. Most of the producers of the current mobile theatres of Assam gained their early experiences from their close association with the then Nataraj Theatre and it went a long way in establishing their careers in this field. Dharani Barman of Suradevi Theatre, Ratan Lahkar of Kohinoor Theatre, Krishna Roy of Awahan Theatre, Prabhat Bora of Puberoon Theatre, Nripen Sarma of Rupalim Theatre, Sarat Mazumdar of Theatre Bhagyadevi, Raghu Malakar of Sri Sri

Informant: Narayan Ch. Goswami
Parihareswar Theatre and Netra Kamal Barthakur of Sri Guru Theatre were some of such producers. However the appearance of Nataraj Theatre decreased the importance of yatra parties in the performing field of the state.

Contribution of 'Nataraj Theatre' to the wide field of mobile theatre of Assam can be traced as follows.

1. It is the first theatre party to introduce electric equipments in a mobile theatre.

2. For the first time it performed both Classical and Traditional Assamese dances on stage.

3. With the local musical instrument Nataraj theatre first used Western musical instruments like electric guitar, organ etc.

4. For the first time it performed social drama on stage. At first they performed Angar, a Bengali social play by Utpal Dutta. After that, in 1965-66 they performed Bandita an Assamese social drama.

5. It is the first and only mobile theatre of Assam to perform successful shows out side Assam.

6. For the first time it introduced colourful moving stage in mobile theatre.

Informant: Achyut Lahkar
7. It is the first theatre to introduce theatre scope and projector in mobile theatre.

8. It is the first theatre to perform novel Assamese plays in mobile theatre.

9. It is the first and only mobile theatre of Assam to perform plays in three different languages—Hindi, Bengali and Assamese in one session.

10. It is the first mobile theatre to introduce revolving stage in mobile theatre.

11. It was the first theatre to perform plays only for adult.39

The thriving popularity of ‘Nataraj Theatre’ helped to bloom two other mobile theatres: namely ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’ at Hajo and ‘Suradevi Theatre’ at Chamata. Both these parties successfully brought a new outlook in the field of mobile theatre and succeeded in fulfilling the taste of the audience within a short span of time. The birth of ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’ and ‘Suradevi Theatre’ brought a new epoch in the development of mobile theatre of Assam.

In 1964, coming from ‘Nataraj Theatre’, Dharani Barman in memory of his mother Suradevi Barman, formed a new party called ‘Suradevi Natya Sangha’. It was not a theatre party in the proper sense, Informant: Achyut Lahkar.
but an improved form of the yatra party. Earlier in a yatra performance all the four sides of the stage were opened for the audience. But here Dharani Barman, the producer made a change and kept three sides open for the audience. In its performance Suradevi Natya Sangha was overall successful. In 1966 Dharani Barman introduced three dimension stage techniques and transformed ‘Suradevi Natya Sangha’ into ‘Suradevi Theatre’. In its first year Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha and well known artist Brajen Barua were appointed as the play director and music director of Suradevi Theatre respectively. Under the initiative of both these persons, Dharani Barman in the beginning year made ‘Suradevi Theatre’ a popular theatre party staging. The four historical plays, namely Raja Harichandra, Sabitri Satyaban, Samrat Asoka and Samudragupta. It is said that the acting of Dharani Barman, Haren Goswami, Rajani Talukdar, Dhaneswar Sarma, Jogesh Sarma, Arati Goswami, Swarna Roy and Bhola Kakati in ‘Suradevi Theatre’ were so bold that the audience had forgotten for a moment, whether they were enjoying a real drama or not.40

From its beginning, ‘Suradevi Theatre’, through some well knitted plays, created an unforgettable sensation among the audience. These plays were Raja Harichandra, Britrasur, Chambalar Abhisap and Khudhita Chambal. The play Chambalar Abhisap was written by Karuna Baishya. The play was based on the real story of Phulan Devi,

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40 Informant: Dharani Barman, Male, Age 78, Producer of Suradevi Theatre, Chamata, Dist. Nalbari, Assam
the queen of Chambal. The role of Mansing, who was known as the terrors of Chambal, was played by the producer Dharani Barman himself. The acting of Dharani Barman was so bold that even today the spectators of that time speak on his bold acting of Mansing in the play *Chambalar Abhisap* and *Godapani* in the play *Jerengar Sati*. In *Chambalar Abhisap* the roles of Rupa, Lakhan Sing and Daroga were performed excellently by Haren Goswami, Akshaya Patgiri and Surya Baishya respectively. The acting of Jogesh Sarma and Bhola Kakati were also excellent.

In 1971-72 ‘Suradevi Theatre’ performed another sensational social play *Saru Bowari*. The role of Saru Bowari was performed by Minati Das Bharali, while the role of Danger Bowari was performed by Arati Talukdar Baruah. During that time the female actresses, especially after their marriage never liked to perform in mobile theatre. But Minati Das Bharali and Arati Talukdar Baruah were exceptional.

Like Nataraj Theatre, Suradevi Theatre also brought certain changes in stage decoration. The man who had made all these changes was Akshya Patgiri from Belsor. With the help of Akshya Patgiri, Dharani Barman introduced ‘revolving stage’ and ‘three dimension stage system’.41

‘Suradevi Theatre’ was the first mobile theatre to perform a biographical play on the stage of mobile theatre. They performed

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Sabyasashi Bishnu Rabha, a play based on the life of Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha, written by the well known playwright Mahesh Kalita.42

While Suradevi Theatre was imparting visual entertainment all over Assam, the kind hearted producer Dharani Barman thinking about the old and neglected artist of the locality, formed a new theatre troupe, named Suradevi Silpi Tirtha just to accomodate and rehabilitate the old and neglected artists. Some of the artists of this Silpi Tirtha were Kamala Chakraborty, Sarbeswar Rajbongshi and others. In its first year it performed four plays namely Amio Manuh, Satru Kanya, Meghabrita Bhaskar and Sabitri Satyaban. In the first year both Dharani Barman and Kamal Chakraborty were the directors, while Dimbeswar Deka and Nilima Roy were the play back singers of Suradevi Silpi Tirtha.43 However this unshaken attempt that Dharani Barman has made was not fully successful and after a few decades Suradevi Silpi Tirtha was closed down.

In 1966 Kanina Mazumdar of Hajo formed ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’. It is the first and only mobile theatre, where Natasurya Phani Sarma and the recipient of prestigious Dada Saheb Phalke award, Asom Ratna Bhupen Hazarika worked together. In its first year it performed Sonit Kuwari, Sahjahan, Raygad and Emuthi Chaol. The excellent

42 Dr. Jagadish Patgiri: Asomor Bhramyaman Theatre, in Natak (Digboi: Gariyashi Sangha, 2000), p.117

43 Informant: Dharani Barman
performance of Mahananda Sarma, Natasurya Phani Sarma, Sumitra Baruah and Nalini Devi in the play Emuthi Chaol in the second year helped ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’ to move forward. Well known play director Rudra Choudhury was the play director of ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’ for many years.

In the third year it performed four plays viz. Kohinoor, Chiraj, Sonar Bharat and Dabi. Phani Sarma occupied a permanent place in Assamese Theatre through his outstanding performance in Chiraj. In the fourth year it performed Dabi, Babrubahan, Kohinoor, Sita Uddhar and Sarmila. All these plays were successful on stage. After that it performed Marjiyana, Sako, Hitlarara Pherari Phouj, Râm Banabash, Sarmita and other plays. In 1972-73 renowned film actor Abdul Mazid had made his entry as a play director in Purbajyoti Theatre. Bhaben Baruah, the well known play writer, Ratan Lahkar, the producer of ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ and Krishna Roy, the producer of ‘Awahan Theatre’ worked together in this theatre.

In 1973 Purbajyoti Theatre was renamed as ‘Amar Theatre’. In 1973, when Karuna Mazumdar, the producer of ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’, became physically weak, Dinaray Das had taken the initiative and tried to continue the traditions of ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’ in the name of ‘Amar Theatre’. In the beginning year it had performed four plays viz. Bhai-Bhai, Garibi Hatao, Sati Tulashi, Bharat Samrat and Ejyeto Manuh.
The main actors and actresses were Rudra Choudhury, Harish Medhi, Lakshi Mazumdar, Phulkumari Bhuyan, Mina Kumari and Aradhana Das. Next year it performed *Sahu Aai, Bhai-Bhai, Pati Patni, Sati Tulashi* and *Dhanir Adalat*. The play *Pati Patni* by Rudra Choudhury was the translated dramatic version of the Academy Award Winning Novel ‘Matir Manish’ by Kalindi Charan Panigrahi. The play *Sahu Aai* was well received by all sections of people. Here the roles of Sri Kanta Kalita, Kabuliwala and Physically handicapped Ajay were performed respectively by Rudra Choudhury, Haren Malakar and Dulal Choudhury. But owing to Dinaray Das’s inefficiency ‘Amar Theatre’ could survive only for a few years.\(^\text{44}\)

Just one year after the birth of Purbajyoti Theatre i.e. in 1967, a new theatre was formed at Pathsala, the birth place of mobile theatre. Hemkanta Talukdar the producer named it Mancharupa Theatre and spent a huge amount of money. Though in acting it could contribute a little, in stage decoration it had introduced many new techniques. It is the first theatre party to introduce static double stage and after that static triple stage system. The stage system of all the mobile theatres of present time is just an imitative form of Mancharupa Theatre. In its first year Mancharupa was the center of attraction for stage decoration. But it could not establish its popularity for long and after three years of performance, it was closed down.

\(^{44}\) Jatin Goswami : op. cit, p.83.
In 1968 Sarat Mazumdar, receiving inspiration from Arun Baishya, the producer of ‘Arun Natya Samittee’ formed ‘Bhagyadevi Natya Samittee’. The name Bhagyadevi was given in memory of his mother Late Bhagyadevi Mazumdar. In the first year Bhagyadevi Natya Samittee performed *Milan Mandir, Dashyu Mohan* and *Rajdrohi*. All these plays were directly borrowed from Bengali Theatre. In the beginning ‘Bhagyadevi Natya Samittee’ was not a theatre party, but an opera where three sides were kept open for the audience. In 1973 the producer Sarat Mazumdar transformed ‘Bhagyadevi Natya Samittee’ into ‘Bhagyadevi Yatra Scope’. That year they performed *Jivanar Are Are, Milan Mala, Rakta Ganga, Puspanjali* and *Dui Bowari*. ‘Bhagyadevi Yatra Scope’ was a developed form of ‘Bhagyadevi Natya Samittee’. Here in place of three sides, only one side was kept open for the audience i.e. it had proscenium type of stage. In 1975 ‘Bhagyadevi Yatra Scope’ was transformed into ‘Bhagyadevi Theatre’. That year they performed *Milan Mala, Rati aru Ramani, Amanuh, Krishna Sudhama* and *Bir Chandmabeshi*. After that they performed many plays and most of them were appreciated by the audience. Some famous plays of Bhagyadevi Theatre were – *Milan Mandir, Sandhikhyan, Saonar Megh, Prithivir Mrityu, Kabuliwala, Mainamati, Jivanar Ara Are, Jonakir Biya, Jaydev, Lt. Sahabar Laj, Devi Maheswata, Haizek* and *Chiraj*. In 1981 Kalyan Dey and Bhaben Baruah came to ‘Bhagyadevi Theatre’. Both these artists made some changes in light, sound and acting in ‘Bhagyadevi Theatre’.
and for that reason the producer Sarat Mazumdar once again renamed ‘Bhagyadevi Theatre’ as ‘Theatre Bhagyadevi’. Now ‘Theatre Bhagyadevi’ is running smoothly under the efficient guidance of Subodh Majundar, the eldest son of Sarat Mazumdar.

In 1974, Biren Kalita of Nalbari formed ‘Rupkonwar Theatre’ at Nalbari. In its first year it performed Kalankini Naika, (a play based on the Hindi film ‘Khilona’); Mallika and Iswarara Phasi. Chandra Choudhury, Ratan Lahkar, Jibeswar Deka, Bhaben Baruah were some of the famous actors. For the first time, it introduced some modern techniques to show ‘train accident’, ‘plane crash’ etc. on stage. In 1975 another person, called Haren Deka formed another theatre named, ‘Biswa jyoti Theatre’ at Nalbari. As both these producers were inexperienced, Rupkonwar and Biswa jyoti theatre parties could not survive for a long period.

Meanwhile in 1972, Ashutosh Bhattacharya and Rishipad Bhattacharya formed ‘Makunda Theatre’ at Makhibaha (Tihu). In the very beginning it was not a theatre party but an opera called ‘Makunda Opera’. In the first year they performed four plays. These were Ajir Manuh, Takar Golam, Kalangkini Sati and Bhismar Pratigya. In the second year, they performed – Janowar, Dui Mahal and Chiriya Khana. In the third year, the Bhattacharya brothers renamed ‘Makunda Opera’

Informant: Subodh Majumdar, Male, Age 40, Producer of Theatre Bhagyadevi, Marowa, Nalbari, Assam
as ‘Makunda Jantrik Theatre’ and performed *Bhagya, Dushasanar Raktapan, Milan Tirtha* and *Tapawshi Ravan*. In the forth year, they performed *Champar Chokulo, Aparadh* and *Bhismar Pratigya*. In the fifth year, they performed *Janatar Adalat, Diaryr Pate Pate* and *Banchita*. In the sixth year, ‘Makunda Jantrik Theatre’ was renamed as ‘Makunda Theatre’. From that time without any pause, ‘Makunda Theatre’ had performed plays in every corner of Assam. In 1987-88, in its 15th year of formation, it staged *Dadhisi* a well written play by Mahendra Barthakur. The play is about the tragic end of an artist of *yatra* troupe. Well known actor Jibeswar Deka was awarded the prestigious Natasurya Phani Sarma Best Actor Award (jointly) for his excellent performance in *Dadhisi*. Makunda Theatre had made a tremendous contribution in the development of mobile theatre in Assam. After the death of both Ashutosh and Risipad Bhattacharya the rising financial mismanagement closed down Makunda Theatre in 2006.

Meanwhile two mobile theatres of Bodo language churned out under the efficient guidance of two gentlemen namely Harikanta Muchahari and Chandra Kanta Muchahari. Both these persons had taken bold steps in establishing Sowzou Phaoni Apha and Sourang Manju Theatre as the first two mobile theatres of Assam in Bodo language.

While Ratan Lahkar and Krishna Roy were jointly taking the initiative to form ‘Kohinoor theatre’, Harikanta Muchahari of Dalgaon formed
Sowzou Phaoni Apha a complete mobile theatre at Dalgaon in 1974. Next year in 1975 ‘Sourang Manju Theatre’ was formed. After that a few mobile theatres of yatra type were also formed in Bodo language. Some of them were Lembro, Hemshree, Maina, Anchi, Nirmali, Angfaury etc. All these parties performed Bodo plays related to Bodo community in Bodo language. But owing to financial crisis not a single party could survive for a long time except ‘Sourang Manju Theatre’.

In 1975 a young foot ball player named Chandrakanta Muchahari popularly known as Chekha formed ‘Sourang Manju Theatre’ at a small sleepy village called Lechra, six kms away from Pathsala. For about sixteen years, it had performed, different types of unique Bodo plays. The standard of Sourang Manju Theatre was to some extent equal to Kohinoor Theatre or Awahan Theatre. Ratan Lahkar, the producer of Kohinoor Theatre, contributed a lot in making Sourang Manju Theatre a successful one. Some of the most successful plays, performed by Sourang Manju Theatre were – Beula, Sadbangsha, Bigriyari, Manjurani and Jarphangla. Padmadhar Basumatyay was the most successful director and actor of this theatre. Some of the popular artists of this theatre were Haren Doimari, Anirudha Basumatari, Gajen Baro, Golak Brahma, Basanti Brahma, Nilima Doimari and Rupahi Basumatyay.46

46 P. Sarma: Souraj Manju Theatre, Chitra Sangbad, an Assamese periodical published from Guwahati dt. 13th September, 1991
Although these theatres brought rapid changes in performance and stage decoration, gradually these theatre troupes lost their popularity. The declining popularity of these theatres was due largely to the fact that the general public taste of the time began undergoing a sort of change. Almost all the plays performed by these theatres were either historical or mythological. The general taste of audience gradually matured and they were not content with historical or mythological or purely fantasy based stories. This change in taste was in keeping with the contemporary Assamese literary scenario, which saw lots of realistic literature particularly novels. The characters in this literature were such that people could identify themselves with them. The stories of these characters were the stories of their day to day life. So as the mobile theatre was intending its reach to the cross section of people a demand for dramatic presentation of realistic stories could be seen among the audience. Moreover the presentation of the dramas in terms of stagecraft, treatment of acting and setting gradually became unacceptable to the audience who were fast maturing in artistic taste. Everything about the dramatic performances of the mobile theatre was largely make belief with no tinge of realism in them. These dramatic performances failed to achieve, to quote Coleridge, ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ which was essential to draw the audience of that time to the theatre halls. The theatres of that time were hardly aware of these changes taking place in public taste and it resulted in its fast declining popularity. The theatre parties, born in the next few years, namely Kohinoor Theatre
and Awahan Theatre seriously heeded to these new requirements to satisfy the audience. Thus began a new environment in the performance of mobile theatre.

In 1975 Ratan Lahkar, the well known actor of Nataraj Theatre and Purbajyoti Theatre, with his close friend Krishna Roy, who was the light director of Nataraj Theatre and Purbajyoti Theatre, formed ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ at the birth place of Mobile theatre, Pathsala. In the beginning year Kohinoor theatre performed five novel Assamese plays. In memory of Rasaraj Lakshmi Nath Bezbaruah and Kalaguru Bishnu Rabha they performed Tejimala and Alankar by Prafulla Bora; in memory of Biplabi Silpi Braja Nath Sarma and Natasurya Phani Sarma they performed Ganga Jamuna by Chandra Choudhury and Charitrahina by Shyama Prasad Sarma and in memory of Silpi Pran Chandra Phukan they performed Maya Mriga by Mahananda Sarma. Among these five plays Tejimala and Alankar were considered as excellent. In the play Tejimala, the role of step mother performed by Mamani Arandhara. The acting of Ratan Lahkar, Ila Kakati and Prasanta Hazarika in the play, Alankar was alluring. The play director was Chandra Choudhury, while the light directors were Krishna Roy and Dwijen Bhatta. Among the actors and actresses – Chandra Choudhury, Prasanta Hazarika, Mahananda Sarma, Ratan Lahkar, Amzad Hussain, Ila Kakati, Upama Baruah, Mamani Arandhara, Kanan Kumari and Sarojani Kalita were prominent.
In 1977-78 (second year) Kohinoor Theatre performed five plays. The massive support that Kohinoor Theatre received from the audience, forced it to perform three plays, namely, *Alankar, Tejimala* and *Charitrahina* repeatedly. In that year they performed two other new plays namely, *Ashirbad* and *Anupama Mor*. Both these plays were written by Prafulla Bora. Prominent actors and actresses of that year were – Chandra Choudhury, Mahananda Sarma, Pabitra Bora, Baladev Saikia, Indreswar Sarma, Praneswar Pathak, Deben Hazarika, Bina Baruwati, Minakshi Chakraborty, Mamani Arandhara, Pratima Bora, Sarala Deka and Usha Choudhury. In 1978-79 (third year) Kohinoor performed six plays. These were *Anurag* and *Aparadh* by Prafulla Bora, *Chandra Grahan* by Mahananda Sarma, *Emuthi Chaol* by Natasurya Phani Sarma, *Alankar* and *Ashirbad* by Prafulla Bora. The charming performance of Mahananda Sarma, Suren Mahanta, Rina Bora and Mina Kumari allured all the spectators of Kohinoor Theatre.

In the forth year (1979-80) Kohinoor Theatre performed *Ganadevata* by Mahananda Sarma and Ratan Lahkar, *Maram Trishna* and *Paharar Jui* by Prafulla Bora, *Surya Grahan* by Chandra Choudhury and *Chandra Grahan* by Mahananda Sarma. The prominent actors and actresses of that year were - Chandra Choudhury, Suren Mahanta, Mahananda Sarma, Ratan Lahkar, Parag Baruah, Ajit Hazarika, Abinash Sarma, Rina Bora, Mina Kumari, Santa Bhattacharyya, Manju Ray and
Khirada Saikia. The play director was Chandra Choudhury and the music director was Dasarath Das.

In 1980-81 (5th year) Kohinoor Theatre performed *Ashimot Jar Herel Sima*, a play by Prafulla Bora, based on an Assamese novel under the same title written by Kanchan Baruah. It is the first play, based on Assamese novel performed by Kohinoor Theatre. The other plays of that year were *Akou Saraighat* by Mahananda Sarma, *Mrityu Devata* by Prafulla Bora, *Man Mandir* by Dr. Anil Talukdar. All these plays were directed by Mahananda Sarma and Hemanta Dutta. The most prominent actors and actresses of that year were – Mahananda Sarma, Ratan Lahkar, Robin Neog, Minati Das, Dulu Devi, Anima Dewan, Lina Hazarika, Rubi Hazarika and well known film actor Nipon Goswami. After that without any pause Kohinoor Theatre has been performing innumerable plays in different places of the state.

In compared to the other mobile theatres ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ is always unique. It has some special features for which it is often considered as the polstar in the wide field of mobile theatre. These features may be stated as below :

1. Kohinoor is the first mobile theatre to perform three shows in one night. In 1980-81 they made this record performing the play *Devi Sanyashini* at Nalbari Rash Mahotsov.
2. Kohinoor is the first mobile theatre to perform 'matinee show'. In 1982-83 they performed Cleopetra at Jorhat as matinee show. On that show they earned rupees eight thousand seven hundred and forty.

3. It is the first mobile theatre to perform two great epics – the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. In 1984-85 it performed the Mahabharata and the very next year the Ramayana on stage.

4. Kohinoor is the first mobile theatre to perform western classics like Illiad Odyssey, Cleopetra, Tarzan Tarzan, Kalsatru, Samrat aru Sundari etc.

5. Kohinoor is the first mobile theatre to build a bridge between the actors of mobile theatre and the celluloid world. Kohinoor first invites film actors to work on the mobile theatre.

6. Bagh Manuh a dance drama, performed by Kohinoor theatre was later on broadcast by Delhi and Guwahati Doordarshan simultaneously. It is the first dance drama of a mobile theatre telecast by Doordarshan.

7. Kohinoor is the first mobile theatre to perform a play based on Assamese novel. The name of that novel was Kanchan Baruah’s Asimat Jar Heral Sima.
8. Kohinoor is the first mobile theatre to perform Hollywood Blockbuster, prestigious Oscar Award Winner James Cameron’s film Titanic. On stage Titanic creates a stir among the audience. The renowned film actress Nikumani Baruah played the role of Rose while Kuntal Goswami played the role of Jack. On the stage Titanic was a grand success. More than 60 persons were seen on the deck of Titanic, when she hit the iceberg.

After the birth of Kohinoor, from 1976 to 1980 many theatres like - Jyoti Rupa, Moon Theatre, Bishnujyoti Theatre, Amar Theatre, Aradhana Theatre, Ma Lakshmi Theatre and others were born. But except Jyoti Rupa and Aradhana no theatre could survive for a long period. In 1976 Golap Borgohain formed ‘Jyoti Rupa Theatre’ at Nitai Pukhuri, Sibsagar. After his death his wife, Arati Tamuli Borgohain takes the charge of the producer and has been maintaining it as smoothly as possible till today. It is the first well decorated class-I mobile theatre of Upper Assam. After celebrating the silver jubilee celebration Jyoti Rupa Theatre establishes a prestigious place in the wide field of mobile theatre. Some of its famous plays are – Kalijar Jui by Mahesh Kalita, Mrityu Sandhan by Awatar Singh, Kal Hira by Ugra Mena, Grahantanta by Dr. Arup Barthakur, Devatar Pap by Sewabrat Baruah and Prem Bandhan by Awatar Singh. In 1977, Abala Barman wife of Dharani Barman, the producer of Suradevi Theatre, formed the first female theatre conducted
by only female characters – and named it as ‘Moon Theatre’. Puspa Devi, the first B.A. pass actress of mobile theatre was the director and actress of Moon Theatre. But Moon Theatre could not earn much popularity among the audience and after a short period Abala Barman had to close down ‘Moon Theatre’. In 1977 Hiranya Barman and Rabindra Barman, sons of Dharani Barman, formed ‘Bishnujyoti Theatre’ and ‘Rang Ghar Theatre’ respectively. Bibhuti Bhattacharya, Bisnu Khargharia and Jibeswar Deka were some of the famous actors of Bishnujyoti Theatre. But after three years of performance the producer Hiranya Barman was forced to close down Bishnujyoti Theatre owing to financial problem. In the beginning though ‘Rang Ghar Theatre’ created a stir among the audience with some plays like *Kushal Kunwar* by Mahesh Kalita and *Kanaklata* by Bhaben Baruah, it could not continue the tradition for long.

In 1978 Sada Lahkar, the brother of Achyut Lahkar formed ‘Aradhana Theatre’. Aradhana Theatre was the developed form of ‘Nataraj Silpi Niketan’, which was formed in 1972. Aradhana Theatre is the first and only mobile theatre of Assam to receive the prestigious National Academy Award for the play *Prithivir Prem*. Experienced playwright, Sujit Singha shaped this play from the novel *Prithivir Prem* by Phani Talukdar.

In 1980 coming from Kohinoor Theatre, one of the two producers of Kohinoor Theatre, Krishna Roy independently formed ‘Awahan
Theatre’. When Awahan Theatre was formed except one or two, most of the theatres failed to receive the admiration from the audience. In its first year Awahan Theatre performed four social dramas. These were Kazirangar Bagh, Agni Kanya and Sneha Bandhan by Prafulla Bora and Jivan Mrityu by Abdul Mazid. All these four plays received grand success. Next year Awahan Theatre performed Ramdhenu by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Simalu Chandan by Mahendra Barthakur, Sneha Bandhan by Prafulla Bora, Kajal Kasturi by Bhaben Baruah and Preyashi by Abdul Mazid. It is remarkable that from the second year i.e. since 1981 Awahan Theatre has been performing more than twenty five plays by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia without any gap. In 1983 it performed three plays by Bhabendra Nath Saikia. These were Amrapali, Bandisal and Manikut. Some of the famous plays of Awahan Theatres are Nilakantha, Samrat, Mad Bhagawat Gita, Ramyabhumi, Banariya Chowali, and Subha Sangbad etc.

After Nataraj and Kohinoor, Awahan has been the only theatre to facilitate some novel Assamese plays on stage. Maintaining all the theatrical qualities it has been creating a comfortable atmosphere in the wide field of mobile theatre since 1980. After the birth of Awahan many new theatres were formed but except a few most of these theatres were closed down. Some of these theatres were Anirban, Puberoon, Chitralekha, Kalpataroo, Aparupa, Devadashi, Apsara, Radhikadevi, Rupalim, Abhijan,
Panchajanya, Indradhanoo, Manchakonwar, Rupanjali, Lakhimi, Indrani, Giri Raj, Uddipan and Turangam theatre. In 1982 Subhash Choudhury formed ‘Anirban Theatre’ at Pathsala. In 1993 Sebabrat Baruah, the well known playwright joined in this theatre as an actor. But as an actor he could not attain much success and that is why devoted himself in composing plays for mobile theatres. In 1984 ‘Aparupa Theatre’ was formed by Mahananda Sarma at Panigaon, 5 kms away from Nalbari. Well known film actor and director Bijoy Sankar had worked in this theatre. Kabuliwala and Nag Kanya were two of its famous plays. In 1986 Nagen Lahkar formed ‘Devadashi Theatre’ at Helana nearly 7 kms away from Pathsala. In the beginning year it has created a boom keeping almost all the famous artists of mobile theatres. Hemanta Dutta, Tohfik Rahman, Reba Phukan and many well established actors and actresses worked together in this theatre. Ridip Dutta’s music direction and Hemanta Dutta’s direction of plays had made Devadashi Theatre as one of the most successful theatre troupes in Assam. In the beginning year they performed Aai, Nabin Master, Mayur Pangshi and Rupban. All these four plays earned unexpected popularity from the audience. But Devadashi theatre could not continue this tradition. Owing to the financial crisis Nagen Lahkar had to close down Devadashi Theatre in 1989.

In 1985 Prasanta Hazarika formed ‘Hengool Theatre’ at Mariyani, Jorhat. It is the 2nd leading theatre party from Upper Assam. Performing
plays like *Invisible Man* Hengool Theatre shows the way to perform science fiction successfully on stage. The play was the translated version of Hollywood blockbuster Invisible man. Some of its well received plays are *Mukhya Mantri, Karengar Ligiri, God Mother, Bandit Queen, Ajali Nabau* and *Buja Manuh*. After the death of Prasanta Hazarika, his wife Ila Kakati Hazarika had taken the charge of the producer of Hengool Theatre. In 1988 Hengool Theatre received the prestigious Atul Ch. Hazarika best play award for the play *Mukhya Mantri*, written by Mahendra Barthakur. Now Hengool Theatre is moving with flying colours under the efficient leadership of Samudra Gupta Hazarika, son of Prasanta Hazarika.

In 1993 Biswa Saikia formed Srimanta Sankardev Theatre at Kujibali, Sibsagar. Since 1993 ‘Srimanta Sankardev Theatre’ has been performing some novel Assamese plays. Some of its famous plays were *Kaldhumuha, Chameli Memshahab, Anakonda, Dongshan, Lalbasti, Lathi, Mandirar Phool, Dak Bangla* and *Nathuram Gadse*.

In 1996 Tralokya Sarma formed Manchajyoti Theatre at Barbhag, Nalbari. Making his theatre party a little different, Tarlokya Sarma, from the very beginning tried to perform some novel Assamese plays maintaining all the theatrical qualities. A few plays performed on the stage of Manchajyoti were *Sanor Kharu Nalage Mok* by Bhaben Baruah, *Andha Devata* by Awatar Singh, *Mai Ata Pap Karim* by Bhaben Baruah, and *Amar Prem* by Prafulla Bora.
In 1999 Naren Das formed ‘Madhabdev Theatre’ at Balitara, 7 kms away from Nalbari. Some of the popular plays performed by Madhabdev Theatre are – Phasikathat Rajkhowa by Bhaben Baruah, Anjan Garar Bivisikha (based on a novel by Prafulla Dutta) by Awatar Singh, Maan Abhiman, Mrityudanda, and Tejpiya Sahib. However the financial crisis and poor management could not fuel Madhabved Theatre for long and in 1994 it was closed down.

In 1998 Nazrul Islam with the help of a few residents of Nalbari town formed Bordoichila Theatre at Nalbari. From the very beginning Bordoichila Theatre catches the attention of the theatre lovers by performing some sensational plays on stage. Dakhal, Joddha, Hat, Akhan Natun Nat, Doctor Bezbaruah, and Pakistanar Preyashi are a few to be named in this regard.

Harekrishna Das, the experienced producer of Pallabi Theatre, Diamond Theatre and Indrani Theatre in 2001, after closing down all the theatre parties, newly formed Pragjyotish Theatre in Guwahati. Aswamedhar Ghora, Emuthi Tarar Jilikani, Parajita Nayak and Guwahatir Gabharu are some of the famous plays of Pragjyotish Theatre.

After that many new theatre parties were formed in different parts of Assam and most of them are imparting visual entertainment to the theatre lovers of the state. A few among them are Debaraj Theatre, Rajashree Theatre, Meghdoot Theatre, Ashirbad Theatre, Saraighat Theatre, Rupayan Theatre, Anuradha Theatre, Chitralekha Theatre and Kareng Ghar Theatre.
However in 2006, under the leadership of Anjana Basumatary a new theatre named Sandaw Baudia Theatre in Bodo language was formed at Masalpur, Bagsa. In 2007-08 this theatre performed four plays in Bodo namely, *Gosokho Burkhaiño Hala* by Phanidhar Deuri, *Gouthar Annyay* by Gadish Basumatary, *Jaykholngao Bema Je* by Jatindra Nath Bado and *Khamglinyay Aor* by Phanidhar Deuri. This theatre troupe attracts a largest number of spectators from all communities of the state.47

It is expected that in the coming days many new theatre will emerge and bring many innovations for the development of the wide field of mobile theatre of Assam.

**DRAMATIC ART AND TECHNIQUES OF MOBILE THEATER**

Theatre techniques are the procedures that facilitate a successful presentation of a play. They also include practices that advanced and enhanced the understanding of the audience to bring to the action and the acting by the cast on the stage. With the rapid strides of science and technology theatre techniques are improving day by day.

**Playwright’s Craft**

Theatre technique is an integral part of playwright’s creative writing of the drama. It is not merely an illusion or imitation of life but a beautiful presentation of reality to the audience. Earlier playwrights were not very much conscious of the presentation of a play rather they stressed on the

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47 Phanidhar Talukdar: Male, Age 52, Lecturer, BHB College, Sarupeta, Assam
pictorial quality. But now-a-days the trend is changing. A playwright’s art now includes his ability to convey ideas to the audience that give the essence to the drama within the framework of its structure. Dialogue is another important aspect that makes his characters come alive and allows for their development in the course of dramatization.

The playwrights of mobile theatre earlier focused different socio-political issues on stage. These playwrights were very much conscious about the social ethos and composed plays for all sections of people. Among these playwrights Prafulla Bora, Mahendra Barthakur, Bhabendra Nath Saikia and others may be placed. On the other hand the new playwrights of present day stress more on technique and less on theme. As a result a section of people always express a sort of dissatisfaction after coming out from theatre hall witnessing a play written by these playwrights. The producers also encourage these playwrights to write such plays where they get an opportunity to show a sinking ship, running train, flying aeroplane etc. The reason behind it, is of course to attract the illiterate village folk.

**The Director’s Craft**

The Director of a mobile theatre has to work for hours and hours during the time of rehearsal, as the success and the failure of a play directly depends upon the director. The director produces the play in the
way he envisages how it ought to be seen. He also interprets the play in a way through which the playwright intended with the play. Besides, the director takes care of the effectiveness of the rehearsals of the actors and co-ordinates the work of designers and the technicians. Unquestionably the work of a director is very troublesome unless he is experienced.

**The Producer's Craft**

The producer of a mobile theatre has to manage all the standpoints on which the success or failure of his party depends. These includes the playwright, the director, stage management, costume and make-up, selection of players, musical staff etc. That means he has to look after both the technical and non-technical matters which have direct or indirect connection to the party. A successful theatre party directly depends upon the mastery of the producer. Though every producer of a mobile theatre has to invest a huge amount of money he or she should think not only of the monetary profit but also the quality of performance as mobile theatres are considered now a days as the backbone of Assamese society and culture.

**Stage Management**

Before discussing stage management let us say a few words on the stage of mobile theatre. Mobile theatres of Assam from its very beginning built the proscénium stage format for performance, which is
essentially a rectangular room with the audience on one side facing the stage on the other; the two separated by an arch called, the proscenium arch through which the audience peers. As the arch creates a picture like frame it is also called picture frame stage. This proscenium stage first developed in Italy during the time Renaissance as a mode of presenting elaborate court masques and other court entertainments.\(^{48}\) Achyut Lahkar the producer of Nataraj Theatre, who is also regarded as the father of mobile theatre developed this stage format with the help of two persons namely Sada Lahakar and Chandra Choudhury. Achyut Lahakar later on introduced many new concepts on stage of mobile theatre like moving stage, revolving stage etc. just to make the system of performance more easier and swift. But the concept of double stage that is prevailing all over Assam now a days was innovated by Hemkanta Talukdar, the producer of Mancharupa Theatre. The static double stage system provides an extra boost to mobile theatre as acting here is possible without any pause. It is supposed that modern prosenceium stage of mobile theatre helps in making mobile theatre more attractive as well as comfortable to the spectators.

Stage management plays a vital role for the overall success of a play. The whole responsibility of stage management is bestowed upon the stage director. The stage director has to work with the director, and

ascertain whether both the director's objectives and the perceptions of the stage designers are compatible and realistic. He also serves the link between the director and the rest of the company, including the actors.

Stage management also includes sceneries, stage lighting, costumes, sound effects etc. And for successful stage production stage director has to put all these techniques together to create an effective environment.

Settings

It has already been mentioned that settings play a vital role in every dramatic performance as it forms the background of the action. Setting is likely to be the first important thing under the general category of theatrical design. It is the first thing that is seen of a play just at the rise of a curtain in the proscenium stage of mobile theatre. Earlier in the stage of yatra, where all sides were opened no setting was used. But gradually it became so important that today no one can think of a play on stage without settings.

Modern settings may be placed under two categories, viz. realistic and abstract. In a mobile theatre these two types of settings are interwoven so closely that sometimes it is difficult for one to draw a line between the two. Realistic settings carry on the tradition of illusionism. This type of settings developed in mobile theatre especially under the initiative of some
unforgettable people like Braja Nath Sarma, Adya Sarma, Achyut Lahkar, Sada Lahkar and Chandar Choudhury. Today almost all the theatre parties of Assam prepare this type of settings for the presentation of a play on stage.

The other type of setting is abstract setting where space, form and light play a vital role in dramatic design. Modern science and technology, and the system of motorizing scene shifting technology, inspired a lot, for the development of abstract settings. Floating walls, rising staircases, walls of lights, blue oceans and the entire surreal environment may be included in this type of settings.

It should be mentioned that settings on a stage have no independent life. The beauty of setting is directly depending upon its performance. In the absence of the actors it does not exist.

Lighting

Light occupies a special place on every dramatic presentation. Earlier the system of stage lighting was not highly developed. The people of ancient Greece used sun light in Greek theatre. In our state people used a kind special lantern of oil seeds. The invention of gaslights and electricity in the 19th century brought a revolutionary change in human civilization and it touches theatres also. Now-a-days the stage light becomes so important that without it acting is almost impossible. Usually
stage lighting system provides an environment to set the moods and sensitivities of the play. It also permits the showing of the emotional charge in the face of the actors. Besides, electricity provides the enormous flexibility of lighting. The incandescent filament is a reasonably small and cool point of light that can be focused, reflected, aimed, shaped and coloured by a great variety of devices. Besides, electric light can be used in innumerable ways upon actors, scenery, audience and on anything, depending upon the needs of dramatic presentation of the action on stage. In present day mobile theatres of Assam have been performing numerous plays based on Holywoods block baster viz. Titanic, Anakonda, Jorasic Park, Invisible man etc. and all these plays would have been a mere dream without modern system of light and sound.

Costumes

The purpose of costumes have to identify characters from the moment they appear on stage and signify the period they belong to or the social milieu in which they are to be seen. They can also indicate to the characters' circumstances whether they should appear rich or poor, comic or tragic, young or old. In a dramatic performance costume must be functional as well as meaningful and aesthetic. The actor does not model his costume; he wears it, walks in it, sits on it, duels in it and dances in it. It is the duty of the costume designer to put appropriate costume for the appropriate characters to make the performance alive.
In Assamese yatra before the birth of Kalika Opera people were not very much conscious of costume. But the trend is changing day by day. To day most of the mobile theatre parties take special care of costume and to look after the matter a costume designer is also employed. Usually the costume designer takes all the responsibilities to design costume for stage presentation. A costume designer always works within the frame work of director’s vision.

**Sound Design**

Sound effects or audio effects are artificially created or enhanced sound. The man who worked in designing this artificial sound effect is called sound designer. The sound designer occupies a very important place in the theatre to-day, and the mobile theatre of Assam is not an exception. The rise of the importance of the sound designing is mainly due to the development of science and technology in modern age. Earlier when sound system was not developed the actors had to take great effort on delivering speech on stage. That is why, during that time, along with the other skills an actor had to have loud voice. Gradually, sound effects also developed to a larger extent. It is true that in a make-shift theatre hall of mobile theatre sound system is not up to the mark. In many cases the spectators have to face a trouble in enjoying the play in peace. It is applicable specially to those spectators whose seats are arranged just in front of the huge sound boxes. Besides, the external sound also in many cases creates trouble in enjoying the beauty of a play as the theatre halls are not sound proof.
WESTERN INFLUENCE ON MOBILE THEATRE

When Assamese people had come in touch with the English, especially after the Treaty of Iandaboo (1826), a new tradition developed in Assam. The tradition that Sankardeva had developed through his ankiya bhaona in the 16th Century was gradually occupied by the Western culture and tradition. The influence of the West on Assamese thought were so great that it affected almost all aspects of Assamese life which includes: education, art and literature, religion and moral sense, economic condition and political aspirations. In literature including drama this influence of the West has been so profound that the new drama that came into being in 1857 with Gunabhiram Baruah’s Ram Navami has hardly any direct link with the Pre British Assamese drama, which has a four century old history.

The conquest of Assam by the British in 1826 was not a mere transfer of political power but a total change in the life of the people, who had so long been groping in ignorance, religious fanaticism and medieval superstitions. The period of modern Assamese literature may be said to have begun from that date, although the first Assamese book in print had came out many years earlier when the Christian Missionaries published an Assamese Bible from Serampor in 1813.49 But modern

49 Pona Mahanta: Western Influence on Modern Assamese Drama, p- 5
Assamese literature really dates after the publication of *Arunodoi* in 1846 from Sibasagar by the Baptist Missionaries. Although spreading of religion was the chief aim of the Missionaries the *Arunodoi* almost revolutionized the mind of the Assamese youth in so far as it threw open the flood gates of Western thoughts and ideas. By publishing various articles, poems, stories, news, diaries, travel accounts, and letters to the editor, the *Arunodoi* provides an extra aroma to Assamese literature.

Meanwhile the Assamese students, scholars and businessman who were in Calcutta, came in touch with the English, and developed an abiding love for them and their culture. Western classics and romantic poems by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats especially caught their attention and inspired them towards literary composition. In 1889 three such students namely Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Hemchandra Goswami and Chandra Kumar Agarwala published an Assamese monthly – *Jonaki*. Both *Arunodoi* and *Jonaki* played a significant role in the development of modern Assamese language, as Assamese was more or less an oral literature confined to the village *satras* and *namgharas* and Ahom Courts.

The arrival of the British and the Christian Missionaries brought a rapid change in the social life of the Assamese people. Under their initiative the old religious beliefs of the native were replaced by a more rational and sacred one, and there grew up a literature dealing not with mythical world of gods and deities but with the lives of the contemporary society.
With the spread of English education, western ideas began to develop in the mind of the natives. As a result a few intellectual Assamese playwrights got an opportunity to analyze the causes of the downfall of the Assamese. At first they chose topics like the use of opium by a large number of the Assamese, the absence of widow marriage, influx of non-Assamese people into Assam and evil effects of their inter marriage with Assamese, and tried to draw the attention of the common Assamese audience.

Among these intellectual playwrights Gunabhiram Baruah (1834-1894), Hemchandra Baruah (1835-1896) and Rudraram Bardalai (1836-1899) were significant. Coming in touch with the western culture these playwrights not only developed the tradition of dramatic composition but also contributed a lot in writing social plays, highlighting certain social issues. Though the tradition of dramatic composition is quite old in Assam, no drama was composed on a subject that can distinctly be called ‘social’ before these three playwrights.

Gunabhiram Baruah’s *Ram Navami* was written in 1857, when the author was on his way back home from Calcutta. The same year it was published in *Arunodoi* after a regular interval, although it did not come out in the shape of a book until 1870. The play *Ram Navami* deals with widow re-marriage but with a tragic ending. Navami a child widow

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50 H, Bhattacharya: op. cit, p-79
Brahmin falls in illicit love with Ram. She becomes pregnant and unable to stand up against the social odium. Both Ram and Navami were excommunicated when the matter became public. The situation became so critical that at last they committed suicide. Ram Navami is unquestionably a social tragedy and Gunabhiram Baruah in this play strongly set an example in defiance of the forbidden custom of widow re-marriage.

The drama is in five acts, each subdivided into scenes, called darshanas. Gunabhiram Baruah's Ram Navami is considered as the first Assamese tragedy where the death of both the hero and the heroine is seen. In technique Ram Navami is largely modelled on the Elizabethan dramatist. The very title of the play Ram Navami appears to have a savour of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The suicide of the hero Ram Chandra in Ram Navami reminds, Romeo in Romeo and Juliet. Similarly in dialogue also Shakespeare is quite visible in Ram Navami. In Act – III Sc. – V, Navami says to Ram:

' Name ki kare? golapak jadi golap nubuli palas
bola hai teo sugandha powa najabane?'

(What does a name do? Will not the rose smell as sweet if we call it Palash?)

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51 Pona Mahanta: op.cit, p.189
This is clearly an echo of Juliet's –

What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet.

(Romeo and Juliet Act – II, ii)

Hemachandra Baruah's *Kaniyar Kirtan* was published in 1861. The play is a social tragedy which deals with the effects of the opium addiction. This was the first modern Assamese play to be performed on a modern stage at Sibasagar. The play shows how a young man, Kirtikanta, son of Bhadreswar Baruah, a revenue collecting officer brings disaster to himself as well as the whole family through his addiction to opium. Kirtikanta was so much addicted to opium that one day when his mother advised him to give it up he said "*I may do without you, even without all of you but not without opium*". The play ends with the death of the prince of opium eater in the jail in utter repentance.

The play *Kaniyar Kirtan* is purely a social play dealing with a serious social problem. As the author says: "*this little play ... composed with a view to exposing the mischievous effects of opium eating which had long been preying upon the very vital of Assam*"\(^5\). Technically the

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\(^5\) Preface to the Second Edition of Kaniyar Kirtan, 1868 p.1
play is of four acts with three to four scenes to each act and is largely modelled on western dramaturgy with no influence of Sanskrit drama. Prastavana, nandi or sutradhara is not seen in this play.

The third social play *Bangal Bangalini* deals with the untightened relationship between Tabhuli and Ram Mohan. Tabhuli, the heroine of this play is a young Assamese girl belonging to Naosalia Baruah family. In the play she is being portrayed as a spoiled girl, who concubines many youths belonging to different community and at the end came in contact with a Bengali youth Ram Mohan Poddar. The married life of Ram Mohan and Tabhuli was not comfortable. After a few years Ram Mohan left Tabhuli stealing all her personal purse. A few years later Ram Mohan again tried to make a family with her but she directly refused as she was now engaged with somebody else. Ram Mohan died of small pox and his body was thrown into the river Kalang.

Like *Kaniyar Kirtan* this play is also written largely on the model of western drama. Here Rudraram Bardalai tries to lay bare the evils of illicit love, scoundrelism and knavery. The use of colloquial language by different community without any touch of artificiality is another important feature of this play.
It is not far away from truth that modern Assamese social play is a product of western influence. Use of social themes, breaking a play into acts and scenes and making tragic ending are a few significant features of western drama. Gunabhiram Baruah, Hemchandra Baruah and Rudraram Bardalai in a beautiful way followed these features of western drama and employed it successfully.

After *Bangal Bangalini* (1871) no serious play was written, till the publication of *Seuti Kiran* by Benudhar Rajkhowa in 1894. In appearance *Seuti Kiran* is more like a romantic tragedy influenced to some extent by Shakespeare's *Othello*. The play is a tragic love story of Kiran and Seuti who were in love. Surath another character is in love with Seuti make a conspiracy as he was not happy with Kiran-Seuti relationship. At the end Kiran became a victim of his rival's conspiracy and murdered Seuti. But when the real truth is revealed he committed suicide. After *Seuti Kiran* no serious social play was written for more than a decade. In 1911 Nabinchandra Bardaloi published his play *Griha Lakshmi* and gradually this trend of writing social play in Assamese developed.

While the trend of writing social play was going on a few intellectual Assamese students studying in Calcutta came in touch
with the realms of Shakespeare. These students not only read Shakespeare but also saw performances of his plays both in the original and Bengali translation and started a new tradition of translating Shakespearean plays into Assamese.

The tradition of translated Assamese Shakespearean plays was started with the publication of *Bhramranga*, translated from Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* in 1888. It was translated by four young Assamese students namely Ratnadhar Baruah, Ramakanta Barkakati, Gunjanan Baruah and Ghanashyam Baruah. After that many Shakespearean plays were written in Assamese. Some of these plays were *Chandrawali* translated from *As You like it* by Durgeswar Sarma; *Bhimdarpa* from *Macbeth* by Debananda Bharali, *Amor Leela* from *Romeo and Juliet* by Padmadhar Chaliha, *Ranjit Singh* from *Othello* by Sailadhas Rajkhowa, *Danduri Daman* from *Taming of the Shrew* by Nabin Ch. Bordoloi, *Chandravir* from *Hamlet* by Bodh Nath Patangiya, *Banij Konwar* and *Ashrutirtha* from *Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* respectively by Atul Ch. Hazarika.

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54 Dr. Sailen Bharali: *Asomiya Natakata Paschayar Prabhab* in *Asomiya Sahityat Paschalyar Prabhab* (Guwahati: Chandra Prakash, 1999), pp.38, 39
A short list of Shakespearean plays translated into Assamese is given below –

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After Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen appears to be the most popular western dramatist. It is precisely because, Ibsen turned from writing plays about history and myth to writing about contemporary social problems. And that is why his plays appeal to our writers. Ibsen has been a leavening influence in the world of the drama and like Shakespeare, Ibsen’s plays were also translated into different languages of the world and they have a profound effect not only in his contemporaries but also on the course of modern drama. Although a few plays have been translated into Assamese Ibsen’s influence especially in style and technique on modern Assamese drama has been great indeed. The most popular translated Ibsen’s plays are Runumi (The Warriors at Helgeland), Putala Ghar (A Doll’s House), Bana Hansi (The Wild Duck), Bhoot (Ghost), and Ganasatru (An Enemy of the People).

Runumi (1946) by Suresh Goswami is translated from Ibsen’s The Warriors at Helgeland. The play is romantic fantasy, based on a Scandinavian saga. The Putala Ghar (1959) was translated from A Doll’s House by Padma Barkakati. In A Doll’s House the knowledge that she has remained a helpless child prompts Nora to leave her husband. Padma Barkakati in Putala Ghar rendered every character from the eyes of an Assamese and tries to establish the rights of woman through the chief character Trishna Barua (Nora). In Putala Ghar Trishna Barua behaves in much the same way and instead of ball dance Nora goes to, she is scheduled to attend a Bihu meet at her aunt’s house.
In 1962 Satya Parsad Barua translated Ibsen’s *The wild Duck* under the title *Bana Hansi*. The setting and the background are changed into native colour but the plot remains unchanged.

Ibsen’s achievements as a playwright also rest upon his two most popular plays *Ghost* (1881) and *An Enemy of the People* (1882). Here Ibsen successfully explored the tragic conflict between personal freedom and social and the moral restrictions of the middle class society. Both *Ghost* and *An Enemy of the People* were translated into Assamese by Mahendra Bora as *Bhoot* and Sashi Sarma as *Ganasatru* respectively. Mahendra Bora’s *Bhoot* is a close rendering from English where no attempt has been made to indianize either the character or the situation.

The translation of Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* under the same title by Narayan Bezbarua also contributes to the development of the post war dramatic literature of Assam.

Though many plays of Ibsen were translated into Assamese no one successfully present Ibsenian depth and momentum to modern Assamese drama before the publication of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala’s *Karengar Ligiri*. Birinchi Kr. Barua writes: *His second drama Karengar Ligiri is his masterpiece and is a marvellous specimen of its kind in Assamese. The dramatist is no longer in the supernatural world of myths. He is among his own kind. He deals with the conflict between man*
and environment, old tradition and new outlook, man and destiny and assails the way in which the ghost of the past doggedly haunts the present.55 Here the most important innovations are to be found in the introduction of setting and elaborate stage direction and the adaptation of the Assamese folk music to stage modelled on the western fashion.56

Just after the Second World War a new dramatic movement called Absurd movement had started in Europe. It was strongly influenced by the traumatic experience of the harasses of the Second World war, which showed the total impermanence of any value and highlighted the precariousness of human life and its fundamental meaninglessness and arbitrariness. The term, the theatre of Absurd, was coined by Martin Esslin for the works of a number of playwrights mostly written in the 1950s to 1960s. Esslin borrowed the term Absurd from the book the Myth of Sisyphus by the French philosopher Albert Camus. It should be mentioned that the major playwrights associated with these theatres Brechett Ionesco, Adamove and Geret did not make an organized movement, it is by virtue of certain common fundamental features in their works that they came close together57. The sweet stream of Absurd theatre entered into the stage of Indian theatre through a Bengali play 

_Ebang Indrajit_ (1965) by Badal Sarkar.


56 Satyendra Nath Sarma: _op. cit._, p.157

It was in the late sixties that theatre of the Absurd began to have some impact on Assamese drama. The first Assamese play under the category of Absurd was *Sri Nibaran Bhattacharya* (1967) by Arun Sarma. This play highlights the tragedy of an artist who fails to convey a message to the people as nobody comes to see his play.

In his next play *Ahar*, Arun Sarma successfully employs many elements of absurd drama viz. static situation, lack of communication, lack of boundary line between fact and fantasy and a total rejection of all rationality. In writing this play, Arun Sarma was unquestionably influenced by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. As in *Waiting for Godot*, in *Ahar* too one of the characters (Nabin) says that waiting is very boring and yet they wait because so many other people – Ahalya, Urmila, Buddhya, Vladimir and Estargon have waited.

Another playwright Basanta Saikia may also be placed into this group. Three of his plays namely, *Mrigtrishna* (1973), *Manuh* (1977) and *Asur* (1977) have shared many elements of Absurd drama.

In Assam, Absurd theatre could not flourish in a proper way. It is precisely because of the test of the Assamese audience. Pona Mahanta in this regard says: ‘and except perhaps a small segment living in the urban areas the audience in Assam generally is far from being such, so that a drama modeled on the theatre of the Absurd is unlikely to
cause a stir among them. Consequently such a work, if written at all, is bound to be a closet drama rather than a play to be performed in a public theatre'.

It has to be mentioned that though the tradition of translation or adaptation of western classics has started in the later half of the 19th century no mobile theatre of Assam has performed any such play until Kohinoor Theatre performed *Cleopatra* on stage in 1982-83. So Kohinoor Theatre is the first mobile theater of Assam to perform a western classic on stage. The play *Cleopatra* was written by Padma Barkataki, while the role of the beauty queen *Cleopatra* was performed by the well-known Assamese film actress Runu Devi. In 1993-94 Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* was staged by Kohinor Theatre. The play was translated into Assamese by the renowned playwright Mahendra Barthakur. The roles of Hamlet and his beloved Ophelia were performed by Tapan Das and Purabi Sarma respectively. After that Kohinoor Theatre performed many western classics successfully on stage. These include plays like *Iliad Odyssey, Benhoor, Othello, Titanic* and *Tarzan*.

Meanwhile other theatre parties like Indradhanu Theatre, Rupkonwar Theatre, Apsara Theatre, Awahan Theatre also performed western plays like *Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet* and *King Lear* on stage.

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58 Pona Mahanta: op. cit., p.255
This is how western culture entered into the wide field of mobile theatre of Assam.

Moreover, the concept of light, sound and music that has been used by mobile theatres are directly borrowed from the west. In technical terms mobile theatres probably borrowed everything from the west.

To sum up, it can be stated that the mobile theatres of Assam, since its inception, owes for its growth, much to its contact with the west, which has also been largely responsible for the remarkable changes that our present generation is witnessing.

**DANCE DRAMA IN MOBILE THEATRE**

Dance drama is one of the most significant features of the mobile theatre of Assam. All the theatrical performances past and present to a large extent depend on dance and music. In ancient Indian dramaturgy the word *natya* is used to identify both drama and dance and it was classified under two main groups- the *rupaka* and the *uprupaka*. *Rupaka* is a perfect drama depicting one continuous theme and having the development of one emotion or *rasa*, and is therefore known as *rasabhinaya*. The *uprupaka* is mainly the *nritya* variety with a small theme or a number of isolated themes from the subject matter of the songs, which are sung and rendered into gestures by the dancers. An *uprupaka* mainly deals with bodily gestures and music which occupies
a secondary position in \textit{rupaka}.\footnote{Chandra Bhan Gupta: \textit{Indian Theatre} (New Delhi: M. Manoharlal Pub., 1991), p.115} The main characteristic of this variety is its stress on the expression of \textit{bhava} as against \textit{rasa} of the \textit{rupaka} and are consequently known as \textit{bhavabhinaya} or \textit{padarthabhinaya}.

The dance drama of mobile theatre, which has become a regular phenomenon now a days, may be placed under the second head of the classification of \textit{natya} i.e. \textit{uprupaka}. Today almost all the theatre parties prepare at least four dance dramas and perform one of them just before the commencement of the main play on stage. In the beginning in a dance drama small themes or stories or episodes, mostly taken from the epics or \textit{puranas} or sometimes from the folk tales, depicting love, separation, meeting, expectancy etc. were performed by a group of dancers through appropriate gestures with interludes of pure dance or \textit{nritya}. The themes of these dance dramas were mainly heroic in nature and it was sung by a team of musicians and singers. Usually in a dance drama the dancers were seen with colourful costumes and make up. They interpret the song with mime and gestures. Here the dramatic quality becomes more pronounced as the theme is a continuous one and many persons participate in the performance.

Mobile theatres continued this tradition of performing dance drama just before the commencement of the main play on stage, keeping all the tradition intact for a period of time. But with the changing perspectives
the theme of these dance dramas also take a turn from epic to present
day problems. Assam was once one of the peaceful states of the country
but now the state is facing innumerable troubles. The problem of flood,
insurgency and unemployment often paralyse the state. Besides the rising
problem of AIDS and other deadly diseases like cancer has also created
terror in the mind of the innocent villagers. It is painful to come across
cases where same women are demonised as witches in certain
underdeveloped communities. These communities resort to violent means
to eliminate the so called witches. This is a symptom of the underlying
ignorance, lack of education, economic and social development.

For all these reasons the producers of the mobile theatre felt it as
a crying need to change their theme for dance drama. Rural people like to
enjoy dance drama. Therefore it would be easier to motivate them through
dance and music and to bring changes in their attitudes as well as in their
activities. In 2007-08 two leading theatre parties namely Awahan Theatre
and Kohinoor Theatre performed two dance dramas dealing with the theme
of agricultural activities. This is of course a novel concept to choose dance
dramas as a means to create awareness among the common masses.

But it does not mean that the mobile theatres are completely showing
disrespect to the traditional dance performances. Often they perform
folk dances which are directly connected with the native.
The present trends of dance drama that one can see in mobile theatre was probably introduced in the mid twentieth century. The renowned lyricist Kirtinath Bardaloi in collaboration with Muktinath Bardaloi first wrote a novel dance drama in Assamese named *Basanti Abhisesh* (Ajit Talukadar in *Sangita* 2004) and it was well received by the contemporary audience. After that dance dramas like *Kapoukunwari* and *Sri Panchami* by Ananda Ch. Baruah; *Hemantika* by Badan Sarma; *Awartan* by Jogyaeswar Sarma; *Sonar Saleng* and *Lakhimii* by Parbati Prasad Baruah and *Apeswari* Prasannalal Choudhury established the path of performing dance dramas on stage. Today there is no mobile theatre without dance drama. A few of the most popular dance dramas are- *Nimati Koina, Son Pakhili, Sonit Kuwari* by Jyotiprasad Agarwala; *Sankardeva, Amrapali, Sitaharan, Kam Sendoor Nila Siyal, Barluitaor Hatbauli, Uttaran* by Jatin Goswami, *Baghmanuh, Prabhati Hengool, Srimanta Sankardeva, Alibaba Sari Bandhu, Sonali Sutar Sadhu* by Garima Hazarika; *Sakuntala* by Hemanta Dutta; *Bhogalir Rang, Talsara Sewali, Asar Saki, Mrityudut, Jivanar Bate Bate* by Ajit Talukadar.

Among these writers of dance dramas, Jatin Goswami and Garima Hazarika are directly connected with the Indian Classical dance and music. And that may be the reason, that in their dance dramas one can find an aesthetic beauty of dance and music. Successful presentation of a dance
drama also depends upon the dance directors. Compared to a full length play though these dance dramas take a limited time of 30 to 40 minutes it carries artistic as well as aesthetic beauty. Among the successful dance directors of mobile theatres a few name may be mentioned- Rabin Das, Uday Das, Hem Baruah, Nagen Lahakar, Prafulla Haloi, Phulen Bharali, and Akshya Medhi.

Earlier in a *yatra* performance classical based dances namely- *gandharva kinnara, apeswari, nartaki, baiji, chokra nach, katig dance* etc, were performed either in the beginning or in the middle of the main play. Sometimes they also performed folk dances.

The classical and the folk dances have an aesthetic beauty. These classical and folk dance varieties have to a large extent been revived and have become popular in towns and cities now a days. The modern stage craft, with its repertoire of scenic effects, lighting devices, costumes and make up has naturally brought in considerable modification in the traditional form of dance dramas. There can be no objection to the use of modern stage devices but proper presentation of traditional and folk dance forms it is essential that we should use them with deep understanding and creative sympathy.

But it is pathetic to see that the modern dance performance in dance dramas miserably exposes the bankruptcy of our aesthetic
sensibility. There is a growing tendency in the dance producers today to try and cover up the lack of dance technique with stage devices and showmanship, wherever possible. Little or no attention is given to the proper understanding of the themes selected. But it is painful to admit that the dance dramas performed by most of the theater parties today have lost their aesthetic quality. And that may be the reason for which critics of mobile theatres like Pranjal Phookan suggested to delete or remove these dance dramas completely from mobile theatre, thinking it as a degenerating dance performance which affects the main play. However complete removal of dance dramas will not solve the problem of dramatic environment of the state and again it will badly affect the native culture of traditional dance performances. Therefore a close scrutiny of the quality of dances, introduced in the dance dramas of mobile theatre should be conducted to find out its weak areas and to suggest for modification.

It is true that dance dramas have provided an aesthetic as well as an artistic environment in the state on one hand and give an exposure to so many hidden talents in the field of performance on the other. It also helps the audience in setting up the tone for the main play in the theatre hall.
PLAYWRIGHTS OF MOBILE THEATRE

A playwright is an anonymous figure in the theatre. While he is the master of his craft so far as the conception of his text is concerned, inside the theatre hall he is the lonely figure sitting in the back row scarcely visible either by the actors or to the directors. However the role of a playwright is always counted in the success of a play.

The tradition of writing novel Assamese plays has developed long back, just after the publication of Ram Navami in 1857. But its entry into the wide field of mobile theatre has started in 1963, after the formation of Nataraj Theatre at Pathsala. Nataraj Theatre in its very beginning introduced three Assamese playwrights. They were Natasurya Phani Sarma, Atul Ch. Hazarika, and Uttam Baruah. On stage Phani Sarma’s Bhogjora, Hazarika’s Tikendrajit, and Baruah’s Jerengar Sati created boom among the theatre loving audience. Since then mobile theatres are performing innumerable Assamese plays on stage at different occasions. In present time it is pathetic to see that the numbers of playwrights are not increasing to satisfy the needs of all mobile theatres. At present there are only a countable number of playwrights of mobile theatres of Assam. As the success of a theatre directly or indirectly depends upon the play, the playwrights of a mobile theatre get a special privilege to compose plays for stage. With the rising popularity of glamour artists the playwrights
of a theatre party also have to keep in mind these actors or actresses in composing their plays. Here in this brief discussion a modest attempt has been made to introduce a dozen Assamese playwrights of mobile theatres of Assam. At least another dozen playwrights could have been included, but this is a representative sample of the most highly regarded working dramatists of Assam.

Natasurya Phani Sarma

In the second half of the twentieth century some dramatists had continued the tradition of writing original Assamese plays and Phani Sarma was perhaps the most successful among them. As a prolific playwright he touches every corner of the Assamese mind. In view of his achievements and his influence on the theatre as social reformer, realistic and imaginative writer, it is universally agreed that he was a versatile dramatist. The plays that brought Phani Sarma to prominence are *Bhogjora, Kiya, Nagpash, Chiraj, Kala Bazar*, and *Emuthi Chaol*. For his play *Bhogjora* Phani Sarma chose characters from the Ahom kingdom, specially the subjects under the Ahom King Lakshmi Singha. The whole play is a conspiracy made by the Tipomiya Gohain against the King Lakshmi Singha. Based on the book *Konwar Bidroh* by the renowned historian Dr. Surya Kumar Bhuyan, the play successfully depicts the social evils like Tipomiya Gohain.
His another play *Kiya* is a reaction against the conservative society where females are often neglected. Here Mira, the leading female character stands alone against her own corrupt father.

*Nag Pash* by the same playwright is an excellent social play based on the Assamese film *Puwati Nisar Sapon*, which was released in 1946.

The play that brought Phani Sarma his first great success with the mobile theatre spectators, is unquestionably *Chiraj*. The play *Chiraj* is an excellent example of communal amity. Here Sabitri a pregnant Hindu girl took shelter in the house of a Muslim, named Chiraj and died in leaving a new born baby named Sita in the hands of Chiraj. The conflict starts when the real identity of Sita is disclosed. The play *Chiraj* may be considered as a revolt against the conservative thinking of the so-called aristocratic society of Assam.

**Atul Ch. Hazarika**

As a playwright Atul Ch. Hazarika has earned profound popularity in the first half of the twentieth century. In his whole career Hazarika composed twenty eight plays and most of them were well received by the contemporary audience. His dramas may be divided into three classes—those based on puranic episodes and anecdotes, those on historical events and those on miscellaneous topics.60

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The puranic group of dramas consist of Nandadulal, Kurukhetra, Rukmini Haran, Beula, Narasimha, Sakuntala, Niryatita, Champawati and Sri Ramchandra. Except Sakuntala and Beula all the others are based on the stories of either the epics or the Bhagavata and their medium is blank verse. His play Beula was first performed by Nataraj Theatre. Based on the mythical episode of Beula and Lakhindar, the play Beula directly focuses on the heroic venture of Beula to save her husband Lakhindar.

The historical group of plays consists of Banij Konwar, Kanouj Kumari and Chatrapati Sivaji. The Banij Konwar is an Assamese adaptation of Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice. His Kanouj Kumari is the first historical play based on an India topic. The play depicts the circumstances that led to the creation of hostility between Joychandra and Prithviraj and shows how the later was made prisoner and killed. His other two plays Chatrapati Sivaji (1947) and Vir Tikendrajit (1959) are based on the lives of the great Marathi ruler Sivaji and the great General of Manipur- Tikendrajit. The play Vir Tikendrajit was performed by Nataraj Theatre in its formation year.

The miscellaneous group of plays contains plays like Marjiyana, Manas Pratiham, Ahuti and Rang Mahal. Based on the story of the Arabian Nights – Alibaba and Forty Robbers, Marjiana is a beautiful play by Hazarika, which was staged by most of the theatre parties of Assam.
It has to be mentioned that Atul Ch. Hazarika wrote dramas to meet the demand of the Assamese stage which, before he started writing, had been practically monopolized by the dramas of the Bengali playwrights—Girishchandra Ghosh and Dwijedralal Roy. Atul Ch. Hazarika neutralized this dominance of Bengali playwrights and inspired his predecessors to write plays for stage performance.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{Prafulla Bora}

Prafulla Bora was born in Dahparbatiya, a small village near Tezpur city. His first play \textit{Akasar Rang} was composed while he was a student of class VIII. In 1997 he received the prestigious Sonit Gourav Literary Award for his immortal contribution to the wide field of Mobile theatre. He composed a huge number of 253 plays including 42 plays of mobile theatres.\textsuperscript{62}

\textit{Asirbad}, one of his most popular plays, was first performed by Kohinoor Theatre in 1977. The play had created a stir among the spectators for its live presentation on stage.

In 1980 Prafulla Bora shaped Kanchan Barua’s novel \textit{Asimat Jar Heral Sima} under the same title for the stage of Kohinoor Theatre.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.158

\textsuperscript{62} Pona Mahanta: \textit{Assamese Drama and Theatre} in \textit{Assam Land and People} (Guwahati: K.C. Das Commerce College), p.299.
Significantly the play was staged by Kohinoor Theatre repeatedly. His another play *Manthan* was first performed by Aradhana Theatre in 1980. The play successfully presents the trouble that has been faced even today by the tea garden labours.

His well received play *Alankar* deals with a village girl named Tagar, who is being forced to face the other part of city life for her poverty.

**Mahendra Barthakur**

Mahendra Barthakur was born on September 1, 1935 at Mahkhuti, Sivasagar. After completion of his graduation from J.B. College, Jorhat, he worked as an assistant teacher from 1957 to 1967 in Gopal Krishna High School at Makum. In 1967 he joined as secretary in the department of drama in Akasbani Guwahati and engaged himself in composing plays special for the mobile theatres of Assam. His first play *Simalu Chandan*, first performed in 1981 by Awahan Theatre, established his reputation as a playwright. A few of his novel Assamese plays staged by the mobile theatres of Assam are *Saraguri Chapari, Mukhyamantri, Bilkish Begum, Dadhis, Gosani, Ban Kuwari, Benhoor, Hamlet, Balya Megh, Dainir Prem, Agni Khyan, Bishnuprasad, Aaideu Sandhikai, Haladhiya Charaye Bao Dhan Khai, Eiya Manuh, Bhal Manuh, Tejal Ghora, Bandini, Manuh, Harichandra, Balya Hati, Narak Bandana, Aair Chakulo, Aai Matite, Samrat, Kalangkini Sati, Makarajal, He
His play *Ei Mdtite* was performed by Awahan Theatre under the direction of Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia in 1982-83. The play was based on a protest against the exploitation of the British Ruler. His another significant play *Dadhisi* was performed by Makunda Theatre in 1985. *Dadhisi* was unquestionably an excellent play dealing with the struggle of a sincere freedom fighter as well as a patriot who fails to enjoy the minimum liberty in his life. Here the role of Dadhisi was played by the renowned actor Jibeswar Deka.

Performed in 1987 (Hengool Theatre) the play, Mukhya Mantri is a political satire. Here the playwright satirically depicts the drastic activities of the political leaders for some votes. The play was so successful that it was selected for the Best Play Sahitya Charya Atul Ch. Hazarika Award. His *Samrat aru Sundari* was based on the story of Asoka, the king of Magadha. Kahinoor Theatre, performing this unique play on stage in 1989-90 earned immense popularity from the audience. In 1995-96 Kohinoor Theatre performed a unique play *Dainir Prem* on stage and earned unbelievable popularity. It was the first play to deal with the deadly infectious disease AIDS.
In 1999, another play *Bishnuprasad Rabha* was performed on the stage of Kohinoor Theatre. This play was based on the real life story of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha. The role of Bishnu Rabha was performed by Prithiraj Rabha, son of Bishnu Rabha.

Mahendra Barthakur passed away in 2005 but his contribution to the wide field of mobile theatre will remain alive in the heart of every Assamese.

**Ugra Mena**

Born on 10th October 1943 at Belsor, 12 kms away from Nalbari town, Ugra Mena was one of the leading playwrights of the mobile theatres of Assam. In most of his plays Ugra Mena presents the revolt of the common men against the rich exploiters. Use of melodramatic qualities, like horror, bloodshed, revenge, murder, ghost, dacoities, tantric and suicide are quite common in his plays. His major plays include names like *Ajir Manuh, Tokar Golam, Janowar, Dui Mahal, Dusasanar Raktapat, Patitar Atma Hatya, Aparadh, Nari Dashyu, Dharma Patni, Bisaktar Prem, Jivan Sanghat, Diaryr Pate Pate, Kamala Kuwari, Ranga Nadir Sapari, Jivan Dinga, Mamata, Aranyar Bagh, Biplabi Chetana, Devatar Nirmali, Surjiyamukhir Swapna, Meghar Madal, Dashyu Rani Putuli Bai, Mritu Lagna, MilanMala, Lava-Kush, Mandir Mazjid, Danvir Karna, Ma Santoshi, Bidrohi Badshah, Asta Prahara Khela, Manimugdha, Ajagar, Mamare Dhara Alnagkar, Ajak Bilati Kukur, Satabdir Pap, and Tezar Sakulo.*
His play *Sesh Prahar Khela* is a fantasy where four youths namely Biswajit, Subhash, Champak and Nagen, closely connected with each other went into a forest to celebrate a party. But in an accident Biswajit, who was engaged with Abha, a beautiful girl, died. The other three friends with the help of a tantric named Swami Durgananda provide new life to Biswajit but only for three days. The play reaches its climax when the tantric was shot dead by Champak. Full of suspense and thrilling experience the play *Sesh Prahar Khela* is a remarkable contribution by Ugra Mena.

His another popular play *Mamare Dhara Alankar* was first performed by Makunda Theatre in 1990-91. Based on the life of the tribal folk of Assam the play mainly deals with love and marriage. Shyam Singh Teren lives a happy life with his three daughters Kadam, Rangsema, and Rengma. Kadam after her marriage with Rongbong Hanse met her college friend Luit and became abnormal. Her abnormality increases when Rangsema committed suicide. Rengma married to Lingdo but they were quite unhappy. In the whole play the playwright successfully depicts the love and tears of the tribal people of the state.

His another play *Milan Mala* caught the attention of all sections of people for its heart touching performance on the stage of Makunda Theatre in 1985. The whole action of the play has been takes place in a small village named Padumi. Two brothers- Milan and Mohit belong to a
poor family of village Padumi, meet all the expenses of their family through Milan. Mohit completed his M.A with the help of the money earned by Milan. Mohit arranged a job and married Dipali, daughter of a rich and proud father and forgot the help that he had received from his brother. Milan was also in love with Mala, the daughter of a rich man named Manik Baruah. As Milan and Mala had spent their childhood and youth together they dreamed of their marriage. But the villain named Sankar motivated the father of Mala and married her against her will. Milan, getting no help from others remained as dumb. The married life of Sankar and Mala was not happy. The play ends with the death of the heroin Mala. Ugra Mena is no more today but the plays that he wrote give him another life to live in the heart of the people forever.

**Hemanta Dutta**

Hemanta Dutta is one of the greatest living playwrights of Assam. The main quality that has made Hemanta Dutta a great playwright is his powerful imaginative quality. As he was born in a culturally rich family of Mangaldoi, it helped him to shape his career as a cultural artist. He worked as an actor in a number of Assamese films like *Natun Asha, Upapath, Ghar Sansar, Ashray, Man Mandir, Sewali, and Prabhati Pakhir Gaan.* As a playwright he occupied a very prestigious position in mobile theatre. He wrote a number of Assamese plays. These are *Rahu Mukti, Nabin Master, Aai, Devi Sainyakhini, Mahabharat, Ramayan, Dustan*
Hemanta Dutta’s *Sapon Bhanga Jouban* is a novel Assamese play staged by Kohinoor Theatre in 2007-08. Based on the love story of two characters namely- Rini and Mrinal, the play is a unique combination of romance, love, horror and hatred. Rini’s elder sister Runi was killed in Shillong by some unidentified persons. It was suspected that her lover was involved with the murder. This tragedy brought a big change in the life of Rini. But the arrival of Mrinal, relieves Rini and gradually both of them develop affection towards each other. Rini was so much absorbed with Mrinal that one day she was shocked, getting a clue to suspect Mrinal as the real murderer of her sister Runi. It is because of the T-shirt that Mrinal was wearing- once given by Runi to her lover. Mrinal was totally innocent about it as he received it from one of his friend Pallab whom he sometimes helped in writing love letters. The story leads to a happy ending in establishing the innocence of Mrinal in one hand and the marriage of Rini and Mrinal on the other. The role of Mrinal and Rini was well performed by Jatin Bora and Barasarani Bisaya respectively.
His *Teez* is a social play based on the religious conflict of two families. Joseph Borbora, a mechanic lives a happy life with his only teenage daughter Mary in a small ward named as Christian Patty. An advocate Narayan Goswami along with his son, who is a doctor in profession, happened to be a member of that community.

One day Joseph was in trouble for taking wine. As there was no doctor nearby, Dr. Dhruba Goswami, son of Narayan Goswami was invited to treat old Joseph. In an emotional state Dhruba falls in love with Mary and decided to marry her. As Mary was a Christian, troubles develop. The play ends establishing the old truth that there might have differences in religion but not in blood.

**Mahesh Kalita**

Born in a small village named Santipur near Dhamdha of Nalbari District, Mahesh Kalita started his career as a playwright through his play *Ek Jati Ek Pran*. He composed this play while he was in class VIII. *Lanchita Jouvan* is his first play performed in 1976 by Manchakonwar Theatre. After this Mahesh Kalita wrote a number of plays and most of these were performed on the stage of mobile theatres. The contemporary audience also accepted his plays because of the live presentation of human nature. Some of his popular plays are – *Miri Jiyari, Sabyasasi Bishnu Rabha, Banariya Phool, Sapon Kanya, Jui Dhowa Sai, Deshar*

In his play Adhikar, Mahesh Kalita deals with the psychological aspects of a woman, named Karabi. She came in the life of Chandan through marriage just to take revenge upon Chandan’s family members. But ironically Abhijit, Binita, Rinku, and Nayan forced her to see life from another angle and that leads to a happy ending. The play presents a psychoanalytical study of a woman named Karabi, who does not represent the whole but a section of women of the society.

Munin Baruah

Munin Baruah made his mark not only as a playwright but also as a film director. His Assamese films namely- Bowari, Ghar Sangsar, Son Maina, Man Mandir, Pratima, Eai Desh Mor Desh, Bhai Bhai, Pita Putra, Sewali, Pahari Kanya, Prabhati Pakhir gan and Hiya Diya Niya have left an impressive mark on Assamese film industry.

As a playwright he occupies a prominent position in Assamese Literature. Most of his plays may be placed under the category of
realistic social plays. His play *Agnimay*, performed in 2005 by Awahan Theatre, deals with the feelings and emotions of a few misguided youths who often engaged themselves in some terrorist activities like bomb blast or kidnapping. Here Bhaskar is being portrayed as a young and energetic youth who comes forward to show the real path of life to these misguided youths.

Money is everything. Opposing this common belief Munin Baruah in his play *Joy Parajaoy*, draws one character named - Ajoy as a man of money. At the end of the play Ajay realises better than others that money may provide something but one can not purchase love affection or brotherhood through it.

**Bhaben Barua**

Bhaben Barua was born in a small village named Pokowa about 7 kms away from Nalbari town on November 7, 1943. In 1964 he came in touch with Kalaguru Bhisnu Prasa Rabha, Bhupen Hazarika and Phani Sarma through Purbajyoti Theatre of Hajo. Under the influence of these three stars he started his career as a playwright. He composed about one hundred twenty plays and all of them depict joy and sorrow of the native. Barua wrote his first play *Juwa Chor* (One Act Play) while he was reading in class VIII. His plays, namely *Mallika, Mainamati, Kushal Konwar, Kanaklata, Akou Ajan Lachit, Swahid, Asushi Pujar Phool,*

His play *Bhaibowari* was first staged by Bardoisila Theatre in 2004. The play deals with the relationship between two brothers—Krishna Kanta Medhi an evergreen bachelor and his brother Bhola, who is an innocent youth. Krishana Kanta Medhi who is portrayed as a man of principle, falls in trouble, when he arranged his brother’s marriage with Ipsita, the daughter of a rich man named Bishwa Pratap. The unhappy relationship between Bhola and Ipsita leads Ipsita back to her father. Conflict starts when Ipsita returns to Bhola’s family, and comes to know that Bhola had already married another girl Bakuli. In the whole play the playwright beautifully presents how an honest person like Krishna Kanta had to surrender in front of the social hypocrisy.
His biographical play *Kanaklata* was first performed by Anirban Theatre in 1983-84. Based on the life and death of one courageous Assamese martyr *Kanaklata* was one of the most popular plays where the role of Kanaklata was performed by Purnima Pathak.

Focusing on the degradation of the Dhuliya Culture of Lower Assam in 1989 Bhaben Barua composed another play named *Ashusi Pujar Phool*. The play was first performed by Awahan Theater in 1983. Here the role of Dhanai Dhuliya was performed by the popular actor Jibeswar Deka.

**Bhabendra Nath Saikia**

Born in February 20, 1932 at Foujdaripatti, Nagaon, Bhabendra Nath Saikia is one of the most alert and informed intelligentsia among his contemporaries. Bhabendra Nath Saikia received his early education from Nagaon. After completion of his matriculation he got admission in Cotton College and completed his graduation successfully. After that he did his M.Sc. from Calcutta University in 1956 and joined as lecturer in Physics in Sivsagar College. In 1961 he was awarded doctorate degree from London University for his research on *The Structure Aggregation and meting of metal and other films condensed from vapour*. He joined as faculty in the Department of Physics, Gauhati University in 1961. After that he devotes his whole life on of Assamese art and culture. It is in 1981 he entered into the wide field of mobile theatre through his play *Ramdhenu*. And after that without any pause his plays have been...
performed by two leading theatre parties of Assam viz. Awahan Theatre and Kohinoor Theatre.

A few of his well established plays are: *Ramdhenu, Andhakup, Bandi Sal, Amrapali, Manikut, Amrit, Janmabhumi, Dinabandhu, Pratibimba, Digambar, Gadhuli, Gahbar, Maharanya, Brindaban, Paramanada, Samudra Manthan, Ramyabhumi, Barnamala, Nilakantha, Pandulipi, Sugh Sngbad, Swarnajyanti* and others.

Bhabendra Nath Saikia's contribution to mobile theatre is so great that only a few playwrights can be placed with him. Almost all his plays deal with the contemporary social problems. He draws his characters from all sections of people and studies them not as a detached, superior kind of observer but as one of their own level. He also deals with the psychological aspects of his characters and portrays every details of their behaviour. Bhabendra Nath Saikia achieves grand success in all his plays and the reason behind is of course, his simple metaphorical dialogue and an artistic presentation of the whole thing.

**Mahananda Sarma**

Born in 1932 at Panigaon, a small village about 7 kms. away from Nalbari PS, Mahananda Sarma is one of the pioneers to develop mobile theatre in Assam. His parents Bishnu Dev Sarma and Amrita Priya Devi were very simple and culturally forward looking persons. They of course
provided a smooth environment for the development of his personality. Mahananda Sarma established himself first as an actor then a producer and at the end as a playwright. In 1957 the came in touch with Assist. Ratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika and that inspired him to join Binapani Theatre, Nalbari. As an actor Mahananda Sarma was quite popular. But the profession of an actor could not satisfy his thirst and that is why after working as an actor in Suradevi Theatre and Kohinoor Theatre, in 1984 he formed a new theatre—Aparupa Theatre. In the very beginning Aparupa Theatre received huge support from its spectators but owing to poor management, Aparupa Theatre was closed down in 1989. However the experience that Mahananada Sarma received from his activities inside the theatre, inspired him to write plays specially for mobile theatre. The plays that can be placed under his credit are—Dakhya Jogya, Sandhan, Maya Mriga, Sobhayatra, Manuh, Akou Saraighat, Aswaklanta, Sendur, Nagkanya, Kabuliwala, Megh Kanya and Dusta Chowali.

Nagen Nath

Born in Hengrabari Guwahati, Nagen Nath, is another significant playwright of mobile theatre. He started his career as a playwright through a play Setu Bandhan. After that he wrote plenty of plays and occupied a prestigious position in the wide field of mobile theatre. A few of his most popular plays are: Swami, Sahajyatri, Mahajudhar Senapati, Banaria
In 1997 his play *Sri Krishnar Baikuntha Prayan* was first staged by Pallabi Theatre. The main plot of this play is based on the holy book *Srimatbhagavata*. It deals with the ruin of the *Jadu Race* of *Mahabharata* for their pride and unjust deeds. The contemporary audience accepted this play for its didactic notes. The role of Sri Krishna was performed by Mantu Kamal Barua, while the role of Balaram was performed by Jadav Saikia.

**Awatar Singh**

Securing 5th position in HSLC Examination 1981 throughout Assam, Awatar Singh successfully qualified in Higher Secondary Examination and joined in the Regional Engineering College, Bangalore. In 1988 securing third position in Civil service Engineering he joined the profession of Engineer. Besides being an intelligent student Awatar Singh
is an excellent playwright. He earned his popularity as playwright through his play *Akhan Sagar Alekh Nadi*, first performed by Makunda Theatre in 1989. Since then most of the theatre parties are performing Awatar Singh’s plays. A few of his popular Assamese plays are: *Andhadevata, Banariya Chowali, Bandini Pratima, Jiya Manuhar Samadhi, Bandi Jouban, Taz Laga Phool, Nara Khadak, Agni Kunda, Priya aru Prem, Phasi, Rajpathar Jui, Achin Preyashi, Agni Kunda, Y uga Nayak, Laila Majnu, Priyatama, Mrityu Jaal, Andha Biswash, Tezpiya Sahab, Juie Porea Ganga, Jaban Bandi, Bhal Manuhar Khong, Munna Bhai, Paket Mar* and *Maram Akura Jui*.

His *Juie Pora Ganga* was first performed by Makunda Theatre in 1996. The play presents the activities of a dutiful police officer-Pratap Hazarika. The play starts with Pratap Hazarika who is being portrayed as a sincere police officer never like to compromise his duty at any cost. One day accidentally he met Taramai, the daughter of the Gaonburha, and proposed her hand to his son Ranjan for marriage. Though Taramai was in love with Milan she sacrifices her love for the sake of her family. After her marriage she came to know that Ranjan’s firm named Ranjan Timber Firm had a direct connection with prostitutes. Both Pratap Hazarika and Taramai were successful in rooting out the evils but they lost Ranjan. The play ends with the marriage of Taramai and Milan.
Sebabrat Baruah

Sebabrat Baruah from Bihpuriya, joined as an actor in Anirban Theatre in 1983. As he failed to earn popularity as an actor, he concentrates himself with composing plays specially for mobile theatres. Today he appears to be one of the most popular playwrights of mobile theatre. A few of his popular plays are: Balighar, Akrosh, Bhadra Manuh, Amrit Manthan, Agnisikha, Jatayur Dare, Judhandehi, Manuhar Adhikar, Ganasatru, Kakadeutar Maram, Ahangkar, Alingan, Pabitra Papi, Bedakhal, Mrigaya, Karmel Sahabar Sangsar, Padatik, Jajabar, Parama Sampad, Ashil, Kathanibarit Karpheu, Nakal Hira, Kranti Kaal, Nastik, Balatkar, Latsahabbar Laaj, Lady Daina, Banjui, Nathuram Godse, Mahan Papi, Rup Arupar khela, Janmantar, Dispur, Sagar Sangamat, Sonali Bali Rupali Noi, Nilajar Laaj, Garakhia Lorara Gaan and Jonakat Andhar.

His play Jivan Nadir Ghat presents an artistic fusion of sorrows and happiness of Assamese society. Here Bikas Hazarika, the proprietor of Hazarika Cotton Mill tries to save the life of his mentally handicapped brother Bibek by celebrating his marriage with a highly educated girl Gargi. But the married life of Gargi and Bibek was not happy. Bibek became a victim of a villain Ajoy Barua, who was the manager of Hazarika Cotton Mill and died. Though there are many ups and downs in the play, the playwright in a successful way maintained the poetic justice at the end of the play.
It is true that no play of Sebabrat Baruah has burst upon the contemporary Assamese society as his *Balighar*. This play was first performed in 1985 by Apsara Theatre. Using the technique of flashback, the playwright highlights the exploitations of the upper class against the common masses. Prominent actors like Mahendra Saikia, Jyotish Sarma, Mouchumi Devi, Mani Bora and Parul Bora acted on the play *Balighar* so boldly that it left an indelible mark on the spectators.

**Jiten Sarma**

Jiten Sarma established himself as a pioneer playwright of mobile theatre through his play *Kaal Dhumuha*. It was performed successfully by Srimanta Sankaradev Theatre in 1993. After that he composed a huge number of plays and most of them had created stir among the theatre lovers of the state. A few of his popular plays are: *Mrityudut, Jalamukhi, Agniputra, Matal Ghora, Dashyu Rani Phulan Devi, Bisphoran, Ghatak, Dainosor, Kuruli, Baidhya Bhumi, Bagh Manuh Guptaghatak, Haizek Ranga Billa, Mrityudanda, Ulka, Aghat* and *Lathi*.

His play *Lathi* is a reflection of the unrest of the contemporary Assamese society. The play starts with the murder of a news reporter Parjyan Barua. Powal, brother of Bishnu was suspected as the criminal, but Bishnu and the newly arrived Police officer Rajiv Barua convinced Rima, wife of Prajyan Barua that they would find out the real murderer.
The story develops and after many ups and downs the real truth is disclosed. The atrocities conducted by the political leaders are shown through the local MLA, Gunasindhu Bhattacharya. Full of terror and suspense *Lathi* is unquestionably a great play by the playwright.

**Hemchandra Kalita**

Born in a small village named Naktapara, Dipila, Darrang in 1962, Hemachandra Kalita is one of the prominent playwrights of mobile theatres of Assam. His father Harkanta Kalita was a teacher in profession inspired his son towards dramatic activities. In 1975 while he was a student of class – VII, he composed a one act play *Mai je Durbhagiya*. It was first performed by Rajghat Samaj Sevak Sangha. After that he composed plays one after another and most of them were performed by the mobile theatres of Assam. A short list of his plays is given below. *Gharamukhi Pakhi, Ati Sonar Anguthi, Sneha Bandhan, Dhumuhar Sesat, Rajpathar Sanglap, Gan Priya Raja, Ban Manuh, Bag Nakh, Atma Sanman, Papiya tara, Chotal Palehi Maan, and Bajak Daba Bajak Sansha.*

**Abhijit Bhattacharya**

Among the younger generation of playwrights, Abhijit Bhattacharya has achieved the status of the major force in the wide field of mobile theatre. Born in December 26, 1973, Abhijit Bhattacharya receives a
cultural environment from his early days specially from his father Hem Bhatta. Presently working as a sub-editor of an esteemed Assamese daily, Abhijit started his career as a playwright through his play *Samiran Barua Ahi Ase*. Based on an Assamese story under the same title by Manoj Goswami the play was first performed by Awahan Theatre in 2000. After that without any pause Abhijit Bhattacharya composed a number of plays and most of them are well received by the theatre loving audience. Use of gimmick is a remarkable feature of his plays. A few of his well received plays are: *Santa Sista Dusta Chowali, Abuj Dora Achin Kaina, Sundari Sanyashini, Milan Mala Ek Prem Kahini, Nach Mayuri Nach, Mor Prem Tomar Sendur, Mane Kande Mane Mane, Mayabi Mayab, Rangdhal Chowali Maoi, AK 47*, and *Professor Abinash*.

Besides, a few other playwrights have also composed plays on different topics and helped in the free flow of the living stream of mobile theatres of Assam. Among these Reba Bora, Rudra Choudhury, Ranjit Sarma, Kanouj Baishya, Babul Khataniyar, Bipul Kumar Baruah, Sushil Goswami, Khirod Khanikar, Sampak Sarma, Samarendra Barman, Mridul Chutiya, Dhrubajyoti Sarma, Chakradhar Deka, Dipak Tamuli, Debajit Sarma, Manoj Bhatta, Sonmani Dutta, Binod Bhagawati are significant.