

CHAPTER 1

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND:

1.1.1 HISTORY OF THEATRE: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Exactly how theatre came into being as an art form is not known. The generally accepted hypothesis about the origin of theatre is related to ritual activities around the world that did not require initiation on the part of the spectator. Aristotle, in his Poetics VI, 2 defined theatre in contrast to the performances of the sacred mysteries. According to this great philosopher, a spectator never had to fast, drink, or march in a procession. However, the enjoyment of a theatrical performance resembles the sacred mysteries in the sense that it brought purification and healing to the spectator through a vision called theama. The place where such performances took place was therefore called "theatron".

1.1.1.1 GREEK THEATRE

Theatre as performance has developed as a distinct activity over the last 2,500 years. The earliest known plays of major importance were the Greek tragedies performed in Athens in the sixth century BC. They were performed as part of a festival in honour of God Dionysus, a deity associated with intoxication, sex, and art. Dionysus, or Bacchus as the Romans called him, was the god of wine and fertility and each year the Greeks held a series of festivals in his honour. The theatre of ancient Greece consisted of three types of drama: tragedy, comedy and satyr play.(Brockett and Hildy 2003, 15-19).

In the fifth century BC, the theatre developed rapidly, partly due to the innovation of Aeschylus. During this period, plays were selected for production in an open competition. Three great tragedians, namely Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, wrote about thirty-five tragedies. Aeschylus, the oldest, introduced a second actor into the drama, and Sophocles departed from the traditional theatrical scheme by introducing a third actor. Later, Euripides introduced a number of characters into the play.

After the development of tragedy, the Greek Theatre was enriched by the development of comedy. The tragic plays made the audience sad, while the comedies put a smile on the faces of the audience and gave them a kind of happiness. The performances lasted for three days and the tragedies were played first. The performances began at sunrise and continued without interruption throughout the day until early evening. A short interval for refreshment was taken. After the performance of a tragedy, a comedy was performed at the end so that the audience could go home happy. (Cleaver, 1948)

The Greek theatre, especially in its golden age, was a comparatively simple arrangement of surrounded seats and a flat space for choral singing and acting. The auditorium and stage were separated by wide entrances, and the whole arrangement had an openness which was never again to be characteristic of theatrical construction. The Greeks attached great importance to the unity of the production, and all the elements of a theatrical performance worked together in perfect harmony

1.1.1.2 ROMAN THEATRE:

Ancient Rome was a centre of theatres with diverse art forms ranging from festive performances of street theatre, nude dancing, acrobatics, and the staging of appealing comedies to the lofty, verbally sophisticated tragedies. After the expansion of Roman Republic between 509-27 BC into several Greek territories between 270-240 BC, Rome

became heavily influenced by Greek drama. With the spread of the Roman Empire (27 BC - 476 CE), theatre spread westward across Europe, around the Mediterranean, and reached England. In the Roman world, plays were translated into Latin and imitated. In this way, a new genre in the theatrical tradition had developed since the first century BC, pantomime. Roman theatre was more varied, sophisticated and polished, adopting elements of theatre mainly from the Greek tradition.

B.C. Livius Andronicus, a noted playwright from the third century B.C., performed a comedy and a tragedy in Rome that had been adopted from Greek and translated into Latin. He also translated tragedies by Sophocles and Euripides, as well as some Greek comedies. Later, Gnaeus Naevius also began writing dramas. By the beginning of the 2nd century BC drama was firmly established in Rome and a guild of writers (collegiums poetarum) was founded. (Livingston, 2004)'

The Roman form of theatre, often performed at public festivals, was less popular than other types of events such as gladiator fights or circus events. Temporary wooden structures were used to stage plays, and members of the Senate felt that if citizens spent more time at theatrical events, it could lead to corruption of the Roman public. For this reason, no permanent stone building was constructed for the theatre until 55 BC. Pompey's theatre was built in 55 BC, although its main purpose was not to perform plays. It was built to provide current and future rulers with a place to gather the public and assert their authority to the masses.

The Romans placed great emphasis on the individual performance of the principal actors. Before the permanent structure for theatrical performances was built, dramas were performed in a very simple atmosphere where the audience had the option of standing or sitting to enjoy a drama. A sort of social division was evident in the seating arrangements in the theatre hall, which were for men, women, and slaves. Roman actors used masks and developed the skill of facial expressions. The Greco-Roman form of theatre is considered the precursor to Renaissance

theatre and clearly paved the way for the development of the theatre tradition over the next few centuries. (Moore, 2012).

1.1.1.3 MIDDLE AGE AND RENAISSANCE:

Although the dramatic traditions inherited from the Greeks were lost after the decline of the Roman Empire, theatrical performances continued and flourished in many ways. Theatrical performances were considered an instrument for influencing the population and a social tool for disturbing the peace. Therefore, the authorities tightened their control over the theatres and passed many laws imposing restrictions on actors. They were treated little better than slaves, and both Julius Caesar and Augustus enforced laws that effectively stripped them of their civil rights. A new form of entertainment, pantomime, also became popular during this period.

The spread of Christianity had a deeper impact on Roman society and the preachers of Christianity were quite reluctant to engage in theatre. The church forbade theatrical performances on Sundays and religious days. Although the invasion of Roman Empire was a disaster for the theatre, theatrical performances were not stopped. As a result of this invasion, many actors were forced to leave the theatres and form small companies. These small troupes roamed the countryside, from villages to cities. These groups put on private performances at weddings, christenings, and other festivals.

For centuries, actors roamed and survived their lives performing on the streets and hobnobbing with acrobats, tightrope walkers, and animal tamers. Some of the best performers were given the opportunity to become minstrels and well- paid servants to nobles and kings. (Cheshire, 1967) The rest merged with the lower class of entertainers and had a slightly better life than the wandering vagabonds. In the eleventh century minstrels became popular with all classes of people and performed in taverns, castles, guild halls and market places. A great change took place in the period between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The church realised that people

watched plays only for entertainment and had no spiritual relationship to this type of entertainment. Recognising the invisible power of drama, which the Church believed distracted the common people from the divine path of spirituality, it banned the production of plays and forbade the clergy from participating in them. But already plays became an accepted part of Easter celebrations and the common people demanded their entertainment. Therefore, the guilds took over the responsibility of producing theatres. The guilds, which had been engaged in such varied tasks as repairing bridges and roads and building chapels and charitable institutions, turned to the production of plays and supplied the actors with costumes and the various scenes and effects. Guild halls and market places replaced church steps for the performance of plays.

Social life in Europe was undergoing major changes and these changes were also reflected in the theatres. Instead of marketplaces, performances were now more often held in ballrooms. The discourse on art and education was revolutionised by the invention of printing. The establishment of numerous educational institutions in different parts of Europe provided opportunities for a section of the population to further their education, and the ruling class became more dominant in the life of the people. Gradually, the miracle games lost their former popularity and the old forms were rediscovered. Since Italy was the epicentre of the Renaissance, most of the country's cities took the initiative to build new theatres, and many Italian authors emerged to write plays based on Roman Classics. By the sixteenth century, miracle plays had completely declined and theatre companies began to favour performances of interludes. Interludes were short comic plays based on everyday life with few dramatic elements. They were performances of sketches from daily life that were quite acceptable to the people of the time.

1.1.1.4 THE ELIZABETHANS:

From the middle of the sixteenth century, theatrical troupes began to adopt a new form of performance, choosing to give their shows on stages

erected in the courts of various inns in London. As such performances became popular with a larger section of the public, the owners of certain inns gave up their traditional business of running messengers and focused on theatre. Stages for such theatrical performances were built at one end of the court, and the auditorium could comfortably hold three to four hundred spectators. Spectators of the Elizabethan era had to pay a penny or tuppence to attend the performance. The aristocracy and the privileged classes of British society were also attracted to these inn performances and took their seats in the galleries. In those days, players had to travel all over the country and so they survived by performing on different stages in inns. From 1573 to 1587 AD there were twenty-three visiting play companies that performed in Stratford.

William Shakespeare was considered the greatest living playwright of the era. In the last decade of the sixteenth century, he had written about twelve plays, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Henry I*. Shakespeare's plays were not divided into individual scenes and were performed with a continuous flow of characters entering and leaving the stage. The development of Shakespeare's art and Elizabethan theatre was linked to the growing influence of the court on drama. Henry VIII had a great fondness for pageants, masques, and dramatic performances, and when Elizabeth ascended the throne she developed a taste for plays. The patronage of the monarchy had revolutionised the theatrical movement in Britain, and within the next fifty years drama evolved from a humdrum form of verse to one of universal appeal, enriched by the great tragedies of Shakespeare.

1.1.1.5 OPERA:

There are a number of definitions of 'opera', according to which it is a form in which artists - composers, singers, poets, technicians and painters - display their creative skills. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines opera as "dramatic performance or composition in which music is an essential part, branch of art concerned with it". Amanda

Holden in its book *The Viking Opera Guide* defines opera as "any dramatic work that can be sung (or sometimes declaimed or spoken) in a performance space, set to music for singers (usually in costume) and instrumentalists." Such a "work" (the literal translation of the Italian word "opera") is a collaboration between a composer and a librettist (the libretto is the text used or intended for use in an extended musical work such as an opera, operetta, masque, oratorio, cantata, or musical) and includes a range of performing arts, such as acting, set design, costume, and sometimes dance or ballet. The performance usually takes place in an opera house, accompanied by an orchestra or smaller musical ensemble led by a conductor since the early 19th century.

Opera originated in Italy in the late 16th century, primarily through works by Claudio Monteverdi, especially *L'Orfeo*, and soon spread to the rest of Europe. In the 18th century, Italian opera continued to dominate most of Europe (with the exception of France) and attracted foreign composers. Another type of dramatic art also became popular and appreciated at the Italian court. This was the delightful *commedia dell'arte*, or troupe of comedians. These comedians developed their art and performances to such a high level that their work had a strong influence on the development of theater in Europe for almost two hundred years.

1.1.1.6 RESTORATION THEATRE:

Between the years 1642 and 1660 there had been little movement on theatrical performances in England, and the Puritan authorities repeatedly attempted, though with limited success, to ban public theatrical performances. In 1642 an act was passed in Parliament suspending performances for five years. After the law expired, the Oliver Cromwell government passed another law calling all actors scoundrels. Many theatres were even disbanded during these eighteen years of stalemate. After a long eighteen years, theatre in England was resumed in 1660 by Charles II when he ascended the English throne in 1660. During his years of exile in France,

Charles II admired French entertainments and theatrical styles, and soon after his restoration on August 21, 1660, the theatres reopened. King Charles II granted two patents to Thomas Killigrew (1612-83) and Sir William Davenant (1606-68) to establish theatres. While William Davenant founded 'the Duke's Men' for younger performers, Thomas Killigrew founded The King's Company for the older ones. While these two companies created new theatrical opportunities, they also created a monopoly on performances that hindered the growth of English theatre. The introduction of women on stage was an innovation of this period.

By the second half of the 16th century, professional troupes had been established in Spain and England. Due to the monopoly, oppression, and revocation of acting licences, many English troupes had to leave the country and these meanderers travelled from one place to another and had to express themselves mainly through pantomime because of their language problems. These meander theatres were very popular in Germany and Scandinavia.

In 1669, Academie Royale de Musique (Opera) was founded in France and a decade later, in 1680, a national theatre was established in France, namely Comedie-Francaise, which is considered the first national theatre in the world. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the drive for political autonomy in many countries sought the establishment of national theatres and the national theatre became a political goal. In the 18th century, actors and stage designers received more recognition from the public than writers, and this century also saw the emergence of bourgeois dramas. Instead of making aristocracy the central theme of drama as in previous centuries, these kinds of dramas took the problems of the middle classes seriously.

As for stagecraft and lighting, lighting came along around 1825 and electricity around 1885, revolutionising the whole concept of stage production in the 19th century. The Romantic movement had also begun in this century and influenced period plays. The new playwrights of the

movement known as realism include Henrik Ibsen, Bjornstjerne Bjornson and August Strindberg in Scandinavia, Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky in Russia, Gerhart Hauptmann and Frank Wedekind in Germany, Henry Bacque in France, etc. Their plays dealt with issues from a real, contemporary society, using plots and dialogues that looked and sounded like every day behaviour and language. Two important Berlin theatres, the Deutsches Theatre and the Lessing Theatre; Moscow Art Theatre and the American Theatre also emphasised realistic staging.

1.1.1.7 20TH CENTURY THEATRE:

Towards the end of the 19th century, the search began for a new theatre that would reflect contemporary truth in every aspect of theatrical production, design, acting and direction. This new philosophy evolved in theatrical discourse, but most Western theatres of the early 20th century sorted and used a variety of means to escape realism, if not reality. The technological advances of the late 19th century brought about a radical change in stage craft, and the invention of electricity and its use opened up new possibilities. In Switzerland, Adolphe Appia turned from opera to drama to expound his theory of design, which called for a fully three-dimensional set with different stage levels and the use of living light.

In 1902, Max Reinhardt opened his Kleines Theatre in Berlin and initiated a movement aimed at eliminating the separation of stage and auditorium and restoring intimacy between actor and audience. In Russia, Stanislavsky developed a method of 'inner realism', which insisted on the idea that in the future the actor should be his collaborator and not his subordinate. After the 1917 revolution, Stanislavsky rejected the idea of allowing his theatre to become a platform for the dissemination of political propaganda. After touring Europe and America, he

decided that the Moscow Art Theatre had to adapt to the new audience, and so began staging in bold, sweeping strokes, emphasising dramatic elements and thereby reviving comic scenes. This endeavour, however, could not stop the spread of Soviet propaganda theatre.

The revolt against realism was also found in Germany, France, Italy, Ireland, and Britain. In the 1920s Bertolt Brecht, one of the most renowned playwrights of that century, developed a theory of stage representation that revolutionised drama in the West. His theory Epic Theatre was designed to appeal to the audience's mind rather than their emotions. He argued that theatre should be the theatre of argument rather than the theatre of empathy. Brecht emphasised the idea that "the actual world exists and is our subject; but this play and this stage are not it." Brecht's idea still influences most theatre productions around the world, especially in Western countries.

In France, the 'absurdist' approach to drama gained prominence in the 1950s. A number of playwrights offered a vision of humanity struggling unsuccessfully, and therefore absurdly, to control its destiny in a world bent on destruction anyway. Some of the well-known writers belonging to the absurdist school are Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco (both from Paris), Harold Pinter (in Britain) and Fernando Arrabal. After the 1950s, many important theatrical developments took place in the Western world. Russian theatre tried to free itself from many restrictions after the death of Stalin in 1953, and there was a cautious attempt to return to experimentation, especially in satirical theatre. In France, Dullin became the main representative of "Total Theatre". Until 1960 there was no permanent theatre company in London and after that only many amateur theatres, provincial theatres and repertory theatres emerged. In the United States a new era began in 1952 with the successful revival of Tennessee Williams' *Summer and Smoke* at the Circle in the Square. In 1961-62, there were nearly 100 Off-Broadway productions in the United States of America, 34 more than on Broadway. This period also saw the

development of the University's Summer Theatre, the Negro Community Theatre.

1.1.2 HISTORY OF THEATRE: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

The history of Indian theatre goes far beyond the historical period of its civilization and most of its components have been borrowed from the traditional forms of theatre prevalent in different parts of the country. The Indus Valley civilization, which flourished in India more than five thousand years ago, practised dramatic entertainments and a large number of archaeological relics found during excavations reflect the rich dance, drama and puppetry tradition of that era. There is also much literary and archaeological evidence from the Vedic era of Indian history that attests to the predilection for music, dance and other theatrical elements.

The earliest history of drama in India can be traced back to Natya Shastra (the science of drama) written by Bharata Muni around 200 BC to 200 CE which describes in detail the dramaturgy of that period. Panini also mentioned the existence of Nata Sutras, the codification of dramatic art in aphoristic texts, as early as the 5th century. The earliest dramas performed in India were written in Sanskrit and had their own script. The main feature of these dramas was that the main character of a play spoke in Sanskrit while the minor characters conversed in Prakrit (Pathak, 2015:19). Just like the Greek tragedies, the historical characters of Sanskrit drama contained mythical characters and themes of epic poetry. Mricchakatika is considered as one of the best dramas of Sanskrit literature written by Sudraka in the 5th century BC. Due to royal patronage, Sanskrit dramas flourished and performances were usually held in the royal courts in the presence of princes and aristocrats. After the establishment of the Islamic Sultanate of Delhi in the early 13th century, this royal patronage declined and due to the new cultural movement that developed under the Sultanate dynasty, Sanskrit drama gradually lost its importance.

The decline of Sanskrit drama created space for the rise of Loknatya (the tradition of folk theatre) in various regional languages in the 17th century. The rise of Bhakti Movement (This socio-religious movement experienced its heyday during the period 800 CE -1700 CE, which had a profound impact on the abolition of idolatry and many other rites and rituals practised by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the Indian subcontinent. The leader of this revival movement was Shankaracharya who was represented by Chatanyadev, Namdeva, Tukaram, Jaydeva and Sankardeva in Assam. He accelerated the process of strengthening the regional languages in India and encouraged the development of the theatrical tradition in the regional languages, which in turn were used to propagate the beliefs and ideals of the said movement. Many regional folk dramas like Yakshagaan (Karnataka), Kathakali (Kerala), Terukutu and Bhagavad Mela (Tamilnadu), Bhavai (Gujrat), Lalita (Maharashtra), Raslila (U.P), Ramlila (Rajasthan) and Jatra (Bengal) emerged as a result of the Bhakti movement. (Vatsyayan ,1996:.95-99)

In Assam Mahapurush Sankardeva the pioneer of the new Vaishnavite movement in this region had developed Ankiya Naat which was again an alternative to the classical Sanskrit Plays. This full-fledged Assamese theatre was a unique form that included shlokas (verses), bhatimas (poems), drama, music and dialogues. Although Sankardeva developed this dramatic form from a mixture of Sanskrit and some vernacular forms, it found little favour with the performing artists. Many of them, especially the illiterate, could not even spell the dialogues correctly or recite slokas. Madhavadeva, the chief disciple of Sankardeva, observed these difficulties and devised a simpler form by introducing shorter plays which he called 'Jhumura'. This form had a simpler form of dance and music and the spoken Assamese language was used instead of Brajaabali.

The era of modern Indian theatre began with the advent of colonial rule in this country. The British, Portuguese and French brought western

theatres to India and the British bastion of Calcutta (now Kolkata) became the new cultural centre. Numerous theatres were built to entertain the British and later permanent theatres were also built in Bombay (now Mumbai). The spread of modern education and the establishment of educational institutions contributed to the development of a new class of educated Indians influenced by Western thought and philosophy. During the struggle for India's independence, many plays were staged, the most notable among them being *Kichak Badha*, written by Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar. The Marathi play shook the foundations of British rule in India. The Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) had played an important role by depicting the mass struggles in their plays. After India's independence, Indian theatre took a new shape, especially after the 1960s. The establishment of National School of Drama (NSD) in 1959 and the popularity of IPTA stimulated new theatre experiments and contributed to the emergence of new amateur groups in different regions of the country.

1.1.3 MOBILE THEATRE OF ASSAM AT A GLANCE

The history of roving or travelling theatre in Assam, popularly known as *Bhramyoman*¹ Theatre, is considered as a unique form in modern theatrical tradition and has been in existence for about six decades since its birth in the year 1963. The inception and development of this atypical form was not an accidental event, rather alike the other theatrical form the concept of *Bhramyoman* was developed by particular individuals by borrowing elements from many traditional forms of dramatic performance and much was adopted from Jatra².

¹ The Assamese term '*Bhramyoman*' means mobile, a thing that can be moved from one place to another. Initially the mobile theatre that was espoused by Achyut Lahkar, the pioneer who founded the first mobile theatre 'Natraj Theatre' with his brother Sada Lahkar, in his home town Pathsala in the year 1963 was not known as 'Mobile Theatre'. The name was coined by Late Radha Govinda Barua, founder of the Assam Tribune Group of Assam after enjoying the performance of Natraj Theatre at the Judges' Field in Guwahati.

² *Jatras* are usually long plays where most of the text are taken from epics or from religious texts. A jatra was always preceded by a musical concert to attract audiences. *Jatra* plays are generally presented on stages that are open on all sides in open-air arenas. The term jatra means a procession or a journey in Sanskrit and is a popular folk-theatre form in West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Tripura, Bihar and Bangladesh. The origin and emergence of *jatra*, basically a musical theatre form, was associated with the Bhakti movement propagated by Sri Chaitanya. *Jatra* performances resemble the Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh, the Tamasha of Maharashtra and Bhavai of Gujarat. The emergence of Jatra was associated with the various Bhakti movements but by the end of the 19th century a transformation transpired to alter the content and text of dramas of Jatra and when it gained entry into urban proscenium theatres, the overall form and performance of Jatra became gradually secular and different Jatra parties started to perform plays having no religious or spiritual connection.

This theatrical form has been considered as the most chosen medium of entertainment particularly in the Brahmaputra valley³ and has passed its long six decades with many of its ups and downs. For seven-and-a-half months-end August to mid-April –every year, at least 30-40 such theaters crisscross Assam, especially its rural and border areas, staging plays which range from classics of Shakespeare to contemporary scripts on lady Diana or the Titanic. It entertains millions of people and thus providing a kind of permanent avenue to thousands of artists and skilled workers including top-notch Assamese film stars. As this theatrical form has an inherited ability to reach every remotest part of the state, particularly in the Brahmaputra valley, it enjoys an edge over both cinema and television. It is assumed that the annual turnover of mobile theatre amounts to crores of rupees and it generates funds for many charitable organizations working in educational, social, and religious fields.

The entire crew of a mobile or Bhramyoman theatre, consisting of around more than one hundred fifty or more people depending upon the size and grade⁴ of the particular theatre group, becomes one large family for not only the period they are on the road, covering more than 70

³ The Brahmaputra Valley has an average width of about 80 Km. The main river of the valley, Brahmaputra is one of the largest rivers in the world and ranks fifth with respect to its average discharge. The river originates from the Kailash ranges of the Himalayas at an elevation of 5300 M. After flowing through Tibet, it enters India through Arunachal Pradesh and flows through Assam and Bangladesh before it joins Bay of Bengal. Its location is between hill ranges of the eastern and north-eastern Himalayan range in Eastern India. Most of the state population lives in the fertile valleys of its two major river systems in the 30 districts of the Brahmaputra valley & 3 districts of the Barak valley. Less densely populated three hill districts viz. Karbi-Along, West Karbi-Along & Dima Hasao, set in the low-laying hills that separate the two valleys.

⁴ Mobile theatre has always been a proprietary venture in unorganized sector and the theatre groups in Assam are informally categorized into A, B or even C on the basis of their manpower, scale of operations, investments, prominence, earnings and sustenance over long run. There hardly any stipulated criteria for such grading and these are mainly peer-reviewed and hypothetical.

destinations all over the state, but also for the two months when they rehearse before the actual performing journey. The sheer logistics involved in feeding and housing so many, transporting them along with the heavy equipment, the large tents as well as the stage props from one destination to another every third day and related aspects are truly overwhelming. These theatres are invited by local clubs, educational institutions, or other such bodies to stage performance on a revenue sharing model. In fact, hundreds of schools and other institutions in Assam have been constructed with the help of such revenue generated over the years by this revenue earning model.

Every theater group has its own rate for performance and it differs from theater to theater. Interestingly groups are informally categorized as A, B or even C on the basis of prominence, infrastructure and sustenance. Usually, an A group theatre takes Rs.80, 000 to 1,20,000 from the concerned committee for every first show and 60 percent of tickets sold for the subsequent shows. The rates for tickets vary depending upon the localities and public demands. Usually, a theatre group has a three-tier seating system that ranges from Rs.50, to Rs 150 and the rates for donor cards ranges between Rs.300-500. The pandal of a mobile group can accommodate about a thousand audiences and thus a committee generally makes a net profit of around Rs.200,000 from a show of three or four nights.

The process of fixing schedules and giving out dates for performance at various places is intricate. Since performances are back-to-back, travel time between destinations has to be minimal –three to four hours at the most. The committees that invite a theatre group has to bear the expenses and make all arrangements for food and lodging for the entire team. Initially mobile theatre had three stages for its performance, but later a two stages system was adopted by most of the groups and now every theatre has the same kind of stage, pandals and other equipment. However, the quality and quantity of such infrastructure varies on the basis of so-called categorization as mentioned earlier. The entire company lives and

travels throughout its seventh month journey in a unique way. Everyone, from the stars right down to the helpers in a commune, eats the same food and travels in the same bus. The most important contribution of the Bhramyoman or mobile theatre is that almost 40 percent of the income generated by the theatre is set aside for the development of schools, colleges and village clubs.

The entry of top Assamese movie stars into Bhramyoman is a curious aspect in that they get paid much more handsomely for their performances on stage rather than their screen performances. The theatre groups engage a host of writers who try not only to entertain, but also to educate and enlighten people through the themes they choose. Many renowned Assamese writers like late Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia, late Mahendra Barthakur, late Durgeswar Barthakur, late Bhaben Barua, late Prafulla Bora, Atul Bardoloi, and late Arun Sarma created some memorable plays for mobile theatres that are still etched in the hearts of every theatre loving Assamese viewer. Most of the earlier plays were mythological and they evolved to social themes to highly melodramatic family dramas. Now this trend has been reversed by plays revolving around social issues or by plays dramatizing popular novels/films or classical novels/films or recent events.

Bhramyoman Theatre (Mobile Theatre) which is now a cultural icon in Assam (List of Mobile Theatres of Assam :Appendix-I) in its own right, plays an integrating and inclusive role in its socio-political as well as economic arenas. Through stage adaptations of many classical English and Bengali novels, the theatre loving masses of Assam, especially the rural folk have not only been entertained but also educated and this may well be considered as the most prominent contribution of Bhramyoman. Even in an age dominated by social media, most people in rural areas still rely heavily on Bhramyoman Theatre as their most preferred source of entertainment. As these people have limited access to any other form of entertainment, they prefer it for its easy accessibility.

1.2 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY:

In the last 30 years, it has remained the most popular medium of entertainment in Assam. For thousands of people, it is the source of their livelihood. Each group consists of nearly 150 members: a mix of technicians, cooks, helpers and of course the acting crew. So, throughout the year, the theatre provides direct employment to thousands of skilled and unskilled workers. It also contributes significantly to the state's GDP. So, we can consider mobile theatre as an integral part of Assam Economy. Despite the importance of mobile theatre in the economy of Assam, no systematic study has been carried out so far to analyse its impact on the economy of the state, especially in terms of its profitability and contribution to the GDP of the state of Assam. Therefore, a systematic study on the economic importance of mobile theatre in terms of growth, employment, income and contribution to the GDP of the state of Assam is urgently required. Therefore, a systematic study of Mobile Theatre in Assam from a purely economic point of view is intended to be undertaken.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of the present study can be broadly classified under the following two categories:

1.3.1 GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To make a descriptive as well as analytical study on the working of mobile theatre in Assam from a purely economic point of view.

1.3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- (a) To explore the growth of Mobile Theatre in Assam from its inception till the present date.
- (b) To investigate into the working of mobile theatres in Assam from conventional theories of market
- (c) To explore the potentiality of this industry in the generation of Employment and Income and investigate into the nature of income distribution among the workforce within the industry.

- (d) To compare and find economic linkage between mobile theatre and Assamese cinema.
- (e) To know the problems of the Mobile Theatre from Economic Point of View and its Probable solutions

1.4 HYPOTHESIS:

To examine the above objectives the following hypotheses have been formulated and these hypotheses are tested in appropriate chapters (viz. Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6)

Hypothesis 1: Mobile theatre industry has an important contribution in creating employment opportunities and income at different categories in Assam.

Hypothesis 2: The structural functioning of Mobile Theatre in Assam is guided by conventional market theory which cannot maximize consumers' welfare due to inherent unorganized nature of the industry.

Hypothesis 3: There is income inequality among different workers working in a particular group.

Hypothesis 4: The profitability of mobile theatre is higher than that of Assamese Film Industry.

1.5 SCHEME OF STUDY

In order to make systematic analysis and presentation of the study, the study is divided into the following chapters as shown below:

- Chapter 1:** Introduction
- Chapter 2:** Literature Review
- Chapter 3:** Data Collection and Methodology
- Chapter 4:** Growth of Mobile Theatre Industry in Assam and its Economic Perspective

- Chapter 5:** Structure and Opportunities of Employment
in Mobile Theatre
- Chapter 6:** Comparative Analysis of Mobile Theatre
vis-a-vis Assamese Cinema
- Chapter 7:** Findings, Recommendations, Limitations and
Scope of further studies