a) Area of the Study:

Kamrup is one of the beautiful and fascinating districts of Assam. It has great variety and colourfulness in its natural scenery and in the cultural heritage.

The district was formally established in the year 1834. Later in the year 1983 and 1985 the district was divided into three small districts, namely, Kamrup, Palbari and Barpeta. But our study is confined to the undivided district of Kamrup. Hence, the area of the study encompasses the undivided district of Kamrup.

The name Kāmrūp is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kāmrūpa' which means assuming any form at will. The name owes its origin to an interesting myth. It is said that Kāmadeva, the God of Love, was reduced to ashes by the fiery glances of Lord Siva in the river island of Umananda and that he regained his form (i.e., rūpa) here and that is why the name of Kāmrūp or

1 Gait, E.: History of Assam, p.349
2 The Assam Tribune, 3rd July'83 and 15th August'85.
Kāmarūpa was chosen for his place. Further, B. Bakati connects Kāmarūpa with such Austric formations as Kāmrū or Kāmrut which in Santali language denotes the name of lesser divinity. The term Kāmrū or Kāmrut is nothing but an alternative form of Kāmarūpa.

Kāmarūpa was formerly known as Prāgjyotisa, i.e., the place of eastern astronomy in the earliest days, mentioned frequently in Indian scriptures, mythologies and poetical works. According to the Kālikā Purāṇa, Prāgjyotisapura was a land where the creator Brahmā sat and first created the stars. So the city was called equal to the city of Indra.

E. Gait has substantiated the etymological explanation offered by the Kālikā Purāṇa. He writes: "Prāg means former or eastern and jyotisa, a shining astrological body. Prāgjyotisapura may be taken to mean the city of Eastern Astrology.

5. Kālikā Purāṇa, XXXVIII/156.
The name is interesting in connection with the reputation which the land has always been held as a land of magic and incantation and also for the fact that it was in Assam the Tantrik form of Hinduism originated. 

K.L. Barua endorses the etymological explanation given by the Kālikāpurāṇa, but he observes: "It is significant that to the immediate east of the town of Gauhati there is a temple on the crest of a hill known as Citrācala, and this temple is dedicated to the Navagraha or the nine planets. It is probable that this temple is the origin of the name Prāgjyotisapura." 

According to B. Kakati the name Prāgjyotisa is connected with the topographical features of the land. He does not agree to connect the name Prāgjyotisa with any religious association. Further, he says that the term Prāgjyotisa corresponds to an Austro-Tic formation like Pagār-juh (jo)-tic (C-Ch), and it means a region of extensive high hills. From topographical point of view Prāgjyotisa or Prāgjyotisapura was on an extensive 

hill. As such, Prāgjyotisā or Prāgjyotisāpurāṇa may be a Sanskritisation of the above mentioned Austric formation.

The references to the Kingdom of Prāgjyotisā are found in the Mahābhārata9 and the Rāmāyana10 as well as in the Markandeya Purāṇa11 and in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa12 and in the Matsya Purāṇa.13 The Nātya-Sāstra also mentions the name of Prāgjyotisā in the book referring to the Odra-Māgadhī style of nātya-pravṛttis.14 Similarly, Rajasekharā in his Kavyamimamsā15 mentions Prāgjyotisā and places it in the east.

According to the Kālīka Purāṇa the name of the land was changed from Prāgjyotisā to Kāmarūpa as soon as Nāraka of Mithilā became king of the land. The word Kāmarūpa (Kāmākhyā) symbolised a new cult, and in exalation of it the land itself was rechristened.16

8 Kakati, B.: The Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā, p.6
9 Mahābhārata, Sabhā-parvan, XXVI-XXX
   Asvamedha-parvan, IXXV-IXXVI
   Droṇa-parvan, XXVI-XXX
   Udyoga-parvan, XVII, 584-585
10 Rāmāyana, I/XXII/7-9; IV/XLII/30-31
11 Markandeya Purāṇa, LVII/13: LVII/44
12 Bhāgavata Purāṇa, X/LX/2.
13 Matsya Purāṇa, CXIV/45
14 Ghosh, N. (ed.): Nātya-Sāstra, XIV/45-47
15 Kavyamimamsā, Ch.17.
The Allahabad inscription of Samudragupta records Kāmarūpa as a frontier territory. The Rāghuvaṁśa of Kālidāsa mentions the names of Prāgjyotīśa and Kāmarūpa side by side in connection with the expeditions of Raghu. The well-known lexicographer Hemacandra (C. 1200 A.D.) records: "the Prāgjyotīśas are the Kāmarūpas". The Jayamehīgalā, a well-known commentary on the Kāmasūtra, written by Yosādha (C. 1300 A.D.) records that Kāmarūpa is a country of the eastern region.

The name Axam replaced the name of Kāmarūpa. The shan invaders entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of the thirteenth century A.D. They are known as Ahoms. The Ahoms were unequalled or peerless, i.e. asama. Tradition goes that the term was applied to them at the time of their invasion of the valley by the local tribes, and in token of their admiration of the way in which the Ahom king first conquered and then conciliated with them. According to B. Kakati, the

17 Fleet, J.F.: Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, III
18 Rāghuvaṁśa, IV/81,83; VII/17.
19 Abhichāṇacintāmani, p. 381.
20 Kāmasūtra, p. 225.
term Asama, i.e., peerless, seems to have been emerged from the word Achām by the process of Sanskritisation. In Tai, Čhām suggests the sense of being defeated. With the Assamese prefix ā, Āsām may suggest the meaning of undefeated conquerors. The word subsequently used to suggest the land also. Another derivation of the name asam can be forwarded as has been suggested by Baden-Powell. According to him, the word asam has emanated from the Bodo form hā-cam i.e., low or level country.

The present undivided district of Kamrup lies between latitudes 25°43' and 26°53' North and longitudes 90°39' and 92°11' East. The district is bounded on the North by the Bhutan hills, on the East by the districts of Darranaj and Nagaon, on the South by the State of Meghalaya and on the West by the undivided district of Goalpara. According to the census report, the district contains at present an area of 3,81102 sq. miles. The undivided district of Kamrup is divided

23 Baden-Powell: The Indian Village Community, p. 135.
into two parts by the mighty river Brahmaputra flowing east to west. The Southern part is called Daśhin Kamrup, i.e., South Kamrup, and the Northern part is called 
Uttar Kamrup, i.e., North Kamrup.

B) Importance and significance of the study:

Kamrup is said to be the land of music. The Rati-Śāstra mentions that women of Kamrupa were skilful in the arts of gīta and vādyā.\(^{26}\) According to the Abhinavā-darpana of Nandikesvara the tradition of the lāṣya-nṛtya was started by Īśā, the daughter of Vāna, the king of Sonepur.\(^{27}\) Hence it can be assumed that Kamrupa has a long and healthy tradition of gīta-nṛtya-abhinaya and vādyā from the ancient past. It is also said that the Goddess Kamākhyā danced always in the temple Kamākhyā. At the time of her dancing the Goddess Kamākhyā became naked. The story of priest Kendu Kalaī and the dance of the Goddess Kamākhyā is often spoken of by people as a great myth.\(^{28}\)


It is seen that gītā-nṛtya and vādyā are still associated with various temples of Assam. Indian music and dance also emerged from the temple. In the Kāmrūp context it is also seen that various dances are being performed in the temple at the time of worship to assure the merit of sacrifice performed. The kings of ancient Kāmrūp donated land and pāikas by issuing copper plates with a view to maintaining daily worship of the deities in the various temples. According to the Śāstras God and Goddesses should be worshipped by gītā-vādyā and nṛtya. As such, many performing Art forms were associated with the different temples. Still now the tradition is continuing in different temples of Kāmrūp. As for example, the Biyah-gowā Ojā-pāli is still associated with the ṛādhava temple of Hājo and Umāntanda temple and the Dhāresvāra temple of Kāmrūp. Another variety of the Ojā-pāli art form is the BisahālIr-vandana or gān gowā Ojāpāli which is associated with the worship of the Kāmākhya temple. Similarly, the Suknānī Ojāpāli is associated with the different Manasā thānsa, i.e., the sacred places consecrated to the Snake Goddess, Manasā or Bisahārī.

Art forms like Dhūliya and Kaliyā are also associated with various temples.
It may also be said that the structures and meanings of the performing arts cannot be understood without referring to their social contexts, and functions. Furthermore, social context and specific functions, therefore, illuminate the meaning of music and dance. Both dance and music are cultural phenomena and social facts. From this point of view it would be logical to say that performing art forms fulfil both the religious as well as the social needs.

The study of performing art forms essentially constitutes the study of the great tradition of India. The performing of Kathakatā and the other Indian tradition of performing mārgī and deśī are also exemplary art forms. Although the quasi-dramatic art forms are mainly based on the themes of the Epics and the purāṇas, yet these art forms have been orally transmitted from generation to generation. Secondly, the performing art forms have been preserved in the memory and handed down to the memory of the succeeding generation in continual rewakenings. As such, the tradition of the performing art forms may be called folk or oral tradition.
The performing art forms have a special place in the socio-cultural life of the Assamese as well as the Indian mind. They have rightly been serving as one of the factors of unification amongst the different ethnic groups of Assam and the rest of India. Furthermore, the performing art forms have made considerable contribution in the process of cohesion and integration from the hoary past, and they have made solid contribution in tying the Assamese people with the pan-Indian cord.

Although most of the performing art forms, mentioned in the subsequent pages, are still living art forms, nevertheless many exponents attached to various art forms, are already dead. It is also feared that a day is not far off when such a situation may arise when it would be very difficult to study the art form systematically.

Till now no in-depth and systematic study on the quasi-dramatic art forms of the undivided district of Kamrup has been made.

Of course, isolated studies on a particular aspect or a particular form may be found, but there has been no comprehensive and integrated study of the quasi-dramatic art forms of the district.
The present study makes an attempt at giving a comprehensive, systematic as well as integrated study of the quasi-dramatic art forms of the undivided district of Kamrup for the first time.

C) Methodology:

The present study is confined only to the relevant books, journals, and field study. The relevant and contemporary works include Assamese, Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit and English literature where references to performing art forms of Assam and the rest of India may be found.

The field work includes observation and interviews. Both the methods of the natural context and the artificial context have been applied in the context of field study. I have met the active bearers and exponents of the various performing art forms personally and have collected material either through questionnaire or by interviews throughout the district and the adjoining areas of the district. I have applied both the 'close system' and the 'open system' (when-ever necessary) in the context of field work. The
following considerations are taken in forming the main basis of the collection of field material:

a) Place visited: Important villages, towns, thanas and sattras.

b) Occasions: The calender cycle rituals, fairs and festivals and different pujas.

c) Relevant information being collected from the various active bearers those who are directly associated with the various art forms.

Descriptive, Historical and comparative approaches are applied in this study. Emphasis has been given at the performing aspects of the different quasi-dramatic art forms of the district.

The use of audio-visual equipments, like the tape recorder and camera are also being made whenever and wherever felt necessary and possible.