CHAPTER 3

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CHAPTER 3

MOBILE THEATRE AND ASSAM

3.1: Introduction

The history of Mobile Theatre of Assam could be traced back to more than half a century. During the last fifty years more than hundred numbers of Assamese Mobile Theatre parties were formed in different parts of Assam, however only a few among them could survive for more than a decade. Of course, at the same time there are many Mobile Theatre groups in Assam, which have been performing continuously for the last thirty to forty years. This is a big achievement for Assamese Mobile Theater. According to Kishor Kumar Kalita, this is a tremendous achievement on the part of these mobile groups to sustain this cultural industry of the state.¹ At present time Mobile Theatre is one of the most popular entertainment medium among the people of Assam.

The *Hemkosh* dictionary edited by Hemchandra Baruah defines the term ‘Mobile’ means ‘that which is being made to travel, travelling’ (*p* 855) and ‘Theatre’ means ‘a theatre hall’ (*p* 535). Thus Mobile Theatre means a type of theatrical performance by a group of people in a theatre hall by travelling one place to another. A special characteristic of Mobile Theatre is that it travels from one place to another with full equipments for performing its plays which make this popular medium unique in nature and thus it was named as ‘mobile theatre’.²

3.2: From Jatra to Mobile Theatre

The story of the Assamese theatre culture is very old, which was imported from Bengal in the form of *Jatra* with the advent of the British rulers to Assam. The beginning of
the Assamese Jatra was a direct influence of Bengal Jatra party. The first Jatra theatre in Assam was started eighteen years after the Jatra theatre in Kolkata came into being. It is a common knowledge as well as various studies prove that with the entry of British rule in Assam, Assamese language was displaced from the official communication. On the other hand, Bengali language was used as official language in the Court as well as educational institutes of the state for several decades in order to facilitate the few Bengali officials and clerks, who were able to convince the British rulers. At that time Assamese is not an independent language but only a dialect of Bangla. It was only in 1873, after a tireless effort by the American Baptist Missionaries, the Assamese language was back in offices, courts and educational institutions. The long lasting effect of Bangla language was visible in cultural side of Assam and also in Assamese Jatra. Besides, almost all prominent Assamese intellectuals and cultural personalities of Assam had their academic and cultural training in Bengal. Assamese students studying in Kolkata were directly influenced by the Bengali culture. Therefore, it was very much obvious that Bengali culture will have a direct influence in Assamese cultural arena.

During that period most of the educational institutions of Assam were under the jurisdiction of Calcutta University, and a large numbers of student went to Calcutta for higher studies. These students also came in contact with the culture and traditions of Bengali’s.

It is view of many Assamese intellectuals that due the heavy influence of Bengali culture in Assamese life, popularity of Assamese Bhaona or Ankiya Naat gradually declined especially in the urban areas. Eminent scholar H Bhattacharyya writes, “Along with the progress of time and varying circumstances, the Bhaona began to undergo
some changes in the nature of their performances; the long standing religious fervor gradually declined.”

This declined popularity of Bhaona ultimately inspired for the development of another performing art called Jatra. The people who went to Bengal for various reasons came in touch with Bengali Jatra and they were so much attracted by this Jatra that they encouraged for the development of this art form in their native places and gradually Jatra culture developed in Assam.

Here it is very important to see the uses of the word Jatra in Assam. In Assam it is very difficult to say if anybody had used the term Jatra before Sankardeva. Dr. Maheswar Neog writes, “What type of Jatra, if any, was prevalent in Kamrupa Assam before Sankardeva cannot definitely be known. But he uses the term Jatra to describe such of his full fledged drama as the Kaliadaman and Parijat Haran which suggests an impress of this non classical popular type of play where Sankardeva saw its representation in his own province and outside”.

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.

After the arrival of British, the popularity of Bhaona and Gayan-Bayan gradually fell down and a new form of Jatra developed under the initiative of some people who had visited Bengal and enjoyed Bengali Jatra. This new type of Jatra first developed in the second half of nineteenth century in Lower Assam. In between 1860-1880, the first commercial Jatra party of Assam was established in a small village named Murkuchi in the undivided Kamrup district (now in Nalbari district) under the initiative of Jaydev Sarma.
With the beginning of this, different *Jatra* parties were formed in various parts of Assam time and again. Persons who were played a very influential role in the development of *Jatra* in Assam were, Brajanath Sarma, Krishna Sarma, Harendra Nath Sarma, Uday Sarma, Rajani Bhattacharyya, Uday Bhagawati, Har Narayan Baishya, Sanatan Hazarika, Dharma Das Mishra, Pushpa Mishra, Kalicharan Sarma, Gopal Mishra, Kamala Adhikari, Srikanta Sarma, Kanak Sarma, Jogesh Sarma, Chandra Choudhury etc.

In the year 1959, “Nataraj Opera Party” was formed by Sada Lahkar in Pathsala. It was quite different from other *Jatra* parties especially in light, music and sound. This was the first step towards the transformation of *Jatra* movement to the wide field of ‘*Bhramyman*’ in Assam.

After “Nataraj Opera Party” some other *Jatra* parties were also formed in different parts of the state of Assam. But most of them could not continue their journey for a long period of time and came to close. In 1963, when Nataraj Theatre the first fully fledged Mobile Theatre was formed by Achyut Lahkar, people came in contact with an extra taste in performance. And with the passes of time, the popularity of old age *Jatra* gradually declined mainly due to its extreme use of traditional music, over acting and lack of well decorated stage. It is true that *Jatra* 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 performances of *Jatra* parties of Assam.
3.3: History and Evolution of Mobile Theatre in Assam

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw the formation of different Jatra parties in various parts of Assam. The formation of these Jatra parties helped a lot and was the pre-indication in the foundation of Mobile Theatre in Assam.

When Jatra or Opera was a very popular medium of entertainment among the general people of Assam, a few enthusiastic youths thought for an alternative way to give Jatra a more sophisticated form. Achyut Lahkar, a passionate youth of Pathsala, under Barpeta district of Assam took an initiative to make Assamese Jatra more commercial, sophisticated as well as realistic. Under his bold leadership, a new episode was begun in the drama movement of Assam with the birth of first commercial Assamese Mobile Theatre in the name of Nataraj Theatre.

3.3.1: The Beginning Age

In Assam the journey of modern Assamese Mobile Theatre was started by Achyut Lahkar of Pathsala. On October 2, 1963 on the occasion of Gandhi-Jayanti, Nataraj Theatre started the journey of Mobile Theatre in Assam with the performance of the play Bhogjara written by Natasurjya Phani Sarma. The other plays performed in its first year of inception were Jerengar Sati by Uttam Baruah, Tikendrajeet by Atul Chandra Hazarika and Haidar Ali. Introduction of female actresses, decorated lighting system, comfortable theatre hall, comfortable seating arrangement for the audiences, scientific sound and music forced the people to consider Nataraj Theatre as the first Mobile Theatre of Assam. Here it is important to mention that in its very beginning the term mobile was not used in the name of Nataraj Theatre. The title ‘mobile’ to this biggest cultural medium of the state was given by renowned Assamese social worker late Radha Govinda Baruah. In the year 1963-1964, Nataraj Theatre was invited to
Latasil field in aid of Gauhati Town Club. It is known that Radha Govinda Baruah first used this term in the remark book of Suradevi Theatre to refer to this particular type of theatre after seeing the performance in Latasil field in Guwahati. It was in 1969. Since then it has been named as Mobile Theatre.\textsuperscript{11} After enjoying the show performed by Nataraj Theatre in Latasil field of Guwahati, Radha Govinda Barua wrote an article in his newspaper \textit{The Assam Tribune} where he mentioned that, “There is no theatre in any parts of the world of this kind which has its own sound machine, own electrical instruments for technical usage, own stage, own theatre hall and other different instruments. This is unique in nature and hence it is titled as the first Mobile Theatre of the world”.\textsuperscript{12}

In 1966, Nataraj Theatre introduced a new technique in the plays of Assamese Mobile Theatre which is known as ‘theatre scope’. In its next year, that is in 1967, with the introduction of both the ‘theatre scope’ and ‘projector’ helped the director to present some dramatic scenes more realistically on stage. The play \textit{1857} was considered as most successful with the use of ‘theatre scope’ in that year. The ‘theatre scope’ was controlled by Achyut Lahkar, the producer himself.

In 1971 Nataraj Theatre used ‘triple stage’ system for giving more entertainment to its audiences. But this triple stage system could not continued for a long time and came to close after first year of its introduction and Achyut Lahkar became unsuccessful as it become technically difficult to prepare the settings of three stage at a same time. Another reason behind its failure was that, till then the concept of permanent stage as it seen now a day was not used by the Mobile Theatre parties and only revolving stage was used for performance. For this it was very difficult to shift all the three stage at a same time.
Introduction of ‘Cine Theatre’ by Achyut Lahkar in 1970 was a revolutionary change in the growth and development of Mobile Theatre in Assam. With the help of cine theatre technique it became very easy to show different cinematic shots on stage. At the beginning year of its introduction, this technique became popular among the audience but it decreases the dramatic performance of a play on stage. Through cine theatre techniques, shots were shown in the screen of the stage and hence the real performance of the characters were kept in behind and thus the value of dramatic performance goes down. After some years, gradually this cinematic technique was not used in the performance of the plays of Assamese Mobile Theatre and this attempt started by Achyut Lahkar became in vogue. Of course, 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 was the first Assamese film produced by a Mobile Theatre party.  

The beginning of Mobile Theatre gave a new platform to the drama movement of Assam. According to Achyut Lahkar, the chief causes behind the birth of Mobile Theatre in Assam were; “to give financial security to all those artists who are engage in this cultural medium, to concentrate more for upliftment of drama culture in Assam as well as to give a new shape of *Jatra* parties for making this medium more popular among the people of Assam.”  

Most of the producers of current Mobile Theatre parties of Assam gained their early experiences from their close association with the then Nataraj Theatre and it went a very long way in establishing their carriers in this field. With the passes of time several new Mobile Theatre parties were formed in other parts of the state. On September 9, 1964, a new Mobile Theatre party namely ‘Suradevi Natya Sangha’ was started by
Dharani Barman in Chamata of Nalbari district. In 1966, the name of this party was changed to ‘Suradevi Theatre’. Till then the plays of mobile theatre were performed in open stage and audience can enjoy it from all four sides of the stage. But Dharani Barman introduced a new system known as ‘three dimension stage’ in the year 1970-1971. In here the back side of the stage was kept closed and the audience can view the performance from three sides of the stage. The man who had made this change was Akshya Patgiri from Belsor, Nalbari. With the help of Akshya Patgiri, Dharani Barman introduced ‘three dimension stage’ as well as ‘revolving stage’ system in the history of Mobile Theatre in Assam.

In 1966, Karunakanta Mazumdar of Hajo formed ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’. Here it is important to mention that Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, the cultural doyen of Assam entered in the field of Mobile Theatre through ‘Purbajyoti Theatre’. It is the first Mobile Theatre group where Natasurjya Phani Sarma and Dr. Bhupen Hazarika along with Bhaben Barua, the well known play writer, Ratan Lahkar, the producer of ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ and Krishna Roy, the producer of ‘Abahawn Theatre’ worked together. In later, the name of this mobile theatre party was changed to ‘Amar Theatre’ but it could not continued its journey for a long time and came to close after ten years of its existence in the year of 1976.

In 1969, a new mobile theatre party namely ‘Mancharupa Theatre’ was started by Hemakanta Talukdar in Muguria of Pathsala. After performing for two years in different places of Assam, it came to close. According to the producer Hemakanta Talukdar, economic difficulty was the primary cause of its extinction. Here it is very important to mention that Mancharupa Theatre introduce the concept of ‘static double stage’ and after that ‘static triple stage’ system. The stage system of all the Mobile
Theatres parties of present time in Assam is just an imitative form started by ‘Mancharupa Theatre’.

In the meantime different Mobile Theatre parties were formed in various parts of Assam. Some of them are Rupanjali Theatre, Barpeta (1968); Asom Star Theatre, Pathsala and Guwahati (1970); Makunda Theatre, Makhibaha (1972); Rupkonwar Theatre, Nalbari (1974), Jyotirupa Theatre, Nitai Pukhuri, Sibasagar (1975) etc. All these theatre parties came to close after some year of its existence due to economic instability as well as proper guide ship.

In 1975, ‘Bhagyadevi Theatre’ was formed by Sarat Mazumdar at Morowa of Nalbari district in Assam. In its very beginning, this was known as ‘Bhagyadevi Natya Samiti’, an opera party in 1968. Again in the year 1981-1982 the name of ‘Bhagyadevi Natya Samiti’ was changed and it was renamed as ‘Theatre Bhagyadevi’. Till now it is running under the banner of this name in the wide field of Assamese Mobile Theatre. It is important to mention here that ‘Theatre Bhagyadevi’ is the oldest Mobile Theatre party of Assam which is still continuing its journey from its very beginning and passed a glorious history of forty eight years of its existence in the field of Mobile Theatre in Assam.

Meanwhile, Harikanta Muchahari and Chandrakanta Muchahari started two Mobile Theatres in Bodo language namely, ‘Sowzou Phaoni Alpha’ and ‘Sourang Manju Theatre’. This two were the first Mobile Theatres of Assam in Bodo language. ‘Sowzou Phaoni Alpha’ theatre was formed by Harikanta Muchahari of Dalgaon in 1974. In the very next year in 1975, ‘Sourang Manju Theatre’ was formed by Chandrakanta Muchahari popularly known as Chekha at a small village named Lechera, six kilometers away from Pathsala town. Haren Daimari, Annirudha Basumatary, Gajan
Boro, Golak Brahma, Basanta Brahma, Nilima Daimari and Rupahai Basumatary were some well known artist of this theatre party.

After this, a few numbers of Mobile Theatre of Jatra type was also formed in Bodo language. Some of them were Lembro, Hemshree, Maina, Anchi, Nirmali, Angfaury etc. The special characteristic of all these theatre parties was that it performed Bodo plays related to Bodo community in Bodo language. But owing to financial instability all these parties could survive for a long time except ‘Sourang Manju Theatre’.

Although the above mention Mobile Theatres of Assam brought various changes in performance and stage decoration, gradually this theatre troupe’s started to lose their popularity. The reason behind this declining popularity of the Mobile Theatre parties of that time was due largely to the fact that the general public wanted certain sort of changes due to undergoing changes of time. Most of the plays performed by these theatre parties were either historical or mythological in nature. But at the same time, the general taste of audiences 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 literature scenario, which saw lots of realistic literature particularly novels. The character in this literature was such that people could identify themselves with the story of novels. 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 peoples. Demand for a dramatic presentation of realistic stories could be seen among the audience. Moreover the presentation of 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 the expectation of the audiences which was essential to draw the attention to the theatre halls of that time. The theatres of that time were hardly aware of these changes taking place in public stage and it resulted in its fast declining popularity. The theatre parties born in next few years, namely ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ and ‘Abahawn Theatre’ seriously headed to these new requirements to satisfy the audiences. Thus began a new chapter in the performance of Mobile Theatre in Assam.

3.3.2: The Golden Age

The golden age of Assamese Mobile Theatre was started with the birth of ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ in 1976. 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’ in Pathsala which brought a transformation to this biggest cultural medium of the state. Prior to this Mobile Theatre was familiar among a particular section of people in the society especially in the rural areas but ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ brought this medium to all sections of people both in rural as well as urban places of Assam. The entry of glamorous persons from the field of Assamese film industry gave a new identity to Assamese Mobile Theatre. In 1980, entry of Nipon Goswami, a popular artist of Assamese film industry into ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ in the play Asimot Jar Heral Sima gave a new looks to this medium.

In the same way some prominent Assamese writers started to write plays for Mobile Theatre and as a result of this Assamese Mobile Theatre became a subject of debate and discussion among some intellectuals as well as newspapers and magazines of Assam. Within a short period of time Mobile Theatre became a place of livelihood for various
amateur artists of Assam and ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ gave the pace of this movement. Here it is important to mention that with the formation of ‘Nataraj Theatre’ the era of Mobile Theatre in Assam was started but ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ played a very significant role to bring this medium into a higher platform in the wide field of Assamese Mobile Theatre as a whole.22

In compared to other Mobile Theatre parties of Assam, ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ is always unique. It has some special features for which it is often considered as the polestar in the wide field of Mobile Theatres of Assam. These are;

1. It is the first Mobile Theatre group of Assam which performed three shows in a one night. In 1980-1981, ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ made this record by performing the play *Devi Sanyasini* at Nalbari Rass Mahotsav.

2. It is the first Mobile Theatre party that performed ‘matinee show’. In 1982-1983, they performed *Cleopatra* at Jorhat as ‘matinee show’.

3. It is the first Mobile Theatre of Assam that performed two great Indian epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. In 1984-1985, ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ performed *Mahabharata* and in the very next year *Ramayana* on stage.

4. It is the first Mobile Theatre that performed western classics like *Iliad, Odyssey, Cleopatra, Tarzan*, etc.

5. It is the first Mobile Theatre group of Assam which builded a bridge between the actors of Mobile Theatre and the celluloid world. ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ for the first time invited film actors from Assamese film industry to work on mobile stage.
6. *Bagh-Manuh*, a dance drama performed by ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ was later broadcasted by Guwahati as well as Delhi Doordarshan simultaneously. It is the first dance drama of a Mobile Theatre broadcasted by Doordarshan.

7. It is the first Mobile Theatre group which performed Hollywood blockbuster, prestigious Oscar award winner, James Cameron’s *Titanic*. On stage it creates a stir among the audiences. Popular film actress Nikumoni Barua played the role of Rose while Kuntal Goswami played the role of Jack on stage. More than sixty persons were seen at a time on the deck of Titanic when she hit in the iceberg.

Here it is important to mention that, the father of Mobile Theatre of Assam, Achyut Lahkar started a new concept known as ‘Cine Thetare’ in his thetare group ‘Nataraj Theatre’ in the year 1968. Through this new concept cinematic shots were shown on stage through projector on screen. With the help of this technique river, snake, airplane, moving car etc. were shown on stage. In its very earlier year of inception the technique of cine theatre became popular among the audience, but one drawback of this new technique was that it is projected through the use of a screen on stage and hence the audience could not get the taste of enjoyment of a real performance one stage. Hence Achyut Lahkar could not continue this technique in the later period of time. But the play *Titanic* and *Jurassic Park* performed by ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ and *Lady Diana* perform by ‘Abahawn Theatre’ became a great success in the history of Mobile Thetare in Assam. The reason behind this success was that the producer and the director use the real scene on stage and hence audience got full satisfaction of enjoying a drama on stage.
After this, ‘Moon Theatre’ was started by Abala Barman on July 8, 1977 in Nalbari. This was the first female Mobile Theatre party formed in the history of India. Of course it came to close after first year of its existence due to inefficient leadership and lack of proper management.23

With the passes of time some other Mobile Theatre parties were formed in different parts of Assam. Some of them are Manchakonwar Theatre, North Guwahati (1977); Lakhimi Theatre, Goalpara (1977); Bishnujyoti Theatre, Chamata (1977); Radhika Devi Theatre, Kamrup (1977); Rupalim Theatre, Abhyapuri (1978); Kalpana Theatre, Nalbari (1978); Maa Lakshmi Theatre, Golaghat (1978); Aparupa Theatre, Pascim Chamata (1978); Biswajyoti Theatre, Nalbari (1978) and Apsara Theatre, Chamata (1979) etc.

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

In 1980, a new Mobile Theatre party was formed in Assam in the name of ‘Abahawn Theatre’ by Krishna Roy of Pathsala. With the formation of ‘Abahawn Theatre’, a new trend was started in the cultural field of Assam.24 Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia, a well known literate of the state entered in this biggest cultural medium of the state as a playwright through ‘Abahawn Theatre’. Dr. Saikia wrote a numbers of plays for ‘Abahawn Theatre’ in his twenty four year careers in the field of Mobile Theatre of Assam. Here it is important to point out that, from the second year of its inception that is since 1981, ‘Abahawn Theatre’ has been performing twenty five numbers of plays
written by Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia without any pause. His first play for Assamese Mobile Theatre was *Ramdhenu* performed by ‘Abahawan Theatre’ on stage.\(^{25}\) Some of his other prominent plays are *Satabdi, Andhakup, Bandisaal, Samudramanthan, Gahbar, Ramybhoomi, Neelakantha, Deenabandhu, Swarnajayanti*, etc. After ‘Nataraj Theatre’ and ‘Kohinoor Theatre’, ‘Abahawn Theatre’ was the only Mobile Theatre party which facilitated 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 in Assam since 1980. Now a days, ‘Abahawn Theatre’ is one of the most popular Mobile Theatre party of Assam which continuously running its journey for more than thirty five years from its very beginning.

In 1984 ‘Aparupa Theatre’ was formed by Mahananda Sarma at Panigaon, five kilometers away from Nalbari town. Well known Assamese film actor and director Bijoy Sankar worked in this theatre.

In 1985 Prasanta Hazarika formed ‘Hengool Theatre’ in Mariyani, Jorhat. This was the second leading Mobile Theatre party started from upper Assam after ‘Jyotirupa Theatre’ started by Golap Borgohain in 1975-76.\(^{26}\) Performing play like *Invisible Man*, ‘Hengool Theatre’ shows the way to perform science fiction on stage. This play was the translated version of Hollywood blockbuster *Invisible Man*. After the sudden death of Prasanta Hazarika, his wife Ila Kakati Hazarika had taken the charge of producer of ‘Hengool Theatre’. In 1988 it received the prestigious Atul Chandra Hazarika best play award for the play *Mukhya Mantri* written by Mahendra Borthakur. Now ‘Hengool Theatre’ is continuing its journey as one of the most successful Mobile Theatre group of Assam with flying colures under the efficient leadership of Samudra Gupta Hazarika, son of Prasanta Hazarika.
In 1986 Nagen Lahkar formed ‘Devadashi Theatre’ at Helana, seven kilometers away from Pathsala. In the beginning year it has created a boom keeping almost all the famous artist of Mobile Theatre of that time. Hemanta Dutta, Tohfik Rahman, Reba Phukan and many 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 Mobile Theatre troupes in Assam. In its beginning year, ‘Devadashi Theatre’ performed *Aai, Nabin Master, Mayur Pangshi* and *Rupaban*. All these four plays earned unexpected popularity from the audience. But it could not continue this tradition for a long time. Owing to the financial crisis Nagen Lahkar had to close down this theatre party in 1989.

In 1998, Nazrul Islam with the help of few residents of Nalbari town formed ‘Bordaishila Theatre’ at Nalbari. From the very beginning it catches the attraction of the theatre lovers by performing some sensational plays on stage. *Dakhal, Jodha, Haat, Ekhon Natun Naat, Doctor Bezbaruah* and *Pakistanor Preyashi* are a few to be named in this regard.²⁷


Here it is very essential to mention that most of these Mobile Theatre parties could not continue their journey for a long time and came to close after a very few years of its formation. Of course a few of them are still in existence and fruitfully performing their shows in the cultural field of Assam. Here, ‘Hengool Theatre’ and ‘Bardoisila Theatre’ are very prominent and they are playing a very effective role in growth and development of Mobile Theatre movement in Assam by entertaining the audiences since its very beginning.

The period from 1975 to 2000 is considered as the ‘Golden Age’ of Assamese Mobile Theatre. During this period the growth and development of Assamese Mobile Theatre got a unique place in the cultural scenario of Assam and became a very influential source of entertainment among the people of Assam. Peoples from different parts of the state started new Mobile Theatre parties and as a result of these more than thirty numbers of Mobile Theatres tropes were formed in various nooks and corners of Assam. The important developments of Assamese Mobile Theatre during this period are;

1. The popularity of Assamese Mobile Theatre was expanded from village to town. Before this most of the Assamese Mobile Theatres limited their performances among rural peoples and villages but with the formation of ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ by Ratan Lahkar in Pathsala, the journey of Mobile Theatre got a new pace and became more familiar among the people of Assam,
especially in the towns and public places in the state. As a result of this, the number of audiences of this popular cultural medium was increased to a large extent and it came more nearer to all sections of people in the society.

2. Entry of established play writers as well as prominent persons from the field of Assamese literature was a significant development of Assamese Mobile Theatre during this period. Persons like Dr. Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Arun Sarma, Mahendra Borthakur, Ratna Oja, Padma Borkataki, Pabitra Deka, Mahesh Kalita, Munin Baruah, Hemanta Dutta, Bhabesh Baruah, Prafulla Borah etc. started to write plays for Assamese Mobile Theatre. As a result of this, a new trend was started and plays on different social, political, socio-economic as well as day to day issues were performed before the audiences. Hence, a transformation came by which the traditional way of writing plays especially on historical as well as mythological themes were replaced by the themes of day to day social issues. During this period Assamese Mobile Theatre acted as a very powerful instrument to reflect different social problems and issues and worked as the mirror of the society through its performances among the people of Assam.

3. Uses of gimmick, performances of pestering dance and entry of glamorous artists from Assamese film industry was another significant development in the journey of Mobile Theatre of Assam during this period. Cinematic techniques like train accident, airplane, rain etc. were shown on stage. The play Titanic performed by ‘Kohinoor Theatr’ on stage, written by Hemanta Dutta is a well known example of this. In the same way a numbers of glamorous artists entered into the field of Assamese Mobile Theatre for which it became more popular
among the general people of Assam. Artist like Nipon Goswami, Ila Kakati, Prashanta Hazarika, Biju Phukan, Pranjali Saikia, Mridula Baruah, Indra Baniya, Bishnu Kharghariya etc. came to this medium. Entry of these popular artists helped a lot to Assamese Mobile Theatre in increasing its entertainment value among the audiences. At the same time, Mobile Theatre became an alternative way for the audiences to enjoy the performance of these actors on stage. Here it is important to mention that entry of glamorous artist gave a new platform to Assamese Mobile Theatre as powerful entertainment industry of the state.

4. Influence of western literature as well as stories on Indian epics in the plays of Assamese Mobile Theatre was mostly seen during this period of expansion of Mobile Theatre in Assam. Plays like *Cleopatra, Odyssey, Iliad, Hamlet, Ramayana; Mahabharata* etc. were staged by which a new trend was started in growth and development of Mobile Theatre in Assam.²⁹

3.3.3: The Present Age

Assamese Mobile Theatre parties, popularly known as ‘Bhramyaman Theatre’, are a unique culture of Assam, providing entertainment in both urban and rural areas of the state. Even with the entry of satellite channels into lakhs of homes of Assam’s villages, Mobile Theatres remain the single largest mode of entertainment in rural Assam and even to a considerable extent in urban Assam.

Mobile Theatre of Assam has a long heritage in the field of performing Art. Assamese Mobile Theatre took such an organized 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 of this kind 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 of 60’s. He was the pioneer of Assamese commercial mobile stage. With the passes of time Assamese Mobile Theatre got a new platform in the cultural field of not only in Assam but its popularity was expanded to other parts of the country. National School of Drama (NSD) invited ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ to New Delhi, the capital of India for its performances in the year 2010 which is a great achievement of this cultural medium of the State. In New Delhi, Kohinoor Theatre performed it shows for five days where peoples from various parts of India as well as some other countries witnessed as its audience. Persons like Sashi Kapoor, Amzad Ali Khan, Subhalakshmi Baruah and many others were present in the line of audience. Adil Hussain, a well known actor in the Bollywood film industry gave a brief description about different aspects of Assamese Mobile Theatre. The plays performed by Kohinoor Theatre in New Delhi were *O Moi Munnai Koisu, Asimot Jar Heral Seema* and *Sitore Semeka Rati*. Besides these, ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ also performed two all time popular plays of their theatre party namely *Titanic* and *Dinosoror Atangka* in this five days tour to New Delhi. Ratan Lahkar, the architect of modern Assamese Mobile Theatre in an interview mentioned that the journey of ‘Kohinoor Theatre’ to New Delhi as invited by National School of Drama (NSD) was happened due to the great initiative of Mridul Baruah, a former Assamese student of NSD as well as Parag Sarma who works as an officer in this premier drama institute of our country. In the meantime, after the year 2000 a numbers of Mobile Theatre parties were formed in various parts of the state. Of course most of them could not continue their journey for a long time and came to close within a very short period from its existence.
Harekrishna Das, the experienced producer of ‘Pallavi Theatre’, ‘Dimond Theatre’ and ‘Indrani Theatre’, after closing down all this three parties formed ‘Pragjyotish Theatre’ in Guwahati in the year 2001. Aswamedhar Ghora, Emuthi Torar Jilikani, Porajita Nayak and Guwahatir Gabharu are some of the famous plays performed by ‘Pargajyotish Thatre’.

In 2004, Robin Neog a very skilful actor in the field of Assamese Mobile Theatre started ‘Aashirbad Theatre’ at Sonapur in Kamrup district. Before this he worked as an executive producer in ‘Hengool Theatre’ for long five years. Within a very short period of time Robin Neog became successful to make his theatre party as one of the most popular in the wide field of Mobile Theatre in Assam. In its first year of inception Robin Neog invited Jatin Bora, a well known actor of Assamese film industry to the field Mobile Theatre. In the same way Kopil Bora, a familiar actor of Assamese film industry entered into the field of Assamese Mobile Theatre for the first time through ‘Aashirbad Theatre’ in the session 2005-2006. Dora Haba Kon, Dancer, Sokat Abat Prem Kahini, Maa Deuta aru Maina etc. are some of the popular plays performed by ‘Aashirbad Theatre’.

In 2006, Sonmani Dutta formed ‘Karenghar Theatre’ in Rukmini Nagar at Hatigaon of Guwahati. It was expanded from Sa-Re-Ga-Ma, a cultural institution of Guwahati. Nirmal Talukdar, Prabin Hazarika, Ajoy Talukdar and Nabin Boro were closely associated in the formation of this Mobile Theatre party of Assam.

‘Rupraj Theatre’, another new Mobile Theatre party of Assam was formed in 2008 at Jalukbari in Guwahati. The producer of this party is Dipa Kalita.

Some other Mobile Theatre parties formed in different parts of Assam during this period were; Bhagyashree Theatre, (2003, Sapekhaiti), Anurag Movie Theatre (2005,
Belsor), Rajashree Theatre (2005, Guwahati), Shakuntala Theatre (2005, Nalbari),
Chitrakatha Theatre by Pranab Das (2005, Nalbari), Devaraj Theatre by Jon Ahmed
(2007, Nalbari), Rajtilak Theatre (2008, Guwahati), Rajmahal Theatre (2009,
Gewahati), Itihash Theatre (2009, Guwahati), Shradhanjali Theatre (2009, Baniakuchi),
Rupantar Theatre (2009, Hajo), Brahmaaputra Theatre (2009, Guwahati), Rangdhali

However, in 2006 under the leadership of Anjana Basumatary, a new Mobile Theatre
party named ‘Sandaw Baudia Theatre’ in Bodo language was formed at Mushalpur,
Baksa. In 2007-2008, it performed four plays in Bodo which attracts a large numbers of
spectators from all communities of the state.

In 2016-2017 sessions, along with the existing parties some new Mobile Theatre parties
will start their journey in Assam. ‘Chiranjeev Theatre’, a new Mobile Theatre party is
formed by Dulumoni Das. Gayatri Mahanta and Mridul Chutia, a very popular actor in
the field of Assamese Mobile Theatre will work together in here. Sanghibihin written by
Mridul Chutia is the chief attraction of ‘Chiranjeev Theatre’ for its initial year of
inception.

Another Mobile Theatre party namely, ‘Rajmukut Theatre’ will start its journey from
Pathsala, the birth place of modern Mobile Theatre in Assam. The producer of this
party is Manash Kalita. The play Narasingha, written as well as direction by Champak
Sarma is the chief attraction of this party. Dibyajyoti Das from Assamese film industry
and Champak Sarma are the main actors for ‘Rajmukut Theatre’ for the year

In the same way ‘Theatre Rajkumari’, a Bangla language Mobile Theatre will start its
journey from Jalukbari, Guwahati. Prem Samudrer Toofan written by Rama Barman
and *Matal Manusher Bhalobasha* written by Amal Kumar are two plays of this party. It is hope that formation of these new Mobile Theatre parties will bring a new revolution in the cultural scenario of Assam and will assist a lot for growth and development of this biggest cultural mass medium of the world.

In the long history of Assamese Mobile Theatre, more than one hundred and fifty theatre parties were formed in different parts of Assam since 1963. But among these about forty numbers of Mobile Theatre parties are performing their shows successfully at present time and the rest are closed down within a short period from its formation. Some popular Mobile Theatre parties of Assam in present time which are continuing their journey from a long period of time are Kohinoor Theatre (Pathsala), Abahawan Theatre (Pathsala), Bhagyadevi Theatre (Marowa), Sankardeva Theatre (Kujibali), Hengool Theatre (Mariyani), Bardoisila Theatre (Nalbari), Jyotirupa Theatre (Sibasagar), Rajtilak Theatre (Nalbari), Itihas Theatre (Guwahati) However, it is expected that in the coming days many new mobile theatre parties will emerge and it will bring many innovations for the development of wide field of Mobile Theatre of Assam.

**3.4: Application of Modern Techniques in Mobile Theatre**

For the successful presentation of a play, theatre techniques are considered as an essential part of a Mobile Theatre party. In simple, thetare technique is nothing but the way of presentation of characters by the playwright through his play. The concept of theater technique includes practices that advanced and enhanced the understanding of the audience to bring to the action and the acting by the cast on stage. With the advent of modern science and technology, theatre techniques are improving day by day.
Playwright Technique:

Theatre technique is an integral part of playwright’s creative writing of the drama. It is not merely an illusion or limitation 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 pictorial quality. But now a day the trend is changing. A playwright is 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 playwright of Mobile Theatre earlier focused on different socio-political issues on stage. These playwrights are very much conscious about the social customs and composed plays for all sections of people. Among these playwrights Prafulla Bora, Mahendra Borthakur, Braja Nath Sarma, Sevabrat Baruah, Avatar Sing and other may be placed. On the other hand, the new playwrights of present day stressed more on techniques and less on theme of the play. As a result a section of people always expressed 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 airplane etc. The reason behind it is of course to attract the audience.

Director’s Technique:

For the success of a play, the director of a mobile theatre has to work for hours and hours continuously during the time of rehearsal, as the success and failure of a play as well as mobile theatre party directly depends upon the director. The director produces the play in the way through his own imagination how it ought to be seen. He also
interprets the play in a way through which the playwrights intended with the play. Besides, the directors take care of the effectiveness of the rehearsal of the actors and coordinate the work of designers and the technicians. It becomes unquestionably a very difficult task to work as a director and coordinate different task as assigned if the director is not much experience and the person is a new comer to this field.

**Producer’s Technique:**

The producer of a Mobile Theatre is the chief person who has to manage all the standpoints and different department of his party on which the success or failure of a Mobile Theatre group is depends. These includes the playwright, the director, stage management, costume and make up, selection of players, music staff etc. This means, the producer 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 not think not only of the monetary profit but also the quality of performance as Mobile Theatre is now a day considered as one of the backbone of Assamese society and culture.

**Stage Management:**

Before knowing about the technique of stage management, it is very important to know something about the stage of Mobile Theatre. Mobile Theatre of Assam from its very beginning built the proscenium 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 of Renaissance as a mode of presenting collaborate court masques and other court entertainment. Achyut Lahkar, the producer of ‘Nataraj Theatre’, who is also regarded as the father of modern Mobile Theatre in Assam, developed this stage format with the help of two persons namely Sada Lahkar and Chandra Choudhury. Achyut Lahkar later on introduced many new concepts on stage of Mobile Theatre like moving stage, revolving stage etc., just to make the performance easier and swift. But the concept of ‘double stage’ that is prevailing all over Assam now a day was invented by Hemkanta Talukdar the producer of ‘Mancharupa Theatre’. The static double stage system provides an extra boost in the performance of a play in Mobile Theatre. Later the modern proscenium stage of Mobile Theatre helps a lot in making this medium 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 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 plays a vital role in every dramatic performance as it forms the background of the action. A setting is likely to be the first important thing of theatrical design. It is the first thing that is seen of a play just at the
rise of a curtain in a proscenium stage on a mobile theatre. Earlier in the stage of *Jatra*, where all the sides were open, no setting was used. But gradually it become so important that today no one can think of a play without settings.

Modern settings may be placed under two categories namely; realistic as well as abstract. In a modern 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 realistic settings developed in Mobile Theatre especially under the initiative of some unforgettable people like Braja Nath Sarma, Adya Sarma, Achyut Lahkar, Sada Lahkar and Chandra Choudhury. Today almost all the Mobile Theatre parties of Assam prepare this type of settings for the presentation of a play on stage.

The other type of settings is abstract setting where space, form and light play an important 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 Ocean 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 there is no existence of settings.

**Lighting:**

Lighting occupies a special place of 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 special kind of lantern of oil seeds. The invention of gas lights and electricity in nineteenth century brought a revolutionary
change in human civilization and it touches theatre also. Now days the stage lights become so important that without it acting are 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 colored by a great variety of devices. Again, electricity light can be used in innumerable ways upon actors, scenery and audience and on anything depending upon the need of the dramatic presentation of action on stage. In present day Mobile Theatre of Assam have been performing numerous plays based on Hollywood blockbusters like *Anaconda, Jurassic Park, Titanic, Invisible Man* etc., and all these plays have been a mere dream without modern system of light and sound.

**Costumes:**

The purpose of costumes have to identify character from the moment they appear on stage and signify the period they belongs to or to social milieu in which they are to be seen. They can also indicate to character circumstances whether they should appear rich and 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 *Jatra,* before the birth of ‘Kalika Opera Party’ people were not very much conscious of costumes. But the trend is changing day by day. Today most of the Mobile Theatre parties take special care of costumes 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
framework 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 today and the Mobile Theatre of
Assam is not an exception. The rise of the importance of sound design is mainly due to
the development of science and technology in modern age. Earlier when sound system
was not developed the actors and actresses had to take great effort on delivering
dialogue on stage. That is why, during that time along with the other skills an actor had
to have a loud voice. Gradually sound effects also developed to a large extent. It is true
that in a makeshift theatre hall of mobile theatre, sound system is not up to the mark. In
many cases the spectators have to take a trouble in enjoying the play in peace. It is
applicable only to those spectators whose seats are arranges in 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.

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**Notes and References:**


7 Ibid. p 107.


9 Ibid. p 25.


13 Ibid. p 35-37.

14 Ibid. p 30.

15 Ibid. p 44.


25 Ibid.


28 Ibid. p 21-22.


34 Ibid. p 189.