

CHAPTER: 6

**PERFORMATIVE ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE
PLAY 'RAJA' BY RATAN THIAM:**



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PLAY ‘RAJA’ BY RATAN THIAM:**

- In this chapter, a detailed study of the “Play: Shakudaba Shaknaiba (The King of the Dark Chamber) Design and Directed By K. N. Ratan Thiam” has been discussing and evaluating on the basis of –

METHODOLOGY:

MACRO TEXT / SAHITYA VS MICRO TEXT / ABHINAYA:

➔ PERFORMANCE TEXT:

- **THEMATIC INTERPRETATION:**
- **DRAMATIS PERSONAE (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**
- **SCENE WISE SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY:**
- **PRODUCTION NOTE:**
- **INTERPRETATION WITH DIRECTOR NOTE:**
- **SCENE WISE PICTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY:**

PERFORMANCE TEXT:

- ⇒ **Duration** : **90 minutes**
⇒ **Language** : **Manipuri**

THEMETIC INTERPRETATION:

“Eternal Quest For Truth And Beauty.”

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

- **Queen Sudarshana**
- **Queen Sudarshana’s Maid Surangama**
- **King Nighthousaba (In Invisible Form)**
- **Thakurda**
- **Wayfarers**
- **King Kanchi**
- **Other Kings – Avanti, Koshala, Vidarbha, and Kalinga**
- **Suvarna - Pretender King**
- **Queen Sudarshana’s Companion Rohini**
- **King of Kanyakubja**
- **Kanyakubja’s Minister**

Major Four Characters

- Queen Sudarshana
- Queen Sudarshana's Maid Surangama
- King Nighthousaba (In Invisible Form)
- King Kanchi

SCENE WISE SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY:

- 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. Ratan Thiyam's strange reinterpretation of Tagore's classic play *Shakudaba Shaknaiba* based on 'Raja – King of the Dark Chamber' about his search for the divine within his inner cell of Darkness.
- 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.**

- The performance begins with Queen Sudarshana's anguished search cries for light in the chamber of darkness that the king has created for her in the subterranean depths. Queen Sudrashana, 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.

- 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 'Basanta Purnima Utsav'.

➤ **SCENE – II: Basanta Purnima Utsav Scene.**

- In the 'Basanta Purnima Utsav', 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.**

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.**

- Queen Sudarshana enjoying the romantic atmosphere of Basanta Purnima 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.**

- 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.**

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.**

- 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.**

- 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.
- Battle between Sudarshana's father Kanyakubja and King Kanchi where Kanyakubja has been defeated by King Kanchi.
- 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.**

- 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.**

- During the battle, trumped-up 'King' Suvama 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.**

- 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.**

- 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".
- Play closes in the Dark Chamber where the play began. Queen Sudarshana finally meets the King. The Queen Sudarshan to whom the Dark Chamber was only Dark now sees Light in it.

PRODUCTION NOTE:

- 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 symbolises 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.
- In this production of the play, the performance begins in the Dark Chamber, with Queen Sudarrshana 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 Sudarrshana. 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:**

⇒ Content from one culture

⇒ 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:**

⇒ From acts to units to metaphysical space.

⇒ Dialogues frequently replaced by visuals.

⇒ 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.”

- An allegorical play, it echoes the very rhythm of unearthly and personal rousing of an individual in his eternal quest for truth and beauty.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- Apart from his universal approach which is congenital 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.

SCENE WISE PICTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY:

SCENE – I: Dark Chamber Scene.



(1-3) With the first sounds Queen Sudarshana, colourful personality cries for 'Light in the Dark Chamber'.

Sudarshana. Light, light! Where is light? Will the lamp never be lighted in this chamber?



(4-6) The dialogues between Queen Sudarshana and her maid Surangama are charged with tension.

Sudarshana. But why should this room be kept dark?

Surangama. Because otherwise you would know neither light nor darkness.

Sudarshana. Living in this dark room you have grown to speak darkly and strangely--I cannot understand you, Surangama. But tell me, in what part of the palace is this chamber situated? I cannot make out either the

entrance or the way out of this room.

Surangama. This room is placed deep down, in the very heart of the earth.

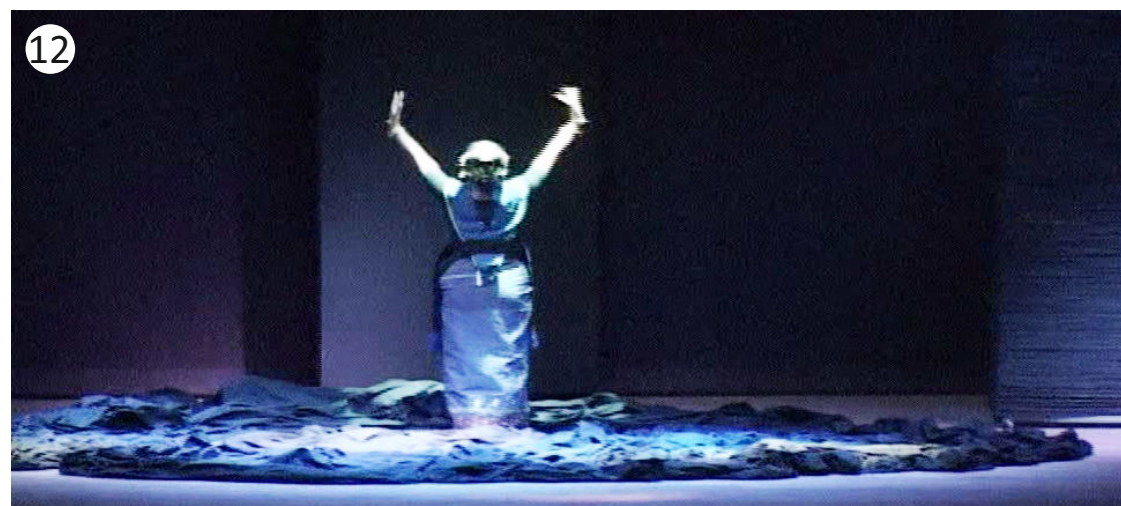
The King has built this room especially for your sake.

Sudarshana. Why, he has no dearth of rooms--why need he have made this chamber of darkness especially for me?

Surangama. You can meet others in the lighted rooms: but only in this dark room can you meet your lord.



(7-9) Surangama, hearing the voice of the King feels that he is right at the door and pays obeisance to him.



(10-12) At this the Queen Sudarshana further feels disturbed and jealous of her maid Surangama



(13-15) The Queen Sudarshana questions the maid Surangama on how she could develop an affinity to the King.

Surangama. Do you not feel a faint breeze blowing?

Sudarshana. A breeze? Where?

Surangama. Do you not smell a soft perfume?

Sudarshana. No, I don't.

Surangama. The large door has opened . . . he is coming; my King is coming in.

Sudarshana. How can you perceive when he comes?

Surangama. I cannot say: I seem to hear his footsteps in my own heart. Being his servant of this dark chamber, I have developed a sense-I can know and feel without seeing.





(16-23) On the arrival of the king, Queen Sudarshan welcomes the King and adorns as a good-looking / handsome King.



(24-25) The dialogues between Queen Sudarshana and the King. Queen Sudarshana is astonished by the thought that if the king is best, how it is that she has not had a chance to see him then.

Sudarshana. Why do you not allow me to see you in the light?

King. So you want to see me in the midst of a thousand things in broad daylight! Why should I not be the only thing you can feel in this darkness?

Sudarshana. But I must see you--I am longing to have a sight of you.

King. You will not be able to bear the sight of me--it will only give you pain, poignant and overpowering.

Sudarshana. How can you say that I shall be unable to bear your sight?

Oh, I can feel even in this dark how lovely and wonderful you are: why should I be afraid of you in the light? But tell me, can you see me in the dark?

King. Yes, I can.

When the Queen Sudarshana persists on her demand and boasts that she would easily be able to pick him out among a million men, the King agrees that he will appear among the people in the ensuing 'Basanta Purnima Utsav'.

Surangama. Where will the Queen see you?

King. Where the music will play at its sweetest, where the air will be heavy with the dust of flowers--there in the pleasure grove of silver light and mellow gloom.

SCENE – II: Basanta Purnima Utsav Scene.



(26-28) Second scene is from Basanta Purnima, when 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.**



(29-30) 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. Suvarna, the pretender King enters the pleasure garden in stately grandeur.





(31-32) Under the leadership of Kanchi, Suvarna, the pretender King is exposed and forced to pay homage to them.



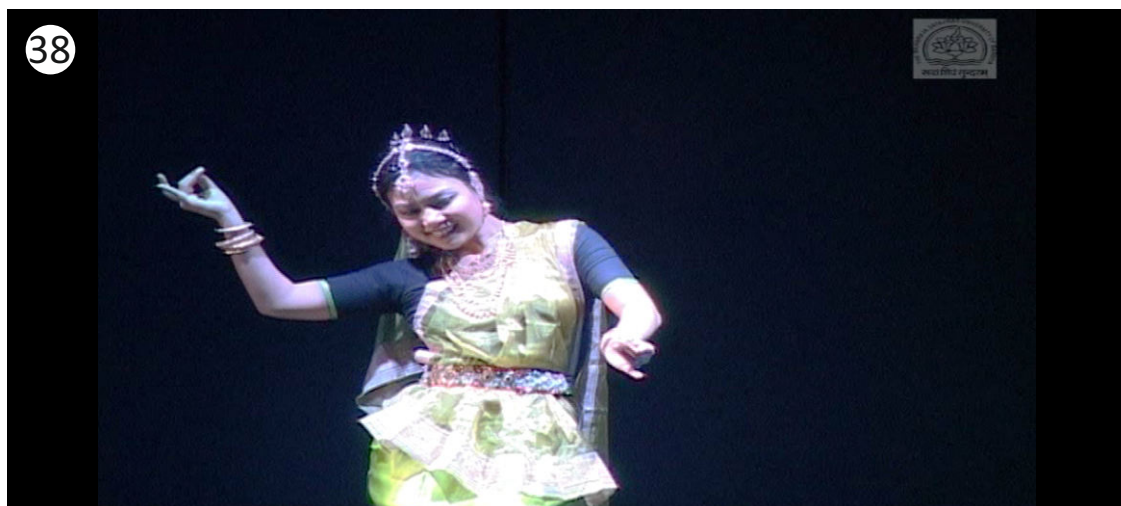


(33-35) Kanchi and other Kings forcefully decorates / establishes to trumped-up 'King' Suvarna as real 'King'. The king of 'Kanchi' asks him to bow down his head in front of him and the dummy king gives in.



(36) 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.



(37-38) Queen Sudarshana enjoying the romantic atmosphere of Basanta Purnima in her palace garden.



(39) From a far distance wrongly identifies the King / Raja – Ningthousaba as the real King.

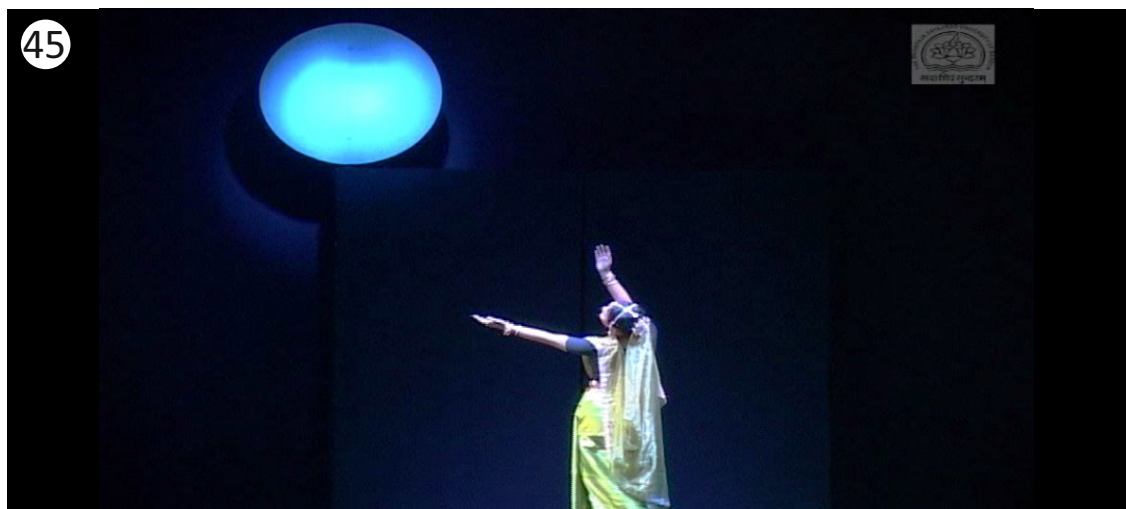


(40) Queen Sudarshana calls her companion Rohini.



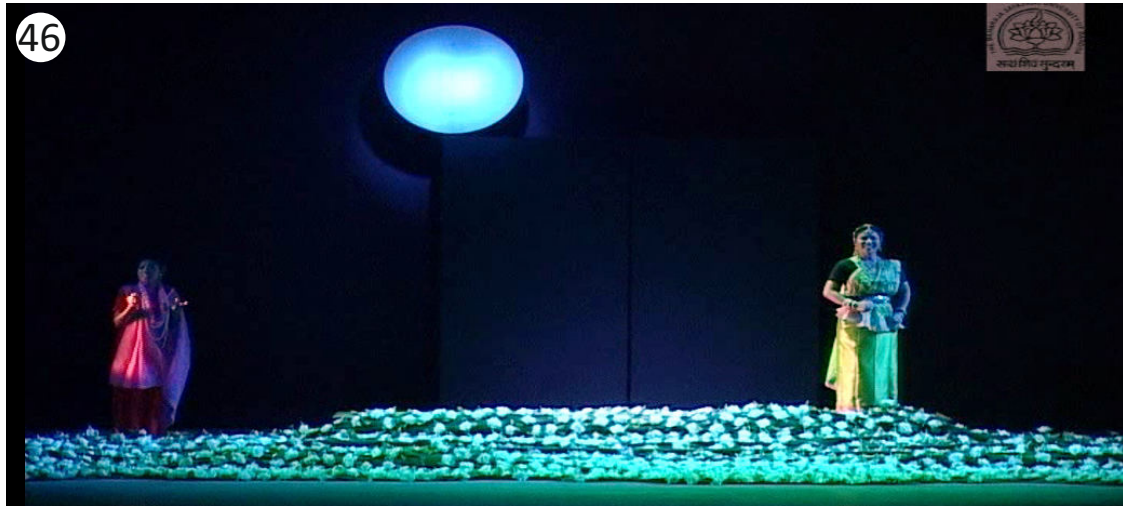


(41-43) Sudarshana allured by the outer beauty of Subarna maladroitly sends to him through her companion Rohini, some blossoms as her greetings, only to be disillusioned too soon. Sudarshana is told to Rohini that the person whose beautiful exterior so irresistibly draws her is without doubt the King.

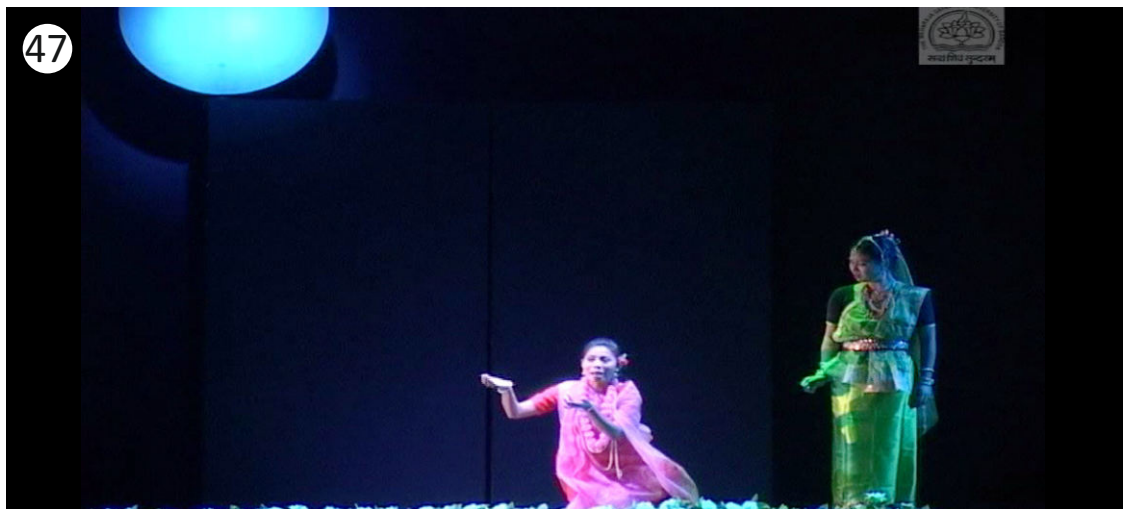


(44-45) Queen Sudarshana soliloquizes and the inner drama of her wavering soul takes shape.

Sudarshana. My heart is all a quiver and restless to-night: I have never felt like this before. The white, silver light of the full moon is flooding the heavens and brimming over on every side like the bubbling foam of wine . . . It seizes on me like a yearning, like a mantling intoxication. Here, who is here?



(46) Rohini re-enters after presenting the Queen sudarshana's greetings.





(47-49) The dialogues between Queen Sudarshana and her companion Rohini.

Rohini. When I gave the King those flowers, he did not appear to understand anything.

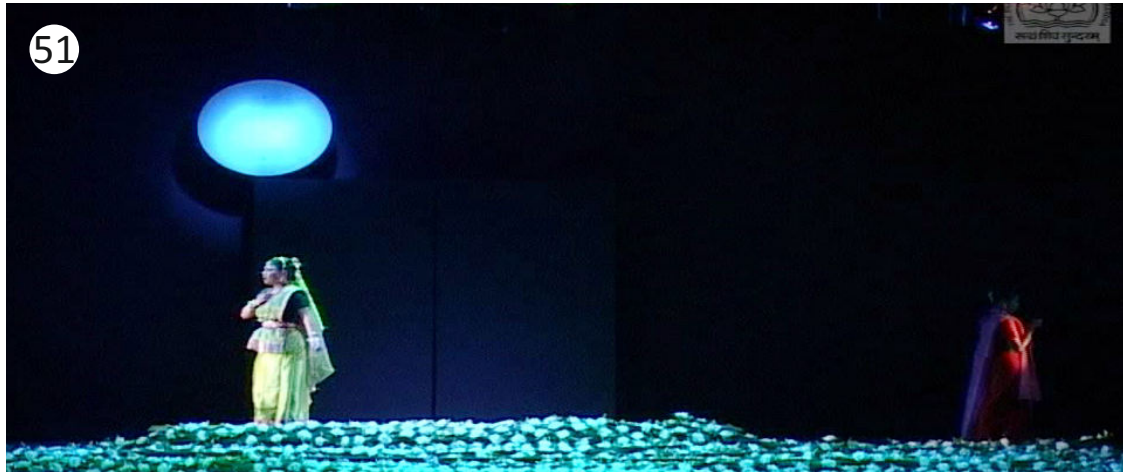
Sudarshana. You don't say so? He did not understand

Rohini. No; he sat there like a doll, without uttering a single word. I think he did not want to show that he understood nothing, so he just held his tongue.

Sudarshana. Fie on me! My shamelessness has been justly punished. Why did you not bring back my flowers?

Rohini. How could I? The King of Kanchi, a very clever man, who was sitting by him, took in everything at a glance, and he just smiled a bit and said, "Emperor, the Queen Sudarshana sends your Majesty her greetings with these blossoms--the blossoms that belong to the God of Love, the friend of Spring." The King seemed to awake with a start, and said, "This is the crown of all my regal glory to-night." I was coming back, all out of countenance, when the King of Kanchi took off this necklace of jewels from the King's person, and said to me, "Friend, the King's garland gives itself up to you, in return for the happy fortune you have brought."





(50-51) Rohini goes out.

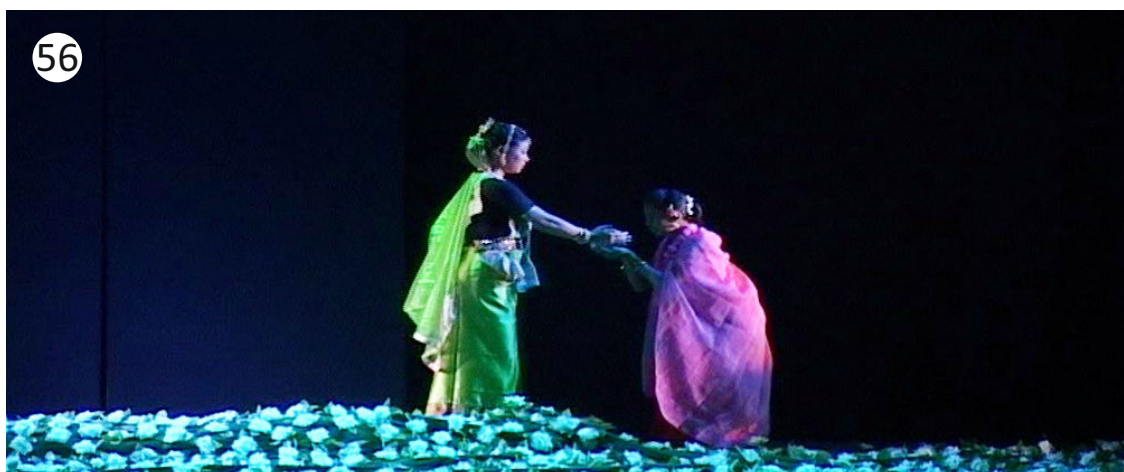


(52) Queen Sudarshana again calls Rohini.





(53-54) Queen Sudarshana asks about necklace which given by trumped-up 'King' Suvarna.



(55-56) Queen Sudarshana gives her bracelets to Rohini in exchange of necklace.



(57-58) Highly Symbolise Scene in which Queen Sudarshana beholds his attractive figure by Kanchi and the other Kings. Queen Sudarshana becomes restless like a caged bird.

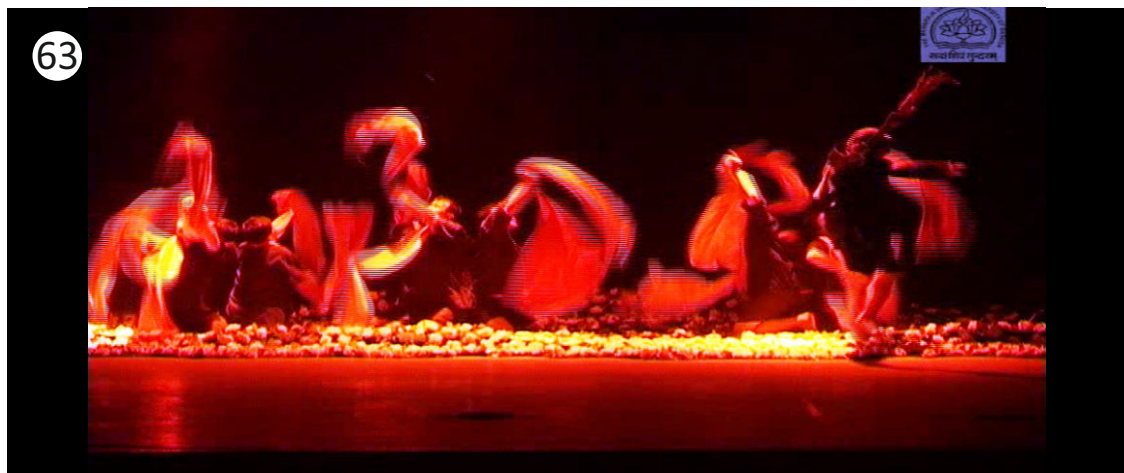
SCENE – V: Palace Garden Fire Scene.



(59-61) Kanchi enters with the false King and instructs to set fire to the garden wherein is situated the Queen's palace.



(62) Kanchi changes trumped-up 'King' Suvarna's attire.



(63) The fire set by Suvarna spreading beyond control unexpectedly.

SCENE – VI: Dark Chamber Scene.



(64-65) The Queen Sudarshana once again converses with 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.





(66-67) Queen Sudarshana is once again seen conversing with the King in the Dark Chamber. Complexity of her tormented soul, her anguish and ignorance, her passion and offended pride, her desperation and self-will.

Sudarshana. O King, I shall not hide anything from you. . . . I have another's garland round my neck.

King. That garland, too, is mine--how else could he get it? He stole it from my room.





(68-70) Queen Sudarshana conscious of the inner rift cannot face the King and wants like an offended lover to run away from him:

Sudarshana. But if you do not cast me off, I will leave you.

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;

King. You have the utmost liberty to do as you like.



(71) 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.**



(72-73) 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.



(74-75) 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.





(76-77) Kanchi discloses his strategy to Suvarna.

Kanchi. In the beginning we must all fight together. Let the battle with Kanya Kubja first be over, then we shall find some way out of the difficulty.



(78) Battle Between Sudarshana's father Kanyakubja and King Kanchi where Kanyakubja has been defeated by King Kanchi.



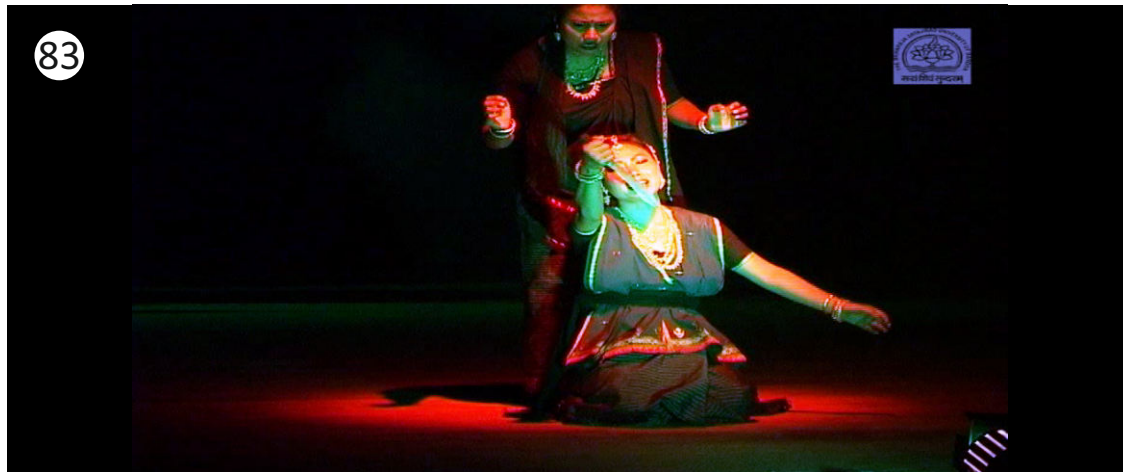
(79) Thakurda enters and dressed as a warrior, to fling his challenge at the kings by telling them that, the King has come.

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



(80-81) Battle / War between the Kings.





(82-83) Sudarshana feels repentance internally, “Oh King, My King. If you had come and helped my father, it would not have dishonoured your fame at all”.

SCENE – X: After Battle / War Scene.



(84) During the battle, trumped-up ‘King’ Suvarna defeats.





(85-87) 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.



(88-89) Sudarshana gets to understand only through pain and lose her pride. Now she is also walking on the road. She believes that it is her defeat that has given her freedom. Now she has understood, that it was not the king who should have come to meet her but instead she should have gone to him.

What a relief, Surangama, what freedom! It is my defeat that has brought me freedom. Oh, what an iron pride was mine! Nothing could move it or soften it. My darkened mind could not in any way be brought to see the plain truth that it was not the King who was to come, it was I who ought to have gone to him. All through yesternight I lay alone on the dusty floor before that window--lay there through the desolate hours and wept! All night the southern winds blew and shrieked and moaned like the pain that was biting at my heart; and all through it I heard the plaintive "Speak, wife!" of the nightbird echoing in the tumult outside! . . . It was the helpless wail of the dark night, Surangama!

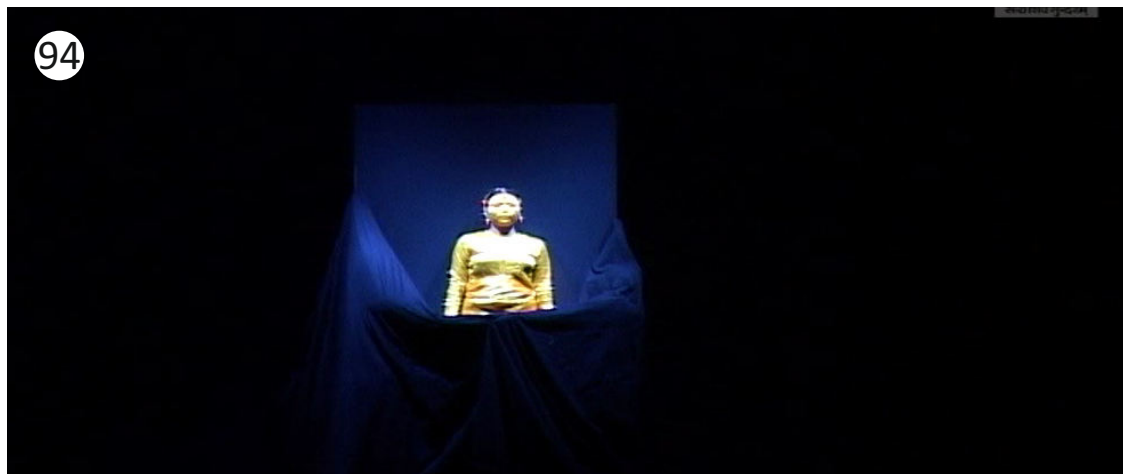


(90) 'Surangama' and 'Sudarshana' both notice that there is yet another person walking besides them. It is the Kanchi king who is now pure at heart. The valiant hearted Kanchi vanquished but regenerated it out on the road questing for inner realization.

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



(91-92) Play closes is in the Dark Chamber where the play began.



(93-94) Queen Sudarshana finally meets the King. The Queen Sudarshan to whom the Dark Chamber was only Dark now sees Light in it.