ABSTRACT

The Study

Mobile Theatre of Assam has a long heritage in the field of performing Art. The term ‘Mobile’ to this popular medium was first used by the renowned social worker Radha Govinda Baruah after seeing its performances in Latasil playground of Guwahati. The first Mobile Theatre group of Assam was established in 1963. It was Nataraj theatre founded by veteran theatre organiser Achyut Lahkar. In fact, Assamese Mobile Theatre took such an organised form after a long journey of more than 30 years in which it was in the form of Jatra and Opera in the initial stage. There is no other theatre in the world like Assamese Mobile Theatre. It has given Assamese culture a unique identity. Revolutionary drama worker Brajanath Sarma’s Kohinoor Opera was the pre indication of Mobile Theatre of Assam in 1960’s. Brajanath Sarma was the pioneer of Assamese commercial mobile stage. Achyut Lahkar introduced several new things to the Mobile Theatre movement of Assam. In Assam, Mobile Theatre has been playing two roles; one promoting drama as an art; and the other, promoting drama as a medium of entertainment as well as communication. Mobile Theatre is a mixture of art and commerce. It has also immense contributions to socio-economic and educational upliftment of Assamese people. It always performs its social responsibility by enacting a dance drama either on socio-cultural issue or on mythological theme before the performance of the main play. It is a medium that has great impact on the viewers. The plays enacted by the theatre groups offered a veritable analysis of multifarious social evils. From the highly qualified spectators to illiterate villagers, all get some point to think after enjoying the performance of a play of Mobile Theatre. Mobile Theatre also contributes to the cultural environment of the state. Music and dance of Mobile Theatre is essentially of folk flavour. Over the years they have managed to capture and use the myriad tunes of the people of Assam, leading to the preservation and spread of folk forms, be it tunes or dance form. Mobile Theatres also have a tremendous contribution to Assamese literature. They have created some new playwrights and offered many scripts to Assamese literature. Though it is not their purpose yet the Mobile Theatres help in the educational upliftment of the people indirectly. The very functioning of Mobile Theatre resembles to modern day’s social enterprise. Globalization has brought
changes to the cultural taste of the people. Commercialization of culture has been started. It has created a market for drama in which Mobile Theatre groups are becoming sellers of drama. In fact, taking the challenges of globalisation they have changed themselves while this change itself has brought new challenges to them. It is seen that, with the advent of modern technologies and impact of cultural imperialism this entertainment medium has sometime lost its artistic value. In this research study an attempt is made to analyse Assamese Mobile Theatre as a medium of entertainment as well as communication in the society.

Relevance of the Study

Assamese entertainment mass media has a very long history. It has passed through various stages from time to time and reaches its presence existence by overcoming some serious obstacles and challenges. Bharatmuni in his Natyashastra mentioned about the presence of some folk performances as medium of entertainment in very early days of human civilization. Among these, Pootala-Naach (Puppet shows), Oja-Pali, Dhulia Gaan and Khuliya Gaan played an important role as a medium of entertainment or amusement among the people of Assam during 17th and 18th century. Besides these, various folk cultures of different ethnic groups of Assam, especially Bhari-Gaan, Nagara-Naam or Nagranaam, Dotara-Gaan, Geetalu-Gaan, Hanaghora, Dinthigay Gouban etc. were very popular source of entertainment. In the same way various ritualistic songs like Aai-Naam, Biya-Naam; festivals songs like Naokhelor-Geet, Holi-Geet and Garakhiya-Geet etc. also played an important role as a means of entertainment among the people of Assam at early days.

Although these folk cultures were very popular medium of entertainment in very early period among the people of the State, the birth of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva (1449-1568) gave a new appearance in the entertainment scenario of Assam. After Sankardeva, his disciple Mahapurush Madhabdeva also played an important role for the development of drama movement in Assam.

After the death of Mahapurush Sankardeva and Mahapurush Madhabdeva, the development of Assamese drama movement stopped for some time and on August 25, 1888, ‘Asomiyat Bashar Unnati Sadhini Sabha’ (ABUSS), a cultural
organization was formed which played a very significant role for drama development of Assam.

After this prominent personality like Hemchandra Goswami, Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Ramratan Choudhury etc. have worked a lot for establishing a permanent theatre hall in Assam. As a result of this the famous Ban Theatre of Tezpur, Assam was formed in the year 1907. With the passage of time, permanent stages were made in different places of Assam. In the same way, in 1923-24, Kumar Bhaskar Natya Mandir was established in Guwahati and it had played a significant role for development of drama movement in Assam.

In November, 1933, Brajanath Sarma, a prominent leader of drama movement in Assam took a bold step with the introduction of female as co-artist through his ‘Assam Kohinoor Opera Party’ at Doomdooma in Sibsagar. Moran Jeeori was the play where female took part in acting for the first time in the history of drama development in Assam.

In the mean time India became independent on August 15, 1947 and with this a transformation came on every aspects of human life whether it is economic, political, social or cultural. The drama scenario of the state was also not an exception of this.

In 1963, a new era of Assamese drama began with the birth of Nataraj Theatre; the first Mobile Theatre of Assam by Achyut Lahkar in Pathsala. Since its inception Mobile Theatre of Assam has been playing an important role as a medium of entertainment and communication. In present time, Assamese Mobile Theatre is known as the biggest mobile entertainment industry of the world. Hence, a systematic and detailed study on Assamese Mobile Theatre is need at this time and in this research work an in-depth study on different aspects of Assamese Mobile Theatre as a medium of entertainment and communication is done which will boost this industry a lot for its future growth and development.

In the literature study it is also found that, Dr. Kaushik Kumar Deka has done a research work on Mobile Theatre of Assam and its impact on Socio-Cultural life; A study in North Kamrup Area. In his research, Dr. Deka made a study on the formation of various Mobile Theatres, which is limited especially to the North Kamrup area of
Assam. But in this research work a detailed and thorough study is done on the growth and evolution of Assamese Mobile Theatre since its inception upto present time with a special focus on the role of Assamese Mobile Theatre as a medium of entertainment as well as communication in the society. At the same time, a study is also done on various modern techniques used by Mobile Theatre parties of Assam which is very need in present time.

Objectives

The objectives of this research study are;

- To study the origin and growth of Assamese Mobile Theatre.
- To study the role of Assamese Mobile Theatre as medium of communication.
- To study Assamese Mobile Theatre as a medium of entertainment.
- To make a study on various new trends used in Assamese Mobile Theatre.

Methodology of the Study

It is an analytical study based on both Primary and Secondary data and hence for collecting necessary data, both Secondary as well as Primary sources is used. In order to collect required information, libraries of some universities namely Gauhati University, Dibrugarh University, Tezpur University, and Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD) are visited for studying books and other related literature work during the review study. Newspapers, Journals, Ph.D. Thesis related to my area of work are used for collecting secondary data. Again, several visits are also done to Pathsala, the birth place of modern Assamese Mobile Theatre for collecting primary information. Persons related with Assamese drama as well as literature are also interviewed during the time of data collection. Own observation is also done to collect some firsthand primary data. Internet is another important source which occasionally used to collect necessary information.
Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this proposed research study is that; “modern Assamese Mobile Theatre gives more importance on entertaining their audiences rather than its dramatic performances which is a serious threat to this biggest cultural medium of the state.”

The Work

The study is presented in six chapters including the introduction and conclusion. Besides this, References, Annexures and Photographs are also attached at the end.

The topic of the research has been introduced in the Chapter One (Introduction) wherein the meaning of medium, meaning of entertainment, definition of entertainment, different forms of entertainment, review of literature, relevance of the study, objectives, methodology used and hypothesis with a brief description have been discussed about.

Chapter Two (Evolution of Assamese Drama) deals with the details regarding definition and history of Assamese drama since its very beginning under the point, origin of drama in Assam, Sankardeva and his Bhaona, later period upto modern drama and the age of modern drama in Assam.

A detailed discussion has done on Chapter Three (Mobile Theatre and Assam) containing different stages regarding the birth of Mobile Theatre in Assam. In here, the role of Jatra in formation of Assamese Mobile Theatre is also discussed under the point ‘From Jatra to Mobile Theatre’. Again, the history and evolution of Assamese Mobile Theatre is also studied as The Beginning Age, The Golden Age and The Present Age. In the same way, applications of various modern techniques like playwright’s technique, director’s technique, producer’s technique, stage management, settings, lighting, costumes and sound designs are discussed.

Chapter Four (Modern Assamese Mobile Theatre as a Medium of Communication) deals with the role of modern Assamese Mobile Theatre as a medium of communication. In here the role of playwright’s of Assamese Mobile Theatres in opinion building is discussed. In the same way its role in edutainment as well as
entertainment are also discussed. Later, the role of modern Assamese Mobile Theatre in the promotion of theatre environment in the state, opportunity of employment as well as the entertainment function perform by Mobile Theatre of Assam is discussed in this chapter.

In Chapter Five (Assamese Mobile Theatre as a Medium of Entertainment), a discussion has been done on various elements of entertainment available in modern Assamese Mobile Theatre such as gimmick, pestering dances, glamour artists, dance drama as well as songs and music are examined. Again, a thorough discussion is also done on Mobile Theatre and entertainment trailers, television serials vis-a-vis Mobile Theatre, Mobile Theatre of Assam and National School of Drama (NSD) and impact of cultural imperialism on modern Assamese Mobile Theatre is also thoroughly discussed in this chapter.

At the end, Chapter Six (Summary and Conclusion) is forwarded by way of conclusion, challenges for Assamese Mobile Theatre, discussion and findings.

At the last of the work References are included followed by the annexure and photographs. APA (American Psychological Association) 6th edition citation style is followed in References.

**Summing Up:**

Mobile Theatre is without doubt one of the most popular forms of entertainment in the state of Assam. This hugely flourishing industry that started its journey in 1963, has also successfully celebrated its golden jubilee year. During this long period of time, from 1963 to 2016, more than hundreds number of Mobile Theatre parties are formed in various parts of the state. Now a day, modern Assamese Mobile Theatre uses different new technologies which are needed with the passes of time. The most important point in here is that, if the Mobile Theatre of Assam uses these technologies in a positive way it will become more successful to continue its journey as the biggest entertainment medium of the world in coming days.