

CHAPTER 4

GROWTH OF MOBILE THEATRE INDUSTRY IN ASSAM AND ITS ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

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4.1 INTRODUCTION

The proscenium theatre movement developed in Assam mainly in urban and semi-urban areas and such performances were mostly held on festive occasions like Durga Pujas and other religious or non-religious social festivals. In the course of this development, numerous theatres were built in different parts of Assam. Some prominent personalities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century contributed as avant-garde to the development of stage and theatre in various places among which we can remember the names Radhanath Phukan, Pandit Hemchandra Goswami, Padmanath Gohain Barua, Bhabanicharan Bhattacharya, Ramratan Choudhury, Krishnachandra Choudhury, Durgadhar Borkotoky, Manikchandra Barua, Tarunram Phukan, Nabin Chandra Barua, Raghunath Choudhury, Nabin Chandra Bardoloi, Benudhar Rajkhowa, Sailadhar Rajkhowa, Indreswar Barthakur, Rajanikanta Bardoloi, Chandradhar Barua, Padmadhar Chaliha, Radhakanta Handique, Durgeswar Sarma etc. Due to the initiatives of these great personalities who are considered as pioneers in many fields of Assamese art, culture and literature, modern stage craft developed in various cities and urban centres of Assam. It became imperative to have a permanent stage everywhere in the state to establish drama as a permanent art form. [Saikia(ed).2008, p. 429]

Apart from developing the auditorium and stages in different parts of the state, there was a kind of venture within the artist's community and promoters to develop theatre as an avenue for generating earnings over and

above expenditure. Shows were open for members of the clubs or societies that managed the theatre halls and their friends, relatives, and associates to enjoy the performances without paying any gate money. Tickets as such were hardly sold and if at all, some money had to be collected to meet the expenses which the membership fees did not cover, that was done by seeking donations (Barua,p-82). Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala(1903-1951)¹, whose immense contribution has revitalized Assamese art, culture and literature during the first half of twentieth century, had brought new ideas and techniques in the sphere of modern Assamese Theatre and modernized the over all aspects of Assamese dramaturgy. Following India's independence, several technical and social changes influenced visual presentation, not only in drama but in every area of creative art. The nascent Indian nation had its hand full with priorities. On one hand there was need to give shape to the idea of the Indian nation state, and on the other there was need to mobilize people against undesirable social practices like untouchability, child marriage etc. On the economic front, the country was in urgent need for rebuilding the economy devastated by colonial exploitations. New technology came into cinema, print and theatre productions. There were many attempts to utilize these new-found technologies for the social causes identified above. During this period, many a group started staging experimental dramas in Assam, some of them being highly influenced by western ideas. (Sarma & Kalita,2020,p-71)

¹ Jyotiprasad Agarwala, who is also known as 'Rupkonwar' has been considered as Assamese cultural icon and the pioneer of Assamese film industry. In 1935 he produced and directed the first ever Assamese film *Joymoti* . His death anniversary (17 January) is observed as *Silpi divas* (Artists' Day) in his honor. As a pioneer of building Assamese nationalism Jyotiprasad always emphasized on a distinct Assamese identity and worked towards the renaissance of the culture of the *Asomiya* people.

4.2 JATRA: THE ANTECEDENT OF MOBILE THEATRE

The term *Jatra* or *Yatra* is synonymous with drama and it literally means motion or a kind of movement. On the other hand, the same word in Sanskrit means festivals etc. The ancient religious festivals invariably had a component in the form of a procession that included both dance and musical performances along with pulling or carrying of the sacred deity or deities of God or goddess. (Sarma & Kalita,2020,p-74). Though *Jatras*, originated along with the Neo-vaisnavite movement but it received huge popularity in Assam after the annexation of this territory with the British empire through the *Yandaboo treaty*² signed between East India Company and the Burmese emperor in 1826 AD. Sarma (1962) mentions three important evolutionary stages about *Jatra* that transformed the form to a dramatic performance: at first, the basic meaning of the word was to travel from one place to the other particularly on a special occasion or festival, for example, Rasajatra, Rathajatra, etc. At the second level, it means festivity and here, the travel per se is not important. At the third level, Jatra came to mean drama or acting. Generally, in festivals some kind of dramatic performance was organized (p.123).

Surprisingly the great saint Sankardeva called some of his dramas *Jatras* and his plays like *Chihna Jatra*, *Kaliadaman Jatra* are the examples of such christening. His chief disciple Madhavdeva also wrote three dramas viz. *Ram Jatra*, *Gobardhana Jatra*, and *Nrisingha Jatra*. But these *Jatras* were quite different both in form and structure from those that were prevailing and flourishing in Bengal.

² The peace treaty that ended the first Anglo-Burmese war was the *Treaty of Yandabo* which was signed on 24 February 1826, nearly two years after the war formally broke out on 5 March 1824, by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side, and the Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin from the Burmese side. According to the treaty, the Burmese agreed to cede to the British- Assam, Manipur, Rakhine (Arakan), and the Taninthayi (Tenasserim) coast south of the Salween River and agreed to cease all interference in Cachar region of Assam and the Jaintia Hills district. The Burmese part also agreed to pay an indemnity of one million pounds sterling in four instalments and allow an exchange of diplomatic representatives between Ava and Calcutta.

Though actually originated in Bengal, the performance of *Jatra* could not solely be credited to that particular geographical location. During the nineteenth century, due to gradual urbanization and industrialization urban and semi urban areas were raised in many parts of Bengal, and the traditional *Jatras* transformed considerably in terms of text, performance, and presentation. Previously such performances were considered voluntary and the importance of financial investment as well as expenditure had little consideration. The artistes of *Jatras* or the promoter/producer of these ventures never considered performing art as an area of income. Rather they devoted their skill and time to entertain the people in a religious or social festival.

But the new education system and urbanization, both fruits of the colonial era, brought a new vision into this performing art form and a few rich people of urban Bengal initiated a transformation by investing considerable capital into the formation of *Jatras*. This was a departure from the use of *Jatras* for religious propagation as it was before. Structurally this form took a new shape, and along with mythical plots other historical stories also started to be adapted by different *Jatra* groups. In 1872, western style of drama appeared in the then Calcutta and as a result of western influence the presentation of *Jatra* transformed rapidly. Instead of mythical or religious narratives, folk as well as social issues also started getting preference in this form of drama. Along with this development, *Jatras* also started to gain popularity in rural Bengal before gradually penetrating other parts of the Eastern India. (Sarma & Kalita,2020, p-75).

After the annexation of Assam with the Bengal province during the first half of nineteenth century the British administration brought a huge number of Bengali speaking people from Bengal to Assam to run the administration. Most of these educated people were skilled clerks who possessed the experiences of working under the British government. These people were the primary the connoisseurs of *Jatras* and the Bengalis, particularly residing in the lower part of Assam, were greatly fond of this dramatic performance. Because of this affection towards *Jatrabhinay*,

Bengali Jatra Parties had gained splendid popularity both in the urban and rural areas of lower Assam. These groups who had travelled from place to place by performing dramas made a great impression upon the Assamese viewers that inspired a section of enthusiastic people to form such groups in their own localities.

If we trace the history of the evolution of Assamese Jatra groups in Assam we find that Tithiram Bayan, who hailed from Barpeta and pioneered the setting up of the first Assamese *Jatra* party in Assam in the year 1860. Bayan was an actor and musical genius who had been patronized by Gobinda Ram Choudhury, grandfather of former president of Axom Sahitya Sabha Prasanna Lal Choudhury. Gobinda Ram Choudhury wrote two Bengali plays – *Ram Banabas* and *Radhikar Manbhanjan* - for this group. The third drama of the group was *Duryodhaner Urubhanga* written by some Bengali dramatists. This group used to travel throughout the state by using the river routes and carried their necessary equipments in three boats. [Choudhury (Ed), 2005.p-17] Sahityrathi Laskhminath Bezbaruah, the pioneer of modern Assamese literature, also mentioned about this Jatra party in his autobiography (Bezbaruah, 1968:p19). In that sense Tithiram Bayan, who criss- crossed different parts of the state and entertained people by the means of dramatic performances, is the avant-garde architect of mobile theatre in Assam. Hazarika (1967) also mentioned about this Jatra group organized by Mr. Tithiram Bayan who went on a voyage up the Brahmaputra and reaching Sivasagar, in upper Assam, won the hearts of the people there as well. Bayan is said to have been an expert violinist (pp.250-251). During the eight years of its existence this *Jatra* party received immense popularity both in lower as well as upper Assam and in that sense, this was practically the first professional *Jatra* party in Assam. (Sarma & Kalita,2020,p- 76).

In around 1860 another Jatra party appeared in Murkuchi village of Kamrup District under the patronization of Joydeva Sarma in 1860. Bhattacharya (1964) writes that between 1860-65, a Jatra party was formed under the patronage of Mr. Jaidev Sarma in Murkuchi village in then

Kamrup.(p.70). Two Assamese brothers, Katiya and Ahina, who had their abode in Kamakhya hill in Guwahati formed a Jatra troupe between 1870-1900 and performed in different places in Assam. Likewise, Garga Ustad and Radha Satola developed similar Jatra groups at Hajo and Majgaon respectively and they usually performed manuscript dramas translated from Bengali. One more theatre group came up in Kamakhya during the same period. The man behind the theatre group was one Gopal ‘Ustad’ , a Bengali artiste who migrated to Kamakhya in 1857. He trained a few local Assamese boys and staged *Joydrath Badh*. His disciples were – Gauriprasad Sarma, Umakanta Sarma, Rajkrishna Sarma. Lakkhinath Sarma etc. Eventually a theatre club was established in Kamakhya in 1877. Unfortunately, Gopal ‘Ustad’ died in an accident when the rehearsal room of the club caught fire. With his death, the club gradually disintegrated. [Choudhury (Ed), 2005.pp-5,10]

During the third decade of the nineteenth century, the British introduced Bengali in the schools of Assam on the ground that it was very difficult and too costly to replace Persian scribes who were on leave or left the services³. The decision of introducing Bengali as a medium of instruction had fueled a kind of nationalistic anger among the newly educated middle class. It stimulated the new Assamese middle class to consider such an administrative imposition as a severe blow to the nascent Assamese nationalism and even to the survival of the Assamese identity. They strongly opposed the use of Bengali language in Assam and had developed a consciousness among the common masses for restoration of Assamese as the language of education and that of the courts. The person who first openly raised his voice against the imposition of Bengali as medium of instruction was Ananda Ram Dhekial Phukan. In his *A Few Remarks on Assam*, he tried to establish the historicity of the development of Assamese

³ Persian was the language in the administration in India during the rule of Mughal India. In 1837, Persian had been replaced by English and vernacular languages in the different provinces of British India as official and court languages. In 1837, the government introduced Bengali as the language of the courts in Assam.

language and affirmed the separate identity of the Assamese language against the expansionist claims of the Bengali. The Assamese language remained suppressed during the period from 1836 to 1871 which witnessed massive resentment among the people of Assam (Goswami, 1997:pp15-16).

For restoring Assamese language American Baptist Missionaries played a key role as they assumed that Christianity could easily be spread in the province only through the Assamese language. Miles Bronson's *Asamiya and English Dictionary* was brought out in 1867 and it became an effective instrument to pressurize the British government to introduce Assamese as the medium of instruction and as the court language. Bronson said that use of Bengali in all schools, courts and official businesses, retarded the cause of education and general progress among the masses. Fortunately, the Assamese Intelligentsia and American Baptist missionaries made a strong case for restoring the Assamese language and eventually, they persuaded the colonial government to introduce Assamese in schools and courts (Mazumdar, 2008,pp-28-30).

The restoration of Assamese language in schools and courts rejuvenated Assamese language and literature. A good number of young and educated Assamese came out to devote their lives for establishing a strong foundation for Assamese language, literature and culture. Such an upsurge may be attributed as a counter response against the decision of colonial rulers to impose Bengali, ignoring the basic sentiments of self-identity of the native people of Assam. Alike the other fields of literature, Assamese dramaturgy took a new turn and people started to translate Bengali drama to Assamese so much so, many original Assamese plays were spurned out. Many rich people of the province of Assam began to invest their money to form the commercial *Jatra* groups and they considered it as a duty towards enriching Assamese language, literature and culture. Most of the *Jatra* groups formed during 1860 to 1930 were centered in Kamrup and Goalpara districts. (Sarma & Kalita,2020, p-79).

Bhogiram Kakati, a resident of Bhaluki village near Pathsala established another *Jatra* party in the year 1888 that performed three Bengali plays namely *Surath Uddhar*, *Parashuramar Matrihatya* and *Garurar Harisadhana*. The Bamunkuchi Jatradaal (1908) was established by Krishna Kanta Sarma at Bamunkuchi, a village situated near Pathsala Town, presently the district headquarter of Bajali. Similarly, Bhadiram Kalita established *Jatradaal* in Bhaluki in 1910 and Helana Jatradaal was established in the year 1916. Later, during the first half of nineteenth century many other *Jatra* parties emerged from the same region. Pathsala Theatre Party, which was established by Santaram Choudhury in 1910, was a unique theatre group as it had a portable stage and equipments that could be carried on bullock-carts. The group used to stage Assamese-language plays and used to travel to nearby areas along with its stage and equipments. Many claim that it was Santaram Choudhury who developed the basic concept of mobile theatre and because of such tradition Pathsala became the epi centre for developing the concept of Bhramyoman Theatre. (Kalita,2011, p-17)

Brajanath Sarma, who is considered as the guru of dramatics in Assam revolutionized the whole structure of *Jatra* and introduced many new elements to this form of performing art. Natyacharjya (guru of dramatics) Brajanath Sarma formed a drama group named 'Xila Kalika Opera Party' in his native village Xila in 1921. During the First World War he participated in the overseas battle as a member of the British Army and later he was transferred to Baghdad. While he was in Baghdad, he met an Englishman called George and became interested in acting. Das (2002) writes about Brajanath Sarma's talent as a dramatist and litterateur. Between 1930-40 he wrote four plays in Assamese meant for the stage namely, *Manomati*, *Barjita*, *Urvashi* and *Varuna*. *Urvashi* was staged in the school week celebration of Gopinath Bordoloi High School, Barpeta Road in 1958 while *Barjita* was performed on the stage of Kohinoor Opera Party. Though he retired from the field of dramatics after 1936, in 1954, Sarma joined the Mairamara Chaturbhuj

Opera in Howly, Barpeta, as the director and later in 1956, joined the Jatra parties of Singimari and Kerkhabari in Goalpara (pp.77-79).

The Xila Kalika Opera Party which was formed to establish the notion that professional artists can survive by means of acting and therefore the theatre group of Brajanath Sarma performed plays in various festivals, both religious and social, and also in marriage ceremonies. He was quite successful in this endeavour. Later, when he formed Assam Kohinoor Opera, he introduced monthly remuneration for artistes and other members. Phani Sarma reportedly used to get a monthly remuneration of twelve rupees which was eventually increased to twenty-five rupees. Chandra Choudhury was offered seven rupees per month. Kohinoor Opera also introduced paid entertainment as there were ticket systems for the audience. Contrary to the practice of amateur theatre, where entertainment was free, the audience had to buy tickets ranging from four annas to two rupees to enjoy the dramas (Sarma D. , 2005).

After dissolving the 'Xila Kalika Opera Party' in 1924, Brajanath formed a new group called Ganakbari Opera Party. Five years later, in 1930, he formed his historic Assam Kohinoor Opera party with active support of Bipin Chandra Baruah of Puarnigudam near Nagaon. Assam Kohinoor Opera Party is credited to be the pioneer of co-acting by female actors in the Assamese Jatra. Sarma reportedly introduced six female actors through his Assam Kohinoor Opera Party during one of the performances at Doomdooma Natya Mandir in 1933. These female actors were - Sarbeswari Das, Golapi Das, Phuleswari Das, Binoda Gogoi, Labanya Das and Sailabala Devi (Hazarika P. , 2011). However, Bhupen Talukdar recorded in his research thesis that two Debdashis of Dubi had participated in some dramatic performance in Pathsala much before Kahinoor Opera introduced co-acting by the female actor. (Talukdar, 2003)

There were many *Jatra* parties that emerged in the then undivided Kamrup and Goalpara districts. These names are given in the below table with year of formation and the name of the producer/directors:

Table : 4.1
Jatra parties in then undivided Kamrup and Goalpara with year of formation and the name of the producer/direct

Sl.No	Name of the Jatra Party	Year of formation	Producer/director
1	Palashbari Jatradaal	1903	
2	Palashbari Jatra party	1907	Ganeshwar Sarma with support From Ustad Nandiram Kalita
3	Pranay Sanmilani Jatrparty	1913	Amritla Thakuria
4	Kholjatra Natyadal Uru Satra Raij Gairah	1913	Upru Satra Raij Gairah
5	Khidirpukhuri jatra party 1912-1915 Basudev Goswami (Producer)	1912-15	Basudeva Goswami
6	Sadilapur Natya Parishad	1915-1916	
7	Palashbari Bandhab Sanmilan Jatra Party	1915-1916	
8	Sri Sri Kaliathakur Jatra Party	1917	Public enterprise
9	Solesala Jatra Party	1918-1919	
10	Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Yarty	1919	Sanjay Choudhry & Nabin Choudhury
11	Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party	1919	Sanaram Mahajan, Kirtan Das, Uma Sarma, Madhab Pathak
12	Maruwa Jatradaal	1919/1941	
13	Sualkuchi Jatradaal	1920	
14	.Gopinath Natya Parishad, Nahira	1920	Girish Medhi (producer)
15	Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party (Choudhurypara, Barihat)	1921	Sukhuna Das Seharam Gaonbura,
16	Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party 1920. (Soru Heramdu	1920	Seharam Das, Chinti Ustad, Maniya Manager, et al
17	Bhalukghata Jatra Party, Boko	1923	Ustad Suryakanta Sarma (Director)
18	Chamaria Jatra party	1923	
19	Gobindapur Jatradaal, Gobindapur	1923	

(Continued.)

20	Jagannath Opera Dal (Rampur-Amudpur)	1925	Ustad Suryakanta Sarma(producer and director)
21	Probhat Adhikari's Jatradaal Dalguma	1925	
22	Piplibari Jatradaal	1925/1947	
23	Sri Sri Bangsigopal Jatrparty (Talukdarpara Barihat)	1926	Bogaram Das
24	Nowapara Jatra Party (Chaigaon, Nowapara)	1926	
25	Shaktidas Natya Sangha (Chaigaon, Nowapara)	1926	Shakti Das
26	Lakhminarayan Opera party	1927	Barkhala
27	Sri Sri Burhagosain Natya Parishad	1929	Nandiram Kalita, Gahin Ch. Das
28	Sri Sri Chaturbhuj Jatra Party (Bor Heramdu, Barihat)	1930	Krishnakanta Mahajan
29	Sri Sri Sankaradeva Opera party	1930	Bamakhata
30	Kamrup Newsouth Opera Party (Khidirpukhuri Rampur)	—————	Chidananda Goswami(producer)
31	Dakkhin Jhankakata Natyadal (Alookhunda)	1931	Maniram Kakoty
32	Laupara Jatradaal	1931	Krishnaram Das, Bamundi.
33	Binapani Opera	1932	Duhnoi
34	Mathpara Sankar Jatra Party (Chaigaon)	1933	Kamalakanta Goswami
35	Kaliathakur Jatra Party, (Amranga)	1936	Laksmiram Mahajan, Khargeswar Das, etal.
36	Majirgaon Jatra Party	1938	
37	Dharapur Jatra Party	1940	
38	Sadilapur Bandhab Sanmilan Jatra Party	1940	Jogen Bharali (play director)
39	Uparhali Jatra Party	1941	Ramdas (play director)
40	Naradpara Burhagosain (Ashrita Jatra party)	1944	Prabhat Sarma, Krishna Sarma,Manik Deka
Continued			

41	Sarpara Jatra Party	1944	
42	Sri Sri Mahalaksmi Jatra Party (Barihat)	1944	Sanjay Choudhury (Producer, Director, Playwright, Lyricist) * From this year , the party travelled as a complete commercial party.
43	Gowalhati Jatra Party	1944	Mamat Bhakat, Bharat Kalita.
44	Palli Jatra Party	1945	Gahin Ch. Das (Producer)
45	Garhgarha Jatra Party	1945	Rameshwar Kumar, Soneshwar Kumar, Chandrakanta Mahanta, et al
46	Jajir Jatradaal	1945	Jaji Barduar Raij Gairah
47	Kalikachyut Bhurapara Opera (Bhagawatipara) (Producer)	1946	Bhogeswar Kalita party(producer)
48	Majkuchi Jatra Party	1947	Homeshwar Das
49	Nahira Nabajagaran Natya Parishad	1949	Bhabadev Goswami, Shyamdev Goswami (Producer)
50	Rampur Jatra Party (Khidirpukhuri)	1950	Suren Das (Producer)
51	Nowapara Jatra Party (Chaigaon)	1950	Hari Sarma (Producer)
52	Murkuchi Milan Natya Samitee	1950	Surya Baishy, Prasana Sarma.
53	Karbhanga Jatra Party (Karbhanga-Boko)	1952	Paharu Boro (Producer)
54	Dakkhin Kamrup Kohinoor Opera (Borphulguri)	1954	Nabin Das, Maniram Das, et al.
55	Nahira yuvak Natya Parishad (Nahira)	1955	Bhabadev Goswami (producer)
56	Sujanpara Jatra Party (Sujanpara)	1955	Shiba Kalita (Producer)
57	Kukuriya Jatra Party (Kukuriya)	1956	Public Enterprise
58	Kendurtala Jatra Party	1956	
59	Dharapur Jatra Party	1956	
60	Champak Natya Parishad	1956	Public Enterprise (Chaigaon)
Continued			

61	Surjya Opera (Rangamati)	1957	Surjyamali (Producer)
62	Basudeva Opera Party, Ghagrapara	1957	
63	Bangsigopal Jatradal	1958	Jatia Raij Gairah (Bamunpara)
64	Hakrapara Jatra Party	1960	Bhudev Sarma
65	Palli Jatra Party (Palli)	1960	Madan Mahanta
66	Batarhat Bandhab Sanmilon Natya Samiti Batarha	1960	Naramohan Goswami
67	Kukurmara Jelijun Jatraparty	1963	Hiren Bora
68	Samabai Natya Parishad, (Amranga)	1963	Rajani Kalita, Umesh Das, et al.
69	Barhihat Jatradal	1967	Dharmeswar Das (Manager)
70	Chitrajyoti Natya Parishad (Dakhla)	1967	Bhubanewar Sarma, Prabhat Sarma (Producer)
71	Natarupa Natya Parishad	1968	Dr. Haladhar Das
72	Angipaar Jatrascope Theatre	1969	Brajen Das (Owner)
73	Binapani Natya Parishad (Sikahati)	1969	Rajen Das, Puspa Kalita, Purnima Das, et.al
74	Barkuchi Jatra Party (Barkuchi)	1970	
75	Rupjyoti Natya Parishad (Maniyeri Teeniali)	1970	Barkat Ali (Producer)
76	Sri Madhab Natya Parishad Bijoynagar, Dak	1971	Prabhat Sarma
77	Singra Jatra Party (Singra)	1972	Khirod Nath (Producer)
78	Rajlaksmi Natya Parishad (Rampur)	1975	Jagadananda Choudhury
79	Nahira Basumilan Natya Parishad, (Nahira)	1978	Paresh Bhagawati
80	Sikarhati Jatra Party(Sikarhati)	1980	Naren Das (Producer)
81	Mancharupa Natya Parishad, Bijoynagar	1981	Azim Barua, Sultan Sheikh(producer)
82	Kamrup Natya Parishad (Dakhla)	1982	Anantaram Deka(producer)
83	Sarpara Bhangragosain Natya Parishad	1984	Ananda Das (Producer)
Continued			

84	Mahalaksmi Natya Parishad, Satarapara	1984	Lohit Nath (Producer)
85	Srikrishna Natya Parishad, Rampur	1986	Suren Das (Producer)
86	Ajanta Natya Parishad (Sikarhati)	1986	Public Enterprise
87	Jugashree Natya Parishad, Sikarhat	1987	Suren Mahanta (Producer)
<p>(Source: Sadin Bises(May 29, 2015); Kakoty, Sangeeta .(2018).<i>Dimension of the Mobile Theatre of Assam</i>; Kalita,,K. K. (2011). <i>Bhramyaman Theaterar Itihaas, Vol-I</i>;Sarma, Dr.Jayanta Kumar and Kalita, Kishor Kumar.(2020). <i>Theatre on Wheels: A brief history of mobile theatre in Assam</i>; Talukdar, B. (2003). <i>Drama of the Mobile Theatre of Assam</i>. (Unpublished thesis); Mazumdar, A. (2004). <i>Ei Jatra Jai Jatra</i>, Jatra)</p>			

4.3 EVOLUTION FROM JATRA TO BHRAMYOMAN:

In our effort to trace the evolution of Assamese Jatra, we find that the cultural-linguistic tussle between Bengali and Assamese propelled the desire among a new section of Assamese entrepreneurs to set up jatra parties and as a result numerous Jatra parties sprang up throughout the state. The motive behind such an initiative to develop Jatras with new equipments and techniques was to counter and replace Bengali Jatras so that Assamese Jatra groups could grasp the audience who were very much affectionate toward this entertaining form.

The overall structure and form that was used in a Jatra group had deep influence in structuring the mobile theatre. The first ever mobile theater ‘Natraj Theatre’ imitated particularly the stage craft, lighting and music from Jatra parties that later on molded and developed according to the contemporary need of a mobile theatre. Sarma and Kalita (2020, pp-84-85) has rightly mentioned about the stagecraft and other cultural elements of Jatra that have enduring influence on *Bhramyoman* as such- “After the advent of British, the western stage structure was imitated and such stage was constructed by using bamboo and wooden planks. For constructing a 16 square feet stage, one to one-and-half feet high bamboo posts were used to hold the wooden platform. The platform was totally open and one side

was used for the orchestra. One greenroom was also constructed nearby the stage. The actors came to the stage from this greenroom through a small convenient path by through the audiences. The time of performances of Jatra was in the evening and it continued all through night. Sometime it started after the dusk and then it went on till the next morning. For lighting the acting arena, earthen lamps (Chakis) were lit and most of the time the inner part of white gourd melon was removed for stocking mustard oil and then it was used as a lamp during the performance. Sometimes, earthen torch (*mahala*) that are fuelled by mustard oil were also used for the same purpose..... music was an integral part of *Jatra* and apart from musical melody, this dramatic form also had a lot of dance performances that were regarded essential to entertain the common audiences. This tradition was possibly carried on in the Mobile Theatre too in the form of Dance Dramas”

4.3.1 THE PROCESS OF EMERGING THE FIRST *BHRAMYOMAN* ‘NATRAJ THEATRE’

The first foundation for the establishing of a new form of professional drama team was laid by none other than Sadananda Lahkar, younger brother of Achyut Lahkar. Born in Pathsala in the year 1933, Sadananda Lahkar after passing out High-School Leaving Certificate Examination (at that time the examination was called ‘Matric’) from Bajali High School in Pathsala, he took admission in Cotton College, Guwahati. But untimely death of his father and consequential financial hardship compelled him to end his college education in the mid-session and return home. Having trained under the guidance of legends like late Dharanidhar Goswami and Bhrigupati Dutta, Sadananda was immensely passionate about acting since his early teens. When he was studying in the high school, he played the role of Krishna in a drama called *Nanda Dulal*. His profound affection towards acting developed his career as an actor and Sadananda continued acting in various amateur *Jatra* groups earning praises for his performances. By the mid-1950s, Sadananda became a household name

among the audience of *Jatra*. In 1953, he joined an opera party of Bagariguri Village and in the next year, he joined another *Jatra* party of village Baagana .These two years established Sadananda Lahkar as a professional *Jatra* actor and his consistent dedication established him as a renowned actor. Gradually he involved himself in other aspects too, like the cultural and managerial aspects of *Jatra* . In 1958 Sadananda Lahkar started his own *Jatra* troupe ‘Natraj Opera’ from Pathsala in 1959. With the financial support of a few local businessmen and traders, Lahkar successfully created a new wave in the world of theatrical performance of that time and ‘‘Natraj Opera’’ became the most popular *Jatra* party, particularly in lower Assam area. Chandra Choudhuryⁱ, who later became one of the most renowned actor-cum-director of mobile theatres, was one of the drama directors of Natraj Opera. Kamala Chakraborty was another drama director who directed a good number of plays in Natraj Opera. Some of the prominent actors of Jatras at that time like Jogesh Sarma, Upen Barman, Haren Roy, Deben Das, Tanu Kalita etc. played the role of male characters while female roles were played by male actors. Among the male actors who played female roles in ‘Natraj Opera’, the names of Kamaleswar Das, Girish Patgiri, Gada Das, Khagen Das and Parikshit Pathak are worth mentioning. Along with dramas, Natraj Opera also brought changes in dance and music by performing various Indian dance forms under skilled directions of Kalawanta Sing, Rabin Das, Jatin Das and SanatanDas. By introducing new performing elements like dance-drama as well as back-ground music, ‘Natraj Opera’ gradually changed the tradition of *Jatras*. In the initial years of Natraj Opera party, from 1959 to 1962, it performed a good number of significant dramas that include - *Abhishap*, *Samrat Ashok*, *Akalar Desh*, *Bhakta Prahlad*, *Kuruskhetrar Agot*, *Sahadharmini*, *Kalapahar*, *Kahinoor*, *Devi Annapurna*, *Din Dokait*, *Dharmar Bali*, *Dukhiyar Jiyori*, *Krishna-Kalindi*, *Bhaskar Pandit*- the contents of which were mostly historical, mythological and social. (Kalita,2011, pp-121-122).

It is pertinent to mention here that before the inception of Natraj

Opera, Jatra parties usually performed only in the festive congregations and pujas etc. But Natraj Opera developed a new trend by continuously performing dramas for almost nine months of the year at a stretch, irrespective of any festive occasion or congregations. For charitable objectives, this group was invited by different clubs, schools, and colleges to perform in their respective localities and the funds generated through these shows were used for various developmental activities including establishment of schools, colleges and religious institutions. Natraj Opera used to perform two to three shows and a large part of the collection from ticket sales would go to the organizers after paying off the opera party. Later such a model became a feasible model for both entertainment and development activities and various organizations of that time started to invite this group into their own localities. Moreover, as this *Jatra* party made possible to create a viable profession by engaging the artiste community continuously for almost nine months a year, performing drama began to be steadily recognized as a respectable career avenue for many struggling artistes who could barely sustain themselves through performance before. Thus, in a way Natraj Opera not only brought in professionalism into the staging of dramas, but also laid the foundation of the business model of mobile theatre. In fact, this was the business idea for the first mobile theater ‘Natraj Theatre’ that was established in the year 1963 by the Lahkar brothers. The same business model has continued uninterrupted for almost six decades till date. (Sarma and Kalita,2020, p-191)

4.3.2 FROM NATRAJ OPERA TO NATRAJ THEATRE

Achyut Lahkar, the doyen of mobile theater of Assam, was born on July 9, 1931 in the village Bagana near Pathsala. His father was businessperson Gaurikanta Lahkar, who owned a shop in the town, and his mother was

Kantipriya Lahkar. After completion of his matriculation in 1949 from Bajali High School, Pathsala, he joined the commerce Stream at Saint Paul College, Kolkata. Unfortunately, he had lost his father just about a month prior to his matriculation. Kolkata, which was then considered as the centre of literary and cultural happenings of modern India, transformed his life and his outlook. In those days, famous Assamese *Awahan* was published from Kolkata edited by Dinanath sarma, one of the pioneers in Assamese literature and media, who again hailed from Bamunkuchi village near Pathsala. When the publication of this magazine was stopped, Achyut Lahkar decided to edit and publish one illustrated magazine titled *Dwipawali* and accordingly the first issue of this magazine was published on 15th June, 1952.(Source: *Manchaprabhakar*, a booklet published on the occasion of conferring ‘Manchaprabhakar’ title to late Achyut Lahkar in the year 2006 by All Assam Mobile Theatre Producers’ Association and Bishnu-Jyoti Silpi Samaj, Pathsala)

But Achyut Lahkar could not continue the publication of the magazine for a longer period and eventually he had to close its publication due to many of his personal problems. After the closure of *Dwipawali*, he came back to his native place Pathsala and passed IA as a private candidate from Bajali College. Then he went to Kolkata again to do his BA which he could not complete because of domestic compulsions. As mentioned earlier, during this period his younger brother Sadananda lahkar founded the ‘Natraj Opera’ which received unprecedented recognition throughout the state. This group travelled across the whole of lower Assam region and even performed at some places in Upper Assam where it earned huge popularity, especially in the tea gardens. ‘Natraj Opera’ turned towards full- fledged mobility in the year 1962 and its theatrical journey touched almost all rural and semi urban centers of Assam. This journey continued till the year 1962 without any interruption. In that sense Sadananda Lahkar actually pioneered a new way of theatre mobility across the state to entertain both rural and urban people.

After his return from Kolkata, Achyut Lahkar wished to change the Natraj Opera, incorporating the latest techniques. Lahkar brothers had a kind of inherent cultural environment in their own home that affected both of them

since their childhood. Gourikanta Lahkar , father of Achyut and Sadananda Lahkar , was a businessman of good reputation and his shop was the best and the biggest at that time. One of the particular attractions of the establishment was that it sold musical instruments and drama dresses and paints. Obviously, all kinds of artistes gathered in that shop and both the Lahkar brothers got opportunities to meet these artistes. Achyut and Sadananda Lahkar were highly influenced by these artiste communities and they got inspiration to take active part in dramatic performances. Achyut engaged himself in stage-craft while Sadananda in performing Art. The then headmaster of Bajali High School, Bhrigupati Dutta and senior teacher Dharanidhar Goswami were great actors of that time. With their inspiration Sadananda appeared on the stage as a charming child-artist. This was the beginning of a life that was fully devoted to the dramatic movement of Assam. On the other hand, Achyut Lahkar was not interested in acting and instead of the art of acting he was greatly attracted by the literary and technical aspects of dramatic art. (Source: aforementioned *Manchaprabhakar*, pp-15-16). Remembering the deep impact and influence of Late Bhrigupat Datta and Dharanidhar Goswami, Achyut Lahkar expressed his gratitude and reverence in the following words:“Yes, I agree. Had Bhrigupati Dutta and Dharanidhar Goswami not molded Sadananda as an artiste, our family would not have given birth to Natraj Opera; and had Natraj Opera not been born, Bhramayman would not have been born. I had just incorporated the experimental business angle to ‘opera’. Sada’s name will always be intrinsically related to the birth of Bhramyaman; he is not neglected. We were both joint owners of Natraj in the first year of its inception. He married before me and had a family to take care of. Possibly because of that he decided later not to continue sharing my madness (with Bhramyaman)⁴.

At that time Achyut Lahkar felt that the small theatre halls of the towns and semi urban areas were not able to cope with the surging enthusiasm of the theatre going public, particularly of the rural area. That paucity inclined Lahkar to think about a novel plan of having plays enacted under big tents pitched in wide open spaces, like the big top of the circus parties. In his words- “The decision to open the theatre was not sudden and whimsical. I

thought that the distinguishing feature of the operas is that they are mobile. They can meet people's necessary programme in public fairs and even in private ceremonies of prominent people. But my experience of theatrical performances in Kolkata, at the 'Bhaskar Mancha' of Guwahati, at 'Ban Mancha', Tezpur, all convinced me that theatre is much better than opera for dramatic performance. It removes a lot of artificiality including the practice of male actors playing the part of female character. One question stuck to the mind –can't we make theatre a moving cultural foundation like the operas? Till that time theatre like those of Kolkata or Bombay was not introduced in Assam. I wished to start it and start with new feature of mobility. With the little technical knowledge, I determined the structure of the stage, the space for the orchestra, light, time for casting and so on. When I saw that in the opera performances of my brother even without microphone and electric light, there were innumerable audiences, I tried to surprise them all by using the scientific devices in the theatre. True to my expectation, the people were spell-bound with the display of light- red, blue, yellow and green from the switches in a hidden part of the stage. It can be said that 'Natraj Theatre 'was born with this commercial motif'. (Source: aforementioned *Manchaprabhakar*, pp-16-17)

⁴ One interview with Achyut Lahkar taken by Kishor Kumar Kalita and Mahendra Choudhury in 2005 was published in *Prantik*, June, 2005 and incorporated in the book '*Bhramayaman Theataror Itihas*' by Kishor Kumar Kalita, All Assam Mobile Theatre Producer Association, 2011, Guwahati. The English translation of this interview was also included in *Theatre on Wheels: A brief history of mobile theatre in Assam* written jointly by Dr. Jayanta Kumar Sarma and Kishor Kumar Kalita.

Thus, Achyut Lahkar founded the first Bhramyoman Theatre or mobile theatre in Assam in the year 1963. Mingling the basics of dramatic art, dance, music, acting, stagecraft with the most recent modern technology, Natraj Theatre started its journey on October 2, 1963. With blessings and support from all corners of the society, the first show of the mobile theatre was held at a temporary stage in Harimandir Premises, the most prominent public place of Pathsala. The first drama performed in the stage of mobile theatre was *Bhogjara* written by Phani Sarma, one of the pioneering dramatist and actor of his generation. The stage was developed as a revolving one and it consisted of two stages. When the performance was going on in one stage, the other one was kept prepared for the next act. To revolve the stage physical force was used and it was done while the drop was cast down. Because of non-interruption between two acts of a particular play, audience got the unprecedented opportunity to enjoy a drama without any pause which was never experienced before. The entire theatre hall was constructed in a triangle like shape which was quite similar with the letter 'V' of the English alphabet inverted and the stage was situated on the vertex of that triangle. The stage at the vertex of the hall was about 40 feet wide. The audience area in front of the stage gradually expanded up to 90 to 100 feet width. Folding chairs used for seating arrangement were made up of timber as metal or plastic chairs were costly at that time. (Kalita, 2011, pp-31)

Initially this form of theatre was not known as Bhramyaman. The name was coined by late Radha Govinda Barua, the Lion Man (Singha *Purush*) of Assam and founder of The Assam Tribune Group in the year 1963. Natraj Theatre was performing at the Judges' Field in Guwahati for the benefit of Gauhati Town Club when R. G. Barua enjoyed its performance one night. Next day, he wrote in his newspaper *Dainik Asom* “.. it is something which has its own sound system, own electrical equipment for enhancing the performance, own stage, own auditorium. Such a unique theatre is not available anywhere else in the world. This should be called the first Mobile Theatre” (Sarma & Kalita, 2020, pp-91-92)

In its initial year Natraj Theatre published one pamphlet where it announced the overall motto of the theatre group. The pamphlet announced “As an assimilated centre of history, literature, arts and science, the stage has become an essential part of expressing the national character. Therefore, the whole world is giving special attention to its development. Nevertheless, in Assam the situation of this art craft and its artists are very pitiable. This art craft has been developed centering on the cities in those states which have an advanced footing in this art form in India. In Assam, we do not have cities like Bombay or Kolkata and for this reason, permanent stages are not developing here. The best drama has exhausted within a few nights in our big towns. Therefore, for the search of a big market we are organizing this mobile theatre so that the artist of this art form could earn their regular livelihoods by concentrating only in this service and could uplift this art form. We are molding a theatre and are trying to impart mass orientation in this cultural venture that have a town centric affiliation. This is an avant-garde venture not only in Assam but in entire India. For the success of this venture, we need wholehearted blessings and advice from the public. Will the public be kind with that generosity? ” (Kalita,2011,pp-29; Sarma & Kalita,2020,pp-94-95)

In its first year Natraj Theatre staged four dramas and these were - *Jerengar Sati* (written by Uttam Barua), *Bhogjara* (written by Phani Sarma), *Tikendrajit* (written by Atul Chandra Hazarika) and *Haidar Ali* (translated). Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Dr. Krishnakanta Lahkar (a Doctor by profession and elder brother of Ratan Lahkar) and renowned dramatist, educationist and a father-figure as far as theatre is concerned Dharnidhar Goswami were the patrons and the responsibility of directing the dramas rested on veteran and popular actor Chandra Choudhury. Kalawanta Sing and Robin Das were responsible for music direction while one of the famous classical exponents of Assam Prabhat Sarma was entrusted with Music Direction along with Chandra Choudhury. Achyut Lahkar had the responsibility of overall planning; Addya Sarma, a renowned theatre personality of the mobile theatre industry in Assam took

the responsibility of art direction and Art design. Gajen Barua who was popularly known as Sonit Konwar , Trailokya Dutta (one of the famous cartoonists of the time who served the Assam Tribune group) assisted by Pramod Roy had the responsibility of Art Design along with Addya Sarma.(Kalita,2011,pp-30)

Natraj Theatre folded up after 40 years of existence. During the successful days of Natraj Theatre, Lahkar initiated some revolutionary ideas in respect of stage craft and presentation. In the year 1966-67, he developed Theatre-Scope and thereafter in 1968-69, Cine-theatre process was introduced in Natraj. He also tried to introduce three numbers of stages in 1970-71, but it did not succeed. Natraj Theatre is the first Assamese professional theatre group that extensively toured different parts of this country and performed their regular shows in those places. The theatre group travelled Cachar and some places of Uttar Banga (the northern part of present West Bengal state of India) and presented Bangla drama there (1978-79). In the year 1979-80 the theatre group made history by performing Assamese play in Cachar and in Uttar Banga. Finally in 1990, Achyut Lahkar experienced a kind of rounded stage or *Alsom* in stage and it got a somewhat lukewarm appreciation from audiences. During the long tenure of theatrical journey, Natraj produced a number of important plays in its initial years `and a few of them are- *Angar* (1964-65, originally written by Utpal Dutta in Bengali), *Nandadulal*, *Anarkali*, *Khana*, *Bandita* (1965-66, most of these dramas were adapted from Bengali origin), *Sati Savitri*, *Biplab*-1987(1966-67), *Jerengar Sati*, *Karbala*, *Ekhan Prithivi*, *Bicharak Samrat Bikramditya*(1968-69) etc .

4.4 ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE: EVOLUTION OF MOBILE THEATRE AT PATHSALA

Now we may raise a relevant question– for what reasons did the undivided Kamrup district, particularly the town Pathsala, become the first

place for Mobile theatre to flourish? Dr. Bhupen Talukdar writes (Talukdar, 2003:p-25) in his thesis that after the establishment of British administration in Assam, the Bengali *Jatra* parties became popular in the lower Assam region and was spreading towards the eastern part of the province. According to him there were certain specific reasons for which native *Jatra* parties evolved and flourished in lower Assam and these are-

1) The traditional dramatic performance Bhaona, which had massive appeal in upper Assam (places like Majuli, Bardowa, Negheriting, Dhekiakhowa Namghar, Nagaon etc.) could hardly attract the common people. In lower Assam, particularly in the undivided Kamrup and Goalpara districts, and they were much more acquainted with traditional form of dramas such as Ojapalai and Dhuliya.

2) Bhaona performances were held within the boundary of a particular Namghar or Satra and had religious passion. Because of the restrictiveness of such religious performances they received little appreciation from the common masses and they could not enjoy the bindings of these performances. Moreover, the language used in the Bhaona was unfamiliar for the common people and hence they could not relate to the stories enacted in those plays. In contrast, the *Jatra* was free from all these restrictions and bindings. *Jatras* were held in the open space and it could easily attract the common folk.

3) As the *Jatras* bear many western elements, it had the possibilities to generate novelty in the performance and this was possibly the most important reason for attracting common people towards it.

Therefore we may come to a conclusion that because of the above reasons, *Jatras* flourished in lower part of Assam and the performance in a *Jatra* party was gradually recognized as an avenue for most of the artistes who could not dream of earning even a minimal income from performing in *Jatras*. Now the second query is why Pathsala became the epicentre for the inception of the first mobile theatre in Assam? Sarma and Kalita (2020: pp-89-90) rightly observe:

“The kind of cultural revivalism that spurted in the 1950s at

Pathsala had a splendid impression over the common public and they made every possible endeavour for the upliftment of this cultural tradition. This enthusiastic zeal might have created a cultural environment for which another cultural form was possible to emerge at Pathsala. Along with this social spirit, the emergence of Pathsala as a semi-urban centre of both commercial trading and cultural milieu favoured rediscovering of a new means of survival for amateur artists of *Jatra* who were mainly marginal farmers and who could earn a little from their dramatic profession. Late Munindra Nath Sarma, noted litterateur and former district president of Barpeta District Sahitya Sabha, told this author – ‘After India’s independence, Pathsala, headquarter of Bajali District, Assam became a centre of *Jatras* and around fifteen to twenty *Jatra* groups were formed in and around present Bajali sub-division. Just like the coffee houses of Kolkata, small tea restaurants of this new town were the meeting places where most of the artist of *Jatras* as well as amateur theatres regularly gathered and exchanged their ideas. Perhaps this *Adda* (a meeting place) culture of the town gave a new dimension to the performing art form and particularly to drama for which the emergence of mobile theatre became possible at Pathsala’.”

Over and above, the town Pathsala⁵ also had a strong cultural tradition and among those elements the tradition of Devadasi⁶ Performances, which had an eminent existence in the Parihareswar Devalaya, Dubi, a village around two kilometers away in the southern side of present Pathsala. This dance form was in practice since the sixteenth

⁵ In 1968 the Assam government’s gazette Notification No LML.304/58/59 published on 29th February, 1968 declared the notified area as Pathsala small town in the then Kamrup District.

⁶ The term Devadasis means persons engaged in the service of God. The devadasi tradition has strong hold in south India with many regional variations. In Assam such tradition was prevalent in Shiva temples. In Assam, the Devadasis were known as *Natees*, which initially meant a dancing girl or an actress but with time, assumed the derogatory meaning of a prostitute.

century and continued till to the middle of the twentieth century. Ratna Kanta Talukdar, a resident of Pathsala town, took the pioneering initiative to revive this dance form in the 1950's, when he already crossed his prime and was a middle-aged man. He contacted the last two remaining Devadasis at the Porihareshwar temple in Dubi, the late Kaushalya Bala Devi and late Roya Bala Devi (both in their 80's) to learn the nuances of this dance form. In 1954, Ratna Talukdar requested Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha to come to Pathsala to see the performance of the dance. It was here that the Kalaguru learnt the dance and condensed the dance to its present form of 10 minutes from the original 25 minutes. Under the keen patronization of late Bishnu Prasad Rabha and other mentors of Pathsala, the Devadasi dance form became popular and many young artistes joined this venture. The first batch that trained under Talukdar comprised Leela Das, Bina Choudhury, Renu Devi and Joya Patgiri. In 1961, this group performed Devadasi dance in many places of Odisha under a cultural exchange programme. The Assam State Government and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting also documented this unique visual performance and produced one documentary on this subject. After a successful revival of this form, Ratna Kanta Talukdar founded Devadasi Silpi Samaj at Pathsala and this society became a platform for producing a number of young trained devadasi artists throughout the years (Sarma M. N., 1987).

Kakoty, Sangeeta (2018) mentions that when mobile theatres first came up, there were very few cinema halls in the state and obviously majority of the rural people did not have access to any. She writes – “So, when mobile theatres came to them, it was only natural that it was a rage. People in the villages used to save money the year round to be able to enjoy the mobile shows. One more reason for the popularity of mobile theatre was that very talented artists who were totally devoted to the stage were engaged. Original plays were written by renowned playwrights keeping in mind the taste of the audience as well as the social relevance. Actors and actresses knew the stage, how to deliver dialogues, the modulation and

voice pitch required, how to move on stage, and how to connect with the audience. Good stories and good actors were the secret of success.” (P-68)

How the question of revenue generation deeply influenced Achyut Lahkar while he conceptualized the idea of Bhramyoman and how the local people had unhesitant support to his venture could be easily realized by going through his Interview. He states (Kalita,2011: p-220) – “I wanted to create a few real Assamese artistes through Bhramyoman. I had hired trainers for Bihu, Satriya dance and a few experts for playing Dhol and Pepa and ground for some then Gajen Barua and Bishnu Rabha joined. Apart from these, some female artistes had also joined. People of Pathsala were almost flabbergasted. One day, seven–eight people (I can recall Kasinath Das and Tarani Choudhury among them) were gossiping in front of a shop at the market centre in Pathsala. As I was passing by someone from the group called out, “Hey! Come here. Young men, what all these you’re going to do? It isn’t easy to manage a dozen actors in the opera and you are going to manage a hundred, that too with female ones! With full respect to the gathering of the old gentleman I offered my obeisance to them and said, ‘I will be able to cross this mountain with your blessings perhaps. I have run Bhramyaman successfully for forty years only with their blessings. Many other Bhramyaman troupe were also formed following Natraj. The inception year was a difficult one, so was the second one. But I received unqualified support from people of Pathsala from the second year onwards. Without that support I would not have been able to build a mobile theatre troupe. People like Dr. Krishnakanta Lahkar, Ananta Sarma, Umesh Dutta and others had helped me with cloths; some others called me mad but some others even helped me with money.”

Achyut Lahkar had to face many difficulties in the very initial year of the Natraj. He was in a kind of financial disaster as he was left with no money to continue. In his autobiography he mentioned that during that period many people of Pathsala came forward to help him and among those he specifically mentioned about Meghraj Agarwala . Agarwala was a friend of Achyut Lahkar’s father Gauri Lahkar and had a timber business. He

provided the necessary timber for the stage in the second year of Natraj on credit. Some people ridiculed Agarwala for his poor business acumen of providing credit to Lahkar; to which Agarwala had reportedly quipped – If my friend’s son falls into a pit, shouldn’t I try to rescue him? What he had done was not wrong, people have appreciated his theatre. If I do not encourage him, the country will not pardon me (Figo, 2010:p-31).

From the very inception of ‘Natraj Theatre’ Achyut Lahkar emphasized on the commercial viability and professionalism. In his own words- “In the current situation, it has been established beyond doubt that no art form can survive without a business angle. A priest now takes a ‘visit’ (fee), a monk also has business interest. I had started Bhramyaman with only a business interest in my mind. Since our government does not pay salary to our artistes, I had to think like this in the interest of the livelihood of our artistes. Television has proliferated now; it can be said that we had to do this for the exigencies of our time. This is inevitable.” (Kalita,2011: p-225).

4.4.1 SOURCE OF FUND FOR KAHINOOR AND AWAHAN THEATRE

Kahinoor Theatre:

In the context of financial management and economic viability, the birth of Kahinoor Theatre has a significant contribution than the rest. This was the first theatre group which had a well-structured and well-coordinated financial backbone. With financial assistance from the Guwahati-based Central Bank of India, Kohinoor paved the way for conscious capital formation in the sector. It was also possibly the first instance of a nationalized bank offering a loan to a non-secured cultural venture in northeast India. In an interview with Kishor Kumar Kalita and Dr.Jayanta Kumar Sarma, Ratan Lahkar profusely and repeatedly acknowledged the contribution of the finance provided by the bank in shaping his life. He states-

“That was possibly the year of 1972. I was in Purbajyoti Theatre and

we had set up our tents in Kalaigaon near Tangla in Darang district. That year Purbajyoti staged a drama named *Ihoto Manuh* (They are also humans). It was a big hit and my performance as a disabled man was lauded all over Assam. People had started asking why an MA-passed man was wasting himself in theatre instead of taking up a job like that of a teacher. One night after the play was over; two persons came in to the green room to meet me. I knew one of them. He was Mukunda Deb Choudhury working in the Post Office at Tangla. The other one was Haren Lahkar, the branch manager of the Central Bank at Tangla. He praised my acting a lot that day. We talked about a lot of things. He invited me for lunch. Since then, we developed a kind of camaraderie. Whenever we used to be performing in Tangla or areas nearby, I used to meet him.

Later on, when Krishna Roy and I joined Rupkowar Theatre in 1974, our friendship with Haren Lahkar was cemented. Rupkowar Theatre was a big hit in the first year of its inception. By that time Haren Lahkar was transferred from Tangla branch of the Central Bank to Panbazar branch as manager. That year, Ropkonwar Theatre had pitched tents in two-three places of Guwahati and as usual Haren Lahkar had come to meet us. In one of those meetings, he asked me an uncomfortable question as to my future in mobile theatre with such a paltry salary of rupees four hundred. He suggested us why do not we start a theatre troupe of our own. Krishna and I were very enthusiastic. We said, if the capital can be arranged, we can handle the rest. He asked us how much money we need, to which we replied that about three lakh rupees and a truck were needed. He said he will arrange a loan from the bank and asked us to prepare a proposal. That was a shot in the arm for us. We immediately started preparing a scheme. Respected Haren Deka sir of Bajali College helped us a lot in preparing the scheme. When we presented the scheme in due time another surprise awaited us. As the total value of the proposal was more than three lakh rupees, the proposal was beyond the purview of Haren Lahkar to sanction and it was sent to the regional office of the bank at Silpukhuri. The senior officer at the regional office was not impressed with the scheme and was reluctant to sanction the

loan. At that point Haren Lahkar had remarked that "...if they fail to repay the loan, deduct the amount from my salary". That was a turning point for Krishna, me and mobile theatre as a whole. I would not have become a proprietor of mobile theatre without the courage and conviction of Haren Lahkar. With the money from the loan Kohinoor was born in 1976." (Sarma & Kalita, 2020, pp-173- 175)

Thus, the mobile theatre activist Ratan Lahakar and Krishna Roy introduced bank finance to the Mobile Theatre Industry. Their submitted proposal for the loan before the said bank was about Rs.500000.00 This was the beginning of starting a mobile theatre unit with proper action plan. They also introduced the concept of investing money to the mobile theatre industry on share basis. Total Investment of their project in the beginning was Rs.1000000.00. Rest of the money for investment was collected from friends, relatives and some organizations of Pathsala.

Awahan Theatre:

The Kohinoor Theatre established by Ratan Lahkar and Krishna Rai had developed a new motive and design in the mobile theatre with regard to art and finance. The Kohinoor tried to bring a new environment in the theatre hall by departing from the tradition of getting Bengali plays translated and adapted for Assamese audience. Instead, Kohinoor adapted a good number of plots from Assamese literature and patronized many Assamese dramaturgies to write Assamese plays based on themes related to the Assamese society. With such local taste and variety in the story along with Assamese music, dance and other cultural elements, the Kahinoor Theatre created a new set of audience leading to expansion of the business.

Though Kahinoor was established by the joint venture of Ratan Lahkar and Krishna Roy, these two friends decided to part ways in 1980. Krishna Roy wanted to start a new theatre group and therefore in 1980-81, he established Awahan Theatre at Pathsala. With barely any capital worth its name apart from a truck, which he got after his separation from Kahinoor Theatre, Krishna Roy also received good support from his friends, chief among these benevolent and theatre loving patrons being Pawan

Choudhury, Janardan Choudhury, Dimbeswar Talukdar and Basudev Jalan. The Jalan family's association with Awahan continued for many years.

The producer Krishna Roy had almost two decade long experience in the mobile theatre industry by then from his very first year in Natraj, i.e.,1963, when he was associated with the group as assistant to its proprietor, the great doyen of mobile theatre industry of Assam- Late Achyut Lahkar. He served under him as an electrical assistant and secretary. As Achyut Lahkar had expertise and experience in lighting and electrification, Krishna Roy could learn a lot under his supervision. Later, in 1967 he joined Purbajyoti Theatre, Hajo where he and his intimate friend Ratan Lahkar started to dream about a new theatre of their own that have been already mentioned above.

About the working capital of Awahan Theatre Krishna Roy states- "When we started Kahinoor Theatre as a joint venture, the natives of Pathsala offered their help to us unhesitatingly. Most of the commodities, equipments and accessories that are needed for beginning a theatre were purchased on credit. Moreover, in the very initial year Kahinoor achieved a tremendous success in its business operandi. Most of the clubs and associations in and around Pathsala offered financial support to us and therefore we had no shortage of working capital. Along with the financial loan that had been provided by the bank we received a huge cash capital from these local organizations. They sincerely wished that such a dramatic platform should prosper from Pathsala which might bring glory to this small town. Later that became a usual practice for generating working capital in Pathsala. These clubs and social organizations used to offer an initial capital in the month of June-July every year ranging from five thousand to more than lacs according to their financial strength and we returned the amount in the month of November, usually at the time of Raas Mahotsava, with their share of profit. So, it is like a cooperative approach towards generating the working capital for a mobile theatre. As in the very first year of Kahinoor, we could earn a huge profit, we were able to return all our

debts. Thus, the spontaneous trust and support towards our endeavor made us firmly believe in the viability of our business model based on multiple small investments and return. When I started a separate theatre, because of the said trust, people came forward instinctively to support me. That is why I had no shortage of working capital when I founded Awahan Theatre.”⁷

About the initial expenditure Krishna Roy again states- “It was around rupees sixteen lakhs, when I started Awahan out of which only two lakh twenty-five thousand rupees was my own investment. The rest were managed either from credit or loan. The major portion of fixed capital investment in a mobile theatre goes into making the stage, equipment & props, and the makeshift auditorium. A regular capital that is needed for the whole year for salary and expenditure is on account of food and transportation. The workers and artistes of a theatre group are provided free food and lodging during rehearsals throughout the nine months of touring season and these has to be arranged by the producer”⁸

Researcher Kausik Deka estimated in 2009 that the initial capital investment for starting a mobile theatre is somewhere between rupees seventy lakh to ninety lakhs (Deka, 2009: p 190). Another researcher, Kumud Das, in his PhD thesis submitted to Gauhati University in 2018 quoted Bankim Rai Medhi, the proprietor of Brindaban Theatre to say that even two-three crore rupees may not be adequate as initial fixed capital investment for an A category theatre (Das, 2018: p 105)

The mobile theatre group gets a fixed amount of money for the first show of the day. It is called ‘Show Money’ and is decided upon at the time of signing of the agreement. For the second show and third show of the day, the revenue collected from sale of tickets is shared at a ratio of 70:30 or 60:40 between the theatre group and the organizing body. For any

⁷ One interview with Shri Krishna Roy taken by this author on 2nd May,2020 at his own residence at Pathsala.

⁸ One interview with Shri Krishna Roy taken by this author on 2nd May,2020 at his own residence at Pathsala

additional shows, the revenue sharing is decided through negotiations most of the time. Natraj Theatre had reportedly fixed “Show Money” at one thousand rupees in 1963. The amount of show money over the years increased to about one lakh twenty thousand rupees in 2016-17. (Sarma & Kalita, 2020, pp-231-232)

This Show Money is the source of almost ninety per cent of the revenue for mobile theatres as revealed in a study conducted by Mousumi Devi for her PhD thesis submitted to Gauhati University (Devi, 2016). She also recorded the total revenue of ten mobile theatres in the year 2013-14 at about rupees seventeen-and- half crores with each group earning within a range of one crore thirty lakh rupees to two crore rupees. On the other hand, the total expenditure of these ten mobile theatre groups during the same year was about twelve crore seventy lakh rupees. Thus, these ten mobile theatre groups together earned a profit of almost five crore rupees in 2013-14.

4.4.2 ADVERTISING: A NEW SOURCE OF FUNDING

Advertising is a very potent instrument which can make or unmake any profit venture. Advertising makes all the difference that matters, only if done in the proper manner, by giving a business its distinctive quality which differentiates it from the also runs. Depending on the kind of media that is being used, target audiences are reached and loyalists can be created from the prospective customers. Although investment in advertising is a very small part of the total business investment, but its effects are palpable in all the facets of a particular business, be it sales boost, customer satisfaction, worker motivation or a good reputation.

Advertising on mobile theatre offers the opportunity to reach the masses because theatre is the most common form of entertainment for the people of Assam, the rural people in particular. Audience here tends to be more categorized into sections. By means of purchasing advertising slots during shows, targeted audiences are better reached by business entities.

Till date more than 130 entrepreneurs (Mobile Theatre Producers' Association, 2015) have been involved in this field. Some have passed the tough test of time and achieved success and some of them failed and closed their venture. The troupe travels with three to six trucks of equipment, pitches its own tents, erects its own proscenium (stage) usually measuring 60 ft by 20 feet and arranges manual illumination. The company remains in a location for three days and stages new productions every year - averaging 250 shows in 70 to 75 different places of Assam including 65% rural area.

It is found that the Mobile Theatre in Assam is a unique entrepreneurial venture which involves business with art and in every year at least 9504000 spectators watch shows. So, Advertising reaches a very large number of target spectators when it is correlated with the mobile theatre of Assam.

The various medium of advertisement in mobile theatre are:

- 4.4.2.1 Posters
- 4.4.2.2 Banners/ Cutout/ Standby
- 4.4.2.3 Hoardings
- 4.4.2.4 Arena Sponsorship
- 4.4.2.5 On stage Display
- 4.4.2.6 On stage materials
- 4.4.2.7 Entrance Gate/ Truck/ Bus/ Goods carrier
- 4.4.2.8 Boundary walls
- 4.4.2.9 Invitation Cards/Tickets (2nd Show only)
- 4.4.2.10 Audio Video Adv
- 4.4.2.11 On dialogue/ mobile ring tone
- 4.4.2.12 Kapeli (135x5 ft size main name plate)
- 4.4.2.13 Scroll Adv. on 4ft/3ft
- 4.4.2.14 Crew Dress/Cap

4.4.2.1 BENEFIT OF ADVERTISING ON MOBILE THEATRE BY COMPANIES:

1. Large Number of audiences: Advertising on mobile theatre offers the chance to reach mass audience.
2. Targeted Audience: Businesses are better when they are able to reach targeted audiences by showing advertisement slots during shows.
3. Sophistication: Mobile Theatre has the advantage of sophistication that is far ahead of many other medium of entertainment among the rural people of Assam. Audio- Visual advertisement can be a powerful tool with enhanced advertising creativity.

4.4.2.2 BENEFITS OF MOBILE THEATRE FROM ADVERTISEMENT

The benefits of mobile theatre from advertisement are:

- Promotion of theatre's Product and Services.
- Traffic (read audience) targeted drive for theatre's business to increase exposure and revenue.
- Establish a solid reputation for Mobile Theatre owner's business within the communities.
- Get the greatest exposure for Mobile Theatre owner's business at lower marketing cost.

Good media selection determines the effectiveness of advertisement. Typically, Media decisions are based on consumer usage and measures. Though perceived usefulness is generally not a consideration, consumers' perceptions of media have definite implications in promotional decisions. Moreover, perceived usefulness of a media cannot be inferred from usage data. In Assam Mobile Theatre can be a potential medium of advertisement as 65% of the rural people enjoy it.

Table- 4.2
Generation Of Fund by the Mobile Theatre (one Troup) Through Advertisement

Head of Advertisement	Main Sponsor	Co-Sponsor	Associate Sponsor	Single Sponsor(Per Anum)	
				Qty	Amount
Posters Banners/ Cutout/ Standee Hoardings	1500000.00	800000.00	500000.00	5000	225000.00
On stage Display				Per Piece	30000.00
On stage materials				100	400000.00
Entrance Gate/ Truck/ Bus/ Goods carrier Boundary Walls					125000.00
Invitation Cards/Tickets (2 nd Show only)					125000.00
Audio Video Adv					200000.00
					125000.00
					175000.00
					200000.00
					25000.00
			Up to 10 sec.		
			Up to 30 Sec.		
			Up to 60 Sec (1-5 times /Drama)	150000.00	
On dialogue/ mobile ring tone Kapeli (135x5 ft size main name plate)					
Scroll Adv. on 4ft/3ft Crew Dress/Cap					
(Source: Himangkan Das,M D , NOW IT, add Agency, Rajgarh Road, Guwahati.)					

4.4.3 EARNINGS OF MOBILE THEATRE FROM SHOWS:

The way of earning of a Mobile Theatre Group in a particular theatre year is that they fix a price (Model Agreement shown in Appendix 4.1) of a show with the societies or organizations and takes the prices of three shows from them. In the theatre year 2015-16, a theatre of category A fixed a price of Rs.120000.00 per show for three day(Appendix-4.1- Model Agreement). Hence a theatre group could earn Rs. 360,000.00 per pendal. Total earnings of a theatre group became Rs. 360,000.00. As the theatre group goes to 75 places in a year, their total collection will become Rs. 2,70,00000.

The Journey Schedule of each mobile theatre is as follows:

Venue: Minimum 75 places in Assam, including 65% rural area
Period: Middle of August to Middle of April

(As announced by the theatre group)

Number of people tapped: 3-4 lakh, annually.

(Appendix-4.2- Show Schedule of a Theatre)

Table 4.3 shows a case study of collection of Kahinoor Theatre in the Theatre Year2015-16.

NAME OF THE THEATRE	NO. DAYS IN A PLACE	PRICE PER DAY(Rs)	TOTAL NO OF PLACE VISITED	TOTAL COLLECTION (Rs)
Kahinoor theatre	3	120000	75	27000000

(Source: Haren Das, Organising Secretary, Kahinoor Theatre)

The organizations who have patronized the Mobile Theatre Group generated revenue by selling tickets of the shows of theatre after paying the contract amount of to the Mobile Theatre Group. Table 4.4 shows a case study of an organization who patronized Rajtilak Theatre in the Theatre Session 2015-16 at Pathsala, the sub divisional headquarter of Bajali Civil Sub-division during the time of 15 days Ras Mohatsav Celebration.

Table- 4.4					
Collection of Pathsala Sarbajaniin Kali Puja Udzapan Samiti and Arohi, a Socio-Cultural Organisation					
Who petronise Rajtiak Theatre in the theatre year 2015-16 at Pathsala during 15 days Ras Mohatsav Udzapan in Normal Weather					
Name of the Organisation	Name of the Theatre	No. of Day	No. of Show	No. of Seats with class division and Rate	Total Collection (Rs)
Pathsala Sarbajaniin Kali Puja Udzapan Samiti and Arohi	Rajtilak Theatre	3	3	200 Special@200/-	120000.00
				400 First Class@150/-	180000.00
				600 Second Class@100/-	180000.00
				400 Gallery @ 50/-	60000.00
				Total Collection	540000.00
				Payment Made to the Theatre@110000/-	330000.00
				Gross Profit	210000.00
(Source: Secretary, AROHI, a socio-cultural organization, Pathsala)					

4.5 THE ECONOMICS OF MOBILE HEATRE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:

A close look at the operational structure of mobile theatre, three distinct entities may be observed. They are: the mobile theatre firm (each different theatre group like Awahan, Kohinoor, Raj-tilak etc. which collectively give rise to the mobile theatre industry), the local bodies of groups of people (a club or a set of people, with some common goal of fund raising either for earning profit or collecting money for a cause) who hire the theatre groups to a particular place at a mutually agreed upon price and conditions, and thirdly the viewers who at a non- bargainable price come to the pandal as the ultimate customer.

Among these three, a mobile theater group aims at maximizing its profit

in every successive season. For them, although, the primary customer of their product are the local bodies who hire them and negotiating with whom a theatre group earn the money, a close observation reveals that it is ultimately the consumers who decide the income of the theatre group indirectly. For some reason if the viewers particularly prefer a specific artist or praise a particular play, more viewers than the actual capacity in the pandal will come leading to a case of excess demand. Consequently, more than one extra show may be arranged beyond the actually negotiated number of shows leading to more revenue to the theatre group. Also, this will have a favourable effect on their future market position. Thus, local bodies as middle persons, only earn some commission for providing local conveniences to the theatre groups. In a sense if theatre groups are called 'whole seller' of their product, the local bodies may be termed as 'retailer' and viewers as the 'customers' who pay a market determined price for the product which is sold in a market with different substitutes in the form of different plays staged by different theater groups.

The effort of analyzing a market mechanism for a nonconventional product within the framework of conventional market theories is not new. Wheaton et.al (2010) presented the structure of human trafficking market under the light of monopolistically competitive structure. In doing so the traffickers were presented as intermediaries between vulnerable individuals and employers by supplying differentiated products to employers. In this market the consumers were presented as the employers of trafficked labour and products were human beings. This study successfully provided a theoretical ground upon which further research evolved.

The market mechanism of mobile theatres is a unique one. Viewing through the prism of the theory of markets, theatre companies act as one of the few firms operating in a monopolistically competitive market. A conventional monopolistically competitive market structure is characterized by the features like many firms, many buyers, existence of close substitutes, presence of selling cost and free entry and free exits to and from the firm. There are many firms within the industry of mobile theatres competing with each other to gain maximum price per unit of its output (play staged) with differentiated product

reflected in the different genres of acts. Each of these theatre groups competes with one another for market share. Depending on the popularity of a particular group earned over the years in the long run and the presence of star artists supported by a play written by some popular script writer in the short run determine together its value in the market. Each mobile theatre company starts its campaign for the next season once the plays and the artists are confirmed. The local bodies hiring theatre groups also try to maximize its profit by minimizing the possible risks. Depending on the anticipated consumer's behaviour based on their budget constraints a local intermediary decides what type of or within what amount of money they are going to spend for hiring a theatre group. It may be further added that each theatre company sets its price in such a way that the long run equilibrium is reached in terms of total number of shows staged (i.e., quantity of output) and the amount of money charged per night (equilibrium price).

Whenever a theatre company gets ready for its next season it puts high emphasis on the advertisement highlighting the glamorous and known celebrities that have come under contract and also on the plays written by known and popular writers appealing to the masses. For example, Dr. Bhabendranath Saikia's plays written for Awahan Theatre had a distinct group of audience which was one of the focal points for its advertisement. This advertisement cost incurred by different theatre groups reflect non price competition. Promoting sales of their tickets for coming shows is quite common in practice. The high contract money with the big glamorous artists is a combination of remuneration as a wage and selling cost for their glamour. Whenever a club or local body hires a theatre company for a season, the pamphlets and posters for local advertisements are supplied by the theatre company and the club only adds stickers showing the dates concerned. In addition to that, the advertisement cost in the newspaper, in social media are also borne by theatre companies.

In a nutshell, a few theatre companies competing with each other selling 'playful' entertainment in differentiated form with embedded selling cost leads to a monopolistically competitive market for them.

Looking at the cost structure of a theatre company, we find two types of cost viz fixed cost and variable cost as shown in the table no. 4.5.

Primary survey among theatre groups reveals that some of the highly placed theatre groups in the market have two sets of stages and pandals etc. for preventing discontinuity in their respective shows from one place to another. They also have their own transportation conveyance as a part of fixed costs.

Table- 4.5	
Cost Structure of Mobile Theatre	
Fixed Cost	Variable Cost
1. Infrastructure like Pandal, Chairs, Stage Accessories, Transportation Infrastructure etc. 2. Artists, especially star artists, who are in contract for the whole season	1. Transportation Cost, 2. Daily wage local labours, 3. Salary for the artists whose contracts are performance based
Source: Primary Survey	

It is interesting to note that with given fixed cost structure each theatre group is limited to a maximum number of shows it can perform in a season of stipulated time limit. Starting from zero number of shows in the season, its average cost will start decreasing with increase in its number of shows initially. But if it intends to go for further expansion of number of shows, it will be in need of expansion of fixed assets associated with added complicity in maintenance. Thus, due to diseconomies of scale at the initial level, economies of scale at the later level and due to higher complicity in very large scale, a theatre company faces a conventional U-shaped AC curve as shown in Figure 4.1. The marginal cost (MC) curve will also take conventional U shape intersecting AC curve at its lowest.

Figure 4.1
Average Cost Curve of Mobile

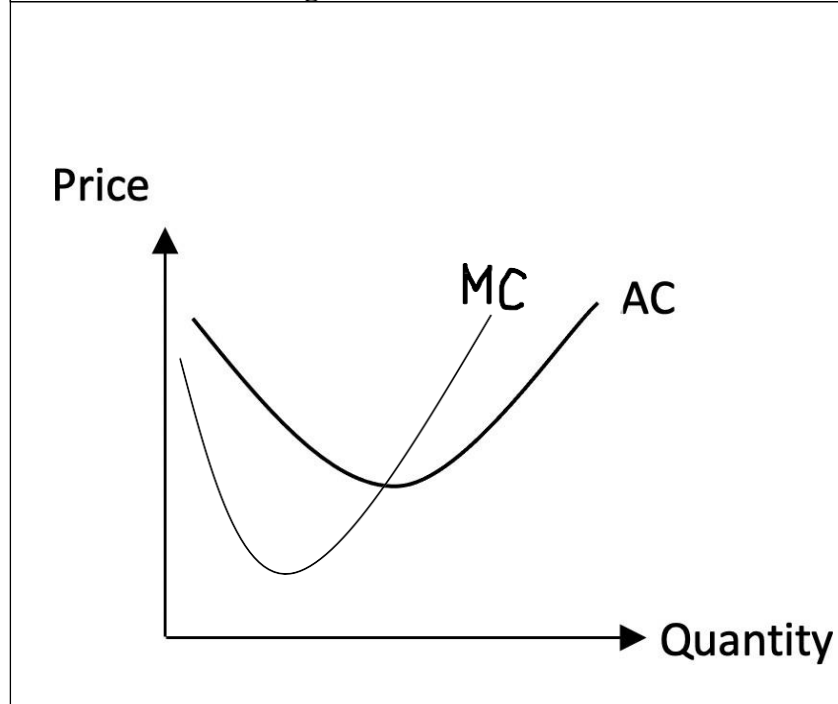
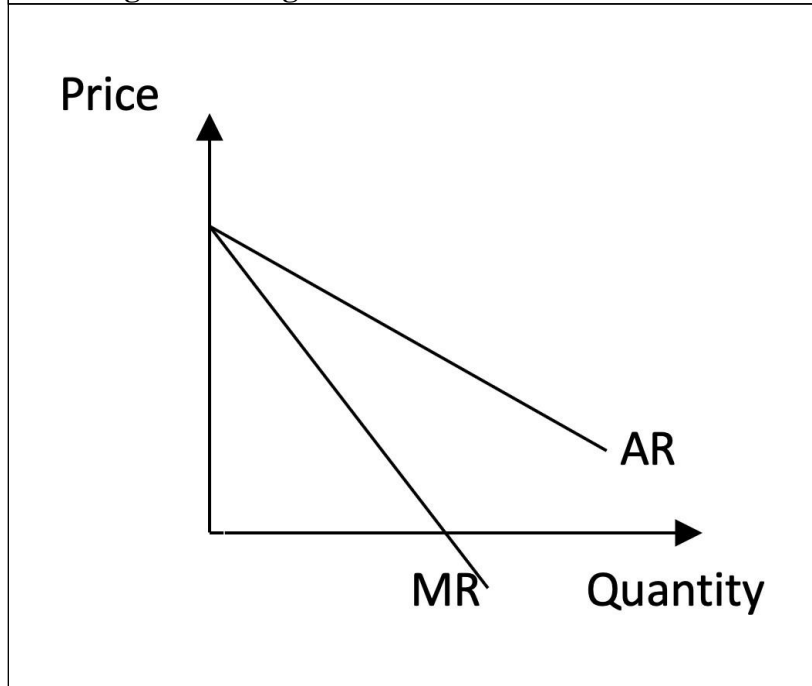


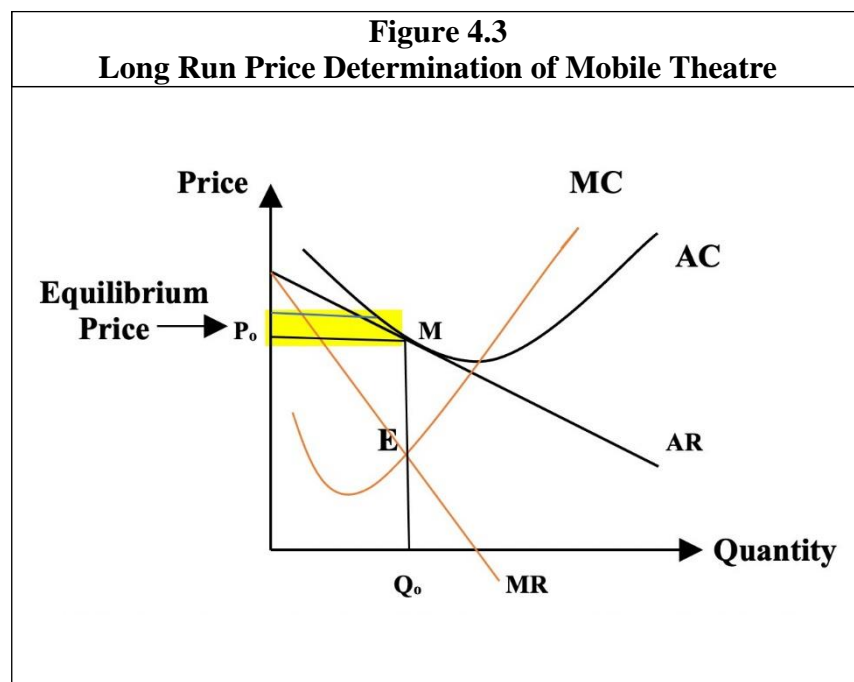
Figure 4.2
Average and Marginal Revenue line of Mobile Theatre



Each theatre group sets the price for their performances which is limited by the demand behaviour of local intermediaries and final

consumer's budget constraint. High price leads to market restrictions for the low-income group consumers. Different theatre groups set their prices on the basis of market behaviour. While hiring a theatre group, local intermediaries go for the group which suits their anticipated profit and at lowest cost. From the theatre group's point of view, if they set the price higher, they will sell less quantity (a smaller number of shows) in the market. On the other hand, a low price will enable more local groups to hire them. The demand line, thus, is the demand behaviour reflected directly by the hiring local bodies which in turn is a reflection of the final consumers who actually come as audience. In a way, each theatre company encounters a downward sloping demand line. Technically speaking, like typical monopolistic competition each firm (here theatre group) demonstrates downward sloping AR as well as MR line as shown in figure number 4.2. In a way, this demand line is a hypothetical perceived demand line for the particular theatre group.

Once the shapes of cost and revenue curves of a mobile theatre group are determined, the equilibrium level of price (price per show) and output (number of shows performed during a season) may be determined with the help of the determining equilibrium point of intersection (E).



Equilibrium point E as shown in the diagram 4.3 satisfies two fundamental profit maximizing conditions: MC is equal to MR and MC curve cuts the MR line from below. The long run equilibrium price can be located, deriving from the equilibrium point E, at point M for the monopolistically competitive market under discussion at which average cost (AC) and average revenue (AR) are equal.

In contrast to purely mathematical or graphical approach to the determination of long run equilibrium price and output of monopolistic competition, mobile theatres set their price around this equilibrium price P_0 on the basis of long run experience, trial and error method and most importantly looking around the prices of other theatre groups. Although, there is a difference in the method of determination, the variation of actual price from the long run equilibrium price P_0 owes to a different reason. The business of mobile theatre differs from other forms of businesses in various ways. It is peculiar as only investing capital in the form of money is not enough to enter the market. Skilled labour force (i.e., artists, writers, directors etc.) is the most important ingredient supported by enough capital investment are necessary requirements. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the market is characterized by free entry and free exit of the firms, in reality, each possible new entrant is limited by high capital investment and availability of skilled labour force.

As there are some specific barriers in the new entry of firms, the existing firms may use this opportunity to set their price little bit higher than the graphically determined equilibrium price P_0 . Moreover, each season is different from the earlier one. Also, for each season the bookings start from the earlier one which again helps the theatre group to set the price in a convenient way that suits their long run business sentiments based on their experiences which remains somewhere around the equilibrium price P_0 but higher than P_0 .

The actual price being higher than the equilibrium price P_0 diminishes consumers welfare as they are charged high due to market imperfections. This market imperfections may be addressed with more

fund to the new entrants in the form of loan. It may further be added that so long as the mobile theatre groups are not registered as firms, with other paper works, which in turn requires enrolment in group insurance and employees' provident funds they won't be subjected to organized public loan system and the market imperfections won't be removed.

Once the price between the theatre group and the local intermediary is set, the local hiring body decides to sell tickets for each play differently to the viewers or the final consumers. This price determination is only an effort to charge maximum possible price to maximize the commission once the 'wholesale price' is set.

It may be noted that although the local intermediary group hiring mobile theatre in the locality is a buyer in a monopolistically competitive environment, in setting the price of each seat in the theatre pandal, they exhibit the characteristic of monopoly seller and sets price on the basis of discriminatory price mechanism in order to reap maximum revenue. This allows them to reach to the pockets of different economic strata on the basis of customers' affordability.

Thus, the market of mobile theatres exhibits characteristics of monopolistic competition, whereas, long run equilibrium prices are determined by experience, trial and error method and most importantly looking around the prices of other theatre groups by each firm which tend to converge towards long run equilibrium price in order to sell total production (total number of shows for a season) with the sole aim of profit maximization with the coexistence of market imperfections causing higher price and reducing consumers' welfare.

Appendix 4.1

Today, the(Day)of
.....(Month) ,.....(Year), st Party
Sri/Smti
.....(
Producer/Secretary/Representative), Theatre Bhagyadevi, PO-Morowa, Dist-
Nalbari, Assam

Versus

2nd Party Sri/Smti
.....
S/D
of.....
.....

Vill/WardNo.....
.....
PO.....,PS.....
.....,Dist.....,
PIN....., on theday of
.....
(Month),.....(Year), for a total of
.....days for the aid of.....at
.....place, pledge for the performance of
Bhagyadevi Theatre for the Theatre Year 2019-20 and the 1st Party receives an
advance amount of Rs.....
(Rs.....only) in cash/by DD. The 2nd Party does
hereby solemnly promise to pay Rs.....
(Rs.....Only) per show to the 1st
Party and both the 1st and the 2nd party do hereby solemnly pledge to also
completely abide by the terms and conditions laid down by the 1st Party as
described below:

Terms and conditions

1. All governmental/non-governmental taxes and transportation costs will be borne by the 2nd party. No donation shall be paid by the 1st party to anyone. The 2nd party shall be liable to pay donations ,if any, to the concerned organization.
2. Workers /technicians shall arrive a few days before the scheduled day of performance for setting up the auditorium. The 2nd party shall make all provisions for their food and lodging including toilets etc. and it shall look after the security and well being of the goods and workers/technicians of the 1st party from arrival to exit from the concerned place of performance.
3. (a) The producer shall be provided with a room of the standard of an Inspection Bunglow. A separate room capable of accommodating two persons, adjacent to that of the producer's, shall be provided for the

assistants of the producer. The presence of all necessary provisions like furniture assortments, toilet and electricity shall be ensured.

(b) The assistant producer shall also be provided with similar facilities as mentioned above.

(c) For a comfortable stay, the main actors shall be provided with decent rooms. A separate room capable of accommodating two persons, adjacent to that of the actors', shall be provided for his/her assistants. The presence of all necessary provisions like furniture assortments, toilet and electricity shall be ensured.

(d) For other actors, music artistes, and dance artistes 17 nos. of rooms, capable of accommodating two persons per room, shall be provided. The presence of all necessary provisions like furniture assortments, toilet and electricity shall be ensured.

(e) For four female actors, 4 nos. of rooms, capable of accommodating two persons per room, shall be provided. The presence of all necessary provisions like furniture assortments, toilets and electricity shall be ensured.

(f) For eight female dance artistes, a house with 3-4 nos. of rooms, with adequate provisions for security and facilities like furniture assortments, toilets and electricity shall be ensured. A separate room for these artistes' female supervisor shall be provided.

(g) Lodging facilities with adequate provisions of furniture assortments, toilets and electricity for 12 light technicians and 40 stage workers shall be made. (preferably near the pandal)

(h) A spacious (20X20 ft. approx) kitchen with provisions for supply of clean water and fuel shall be ensured by the 2nd party. The cost of fuel shall be borne by the 2nd party. Adequate lodging facilities for the kitchen staff, preferably nearby the kitchen area, shall be made. Ten pairs of desks and benches shall also be provided for dining.

4. A spacious open space (field) measuring 150X200 ft approx. must be there for setting up of the auditorium. A good approach road, durable enough for a 10 tonne truck, must be there for transportation of heavy equipments and tents.

5. (a) A green room or dressing room with tin roof of 20X100 ft approx. is to be provided 25 ft. behind the stage. It is to be covered on all four sides and divided into two sections for the safe keeping of stage paraphernalia. (It is to be ensured that light does not go out of it.)

(b) A temporary urinal is to be provided in the vicinity of the stage.

6. (a) Adequate fencing around the auditorium is to be ensured so that cattle and unwanted elements are kept at bay. A temporary toilet is to be provided

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at a reasonable distance from the auditorium for the audience .An emergency exit route behind the auditorium shall also be provided for.

(b) An entry route for light motor vehicles (four wheelers) shall be provided near the stage.

7. The 1st party will provide some publicity/advertisement material(s) to the 2nd party, which shall collect the same from the office of the former. The 1st party's role shall be limited to this only with regard to publicity/advertisement.

8. (a) The 2nd party shall ensure electricity supply a day prior to the first stage performance by collecting test report etc. (single phase).The 1st party shall bear Rs. 500.00 of the total electricity bill for the period. The 1st party shall not be liable for providing light to any other area except the auditorium and the ticket counter(s).

(b) The 2nd party shall provide a space measuring 10X20 ft. for installation of power generators with adequate security. Water supply shall also be ensured.

9. (a) the 1st party shall not be liable to any action in case of Cancellation/stoppage of performance, damage to the tents of the auditorium or change of artiste(s) in the event of natural disasters or any other unforeseen event.

(b)The 1st party shall reserve all rights for the dramas, the programs for the performance of dance dramas (nritya natika), change(s) in the performance schedule etc. There shall be no provision for any intermission.

(c) Plants/trees and furniture assortments (chairs, tables etc.) needed for performing shall be provided free of cost by the 2nd party.

10. the 1st party shall get Rs.1,10,009.00 for the first show of every day. In case of second show, the 1st party and the 2nd party shall get 65% and 35% respectively of the total

amount collected. The 1st party shall provide tickets etc. for the second show, if any. (There shall be no provision for season tickets in case of second show)

11. In case of cancellation of a scheduled performance, the 2nd party shall inform the 1st party at least a month prior to it, failing which the advance amount shall stand forfeited. Apart from it, the 1st party shall have every right to claim adequate compensation in such an eventuality.

12. Amounts mentioned in this contract shall be paid before each show on each night. The advance amount shall be adjusted at the last show.

13. The 2nd party shall reserve 40 nos. of complimentary seats in every show for the guests/dignitaries of the 1st party. Invitations of the 1st party shall be applicable in this case.

14. The 1st party shall be obliged to provide 1100 chairs and a galler with a seating capacity of 500 persons. If, for any unintended reasons, the number of chairs happen to be less than 1100, the 2nd party shall not complain.

The gallery shall be set up by the 1st party. It shall also unload the chairs from the truck(s). the 2nd party shall arrange them.

300 more chairs than that provided by the 1st party may be arranged. *However, if it is more than 300, the theatre producer/representative shall be contacted and discussed.*

15. (a) If the lodgings of artistes are located far from the auditorium, the 2nd party shall provide for their adequate security and conveyance to and fro free of cost.

(b) The 2nd party shall provide a night watchman at the pandal with the 1st party.

16. All law suits shall be carried out under the jurisdiction of the courts of Nalbari

District.

17. Verbal assurance, promise, deal etc. on the part of the 1st party representative(s), if any, shall not be of any consequence whatsoever.

With full knowledge of everything that is laid down in this contract, I/We do hereby solemnly pledge, in a fully stable state of both body and mind, to abide by all the terms and conditions of this contract.

Signature of the 1st Party

Signature of the 2nd Party

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(Source: Agreement Copy of Theatre Bhagyadevi and translated to English)

Appendix –4.2

One Year Schedule of Show of Awahan Theatre in the season 2019-20

Sl. No.	From	To	Village/ Town	District
1	20/08/2019	28/08/2019	Pathsala	Barpeta
2	29/08/2019	31/08/2019	Dumuria	Barpeta
3	01/09/2019	03/09/2019	Manas	Baksa
4	04/09/2019	06/09/2019	Sarupeta	Barpeta
5	07/09/2019	09/09/2019	Helana	Barpeta
6	10/09/2019	12/09/2019	Barimakha	Baksa
7	13/09/2019	15/09/2019	Makhibaha	Nalbari
8	16/09/2019	18/09/2019	Jonaram chouka	Darrang
9	19/09/2019	21/09/2019	Dimu	Kamrup
10	22/09/2019	24/09/2019	Barbhag	Nalbari
11	25/09/2019	27/09/2019	Mirja	Kamrup
12	28/09/2019	30/09/2019	Goreswar	Baksa
13	01/10/2019	03/10/2019	Dijari	Nalbari
14	04/10/2019	06/10/2019	Borka Durgapuja	Kamrup
15	07/10/2019	09/10/2019	Belshar	Nalbari
16	10/10/2019	12/10/2019	Karara	Kamrup
17	13/10/2019	15/10/2019	Dongpar LaxmiPuja	Baksa
18	16/10/2019	18/10/2019	Hajirapara	Darrang
19	19/10/2019	21/10/2019	Ganeshguri	Guwahati
20	22/10/2019	24/10/2019	Bijni	Chirang
21	25/10/2019	27/10/2019	Ratakuchi Kalipuja	Kamrup
22	28/10/2019	30/10/2019	Kharadhara	Barpeta
23	31/10/2019	02/11/2019	Nikasi	Baksa
24	03/11/2019	05/11/2019	Nalbari	Nalbari
25	06/11/2019	07/11/2019	Kulhati	Kamrup
26	08/11/2019	10/11/2019	Gitanagar	Kamrup
27	11/11/2019	13/11/2019	Palashbari Ras	Kamrup
28	14/11/2019	16/11/2019	Chaygaon	Kamrup
29	17/11/2019	19/11/2019	Boko	Kamrup
30	20/11/2019	22/11/2019	Nagarbera	Kamrup
31	23/11/2019	25/11/2019	Dudhnoi	Goalpara
32	26/11/2019	28/11/2019	Lakhipur	Goalpara
33	29/11/2019	01/12/2019	Abhayapuri	Bongaigaon
34	02/12/2019	04/12/2019	Bongaigaon	Bongaigaon
35	05/12/2019	07/12/2019	Chapar	Dhubri
36	08/12/2019	10/12/2019	Bilasipara	Dhubri
37	11/12/2019	13/12/2019	Guripur	Dhubri

38	14/12/2019	16/12/2019	Goalpara	Goalpara
39	17/12/2019	19/12/2019	Salmara	Bonington
40	20/12/2019	22/12/2019	Sarbhog	Barpeta
41	23/12/2019	25/12/2019	Barpetaroad	Barpeta
42	26/12/2019	28/12/2019	Barpeta	Barpeta
43	29/12/2019	31/12/2019	Kalaigaon	Udalguri
44	01/01/2020	03/01/2020	Udalguri	Udalguri
45	04/01/2020	06/01/2020	Bihaguri	Shonitpur
46	07/01/2020	09/01/2020	Kaliyabar	Nagaon
47	10/01/2020	12/01/2020	Bishwanath Chariali	Shonitpur
48	13/01/2020	15/01/2020	Chatia	Shonitpur
49	16/01/2020	18/01/2020	Narayanpur	Lakhimpur
50	19/01/2020	21/01/2020	Thelamara	Shonitpur
51	22/01/2020	24/01/2020	Bebejiya	Nagaon
52	25/01/2020	27/01/2020	Jagibhakatgaon	Marigaon
53	28/01/2020	30/01/2020	Ural , Sonapur	Kamrup
54	31/01/2020	02/02/2020	Azara	Kamrup
55	03/02/2020	05/02/2020	Bezera	Kamrup
56	06/02/2020	09/02/2020	Makhibaha Sabha	Nalbari
57	10/02/2020	12/02/2020	SarthebariSabha	Barpeta
58	13/02/2020	15/02/2020	Jagiya	Nagaon
59	16/02/2020	18/02/2020	Neharubali Nagaon	Nagaon
60	19/02/2020	21/02/2020	Kuwarital	Nagaon
61	22/02/2020	24/02/2020	Jamuguri	Shonitpur
62	25/02/2020	27/02/2020	Gogamukh	Lakhimpur
63	28/02/2020	01/03/2020	Nayabazar	Majuli
64	02/03/2020	04/03/2020	Garmurh	Majuli
65	05/03/2020	07/03/2020	Rounappar	Majuli
66	08/03/2020	10/03/2020	Dhakuakhana	Dhemaji
67	11/03/2020	13/03/2020	Dibrugarh	Dibrugarh
68	14/03/2020	16/03/2020	Maran	Dibrugarh
69	17/03/2020	19/03/2020	Shibasagar	Shibasagar
70	20/03/2020	22/03/2020	Jorhat	Jorhat
71	23/03/2020	25/03/2020	Tiyak	Jorhat
72	26/03/2020	28/03/2020	Dergaon	Golaghat
73	29/03/2020	31/03/2020	Barguri	Golaghat
74	01/04/2020	03/04/2020	Numaligarh	Golaghat
75	04/04/2020	06/04/2020	Tejpur	Shonitpur
76	07/04/2020	09/04/2020	Dhekiajuli	Shonitpur
77	10/04/2020	12/04/2020	Mandakata	Kamrup

(Source: Krisna Ror, Producer, Awahan Theatre)