

CHAPTER III

STRUCTURE, TECHNIQUE AND MANAGEMENT IN MOBILE THEATRE

The emergence and subsequent development of Assamese theatre now leads this study into this third chapter, where it has been attempted to explore the entire structure of the mobile theatre along with the various techniques used for presentation of plays on stage, as well as the aspects of management involved in running this nine-month show, that is mobile in every sense of the term. The tripod on which this structure stands upon, is basically the producer (finance and overall management), playwright (provides the raw material) and the director (utilizes the raw material), supported by the rest of the entourage that includes right from the actors, technicians, workers, both skilled and unskilled, management personnel, to the gatekeeper. Earlier, the three main persons, i.e., producer, director and playwright were three different people, but nowadays, most playwrights are also the directors of their own plays.

3.1 The Producers

A theatre producer is the person who oversees all aspects of a theatre production. The producer is the one who starts the entire process. He is the person who finds the director and playwrights, and works towards the commercial success of the business trying to juggle many balls in the air, which

include casting, securing funds for the production, negotiating with the inviting committees (most times through the secretary) and taking care of everyday details of the cast and crew, et al. Proper marketing and advertising strategy, with the help of the concerned departments, is one of the most important responsibilities of a producer.

In the mobile theatre scenario, producers are mostly the sole proprietors of the theatre (though partnership is also seen) and as such, they are the captain of the ship. Each mobile unit employs around 100-150 people right from the director, actors, dancers, singers, musicians, technicians to the workers, etc. Assuming that every said member has four family members at an average we have around 400-600 people for whom the producer is directly responsible. It is for the producer to chalk out the budget for a season and also arrange that money. Today, for a theatre to begin business, the budget touches at least a few crores. Mobile theatres are private set ups and as such involve a huge amount of risk. In such a situation the producer has to rely on his own resources, bank loan, private financing, help from friends and well-wishers, plus the advance amount taken from the inviting committees to make all ends meet. Apart from that, it is also his headache to rope in the best playwrights and the 'star' actors because without 'saleable' names, inviting committees are reluctant to invite theatre groups. This is definitely not an enviable position.

Late Ratan Lahkar (70 yrs) producer and proprietor of Kohinoor Theatre, while sharing his long experience said, 'One cannot imagine the tension and hard

work that a producer has to go through every year to sustain the theatre. It is not just about me, I am responsible for every person associated with my theatre' (R.Lahkar.Personal communication. May 22, 2014). The producer has to keep a tab on every single detail and requirement of the theatre. Any kind of emergency situation has to be dealt with by him. To fix up a deal for the next season with the various committees who invite them, the producer is generally represented by the secretary of the theatre. The producer is the person who decides the plays to be presented in a season and employs every person required by the theatre. Nowadays it is often heard that producers (on the suggestion of the playwright) first decide the 'star' for the season and then, scripts are penned based on the capacity of these 'stars'. This trend has led to an unannounced competition amongst all mobile theatre producers to catch the best saleable stars at atrocious costs.

Mobile theatre is a commercial venture and naturally every producer's aim is a successful season. The AAMTPA (All Assam Mobile Theatre Producers Association) has time and again voiced their concern against this 'catch the best star' trend, but ironically, they themselves are the people who are responsible for this competition. The responsibility of the mobile theatre producer is quite heavy. If a producer understands and respect culture, is socially aware, and have the ability to be a pathfinder for the society, then mobile theatre in Assam will never see its sunset. Today, when this medium has gained so much popularity among all sections of people, both in the rural and urban space, the producers need to be

even more careful about what they are offering to the public in the name of entertainment. When a lot of criticism has also been aimed at the mobile theatre set up regarding dependence on glamour stars, lack of original plays, overuse of technical gimmicks, dearth of new acting talents etc., it is the producers who are answerable. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience, the glorious tradition of mobile theatre that has seen producers like Mr. Achyut Lahkar, Mr. Biren Kalita, Sangeet Natak Akademi Awardee Mr. Dharani Barman, Mr. Karuna Mazumdar, Mr. Sadananda Lahkar, Mr. Sarat Mazumdar, Mr. Prashanta Hazarika, Mr. Ratan Lahkar, Mr. Rabin Neog et al., to name only a few, now needs able shoulders to carry forward this legacy. The next generation of producers must never forget that apart from being business, mobile theatre must reflect the cultural essence of Assam.

3.2 The Directors

If the producer is the CEO of a mobile theatre, the director is the Managing Director. He is the person who leads the team of workers towards the realization of a goal. That goal being, a successful presentation on stage every night in each show. We must remember here that we are talking about 'live' theatre. To meet this responsibility, the director must have a vision. It is the director who gives an interpretation to the play staged and for that he/she has to sit in discussion with the playwright, light and sound people, music and dance directors and technicians in planning the production. This creative intercourse naturally brings in great feedback. A play is essentially a director's baby and as

such he/she must have complete understanding of its structure and meaning without which, he/she will fail to understand the characters in the script and what demands a particular character will put on an actor. The director must have keen knowledge of the mood of the audience and how it may affect the performance. It is the director who finalizes the cast and rehearsal schedule. Cohen (1981) describes,

The director's most time-consuming task is to rehearse the actors. The director must be organized, for he or she focuses the entire cast during this time. The director's medium is the actor in space and time. Space is defined by the acting area and the setting while time is defined by the duration of the production and the dynamics of the drama. The director must be able to see the actor as a person and strive to draw out that person's potential. Consequently, the director constantly must be sensitive to both the needs of an actor and at the same time think of ways to meet those needs in positive ways (p.52).

Therefore, the director is the stone that polishes a theatrical production to perfection. He/she is the pilot of the airplane that belongs to the producer. And when the show actually begins, all that the director can do is watch as one among the audience. Strictly in alphabetical order, some of the renowned directors of mobile theatre are, Mr.Abdul Majid, Mr. Atul Bordoloi, Mr.Bhabesh Barua, Dr. B.N Saikia, Mr.Champak Sarma, Mr.Hem Barua, Mr. Hem Bhattacharya,

Mr.Hemanta Dutta, Mr.Jibeswar Deka, Mr.Mahananda Sarma, Mr.Munin barua, et.al.

3.3 The Playwrights

Drama is the written text of a story, while a play/theatre is the stage presentation of the same. The version of the drama which has to be scripted for presentation on stage, is done by the playwright. A playwright can write his or her own original creation, or take a story written by another and adapt it for stage. In mobile theatres, right from the very beginning, the producer, playwright and director's role has been seen to have overlapped, for instance, Mr.Achyut Lahkar, the producer of Nataraj Theatre, also wrote many of the plays. Even then, there was a distinct line up of playwrights down the years who contributed immensely to the rise and popularity of mobile theatre in Assam with their creations. Every theatre had a trend of staging three to four plays per season. If we assume that twenty theatre groups, big and small, perform in a season, that means sixty to eighty plays were required. Forget writing originals, it is a daunting task for playwrights to script this number of plays. Every theatre group engages at least two playwrights per season. Many times, the same playwright pens plays for different theatres at the same time. Arranged alphabetically for the sake of convenience only, the history of mobile theatre stands witness to the presentation of the plays of some of the most applauded playwrights in Assam like Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya, Mr. Achyut Lahkar, Mr. Arun Sarma, Mr.Atul Bordoloi, Mr. Atul Chandra Hazarika, Mr. Bhaben Barua, Dr.B.N Saikia, Mr.

Hemanta Dutta, Mr. Mahananda Sarma, Mr. Mahendra Barthakur, , Mr. Mahesh Kalita, Mr. Munin Barua, Mr. Mridul Chutiya, Mr. Pabitra Kumar Deka, Mr. Padma Barkataki, Mr. Phani Sarma, Mr. Prafulla Bora, Mr. Seabrata Barua, Mr. Ugra Mena, Mr. Uttam Barua, et al. The point that one cannot miss here is that, in this long journey of half a century of mobile theatre, only one female playwright is seen, Ms. Minoti Acharya, who wrote *Lakhimee Bowari* for Abahan Theatre in 1991. This was informed by Mr. Krishna Roy, producer of Abahan Theatre (K. Roy. Telephonic interview. March 10, 2015). Kalita (2011) informs, prior to that, Ms. Arati Das Bairagi had written and directed, and Ms. Nalini Bala Hazarika had written *nritya-natikas* (dance-drama) for Hengul Theatre between 1986-89 (pp.166-167).

Award winning Assamese film-maker Ms. Manju Borah (61yrs) in an interview with this researcher laments about the scarcity of quality playwrights/scriptwriters in the Assamese cinema-theatre scenario, 'If I find better scrip'ts I am sure my work will improve manifold. It was the paucity of scriptwriters that compelled me to do my own scripting. Same is the case in Assamese amateur theatre' (M. Borah. Personal Communication. May 22, 2016). A dramatist is the creator on whose imagination the director gets to work. A good story that carries a strong social message is the ideal ingredient needed for a good theatre production. If one looks back to the history of the plays presented on the mobile stage, one comes across a humongous list. Mobile theatres in its existence of fifty plus years have staged not less than 6000 plays, that is, if we assume 40

theatre groups per year staging 3 plays each. That would be $40 \times 3 = 120$ plays per year $\times 50$ years = 6000 plays. This is indeed a great contribution to Assamese drama literature considering the fact that mobile theatre plays are always written in Assamese language. To give credit to the playwrights/dramatists of mobile theatre, they have to churn out creations suitable for the mobile stage and that too, within a stipulated deadline.

3.4 The Actors

Schechner (1990) writes,

A good actor is the one who understands the character very well, thus becoming the character. [.....But] we should not forget ourselves while acting. While acting, half the actor is the role he does and half will be himself. The half actor 'who does not forget' himself is the knower, and the half who 'becomes the character' is the feeler (pp.36-37).

To quote (Q.I Kumar, 2014) acclaimed playwright and director of mobile theatres, Mr. Abhijeet Bhattacharya,

It is an actor's media, acting is primary. I may write something great but how the actors present it on the stage matters the most, because that is what the audience gets to see. Even the ratings of the three plays we present in each mobile theatre has come to be decided by the audience based on the acting caliber

of the actors. I cannot decide which play will be number one. For me all my plays are of equal importance to me. The audience decides (p.13).

Once, the mobile theatre artists were a distinct group apart. Not everybody knew them, except the mobile theatre-lovers. In a theatre everyone was equal, no preferential treatment was given to anyone. Right from lodging, food, transport everything was shared. It would be another thesis in itself if we try to list all the actors, both male and female, who enriched the mobile stage with their hard work in this long journey of half a century. Film stars were not unknown in mobile, for instance, Mr. Nipon Goswami, popular actor of Assamese cinema, was in Suradevi Theatre as early as 1977-78 and also in Kohinoor in 1980-81. Mr. Biju Phukan, popular star of Assamese cinema, joined Suradevi for 1992-93, Mr. Jatin Bora, popular cine artist of Assamese cinema joined Ashirbad Theatre for 2004-2005 followed by Mr. Kapil Bora, popular Assamese film actor, in 2005-2006. Today, when the Assamese cinema industry is almost non-existent, mobile theatres have become the alternate means of livelihood for the hundreds of people who have been a part of this industry.

The word 'glamour' has been utilized to the maximum by Kohinoor Theatre and the idea was to attract people from all social strata. Mazumdar (2015) writes, a new trend was started by Sakuntala Theatre to get the so called 'glamorous' VCD (Video Compact Disc) starlets into mobile theatre (p.23). Theatre critics feel that though this has definitely popularized mobile theatre through salability

(advertisement) of these stars, but on the downside, it has resulted in compromising on strong stories and acting. Another fact of this star culture has led to a competition among the various theatre groups to get the 'glamour stars' by paying atrocious amounts of 60-65 lakhs for a season. Moreover, the stars nowadays get a preferential treatment and this has definitely brought in a gap in the earlier family set up that used to be there, though theatre producers deny this fact. This was expressed by some artists of mobile theatre on terms of anonymity during field study of the scholar. Today, if anyone has been benefited maximum from mobile theatres, it is this small group of 'star/glamour' artists because it is on their names that the business of the season depends. Hence, the race to rope in the most bankable stars at whatever amount of money they charge is on.

A dearth of good actors has also been felt within the field. A new generation of talent must come out for good plays to be staged on mobile theatre. After all, it is an actor's medium. Arranged in the alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, some of the stalwarts in the department of acting in mobile theatre who started their career and carved out special place because of their talent include Ms. Amina Dewan, Mr. Anup Hazarika, Ms. Barasha Rani Bishaya, Mr. Bhabesh Barua, Mr. Bhola Kotoki, Mr. Champak Sarma, Mr. Dharani Barman, Mr. Jatin Bora, Mr. Jibeswar Deka, Ms. Juri Sarma, Mr. Mahananda Sarma, Ms. Minoti Bharali, Ms. Minoti Das, Ms. Moni Bordoloi, Ms. Moni Devi, Mr. Mridul Bhuyan, Mr. Mridul Chutiya, Ms. Niru Phukan, Mr. Pankaj Pujari, Ms. Pakiza Begum, Mr. Praneswar Pathak, Mr. Pranjit Das, Ms. Pratima

Bhuyan, Ms. Prastuti Parashar, Ms. Pushpa Devi, Mr.Rabi Sarma, Ms.Rupa Barua, Mr.Tapan Das, Mr.Upakul Bordoli,et al., to name a few.

3.5 The Auditorium

(a) Stage and Seating Arrangement

Macintosh (1993) says, 'theatre architecture is more than the frame to a picture. The audience is generally less aware of the contribution of theatre architecture to the theatre experience' (p.1).

Mobile theatre has been all about innovation. It was an attempt to bring in new ideas and experiment with them. As mentioned above, the proscenium stage was chosen for performance because of certain advantages. A backdrop, the wings, the screen, etc., was much more convenient than the open performing area's in *jatra*. Kalita (2011) states that, Mr. Achyut Lahkar used a revolvingstage (trolley) in this maiden presentation to facilitate uninterrupted performance (pp.31-58). There is a misconception among people that the revolving stage was Mr. Achyut Lahkar's creation. In fact, as written by Richmond, et al. (1990) turntable stages gained currency in Calcutta during the 1930's when they were introduced in the Rangmahal Theatre by Mr. Chatu Sen, a Bengali, who first saw them in New York (p.443). Mr. Achyut Lahkar had witnessed this during his tenure in Calcutta, and borrowed the idea for Nataraj theatre. Kalita (2011) further writes, the use of tyres underneath to support the stage created problems in the first year, as the entire stage shook when the artists

walked around. As such, next year tyres were replaced with iron wheels. Initially the auditorium was shaped like an inverted V where the frontage had a breadth of about 40ft while the backside expanded to 90-100 ft. It was later on with experiments that the present shape and set up of the auditorium came about (pp.31-58).

Figo (2010) transcripts, folding wooden chairs were used to seat the audience. The concept of the gallery was also not there. It was from the Diamond Circus of Mr. Haren Das of Bajali that Mr. Achyut Lahkar picked up and introduced this idea in the third year of Nataraj theatre. In 1966-67 Lahkar tried a new innovation called the 'Theatre scope' on the stage of Nataraj theatre where some cinematic methods like 'fade in', 'fade out', 'intercut' etc were tried, though no camera or reel was used. Then in 1968-69, Lahkar introduced the historic "Cine-theatre" where certain scenes which were difficult to perform on stage were shot using camera and then projected on stage as a part of the play unfolding. For this, the camera was rented from Calcutta. In 1970-71, Mr. Dharani Barman, producer of Suradebi Theatre introduced the three- dimensional stage which was the idea of his art director, Mr. Gobinda Choudhury. (pp.32-33). Mr. Ratan Lahkar informed in his interview that Mr. Achyut Lahkar also tried the three stage idea in Nataraj Theatre for the first time that same year. Ever experimental, Lahkar attempted another innovation in 1990-1991 when he introduced the revolving stage giving it the name 'Alsom'. The stage was divided into three parts where three different sets could be shown. Each set could be

changed as soon as the screen dropped, with the show going on in the other two, and then simply revolved back as required. This idea was an improvised version of his maiden attempt in 1963 when he used the trolley on tyres. (R. Lahkar. Personal Communication. May 22, 2014).

In his interview with this researcher, Mr. Mahananda Sarma reminisced how it was Mancharupa Theatre (1969) that first introduced the concept of the two-dimensional stage, that is, static twin stages. This was conceived by himself and Mr. Bhaben Barua, two stalwarts of mobile theatre. This innovation of Mancharupa Theatre was so successful that even today all mobile theatres of Assam use the twin stage set up (M. Sarma. Personal communication. July 04, 2014).

(b) Lighting

Light is a medium to express the theme and style of drama. To quote McCandless (1958), “Visibility, naturalism, composition and atmosphere are the objectives for lighting, no matter what form of theatre or type of production” (p.8). Some of the most revered names in the history of theatre lighting include Sebastiano Serlio, Inigo Jones, Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig. When the proscenium stage came into vogue in Assam, gas light was used for lighting. Bhattacharya (2008) mentions that, it was in 1921, that a new chapter began in the history of theatre in Assam, when the famous Ban Theatre of Tezpur was electrified and the play *Nilambar* was staged (p.17). De (1995) describes, initially

in mobile theatres, the only objective of lighting was to light up the stage properly. They had to be switched off to help change scenes. When required, coloured filter was placed in front of lights to create coloured lights. In 1968-69, when Nataraj Theatre tried the 'cine-theatre' experiment, lighting was used intelligently to establish a balance and continuity between the projected screen shots and the live stage scenes (pp.65-67). Sarma (1995) mentions it was only in 1974 that Rupkonwar Theatre gave a new meaning to the word 'lighting' for the first time in mobile theatre (p.101).

De (2008) further writes, in 1979-80, Kohinoor Theatre first used ultra-violet light and for the first time 'double-acting' was made possible on stage with its clever use. In 1980-81, Abahan Theatre staged a scene of an aeroplane crash, and in 1981-82, Theatre Bhagyadevi showed a helicopter flying. All such scenes were done with proper planning and experimentation of lighting. It is a matter of great pride that renowned lighting director, Mr. Tapan Sen, was also associated with mobile theatres of Assam and he admitted how difficult and dangerous it is to work in the temporary set up of mobile, where one is vulnerable to the wrath of nature (pp.55-158).

Gradually, with time the importance of lighting in theatre has increased and various new tools and electronic equipments have been developed. Goswami has written (2012), to increase or decrease the depth of light, the journey from water dimmers have reached the DMX Console today. Similarly, from the ordinary bulb to Plano Convex (PC), Profile, Fresnel, LED, Intelligent lights, PAR, Multi-

ten, etc., have come into use (p.175). Though experiments are still going on, one cannot help but admit that the equipments in use in Assam for lighting in theatre is still of a much lower standard. Even today, the lighting assistants who work on the stage, particularly up in the ceiling, with no protection gear, risk their limb and life. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, some of the people who contributed, and some still contributing their skills through lights to mobile theatre include, Mr.Achyut Lahkar, Mr. Adya Goswami, Mr. Arabinda Kalita, Mr. Arunabh, Mr. Ashok Deka, Mr. Ashu Roy, Mr. Bidya Hazarika, Mr. Bhubaneswar Bhagawati, Mr. Chakra Talukdar, Mr. Dharani Kalita, Mr. Dinesh Deka, Mr. Dipak Roy, Mr. Hiramoni Goswami, Mr. Kalyan De, Mr. Kamal Sarma, Mr. Kamini Talukdar, Mr. Karuna Pathak, Mr. Krishna Roy, Mr. Kshitij Sarma, Mr. Nirmal Lahkar, Mr. O.P Nayar, Mr. Pramod Barman, Mr. Rajesh Saha, Mr.Tiken Das, Mr.Uma Thakuria,et al. The interesting thing here is, these people learnt their skills through socialization process. Mobile theatre, that way, has been a school that has given the opportunity for its students, particularly the technical employees, to learn, experiment, innovate and develop.

(c) Sound

In theatre, sound is the medium of connection with the audience. It may be dialogue, it may be music, or it may be any other ‘noise’, like birds chirping, wind howling, vehicle starting, etc. Without sound no theatre is possible. ‘Mime’

is of course, a performing art, where dialogue is not there, but music and other sound effects are used to put across the meaning of what is being conveyed.

It was after the 1930's, that the sound recording industry expanded rapidly throughout the world with new innovations. In the early 1950's there were several simultaneous developments in the audio industry that ushered in the modern era of sound in the theatre. Advances in electronic engineering greatly enhanced the recording and playback equipment. Additionally, for the first time the effects and the music needed during a production could be played from a central location. The playback deck as well as the amplifiers and mixing and equalization equipments were typically housed in a booth at the back of the auditorium. Portable loudspeakers were placed wherever needed on the stage or in the auditorium. Through the use of a playback mixing console (mixer/mixing desk), the sound operator could direct the sound for a particular cue to its appropriate location at a specific loudness level. It, therefore, became possible for one operator to run all of the sound cues from the sound booth during a production (Stagecraft: 2016). It was common in productions of musicals to use microphones by the early 1960's. These microphones were placed across the front of the stage and hung down from above. But these systems had problems- one, the singers had to stand directly in front or just below the microphones for best results, and two, the cables that connected the microphones to the mixing console were disturbed by radio-frequency interference from the stage lighting system.

A new development that came in the 1980's was the affordable miniaturized wireless microphones. Wireless microphones send their signal to the mixing desk via a small low-power FM radio transmitter hidden somewhere on the actor. The microphone is often placed in the actor's hair or mounted on a flesh-coloured headset mouthpiece. The accuracy of sound reproduction (sometimes referred to as 'presence') that is obtained by placing the microphone in close proximity to an actor's mouth is extremely high. The use of wireless microphones soon expanded beyond musical theatre to every type of theatrical presentation. The advantages of audiences' being able to clearly hear actors were obvious. The ability to modulate the loudness of an actor's voice also allowed directors and sound designers to begin experimenting with the use of background music and effects throughout entire scenes in much the same way that movies and television used sound. The other significant technological development to affect the sound industry in the 1980's was digitization. Digital sound equipment like, pre-amplifiers, amplifiers, mixing consoles, and so forth, began appearing early in the decade, although only in the late 1980's did such equipment become sufficiently affordable that it was adopted widely (stagecraft:2016).

The mobile theatre of Assam has also journeyed through various stages of development in the department of sound. Once, when sound system (the technology) was not there, actors and singers depended on the strength of their vocal chords. Time saw the coming in of the microphone and loudspeaker. In a mobile theatre auditorium (tent), the sound system plays a great part in appealing

to the 1500-2000 audience. What is being said on stage must be clearly audible till the last gallery. 'Surround sound', as in permanent halls or movie theatres, is not possible in the mobile theatre, though sound systems have been improvised a lot, and today, quite sophisticated consoles are used. Special effects of sound create an ambience for the scene unfolding on stage. Yet, it is still a trend in mobile theatres to deliver dialogues in a very high octave, which sounds very unnatural. Using powerful wireless microphones and proper planning of sound equipment in the mobile tent can surely change this. In its glorious history of half a century, people who have contributed in the field of sound control to enhance the appeal of a play in mobile theatres include Mr. Aghuna Das, Mr. Dipak Bharali, Mr. Dipak Das, Mr. Ganga Kalita, Mr. Girish Haloi, Mr. Hitesh Das, Mr. Jiten Das, Mr. Karna Rai, Mr. M.C Chauhan, Mr. Mathura Rai, Mr. Paresh Sarma, the first sound controller of mobile theatre (Figo:2010:40), Mr. Ramen Kakoty, Mr. Rinku Kalita, Mr. Samar Rabha, et al., to name only a few. These names have been arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone.

3.6 Set

Ottley (1953) describes, "The simplest description of a set is a background in front of which primary motion or action (that is action which is definitely controlled) takes place" (p.5).

In an interview taken by this investigator, Sri Upakul Bordoloi, popular actor-director of films, amateur theatre and mobile theatre, said, “Stage settings create the atmosphere of what is being shown. With the coming in the proscenium stage, set designing also gained importance. The correct stage set adds to the quality of the play presented” (U. Bordoloi. Personal communication. October 03, 2012). Once again, it was Nataraj Theatre that had paved the path and in the long journey of fifty-three years that mobile theatre travelled, art direction and settings underwent various experimentation and transformation.

Quite a number of people are engaged by the mobile theatres for the creation of the sets known as *mancha sajja*, which is done under the supervision of the set designer. Depiction of the environ of a scene is known as *drishya sajja*, where care is taken to put the right object in the right place as required in the different scenes. The process of creating a set design begins with the designer closely studying the script for the information it contains about the period, country, locale, mood, spirit of the play, socio-economic status of the characters etc., that will help develop the design. The settings must express the mood and spirit of the play. The mood refers to the overall emotional quality of the play which may be happy or sad or tragic or comic etc., while spirit means the style in which a particular production is to be presented. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, the stage settings of mobile theatre has seen the expertise of people like Mr.Arjun Kalita, Mr. Arun Rai, Mr. Bhaben Deka, Mr.Bhumi Rai, Mr. Bhupen Boro, Mr. Binoy Rai, Mr. Chandramohan Baishya,

Mr. Dhani Haloi, Mr. Dharma Rai, Mr. Dilip Deka, Mr. Dipak Saikia, Mr. Dipen Rai, Mr. Dwijen Choudhury, Ms. Garima Hazarika, Mr. Girish Das, Mr. Gobinda Rai, Mr. Gopal Rai, Mr. Harish Patgiri, Mr. Kamaleswar Kalita, Mr. Lakkhi Das, Mr. Montu Das, Mr. Nuruddin Ahmad, Mr. Phani Sarma, Mr. Raben Rai, Mr. Sarbeswar Das, Mr. Siben Sutadhar, Mr. Singha Sarkar, Mr. Suren Rai, Mr. Sushil Das, et al.

3.7 Music and Dance

Ranade (1990) says, “theatre music is deliberate, planned and art oriented in conception. It is performed in consciously controlled condition” (pp.8-19). When Mr. Achyut Lahkar dreamt of Nataraj Theatre, he saw a complete entertainment package. As mentioned earlier, he got the best people in the business. Music, under the supervision of Mr. Prabhat Sarma and Mr. Chandra Choudhury, both renowned music directors, while dance was to be directed by Mr. Kalawanta Singh, a renowned exponent of Manipuri dance, and Mr. Rabin Das, another excellent dancer. From Nataraj Theatre till today, music and dance in mobile theatre has come a long way. Earlier, all music played and songs rendered, was live. The musicians and singers sat in front of the stage and performed. With time that trend changed. renowned music director, Mr. Nanda Bannerjee who has been associated with both cinema and mobile theatre informed that, recorded songs were first used in 1984 by Chitralakha Theatre, Pathsala (N. Bannerjee. Telephonic interview. June 15, 2015).

Bhagawati (2004) writes, after its very first successful year, Abahan Theatre brought out a cassette of the songs that were used in their plays. This was ‘Hits of Abahan’, the first audio cassette of mobile theatre. It created a sensation in the music world of Assam (P.45). Veteran singer and music director of mobile theatre, Mr. Dasarath Das informed that, “the first lip-sync of songs in mobile theatre was done in 1974 by Asom Star Theatre in the play *Nartaki*, wherein the popular song *Jil jil jilmil/ Sil sil silmil /junakare pahi o junakare pahi* was rendered by Mr. Dasarath Das and Ms. Bina Bora” (D. Das. Personal communication. July 07, 2014). Today, song recordings are done in sophisticated studios by famous music directors and equally popular singers render the songs.

The music scenario of mobile theatre had touched a new level when the internationally reputed maestro, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika took the responsibility as music director for the 1966-67 season of Purbajyoti Theatre established by Sri Karuna Mazumdar at Hajo. This was a new high for the entire mobile theatre world. The compositions by Dr. Hazarika in the play *Sonitkonwari* brought in the flood of Assamese indigenous musical flavor into mobile theatre. He was assisted by personalities like Mr. Jayanta Hazarika, Dost Habibur Rehman and Mr. Prabhat Sarma, each, a luminary in the music world of Assam. The second mobile theatre that Dr. Hazarika chose to work for, as music director in 1984-85, was Aradhana Theatre established by Sri Sadananda Lahkar, the same person who had been the brain behind Nataraj Opera, and the inspiration for his brother, Achyut, to experiment with Nataraj Theatre. Once again, in his inimitable style

Dr. Hazarika left his mark in the play *Srimanta Sankaradeva* by experimenting with the *totoi*, a type of devotional song composed by Srimanta Sankaradeva *Madhu Danava Danava Deva Barang*. The third and last mobile theatre that Dr. Hazarika had been directly associated with, as music director for the play *Sakuntala*, was Indradhanu Theatre in the eighties.

Das (2016) writes, it goes to the credit of Abahan theatre, that they could present Bhabendranath Saikia, one of the most acclaimed literateur, film-maker, dramatist and playwright of Assam, as a lyricist and music composer as well. He was particularly careful that background music should not make the dialogues inaudible for the gallery audiences. Saikia used songs in only three of his plays, *Pratibimba*, *Nilakantha* and *Deenabandhu*. He wrote the songs and composed the music. In *Nilakantha* (1984-85), the songs were, (i) *Kumal pator Kapani dekhilu/dekhilu katona gabharu pator/batahor satey nibir gabhir khela/Mai najanu eiya gadhuli ne puwa*, and, (ii) *Ses hol aji ejugar itihaas/nakariba maan nakoriba abhimaan/anumati diya gaun mur ses gaan*. In *Pratibimba* (1989-90) the short song was, *Kije nirab ei rati/mar gol tapta beli/jirani bisari ubhatey niraley klanta pakhi*, while in *Deenabandhu*, the two songs were, (i) *Kor ejaak sapon jen barason*, and, (ii) *Diya muk diya, akashar darey eti mon* (pp.25-30).

Kalita (2011) informs, the first playback singers of mobile theatre were Mr. Rajkrishna Barhoi and Ms. Renu Phukan, both in Nataraj (p.52). It has become a fashion now to put in song and dance sequences in the typical ‘Bollywood’ style to attract the audience. It was the norm to perform a dance-drama (*nritya-natika*)

before the actual play was presented by every mobile theatre. These dance-dramas were as important as the main play. The dance-dramas gained as much acclaim because they carried a relevant social message. However, with time, this preliminary performance is now being neglected. Many theatre groups are even doing away with them. In the field of music direction, mobile theatres have a long list of great talents. For the sake of convenience alone, the names are being arranged in alphabetical order. Mr. Ananda Narayan Deb, Mr. Apurba Das, Mr. Basistha Mazumdar, Mr. Basanta Thakuria, Mr. Brajen Barua,, Mr. Chandra Choudhury, Mr. Dasarath Das, Mr. Debeswar Sarma, Mr. Dibakar Deka, Mr. Gobinda Choudhry, Mr. Mukul Barua, Mr. Nanda Bannerjee, Mr. Narayan Barua, Mr. Prabhat Sarma, Mr. Raj Krishna Barhoi, Mr. Ramen Barua, Mr. Ridip Dutta, Mr. Sujit Singha, et al. Among the younger generation working now, are Mr. Ajay Phukan, Mr. Arupjyoti Barua, Mr. Palash Gogoi, Mr. Sibabrata Sarma, Ms. Tarali Sarma, Mr. Tirtha Saharia, et al.

The dance director has been an important part of mobile theatre right from its inception. The job of the dance director is to conceptualize the dance sequences that help to take the story forward while the choreographer is the person who executes it. The dance director of course worked in complete tandem with the director and playwright of the drama. Dance sequences that reflected the Assamese folk culture and music was presented. For example, *Bihu* dance was first presented on the stage of mobile theatre by Mr. Achyut Lahkar in Nataraj theatre, because he wanted to promote the indigenous culture and its knowledge

in Assam. *Bihu* is the most important festival of the Assamese community and is celebrated thrice in connection with three different seasons, viz., *Magh Bihu* (January), *Bohag Bihu* (April) and *Kati Bihu* (October). The Bohag bihu is the new year which is welcomed with song and dance. Bihu songs and dance are thus, a reflection of the Assamese community's affinity with nature, depicted through love and romance.

Figo (2010) writes, Lahkar specially invited *Bihu* expert Mr. Lila Saikia from Chapalaghat in Nagaon to Nataraj Theatre to train the artists (P.53). As mentioned earlier, dance directors and music directors were separately engaged for the season for the dance drama (*nritya natika*) that preceded the actual play. These dance dramas were carefully chosen. Arranged in alphabetical order for the sake of convenience alone, names of dance directors like Mr. Ajit Talukdar, Ms. Arati Das Bairagi, the first female dance drama playwright and director in mobile theatre, Hengul, 1986-87 season, Mr. Bhupesh Sarma, Ms. Garima Hazarika, Mr. Gunakar Dev Goswami, Mr. Guneswar Bhuyan, Mr. Hemkanta Barua, Mr. Jatin Goswami, Mr. Jiten Das, Mr. Kalawanta Singh, Mr. Khagen Barman, Mr. Nabin Bora, Mr. Naren Das, Mr. Prafulla Haloi, Mr. Rajanikanta Patgiri, Mr. Ranjeet Singh, Mr. Robin Das, Mr. Tilak Baishya, Mr. Uday Das, et al., has been etched in the history of mobile theatres.

A changing trend has come in where, nowadays, the choreographers have taken over, and free lancers in this field are engaged by the producers, not necessarily for the entire season. Some of the choreographers making their

presence felt in the mobile theatre scene today, in alphabetical order, are Mr. Ashim Baishya, Mr. Dhanjit Nath, Mr. Gautam Baishya, Mr. Jitu Roy, Ms. Jolly Bora, Mr. Pankaj Ingti, Mr. Pranju Prince, Mr. Ratul Das, Mr. Santumoni Sarma, Mr. Uday Shankar, et al.

3.8 Makeup and Costume

Makeup refers to the products applied to the face or body of an actor to change or enhance their appearances. While costume means the dresses/clothes donned by the actors to bring out the essence of the character, time and situation they portray.

Medhi (1948) writes Makeup and costume are essential part of any theatrical performance. It helps create a character. During Sankaradeva's time the actors wore specially prepared costumes of various designs representing various characters. These characters also wore all kinds of Assamese ornaments appropriate to their age and sex, including *ghunghura* (tinkling bells) and *nepur* (anklets). Colours had a special significance in the *Ankiya bhaona*. For example, Krishna, the full incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, the preserver and restorer, always wears yellow, and black was always used to depict the *rakshasa* (demon). It was a remarkable part of *Ankiya bhaona* to use effigies and masks. Pioneered by Sankaradeva, the tradition still continues. Effigies were made with bamboo and cloth while masks were made of wood, bamboo, clay and cloth painted using natural colours like indigo (*nil*), lamp black (*chai*), lime vermillion (*hengul*), yellow arsenic (*haital*), etc. The actors used Makeup to bring out their characters

properly. Krishna was painted blue to adhere to the descriptions in the scriptures. Natural dyes and colours were used for Makeup. False hair, beard, etc., were also used as per the characters portrayed (pp.Lvi-Lvii).

Sarma (1990) writes, the early Assamese *jatra* parties had to face a lot of difficulties because it was not easy to get the required materials in Assam. It was Brajanath Sarma who took great pains to get the costumes and Makeup from Calcutta when he started his Kalika Opera Party. He wanted development in these areas so that the dramatic presentations could be more authentic and attractive (p.101). Makeup was done by the actors themselves using amber grease, white lead and lamp soot. Various types of wigs and false beard were used. Jewellery was also an essential part of the get up of the characters.

When the mobile theatre era began, Makeup and costume remained as important as ever. The mythological and historical plays entailed quite an expense as far as the get up was concerned. Each mobile theatre had its tailor master who stitched the costumes as required. Mr. Khagendra Talukdar, (40 yrs) a mobile theatre enthusiast shared, today, it has become a fashion to engage a costume designer in each mobile theatre. Earlier the 'tailor master' was good enough (K.Talukdar. Personal communication. August 06, 2012). Smt. Moni Bordoloi, (48 yrs) former actress of mobile theatre informed that one interesting trait which has not changed in its history of half a century is, mobile theatres do not employ a Makeup artist. Though it is a very important part for any stage

performance, and Makeup as a department is given great importance, in mobile theatre, the actors still do their own Makeup. The Makeup stuff is provided by the theatre and today, the same products as in movie Makeup are used. (M. Bordoloi. Personal communication. October 05, 2012).

3.9 Technology to Tantalize: Impact of Globalization

Theatre in Assam has come a long way from the open air, seed-oil lit performances. The mobile theatres have experimented a lot in the attempt to bring in new innovations as mentioned above. The use of technology in the modern age has helped break new grounds. Mr. Achyut Lahkar had already shown the path for innovations and experimentation in Nataraj theatre. In 2007-08, Hengul Theatre attracted attention by using a ropeway on stage. In 2008-09 they showed a war tank and used a lift on live stage. Mr. Ratan Lahkar, (70 yrs) erstwhile produce-proprietor of Kohinoor Theatre, in his interview narrated how, when Kohinoor presented *Tarzan* in 1989-90, for the first time, a direct impact of cinema was felt on mobile theatre. This was followed by staging *Ben-Hur*, 1992-93. When *Titanic*, Mr. James Cameron's Hollywood blockbuster, was presented on Kohinoor's stage in 1998-99, it created such a stir that Star Television, UK, came to Assam to cover that performance. In 2004-05, Kohinoor staged *Jurassic Park (Dinosaurar Atanka)*, another Hollywood superhit. (R. Lahkar. Personal Communication. July 09, 2014) Kohinoor Theatre, thus, set a trend of performing unbelievable technological stunts on live stage.

Nowadays, it is very common to show cars, bikes, trucks and even helicopter landing on the live mobile stage. This attracts huge crowds no doubt, but many theatre lovers feel too much of importance on these superficial aspects has led to compromising on good story and acting. The more technological gimmicks one can use, the better. It needs mention here that even today, both *bhaona* and *jatra* still exist in Assam. Both forms have been touched by modern technological developments no doubt. Mobile theatre is a commercial venture and so, it is natural that producers will try all means to retrieve their investments with the best profits. Having said that, one must not forget the aim with which Mr. Achyut Lahkar had founded Nataraj Theatre - to take theatre to the masses. Theatre being an excellent medium of mass communication, its role in society is of great importance. Everything changes with time and so has the journey of Assamese theatre. Technology, as in cinema, has come to play a crucial role in mobile theatre as well.

As shared by Mr. Upakul Bordoloi, (61yrs), “one of the most revered name in the field of art direction in mobile theatre was Mr. Adya Sarma. He was the man who sank the *Titanic* on the stage of Kohinoor without a single drop of water. Associated with mobile theatre right from Nataraj Theatre, Mr. Adya Sarma took art direction and technical expertise in mobile theatres to a different level and set the benchmark that others are still trying to touch” (U. Bordoloi, Personal communication. October 03, 2012).

Mr. Pulu Kr. Sarma, (58 yrs), eminent cultural activist and journalist, in his interview stated,

The unique expertise and sensitive intellectual efforts of this revered man, Adya Sarma, in the technical and artistic presentations of the mobile theatre plays has taken its reputation beyond the boundaries of India to a world platform. A renowned and respected teacher of Art, who was at the same time a painter, a sculptor, a tabla player, a scene-designer, and an actor, this creative talented idealist was loved by all as *Guruji*. His contribution to the enrichment and development of Art in Assam through his school Rang-ghar and later, New Art School, in Nalbari, is beyond words. He was the undisputed father of the art of scene- settings, art and painting departments in the mobile theatres. He could create magic within the limited facilities available and make possible what seemed almost impossible (P.K. Sarma. Personal communication. July 07, 2017).

Cultural activist and businessman, Mr. Gopal Jalan, (49 yrs) in his interview said,

Without Adya Sarma's creativity it is impossible for us to imagine the stage of the mobile theatre. He had all the skills to bring alive the mobile theatre stage. He could

anticipate very well what kind of artistic innovations the audience would like to see on stage. He understood people. That is why he is called *Jivansilpi*. What his creative genius did for successive plays for the mobile theatre in Assam, would have been probably unthinkable for many renowned artists of the world. He was in no way any less than ten other world famous artists. He never craved publicity and that is why most people think he was just a stage artist. We have failed to give him the recognition that was due (G. Jalan. Personal communication. April 02, 2015).

Mr. Atul Mazumdar, (72 yrs), mobile theatre critic and writer, lamented that this man of exceptional creative genius, who dedicated his entire life to Art and its development, has never been considered by the State government to be nominated for the Sangeet Natak Akademy Award (A. Mazumdar, Personal communication. July 15, 2016)

Mr. Ratan Lahkar, (70 yrs) producer of Kohinoor reminisced during his interview,

Titanic was the best creation of Adya *ka's* artistic life. It has left him immortalized in the annals of stage history of Assam. He was a persona without any comparison. He was unique. He did not save a single penny for himself and yet, he was rich beyond imagination-rich with the love of the people. His talent

and artistic genius was unbelievable (R. Lahkar. Personal communication. May 22, 2014).

When I went to watch *Titanic* staged by Kohinoor Theatre, I was not particularly excited because the Hollywood blockbuster was fresh in mind. But when the play began and the scenes unfolded, Mr. James Cameron's mega movie faded away. Mr. Adya Sarma's exceptional stage creations under the direction of Mr. Hemanta Dutta brought the stage alive. That scene where the helicopter lands on the deck of the ship was unbelievable! Again, when water gushes into the ship after it hits the iceberg, people forgot they were watching a live stage presentation

Thus wrote Mr. Medhi, a mobile theatre connoisseur (Medhi, 1998:7)

An important comparison between renowned light and stage settings expert from Kolkata, Mr. Tapas Sen and Mr. Adya Sarma has been brought up by eminent scholar of Assam, Mr. Udaiyaditya Bharali (2015) who writes, do we Assamese know that two decades before *Tapasda* created sensation on the theatre stage of Kolkata, in Nalbari and its adjoining areas, deer's ran, huge serpents opened their hoods, and *Garuda* flew on stage? These were events of the fifties. In 1963, the miracle that the audience had seen in the Nataraj Theatre presentation, *Beula*, has remained unforgettable. Later, on the stage of Kohinoor Theatre, the sinking of the *Titanic* was unbelievable. The great artist who made

all this possible was Adya Sarma. He was a genius but never got the proper facilities to showcase that genius. We all know about MTapas Sen, but how much do we know about Adya Sarma? Stalwarts like Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Shobha Brahma of Assam and eminent artists of West Bengal like Jamini Roy and Ram Kingkor Baiz recognized him for what he was and therefore frequented his dilapidated house. But we, the Assamese people, do not know, what we should have, about this great man. (pp.13-17).

Some of the other names who have contributed immensely to the field of art direction in mobile theatres from its inception include, in alphabetical order, Md. Abdul Majid, Mr. Ajit Das, Mr. Anil Boro, Mr. Anjan Barua, Mr. Biren Das, Mr. Brajen Koch, Mr. Chandan Chutiya, Mr. Dhiren Das, Mr. Gobinda Choudhury, Mr. Golok Saha, Mr. Harjeet Singh, Md. Harun Ali, Mr. Hemen Das, Mr. Joon Deka, Mr. Kalpa Kakoty, Mr. Khagen Das, Mr. Moon Baishya, Mr. Mridul Boro, Md. Nuruddin Ahmad, Mr. Ranjit Shil, Mr. Paplu Papul, Mr. Pramathesh Chakraborty, Mr. Pramod Kakoty, Mr. Rajib Ahmad, Mr. Rinku Baishya, Mr. Rupak Das, Mr. Rupen Das, et al . The buzz is making rounds that Kohinoor Theatre will be experimenting with 3D in the next theatre season 2017-18 (*The Telegraph*, July 09, 2016). Innovation has led to transformation of form, content and presentation styles. It is a feat in itself that in this age of hi-tech cinema, television, internet, etc., mobile theatre has been able to not only sustain but also establish itself almost as an alternative to cinema industry in Assam. This journey of Assamese theatre which was started by Srimanta Sankaradeva

with his *Chihna yatra* in the 15th century has been a vibrant process which will continue to bring in new transitions in the future.

3.10 Management Matters

Though it is the Producer, with the help of the Assistant producer, who looks after all aspects of the theatre, there are the posts of the, Overall planner (*Samagrik Parikalpana*), the Secretary (*Sampadak*), the Representative (*Pratinidhi*) and the Organizer (*Byabasthapak*) who actually look after the management aspects. Like all other employees of a mobile theatre these posts are also contractual for nine months, but in many cases it has been seen that the persons in these posts have continued working in the same theatre for years. This is because the most important requirement of these posts is experience. The overall planner is present in the theatre on behalf of the producer, who may not be able to devote full time. The secretary works in close coordination with him, discussing all matters. The representative is more or less the public relation officer though many theatres do not have this post anymore, while the fourth post in this hierarchy is the organizer who may be assisted by one or two assistants. The duties and responsibilities are clearly chalked out for each post. Collection of money, payments, venue bookings, lodging, food, solving all kinds of problems, not to speak of emergency, etc., has to be taken care of.

One of the most important aspect of management in a theatre is its successful marketing. Every theatre group presents shows in about 77-79 venues

in a theatre season and these venues are decided and booked from about October-December (for next mobile theatre season) till the beginning of rehearsals in June-July. This is where the inviting committees come in and enters into an agreement with the theatre on a proper stamp paper and payment of an amount as advance after bargaining over the terms and conditions put forth by the Secretary, whose skill and experience is tested here. A number of factors are kept in mind by the inviting committees also when they decide to invite a theatre, like- (i) the reputation of the theatre itself, (ii) the 'star' artist for that season, (iii) the kind of business done by the theatre during the previous season, (iv) the playwrights and the plays, e.g., nowadays, Mr.Abhijeet Bhattacharya is almost a must for writing dramas for all mobile theatres and (v) the public's response to the theatre group. Mr. Ramen Sarma (55 yrs), Secretary, Sankardev Theatre, 2015-16 informed, the Secretary of the theatre carries out the responsibility of the marketing manager, i.e., book the venues by dealing with the invitation committees. (R. Sarma. Telephonic interview. December 16, 2016). In case of the reputed 'A' category theatre groups, it is the invitation committees who make a beeline to get agreements. But in case of 'B' category and newly established theatres, getting bookings is a challenge. That is why, many times they try to cover up the time between two venues (if available) as well as earn some more by performing in a fill-in-the-gap venue. This is an important responsibility of the secretary, which he must plan out properly with the inviting committee of the new venue.

Mr. Padma Chetia, (35 yrs), Secretary, Bridaban Theatre, 2015-16 said, the secretary of the theatre also has the prime responsibility of keeping all accounts. For this, he needs to keep the correct count of the agreed per day collection as well as the collection from the 2nd show and 3rd show (if any) which comes from the sale of tickets through the counters or door to door sale of season tickets (P.Chetia. Personal communication. December 15, 2016). It should be noted here that a season ticket is a ticket which allows the purchaser to watch all shows on all three days of a theatre's performance in a particular venue. Apart from this, he must also maintain a daily record of all payments made to every employee whether in advance or per venue (*pandal*) payment or on daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis as had been agreed upon. A per day expenditure account also needs to be kept for all kinds of daily expenses incurred. Of course, for the auditing and income tax matters, the theatres take professional help of Chartered Accountants. The final accounts record is usually completed only at the end of the theatre season when the group returns to the base camp after nine months. Most theatres engage 2-3 persons just for the proper account keeping. In some theatres the Secretary deposits all accounts to the Producer-owner after each venue (*pandal*), that is, every three days.

Mr. Ramen Sarma, (55 yrs) further informed that once the agreement is signed with an inviting committee, the organizer with his assistants, must check that the committee has provided for, (i) proper facilities for the advance party, which comes before the theatre arrives, to prepare the auditorium and stage.

These must have living quarters, cooking and dining area, fuel (for cooking), potable water and hygienic toilets-bathrooms, (ii) proper accommodation must be arranged separately for the 'star' artist in a hotel, Guesthouse, Inspection Bungalow or in the residence of an affluent person of that locality, (iii) proper arrangement is made for the Producer to stay , (iv) accommodation for the entire cast and crew of the theatre group, between 100-150 people, with separate quarters for the female members and hygienic toilets-bathrooms, (v) whether conveyance facility is there, in case the venue of the show is away from the provided accommodation, (vi) additional security arrangement around the venue of the show to help the security people of the theatre group, (vii) separate dressing rooms for the artists, facility to keep the Makeup and costumes properly, (viii) a well-lit green room to put on the Makeup with sufficient mirrors and a toilet nearby, (ix) electricity connection in the venue which should be checked properly by the organizer, at least a couple of days before the show. Where no electricity is there, the inviting committee must provide a generator and 20 litres of diesel per day for the shows to be staged (x) proper seating arrangements in the auditorium with chairs, numbering around 1000 belonging to the theatre group plus 500 seats in the galleries, additional seats about 400-500, can done by the inviting committee. Around 2000 people are seated in a proper auditorium. (R. Sarma.Telephonic interview. December 16, 2016). Copies of the agreement signed between mobile theatre units and the organizing committee/ individual artists has been given in Appendix IV.

3.11 Publicity and Advertising

In the earlier days, the theatres used to print a pamphlet called the 'programme' which was rolled into balls and thrown into the audience to give information about the plays to be performed. As written by Sarma, (2004), those childhood memories can still excite us. Just before the last concert someone from the puja committee would come on stage with lots of coloured leaflets in hand. Then, those leaflets were rolled into 'balls' and thrown to the crowd, that went into a frenzy to catch those balls. At that age, we never understood the value of those leaflets as advertisements or pamphlets. And probably that is why till much later, we could never gauge the abundant possibilities hidden in those coloured papers distributed before very *pala* (pp.8-15).

Gradually with time this system of throwing 'balls' disappeared. Then came the fashion when publicity of the mobile theatre was done by announcing the details from a vehicle, which was decorated with posters, with the help of a public address system. This has not gone out of practice completely. Even now, some theatres use it to attract people. Today, the entire advertisement for the coming season is based on the promotional songs, both audio and video. Publicity entails quite a big expenditure for the theatre as it means engaging (i) a printing house for the banners and posters, (ii) graphic designers, (iii) Video editors and editing studios, (iv) a still photographer and his studio, (v) Newspapers, (vi) Local television channels, and (vii) publishing the souvenir of the theatre.

The following table 3.1 shows how mobile theatres, nowadays, outsource the responsibilities of publicity for each season to various agencies. Naturally, this process has made publicity, not only a very expensive affair but also quite competitive. Each party tries to outdo each other. The specific agencies may change each year for each theatre.

Table 3.1: Outsourced agencies and their responsibilities in mobile theatre

Sl.No.	Name of the mobile theatre	Outsourced Agency	Agency's responsibility
1	2	3	4
1	Surya	K.D Computech / Destiny / Ma Studio / Now-It: All in Guwahati / Devi Parbati Offset Press : Samata.· Still Photography Local Television & FM Radio Website/Facebook/Whatsapp promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors Information uploaded	Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics Photographs for publicity.
2	Itihaas	Destiny:Guwahati Media Partner : DY 365 recording, editing, graphics Photographs for publicity.	Printing Banners & Posters, Video

1	2	3	4
3	Rajshri	<p>promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors Information uploaded ChoudhuryPrinters : Nalbari /Destiny : Guwahati Media Partner: DY 365 Radio Partner : 92.7 BIG FM/ Gup-Shup Website promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors Information uploaded</p>	<p>Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics Photographs for publicity.</p>
4	Rajtilak	<p>Destiny : Guwahati Media Partner : NewsLive / Pratidin / NewsTime Assam Radio Partner : Red FM /92.7BIG FM / Gup Shup Website promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors Information uploaded</p>	<p>Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics Photographs for publicity.</p>
5	Hengul	<p>DreamsFeatures / RedAV Studio / Gyanam : Guwahati Media Partner : NewsLive / DY365 Radio Partner : 92.7 / Gup Shup promos, songs, interview of Actors and Directors Information uploaded</p>	<p>Printing Banners & Posters, Video recording, editing, graphics Photographs for publicity.</p>

Source: *Managerial & Economic Aspects of Mobile Theatre Establishment of Assam*, unpublished thesis, Mousumi Devi, G.U, Commerce Department, 2016.

Theatre connoisseur Mr. Rabendra Kumar Das (72 yrs), a retired bureaucrat, feels that one particular aspect of mobile theatre which has never really received much attention is the importance of the souvenirs (mouth piece of the theatre) brought out by the theatre groups (pp.90-93). Mr. Atul Mazumdar (72yrs) mobile theatre critic and connoisseur in an interview with this researcher informed that the first theatre that brought out a souvenir was Kohinoor Theatre in 1976, named *Karani* (A.Mazumdar. Personal communication. July 09, 2013). It is still published every year. The souvenir not only gives information about the particular theatre, its plays, people associated, schedule of performance for the entire season, etc., but also carries various articles and write ups on theatre or relevant social issues. These souvenirs provide important material for research work on theatre. But many times, it is seen that articles are repetitive and some are written just for the sake of writing. The producers must understand that the souvenir is an important treasure as it reflects not only the theatre but is, also a contribution to the literature on mobile theatre. As written by Sarma, (2004), compared to the amateur theatre groups, the mobile theatres have an advantage as far as the sale of souvenir is concerned. A mobile theatre runs for a period of at least six months in various corners of Assam. The well established theatre groups are generally packed houses. This is a great opportunity for 'pushing sale' of the souvenir. If this can be done, the mobile theatre souvenir can have a permanent market. These souvenirs should be taken up as literary work, instead of temporary means of collecting advertisements (pp.8-15).

Unfortunately, the theatre groups themselves have not cared to preserve the copies of their own souvenirs of all the earlier years. A compilation of the souvenirs of different theatres, every five years, if done by the AAMTPA, will definitely lead to the creation of a rich treasure house of information on mobile theatre. Another step that can be taken to improve the quality of the souvenirs is to hold an annual competition for the ‘Best Souvenir of the Season.’

Table 3.2: List of souvenirs which are/were brought out by some of the mobile theatres

Sl. No.	Name of the Mobile Theatre	The Souvenir
1	2	3
1	Kohinoor	<i>Karani</i>
2	Theatre Bhagyadevi	<i>Sangeeta</i>
3	Abahan	<i>Rangabedika</i>
4	Hengul	<i>Hengul</i>
5	Indrani	<i>Rangarupa</i>
6	Bordoisila	<i>Aamaar Bordoisila</i>
7	Itihaas	<i>Itihaas</i>
8	Srimanta Sankaradeva	<i>Manikut</i>
9	Mukunda	<i>Nirmali</i>
10	Brindaban	<i>Brindaban</i>
11	Rajtilak	<i>Rajtilak</i>
12	Ashirbad	<i>Ashirbad</i>
13	Surya	<i>Kiran</i>

Source: Field Work Study

The souvenirs listed above in table 3.2, are of only thirteen very popular and successful mobile theatres. Every mobile theatre group brings out such a mouthpiece. As has been mentioned above, the souvenir is a record of the mobile theatre for every season. As such, it is very important that the souvenirs are brought out seriously and the standard of the material published therein is screened properly. If preserved chronologically with care, a souvenir can become an immensely valuable source material for any scholar studying mobile theatre.

3.12 Food and Transport

Prior to the beginning of the touring season, for about a month and a half or two, intense rehearsals are done in the respective camps. Light, sound, music, actors, technicians, everyone must be in perfect sync because it is a live performance and no retakes can be given. Each camp has an office, a rehearsal hall and lodging for all associated with the particular theatre. A well-managed kitchen caters to the food. The smooth management of the mobile theaters can be a lesson for students of management. Catering to around a 100 people on a daily basis is not an easy task. Breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner everything is provided for every single employee of the theatre. A huge dining hall, with the required number of desks and benches, is where everyone eats together. The kitchen has a total of 5-6 staff (cook plus helpers). Talking of food, the theatre has to feed its employees during the nine-month touring. Every night after the show, the cast

and crew dine together which is cooked in the venue itself. Breakfast and lunch too, is provided in the accommodated lodgings. “The entire expenditure on food varies from theatre to theatre. For our theatre, about 7-8 lakhs cover it”, says Mr. Ramen Sarma (55 yrs), Secretary, Sankardev Theatre, 2015-16 (R. Sarma, Telephonic interview. December 16, 2016).

When the travelling starts, the entire set up has to be moved and right from the auditorium, in a gigantic tent, that can seat 1500-2000 people, the same number of chairs, wooden planks and bamboos to set up the stage, stage-settings, costumes, lights, sound equipments, music instruments, the entire kitchen, beddings, etc., are loaded on 4 to 5 trucks, which belongs to the theatre group, or are hired sometimes. The people travel by bus to the destination. It is amazing that in spite of the long distance between two venues there is no break in the schedule of the theater group. This is because most of the theatre groups own two sets of stage-auditorium settings which can be sent off in advance for the required preparations. The others fix up dates keeping all logistics in mind. In their above mentioned interviews, while Mr. Ramen Sharma (55 yrs), Secretary, Sankardev Theatre quoted the expenditure on transportation as Rs.18,22,000/- in a season that covered 78 venues, Mr. Padma Chetia (35 yrs) Secretary, Brindaban Theatre, 2017-18 quoted a sum of Rs.22,80,000/- while covering 79 venues.

3.13 Economic Matters

When we talk about the mobile theatre structure, we can compare it to any other industry. This is an industry. Bhattacharya (2015) writes that since 1963 at least 200 mobile theatre groups have been formed in Assam (pp.205-211). At present around 40 mobile theatres are fully active in Assam . From August to April these groups perform about 500 shows. The mathematics is clear: 9 months, i.e, 270 days, 3 plays per venue with 2 shows each day, i.e, 6 shows per venue (3rd show is exceptional). Thus, 6 shows in 79 venues adds up to 474 shows. If 40 mobile theatres are actively performing, that means $474 \times 40 = 18,960$ shows are being performed every year in Assam. This is surely unparalleled statistics in the entire world. In a state (not country), every year nearly 19000 plays are being staged. If on an average 130 persons are taken to be associated with every mobile theatre, and we take 40 numbers of mobile theatres as actively functioning right now, then, $130 \times 40 = 5200$ persons are directly employed in this industry. Again, if we assume that of the average 130 persons employed by each theatre, has an average family of four members each, then, $130 \times 4 = 520$ people are sustaining from one mobile theatre, and $520 \times 40 = 20,800$ persons are being fed by the mobile theatres of Assam as a whole. In today's times, when employment is not very easily available, this is a major contribution of mobile theatre to the socio-economic set up of Assam. Since skill, and not, educational qualifications matter here, it gives opportunity to such people who would have otherwise remained unemployed. From here, we can now look into

the economics of mobile theatres. Where does the money come from? What is the budget for a season? How much earning is generated? What are the expenditures? What kind of profit are we talking about? What is the share of the inviting committee as against the producer? These are questions that will help us understand mobile theatre better.

Apart from a bank loan which a producer can avail, help from friends and family, his most important source of investment for the season comes from the Inviting Committees in the form of advance payment, which is agreed upon through a formal contract. It must be understood that there is no fixed rules and regulations in the mobile business. So, this advance payment varies in the market. Patgiri (2009) has pointed out that the mobile theatre of Assam can be established as a 'Human Industry' unparalleled in the world. To understand the accounts of its income-expenditure, 10 mobile theatre groups can be taken as model. 10 groups mean around 1000 employees @ of 100 per theatre. Each established mobile theatre performs 230-240 days in a season and such a theatre has a seat capacity of 2000 per show. Each group earns about 90,000/-1,00,000/ rupees per 1st show. That means 10 groups collect 9,00,000/ rupees, which when multiplied by 230 1st shows add up to 20, 27,00,000/ (Twenty crore twenty-seven lakh) rupees. With this amount, if we add only 100 2nd shows we have an additional 9,0000000/ (Nine crore) rupees. Thus, the total collection of 10 theatre groups in a season would amount to Rs, (20,27,00,000/ + 9,0000000/ = 29, 27, 000000/) (Twenty-nine crores twenty-seven lakh) (pp.100-102). If we assume

that 40 mobile theatre groups are actively doing business, one can easily calculate the amount of money we are talking about. Keeping in mind this huge economic dimension, there is every reason to demand that the government should recognize mobile theatre as an industry for its long life.

Now, nine years later from Patgiri's above calculation, for the season of 2017-18, Abahan Theatre is charging 2 lakh rupees per committee while most mobile theatre groups are taking 1.50 lakh rupees. This was informed by Mr. Jon Barua, Secretary, Chiranjeeb Theatre, 2016-17 (J.Barua.Telephonic interview. December 17, 2016). In its itinerary, a theatre performs in 77-79 venues. That means Abahan Theatre has a collection of $200,000 \times 79 = 15,800,000$ rupees to invest. This is from the advance payment. The rest of the payment has its own equation. The inviting committee must pay a fixed (agreed) amount for the first show of each evening. For 2017-18, Abahan has charged Rs.1,26,000/ per 1st show each evening, in every venue, which means $Rs.1,26,000 \times 79 = 9,95,4000$ /. In addition, the 2nd and 3rd show collection is usually divided between the theatre and inviting committee on the ratio of 70:30 or 65:35. One must also understand that a season of nine months also entails huge expenditure.

3.14 Marketing

According to the Oxford Compact Dictionary, marketing literally refers to 'activity or process involving research, promotion, sale, and distribution of a product or service' (p.430). Mobile theatre is 'product' that needs marketing.

Without proper promotion, and sales, this 'product' will not sustain. Without the official stamp of an industry, mobile theatre is still functioning like an industry. Bread and butter for hundreds of people come out of this 'industry'. Thus, when we talk about marketing of mobile theatre, it is a process that begins with the choice of the most 'saleable' plays to the fiercely competitive publicity drive. The 'star' artist component has also become a major part of the marketing strategy, because, bigger the star, better the business. Moreover, the inviting committees also invite the mobile theatres on the basis of the 'star' of the season. Referring to marketing of theatres, Richmond (1990) writes, touring is the only means by which a substantial profit may be realized by a theatre organization. Among the many ways in which theatre organizations produce revenue, the most common is through ticket sales. Many amateur theatres distribute a special souvenir program, which they usually print once a year. The program is filled with advertisements and often include short articles about various aspects of theatre in general or historical information about the group. These programs often provide a substantial income for organizations that would not survive on ticket sale alone. The advertisements are used as a tax deduction by the contributors (pp.432-434). This observation of Richmond fits in with mobile theatres marketing as well.

Mobile theatre, as is clear from the above, is big business and this becomes even more clear from the latest data given below which has been collected by the

scholar from a successful mobile theatre group, Brindaban Theatre, in its sixth year of business.

Table 3.3: Annual income of Brindaban Theatre (2015-16)

Sl.No.	Total number of venues a year (Average)	78 venues
1	2	3
1	Advance taken from each venue	Rs.1,50,000/
2	Advance Collection from all venues	78 @ Rs.1,50,000/= Rs.1,17,00,000/
3	Total number of shows per year (Average)	156 @ of 2 shows per day
4	Income per show (1st + 2nd)	Rs.1,00,000/(fixed)+70:30
5	Income per day	Rs.1,00,000/ +70,000/= 1,70,000/ (fixed)
6	Total income per venue (3 days) (Maximum, assumed)	Rs.1,70,000/x 3= 5,10,000/
7	Gross Income from 78 venues in 9 months	Rs.5,10,000/x78=3,97,80,000/
8	Net Income (after advance deducted from gross income)	Rs.3,97,80,000/- 1,1,70,000/ = Rs.3,86,10,000/(Three crore eighty Six lakh and ten thousand) only.

Source: Secretary, Brindaban Theatre (2015-16)

The table 3.3 above shows that, if 2nd show takes place, the collection is divided between the mobile theatre and inviting committee at the ratio of 70:30. Assuming that the venues had 2nd show, earning Rs.1,00,000/ per show, the mobile theatre gets Rs.70,000/ and inviting committee gets Rs.30,000/ @70:30 ratio. 3rd shows are very rare and as such, has been excluded from the income calculation. A mobile theatre earns a huge sum of money every season. It must be

mentioned here, that the table above is specific to one particular theatre in one season. But, from it, we can get a fair idea of the income of the entire mobile theatre industry (if we may use the word).

Table 3.4: Annual expenditure of Brindaban theatre (2015-16)

Sl. No.	Head of expense	Amount in Rs.(for 9 months)
1	2	3
1	Director - playwright	3,00,000/--
2	Music Director	5,00,000/
3	Art Director	5,00,000/
4	Choreographer	@ of 20,000/per song: 5 songs: 1,00,000/
5	Singers: @2:1 male,1 female(regular) Guest singer:	1,60,000/x2= 3,20,000/@ 20,000/ per song: for 5 songs: 1,00,000/(average)
6	Dancers: 6 male,6 female	@8000/per head/month=8,96,000/
7	Instrumentalist (5)+Assistant(1)	9,50,000/+72,000/=10,22,000
8	Transportation+ salary + fuel	22,80,000/
9	Food+ salary of this dept.	21,03,000/
10	Makeup stuff + costume designer	1,00,000+3,00,000/=4,00,000/
11	Light + sound (salary of technicians)	12,32,000+ 3,14,000/=15,46,000/
12	Auditorium and stage (salary of manual workers)	16,11,000/
13	Publicity (Printing Banners, Posters, Souvenir, Photoshoot, Videorecording, Graphics, Electronic and Print media ads., etc.)	20,00,000/
14	Miscellaneous	15,00,000/
15	Total	1,51,78,000/(One crore Fifty one lakh and Seventy eight thousand) only

Source: Data collected during Field Study from the Secretary of Brindaban Theatre, (2015-16)

Table 3.4 above shows the expenditures incurred by Brindaban Theatre in the year 2015-16. It is clear from the table that just as the income is a substantial amount of money, so is the expenditure of the theatre.

Difference between the income and expenditure of Brindaban theatre for the year 2015-16, thus stands at, Rs.3,86,10,000/-Rs.1,51,78,000/=Rs.2,34,32000/ (Two Crore Thirty-Four Lakh and Thirty-Two Thousand) only. This is big money indeed, but as mentioned above, this is not uniform. The well-established mobile theatre groups can arrange such huge budgets banking on their experience and reputation but what has been termed as dangerous by many theatre connoisseurs, is the fact, that in the recent years, many people have suddenly turned into mobile theatre producers without any understanding or love for the medium. This is the black money brigade whose sole purpose is money. These people can dish out any amount to buy the 'star' artists, without whom the organizing committees hesitate to invite the groups. Economic benefits must have a proportion of justice as well. The equal hard work, if not more, done by a regular theatre artist earns him/her not more than rupees 3-4 lakh in a season whereas a 'star' can demand rupees 50-60 lakhs. Is this fair?

Mobile theatre is a business venture and the producer must think of profit if he has to sustain the hundred plus people and their families who depend on him. But this unhealthy development is not at all encouraging for the future of Mobile Theatre. By properly planning the yearly remuneration for the mobile theatre producers and artists, monthly salary of the various employees, provision

for bonus, arrear, provident fund, pension after retirement etc., the State or Central government can set an unprecedented example in the world. It may be mentioned here that the Assam Legislative Assembly has passed the Mobile Theatre (Regulation & Artist Welfare Fund) Act on 2010 and it has been issued for public information on 7th September 2010 in the official Gazette. This Act has been discussed in the subsequent chapter of this research work and a copy of the same has been given in Appendix IV.