

# Performative Analytical Study of The Play 'Raja' By Ratan Thiyam



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## Abstract

RatanThiyam creates a 'Theatre of Expression' that is 'Visually Magnificent Spectacle', majorly focuses on 'War and Peace' which are highly concern of 'Political and Social' scenario with 'Regional Politics' directly. Thiyam's own political message is most clear to those farthest away from his 'Roots'.

RatanThiyam uses the Folk and Traditional Forms of Manipuri like...

1. Occidental and Oriental Performance Theories and Performance
2. Thang-Ta
3. Lai Haroba
4. Natasankirtana
5. Wari Leeba
6. Manipuri Raslila

...with telling effect without saying anything about their mobilization as part of a larger political statement.

**Keywords:** Tagore, Ratan Thiyam, Raja.

## Introduction

To study the content and the form relationship in Tagore's play Raja and philosophical, regional and global thoughts perceived and expressed by Shri Ratan Thiyam. It shows the visual images and body culture with a base of Zen philosophy, the Japanese and the Korean theory which also has focus on Natyashashtra.

## Aim of the Study

In this chapter, a detailed study of the "Play: Shakudaba Shaknaiba (The King of the Dark Chamber) Design and Directed By K. N. RatanThiyam" has been discussed and evaluated on the basis of-

## Methodology

### Macro Text / Sahitya Vs Micro Text / Abhinaya:

#### Performance Text

1. Thematic interpretation:
2. Dramatis personae (in order of appearance):
3. Scene wise synopsis of the play:
4. Production note:
5. Interpretation with director note:
6. Scene wise pictorial analysis of the play:

#### Performance Text

Duration : 90 minutes

Language : Manipuri

#### Thematic Interpretation

"Eternal Quest for Truth and Beauty."

#### Dramatis Personae (In Order of Appearance)

1. Queen Sudarshana
2. Queen Sudarshana's Maid Surangama
3. King Nighthousaba(In Invisible Form)
4. Thakurda
5. Wayfarers
6. King Kanchi
7. Other Kings – Avanti, Koshala, Vidarbha, And Kalinga
8. Suvarna - Pretender King
9. Queen Sudarshana's Companion Rohini
10. King Of Kanyakubja
11. Kanyakubja's Minister

#### Major Four Characters

1. Queen Sudarshana
2. Queen Sudarshana's Maid Surangama
3. King Nighthousaba(In Invisible Form)

## 4. King Kanchi

**Scene Wise Synopsis of The Play**

1. In 1910, when Rabindranath Tagore wrote the 'Raja – King of the Dark Chamber' and it appeared on stage a year later in Shantiniketan on his 50th birthday, little did he know that one day it would jump the regional language divide to render itself in Manipuri. RatanThiyam's strange reinterpretation of Tagore's classic play *ShakudabaShaknaiba* based on 'Raja – King of the Dark Chamber' about his search for the divine within his inner cell of Darkness.
2. Thiyam's production, adapted and comes as the story of a woman's battle with darkness and her redemption into inner light when she gives in to the joy of surrendering to the "ugly" – and finds solace in its inherent horror. At the center of Thiyam's play are four major characters – Queen Sudarshana, her maid Surangama, invisible King and King Kanchi. A motley cast of smaller characters adds to the layers which are played out in three primary tiers - that of the Queen and her maid, the King and his men and a posse of Manipuri folk dancers and musicians who alternate the scenes in a set sequence.

**Scene – I: Dark Chamber Scene**

1. The performance begins with Queen Sudarshana's anguished searchcries for light in the chamber of darkness that the king has created for her in the subterranean depths. Queen Sudarshana, wedded early in her life to the King who would meet her only in a dark chamber of his palace, insists on seeing her husband in the light. The King's disinclination to make himself visible greatly disgruntles her. She is equally annoyed when her maid of honour, Surangama, who understands the ways of the King, tells the Queen to be content with this secret meeting in the room which is in the interior of the earth, specially built by the King for her sake.
2. The Queen asks Surangama to tell her whether the King is handsome or not. She is hardly satisfied with the ambiguous description of the King she extorts from her maid. The Queen directly requests the King to reveal himself to her outer sight. The King tells her that she will fail to recognize him in his manifestation among other outer things, unless she is prepared for it. The Queen proudly replies that she would certainly succeed in spotting him. On her insistence the 'King – a personification of darkness' agrees to make himself visible on the occasion of the ensuing 'BasantaPurnimaUtsav'.

**Scene – II: BasantaPurnimaUtsav Scene.**

1. In the 'BasantaPurnimaUtsav', thousands of people enjoying the full moon night and the Utsav is in full swing. The evening is intoxicating but the King's absence is marked and discussed by many people. But the old man Thakurda says that the king is everywhere.

**Scene – III: Kanchi as well as Other Kings and trumped-up 'King' Suvarna Scene.**

1. The mystery of the invisibility of the King intrigues the generality of mankind who have come out from far and near to participate in the festival. Some are even sceptical of the very existence of the King and consider the country to be kingless. Thakurda, who claims himself to be the faithful friend of the King, has no doubt whatsoever about the King's omnipresence.
2. The Kings – Kanchi, Avanti, Koshala, Vidarbha, and Kalinga; from the neighboring principalities arrive to participate in the festival as royal guests, they find no one responsible to receive them.
3. Suvarna, the pretender King enters the pleasure garden in stately grandeur. Under the leadership of Kanchi, Suvarna, the pretender King is exposed and forced to pay homage to them. Kanchi and other Kings forcefully decorates / establishes to trumped-up 'King' Suvarna as real 'King'. The king of 'Kanchi' asks him to bow down his head in front of him and the dummy king gives in. The king of 'Kanchi' wants to use him as a pawn. The trumped-up 'King' Suvarna is also ready to betray his kingdom.

**Scene – IV: Queen Sudarshan and her companion Rohini, Palace Garden Scene.**

1. Queen Sudarshana enjoying the romantic atmosphere of BasantaPurnima in her palace garden. And from a far distance wrongly identifies the King / Raja – Ningthousaba as the real king. Queen is totally moved and charmed and ask her maid Rohini to present flowers to the King.
2. Sudarshana is tricked into believing the personable Suvarna, fair complexioned to be the King whereas the latter is no more than a "trumped-up-King" who has appeared before the public and most of whom are taken in by his kinglike outside.
3. Allured as Queen Sudarshana is by his outer beauty, she sends to him her garland through a maid of hers. Suvarna is presently found out by the shrewd King of Kanchi to be a pretender whom he proposes to use as a decoy to capture Queen Sadarsana.
4. Rohini goes to Suvarna only to find that he was sitting silent like an idol who did not show any sign of recognition. On the other hand Kanchi took the initiative in accepting the flowers and also seizing a necklace of jewels from Suvarna and he bestowed this upon Rohini.
5. She returns to her mistress in a blissful spirit. The queen takes it as an awful insult and demands that Rohini should leave the necklace and accept another ornament instead from her.

**Scene – V: Palace Garden Fire Scene.**

1. Kanchi sets fire to the Palace garden which, however, soon spreads beyond control. Surrounded by fire, as "the threatening black cloud" Queen Sudarshana Shamed beyond bearing she longs to be reduced to ashes.

**Scene – VI: Dark Chamber Scene.**

1. The Queen presently meets the King in the "Dark Chamber", with the gnawing sense of shame for she knows that she has betrayed herself by putting another's garland" around her neck.
2. Queen Sudarshana conscious of the inner rift cannot face the King and wants like an offended lover to run away from him but the divine lover whom the human soul cannot leave for ever asks her impassively to disown him if she likes and if she can. She would not be consoled by the King and her imperious self-will makes her desert him and seek shelter in the house of her father, the king of Kanyakubja.
3. Surangama understandingly reads the mood of the Queen and begs to be allowed to accompany her travail of awakening.

**Scene – VII: The King of Kanyakubja, father of Sudarshana, and his Minister Scene.**

1. The King of Kanyakubja, the father of Queen Sudarshana, who too is not prepared now to accept her warmly. He tells his minister that she, who has faithlessly left her husband, will be no more than a mere maid-servant in his house.

**Scene – VIII: King Kanchi's Encampment Scene.**

1. Kanchi is conversing with the messenger of Sudarshana's father making clear to him that the kings are waiting to rescue Queen Sudarshana from the servitude and degradation of which she is condemned.
2. Battle between Sudarshana's father Kanyakubja and King Kanchi where Kanyakubja has been defeated by King Kanchi.
3. Thakurda enters and dressed as a warrior, to fling his challenge at the kings by telling them that, the King has come.

**Scene – IX: Battle Scene / Sudarshana and Surangama Scene.**

1. Battle / War between the Kings. Queen Sudarshana's expiation begins in her father's house where Sudarshana has more sorrow in store for her, for all the kings pursue her there to claim her. They challenge her father to fight or surrender her to them. In the fight, she learns to her extreme remorse, that her father "has been taken prisoner and the victorious kings are waiting for Sudarshana to choose one of them as her husband.

**Scene – X: After Battle / War Scene.**

1. During the battle, trumped-up 'King' Suvarna defeats and self – realization of Kanchi King. Kanchi proves a blissful defeat. The Kanchi King wants to meet the real king so he can appreciate his bravery. The transformation of the King of Kanchi from an insurgent to a believer is the transformation of the agnostic for the battle he waged was the battle of an unbeliever with the Supreme Reality.

**Scene – XI: Queen Sudarshana and Surangama Scene.**

1. The news comes that the battle is over and the King's enemies are routed. But Sudarshana, who eagerly awaiting the arrival of the King, is told that he has gone away after his victory. Queen

Sudarshana and the King of Kanchi realize that they were misled by wrong values.

**Scene – XII: Dark Chamber Queen Sudarshana and King Scene.**

1. One perceives that the King is beyond physical sight, while the other feels that he is beyond physical might. Sudarshana, now spiritually awakened, is lovingly bidden by the King to "come outside into the light".
2. Play closes in the Dark Chamber where the play began. Queen Sudarshana finally meets the King. The Queen Sudarshana to whom the Dark Chamber was only Dark now sees Light in it.

**Production Note**

1. Raja – The King of Dark Chamber is a symbolic allegorical play. It is not divided into acts and scenes. It reflects Tagore's philosophy and the relationship between an individual and the universes. In the play, the King symbolizes God and the Dark Chamber where he resides represents the Inner-Self of man. He can only be accessed in the dark chamber, which means God cannot be found outside, one has to search within.
2. In this production of the play, the performance begins in the Dark Chamber, with Queen Sudarshana crying for light and the invisible King saying that she should identify him when he appears in the festival 'Basant Purnima Utsav'. From here it goes through an entire narrative that finally ends with the reunion of the invisible King and Queen Sudarshana. The Queen is asking for the normal external light and the King is eager to show the internal light which carries both 'Beauty and Truth' and thus, constantly tries to lay the foundation for an intense approach to the inner realms.

**Complex forms of cultural encountering – new artistic expressions through blending:**

1. Content from one culture
2. Forms – Theatrical expressions or elements and techniques from one or more artistic forms from another culture, possibly also intermingled with elements and techniques – Music, Movement, Dance etc. or images from the first culture.

**Structure**

1. From acts to units to metaphysical space.
2. Dialogues frequently replace by visuals.
3. No specific time concept.

The narrative from here on twists and turns through paths of blood, treachery and conflicts till the Queen Sudarshana and her Dark Lord King unite. In the final act, the queen cries for the sun as the king embraces her in his inky folds. In that overriding darkness, she shines like a deity bathed in her inner golden light – a diva of the underworld.

What probably lifts the play from the mundane is its use of the Manipuri language that is at once folksy, harsh on the uninitiated ear, anguished and yet appealing in its earthy lyricism, the play inspires in the viewer a desire to learn the unknown – in this case the colourful "Bhasa or Vernacular" arts of India. The use of Manipuri classical dance movements, folk traditions and local attires – in a

screaming palette of saffron, red, yellow, golden and black – create a gala on stage.

#### Interpretation with Director Note

“Eternal Quest For Truth And Beauty.”

1. An allegorical play, it echoes the very rhythm of unearthly and personal rousing of an individual in his eternal quest for truth and beauty.
2. This is a complex psychological play and yet very contemporary. When we look at the concept of globalization and the technological development, there has to be a spiritual balance between what we do technologically and our meaningful endeavors.
3. Raja – The King of Dark Chamber production is an attempt to give a concise and precise portrayal of the original text and more concentration is being given to express the ‘Thematic Content’ of the play. Hence, the performance text is treated with structural changes according to the complex demand of the thematic content.
4. Tagore’s depiction of ‘Darkness’ in this play is the ‘Darkness of the Inner Self and Human Mind’, which most of the time is materialistic by nature, full of unlimited desire and bears a lack of spiritual depth. The more the human mind is purified the more is the darkness is gone. The process is like a long stillness before daybreak, secret and silent by nature. There is nothing to mark it except the quietly increasing light and the silent definite evolution taking place inside.
5. Apart from his universal approach which is congenial in his writing, the most contemporary aspect of Tagore is his portrayal of the impact of changes on the human mind, and the condition created because of the advanced civilizations and their growing power on others, which places

increasing demand on us and where the attitude towards existence is compelled to be external. But in spite of many difficulties a continuous effort should be made to find a path for inner preparation after which the voice of the conscience is being heard.

#### Conclusion

This article would be concentrating on play ‘Raja’ in the theatrical aspect considering the playwright and directors contribution but most importantly the “Indianness भारतत्व” brought forward by Rabindranath Tagore and Ratan Thiyam will be a new dimension for those who want to learn about the “Indian Philosophy, Indian Aesthetics, Theory of Purushartha; in their artistic and creative works.

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