Modern One-Act Play is a branch of dramatic literature, the pedigree of which is to be discovered in the western dramatic literature. Of course, in the fifteenth century One-Act plays of unique type were first written in Assamese by Sankaradeva, popularly known as Ankia-Nat. Assamese language was at its zenith and the Ankia-Nat-Shaona gained its momentum in the period from fifteenth to the eighteenth century and the enactment continued in full swing. Enactment of drama was the principal means of Sankaradeva and his main disciple Madhavadeva to contact the general people for preaching his faith. Sankaradeva's One-Act plays and the modern One-Act plays are not from the same root. There is gross difference between the two.

Modern One-Act play is the phenomenon of the twentieth century. The technique, purpose, pattern and the literary style are completely different from that of Ankia-Nat, excepting the plays of Madhavadeva in which, the character of Lrd Trana is painted prominently as a pivotal character, to focus a single episode of His life and hence akin to some extent to the modern One-Act plays. In a modern One-Act play, the portrait of a single person is painted, a problem of a single or a group of persons raised or a single episode is depicted. The other characters of the drama only help in the growth of the
play if a single person is to be painted. It is a fact that neither the modern Assamese One-Act play have grown out of the Vaisnavite Ankia Nat nor influenced by the latter.¹

In Assamese literature, the modern One-Act play had its first appearance with the One-Act plays of Lakshminath Bhasarao.² Excepting 'Pacomi', the three unities, place, time and action have not been maintained in two other plays, namely, Homal and Cikopati-Nikopati of Bhasarao.

Laksmidhar Sarma's One-Act plays 'Prajapati Bhul', 'Desar Katha', 'Atmasaman', 'Hridayar Malya' etc. were published in 'Awahom' in different period of time. In the true sense, those dramas do not come in the purview of Modern One-Act plays. In the later period, before independence, Prabir Phukan wrote some One-Act plays. Those were 'Bungsadhejar Kirti', 'Dui-Dost', 'Commercial Marriage' etc. These dramas were very popular and were enacted at Guwahati.

In Assam, regular staging of One-Act plays began after the independence of India. In the sixth and seventh decades, the One-Act plays became very popular to the audience as well as the stage actors. That was the result of formation of the 'Sadou Asom Ekanka Nat Pratigya' at Dibrugarh in 1959. The

2. Ibid., p. 364
first competition of One-Act plays was held at Dibrugarh by this organisation. The founder president and the founder secretary of the 'Sadou Assam Ekanka Nat Pratiyogita' were Bishnu Rava and Tafassal Ali respectively. The aims and objects of the organisation were as under -

(a) To find out good dramatists in Assam,
(b) To search for good stage artists in Assam,
(c) To trace-out One-Act dramatic literature from the competition.

Taking all these aspects in view, it was decided to hold One-Act Play competition in different places of Assam on the basis of invitation by the local organisation of the place. The competition was held once in every year. The rules and regulations were further amended in 1967 and the name of the organisation changed to 'Asom Natya Sammilan'. Over and above, the three aims and objects as mentioned above, a strong determination taken to strengthen the organisation by opening branches in all towns and semi-towns of Assam, holding districtwise competition and finally central competition at the place for final competition. In such a move, many new dramatists came into the notice, and many good One-Act Plays were written by them. In this connection mention may be made as under - Tafassal Ali's 'Nepati Keneko Thako', Bhola Kataki's 'Ribhrot', Ghanskanta Saikia's 'Mahasamar', Bhaben Saikia's 'Baona', 'Avarodh', Himendra Kumar Barthakur's 'Dvip', Jogen Beyer's
Asom Natya Sammilan also gave stress for a stage movement in Assam on permanent footing. It was decided to unite the dramatists, stage artists for this purpose for better understanding and strengthened the movement throughout the state of Assam. Sammilan also determined to take appropriate action for improvement of the stage crafts, the acting talents and to publish the original and standard One-Act Plays and also to make the Sammilan as the common platform for dramatists, stage actors, Directors and art-lovers for an easy exchange of views with the aim to develop the dramatic literature, the stage management and the histrionic art. Arrangement of Seminars arranged to discuss the manifold problems and suggestion for their settlement.

For organising and launching a long-term movement a strong central committee was also formed to give a proper shape to the organisation. The organisation was three-fold and three stages:

1. The Branch Committees - lowest stage
2. The District Committees - Middle stage
3. The Central Executive Committee - Highest stage.
The members of the Central Committee to be elected by the general body of the organisation. The District Committee members to be elected by the general members of the districts and the Branch Committees to be formed by the general members of the branch. Of late, the central office of the Assam Natya Sannilan established in the district of Majuli and the competition of the One-Act Plays has since been reviewed by the general body and presently the competition for full-length dramas are held every year as arranged by the Assam Natya Sannilan with the co-operation of the stage artists in particular and the Assam public in general.

A question was raised as to why the One-Act Play became very popular within a short space of time. In the present juncture of time people have to remain much busy with the hard work to earn the livelihood and with multifarious works. They cannot afford sufficient time to spare for enjoyments and entertainments. As such, people like One-Act Play for enjoyment within a short space of time of 40/45 minutes.

Most of the One-Act plays consist of one scene only. Once the curtain is removed, it does not fall in the midst of the play, but only at the end. So the One-Act plays do not kill much time of the spectators and as such they are popular.

To perform a full-length play, the artists and other participants have to spare much time in rehearsal and prepare-
tion of a play. On the other hand the One-Act plays take much less time for rehearsal and preparation etc. and as such, liked by the actors and spectators.

In One-Act play, the number of actors and accessors required are less than the full-length play and as such holding of such a performance is comparatively easier. The number of female artists required in a full-length play becomes a hard-problem. In an One-Act play, generally, the female artist required less in number. In some One-Act plays, there is no part for a female artist to play.

Availability of a proper full-length play choiceable to the Party for enactment also sometime stands as a problem. The playwrights or the publishers do not normally want to publish One-Act plays because the purchaser of the literary species are small in number and does not return the actual expenditure incurred for publishing.

From the second half of the twentieth century, when the enactment of One-Act plays became very popular for the stage artists, organisers and the spectators, some learned actors and dramatists of the full-length dramas expressed bitterly that the One-Act Play stood as a challenge to the full-length play and went afraid that this new literary art would drive-out the full-length play from the stages of Assam and would be like a desolate art of the stage and consequently
the other branches of arts like music, orchestra etc. which are the part and parcel of the full-length play would also get a set-back. But in the practical field it was found that the position of full-length play has not been lowered or deteriorated. It is a fact that considering from the style, pattern, technique and as a literary art both the types have some difference but one will not define the other as a histrionic art.

It is also a fact that one-Act play is not a miniature form of a full-length drama but both have their own separate identity and characteristics, as the short story is not a small part of a novel but have their separate identities as literary species.

A one-Act Play may consists of more than one scene, but in the competition, the organisers allow only single scene to be played with a time limit of 40/45 minutes in total. This has been done to the advantage of holding a competition within a reasonable time of two to three hours in which three or four groups can enact the plays. For scene setting and for preparation the allotment of time is very much limited and as such, the plays are performed with the least number of paraphernalia on the stage or the play is performed on the stage, taking the black screen as the background.
As an One-Act play is not a part of a full-length play, but a complete art in itself, the speed of the drama should be rapid to reach the climax within the permissible limit. As such, in an One-Act play no unnecessary character can be painted nor an uncalled for dialogue can be added. In such a drama, the endeavour is made to paint distinctly a single character or a single episode with a single problem. The problem painted in One-Act play should not be of many-faced but a concrete and condensed one. The episode either may be drawn from the past or from a contemporary event.

In Assam, One-Act play competitions are held, on the whole Assam basis, in many places like Guwahati, Nalbari, Tinsukia etc. by the local committees of these places. Such One-Act Play competitions are also held in schools/colleges and universities. The problem of getting females to play the roles of female characters is no more prevalent in Assam now-a-days. Even some dramas with female characters only are also enacted entirely by the lady-artists. It may be said with determination that the enactment of One-Act plays have contributed a countable share in the stage movement in Assam along with the development of Acting, directing and producing of dramas in the state of Assam. It also has enriched our dramatic literature by creating good species of original One-Act Plays.
It cannot be denied that 'Assam Natya Sammilan' previously known as 'Soden Assam Khanka Nat Pratigya' took its birth at Dibrugarh, was the pioneer organisation in Assam to play the first fiddle of starting a regular competition of One-Act Play. It is also a fact that before the Soden Assam Khanka Nat Sammilan came into the existence, there was no such organisation in Assam which organised a competition of dramatic script, enacting of drama in a regular basis and a common platform was arranged for the stage actors, directors, script writers and lovers of arts to meet physically and discussed the trend of dramatic arts by sitting together in a congenial atmosphere. It is also a fact that the spirit and art of stage movement in Assam, was awakened by the Soden Assam Nat Pratigya organisation later came to be known as Assam Natya Sammilan produced and propagated the love for one's own mother tongue and to keep the integrity amongst the different sections of Assamese people.