

Role Of Kohinoor Theatre In Socio-Economic Development Of Assam

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Abstract:

‘Bhramyaman Theatre’ (Mobile Theatre) is a unique drama tradition in Assam. It is one of the most popular and influential industries in Assam. This medium of entertainment, founded with drama and acting as its base, is rarely found in other places outside Assam. In a word, ‘Bhramyaman’ (mobile) theatre is a unique identity of Assam. Kohinoor Theatre has a special interest in the development of social cohesion by giving a new look to the traveling drama tradition or the mobile theatre of Assam. Kohinoor has been playing a leading role in the development of Assamese language, culture and heritage since its inception in the seventies. Greater Assamese culture has been enriched by the combination of different cultures of different castes and ethnic groups. That is why traditional folk songs and sounds, folk tales of the different ethnic groups of Assam are presented in the stage of Kohinoor Theatre which has made the Theatre acceptable to all and has strengthened the process of nation-building in Assam. Kohinoor Theatre's role in strengthening the harmony between Upper Assam and Lower Assam and Hills and Valleys in the state is immense. At various times it has been playing a leading role in creating social awareness through the medium of art. This study has been selected with a view to see how the various roles played by the Kohinoor Theatre in the socio-cultural and economic aspects have helped in the transformation of the socio-economic life of Assam.

Keywords: Mobile Theatre, Kohinoor Theatre, Assam, Jatrada, Drama

0.0 Introduction

0.1 Introduction to the Subject:

The tradition of modern Assamese drama has progressed in two directions. One is the theatrical genre dedicated to the amateur theater and the other is the theatrical genre dedicated to the traveling

genre. An advanced and modern form of traveling theatre, the mobile theatre by adopting two strategies from the proscenium stage as well as from the films and expanding the cultural work has gained a strong public status. In 1959, Sadananda Lahkar started the Nataraj Opera, a modern mobile theatre troupe in Pathshala which was later given a new identity in 1963 by his elder brother Achyut Lahakar and was named the Nataraj Theatre. Later, following the Nataraj Theatre, a large number of theatrical troupes were born, which gave a new look to the traveling theatre genre. Among those mobile theatrical troupes founded in the seventies, Kohinoor Theatre is one of the most popular troupes.

The Kohinoor theatre troupe has been instrumental in the development of Assam's art, literature, society and culture in all directions as well as in the economic field. This Theatre troupe is very popular in the traveling drama genre of Assam. The main reason is the 'Naats' (plays) they serve. From the year of its birth in 1976 to the present year, Kohinoor Theatre has been staging a great number of plays which have an immense contribution to the field of Assamese drama. The plays staged by the Kohinoor Theatre are entertaining and have a rich literary quality as well as social consciousness. Its role in creating awareness against immoral activities like rape, murder, disorder etc. in the society through drama is significant. The harmony of Kohinoor Theatre has become a strong foundation in the cultural economy of Assam like the writings of other theatre groups which have given a strong dimension to the traveling drama genre of Assam. Its role in establishing employment in the performing arts world for the artisans of the state as well as in building educational and social programs with a sense of social responsibility is remarkable. The role played by this troupe in the cultural as well as social and economic aspects of Assam is very significant. This article titled Role of Kohinoor Theatre in the Socio-economic Development of Assam attempts to do an analytical discussion of the roles of the Kohinoor Theatre in the social lifestyle and development of the state and the aspects which are covered by this theatre in order to do so.

0.2 Purpose and Significance of the study:

0.2.1 Purpose:

The main purpose of the paper titled Role of the Kohinoor Theatre in the Socio-Economic Development of Assam discusses the various roles of the Kohinoor Theatre in the development of the social life of Assam. The following are the purpose of the research paper:

1. To explore the role of Kohinoor Theatre troupe in the economic development of Assam.
2. To explore the role of Kohinoor in the development of the social sphere.
3. To explore the role of Kohinoor Theatre troupe in cultural transition.
4. To judge the moral values and knowledge created by Kohinoor's play and the social consciousness created by knowledge.

0.2.2 Significance:

In the context of Assam's traveling drama genre: Kohinoor Theatre's role is important in various aspects of society, such as political, economic, cultural, educational, entertainment, public opinion formation, national unity, etc. Kohinoor Theatre has been gaining popularity in both rural and urban areas since its inception as one of the major means of mass communication. From this point of view too, the selected research work is important. However, there have been several studies on mobile theater, although no research or systematic study has been conducted on the role of Kohinoor Theatre. Therefore, the proposed research topic has its importance for a systematic discussion of Kohinoor Theatre's role.

0.3 Methods of study:

The methods of studies such as data analysis and the field study method have been used for data collection and data analysis of the selected subject of the research paper although the field study method has gained special importance. Descriptive and analytical methods have been used in the analysis of the subject.

0.3.1 Field Study Methodology:

The proposed research work has resorted to field based study methodology as a method of data collection. The following methods have been used in the field study:

(A) Questionnaire method:

A question paper has been prepared to ensure that the information collected for the proposed research work is organized and consistent. The questionnaire included questions about the origins and development of the Kohinoor group, its originality, plays with different themes, the techniques used in performing plays, etc.

(B) Observation method:

The proposed research work has collected information through direct conversations with the sponsors and other artisans of the Kohinoor Theatre group.

(C) Interview method:

The proposed research work also collects information through interviews. For the interview, information has been collected by selecting sponsors, playwrights, artisans associated with the Kohinoor Theatre group.

1.0 Bhramyomaan (Mobile) Theatre of Assam and Kohinoor Natyadal (Theatre troupe) : An Introduction

Bhramyoman (Mobile) Theatre, an exceptional theatre genre of Assam, was established during the post-independence period. The traveling theatre troupes, which have been going through various ups and downs, have recently been recognized and admired as one of the strongest mass cultural

mediums in Assam. Assam's ever-growing mobile theatre has been well-received by audiences as well as critics and critics in the field of culture.

1.1 Bhramyoman Theatre (Mobile Theatre)

1.1.1 Meaning and Definition of Bhramyoman Theatre (Mobile Theatre)

The term “Bhramyoman Theatre” refers to an act which goes to different places and performs on stage temporarily. According to the lexical meaning, the word “Bhramyoman” means to move from one place to another or mobile¹. The term “Theatre”, on the other hand, refers to a theatrical or open space for theatrical content². Theatre is derived from the Greek word 'Theatron', which is derived from 'Theastai'. According to the dictionary, theatre is one of the large areas where musical and plays are performed³. Elsewhere in India, commercial theatre plays are performed on permanent stages. But the mobile theatre of Assam travels to various places with temporary and portable stage performances. This sets the mobile theatre apart from other theatres. Due to this difference, Radhagovinda Baruah after watching the plays of the first mobile theater of Assam “Nataraj Theatre” appreciated their efforts and named this medium of theater as the “Bharmyoman Theatre” through the newspapers Dainik Asom and The Assam Tribune and since then it has been known as the Bhramyomaan Theatre⁴.

1.1.2 The Source of Origin

After the Yandaboo Treaty of 1826, the Loknatya Jatra of Bengal arrived in Assam to entertain the Bengali-speaking people. The Assamese people also started to form Jatra dals in imitation of the Bengali Jatras. In 1807-22, under the leadership of Tithiram Bayan and under the patronage of Gavindaram Chowdhury, the first Jatra Party was formed in Assam. Tithiram Bayan's Jatra was the first Assamese theatre troupe to travel to different parts of Assam⁵. From 1860 to 1930, Kamarup and Goalpara districts were the centers of many such expeditions in Assam.

With the formation of the Shila Kalika Opera Party in 1921, Brajnath Sharma gave a new dimension to the travelling theatre world in Assam. After it broke down in 1929, he formed the Assam Kohinoor Opera Party in 1930 with the financial help of Bipin Chandra Baruah of PuraniGudam. By 1938, the group had been able to gain popularity by performing Bengali dramas as well as basic Assamese dramas like Maran Jiyari, Naga Konwar and Ban Raja. Braj Nath Sharma's Kohinoor Opera was the first full-fledged commercial traveling theatre troupe in Assam. From that point on, Brajnath Sharma is considered to be the first patron of traveling drama. While performing at the Jorhat Natya Mancha, the Assam Kohinoor Opera Party transformed into the Assam Kohinoor Theatre⁶.

¹ Basanta Kumar Goswami, *Byavaharik Asamiya Abhidhan*, p.1237

² Ibid, p.895

³ Jogesh Das (edi.), *Bishnu Prasad Rabha Rachanawali*, p.55

⁴ Kishor Kumar Kalita, *Bhramyaman theatarar itihās*, p. 197

⁵ Ibid,p.16

⁶ Dhiren Sharma, *Asamar natya-subash*,p.33

The Natraj Opera troupe founded by Sadananda Lahkar in Pathshala in 1959, had also performed plays in various places. Sadananda Lahakar's elder brother Achyut Lahakar transformed the Nataraja Opera and on October 2, 1983, the first modern full-fledged Assamese traveling theater troupe was born called the "Nataraja Theatre". All these happened in a temporary stage and workshop in the front yard of the Hari Mandir situated in Pathshala. His theatre group successfully presented three plays Bhogjora, Jerengar Soti, Beula as their first step in the journey of mobile theatre. His efforts led to the development of the mobile theatre. The Nataraj Theatre staged plays in different parts of Assam from the year 1963 to 2003. Apart from that, the Theatre also staged plays in other states like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and were successful in popularizing the flow of Mobile Theatre.

1.1.3 Various mobile theatre troupes of Assam:

The ideals and success of Nataraj Theatre, organized in 1973, inspired many to form traveling theater troupes in Assamese, Bodo, Bengali, Nepali, Tea Tribes etc. Many of the later traveling theatre troupes have disappeared for various reasons, and some were renamed.

Mobile Theatre groups that were founded with Nataraj Theatre as their inspiration were Dharani Barman's "Surdevi Theatre", Karuna Mazumdar's "Purbajyoti Theatre", Biren Kalita's "Roopkonwar Theatre", Sada Lahkar's "Aradhana Theatre", Ratan Lahkar's "Kohinoor Theatre", Krishna Roy's "Aavahaan Theatre", Prashanta Hazarika's "Hengul Theatre", Sarat Mazumdar's "Theatre Bhagyadevi", Atul Bhattacharya's "Mukunda Theatre", Hemakanta Talukdar's "Mancharupa Theatre" and "Rupanjali Theatre", Biswa Saikia's "Srimanta Sankardev Theatre", "Jyotirupa Theatre" produced by Gulaap Borgohain, and "Anirban Theatre" and "Aparoopo Theatre" both founded by the production of Subhash Choudhury etc are noteworthy.

On the other hand, theatre groups in other languages of Assam were also formed. Such as in Bodo language, "Bardaichikhala Theatre", "Barlamfa Theatre", "Dwijau Faunai Afat" etc, amongst the Tea Tribes are "Amaltara Theatre", "Binandini Theatre", "Nayantara Theatre", "Nayachan Theatre" etc. The only Nepali language theatre group is the "Laligurash Theatre".

1.2 Kohinoor Theatre

1.2.1 Origin and Development

The Kohinoor Theatre founded in the latter half of the twentieth century is one of the noteworthy theatre troupes of Assam. The Theatre, which was jointly founded by Ratan Lahkar and Krishna Rai in Pathshaala in the year 1976, staged their plays keeping in mind the commercial aspect. However, Ratan Lahkar had been the sole producer of the Theatre troupe since 1980. Since the demise of Ratan Lahkar on January 29, 2017, Tapan Lahkar has been the sponsor of Kohinoor Theatre Troupe. The word "Kohinoor" literally means "diamond". Ratan Lahkar named the theatre, 'Kohinoor' on the advice of a man named Krishna Hari Deka for the purpose of brightening the name of his theatre troupe like a diamond. By this naming, the theatre meant that Brajnath Sharma's Kohinoor Opera and Kohinoorr diamond's combination was a novelty, with

two words: motion and progress in its vein and in it was hidden Kohinoor's theatrical ideal and significance⁷.

Kohinoor was the first traveling society to take the audience to the next level and it was in this way that the Kohinoor drama troupe was directly or indirectly helped to reach the developing stage. With the financial support of the Central Bank of Guwahati, Kohinoor for the first time has emerged as a strong theatre troupe, paving the way for an organized capital process. From that point of view, the formation of Kohinoor group has been considered as an important milestone in the history of mobile theatre in Assam. Kohinoor was the first mobile theatre troupe to make its debut in a well-organized manner from a financial point of view⁸.

Although Assam has a large number of traveling theatre troupes, Kohinoor is the only theatre troupe in Assam which has performed the largest number of Assamese literary plays on stage. Kohinoor's stage was the beginning of the first dual character performance, a theatrical form of classical literature and foreign plays. In addition, Kohinoor was the first to bring film artists to the world of travelling theatre and introduced themselves as a popular theatre troupe. In addition to taking forward the stage-craft of Assam to a more developed version, Kohinoor Theatre was able to industrialize the Mobile Theatre genre of Assam by inculcating and developing the social, literary, cultural, economic and other such spheres of the state. A cultural industry like Kohinoor not only reflects the performing arts sector but also provides a means of livelihood to so many actors-actresses, technicians and hundreds of people and their families.

1.2.2 Plays presented and staged by Kohinoor:

The main reason for the popularity of Kohinoor's theatre among the people of Assam is the plays they have been performing since 1976. Saraguri Chapori, Hey Mahanagar, Gohbar, Kobor aru Konkaal, Maharanya, Boliya Hati, Tejimola etc are various moral plays staged by Kohinoor Theatre. Bishnu Prasad, a biographical play dealing with a life of thought and art; the Assamese translation of Cleopatra, Benhur, Hamlet, Mrichchakatikam, known as Matir Garhi, Othello, etc. is an impeccable creation of Kohinoor. The Assamese translation of Titanic has made history in the history of travel with Assamese transformations and advanced art-techniques. Although not all of these plays, almost all of them can be said to be original and rich in fundamental dramatic quality.

Kohinoor theatre troupe has performed various plays based on the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata, and has contributed to the development of drama literature in the form of plays. In this case, Kanchan Baruah's novel Ashimot Jaar Xeraal Seema, staged by Kohinoor Theatre in the form of a play by Prafulla Borah in 1978, is one of the most popular dramas in the traveling theatre world. Kohinoor has started a drama revolution by their drama adaptations of novels like Monuram Gogoi's Sagoroloi Bohudur, Reeta Choudhury's Abiroto Jatra, and other novels and popular literary works like Anuradhar Desh, Kaal Shatru, Prarthana, Samrat, Sundari etc.

⁷ Mukul Goswami, 'smritit vahe saru saru kotha', Rana Deka, Himangkan Das (edi.), *Karani*, 27 August, 2016,p.36

⁸ Kishor Kumar Kalita, op.cit.p.83

2.0 The role of Kohinoor Theatre troupe in social transformation:

The direction of social transformation is changing over time and society is no exception. Society is made up of individuals. With the change of time, people change and so do their morals, values, conceptions, thoughts and ideals, etc. This is the social transition. Kohinoor Theatre has been playing a significant role in the transformation of Assamese society and life, although many a time playwrights have been criticized for not accepting the play as a mere entertainment tool. In the same way, the issue of staging plays for making money and doing business has been criticized for a long time. However, the role of Kohinoor Theatre troupe in the socio-economic development of Assam cannot be underestimated.

2.1 Economic Development

2.1.1 Economic Establishment

Ever since its inception, Kohinoor Theatre troupe has contributed to the economic development of the state. The role of Kohinoor Theatre troupe is immense when it comes providing financial assistance to many Assamese artists and artisans. Every year about 130-150 experienced people are employed in Kohinoor's theatre troupe. Every year a large number of actors-actresses, playwrights, directors, producers, songwriters, singers, music producers, choreographer, art directors, stage directors, poster-banner designers, technicians, publicity designer, along with people involved with different departments like dance, instruments, music, decorations, sound, stage, auditorium, food etc are employed by the Kohinoor Theatre. Kohinoor has helped all these people to make a living and support their families.

Actors - actresses and technicians are contracted by the theater for one year. From mid-July of the year to April of the following year, about 62-80 exhibitions are carried out from Pathshala of Barpeta district to different parts of Assam. The Theatre troupe, for each exhibition receives about Rs. 35,000-50,000 from the convening committee. Out of the total capital, three-fourths are paid to the playwrights, directors, music directors, actors-actresses, and from the rest one part becomes the profit and the other goes to the convener. In this way, everyone who is professionally involved with Kohinoor gets their salary, although the cost of each artist and artisan is different. In addition, local small businesses in the area where the theater troupe performs become active for 3 or 4 days of the event. Based on this information, it can be said that even though the Kohinoor Theatre runs as a sole proprietorship theater, it is not only giving a little relief but also providing a small but economic benefit to the society.

2.1.2 Public Welfare Development

The money earned by the traveling theatre troupes has contributed to the social welfare development of many villages in Assam. In general, educational institutions, associations, and social events in different places invite traveling theater troupes with the objective of raising funds. In this case, the main source of capital for both the theatre troupe and the convener is the audience coupons sold in exchange for the presentation of stage plays. The theatre troupes provide

40 per cent of the proceeds to the convening committee. Therefore, traveling theatre troupes in rural areas are popular not only as a source of entertainment, but also as a source of income or capital.

The steps taken by Kohinoor theatre troupe as a social organizer have been instrumental in the development of social life. In addition to providing financial assistance for the construction of educational institutions, Hari Mandir(Temples), libraries, club-associations, roads etc., the Theatre has also helped raise funds for the Arts Branch of Lakhimpur Commerce College in 1999 by presenting many plays. On the other hand, Kohinoor's efforts at raising the funds of the Mukbodhir school in Jorhat is very well known⁹. In this way, Kohinoor Theatre is widely recognized for its act of social responsibility in the development of educational institutions, religious ceremonies, sports groups, etc. in different parts of Assam. Many times, Kohinoor Theatre has provided financial assistance to the hosting committee when the latter is faced with any loss¹⁰. In this way, Kohinoor Theatre has become a major part of entertainment as well as a part of the social life of Assam.

2.2 Social Development

2.2.1 Development of Assamese Literature

Literature is a reflection of society. As a social person, the writers express the image of society beautifully through literature. Drama plays an important role amongst the various genres of literature. This is because in other genres of literature, the image of society is expressed according to the author's description, but in drama, that image comes to life through acting.

Development of the Drama literature:

The contribution of Kohinoor Theatre troupe in the development of Assamese Drama Literature (Natya Sahitya) Alachani etc. is undeniable. Every year Kohinoor Theatre has staged various plays that contributed a lot for the development of Assamese Drama Literature (Natya Sahitya). Prafulla Borah, Chandra Chowdhury, Mahananda Sharma, Fani Sharma, Hemanta Dutta, Padma Barkataki, Basanta Das, Mahendra Borthakur, Arun Sarma, Pabitra Kumar Deka, Bhaben Baruah, Atul Bordoloi, Durgeswar Borthakur, Indraprasad Hazarika, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Jiten Sarma, Sevabrat Baruah, Pankaj Jyoti Bhuyan, Abhijit Bhattacharya, Bhaskar Barman, Rajdeep Pradeep Dey, Champak Sarma etc are some noteworthy playwrights who have written many plays for Kohinoor Theatre and whose plays are staged and presented to the audience by the Theatre. On the other hand, when it comes to musical plays, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Laxminath Bezbaruwa, Dasharath Das, Arun Sharma, Ajit Talukdar, Neelim Kumar, Mainul Haque, Abdul Karim Khan, Pratima Das and Krishna Phukan are some of the major names.

Ratan Lahkar's role in the development of Assamese drama tradition is noteworthy. Ratan Lahkar was the first person who was able to bring back the naturalness by removing the artificiality

⁹ Ranjan Bhattacharaya, *Natyachetona*, p.207

¹⁰ Primary Data, Tapan Lahkar, producer, Kohinoor Theatre

in the words in the acting world of Assam. Kohinoor's role in giving a new dimension to the playwrights through the art of producing and presenting high quality plays is remarkable. Original plays such as Prafulla Borah's Tejimola, Alankaar, Mahendra Barthakur's Dainir Prem, Arun Sarma's Baghjaal, Mahananda Sarma's Mayamrig; and novels given the form of a play such as Bhabendra Nath Saika's Gohbor, Sevabrat Baruah's Dhumuha Pokhir Sadhu, Mahananda Sarma's Bishkonya; plays adapted from foreign literature such as Cleopatra, Dastaan Shahide Karbala, Teje Loga Baat, Benhur and plays inspired from and based on movies such as Titanic, Tarzan, Dinosaur Atonko etc are some of the noteworthy plays staged by Kohinoor Theatre. In this way, by translating or adapting the original Assamese plays as well as the theatrical forms of local and foreign fiction and some of the best plays in the world, Kohinoor Theatre has made a name for itself in Assamese drama. During the pre-Independence period, Assamese Drama Literary writing had limited social plays, although this trend was strengthened by a large number of social realist dramas in the period post independence. Many of the plays that have been staged by Kohinoor from its inception to date have not been published yet. The publication and preservation of these plays will further enrich Assamese drama literature.

- **Kohinoor's mouthpiece magazine Karani:**

Almost all traveling theatre troupes publish their respective annual mouthpiece and a number of staged plays which are making their way and contributing to the growth of the Assamese literary world. In the past, before the performance of the play at the procession, a piece of paper describing in detail about the characters of the play, the math department, which character would appear on the stage, etc., was distributed among the audience. This piece of paper was called the 'program'. The Nataraj Theatre improved the system by introducing people associated with the troupe, including facial images of the artists. This little book was called the "Anusthaanlipi". In September 1976, the Kohinoor Theatre troupe published and distributed its own mouthpiece magazine called Karani in place of the "Anusthaanlipi". The mouthpieces of various drama troupes in Assam were published, although some were closed completely or some are not published every year due to lack of funds. But the specialty of Kohinoor Theatre troupe is that this group has been publishing Karani every year from its inception till date. Since then, Karani has been able to find a special place in Assamese drama literature.

Kohinoor's annual mouthpiece 'Karani' has also contributed to the development of Assamese literature by preserving the information of this theatre troupe. Kohinoor's Karani reflects the works and lives of the playwrights, directors, plays, musical plays, actors and actresses, musicians and dancers, art and crafts and the expertise and talents of the technicians and stage artists etc along with the social consciousness of the local well-wishers and drama lovers, and people associated with the art of drama from different parts and localities of Assam. On the opening page of each issue, there is a quote from Bishnu Prasad Rabha. This is followed by a remarkable page which pays homage to the late artists from the literary world to the traveling theatre world, as well as to other people involved in traveling theatre. In this way, the mouthpiece consists of different sections like the sponsor's message, the editorial, an essay of a well-known

author in every issue, the inside story, a word of prayer, interviews, travelogues, etc. and regular issues of the Karani have been published as an important magazine since its inception. In addition to this, the images and names of artists, technicians etc have become a valuable part of the Bhramyaman or Mobile Theatre history.

The works of the important people leading the Kohinoor Theatre, the artists and the technicians, the plays staged and presented by the Theatre etc reflected by the Karani and some of the insightful essays published in the mouthpiece have all contributed to the development of Assamese Literature as a whole.

2.2.2 Establishment of National Unity and Solidarity

The role played by the Kohinoor Theatre troupe in the field of unity and solidarity is noteworthy. About 130-150 people in Kohinoor have to travel to different parts of Assam for about eight months of the year and stay directly or indirectly as family members. The members of this family are from different languages, different communities and different regions. In addition, they stay in the same place for three or four days. In those days they became close to the local people. Under different circumstances, sometimes the artisans and craftsmen of the troupe have to stay in the houses of the local people, and create a bond like family members with the host family. In this way, the actors and artists are enriched with the experience of the local culture of different parts of Assam. In the same manner, during the presentation of the play, everyone, regardless of caste, creed and creed, shows unity as a family.

Most of the plays staged by the Kohinoor Theatre clearly review the direction of social degradation and build social harmony among the masses with the message of morality, unity and brotherhood. In this case, it can be said that communal harmony can be manifested in the words written by Mahendra Barthakur in his play Saraguri Sapori't. Based on the life of Ajan Fakir and based on Zikir songs, the play was instrumental in eradicating communalism and awakening the national consciousness. The play, which was staged by Kohinoor at Bejara near Baihata Chariali a few years ago, brought tears to the eyes of both Hindu and Muslim audiences¹¹. In this way, Kohinoor Theatre troupe has been playing a leading role in maintaining the sense of harmony among different castes and communities.

2.2.3 Promotion and Dissemination of Assamese Culture:

Kohinoor has performed outside Assam with the aim of introducing Assam's mobile theater to the world. With the efforts of Ratan Lahkar, the sponsor of Kohinoor Theatre troupe, Anuradha Kapoor, Director of National School of Drama, Arunachal Pradesh and Delhi, invited the Theatre troupe to perform their plays at the Indira Gandhi Cultural Center, Delhi from April 23, 2010 to April 30, 2010 . After the five-day Drama exhibition, Ratan Lahkar's name was featured in the international media in parallel with the national media. For the first time in the history of the Assamese news world, Kohinoor made headlines through the play Titanic. Journalists from

¹¹ Naren Patgiri, 'Prasanga-Bhamyamaan theatre', Paramananda Rajbonghi (edi.), *Asomiya Natak-Parampara aru Paribartan*, p.189

England, USA and France had been overwhelmed by the Titanic presented by the Assamese young artist on the stage and it has been seen that Kohinoor's Titanic has been widely covered in the media of that country. Comparing the Titanic staged by Kohinoor, with that of James Cameron's Hollywood movie Titanic, the magazine India Today declared the former to be better. Kohinoor has also performed in the Barak Valley. However, in the Barak Valley, even though the theater was not able to attract a large number of spectators, it has received good responses from conscious drama lovers. In this way, Kohinoor has been able to give a special place to the traveling theatre of Assam in the history of national drama literature.

2.2.4 Development of Cultural Area:

Through the creation of many playwrights, composers, actors - actresses, singers, producers, musicians, dancers, behind-the-scenes musicians, Kohinoor has made a name for itself in the field of drama, dance and music in Assam. The plays, musicals staged by the Theatre troupe are mainly based on the traditional folk songs, folk dances, and classical art forms like Shastriya music and Shastriya dance forms of Assam. This has led to the practice and preservation of traditional folk dance and folk music of Assam, albeit indirectly. Various ethnic dances of Assam - Bihu, Ojapali, Jhumur, Bagurumba, Rabha nritya etc. are seen to be used in the plays. Barpeta's "Holi Geet" was presented in the play Mukti written by Hemanta Dutta based on the story of Laxminath Bezbaruwa's novel of the same name in the year 2014-15. In the same way Zikir songs is used in Mahendra Borthakur's play Saragurir Saporit, Rabha Sangeet in the play Bishnu Prasad, Borgeet composed by Sankardev in the play Tej Loga Batot by Mahendra Borthakur, Ojaa Pali is presented in the play Matir Garhi by Arun Sarma and Borgeet in the play Mahabir Chilarai etc are some noteworthy works where Kohinoor Theatre has played a significant role in the Cultural sector of Assam by using Assamese folk and classical music in their plays.

On the other hand, a play titled Noyoner Kajol, written and directed by Abdul Kareem Khan uses the folk songs of Goalpara, Assam. Kopou Phool, a play written and directed by Abhijeet Bhattacharya has presented Rongali Bihu, a major festival of Assam. With the use of different local musical instruments like Dhool(Drum), Banhi (Flute), Mridanga, Khool, Doba, Kanh, Shankha, Pepa etc, Kohinoor has contributed to the cultural sector of Assam.

3.0 Social consciousness drama reflected in Kohinoor's plays

Drama is a powerful means of social transformation. It is very important in making people aware of the importance of a subject. The economic, political, social and intellectual condition of the society changes with the passage of time and accordingly the form of social consciousness changes. The playwrights try to bring change in the mindset of society by pointing out their perceptions, misconceptions, faults and errors, good and bad, etc. through their dramas. From stories of corruption, dishonesty, extremism, youth-disorder, AIDS to terrorism, Kohinoor has been creating awareness among the masses through its dramatic stories. On the other hand, even the musical plays staged by Kohinoor Theatre present the dangerous consequences of drugs and

other substance abuse, witch-hunting, AIDS etc and helped to create a sense of human and moral values in the minds of the people

3.1 Eradication of Social Disorders

The play *Dhumuha Pakhir Sadhu* (1995-96), written by Sevabrat Baruah and staged by Kohinoor Theatre seeks to create awareness among the people against deforestation. The newly appointed Barun Choudhury did not have enough security forces in his office to help him fight against the illegal poachers and hunters in the forest and so, he decided to seek help the villagers. He gathered them and made them aware of the issue. The village youths agreed with Barun. In the first scene of the play, the dialogue between the two characters is shown in the following way:

Ananda, "This Reserved Forest is our temple. It provides us food and offers us shelter."

Afzal, "We should not treat such a devoted friend like an animal." ¹²

In the last scene of the play, Barun protests against the vicious cycle of evil in the society and tries to sensitize the masses for the betterment of the society through a story:

"A Maharishi died. But in the jungles and in many forests, Maharishis have looted our forest resources, destroyed the environment, brought down natural disasters and left hundreds of thousands of families homeless. Let us take an oath that we will never let this evergreen motherland of ours become the playground of the Maharishis, the enemy of the people. We will protect the environment."¹³

3.2 Class - Inequality

The concept of caste discrimination and class inequality prevailing in the society is presented through Bhabendra Nath Saikia's play *Gohbor*. The play reflects the status quo of human beings and human values above caste and class. Alok Prasad Chowdhury, who identifies himself as a person of high caste, has been given a heart implant. Chandikai, the true heir of that heart, claims that the heartbeat of the husband's boundless heart is so overflowing with love that she wants to hear it. In this way the word of the real heir of Alok Prasad's heart is spread among the people and he becomes the object of hatred of all. At that moment, the human consciousness that arose in the heart of Alok Chowdhury has removed the narrowness of class distinction. He realizes that:

Alok: Very small, very small - the heart that encloses this heart, our heart is too small to occupy such a heart. We lack space. (*Gohbar*)

3.3 Communal Harmony

Communal harmony is reflected in Mahendra Barthakur's play *Saraguri Saporit*. There is no anti-religious sentiment among the Darrangian people of Saraguri Saporit. When Sarbananda kills himself on the way to Garhgaon, everyone suspects Badaruddin of pushing Sarbananda and killing him. But just when he is about to be punished by the villagers, one amongst the villagers says the following lines showing the communal harmony in the locality:

¹² Sewabrata Baruah, *Dhumuha Pakhir Saadhu* (script), 1st scene

¹³ *Ibid*, p. Last Scene

Villager: I cannot support something that is decided in the heat of the moment. We are people of two clans, that is, Hindus and Muslims but we are like brothers. We drink water from the same Ghat. In this case, it is better not to react or something based on some rumours. ¹⁴

On the other hand, in the words of Azaan Fakir, the message of communal harmony is echoed through:

The human race is one community. Hindus and Muslims are all alike before God. There are rows of graves in the cemetery. The Hindus will be cremated and the Muslims will be buried. The land does not belong to Hindus, not to Muslims. The soil belongs to Allah, God, Earth. (Saraguri Sapori)

3.4 Youth Violence

The play *Dainir Prem* by Mahendra Borthakur has essence of Youth Violence and the misguided behavior, and reflects the money minded thinking and consumerism of modern people. The play concerns around the story of a AIDS affected boy, the dangers this disease carries and gives the audience a message of awareness on AIDS. This is described in the fourteenth scene of the play:

Ranjita: "HIV can be transmitted in the human body for various reasons. The reasons for this are 1) Transmission from a sex worker, 2) If a HIV infected person donates his blood to someone else or a syringe that is used to inject an HIV patient is injected to someone else without first getting it disinfected in boiling water. The patient loses his immunity after being infected by this disease. That is why there is no medical treatment that can cure it."¹⁵

On the other hand, the viewers have been warned about the possible harms of drug addiction to the youth. The character Bhadrakanto, who is actually the head poacher, does not appear to be so. His son, Amar, become addicted to drugs and dies of AIDS after coming in contact with some sex worker. In the end, Bhadrakanta realizes his mistake and hands himself over to the police. When Bhadrakanto is overwhelmed with the grief of losing his son in the hands of the harmful drugs, the doctor says something to him that is a warning message to every parent. The following message given by the doctor plays its role in creating social awareness about drugs and its consequences to the masses:

Doctor: "Now I really need to comfort you. But as a parent, as a father, you have failed to fulfill your duties. For the past eight years or so, Amar has been injecting drugs and HIV from sex workers into his body. You are also responsible for the untimely death of your child."¹⁶

3.5 Corruption

¹⁴ Mahendra Borthakur, *Saraguri Sapori* (Script), 1st scene

¹⁵ Mahendra Barthakur, *Dainir Prem* (script), 14th scene

¹⁶ Ibid, 18th scene

Corruption is a social disorder of the present time. Kohinoor has tried to create social awareness by exposing the nature of corruption in the society through plays like *Boliya Hati*, *Maharanya*, *Hey Mahanagar* etc. In Mahendra Borthakur's play *Boliya Hati*, Gagan and Paporri have come to the house of teacher Bishnu Kinkar Hazarika to ask for fake documents to show them as matric pass. After seeing the audience protesting this kind of behaviour shown by Gagan and Paporri, the teacher addresses them and says,

“This is something that cannot be simply ignored, Kalita. This is just one aspect of our destructive mentality. What is the basis of this mentality? How did this stigma spread in the sacred service like a teacher?”¹⁷

Besides, Debabrat getting the job of a teacher after cheating in his exams is a realistic picture of the present time. What Bishnu Kinkar says against this immoral behaviour shows his social consciousness thoughts,

“This is a humble request of this old man, don't gamble and play your immoral games against the institution that builds the future of this nation. Don't lead the young boys and girls to a wrong path with your dirty politics. My dear students, today on my farewell day, I request you all again and again to be individuals of human values. (*Boliya Hati*)

In this play *Hey Mahanagar* by Mahendra Borthakur, the experience of the characters Guneshwar and his sister-in-law in trying to get the money her late husband deserved, reflects the social consciousness of the playwright. Guneshwar has protested against the injustice done to human beings by the people in the following way:

Guneswar: “Do not think that we are some useless piece of log. Do not think we are your puppets or your pet dog. (*Hey Mahanagar*)

3.6 Political Awareness

Bhabendra Nath Saikia's play *Maharanya* portrays the changed political situation of the society. Political leaders address the gathering and speak of human unity, national solidarity and social progress. But the inconsistency of their words and deeds proves the emptiness of such speeches. In the first scene of the play, the dialogue between the people and the government is revealed through Ajay's dialogue-

Ajay: “This people are tired of listening to your speeches of unity, national unity, courage and determination. But those people who resides in this country and have not heard this speeches do not understand the meaning of it, let alone the value it carries. But common people do not protest against the political leaders. And the learned people do not do anything for the sake of their respect.” (*Maharanya*)

That is why, in order to create political awareness and consciousness among the people, Ajay says, “I will remain silent because I am a professor. He will remain silent because he is sacred of getting fired from his job. And those people, without any disturbance, will continue giving their speeches.”¹⁸

¹⁷ Mahendra Barthakur, *Boliya Hati* (script), 2nd scene

¹⁸ Bhabendra Nath Saikia, *Maharanya* (Script), 1st scene

Kohinoor's play has an educational aspect that can create social consciousness, although this is observed only through entertainment. In this way, Kohinoor theatre troupe has often fulfilled its social responsibility by composing plays based on various social themes.

4.0 Conclusion

A study on the Role of Kohinoor Theatre in the Socio-economic Development of Assam shows that Kohinoor Theatre troupe has been playing a significant and important role in the field of traveling drama tradition in Assam through various stage plays. After doing a detailed discussion of the topic, the following is a list of deductions that can be arrived at the end of the study:

- Kohinoor Theatre, keeping in minds their commercial business, has financially helped build educational institutions in the economically weak villages, youth clubs and various other associations to raise their funds, build infrastructures and other such economic developments.
- It has given employment to many actors-actresses, technicians various other workers associated with the Theatre troupe and have provided financial support to them and their families.
- While maintaining the literary importance and responsibility of the editing and theatrical work, it has focused on social reform against the protection of nature, crime, injustice and corruptions. Their mouthpiece magazine, “Karani” not only reflects the literary importance and duties of theatre group but also focuses on environment protection, and protests against crimes, injustice, corruption, etc. hereby trying to reform the society.
- By presenting local cultural plays of different castes and tribes of Assam, the Theatre attempts to raise awareness about the responsibility and necessity for their propagation, dissemination and survival.
- Assam is a meeting place of different castes and tribes. The Kohinoor Theatre tries its best that the people of Assam maintain a communal harmony, do not fall prey to any religious conspiracies, to the dirty politics of religion or other ethnic conflicts so that the Assam known for the brotherhood of Sankar-Azaan thrives forever.
- Kohinoor Theatre is the first to try to attract the audience to the traveling drama by staging plays with the help of new technology, technical knowledge, modern art and technique.

Even today, Kohinoor theatre troupe continues to play a leading role in imparting moral values and knowledge to the masses in addition to entertaining and them.

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