

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The beauty of the Assamese culture has been the saga of the integration and assimilation of different races and tribes inhabiting here. As Sharma (2014) writes, fresh elements, both indigenous and non-indigenous, have been constantly incorporated into the folds of Assamese society making it a composite culture. It is a culture shaped by the folk traditions which retain their exclusivity even when influenced by elite sanskritized forms in the process of assimilation. The Vaishnava era witnessed development in language, literature and the performing arts (song, dance, drama and theatre) that invigorated Assamese culture with a new life and vitality (pp.xxxvii-xxviii). Even prior to that, from ancient times Performing Arts have been a part of not only festivals but also the daily life of people in Assam. Folk songs, dance and drama that has been passed on from generation to generation stands proof of this. It is said that to understand a particular community one has to look into its folk traditions and Performing Arts.

Goswami writes (Rajbangshi:1995), *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankaradeva's *Ankiya Nat* was the high watermark in the cultural history of Assam. We do not find concrete evidence of drama creation in Assam prior to this (p.28).

Neog (1982) writes, the history of Assamese drama is very long and old indeed older surely than the drama of any Indian modern language by at least a century. The first Assamese drama is certainly *Cihna yatra* (pageant on painted scenes) (p.10)

Goswami writes (2007), prior to Sankaradeva there was no full-fledged drama in Assamese. He is, therefore, considered to be the father of Assamese drama and stage (p.68).

With the passage of time declined the six hundred year reign of the Ahom dynasty and began the British administration in Assam. The cultural arena also suffered a dark phase as the popularity of *Ankiya nat* gradually began to lessen. At this point of time, the Bengali *jatra* that entered Assam was like a breath of fresh air that invigorated the cultural arena of Assam. It was with the coming in of the British rule in Assam, that paved the path for *jatra* to spread its influence here. With the British came a flow of people from different parts of India, particularly Bengal. The reason behind this was the educated Bengalis as helpers of the British understood the administrative work of the rulers. Moreover, at this very point in time the British started the Tea industry here and required people who had the knowledge of English. It was not feasible to recruit each employee from England and so, the British preferred the English educated Bengalis.

Talukdar (2003) writes, naturally, these Bengali's who came to work here brought with them their own culture. During the various festivals like *Durga puja*

(worshipping of goddess Durga), and *Kali Puja* (worshipping of goddess Kali) and sometimes just for the sake of entertainment, these people invited the *jatra* parties, which at that time was gaining a new lease of life and great popularity in Bengal (p.14). These *jatras* were great entertainers for the labourers working in the tea gardens of Assam. Gradually, these travelling troupes began to attract the curiosity of the local Assamese people and soon they too, like the Bengalis acquired a taste for *jatra*.

Bayan (1994) writes, the first, all Assamese *jatra* party was formed in 1860 by Mr. Tithiram Bayan, an actor, dancer and musician of Barpeta, with the patronage of Mr. Gobindaram Choudhury. This troupe, which was the first Assamese professional drama party, performed upto Sivsagar in Upper Assam (p.81). Bhattacharya (1988) mentions, another name that needs mention here is Mr. Jaydev Sarma, who around the same time formed his *jatra* party (p.107). In due course of time various other *jatra* parties mushroomed. The historic step from *jatra* to *Bhramyaman* (mobile theatre) was taken by actor Mr.Sadananda Lahkar, when, in 1959 he formed Nataraj Opera, a modern *jatra* troupe in Pathsala, in the district of Barpeta, Assam. It performed right upto Golaghat in upper Assam and was particularly popular in the tea gardens. It was from here that Mr. Achyut Lahkar, Sadananda's brother, had the brainstorm of creating Nataraj Theatre with the dual intent of one, providing financial security to the artists and two, modernizing the *jatra*, plus, encourage original Assamese drama. Thus was born the first mobile theatre of Assam, Nataraj Theatre in 1963.

The first thought that naturally comes to mind on reading the title of this research work would probably be, 'what is mobile theatre'? The literal meaning of 'mobile' is something that moves. Guthrie, et al. (2016) writes 'theatre', also spelled 'theater' in dramatic arts, is an art concerned almost exclusively with live performances in which the action is precisely planned to create a coherent and significant sense of drama (p.03).

Elsewhere in India commercial theatre is performed in a permanent hall but in Assam, the mobile theatre is a temporary set up that travels from place to place performing commercially. The equivalent term for mobile theatre in Assamese language is *bhramyaman*. Kalita (2011) informs, this word was coined by none other than one of the architects of modern Assam, Mr. Radha Gobinda Barua, after watching Natraj Theatre in Guwahati in 1963-64 (p.29). In a mobile theatre all the required paraphernalia, right from the temporary stage, screens, galleries, chairs, light and sound equipments, bedding and utensils, to the cooking stove, etc., are carried over to where the temporary auditorium and stage is set up. As shared by mobile theatre critic, Mazumdar, the ideas that motivated the creation of mobile theatre were :

- (i) taking drama to the common man,
- (ii) to change and improvise *jatra* which was looked down on by the intelligentsia,

- (iii) to provide the artists (actors, technicians, etc.) a respectable platform where they may find not only acceptance and adulation from the society, but also financial security,
- (iv) to free theatre from the city-centric shackles of performing, and
- (v) to bring about a trend of commercial theatre in Assam.

(A.Mazumdar. Personal communication. January 10, 2013)

As put by Richmond (1990), “In India, as in much of the Western world, the main objective of commercial theatre is to make money, no matter what the quality of the product. Indeed, although they may wish to derive their living from theatre, many theatre artists consider it an insult to be called ‘commercial’, and prefer to be labeled ‘professional’”(p.391).

Mobile theatre of Assam has travelled a journey covering half a century. It is undoubtedly one of the most popular medium of entertainment in both rural and urban areas of Assam today. Come autumn, and the carnival on wheels sets out weaving its magic enthralling thousands of enthusiastic audience with their annual shows packed with emotion and technology. The function of theatre/drama in our culture goes beyond mere entertainment. Through it, we can find the meaning of our own culture. The study of theatre/drama brings to light its importance as a vehicle of cultural renaissance in the changing society.

1.1 Problem under Study

During the span of its existence, mobile theatre of Assam has gone through a lot and survived. Today, it has an annual turnover of more than 10 crore rupees. In the present times when unemployment is a major issue, the mobile theatre employs hundreds of people, thus sustaining many. Though there has been a lot of talk about recognizing the mobile theatre as an industry by the Government of Assam, no concrete steps have ever been taken in this direction nor has there been any efforts to introduce any policy in this connection. This aspect with its pros and cons needs to be studied.

Apart from the economic aspect, the mobile theatre, as a means of mass communication, is perhaps unparalleled and can play a vital and constructive social role, provided, utilized correctly. Cinema, drama, theatre, etc., are but reflections of our society and, therefore, this medium can be used in a constructive manner to bring about a social revolution with regard to important issues be it social, political, economic, environmental, etc. The contribution of mobile theatre to the cultural arena of Assam has many a times been underplayed. The so-called intelligentsia has always had a condescending attitude towards mobile theatre. The question naturally arises: why? Mobile theatre is where the common man gets a taste of, and learns to appreciate theatre. This is where he can connect one to one with the artists on the stage unlike cinema, which is larger than life and as such, fantastic. Mobile theatre is a complete package with acting, dance, music, action, emotion, etc., all thrown in with a

liberal dose of technical gimmicks. The demand for good artists has always been there and today, when the Assamese film industry is almost nonexistent and its future uncertain, the mobile theatre has extended the vital lifeline to many artists and technicians for sustaining themselves.

1.2 Literature Review

Evaluation of the literature on the research problem is indispensable to have an idea on the problem under study and also to arrive at the right perspective. The mobile theatre is not a common component in many societies and areas, and therefore, writings on it is not much available. Moreover books and research papers on the mobile theatres of Assam is scanty. In the following pages some literature relevant to the subject of study have been discussed to find a path on how to proceed with this research work.

Preston (2001) has written in *Opera on the Road: Travelling Opera Troupes in the U.S,1825-1860* that Travelling Opera troupes in the United States of America were seen as early as 1820's (p.35).

In the *Cambridge Paperback Guide to Theatre* edited by Sarah Stanton and Martin Banham, (1996) an account of travelling theatre has been given as such :

Tent show: American touring entertainment. These plays or variety shows, dating from 1850's were staged under canvas. By the 19th Century, travelling troupes with repertoires, extensive enough to

provide weeks worth of entertainment, had become popular in the summer, when local Opera houses were too poorly ventilated to attract the public. The Chautauqua circuit, offering lecture meetings of an educational or religious nature, performed in brown tents to distinguish them from the white canvas of the show tents, which were 50-60 feet wide. With bare benches or bleachers and a platform stage designed for portability. The earliest repertoires were imitations, often pirated, of the standard domestic fare, primarily melodrama. Later Tent showmen composed their own plays, carpentered to a limited company and familiar themes of rural life. After world war I, motor vehicles replaced rail transport, and tent shows proliferated. Some 400 shows were travelling through the U.S in 1927. But the catastrophic effects of depression, dust storms, unionisation and competition from local cinema led to closure of hundreds of companies in 1930's. The Federal Theatre Project absorbed many of these entertainers and in the 1950's only some dozen troupes survived (p.371).

In the book *African Popular Theatre: From Pre-Colonial Times to present Day*, David Kerr (1995) has written, how in Africa, between 1961 to 1967, a travelling theater movement was organized by two spirited expatriates, Martin Banham and Geofry Axworthy, by the formation of the University College of Ibadan Dramatic Society in Nigeria. Likewise, the Makerere Free Travelling Theater (MFTT) came into being in 1965, in Uganda. The aim was to bring

popular drama to the general public. A heavy logistical infrastructure and administrative preparation backed this theatre, like a fleet of Government and British Council Land Rovers, a huge backdrop, that was multi-coloured and splash-dyed, stands, trunks, props and costumes, stands, tape recorder, a transformer and even a mobile girls dressing room. Although there were obvious concessions to a notion of a flexible mobile theatre, there was a feeling that fairly elaborate resources were intended to give rural areas a feeling of polished urban art theatre. This was borne out by the rehearsals which lasted for five weeks, including language laboratory work for those learning or improving an East African language (p.133)

Kerr (1995) further writes, there were some features of the MFTT which prevented it from achieving a totally popular theater campaign amongst East African subaltern classes. The main problem was that the impressively elaborate logistics of the tours like the fleet of Land-rovers, lengthy rehearsals in Kampala, copious costumes and so on, tended to prevent a completely fluid interaction between performers and community. In these conditions the incipient elitism of urban intellectuals entertaining provincial masses is difficult to avoid. Some flavor of it comes out in Cook's observation concerning the need for travelling theater members to provide their own food on grounds 'that ordinary school diet is neither palatable nor adequate to a mixed group of East Africans under considerable physical and nervous strain.'Such special treatment, however understandable, reinforces the feeling that university players are gifted elites

generously bestowing their talents on popular audiences. Peter Nazareth makes a similar complaint, “Once a year theater descends upon the people instead of growing out of them, and disappears”. This criticism is important and influential (p.138).

In the book *Japan's Modern Theatre: A century of Change and Continuity*, Brian Powell (2002), says unlike now, small towns very rarely possessed halls suitable for mounting productions planned for urban venues, particularly, as a perception that elaborate scenery was necessary, was pervasive throughout *Kabuki*, *Shimpa* and *Shingeki*. Thus, the *Johokyoku* was determined to promote a type of theater that could be taken anywhere in Japan. Some physical stamina was needed. Politically, the agenda was very different and this time the goal was not to change political opinions but to exert moral persuasion. Such theater had been part of Izuka's plan for National drama and others had developed this element of his ideas. No form of theatre was excluded and even the entertaining conglomerates had their own touring subsidiaries but there was a feeling in articles contributing to the debate on mobile theatre that it should be anti-commercial and focus on developing new dramaturgical and performance modes to suit its new mission (p.131).

Powell (2002) further adds, both the Imperial Rule Assistance Association and the *Johokyoku* were keen to promote *ido-engeki* (mobile theater) as part of their drive towards the mobilization of all aspects of the nation's life, and supported fully, the establishment of an official organization to co-ordinate

mobile theater activity. This was the *Nihon ido-engeki Renmei* meeting or Japan League for mobile theater and its founding meeting took place in June 1941(p.132).

In the book *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920*, James Von Geldern (1993) writes, perhaps pre-revolutionary Russia's finest example of popular theater was Gaideburov's mobile popular theatre located on the outskirts of Petrograd. The mobile popular theatre was the first to perform on the streets of revolutionary Russia in May 1917; Founded in 1903 as the popular theatre by Gaideburov and his wife, Nadezhda Skarskaia, a daughter of the great Komissar zhevsky acting family, it was located in the Ligovsky People's House funded by a wealthy social revolutionary, the Countess Sofia Panina. Its mission was to supplement the thin cultural fare offered by the Petrograd workers. By 1907, the popular theater had merged entirely with its alter ego, the mobile theater, which staffed by the same actors, spent summer months touring the provinces with modern repertory aimed at the local intelligentsia (p.119).

Nicolas Kanellos (2003) writes in *Hispanic Literature of United States :A Comprehensive Reference*, the mission of the Puerto Rican Travelling Theatre (PRTT) is to educate and acquaint the general public with important contributions by playwrights from Latino or Hispanic extraction; to present and produce truly bilingual professional theatre; to offer artistic development to emerging and established artists; and in these ways to contribute towards the diversity of American theatre and national culture. The PRTT was founded in

1967 following the highly successful run of the OXCART, Rene Marque classic drama of Puerto Rican migration. Realizing that such a professional production was not accessible to most of the families from economically disadvantaged communities, Ms. Colon Valle, the PRTT'S founder and Artistic Director, made the decision to present the play free of charge in New York City streets with funding secured from the then Mayor, Mr. John Lindsay. This initial summer production helped launch the Spanish bilingual theatre movement and led to the creation of a major cultural legacy for New York and the United States (p.275).

The PRTT's lasting impact is felt in 39 years of continued theatre programming and audience development, including the introduction of new and significant Hispanic voices to the professional theatre mainstream; a unique culturally diverse model for playwright development and enrichment; cultivation of an awareness of the theatre as a viable career for economically disadvantaged youths; and year-round Spanish and English language offerings. Since 1967, the Annual Summer Tour of PRTT has performed in parks, playgrounds and on street corners throughout the five boroughs of New York and areas of New Jersey, presenting free of charge productions to most neglected communities of the city. Today, PRTT remains few of the touring theatres in New York Metro and is known for especially performing works by classic Hispanic writers and current Latino playwrights in both English and Spanish.

The Journal (2014) states that, before the production of the first indigenous film in Nigeria, the Yoruba traveling theatre had established a rich, flourishing tradition of touring plays across the nation and beyond. Adedeji and Ekwuazi (1998) comments that, the Yoruba theatre has made an indelible impression on the whole country. As a traveling theater, it has taken the theatre to the people and entertained vast and diverse audiences throughout the country. Not earning any subsidies from the government or financial support from any foundations, the artists have progressively managed to survive in a very big way. They draw their income not only from their stage shows but also from television shows, from waxing their music and plays on discs, by printing their plays as photoplays and as literature. Ogundele adds that, at its height of productivity and popularity in the 1970s and early 80s, there were at least 100 troupes of the traveling theatre in Yoruba society. From a vast and robust popular theatre base, it becomes quite easy for the Yoruba traveling theatre to hijack the industry for the furtherance of their artistic career in another medium. Secondly, the Yoruba has a long theatrical history which dates back to the Alarinjo (or Eegun Apidan) masquerade performance of the old Oyo empire, and many, live in big cities and towns which allows for the formation of a vast audience pull, each time the traveling theatres visited the communities with a new play which also spread to non-Yoruba speaking areas of West African coast (Ogundele,1999:47) (p.186).

Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer (2012) has said in *Gender and popular culture* that, popular culture is a contested concept. It is vague and diffuse and

can therefore be filled with different meanings. In order to investigate these meanings, we will start by looking at the more general concept of culture. Raymond Williams (1983) put forward three meanings of the word 'culture', arguing that it can refer to (a) intellectual, spiritual and esthetic development, (b) a particular way of life of a group or historical period and (c) texts and practices which produce meanings. The concept of 'popular' culture is of course different from that of culture. It has a quantitative dimension. The word popular suggests that it is liked and /or practiced by many people. And indeed many aspects of culture which we would commonly class as popular culture are widely appreciated and consumed, such as pop music and television. However, the connections are not always straight forward. There are certain aspects of culture which we would commonly class as 'high' culture but which are still 'popular' in the sense of being liked or practiced by many people, for example, classical music such as Pavarotti. Conversely, certain aspects of popular culture, for example, niche T.V channels may not have wide audiences at all. Popular and high culture is often mixed, for example, when classical literature is turned into television serials which are watched by millions of viewers .Is this high or popular culture? While popular culture has a quantitative dimension this alone is not necessary or sufficient to define it. The other factor to emerge as important here is that popular culture in all its definition is compared explicitly or implicitly, to some 'other' culture. Most commonly this other culture is so called 'high' culture, which is usually taken to include serious and classical forms of

culture such as works of old literature, paintings, poetry or classical music (pp.83-85).

The authors also say, 'high' culture is deemed intrinsically worthy, serious, quality art, while 'popular' culture is judged superficial, simplistic and driven by profits rather than skill or quality. Often these judgments are linked to the commercialization of culture and the creation of a culture industry. While 'popular' culture is considered to be of intrinsically low artistic quality because the pursuit of profits necessitates meeting the lowest common denominator, 'high' culture is associated with a bygone golden era free of commercialization, where art thrived for the art's sake. The juxtaposition of high and popular culture is flawed in various ways - firstly, this categorization is elitist and fails to recognize that the standard by which the quality of culture is measured are not universal or neutral but themselves a product of culture. Secondly, in contemporary western culture the economic system of capitalism shapes the production of all forms of culture and art there is no space totally free of commerce (pp.86-87).

Sailen Bharali (1985) in his book *Natak* has said, among the various branches of literature drama holds a special position. Although the scholars differ as to how drama originated, the majority agree that religious rites and rituals in due course of time gave birth to drama. It was probably in Egypt the centre of ancient civilization that drama was acted out for the first time. Osyris, the God of agriculture and his imagination by the Egyptians was the content of this drama.

But unfortunately, there being no proof of this, it is the Greeks who can claim to have given birth to drama. This was connected to the religious rites and rituals to please Dionysus, the Greek God (p.23)

It was during the reign of King Pisistetus in 534 B.C, a drama competition was organized in Athens. Playwright, actor and priest Thespis is said to have been the winner of this competition. This competition later on became a grand public festival in Greece and contributed a lot to the evolution, progress and development of Greek drama. It was during this time that the need for a stage/Arena (theater hall) led to its construction and the art of 'acting' began to gain popularity among the common people. Greek drama artists were carefully selected and trained. As written by Bharali (1985), Demosthenes said, "Actors should be judged by their voices and politicians by their wisdom" (p.32). Schools for voice-training were set up in which actors and singers were trained and actors had to have knowledge of all aspects of acting. The Greek drama productions were characterized by proper planning and rehearsals. Theatre definitely was one of the greatest elements of the glory that was Greece (p.32).

Bharali (1985) also informs, five playwrights dominated Greek Drama for 200 years- The Tragedians were (1) Aechylus (525-456 BC) who wrote the tragic trilogy *Oriesteia* and introduced the concept of the second actor *Diutoragonist*. (2) Sophocles (496-406 BC) who wrote the *Oedipus Rex* trilogy. (3) Euripides (480-406 BC) who actually foreshadowed the ultimate form of drama. The Comedians included (4) Aristophanes (448-380 BC) and (5) Menander (342-292

BC). Likewise, in England, drama evolved from the corridors of religion. Initially acting was confined within the four walls of the Church, but as it gained popularity various issues of Christian life began to be enacted and gradually, from the confines of the Church drama spread itself among the nook and corner of society. Thus, we can conclude that drama was born out of religious organizations and this fact has been corroborated by the dramatic literature of various countries (p.35).

Alchin (2015) writes, the formation of Elizabethan Acting Troupes was the result of the popularity of the Elizabethan theatre. The Elizabethans enjoyed entertainment and they loved plays and the theatre. The first theatre in England was not built till about 1576. Prior to that, actors travelled from one town to the other and one castle to another. But travel was difficult in the Elizabethan era. Because of frequent outbreaks of the terrifying bubonic plague, strangers were viewed with suspicion. Anyone who wished to travel in England had to obtain a license from the Bailiff in the Guild. This ensured that the spread of disease was contained as much as possible and the poor, homeless, and anti-social elements could not move easily from place to place. The major Elizabethan Acting Troupes were 'Lord Strange's Men', 'Chamberlain's Men', 'Admiral's Men' and 'King's Men'. According to the Sumptuary Laws, the Elizabethans were prohibited to wear any clothing which was above their social standing. Many Elizabethan plays were about Kings and the nobility but the actors were restricted to wear any clothes which might convey this high status. This severely restricted

and spoilt the performance of the plays. The Queen herself enjoyed this form of entertainment. So, a 'get out clause' was written into the Sumptuary Law (Alchin,elizabethan-era).

In the book *Continuum Companion to Twentieth Century Theatre*, edited by Colin Chambers (2006) it is stated that, in the late 1940's a number of specialist companies began to tour for audiences of children in both schools and theatres with a more serious intent. These companies of which the most enduring have been Caryl Jenner's *Unicorn Theatre* (founded in 1947) and *Theatre Centre* (founded in 1949), drew on the model of the work developing in the Soviet Union since the 1920's and after the second World War in Eastern Europe where cultural enrichment was seen to be vital adjunct to education and where major building based companies with considerable financial subsidy had been established working with the same resources and expertise as theatre for adult audiences (p.152)

In an interview published in the *New York Magazine* (1991), it is written that in 1967, Raul Julia, famous Hollywood actor met the man who jump started his career.

Joe Papp was doing the Spanish production of Macbeth in the mobile unit", says Julia, "and I auditioned and got the part of Macduff, and we travelled all over the neighbourhood with this truck, that turned into a stage. It was a wonderful

experience. We were bringing theatre to people who had never gone to the theatre before (p.55).

Mahanta (2011) writes in *Natakar Katha*, ancient India is said to have been a rich treasure house of dramatic literature. Sanskrit was the language in which drama was written. The word 'Indo-Drama' has also been used by some for Sanskrit drama. Sanskrit drama dates back to some 2000 years earlier. There is no scientific proof of dramatic creations prior to this but since we do not have the biography of the playwrights or information about their timeline, we cannot establish a concrete age for Sanskrit drama. In fact, from the sources gathered, the playwright *Bhasa* has been said to be the first playwright chronologically. According to scholars, *Bhasa* belonged to the 3rd century BC but surprisingly it was only in the first part of the 20th century that 13 dramas established as his creations have come to light.

It was from Trivandrum that for the first time these 13 dramas, edited by Mahamahopadhyay Ganapati Shastri were published. Other celebrated playwrights of Sanskrit drama were *Kalidasa*, *Bhababhuti*, *Sri Harsha*, *Vishakhadutta* and *Shudraka* (pp.9-13).

In India, a popular traditional story about the birth of drama, states that *Natyashastra*, the fifth veda, was created by Brahma, (the creator, and one of the Hindu triad) himself by taking elements from the four Vedas, *Rig* (content), *Yajur* (action), *Atharva* (Ras) and *Sam* (Music), on the request of the *Devatas*

(celestial beings). Indian thought has always been inclined towards connecting anything ancient and great with divine or heavenly grace and this story was also probably such an imagination. But what is to be noted here is that the ideas in *Natyashastra* apply to drama of all age and place. Mahanta (2011) further write, the birth of drama goes back to such unknown times that it is difficult to attribute a particular date for it and that is why it is imagined to be the creation of Gods; Drama can provide both education and entertainment to all classes and section of people; Drama must never target and attack any particular class of people in the society; It is always better to perform a drama in an auditorium/stage than in an open area; For acting in a drama, practice and rehearsal is a must; An actor must always be physically fit; It is necessary for female artists to act along with male artists; There is complete connection between drama, dance and music. Here, one must mention that in ancient India, people associated with acting were considered to be low class and were looked down on by the high class Brahmins. As such, it can be said that it was the low class common people who contributed to the progress of acting (pp.9-11).

An interesting point has been made by Mahanta (2011) is, that, as against the general belief that origin of drama lies in religious rites and rituals, it was actually non-religious or secular. From time immemorial, even before religion had emerged, various forms of folk drama were in practice in different parts of the world. And it is widespread knowledge as to how folk drama traditions have impacted regular and written drama (pp.12-13).

Mahanta (2011) further states that it was in the beginning of the 16th century that in eastern part of India in Assam, a dramatic form of high quality was created. The personality behind this creation was the social reformer, poet, dramatist, musician and propagator of the neo-vaishnavite movement, *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankaradeva. His main disciple *Mahapurush* Madhabadeva followed his *guru's* footsteps and wrote plays that contributed to the foundation of Assamese drama and stage. These plays created by the duo were called *Ankiya nat* though neither Srimanta Sankaradeva or Madhabadeva used this word, both instead used *Natak*, *Nat* or *Jatra*. It was a description added by people in the later times probably because these plays had no division of scenes. Both Srimanta Sankaradeva and Madhabadeva aimed at the rejuvenation of a spiritually, politically and economically decadent society of Assam through the neo-vaishnavite movement. And thus, along with *Naam-kirtan* and *Borgeet*, *Ankiya nat* was also a means of propaganda (pp.58-59).

The author (2011) also says that since Sankaradeva wanted to overhaul the society through religious preaching, naturally his plays were religion based. A speciality of *Ankiya nat* was its heavy dependence on songs. In fact songs and *shlokas* far exceeded the dialogues and at times, even the action. Another special characteristic of *Ankiya nat* was the *Sutradhar*, who was the central force of medieval Assamese drama—singer, dancer, actor, stage-director all rolled into one, this character, once making his entry would not leave the stage till the end of the drama. The language used in *Ankiya nat* again was another unique

characteristic because it was not the common spoken language. This language was *Brajabuli*, a mix of Assamese and Maithili, an incomparable creation of Sankaradeva (pp.59-60). It may be mentioned here that *Brajawali* or *Brajabhasha* (as was used in Braj) came to be called *Brajabuli* after its fusion with Assamese.

The author (2011) further adds that the acting process of *Ankiya nat* is called *bhaona* which has come from the word *bhao* (to imitate). Before the actual play begins, a musical performance called *Dhemali* was presented by the *Gayan-Bayan*. The *Ankiya nat bhaona* is generally performed in the *Namghar* (Prayer Hall). If the *Namghar* is small then a temporary hall is created around it for expanded space. Right in the middle of the *Namghar* an area is kept clear as the 'stage'. The audience sits around this area on the floor. On one side of this clearing is the *Manikut* (Sanctum Sanctorium) while on the opposite side a path is cleared among the audience for the entry and exit of the actors. A little space is kept segregated by a screen where the actors get ready for their performance and the necessary equipments to be used in the drama are kept. This was the *cho-ghar* i.e. Green Room (p.60). In his book *Natak: Prachin aru Adhunik*, Prafulla Kr. Nath (2001) has opined that before the creation of *Ankiya nat*, there were several folk drama styles in Assam from ancient times. Among them, *Dhuliya Nach*, *Ojapali*, *Deodhani Nach* and *Putola Nach* may be mentioned. It can also be said that these indigenous dramatic forms did influence the emergence of *Ankiya nat*. Apart from *Putola Nach* and *Ojapali*, two other folk drama forms of Assam in

the Goalpara area are *Kushan gan* and *Bhari gan*. These two forms of folk drama were popular in Western Assam and North Bengal. In fact, the ancient folk drama forms in Assam, folk drama forms of North and South India in the middle ages and Sanskrit drama—the reflection of the union of these three can be seen in the *Ankiya nat* of Srimanta Sankaradeva (p.2)

Mahanta (2011) again says in *Natakar Katha* that it is also true that although Srimanta Sankaradeva gathered sources for his *Ankiya nat* mainly from the various indigenous dances and music prevalent in Assam from ancient times, the impact of Sanskrit drama was natural in the creations of this scholar of Sanskrit, for example, introduction of the *Sutradhar*, emphasis on *Purbaranga*, use of Sanskrit *shlokas* and *Nandi*, and closing of the play by *Mukti-mangal Bhatima* are clearly impact of Sanskrit drama (p.63).

Vatsyayan (1996) opines that in various parts of India, different types of indigenous popular dramatic mediums flourished like *Yakshagaan* (Karnataka), *Kathakali* (Kerala), *Terukutu* and *Bhagavad Mela* (Tamilnadu), *Bhavai* (Gujrat), *Lalita* (Maharashtra), *Raslila* (U.P), *Ramlila* (Rajasthan) and *Jatra* (Bengal). There are some similarities between *Ankiya nat* and these indigenous dramas, but this is probably because all these dramatic styles were impacted upon by Sanskrit drama and the prominence of religion in medieval society. But having said this, we cannot deny that because Sankaradeva, during his *tirtha yatra* (religious sojourn) had visited various places across India and witnessed different dramatic forms prevalent, it is not unlikely that at least some of the dramatic forms did

leave an impression upon him. The elements drawn from the folk form of music, dance and drama not only broadened the range of appeal but gave *Ankiya nat* its unmistakable Assamese character. Among the folk forms that influenced him the most were *Ojapali* a fascinating form combining elements of balladry, dance and drama, *Dhuliya nach* a form of group singing and dancing, *Bhaoriya*, balladry, and *Putola nach* the traditional marionette theatre of Assam. It required a rare sensitivity to mould all these diverse elements and influences into a powerful dramatic alloy, which Sankaradev possessed (pp.95-99).

In his book *Ankiya Bhaona*, Goswami (2000) has stated that a fact known to one and all is that the art of drama is an *art*. Like other art forms, it too, cannot be a neutral matter in the journey of human life. Every art is deeply connected with the cultural identity of nation or race. Judged from this angle, we can say that the art of drama has been the signature of human history (p.1)

In *Asamar Navajagaran: Ana-Asamiyar Bhumika*, Barpujari (1987) writes, that although it is difficult to establish since when and how *jatra* became popular in Assam, a look into the cultural history of Assam shows that it was with the coming in of the British rule in Assam that *jatra* began to spread its influence here. With the British came into Assam a flow of people from different parts of India, particularly Bengal. The main reason behind this was, the educated Bengalis, as the helpers of the British rulers understood their administrative workings. Moreover, at this very point of time, the British had started the Tea Industry in Assam, where they required people who knew English. Therefore, the

British preferred the Bengalis. Naturally, the Bengalis who came to reside here in Assam brought their culture with them. During various festivals like Durga Puja and Kali Puja and sometimes just for the sake of their entertainment, these people organized and invited *jatra* parties, which at that point of time was gaining a new lease of life and popularity in Bengal (p.33).

Bharali (1984) in *Asamiya Lokanatyia Parampara* has opined that though this folk theatre was recognized as popular drama of the masses of Bengal, in Assam also, we have information that there was a kind of folk drama called *jatra* (p.68)

Richmond (1990) in 'Characteristics of Modern Theatre' in *Indian Theatre Traditions of Performance* has written, The Kalanilaya Vistavision Dramascope Company of Trivandrum, Kerala founded in the 1970's by Kalanilaya Krishna Nair spends most of its time on the road travelling about the state. The group rents or leases a plot of land on the outskirts of a large town or city and erects a large temporary theatre of thatch and bamboo, seating around a thousand people. A manager travels with a company of paid actors and backstage artists, arranging food and living accommodations and organizing the schedules of about seventy-five individuals. A repertory of plays is produced and when the audiences begin to dwindle and the income lessens, the company moves on. Wages are paid according to the grade and level of the actors and technicians. Because the company tours regularly and produces plays nearly everyday of the week, the people involved cannot engage in other employment.

Similarly, The Kerala People's Art Company (KPAC) and Kalidasa Kalakendra, two major Communist commercial theatre groups in Kerala begin the touring from September in modern vans, on top of which scenery is stored, performing primarily in the Malayalam speaking regions of India.

Another such example cited by Richmond is Manohar's National Theatre of Madras, one of the best-organized and slickest commercial operations anywhere in urban India. It tours from theatre to theatre within the city and also on the road and is flexible enough to make use of a variety of theatre facilities and adapt to the most challenging conditions. (pp.392-393)

In his unpublished thesis *Drama of the Mobile Theatre of Assam*, Talukdar (2003) says, the basic subject of the early *jatras* were religious, mainly, *Krishnaleela*, the merry making of Lord Krishna, but by the 19th century this trend began to change. Calcutta, around this became a commercial hub and there emerged a class of rich people who had abundant leisure in their hands. These people began to patronize the *jatra* troupes and organize shows for their own entertainment. Consequently, *jatra* lost its original objective of religious and spiritual preaching and became a tool for entertainment (p.16).

Deka (2009) writes, it was between 1860-1865 that a *jatra* troupe under the leadership of Sri Tithiram Bayan was formed in Barpeta following the Bengal model. At the same time Sri Manohari Das and Sri Haricharan Bayan also formed two separate *jatra* troupes in Barpeta. Again, Ambikagiri Rai Choudhury

formed *Sanatan Sangeet Samaj* (1911) and *Dakkhinhatir Jatra Dal* in Barpeta itself. Here, the Sutradhar family, Gandhiya family and Galiyahati Bayan family were the *jatra* performers. Brajanath Sarma, the legendary revolutionary artist started *Sila Kalika Opera Party* in 1912 and *Ganakgari Opera party* in 1928. It was in 1933 that Sarma inaugurated co-acting in Assam, which was indeed a historical achievement that enshrined his name forever in golden letters in the cultural history of Assam (pp.90-91).

Once this trend of *jatra* came in, various *jatra* troupes began to mushroom in Assam, particularly, lower Assam. And very soon *jatra* became a part and parcel of the cultural arena. No function or festival was complete without a *jatra*. In the Bajali area of Barpeta alone, the *jatradals* that came up were *Bhogiram Kakoti's Bhaluki Jatradal* (1888), *Bamunkusi Jatradal* (1908), *Pathsala Theatre party*(Santoram Choudhury) (1910), *Gobindapur Jatradal* (1923), *Napara Opera-Bamunkusi* (1930), *Madhya Bajali Opera* (1930), *Bogriguri Jatradal* (1953), *Bagna Jatradal* (1954) et al.

Kalita (2011) in his book *Bhramyaman Theatreerar Itihas, Vol.I* has written, the first step from *jatra* to mobile theatre was taken by Mr. Sadananda Lahkar. It was in 1959 that this talented actor formed Nataraj Opera- a modern *jatra* troupe. This troupe performed right up to Golaghat in upper Assam and was particularly popular in the tea gardens. Gradually, in the changing social scenario the neo-city dwellers began to lose connection with *jatra* and the need for a new form of entertainment was felt. Moreover, the need for commercial profit in order to give

employment to the artists was also felt. Thus, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, brother of Mr. Sadananda Lahkar wanted to reshape Nataraj Opera. He wanted the art of acting to sustain the artists by providing them year long employment. Prior to this, the *jatra* troupes performed one or two times on invitations and sat idle for the rest of the year. It was with the dual intent of providing financial security to the artists as well as modernizing the *jatra* form that the first mobile theatre, Nataraj Theatre, was born in 1963 (pp.18-19).

It was to be a theatre in every sense of the term, the only difference being this entire set up of hall, stage, lights, generator, sound- system, musical instruments, utensils, bedding and other accessories would be mobile. Instead of the people coming to the theatre, the theatre would now go to the people.

From the time when *Mahapurush* Srimanta Sankaradeva created *Ankiya nat*, to the present experiments in the arena, Assamese theatre has traversed a long time of about six centuries. And in these six centuries Assamese theatre has gone through a lot of highs and lows affected naturally by the changing political, socio-economic and cultural atmosphere. A huge collection of books have been written on the traditional as well as modern Assamese theatre in Assam. Right from Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika's *Manchalekha*; Mr. Harishchandra Bhattacharya's *Asamiya Natya Sahityar Jilingani* and *The Origin and Development of the Assamese Drama and The Stage*; Mr. Dhiren Sarma's *Asamar Natya Subas* and *Brajanath Sarma*; Mr. Satya Prasad Barua's *Natak Aru Abhinay Prasanga*; Mr. Sailen Bharali's *Natak, Asamiya Lokonaty Parampara* and *Natya*

Kala:Desi aru Bidesi; Mr. Poona Mahanta's *Natak aru Natyakar and Natarak Katha*; Mr.Pradip Hazarika's *Natya Samikkhya*; Mr.Jagadish Patgiri's *Natya Kala Dese Dese*; Mr.Prafulla Kumar Nath's *Natak Prachin aru Adhunik*; Mr.Satyendranath Sarma's *Asamiya Natya Sahitya*; Mr.Nabin Chandra Sarma's *Asamar Lokonat*, Mr. Alex Figo's (transcription) *Bhramyaman Theatre Achyut Lahkar's Autobiography*; Mr.Purandar Patgiri and Mr.Alex Figo's *Long March-Biography of Ratan Lahkar*; Mr.Atul Mazumdar's *Ei Jatra Jai Jatra* and *Bhramyaman Theatre: Pratyasa, Prapti aru Aprapti*, to Mr. Kishore Kumar Kalita's *Bhramyaman Theaterar Itihas Vol.I*, which has been initiated by the All Assam Mobile Theatre Producers Association (AAMTPA), is an exhaustive list. Inspired from these writings, research scholars have also ventured into the field of mobile theatres. A few completed Research works on the subject include- (i) *Drama of the Mobile Theatre of Assam*, Mr. Bhupen Talukdar, Department of Assamese, Gauhati University, 2003. (ii) *Mobile Theatre of Assam and its Impact on the Socio-Cultural Life: A study in North Kamrup Area* by Kaushik Kumar Deka, Department of Folklore, Gauhati University, 2009. (iii) *Managerial & Economic Aspects of Mobile Theatre Establishment of Assam*, Ms. Mousumi Devi, Department of Commerce, Gauhati University,2016,etc.

Mention may also be made of renowned Assamese literateur and film maker, Bhabendranath Saikia's article, *Bhramyaman: The Travelling theatre of Assam*, published in the Seagull Theatre Quarterly (Issue no.11) September,1996. A Junior Fellowship (2006-2009) project from the Ministry of Culture, GoI was

done by Ms. Ruby Barua on the topic *Aesthetics in Mobile theatre Drama*. Mr. Merajur Rahman Barua had also availed a Fellowship from *Majlis*, a culture body in Mumbai and made a 59 minute documentary on the posters of mobile theatres of Assam titled, *Pageant in Painted Scenes*, in 2008.

1.3 The Locale

The intended study will be conducted in Assam, situated in the tropical latitudes 24⁰3 N and 28⁰0 N and longitudes 89⁰5 E and 96⁰1 E. Medhi (2008) writes-

Assam is an ancient land and it has a thought provoking history. In the epic period the land was referred to as Pragjyotishpura, land of the eastern lights, and in the *Purana* and *Tantra* periods it acquired the name 'Kamrupa', where the god Kamadeva regained his form. The name Assam is an anglicized formation of the Sanskrit term *asama*, which means unparallel or peerless (p.91).

Among all the states of the North East India, Assam is the most populous state and mobile theatre, other than the Barak valley is a popular medium of entertainment across the state. A little detail about the place where mobile theatre originated in its current *avatar* (incarnation) has, therefore, been sketched. It was in the first part of the 20th century, the British were planning expansion of the railway in the North bank of the Brahmaputra, covered densely with *Sal* (*shorea*

robusta), teak and various other trees. Amidst this forest one could find one or two remote villages. The Bajali area, inundated by the Pahumara and kaldia rivers, was a fertile belt from where the production of grains, areca nut and betel leaf, *Eri*, a kind of indigenous cloth prepared from the yarns extracted from the *Phillasimia ricinii* cocoon, and Bhutan-produced oranges were exported to various places.

Prior to 1909, the town of Pathsala was known as 'Souka-Panisala'. The origin of this can be traced to the *Choudhury Vamsavali*, the genealogy of the Choudhuries, of the Bajali area. It was in the reign of the Koch king Naranarayana, that Purushottama Choudhury established Souka-Panisala where many of his successors enjoyed the status of Choudhury, the landlord of an area. There is no doubt that the name 'Panisala' came from the tank dug during the time of the same Koch king. Renowned litterateur and dramatist of Pathsala, Munindranath Sarma (1987) in an essay, *Aitihāsik Patabhumit Pathsala* wrote thus, about the name Pathsala,

The name 'Pathsala' is old. In a copper plate recording the land grant by Swargadeo Gaurinath Singha in 1709, it is mentioned that on the North bank of the Pumara river is a village called Pathsala. That village is still there and the western side of today's Pathsala town falls within that very Pathsala village. Pathsala is situated between the railway track and the North Trunk Road. Many people say that the name Pathsala has been derived from Panisala but this

is baseless. Apart from the rhyming of the two names there is no connection between them (p.25).

There are others who opine that the name Pathsala has come from 'Pathsala Vidyalaya'. Probably during the King's reign there used to be a traditional lower primary here and in due course of time the place came to be known as Pathsala.

In the first decade of the current century, the British Government constructed the railway track followed subsequently by the rail station. And for whatever reasons the rail station was named Pathsala station. Gradually, many organizations which came up adopted the same identity. Shops and other business establishments cropped up and at one point of time the entire market came to be called Pathsala market and the name Souka-Panisala faded into oblivion.

Two incidents impacted the adoption of the name Pathsala for this muffed town. The first was, on 10th January 1909 when the 'Pathsala Middle Vernacular School' was established and the name Pathsala was used for the first time. It was only natural that the person who established this school, Late Amritlal Choudhury wanted to immortalize the name of his birthplace. As mentioned by Dutta (2002), the second was the construction of the railway station when the Eastern Bengal Railway started the process of expansion of the railway track in the North bank of the Brahmaputra (p.15). Though there is no concrete evidence

as to which came up first, the local people claim that the railway station was constructed earlier.

It was in this mufossil town of western Assam that a cultural revolution began in the same year 1909, when Mr.Santaram Choudhury established the 'Pathsala Theatre Party'. It was due to his efforts that the 'Pathsala Natyamandir', i.e. the local theatre hall, was born in 1924. Pathsala became the centre of *jatra* and modern drama and it was here in 1963, Nataraj Theatre, the first mobile theatre of Assam was created. Mr. Achyut Lahkar, the person who created Nataraj Theatre, dreamt of a travelling auditorium with a proscenium stage, i.e, a mobile set up. An equal share of credit for the birth of Nataraj Theatre is due to Mr. Achyut Lahkar's brother Mr. Sadananda Lahkar because it was he who had established Nataraj Opera Party, a modern *jatra* party in 1959. Mr. Achyut Lahkar improvised upon his brother's concept thus creating Nataraj Theatre.

Kalita (2013) states, there were certain cultural factors which contributed to the birth of mobile theatre in Pathsala. From the later part of the 19th century to the first part of the 20th century, Bajali, a place near Pathsala, saw the formation of several *jatra* parties in many villages namely Bhagiram Kakoti's *Bhaluki Jatra Dal* (1888), *Bamunkuchi Jatra Dal* (1909), *Gobindapur Jatra Dal* (1923), *Sri Sri Sankaradeva Opera* (1930), *Bamunkuchi Napara Opera* (1930), *Madhya Bajali Opera* (1930), *Bagariguri Jatra Dal* (1953), *Bagna Jatra Dal* (1954), etc. Apart

from the rise of these *jatra* parties, the person who created an atmosphere for performance and progress of drama in Pathsala was Mr.Santaram Choudhury. As mentioned earlier, with the establishment of the Pathsala Natyamandir the path became smooth for amateur drama. In May 1940 was formed the Bajali Progressive Block, which later on came to be known as Pragati Sangha, and it came forward to play an important role in the development of dramatics in Pathsala. In the later years various amateur drama groups in Pathsala could utilize this stage for their experiments. The Pathsala Sahitya Sabha established in 1962 also played an important role in the practice and progress of dramatics (p.5).

Sarma (1995) writes, on the evening of 2nd October 1963 the inaugural drama of Nataraj Theatre was Mr. Phani Sarma's *Bhogjara*. Mr.Bishnu Rabha, one of the most revered names in the cultural scenario of Assam, is said to have commented thus on the concept of Mr. Achyut Lahkar,

A huge tent which will hold a stage and an auditorium with a capacity to seat a thousand people, two dynamo engines which will light the entire set up, six microphones that will amplify the slightest whisper, a tape recorder which will help create special scenes. A luxurious affair. No one has ever dreamt of making theatre so techno-savvy in India. If this fantasy of Achyut Lahkar becomes a reality, then the history

of theatre in Assam will add a new chapter inked in gold
(p.100).

Raichoudhury (2010) writes, in 1967, Mr. Hemakanta Talukdar produced the Mancharupa Theatre in Pathsala with Mr.Chandra Choudhury as director, and renowned actor-director-academic, Mr.Dharanidhar Deba Goswami. Pathsala saw the birth of Asom Star Theatre in 1970 which created quite a stir with drama presentations like *Nartaki*, *Kalankini*, *Subhajatra*, *Hitler*, etc. In 1973 Pathsala witnessed Mr. Sadananda Lahkar creating Nataraj Silpi Niketan which later took the name of Aradhana Theatre. This theatre party won the All India Critics Association (AICA) award in 1981 at the National level. In 1976, two friends, writer-actor Mr. Ratan Lahkar, and experienced lighting artist Mr. Krishna Roy created one of the most successful theatre till date, Kohinoor Theatre. Then In 1980, Pathsala got another gift in the form of Abahan Theatre which was produced individually by Mr. Krishna Roy. Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, renowned litterateur and film-maker, became an integral part of Abahan Theatre and gave some of the best dramas of mobile theatre like *Janambhumi*, *Nilakantha*, *Satabdi*, *Dinabandhu*, etc. In 1982, another mobile theatre which was born in Pathsala was Anirban Theatre. In this way, in the later years also this town was the birthplace of many other theatres like, Upasana and Chitralekha Theatre (Producer: Mr. Rajani Patgiri), Kumar Indrajeet Theatre (Producer: Mr. Kankeswar Kalita and Mr. Jogen kalita), Natasurjya Bishnu-Jyoti Theatre (Producer: Mr. Kalpa Kakoti), Pallabi Theatre (Producer: Mr. Gopesh Talukdar),

etc. Of course most of these theatres could not survive the test of time (pp.357-358).

Patgiri (1995) writes, few other reasons contributed to this region emerging as the centre of mobile theatre. The first, being the impact of the theatre movement in Bengal because of geographical proximity, religious (*Bhakti* movement) reasons, and connection through transportation. Though the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Sankaradeva had a strong impact in Barpeta, it could not make much inroads from Pathsala to Nalbari. As a result the *Satriya* culture including *bhaona*, the one act vaishnavite play, was not practiced much in this area. One can clearly see that because of this, the mobile theatre has had a huge influence of the *jatra* of Bengal as against the *bhaona*, which is almost non-existent. The second factor was, in the freedom movement, the role of Bajali in Pathsala and Barnagar in Sarbhog was glorious, and the direct impact of the patriotic presentations on the stages of Bengal, to rouse the patriotism of the common man through *jatra* plays like Mukunda Das' *Nildarpan* and *Nabanna* were clearly felt in these two areas (pp.166-170).

1.4 Objectives of the Study

This endeavour tries to examine the:

- (i) History and evolution of mobile theatre in Assam;
- (ii) Composition of present day mobile theatre (man, material and life);

- (iii) Role and status of the actors, musicians, workers, etc. in the mobile theatre;
- (iv) Look into the position of women in the arena of mobile theatre;
- (v) Mobile theatre as a source of entertainment;
- (vi) Place of mobile theatre in social, cultural and economic arenas of Assam;
- (vii) Problems and prospects of the mobile theatre.

1.5 Research Questions

Keeping in mind the objectives mentioned above, this research work has attempted to explore the following research questions-

- (i) Has the commitment to the original idea of social responsibility combined with bussiness been sidelined, and is today, mobile theatre is only about bussiness?
- (ii) Is the negative trend of class difference within the mobile theatre is increasing?
- (iii) Is mobile theatre still a male domain where women have been, and still are, invisible as decision maker ?
- (iv) What has been the impact of mobile theatre on the society, cultural field and economy of Assam?
- (v) What are the future prospects of mobile theatre?

1.6 Methodology

It has been already stated that the birth place of mobile theatre is Pathsala of Assam, and therefore, the basic data for the intended study have been collected from Pathsala. True to the Snowball Method, mobile theatre has become a prime source of entertainment in Assam, both in rural and urban areas. And as such, required data has also been collected from different places of Assam. Both qualitative and quantitative data have been used in the study. Primary as well as secondary data have been used in this study, and the secondary data has been collected from books, journals, newspapers, leaflets, etc. The collected data has been systematically arranged, analyzed and interpreted and meticulously placed in the six chapters of the thesis. The tools of data collection has been through:

1. Observation: This tool was employed to observe overall life in the mobile theatre camp including rehearsals of the plays, presentation of plays in various venues, what goes on in the auditorium(tent), green room, ticket counters, etc.
2. Interview : Various subjects were chosen for interview based on their association, experience and expertise in their own field in connection with mobile theatre.(a) Producers, (b) Directors, (c) Playwrights, (d) Actors, (e) Musicians and Singers, (f) Dancers, (g) Technicians (Light and Sound), (h) Manual workers, (i) Mobile theatre lovers, (j) Audiences, etc.

3. Collection of text: This included searching for the drama text and annual souvenirs of the various mobile theatre groups, original documents like letters, contracts, tickets, invitation cards, etc.
4. Photographs: Still pictures comprise an important part of documentation and as such, collection of photographs has been done.
5. Informal chatting: Apart from formal interviews, informal chatting with people who had significant knowledge to share on the subject also helped a lot in collecting information.

The Field Study was intended to get a first-hand experience of a mobile theatre. Spending time within the mobile theatre camps gave this scholar valuable feedback about life in mobile theatre, not available in any book. Altogether around 40 people from within and without mobile theatres was interviewed. This sample size was convenient to handle and care was taken while selecting the interviewee to take into account their experience, work profile, age and sex.

1.7 Method of Data Analysis

For the data analysis of this research work,

- 1.Strenght (S)
- 2.Weakness (W)
- 3.Opportunity (O)
- 4.Threat (T)

SWOT framework has been chosen. Though it is true that this method of data analysis is usually used in the Management sector, but since there is no hard and fast rule that a SWOT analysis cannot be used elsewhere, it was interesting to look into mobile theatre through the SWOT prism. The inspiration to use the SWOT framework for data analysis was derived from the unpublished thesis of Mrinal Jyoti Goswami, *Samaj Bastavatabad aru Mancharitir Alokot Sampratik Asomiya Natak: Eti Adhyayan (1967-2003)*, Faculty of Arts, Gauhati University (2012). In spite of various criticism and negative feedback that it has had to digest, mobile theatre is still going strong in the state. Therefore, its various dimensions have been placed on the SWOT framework to analyse and interpret the data collected. It must be admitted that the same data, could have been analysed using other methods as well.

1.8 Limitation of the Study

It must be humbly accepted by the research scholar that this work is not an end in itself. Mobile theatre of Assam and its history of over fifty years is a vast topic. In its continuous journey, scores of mobile theatre groups could not survive and disappeared, while at the same time new groups are appearing every other year. It is very difficult to even state the exact number of mobile theatre groups in Assam at this moment. Moreover, thousands of people are directly and indirectly involved and connected with mobile theatres. To study about all these in one research work is quite not possible. That is why an amalgative data collection, touching upon as many dimensions as possible, from both established as well as

newly formed mobile theatres, has been done for this study. One major inconvenience that was felt during the process of this study was the lack of any preservation efforts by the mobile theatre groups themselves. Old original documents, photographs, manuscripts, souvenirs, etc., hardly anything can be found. Very few people could give information with any authority. Another difficulty faced was, mobile theatre being a commercial venture, the producers are more than reluctant to share authentic profit-loss data. Other than that, going to the remote areas to study the audience pattern and behaviour was also a limitation. Many times the weather also created havoc, particularly in the rainy season, in conducting field study. It must be admitted that there is a lack of books on mobile theatre of Assam. A lot of effort was needed to search out information from newspapers, magazines and journals. In spite of the above mentioned hurdles, an attempt has been made to put forth a research work, which will attract and encourage future scholars to explore the unexplored dimensions of the mobile theatre of Assam.

1.9 Scheme of Chapterization

This work titled **Dimensions of Mobile Theatre of Assam** has been taken up to explore the various dimensions of mobile theatre. A particular subject can be studied and analyzed by different people from diverse angles. The research scholar hopes that this work, when completed, will be a valuable addition with

new inputs to the work already completed in this particular field. The entire subject matter has been presented in six chapters:

- The 1st Chapter is the '**Introduction**' where the scholar attempts to introduce the subject, and establish the relevance of the study, review connected literature, present the locale taken, chalk out the objectives of the research work, design the research questions sought to verify, explain the methodology and tools of data collection adopted, justify the method of data analysis, explain the limitation of the study, and present the chapters designed.
- The 2nd Chapter has been titled '**Emergence and Evolution of Mobile theatre in Assam**'. Here the scholar has tried to trace the story of how, when and from where the mobile theatre evolved, till its present status, in Assam.
- The 3rd Chapter titled '**Structure, Techniques and Management of Mobile Theatre**' attempts to reveal the inside story of the mobile theatre right from its physical attributes to the economics, passion, emotion and extreme hard work connected with it.
- The 4th Chapter has been titled '**Problems and prospects of Mobile Theatre**' where the idea is to understand the various difficulties and

problems that mobile theatre has been facing since its inception, its saga of survival against all odds and also to focus on the prospects it holds.

- The 5th Chapter, **‘Impact of Mobile Theatre on the Assamese Society and Culture’** dwells upon the impact of this most popular medium of entertainment in Assam. Has this impact been positive or negative? Has the impact been strong enough? Could it have played better and different role?

- The 6th and final Chapter, **‘Summary and Conclusion’**, summarizes the entire discussion in the previous five chapters and then puts forth the conclusions and suggestions that the scholar reached upon while pursuing the research work.

1.10 APA Style of Citation and Reference

For this research work, the APA style of citation and reference has been followed as per the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, (Sixth Edition).