



Scheme for “Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”

Form for National Inventory Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India

A. Name of the State – ASSAM

B. Name of the Element/Cultural Tradition (in English)

- Name of the Cultural tradition- Traditional Puppet theatre of Assam.

B.1. Name of the element in the language and script of the community

- i. Concerned, if applicable

C. Name of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned (Identify clearly either of these concerned with the practice of the said element/cultural tradition)

- Not Particularly . People who are practicing this art are from different communities.

D. Geographical location and range of the element/cultural tradition (Please write about the other states in which the said element/tradition is present)

- The ***String puppet theatre*** known by such names as *Putala Nach*, *putala bhaona* and *putala bhaoria* has been a most popular medium of folk entertainment in plains of Assam through out this period. String Puppet theatre is also found and practiced in other states of India Like West Bengal, Orrissa,

Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerela, Tamilnadu etc.

E. Identification and definition of the element/cultural tradition of the India

(Write "Yes" in one or more boxes to identify the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element. If you tick 'others', specify the domain(s) in brackets.)

- I. (some times oral and some times written script) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage
- II. (yes) performing art
- III. (yes) social practices, rituals and festive events
- IV. (no) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- V. (yes) traditional craftsmanship
- VI. other(s) (

F. . Provide a brief summary description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it

Usual traditional puppets of Assam are suspended, manipulated and controlled by basically three strings attached to a control rod or bar held from the above by the puppeteer. One string on head other two on hands.

G. Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element/Cultural Traditions? Are there any specific roles or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of it? If yes, who are they and what are their responsibilities?

- The bearer and practitioners of this cultural tradition are not from any specific categories. And with no special responsibilities .

H. How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today?

Through training and internships under the guidance of the senior puppeteer and existed local puppet theatre groups

workshops organised by cultural affairs department of the State , Sangeet Natak Akademi, and some local Ngos.

I. What social functions and cultural meanings do the element/cultural tradition have today for its community?

- This Traditional Puppetry art form usually traditionally performed as a entertainment **element** during Annual Festivals like Biswakarma Puja, Durga Puja, Basanti Puja, Saraswati Puja, Boahag Bihu , Weddings and other social functions.

.Presently this art form performed as a part of educational purpose also.

- J. Is there any part of the element that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development? I.e. describe any aspect of the element/cultural tradition that may be unacceptable to Law of the country or may be in opposition to practicing community's harmony with others.

- No there is no such things that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development.

- K. Your Project's contribution to ensuring visibility, awareness and encouraging dialogue related to the element/cultural tradition

This project will document the process of puppet making in traditional way and to experimentation with traditional process.

- L. Information about the safeguarding measures that may protect or promote the element/cultural tradition

Awareness in the masses about the

- M. (Write "Yes" in one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the communities, groups or individuals concerned)

1. (yes) transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
2. (yes) identification, documentation, research
3. (yes) preservation, protection
4. (yes) promotion, enhancement
5. (yes) revitalization

- N. Write about the measures taken at local, state and national level by the Authorities to safeguard the element/cultural tradition?

- A. Sangeet Natak Akademi , Govt of India is promoting this art form sponsoring workshops and providing funds for production Of puppet plays to the existing puppet theatre groups of Assam . and by organising puppet festivals in different parts of India

B. *Cultural department ,Govt of Assam is trying to promote traditional puppetry by providing grant in aid to some selected groups*

O. Write about the threats, if any, to the element/cultural tradition related to its practice, visibility and future longevity. Give facts and relevant reasons based on the current scenario.

P. Safeguarding measures proposed

a. (This section should identify and describe safeguarding measures to protect and promote the element/cultural tradition. Such measures should be concrete and can be implemented to formulate future cultural policy for safeguarding and promoting the element/cultural tradition in the state)

Q. Community Participation

a. (Write about the participation of communities, groups and individuals related to the element/cultural tradition in formulation of your project)

R. Concerned community organization(s) or representative(s)

i. (Provide detailed contact information for each community organization or representative or other non-governmental organization that is concerned with the element such as associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees, etc.)

S. Name of the entity

T. Name and title of the contact person

U. Address

V. Telephone number

W. E-mail

X. Other relevant information

Y. Give information of any Inventory, database or data creation centre (local/state/national) that you may be aware of or of any office, agency, organisation or body involved in the maintenance of the said inventory etc.

Z. Principal published references or documentation available on the element/cultural tradition

a. (Books, articles, audio-visual materials, names and addresses of reference libraries, museums, private endeavours of artistes/individuals for preservation of the said element, publications or websites)

i. Signature:

1. Name & Designation:

.....

ii.

iii. Name of Institution (If applicable):

.....

iv.

i. Address:

.....

v.

vi.

AA.

BB.

CC.

a. .

Second Report
Audio- Video and written Data
Collection of
Traditional Puppet Theatre of Assam

Scheme for
“Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage
and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”
2015-2016

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Detailed report

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Second Report

Audio Video and Written

Data Collection of

Traditional Puppet Theatre of Assam

Scheme for “Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”

2015-2016

In the Second phase of our Data collection —

Introduction

1. Rehearsal and Demonstration of Navaratna Putala Theatre group of Bhalukmari village, District –Nagaon, Assam
2. Interview with the proprietor and Artists and puppeteers of Pancharatna Putala theatre , Bhalukmari village, District Nagaon, Assam.
3. Rehearsal , Demonstration and interview with the proprietor , artists of Shiromoni puppet theatre group Kakomari Village , District – Nagaon, Assam

Detailed Report

Data Collection – 04

Navaratna Putala Theatre

Established in 1979

Proprietor – Giridhar Senapati

Bhalukmari village, District –Nagaon, Assam

Dated- 27.08.2016

Descriptions

Giridhar Senapati was born in early fifties in Bhalukmari of Nagaon district, was fascinated by the traditional string puppetry as a young child. He witnessed the work of Puppeteer Betharam Borah of his nearby village who used to perform in different occasions at that time. He managed to learn the skills of the art form from Puppeteer Betharam Borah . In 1971 Senapati started a puppet theatre group with his friend Premeswar Bordoloi. Later on in 1979, they split in to two groups and started his own puppet theatre group.

There are 10 persons in his group including his wife , son and daughter.

Giridhar Senapati makes his puppets with traditional process using peeth, clay and cloth. Use oil paints and colours. Navaratna putala theatre have double stages like mobile theatre of Assam. Also equipped with tent , pandal , lights and sound system. They do live performance of music and dialogue part .every year Navaratna putala theatre prepare three puppet plays of mythological, Historical and social stories. Some times adapt a popular novel also. Besides string puppetry Giridhar Senapati uses shadow puppets also if necessary. Assam had a tradition of shadow puppets but it is not found in tradition now .

Usually the group gets invitation to perform from different religious or cultural organizations in different occasions from different places of Assam ,mostly in interior and rural places with a fixed remuneration for three day long performance.

Their season for performance starts from mid September to month of April. At this moment they are busy with rehearsals.

The members present during our visit were –

Giridhar Senapati – Playwright , director, singer , actor, puppeteer and proprietor.

Padma Senapati – lead singer and actor (dialogues)

Rupan Senapati – Puppeteer, Musician, manager, technician, stagecraft

Mridul Bordoloi – puppeteer and technician

Deva Bordoloi – puppeteer, stagecraft ,technician

Interview with Giridhar Senapati

Interview with Padma Senapati.

Interview with Rupan Senapati

Audio- Visual Description

Data collection no- 4

Navaratna putala theatre.

Time	Description
00.01.53	<p>(Giridhar senapati proprietor of Navaratna putala theatre.)</p> <p>My name is Giridhar Senapati from Bhalukmari, district Nagaon ,Assam . I have started this Navaratna putala theatre 36 years ago in 1971 . There was a Puppeteer named Betharam Borah from the nearby village Kakomari who used perform puppet plays during festival and different occasions . I was fascinated by the techniques of performance and manipulation. I tried to learn the techniques from him and I have started this Navaratna putala theatre with my friend in 1971 inspired by him. But Navaratna putala theatre formally established in 1979 only. And continued to perform this art from till now.</p>

I was fascinated to see how those small puppets entertain and amused people and it is traditional culture also which should be preserved and practice also, that's why I have decided to take it as my livelihood.

Traditionally puppets were used to be of 6 inches only, without legs and had only three strings we have developed it to 1.5 feet to 2.5 feet and added legs also so that we can make them walk. And like mobile theatre we have established double stages to perform. At first we used to perform plays based on mythological stories like akal Bodhan, sabitri satyaban , sati behula, raja Harichandra etc. later on we have included social dramas. We have started using lights , sets and Music and modern techniques like any other theatre. Earlier stage and performing areas were small,

Time

Description

but with double stages and tents and sitting facilities we have made it larger thing. People used appreciate it and enjoyed . we use to travel from one place another with all the equipments . I hope our next generation will take forward this tradition in future and I am glad that two of my disciples have recently established two new puppet theatre groups in this area that are Rongghar and Shiromoni .

00.07.21

There are four types of puppetry string puppet, rod puppet, finger or hand puppet ,and shadow puppet, Assam used have a tradition of shadow puppet which not found now. We do mainly string puppet and use shadow puppet also. For example in tejimola play we used shadows for the lotus flower.

00.08.22

We use peeth to make puppets. We collect peeth during season and dry it then cut it in to pieces according to sizes of face , hands, legs and body. We use a mixer of clay, cow dung and thatch to give shape of the face , eyes etc. then we use oil paint to colour the face .and for hair we use artificial hair. We fix the head with the body using a ribbon so that it can move freely. And there are three parts in the hand. We use 4 to 13 strings in a puppet. Traditionally there were only three strings used. But now a days if necessary we use more than that . puppets are dress up according to the characters and plays.

00.11.13

3 to 4 persons manipulate puppets .We use platforms to manipulate puppets and use sets also . we have our own collection of equipments light and sound. Dynamo,

Time	Description
	<p>colourfull lights are used. Music is done by live with singers and musicians. They perform the dialogues also. I do everything making of puppets, Playwright, direction, music direction, dialogues , singing etc</p>
00.13.05	<p>Cultural committees , organisations from different places invite us to perform. They give us fixed remuneration and provide space and other facilities to perform. The committees sell tickets for collection. Sometimes noble people donate us to buy equipments for the satisfaction they got from our shows.</p>
00.14.30	<p>In 1993 I have participated in a national level puppetry workshop organized by Govt of India at Guwahati. I have experienced all type of Indian puppetry in that workshop. String Puppetry from Karnataka was very advanced and beautiful. In 1986 I was associated with elementary education department. Then director Prabhat Konwar gave me an opportunity to teach primary school teachers puppetry as a part of audio visual teaching programme.</p>
00.16.45	<p>In 2013 I did shows under Songs and Drama Division. We have performed I schools the subject of the show was educational . I have not performed under Sangeet Natak Akademi. Once SNA have invited us to perform but at that we were not available were busy doing shows .</p>
00.18.18	<p>I have not got any financial assistance from any organization . We perform against the remuneration from the committees of different clubs, and social organisatios.</p>

Time	Description
00.18.40	Now at least Rs five lakhs will be needed if we go for a production including all the equipments like pandal , seats, stage (double), lights ,sound, Music ,artist payments, properties, puppets etc.
00.19.50	We are developing gradually. Initially we had puppets only then we used one stage only. We used to carry our things on a horse cart. Then we started to use double stages , lights and sound equipments. All the equipments become double so now we need two mini trucks to carry all the things and have to perform form at least 3 days at a time. Our earning is limited. Initially 4/ 5 people could handle the show. But now at least 15 people needed to perform . my wife and son also performs. Other performers come and go every year I train people and they perform with us.
00.27.00	In my left its my wife Padma Senapati. She sings and do dialouges of female characters. Then its rupam Senapati, my son he plays table and musical instruments and helps me with other technical parts also. Then in my right its Deva Bordoloi, he helps with manipulation.then its Mridul Bordoloi, he also helps me in manipulation and settings and technical part. There are 3 more persons work with us they are not present at this moment.
00.27.45	I am Padma Senapati. I used to perform with puppet theatre as young girl later on after marriage my husband started his own group I have been performing as a singer

Time	Description
	and delivering dialogues of female characters. Sometimes I play instruments also and sometimes manipulation also. We have a daughter she also used to perform but now she is married lives in a different town.
00.29.10	Song from a famous play named Shonit Kunwari. Dialougues from Bhakta Prahlad.
00.30.45	Live music of the puppet show and presentation of puppet . A Bihu dance.
00.35.40	Krishna dance with satriya music.
00.36.25	Joker A scene from a mythological puppet play.
00.40.05	Myself Rupan Senapati. I do Manipulation of puppets as well as settings . My elder sister also used to do puppetry she was very efficient but now she is not here. We have to manage everything by ourselves from stage making to preparing the performance area , tent. Managing the audiences. Manipulation of puppets, music , settings everything.



Giridhar Senapati Proprietor Of Navaratna Putala Theatre



Giridhar Senapati With His Puppets



Store Of Puppets.



Team Members And Puppeteers With Puppets



Giridhar Senapati With His Puppets



Puppets Of Navaratna Putala Theatre



.Stage For Performance



.Ready For Performance – Music And Dialogues



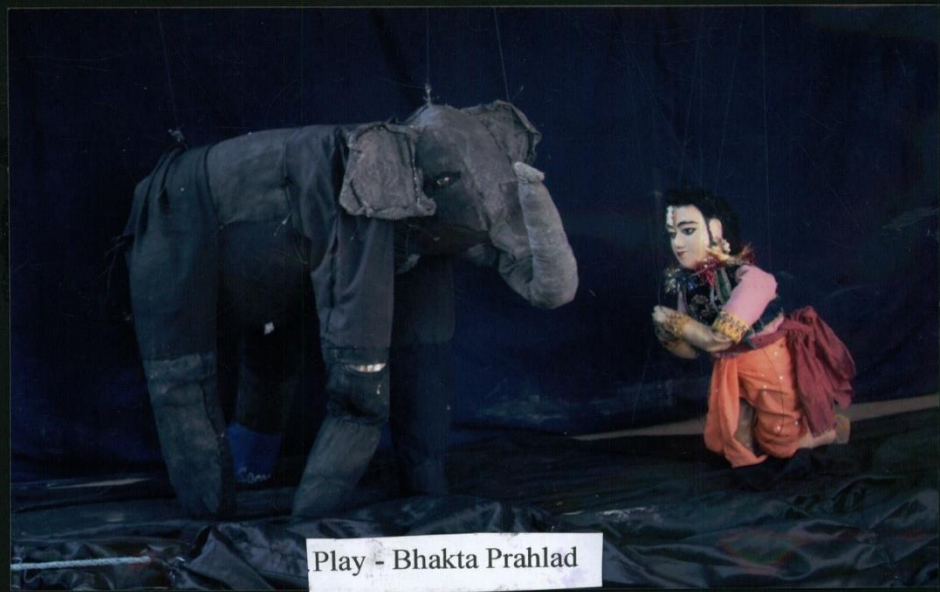
Preparation For Demonstration And Rehearsals



Puppets For Demonstration And Rehearsals



.Manipulation By Puppeteers



Play - Bhakta Prahlad



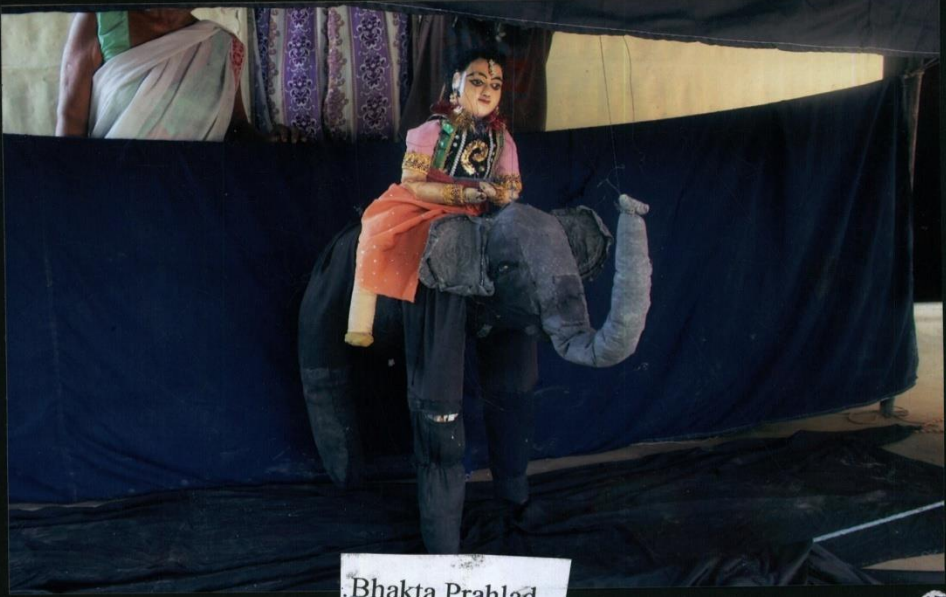
Banner Of Navaratna Putala Theatre



2. Paper Cutting – Story About Navaratna Putala Theatre
Published In A Esteemed Daily News Paper



Paper Cutting



Bhakta Prahlad



The Joker

18

Detailed report

Data -5

Pancharatna Putala Theatre.

Village – Bhalukmari, District- Nagaon, Assam

Established in 1979 by late Premeswar Bordoloi

Contact-

Dated -29.08 2016

Pancharatna Putala Theatre was established in 1979 by Premeswar Bordoloi at Bhalukmari Village of Nagaon District of Assam. Premeswar Bordoloi started his carrier asa puppeteer from 1971 . Bordoloi and his friend Giridhar senapati started a puppet theatre group in 1971 and in 1978 that group split in to two groups named Pancharatna and Navaratna.premeswar Bordoloi owned Pancharatna Putala Theatre group and was actively doing performances until his death in 2005. After his demise his wife Putumai Bordoloi has took over the charge of the group and with the help of her son Kosha Bordoloi and Prabin Bordoloi a cousin brother of Premeswar Bordoloi and who is the Playwright, actor and music director of the group .

Pancharatna putala theatre performs mythological, historical and social plays. Premeswar Bordoloi used to make puppets himself and in traditional way that is using peeth, clay , etc.

This puppet theatre group usually perform in home district only. They have done educational , social awareness programmes also under Sangeet Natak Akademi for school children. We have visited during their rehearsal period.

- ❖ Interview with Putumai Bordoloi the proprietor and wife of Late Premeswar Bordoloi.
- ❖ Interview with Prabin Bordoloi playwright, music director, singer, actor.

Audio visual description.

Time	Description
00.00.25	I am Putumai Bordoloi wife of Premeswar Bordoloi. From village Bhalukmari owner of Pancharatna Putla Theatre. My husband premeswar Bordoloi has established this puppet theatre group in 1971 with his partner Giridhar senapati as Navaratna Putala Theatre.i. It was successfully running . and in 1979 the group split to groups named Pancharatna and Navaratna,Ggiridhar Senapati owned the Navaratna putala theare group.and Premeswar bordoloi started to run this Pancharatna putala theatre. I used travel with the group sometimes but never took part with the performance.My husband died on 2005. From 2006 I have taken the charge of the group. There are 20 people in our group. Padum Bordoloi, Keshav Bordoloi, My daughter Tarulata , Mana Bordoloi are main artists and singers .
00.02.18	Puppets , different characters and sets.
00.03.02	We have performed educational shows in schools under Sangeet Natak Akademi . we prepared our own script. Our group member write the scripts of our puppet plays. Savitri Satyaban and Sati Beula these two of our plays are taken by All India Radio Nagaon for radio Drama.
00.04.05	He is Prabin Bordoloi . he looks after the sound and music part. He is the music director, singer actor.This is my son Kosharam Bordoloi he plays musical instruments and does management also.
00.04.30 – 00.10.37	Prabin Bordoloi.-- As you know that Premeswar Bordoloi

Time	Description
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started puppetry in 1971 with his partner Giridhar Senapati. Then in 1979 he established Pancharatna putala theatre and I have been associated with this group from the beginning. Premeswar bordoloi is my cousin and neighbor also . I was always interested in music and my brother asked me to associate with him . so from the beginning I am doing music and acting with this group. although

Sometimes I have worked in Mobile theatre also. I write plays also for this group.

People like comedy. We do live performance of music and dialogues . We are more popular in distant places then in our own village. People appreciate our efforts and that gives us satisfaction.

Two new puppet theatre groups have been established recently in this village but what I have seen is they are not performing any historical or mythological plays. Modern influence is good but we should not leave our tradition. We Pancharatna and Navaratna putala theatre have always performed traditional plays atleast one in every year.

We make puppets . we do string puppets mainly. We will need to improve our presentation style and settings also . entertainment and decoration are to be done to attract audiences.22

00.10.37

paper cutting, felicitation.



Puppets Of Pancaratna Putala Theatre.



Putumai Bordoloi
Proprietor Of Pancaratna Putala Theatre.



3 A Puppet From A Social Play



২৩

4 Puppets



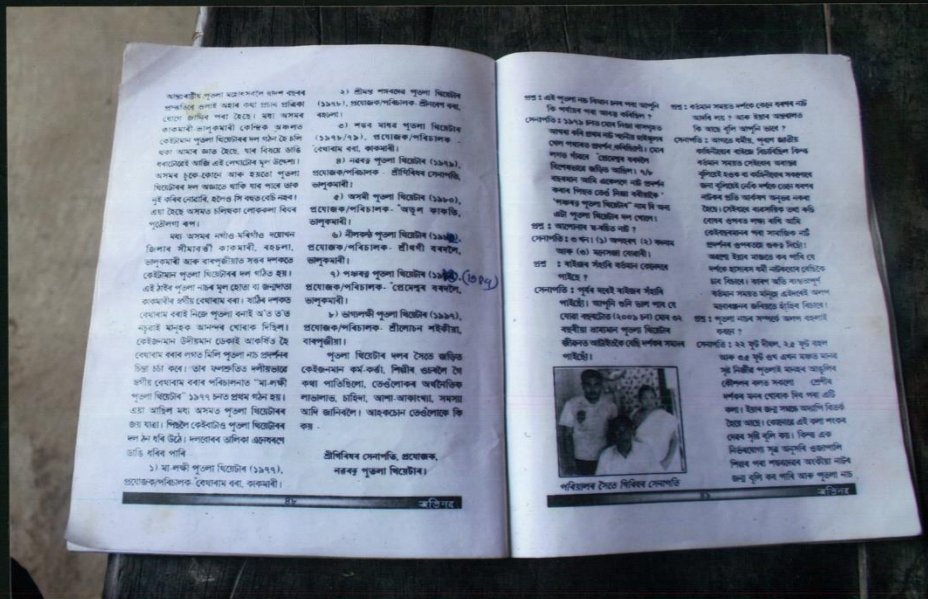
10 Puppets With Settings



10. With Prabin Bordoloi, Putumai Bordoloi, Kosha Bordoloi (Lto R)



Equipments For Stages



Paper Cutting



5 Puppets



6 Puppets With Settings



7. Prabin Bordoloi, Putumai Bordoloi, Kosha Bordoloi (Lto R)



8. Different Characters.

Detailed Report

Data- 6

Shiromoni Putala theatre theatre

Kakomari village, District Nagaon, Assam.

Proprietor --- Kiran Bordoloi, Established in 2013

Rehearsal period.

Dated-- 2nd September 2016

Shiromani Putala Theatre was established in 2013 by Kiran Bordoloi of Kakomari Village of Nagaon District of Assam. Kiran Bordoloi was born in 1986 . His father Prabin Bordoloi and his mother were associated with puppetry . they used to make traditional puppets had rehearsal of puppet plays at home. As a child his interest was to make dolls and statues with clay. Later on he shifted his medium to cement. He then became interested in puppetry and associated with a puppetry group Sagarika putala theatre Ouzari, Khetri of Kamrup district, Assam, Then he joined Navaratna Putala Theatre for two years and learned puppetry. In 2013 he started his own puppetry group Shiromoni Putala theatre. He decided to develop puppets . Traditionally puppets are of 6 inches. But later on in 70s Puppeteers of Assam Increased its height to 2-3 feet. Kiran Bordoloi decided to increase the height to 5feet and he used thermocol to make puppets. Puppets become heavier because of the increased height. One person can manipulate only one puppet at a time. Whereas two regular puppets can be manipulate by one person at the same time. Shiromoni Putala theatre is preparing for their shows of the year 2016-2017 . there are 20 members in the group. They have double stages. Having all the equipments like pandals, seats, stages , sound and music equipments, lights etc. In the year 2015-16 Shiromoni Putala theatre had 82 shows. These three daylong shows contains three plays.

Team members:-

Kiran Bordoloi- Proprietor and puppeteer

Bogimon Das, – Dressmaker, tailor, and stitch
everything required ei. Tent .

Surjyakanta Bordoloi - Stagecraft, art and settings .

Jitumoni Bordoloi - Puppeteer.

Deepjyoti Mech - Stage craft,

Tinku Deka - Puppeteer,

Pranjal Bordoloi - Stagecraft,

Sukleswar Deka - Puppeteer.

Manoranjan Bordoloi - Sound and light department.

Ranjiravi Das - Puppeteer.

Rajeev Sarmah – Director

Address:

Shiromoni Putala theatre

Kakomari village, District Nagaon , Assam

Audio visual Description

Time

Description

00.02.15

Kiran Bordoloi. ---Myself Kiran Bordoloi son of Prabin Bordoloi, from Barbari , Kakomari village Nagaon Assam, I was born in 1986. My parents were associated with puppet theatre. They used to rehearse in our house and I have experienced it since I was very young. my father used to make puppets . my interests grew and I joined Bhagyalakkhi putala theatre. Then I worked with Sagarika Putala theatre. Then worked with Navaratna Putala Theatre for two years. Then I have decided to go my own and developed the puppets. usually puppets are 2 feet to 2.5 feet, and mostly no legs but I have increased the height of the puppets to 5 feet. And have put legs. I know how to make puppets. But I was not very experienced with the drama part . so went to some people who can write do music and acting also. In year 2012-13 I have established this Shiromoni putala theatre. The first show was in Amsoi. We started with four plays a four day puppet performance programme but now we have reduced to 3 plays .

00.04.30

I was actually very much interested to make things from clay from my childhood. I used to bunk school and went to paddy fields to find clay and made statues etc. later on I started making idol and statues and other things like decorated gate, wall etc. for temple, people and organizations using cement. That way I have earned some money . With that saving I have started this puppet theatre group.

Time	Description
00.05.33	<p>There are 20 people in my group. At this moment 10 people are present for rehearsal. Others will come later. We are going to start our shows from September and will finish on next year April. That period is our season for performance. In offseason I use make statues or other projects . During off season we try to improve our puppets and the plays also. Last year in 2015-2016 we did 82 shows mainly in middle Assam part. We are not getting any grant in aid from Government.</p>
00.07.50	<p>We are preparing for our coming season. Stitching tent , dresses, settings etc.</p>
00.08.04	<p>He is Bogimon Das, he is a tailor and stitch everything required . he is Surjyakanta Bordoloi, he is in art and settings par. Jitumoni Bordoloi, he is a puppeteer. Deepjyoti Mech he is also doing the stage craft, Tinku Deka is a puppeteer, Pranjali Bordoloi is doing stagecraft, Sukleswar Deka, he is with us from the beginning, he is a puppeteer. Manoranjan Bordoloi is in sound and light department. Ranjiravi Das is a puppeteer.</p>
00.09.50	<p>I am Rajeev Sarmah from Rangia, district Kamrup. Last 14 years I was working as an actor in Mobile theatres. Last year I got an opportunity to see puppet theatre and got attracted to the art form. I did watch Puppet theatre when I was very young . I was very glad to the initiative taken by this guy to conserve this art form. I was working with Mobile</p>

Time

Description

theatre and mobile theatres now a days become too commercial. This year I have decided to associate with puppet theatre as a director and actor. This year we are going to perform three social drama one of these is Titanic. We are thinking of make short plays on social awareness also.

00.12.47.

Kiran Bordoloi----- Traditionally Assam's puppets are 6 inch to 1 foot. But later on puppeteers of Assam increased its height to 2.5 feet. But with this size it's difficult to perform with larger audience. So I have decided to increase the height to 5 feet so that audience can watch comfortably . I have started using thermocol for making puppets . thermocol is lighter in weight . usually weights of puppets are 2 / 3 kgs but now my puppets are weighted 8kgs due to the increased heights. There are some disadvantages also as for small puppets one person can manipulate two puppets at the same time but due to increased height and weight one person can not manipulate two puppets . for that reason we have increase our team member also . usually there are 8 to 10 person in a puppet group. But we have 20 person in our group. And it become difficult to manipulate puppets also due to heavy weight puppeteers have take rest during shows . we have double stages like mobile theatre. Costing of the production also increased . . Usually now a days people are not very much interested to see puppet theatre. We want give people a new taste and people are liking it. We are performing social plays only. Mythological character become heavier than these normal characters



Banner Of Shiromoni Putala Theatre



5. With Kiran Bordoloi



7. A 5 Feet Tall Puppet



construction of stage



Construction of Stages and Pandal.



2. Kiran Bordoloi –
Proprietor And Director Of Shiromoni Putala Theatre



Wooden Frames For Stages



Stage In The Making- Proprietor In Action



3. Preparation For Rehearsals.



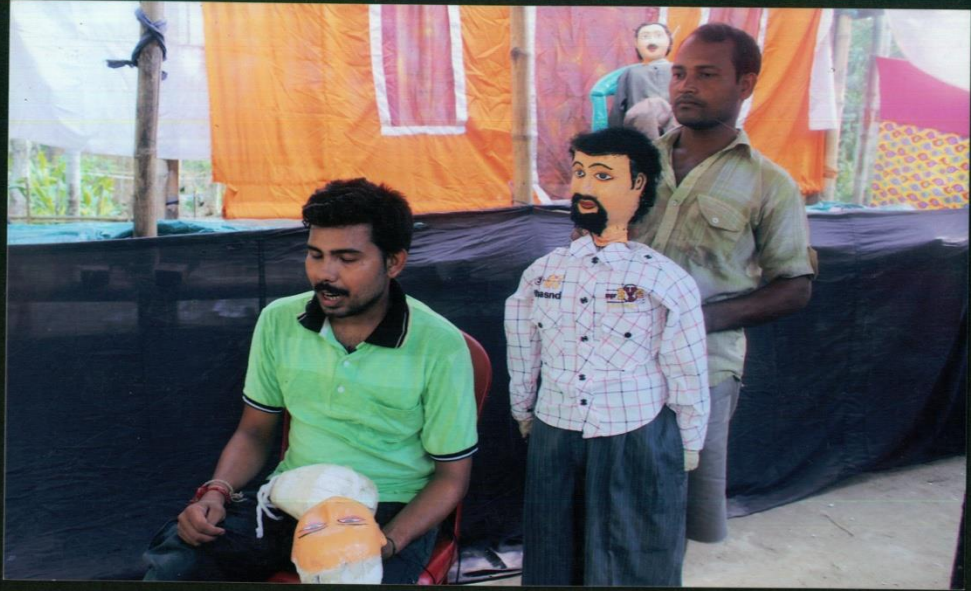
Working Still



10. Rehearsals



12. Rehearsal



9. Puppeteer With Puppet



The Team Shiromoni Putala Theatre



Puppets-And Puppeteers Ready For Rehearsal



Director , Actor Rajeev Sarmah



06 Paper Cutting



11 Rehearsal

Conclusion of 2nd Report

In this 2nd report we have collected data from Nagaon district of Assam (middle Assam) . Where 4 traditional puppetry groups are actively performing . We have collected data of three groups. From April to September is the off time for traditional puppetry groups . During summer groups usually reconstruct or repair their puppets and in August and September they start doing rehearsal s. We have visited their rehearsal spaces and interviewed the puppeteers and proprietors of these three groups .

First group Navaratna theatre was officially established in 1979. But it has started performing actually from 1972. Which is actively performing .Puppeteer Giridhar Senapati and his family along with other group members are rehearsing. They focusing mainly in social plays as well as mythological like Bhakta prahlad and Sati beula . Puppets of this group is of about 2feet to 3 feet tall.

2nd group Pancharatna putala theatre was established in 1979. Founder puppeteer late Premadhar Bordoloi's wife Putumai Bordoloi is managing the group now with the help other group members. They are also focusing on social plays only.

3rd group Shiromoni putala theatre is on reheasal period. Proprietor is Kiran Bordoloi. This group was established in 2013 and has developed their puppets from usual sizes to 5feet, almost life size. People got attracted to these enlarged puppets but it is difficult to manipulate for increasing weight. This group is concentrating on social plays only. Shiromoni Puppet theatre organizes their own shows . They have their own pandal and have double stages with all the sound and light equipments . Tickets are sold for shows . In rural Assam these puppet groups are very famous and popular.

Third Report
Audio- Video and written Data Collection
of
Traditional Puppet Theatre of Assam

Scheme for
“Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural
Heritage and Diverse Cultural Traditions of
India”
2015-2016

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Third Report
Audio Video and Written
Data Collection of
Traditional Puppet Theatre of Assam

**(Scheme for “Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage and
Diverse Cultural Traditions of India”2015-2016)**

In the third phase of our Data collection—

Introduction

1. Demonstration and interview Mohkhali Putala Nach Samiti
Village -Bali Pukhuri , Mohkhali, Nalbari, Assam
2. Performamce by Surajit Academy
A socio cultural organization
Jalukbari, Guwahati, Assam
3. Ruby Puppet theatre
Rehearsal ,techniques, Demonstration and interview with the proprietor ,
artists of Rubypuppet theatre Village- Jakhala, Bijoy Nagar Palash Bari,
Kamrup Assam
4. Interview with research scholar Dr Moushumi Bhattachajee
Guest Faculty-Cotton University & Gauhati University.
5. Puppet play BHEEM CHARITA by ANTARANGA in association with
Directorate of Cultural Affairs , Govt of Assam.

DETAILED REPORT

Data collection-07

Mohkhuli Putala Nach Samiti

Village- Bali Pukhuri, Mohkhali

District Nalbari, Assam

Established – 1885

Founder – Late Kalikanta Barman

Proprietor – Banikanta Barman

Team members- Banikanta Barman, Naren Koivarta, Amal Baishya, Chandra Das, Ramesh Baishya, Dhruvajyoti Barman, Chandradhar Koivarta

DESCRIPTION:

Mohkhali putala Nach samiti was established in 1885 by late Kalikanta Barman of Mohkhali, Nalbari, Assam. Presently is running by his grandson Banikanta Barman. Banikanta Barman's elder brother Radhakanta Barman was also associated with the troupe, now he is retired and got artist's pension from the Govt of Assam.

This puppetry group performs in traditional style. Usually traditional puppet show group consists of at least five persons. Three or four constituting the chorus and the rest manipulating the puppets. The key person of a traditional troupe is the leader of the chorus. Others are normally his collaborators and helpers (jogali, bhari), while the chorus with the drum(khol) and one or two symbols (taal, Manjira) take their place on side in front of the stage, the manipulators of the puppets remain in the stage behind the screens. Lighting was formerly provided by torches (Mahalaa, Aariyaa). But their places have since been taken by electric lights now.(1)

The stage itself is a very small and simple affair which can be put up in the matter of two or three hours. A frame is put up with a few bamboo posts and beams. Within this frame a small platform measuring about 10 to 12 feet in length and about 3 to 4 feet in breadth is raised on one side at the height of above 3 feet from the ground. Excepting the platform inside, the three other

sides of the frame are covered with screens .Both the lower and upper portions of the platform which is in the front side facing the audience are covered with screens leaving a space about 3 to 4 feet open along the length of the platform-just enough to reveal the puppets. At the back of the platform is another screen , normally black, standing up to about 4 feet behind which the manipulators stand either on the ground or on a low bench or some such thing. For the stage the term used by most traditional troupes is DOHRA (tambu) and the arena as a whole is usually called AASAR. (2)

In the traditional Puppet shows , the leader of the choruses not only the chief singer and narrator but he is also the interpreter of the speeches of the puppets. The speeches are made in a high-pitch sharp squeaking sound produced with one or more crude whistles made of a cane or bamboo frame and a leaf or rubber membrane . the sound is made from behind the screen by one or more the manipulators in a manner that somehow imitates human speech but not easily intelligible. The leader enters in to a conversation with the characters speaking in the squeaking voice in such a skillful manner—of course by an arranged understanding with the back stage ghost voice that the audience is made to forget the time-lag between the utterances of the character and the interpretations given by the leader himself : an impression is created as though the characters were speaking in an intelligible language. This device which could be termed “instant flash-back” is extremely subtle and is one that gives the traditional genre both distinctiveness and charm.

A traditional show starts with some preliminaries like the playing of special rhythmic patterns on the khol and tal (guru ghat),singing of invocatory (vandana) and other special songs. Formerly the bayan of such a show used to hold a yalk-tail whisk (chowar) in his right hand and to move about among the audience along gangways with dance-like steps and gestures, particularly during the preliminaries.(3)

A puppet character a joker makes humorous comments.
Part of the songs or recitation are called Dhura and Suchana.

1-The Assam Academy review article- Puppetry in Assam by Dr Birendranath Datta, Page -98

2-The Assam Academy review article- Puppetry in Assam by Dr Birendranath Datta, Page -99

3-The Assam Academy review article- Puppetry in Assam by Dr Birendranath Datta, Page -100

AUDIO VISUAL DESCRIPTION
DATA COLLECTION-07
MOHKHALI PUTALA NACH SAMITI

Time	Description
00.01.00	Entering the in the house of Mohkhali putala nach Samiti,
00.01.30	Construction of the stage.
00.10.52	<p>My name is Banikanta Barman. Mohkhali , Balipukhuri par is my village in Nalbari district. My grand Father Kalikanta Barman has established this puppet theatre group <i>Mohkhali Putala Nach Samiti</i> in 1885.After him my father Harikanta Barman continued the tradition of performing puppet theatre I was trained by him . after his death I have taken the charge of the group in1969. Now my son dhrubajyoti barman has joined us.</p> <p>We came to know that my grand father left his home at the age of 12 years and returned after few years with the knowledge of traditional string puppetry which was a popular tradition. Nobody knows how and where he got this training; may be he joined some puppetry group and lived with them. In 1885 he established this puppet group. He himself made all the puppets using <i>Kuhila</i> Pith (Indian cork) and clay and cloths. He wrote the plays based on Ramayana by Kirtibas. As a puppeteer he used to manipulate and speeches are made in a high pitch sharp sound produced by by <i>pepa</i> a crude whistle made from cane or bamboo and banana leaf . a narrator or bayan narrate the dialogues. After my grandfather my father used to write the plays and manipulate based on Ramayan by kirtibas .</p>

Time

Description

Mainly the Adi kanda ramayan . Now I am the manipulator and also I write the plays. Earlier they used to sing padas from kirtibasa Ramayana in Bengali language but later on translated the version in to Assamese language.

There is only one manipulator who manipulates puppets and make sound of dialogues by using that crude whistle. there are 5 members in the group including the puppeteer. Bayan or sutradhar, Pali or dhuliya who plays the drum dhol, khuliya who plays the instrument Khol, , and taaliya who play the cymbals, Sutradhar sings the Padas and narrates or interprets the dialogues with the help of his team mates.

Manipulator can manipulate four to five puppets at the same time. We made puppets from pith which was available locally but pith are not available now we have to collect from other parts of the state . we use mixer of clay ,cow dung and other materials to make eyes and nose and parts of face then colour it and then put cloths according to the characters. Strings are attached . traditionally there were three strings but now we use more than three. Its four to six if necessary.

I am the manipulator. The other members of the team are from sometimes from the family and sometimes not. I am following the traditional way of performance. Now a days other traditional puppetry groups are improvising their style of performances but Sangeet Natak Akademi insists us to keep the original form of performance so we sticking to the traditional style. Sangeet natak Akademi invited us to to every festival organized by them in many places in country.

Time

Description

People from different academic institutions , researchers from abroad (London, Germany etc.) did come to do research on our traditional puppetry form.

We have not got any grant in aid for production from the Government or Sangeet Natak Akademi. I am an employee of Directorate of Information and Public Relation, govt of Assam.

Initiative has been taken by UNICEF for demonstration for Students from colleges . We have been invited to give demonstration. Sometimes during holidays school students come to our place for workshops. We show them how to make puppets and how to perform as well.

We perform Ramayana based on Kirtibasa Ramayana which is originaly in Bengali language but we have translated it assumes and perform the geeta and Pada in Assamese.

We have perfomed in Karnataka, West Bengal, Tripura, New Delhi, Mumbai, etc.

We have not performed out side the country yet.

Initially I have joined as puppet artist in DIPR in 1986. There are 7 members in our team . but today only four are present

He is Naren Das the Narrator *sutradhar or bayan*.

He is Amal Baishya . He plays drum *DHOL and KHOL*

He is Ratul Baishya he is with instrument taal, manjari or juri. They all participate in chorus also.

Time	Description
00.25 .00	<p>I am Naren Kaivarta / Das – I am associated with this group from 1970. I do like to sing. One daybrother DADA BANIKANTA has told me to learn the art mainly the sutradhar part. UNCLE Harikanta barman taught me a dhura (a traditional song) . He was very sick at that time.</p> <p>O mor dehar bharasha nai.... A dehbichar geet</p> <p>He died in 1975. After that in that year I have performed with Bani dada in Kolkata. We have performed in Newdelhi in 1982 and many other places. Shillong, Silchar, Mizoram.I have learned all the song and dialogues from Banikanta Barman. And he has learnt it from his father.</p>
00.27.49---	<p>Amal Baishya---- Its been more then 20 years I am associated with this group . I like music . traditional music is in verge of extinction . I myself volunteered here in this group and last 20 years has been associated with the group. I am a musical instrument player. Sometimes participate in chorus. We have not learned the manipulation of puppets.</p>
00.28.40	<p>Naren Kaivarta /Das --- I have learned the manipulation so that in emergency I can be help. Once there was two performances at the same time in two different places that time I have performed in one place Bani Dada has performed in the other place. I have used dialogues also with whistles.. I have participated in training programme of puppetry organized by Directorate of cultural affairs , Govt. of Assam. I made some puppets also.</p>
00.29.50	<p>Ratul Baishya.---- I am interested in music only.. I am not a regular member of the team but often I participate in performance if needed. Like today</p>

Time**Description**

two members of the team is absent today so I have participated. Amal Baishya is my grandfather in relation. As a child I have enjoyed the puppet performances of this particular group. I was fascinated by the performances and was very surprised to see those dancing puppets because we could not see the manipulator.

.00.31.40

Banikanta Barman---- puppet shows are generally performed at night . the duration of one show may be of 5/ 6 hours. Earlier during my grandfather's time, arrangements of light was made in a very innovative way using local materials. Lower part of a banana tree was cut and made bowl like hole inside it and dried and filled with half grounded mustard seeds with a wick of one kg cotton yarn . two of these kind of torch were sufficient for the show for a whole night. Later during my fathers time it was replaced by torch made of Bamboo cylinders filled with crude oil with a big cotton yarn wick also used seeds of Robab tenga (a sour fruit size of a football)which is put on a stick and lit . these seed torch light are it for three /four hours at a stretch . then I have seen my father using dhola lamp . Two lamps were hanged using bamboos in front of the stage. Later we used petromax lights . Now we use electric lights . We don't have our own equipments when needed we take for rent.

our traditional style of performance is- we use pepa (a whistle) to express puppets speeches and moderator or sutradhar use narrate it . pepa is made of banana leaf and a bamboo or cane stick like this. We make two pepas.

Time**Description**

40.58--

Now we will start our performances with saraswati bandana , then ojalali and then play SEETA SAYAMBAR.

1.19.36---

My name is Radhakanta Barman this Mohkhali Putala Nach Samiti was established in 1885 by our grandfather Kalikanta barman . we are unfortunate

that we did not see him. Then our father continued to perform in many places of the state and was famous. After his demise my brother Banikanta become the director and I become the producer of the group. We have performed in many states of the country and appreciated by the people. West Bengal , Bangalore, Tripura shilling , Newdelhi etc.

But unfortunately some years ago the popularity of puppetry was declining and government also was not taking much interest. But presently not only our group the other groups of Assam are doing well. Popularity among people are increasing and govt. also showing interest in developing this art form by organizing workshops and shows. Many people from India and govt. agencies also taking interest for conservation and practice of this art form. and also helping financially the puppetry groups. I have received artist pension in 2015 for contribution to this puppetry art form from the govt. of Assam. My request to the Government is to help these poor artists from all over India to survive and to continue this art form.

1.24.37

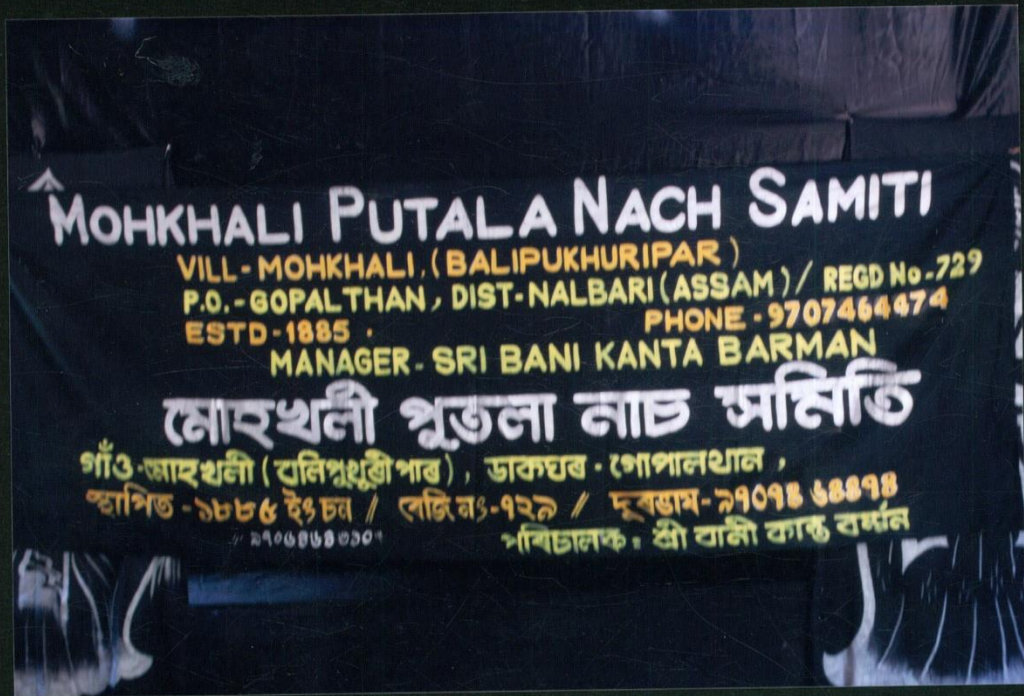
Ram Lakshman Seeta

12628

Manipulation

127.30

Ravana and Mareech . (part of SEETA HARAN)



1. Mohkhali Putala Nach Samiti



2. Puppets



3. With the Performing Team



4. Construction of the stage



5. Construction of the stage



6. Performing traditional puppetry with Bayan and Palis



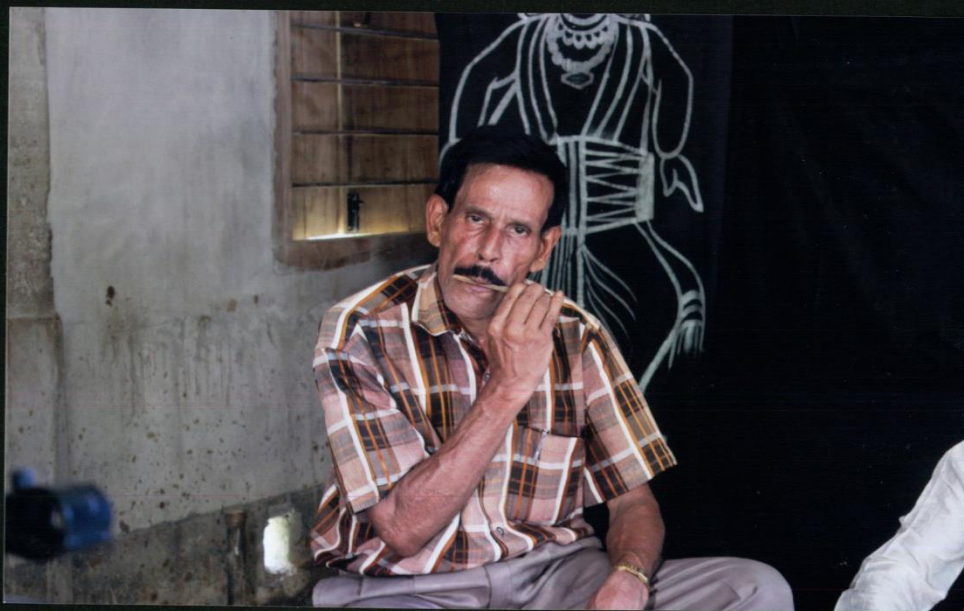
7. Performers – Banikanta Barman , Ratul Baishya ,
 Naren Koivarta, Amal Baishya



8. Sutradhar Puppet



9. Banikanta Barman –in the making of a PEPA (whistle)



10. Playing PEPA by Banikanta Barman



13. Traditional Musical instruments –
Khol, Dhol, Taal



14. Gathered audience



15. Ravana and Mareech from Seeta Haran play



16. Ravana and Mareech from Seeta Haran play



17. Jatayu Puppet



18. Raam and Seeta
from Seeta sayambar
play



19. With Banikanta Barman and Ravana Puppet

MORE THEN
100 YEARS
OLD PUPPET.



**Radhakanta Barman ,
A recipient of Artists pension as a senior puppeteer**

DETAILED REPORT

DATA-8

SURAJIT ACADEMY, SOCIO CULTURAL ACADEMY

JALUKBARI, GUWAHATI

Dated-04.01.2017

DESCRIPTION:

Contemporary puppeteer Binita devi is working under the banner Surajit Academy situated in Jalukbari Guwahati . Surajit Academy has organized classes on puppetry under the guidance of Binita Devi. Binita has learned string puppetry from Banikanta Barman of Mohkhali Putalana Samity and is a recipient of Junior Fellowship of Ministry of Culture , Government of India.. On 3.1.2017 they have performed a tribal dance form the Bagarumba of Bodo tribe in traditional string puppet style.



1. Surjit Academy a socio cultural organization presenting puppet plays



2. String puppets – a Bodo tribal dance



3. String puppets – a Bodo tribal dance



4. With Binita Devi a contemporary puppeteer

DETAILED REPORT

DATA -9

Ruby Puppet Theatre

Jakhala Village, Mirja, Palashbari

District - Kamrup, Assam

Established- 1976

Proprietor – Abani Sarmah

Date- 28.04.2017

TEAM MEMBERS-

Abani Sarmah, Dipankar Sarmah, Jayanta Sarmah, Diganta Das, Dinesh Sarmah, Hirakjyoti sarmah, Dwipen Rabha, Jiten Rabha, Phuleswari devi.

DESCRIPTION:

Abani Sarma established this Ruby puppet theatre in 1976 . As a young child he was attracted to puppet theatre and at teen age he joined a puppet theatre group from west Bengal Ma satoshi putul theatre. And travelled with them in many places of Assam . later his father suggested him to establish his own group. In 1972 he started his own puppet theatre group and formally he registered his as Ruby puppet theatre in 1976.

Abani Sarmah makes his puppets mostly from peeth (Kuhila) but now he is using thermocol also as the peeth is not available now adays. Puppets have more then 4 strings up to 12 strings. The plays are mostly mythological and social also based on different stories and folktales and performed in a modern theatrical style with traditional string puppets, not like traditional style . he is the playwright and director of the plays . He alone deliver all the dialogues in different voices and sings all the songs. Music direction also is done by him only. There are 10 members in his group.

Ruby puppet theatre uses double stages for performances made of wood and iron frames. They use electric lights and other modern equipments for special effects. They use electric musical instruments also along with harmonium table and other traditional instruments.

He also mentioned about Mayaram Bhakat a puppeteer from Palashbari area who used to perform during 50s and 60s. at that time puppets were of six inch in height with three strings only. and dressed with khadi or traditional handloom materias with traditional motifs. He used to perform in traditional way using whistles and narration.

Abani Sarma gave a demonstration of Seeta Haran play based on Balmiki Ramayana which is developed by himself . he wrote the songs also.

Abani sarma got grant in aid from Government of Assam for twice one Rs 20,00/- and in 2016 its 50,000/-. They have performed many times in programs organized by Sangeet Natak Akademi in Many places and he conducted workshops also.

Audio Visual Description

Time

Description

00.01.15

ABANI SARMAH--- I want to make museum out here . the traditional things like these- fishing equipments ,musical instruments ,agricultural equipments etc. are in verge of extinction now so I am collecting these and want to establish a museum of these rural traditional products.

00.01.43

Rehearsal

00.03.40

The name of our puppet theatre is Ruby Puppet theatre .At first it was named as putala nach then in 1976 I established it as Ruby puppet theatre .My name is Abani Sarma , I am from Jakhala village of Mirja , Palashbari. My father Narayan Sarmah, My mother Pramila devi was Head mistress of primary school..

When I was in school I witnessed a puppet theatre group from West Bengal Maa Santoshi putul theatre. which was performing in this Palashbari area. It was in Bengali language. I was fascinated by the performance and I joined them . I have travelled with them for two years .then My father Narayan Sarmah told me that I f you really like it so much then why don't you establish your own puppet group? That group was from Navadweep of West Bengal. I went Navadweep to learn puppetry making and other technical things and stayed there for 6 months. After that I came back to home started my own company. I also bought some puppets from them and at first I used those puppets and then I started making puppets myself. It was in early 70s. then I named my Puppet group as Ruby Puppet theatre in 1976.

Time

Description

At first I performed puppet plays based on Indian mythology like Ramayana, Mahabharata, and Kirtan but as the time goes people are more interested to see social stories , so I have started performing social dramas based on folk tales or collected plays written by other writers as well as mine also. I deliver all the dialogues of all the characters in the play in different voices. And sing all the songs also.

I compose myself , sometimes tune is based on traditional folk music and some time based on popular songs. We use to used traditional musical instruments but now a days we are using electronic musical instruments .

00.09.55

I have done performance under Sangeet Natak Akademi in many states of the country.

I did performances on swacha Bharat Mission.

00.10.48

We have plays on Ramayana based on Balmiki Ramayana translated in Assamese. Traditionally there was no dialogues in puppetry of Assam, narration and music was applied. but we using dialogues .

00.12.12

Usually we use peeth to make puppets but now days peeth is not available so we have started to use thermocol also.

00.12.32

10 to 12 person is needed to perform, we have double stages. But at this moment

We perform in double stage. Sometimes we perform with 5 people for demonstration only.

Now this Jayanta sarma . He is a puppeteer, this is pradeep das, and in music Hirakjyoti Sarmah.

Time

Description

We have double stage and all the equipments needed. like mobile theatre to attract audience. We are using special effects- gun fire, war scenes , in Ramayana Lakshmana give three lines to Seeta and when Ravana tried cross it fire comes out. We have all kind of lights we have.

We have got two grant in aid from Govt. of Assam twice .once it was Rs 20,000/- and last year it was

Rs 50,000/-. The group is a registered group. But we have got grant in aid from Sangeet Natak Akademi. we will apply for it.

00.15.55

I conduct workshops also . where we do everything from making of puppets to dress and décor. We use 4 to 7 strings in a puppet.

00.17.00

We do music based on traditional folk music . now I am going sing a song from SEETA HARAN .. when Seeta saw the golden deer – SONG

00.18.45

I wrote the song.

19.30

Usually in Assam traditional puppeteers followed Kirtibashi Ramayana but I followed Balmiki Ramayan Translated in modern Assamese language. Other plays are based on modern plays , social plays. One play based folk tale.

20.47

If someone sponsors us and told to produce a play then I will emphasize on doing a play with special effects and modern techniques. Because audience likes gimmicks and special effects and theatrical moments. It is not easy to survive doing mythological plays in earlier style . we have design it

Time

Description

with modern techniques then audience will sure accept it.

And we have develop our puppets also . These should be more flexible . it needs modern techniques. And more well designed dress and décor. But we need financial help to do that. The face of Ravana – ten heads of Ravana is made of paper pulp. We use traditional dress in modern plays only . in Mythological we use royal dresses that everyone use.

00.24.00

Puppeteers are preparing puppets for demonstration . Ravana , Ravana in the disguise of Hermit. Lakshmana and Seeta.

00.35.34

Demonstration of Seeta Haran . Characters – Lakshmana, Seeta, and Ravana the hermit and rRavana with ten heads. All the dialogues of different characters and singing is done by Abani Sarma. When Ramayana performed on stage special effects used in the sscene where Ravana tried to cross the lakshman rekha fire comes out .

00.47.37

Demonstration of a song –Seeta with the golden deer.On the stage--- the stage is decorated with trees and bushes where the deer plays hide and seek with Seeta.

00.49.03

In 60s I have witnessed Assameses traditional puppetry in this area. An artist named Mayaram Bhakat used to perform puppetry in different occasions . puppets were made of pith (kuhila)which were fine pieces of handicraft . Height of the puppets were six inches with three strings and dresses were made of khadi materials or traditional handloom materials with traditional motifs. Basically shows

Time

Description

were of mythological stories from ramayana and Mahabharata. I have seen a show of war between Ram and ravana. Whistles was used for expressions and narration . At that period every people knew the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. So it was easy to understand . Mayaram bhakat was invited to perform in religious functions, social functions and family functions . Sometimes he used to perform in weekly market places also. He used to carry those puppets in a bamboo basket on his heads.



1. Ruby Puppet Theatre



With the Team of RUBY PUPPET THEATRE



3. Puppeteer Abani Sarmah



4. A puppet in the making



5. A Siva Puppet



6. Dashanan



7. Abani Sarmah rehearsing Music



8. Puppeteer s busy - preparation for performance
Ravana as a hermit



9. Preparing Ravana for performance



10. Preparing Ravana for performance



11. Puppeteers manipulating puppets



12. Ravana in disguise and Seeta from SEETA HARAN



13.RAVANA and SEETA



14. Different puppets



15. Seeta with the golden Deer



16. Laxman & Seeta from Seeta Haran

**DETAILED REPORT
DATA COLLECTION NO.-10**

Dr. Moushumi Bhattacharjee

Maligaon , Guwahati Assam

Research scholar

Guest faculty – Cotton University

And

Gauhati University, Assam

PhD on the thesis- Puppetry in Assam - Continuity and change

AUDIO-VISUAL DESCRIPTION

Time

Description

00.23.00- 00.01.54

I will start with the my Phd. My thesis was on Puppetry in Assam – Continuity and change. Basically when I say continuity and change my entire thesis tried to deal with historical aspect of Assam and then there was a gradual decline in the status of puppetry. My question was what was the reason behind the decline.? My entire thesis tried to deal with the historical aspect of puppetry.- When was it started in Assam? There was a gravel decline in status of puppetry. So there was a question in my mind what was the reason behind the declination of Puppetry in Assam and then a time come with globalization puppetry sa a far people..so how does it help the present puppeteers ? that is my entire thesis is all about. I have faced many questions, like when I meet my guide she asked me the first question why puppetry ? why not anything else? Why not any other art form? You could have taken any other art form but my point of view is as a student of master degree.. when I was pursuing my masters in Assam University ,Silchar.. I was given a topic on puppetry. A seminar

Time**Description**

topic on puppetry. So till that period of time I had third preconceived notion that puppetry only exist in Rajasthan. because whenever we read about puppetry we only find about Kathputli. We don't find any information about Putala Nach of Assam. So I grew up and I also remember seen a puppetry when I was in school but was also from Rajasthan.

00.01.54- 00.02.35

When I went google for my secondary information I was shocked to see that there were twelve states in India where puppetry is in practice and as the result was alphabetically Assam was in top of the list. So that was a turning point in my life. Because having in born and brought up in Assam. I never knew about the puppetry's existence in Assam. From that point of time I thought that I would be defiantly do something with this art form if I go for my higher studies. So that was how the ignition of puppetry started with me.

00.02.35- 00.03.35

So During this puppetry period I come to know about fellowship by National Folklore support Centre. They provided with the fellowship. It was the money year fellowship. Normally fellowship is provided to the candidate or the scholar but NFSC provides fellowship not only to the scholar but also to the collaboration of the certain field. Suppose the amount is 20,000 then 10,000 will be received by the scholar and 10,000 will be received by the community- the collaborator with whom he or she is working with and with that point of view I started working with Sri Narayan Deka, puppeteer from Makhibaha- Assam puppet theatre .So with that point of view from that period my association with Deka da started.

Time**Description**

00,03.35- 00.05.25

Then during the course of the project,.. it was one year project as it happened because of field work and all.. it goes extended so it was one and half year project. So we had travelled almost each and every corner of the state of Assam because puppetry is been performed in villages . Basically it is famous in the rural areas. This was another thing that I came to know and a shocking thing for me- whenever a puppet performance is organized in a rural areas then it is filled with audiences but same thing whenever is organized in an urban.. say in Guwahati city we don't get a much of the audiences. That is another point of views that is the gap which needs to be filled up. I would like to mentioning a very recent example of 'Jeevan kite festival' which was organized in the bank of Brahmaputra. There Narayan Deka set up his puppet theatre and just behind the puppet stall there was adventures sports stall. When I went to meet Deka da I was shocked to see not a single audience was there price of the ticket was just Rs. 10/- ,not a single audience was there and they were performing continuously as per schedule where as when I went forward youngster were lined up buying tickets worth Rs. 50/- or Rs. 100/- to participate in adventurer sports.

00.05.25- 00.05.45

That is another point, I think the generation like you if you are working on puppetry right now because there is something after my submission of the thesis otherwise. I would have include this point of view.

00.05.45- 00.06.52

This point is also a very vital point because as youngsters attraction to adventure sports is something we should.. but it is a westernized concept. But if we are not respecting our traditional thing is it very much

Time**Description**

ethical for us to show respect to the westernized concept and how far can be sustain like attaining those westernize culture if we don't have respect for traditional thing. So this is something I still keep On working because of my love with puppetry and now I am planning to do a documentary on puppetry. I have friend- colleague, he is a professional filmmaker also. So now we are in the scripting stage. Now we are going to do the documentary. Outside Assam they don't known anything about the existence of the puppetry in Assam. So we are thinking if we do a documentary that at least it will create awareness in people about the existence of puppets in Assam.

00.06.52- 00.07.57

Another point of view I was aware doing the NFSC fellowship days. There was some other puppeteers like Padmini Rongarajan. She was from Andhra Pradesh and two scholars from Odisha one is Ajit Dey he is a film maker another Indraneel Lahiri. They were also working in on the same fellowship. We had a same area of interest- the puppetry. When we did interact we used to come up with same question that we know about shadow puppetry of Odisha. We know about Kath Putli of Rajasthan then why don't we know about the Putala Nach of Assam? So that is the gap which I would like to my research will track to highlight ,because as per generation, as a young generation as the new generation do not take this art form forward may be in 20 years from now this art form may be completely obsolete.

00.07.57- 00.09.15

Another angle which can be taken is economy. The financial factor. During my association with their art form for last 5 to 6 years. I have spent days and night with the family members of the existing

Time**Description**

puppeteers. I found something, like Deka Da, he has three sons. One is in Assam Police, others are in part time business. They are not interested in taking up their father's business. Why? He said- Our shows, our duration of performing shows are September to April and how much shows do they get in a month? May be one or two or in a festive season it may be of four or five and for each and every show they get 3000/- or maximum 10,000/-. They have troupe members of 8 to 10 and they need to travel, they need to pay the conveyance charges and all he put a question on me - with that much of earning is it possible to maintain my family throughout the year? What would I do after the performance season ends. -So this kind of questions.

00.09.15- 00.10.14

I find some people who says that govt. should do something. But I don't agree because it should be from us. Like Govt. will not tell the youngsters that please show respect to your traditional art. It has to come from within. Now during my tenure of research I was told that Moushumi you learn the puppetry- but it was my interest. I used to tell Deka Da when your shows are not running you please tell me how to manipulate strings. So that way I have learned. I can not say I am a master but yes I have learned the basics. So these that inclination have to come from within and for that particular thing. I think the first steps to establish is that- this art for existing.

00.10.14- 00.11.43

Another thing which can be highlighted is when govt. or Sangeet Natak Akademi organises puppet Festivals.. last time it was organized herein Assam it was in 2011 in Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra. So I stay in Adabari its far from here. you can see the

Time**Description**

pain of travelling. Because of my interest I had to travel everyday for covering the shows, so what happened people from this part of the city is completely opposite pole to attend the shows in Kalakshetra. What I feel is-when this kind show organized a mid point in the city should taken that people from entire city can attend or parallelly in may be two places. Rabindra Bhawan can be easily accessible. So some shows in Rabindra Bhawan. Some in Kalakshetra. This practical thinking has to be done by the people. Who are in-charge of the organizer committee.

These are the loop holes basically which can be highlighted or tackled or fulfilled basically if you want to take puppetry to another 10 to 20 years from now.

00.11.43 -00.12.19

Now the Subject matter. Basically puppetry practiced in the rural areas it is mythological themes the religion themes. So some of the shows which are very popular among masses . Chandra Bangsha, Sati Jaymati, Lakhindhar Behula, Raja Harichandra. This is the most showed performance. But yes some other groups who performs episodes from Ramayana I can tell you about Banikanta Barman of Mohkhali Putala Nach Samiti.

00.12.19- 00.13.19

The problem is totally with a traditional puppet. Other puppeteers have improvised their style of presentation. Banikanta Barman does not include, he is still following the traditional use of Pepa (whistle). So what happens, I will insight an example. In Pandu Adarsh Bidyalaya in Pandu Guwahati, during Saraswati Puja he was called to perform. The school invited him to perform. When I came to know about it

Time**Description**

I went there for video footage to NFSC project. It was a regulation that every month we have to send three hours of video footage as part of my following.

00.13.19- 00.15.42

I was there with everything, camera and all. When everything was ready I started interacting with the student community. I saw that they are very interested, very excited because they have never saw a puppet show before. Then basically what happened. They said we never saw puppet, girls said 'we know Barbie doll but doll or puppet can dance that is how can be?'. And they want to see. So at 5-30 puppet performance started. episode was Seeta Haran. They used Pepa (whistle) and moderator started to translate the dialogues. The children community could not relate the things. It was a full packed auditorium. Slowly students started coming out I told my assistant to keep going and I came out and asked student what happened you were so excited. You never seen puppetry now what happened? Why are you leaving? They said we are having a gap in understanding. What the pepa is saying and what the Sutradhar is saying we could not understand. That is the problem with traditional puppeteers. He does not want to change. He is following the legacy. And that is I think the hurdle of taking forward the art.

00.15.42- 16.38

Narayan Deka, Abanikanta Sarma improved and performing modern kind of shows like diabatis awareness, aids awareness, social plays. Now subject matter is very open. They are making shows on different themes.

Basically in rural areas it is regional theme and in urban sector people are looking for different kind of subject matter.

PUPPETRY IN ASSAM: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Arts
Gauhati University
For the Ph.D. Degree



Moushumi Bhattacharjee
Research Scholar
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Gauhati University
2015

*Thesis –
Puppetry in Assam : Continuity and Change*

*Dr Moushumi Bhattacharjee
with the puppet of Dr Bhupen Hazarika*



Detailed Report

DATA COLLECTION -11

ANTARANGA

(An organization for children art , theatre and Pupperty)

Established – 2012

Guwahati , Assam

Email id-antaranga12@gmail.com

Puppet play- **BHEEM CHARITA** dtd.-16/02/2018

DESCRIPTION-

Antaranga is a registered socio cultural organization established in 2013 in Guwahati Assam which is working for children art , theatre and Pupperty since its inception . Contemporary puppeteer Antara GG Choudhury is actively associating with the organization. This organization has organized five puppetry workshops and produced three puppet plays in association with the directorate of cultural affairs , Govt of Assam so far. Antaranga is practicing traditional string puppets as a part their puppetry activities . In this puppet play BHEEM CHARITA based on ancient Assamese poet Ram Saraswati's Bheem Charita which was produced in association of Directorate of Cultural Affairs , Govt of Assam (16.02.2018) used traditional string puppet made of PITH as the sutradhar of the play along with other forms of puppets. A senior traditional puppeteer Suren Patar trained the puppeteers of Antaranga to manipulate string puppet . One interview with Suren patar was included in the first report of this project.



1. ANTARANGA
(an organization for children art , theatre and Puppetry)



2. Sutradhar – A string puppet





3. Bheem and Bakasura



4. Felicitation to Traditional String Puppeteer Suren Patar

CONCLUSION of 3rd Report

In this third report we have collected 5 data .

Data no-7 Mohkhali Putala Nach Samiti is performing in ancient traditional style which is discussed in the description of the data. This is the oldest puppetry group of Assam established in 1885.

Data no 8 Surajit academy of Jalukbari ,Guwahai is working in the field of contemporary puppetry also working with traditional string puppetry of Assam.

Data no 9 Ruby puppet theatre of Bijoy nagar , Palashbari, Kamrup is actively working with traditional puppetry since 1976. Abanikanta Sarma the proprietor director , playwright and solo singer and actor,. Ruby puppet theatre performs professionally with all the modern equipments and in modern theatre style (2nd category).

Data no 10 Interview with Dr Moushumi Bhattacharjee is the Data no 10. Dr Bhattacharjee has done her PhD on Puppetry of Assam : continue and Change.

Dr Bhattacharjee found that Putala Nach of Assam is not widely known in outside Assam. Popularity of the art form also declined in the state. She tried to find out the reason behind the declination . In her research she found that this art form is still very popular in rural Assam . Mythological plays are also very popular but in urban areas not that popular. Specially in traditional style of performance there is gap of understanding in audience in urban areas as whistle is used and moderator use to explain the dialogues or situation. Troupes of 2nd category that is tradional puppets with modern techniques are more accepted by the audience. She thinks awareness about art form among masses is very much needed . and performance level should be more stylized to attract young people. There is a financial factor also next generation of the families of puppeteers are

not interested to take it as their livelihood because season for puppetry performance is limited its September to April only and invitation for performance are also limited so most of the puppetry groups have taken it as secondary source of income. Awareness among people cannot be forced it should be come within. Government organization should organize puppetry shows or festivals more frequently and in a place where its accessible to everyone. Basically in rural areas it is regional theme and in urban sector people are looking for different kind of subject matter.

Data no 11 is of a Puppet play production BHEEM CHARITA By Antaranga an organization for children theatre and puppetry in association with Directorate of Cultural Affairs Govt of Assam. Where Traditional String Puppetry was used .

Conclusion

Project

Audio- Visual and written documentation

of

Traditional Puppet Theatre of Assam

In this project we have collected total 11 data.

It is not known exactly at what time the art of puppetry first made its appearance in Assam But there are sufficient grounds to believe that the tradition of puppet shows here goes back to several centuries (atleast the early 15th century).The Assamese Bhaagavata contains several references of two types of puppetry that is wooden puppet and Shadow puppets in Assam which was called as Tatak Tatek Natak and the showmen designated by such terms as Tatekiya and Bajikar

It is fair guess that the art of Puppetry continued to be practised in some manner or other after the time of composition of the literary works referred to above. But no clear information is available as to the state of the art it might have gone through since then till we come to a period about a hundred years from now . from all available accounts it is clear that whatever the position in earlier times, shadow- puppets have not been known in Assam during the last hundred years and the art, even though practiced at one e time, must have died out. But the *String puppet theatre* known by such names as *Putala Nach*, *putala bhaona* and *putala bhaoria* has been a most popular medium of folk entertainment in plains of Assam through out this period.

Taking in to account the themes , techniques and outlooks involved , assortment of puppeteer groups active at the present time could be placed in three categories:

- 1) those that stick to the traditional pattern more or less strictly.
- 2) those that claim to be following the traditional lines but have in effect absorbed various innovations often unknowingly
- 3) those that have gone for all kinds of patently non traditional or modern things.

In this project we have collected total 11 datas . Seven of them of traditional puppetry groups, one interview with an individual puppeteer, one interview with a research scholar and two datas of cultural organization.

In our data collection we have found that Mohkhali Putala nach Samiti comes under the 1st category.

Other traditional groups come under the 2nd category.

Repertoires

The main play of the repertoires of most of the traditional troupes (1st category) were limited to the stories from Ramayana , Mahabharata and Bhagavata. How as rule they confine to religious or mythological themes troupes of 2nd category venture out in other fields besides the religion ones and include in their repertoires play with themes adapted from popular legends and historical episodes . sometimes themes including folktales , classics, romances, and fantasies even adaptation form famous novels.

Almost all categories of troupes today dish out skits , farces and dance drama in a bid cater to contemporary taste.

Concluding remarks

This art form is not purely family business in Assam. The people engaged in the art are drawn from the peasantry who take it up because of their attachment to it not out of any commercial motive. They are at best semi-professional who earn a little extra cash now and then from their performances. But at present we have found few groups who have taken it up as fulltime profession- Ruby Puppet theatre and Shiromoni Putala theatre for instance.

It is significant that in Assam there is no cast or professional class associated with puppetry and there is no stigma attached to its practice. It is true that normally the economic status of the puppeteers has been rather low. Apart from the fact that mostly they come from low income peasant families, the remuneration they paid for their performances are usually a mere pittance and these too come not very often. They are invited in religious festival, social functions marriage ceremony Pujas etc. But presently those puppetry groups who have taken it as prime income source have their own Penndel of mobile shows with ticket system. They have double stages made of iron frame and wood, have all the equipments of lights and sound.

It is noteworthy that at present there are 13 traditional puppetry groups in Assam actively performing their shows mostly in rural areas of Assam. Most of them are in lower Assam and some are in Middle Assam. Groups which were existed in upper Assam were no more in action now. Among the existing groups almost 5 puppetry groups are established in last five years one of them is following the traditional style of performance(1st category). Others come under the 2nd category. There some contemporary puppeteers and organization who come under the 3rd category but they are practicing traditional puppets also(a list

is given below).It is equally remarkable that almost all the groups are concern for the preservation for this important art heritage.

In very recent times puppetry has attracted renewed attention and gained fresh recognition from from different quarters including scholars, experts, the intelligentsia, and the concerned government departments as powerful medium for entertainment and enlightenment particularly for children – capable of carrying socially relevant messages. Experiments are going on with puppetry in other art forms like theatre and dance.

List-of Traditional puppetry groups active at present in Assam.

1. Mohkhali Putala nach Samiti (1885)
Mohkahali , Nalbari Assam
2. Ruby Puppet theatre (1976)
Bijoy nagar , Kamrup, Assam
3. Sagarika Puppet theatre(1998)
2no Oujari, Khetri, Kamrup, Assam
4. Navaratna Putala theatre (1979)
Bhalukmari , Nagao Assam
5. Pancharatna Puppet Theatre (1979)
Bhalukmari ,Nagaon , Assam
6. Shiromoni Puppet Theatre(2013)
Kakomari, Nagaon Assam
7. Rong ghar Puppet theatre (2012)
Kaomari Nagaon ,Assam
8. Assam Puppet Theatre (1985)
Makhibaha , Nalbari , Assam
9. Asomi Puppet theatre (1998)
Makhibaha , Nalbari, Assam
10. Ma Manasha Puppet theatre (2018)
Gandhiya, Nalbari, Assam
11. Pallabi Puppet theatre(!997)
Makhibaha, Nalbari ,Assam
12. Nataraj Puppet theatre(2004)
Gandhiya , Ojapara, Nalbari Assam
13. Basudev Putala Nach (2007)
Gandhiya, Nalbari , Assam

Research Scholars, Government agencies and other Organizations in Assam which are working in the field of puppetry.

- Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi.
- Puppetry wing ,Department of Culture ,Government of Assam
- Srimanta sankaradeva Kalakshetra , Guwahati , Assam
- Surajit Academy Jalukbari , Guwahati (socio cultural organization)
- Antaranga (an organization for children art theatre and Puppetry), Dispur, Guwahati, Assam
- Indira Gandhi National centre for Arts Regional centre , Guwahati also taking up activities for conservation and preservation of traditional puppetry of Assam

- Dr Birendranath Dutta ,academician, eminent folklorist, researcher of Assam and recipient of Padmashri award.
- Dr Nabeen Sarma, eminent folklorist, Guwahati University
- Dr Moushumi Bhattacharjee , Reaserch scholar.
- Nasifa Islam Rajbongshi, Educationist , Researcher.