

CHAPTER: 4

PERFORMATIVE ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE PLAY 'RAJA' BY K. N. PANIKKAR:



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**PERFORMATIVE ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE
PLAY ‘RAJA’ BY K. N. PANIKKAR:**

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

METHODOLOGY:

MACRO TEXT / SAHITYA VS MICRO TEXT / ABHINAYA:

➔ PERFORMANCE TEXT:

- **THEMETIC INTERPRETATION:**
- **DRAMATIS PERSONAE (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):**
- **TRANSLATOR’S NOTE:**
- **SCENE WISE SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY:**
- **INTERPRETATION WITH DIRECTOR NOTE:**
- **SCENE WISE PICTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY:**

PERFORMANCE TEXT:

- ⇒ Duration : 90 minutes
⇒ Language : Malayalam

THEMETIC INTERPRETATION:

असतोमा सद्गमय ।

तमसोमा ज्योतिर् गमय ।

Asato Mā Sadgamaya

Tamasomā Jyotir Gamaya

From Darkness Lead Me To Light

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

- Queen Sudarshana
- Queen Sudarshana's Maid Surangama
- King (In Invisible Form)
- King – In the Form of 'Cruel Terror'
- King – In the Form of 'Sweetness as in Terror'
- King Kanchi
- Other Kings – Avanti, Koshala, Vidarbha, and Kalinga
- Thakurda
- Wayfarers
- Suvarna - Pretender King
- Queen Sudarshana's Companion Rohini

Major Five Characters

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

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

- Creating a Malayalam version of Tagore's 'Raja – The King of the Dark Chamber' has been a unique experience, it cannot be a mere literal translation; nor is it a question of identifying verbal substitute in another language. Words, phrases and metaphors here do not signal a specific objective phenomenon as it happens in any other literary work. They function as symbols, profound and deep and of multiple layers of meaning. Hence there is no rigidity as regards theme, characters, denouement; this unique creativity provides ample scope for free employment of an imaginative Director's innovative skill.
- No wonder Tagore himself has proved this possibility by becoming his own Prekshaka / Viewer and critic and revising his own plays several time changing their names, sequence of incident and even the title of dramas. With all these changes the play was growing and at the same time maintaining his dominant vision emanating from the innermost mind of the author. The play necessarily starts from the mundane level with familiar characters and down-to-earth dialogue and quickly picks up momentum to reach at the highest allegorical level of revelation. To convince the ordinary viewer, the playwright has to come down very often to common man's expression without disturbing the umbilical cord which relates to the Eternal. This in fact includes basically the vision of Bhagavad Gita and Gurudev's own Gitanjali.
- To communicate this high philosophy through the medium of theatre is a formidable task confronting the writer and producer while formulating the sub textual implications.

Apart from the symbolic and allegoric nature of the text, another major problem confronted by the translator is the rendering of songs into Malayalam. As a lyrical play, poetic interludes exceed, as poetic expression with its essential Natyadharmi quality and this is an integral part of Tagore's story-telling. Employing native rhythm and cadence to such songs was essential. All the songs translated are not included in the production script since the stage version did not demand such an exhaustive use of the original text.

SCENE WISE SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY:

➤ SCENE – I: Dark Chamber Scene.

- This scene is in the dark chamber of the palace where the Queen Sudarshana and her maid Surangama meet. The real Raja of the land is never seen by anyone; the queen too is no exception. The Raja makes his visitation to the dark chamber where He cannot be seen by either the queen or her maid. But Surangama claims that she has the rare gift to identify the presence of the King in the dark chamber. However the queen neither perceives him nor feels His presence. She feels hurt out of her characteristic vainglorious nature.
- Surangama, hearing the voice of the King feels that he is right at the door and pays obeisance to him. At this the queen further feels disturbed and jealous of her maid. The queen questions the maid on how she could develop an affinity to the King who had been cruel to her father. Surangama recalls the days when she was put to ruin and then she came into contact with the King, who appeared a cruel terror in the beginning and later turned out to be as matchless in sweetness as in terror.
- The dark chamber is for Sudarshana as terrifying as death. She longs to see the King in broad day light. Now the King's voice is heard asking Sudarshana why she wants to see him as one among thousand things in the day light. When the queen 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 'Vasanta Utsav – Spring Festival'.

➤ **SCENE – II: Vasanta Utsav Scene / Kanchi as well as Other Kings and trumped-up ‘King’ Suvarna Scene.**

- In the pleasure garden where the ‘Vasanta Utsav – Spring Festival’ is on Thakurda makes his presence as a wandering pilgrim singing melodious songs conveying, profound thoughts on the colourful season that entralls the whole country.
- 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. They push him to remove all his royal outfits. Then the Kings conspire to accept him as the King of the land only to use him as a means to gain Sudarshana, the queen for them.
- While Suvarna remains under the complete control of Kanchi and the other Kings, Sudarshana beholds his attractive figure from a distance. She becomes restless like a caged bird.

➤ **SCENE – III: Queen Sudarshan and her companion Rohini, Palace Garden Scene.**

- Queen Sudarshana sends her companion Rohini with a handful of flowers as a presentation to the King, conveying that she could recognize him. 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 – IV: Palace Garden Fire Scene.**

- Kanchi instigates Suvana to set fire the palace garden with a view to take advantage of the confusion to accomplish his sinister object of possessing the Queen Sudarshana. This is being overheard by Thakurda who tries to bring home to them the gruesome result of their plan. The fire lit by Suvana unexpectedly spreads everywhere and people begin to run amuck in frenzy.
- The whole plot develops as per the selfish design of Kanchi without the knowledge of the other kings who are all left in the dark about the confusion. Fire spreads everywhere, Sudarshana seeks a way to escape from the fire and desperately calls for help from her beloved King. To her great shock Suvana confesses that he is not the king but only a pretender.
- Now Sudarshana has no other way but to offer herself to the God of Fire. Surangama, the enlightened maid guides her through fire and leads her to the dark chamber.

➤ **SCENE – V: Dark Chamber Scene.**

- 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.
- Sudarshana, now an impoverished figure passes through the street in a spiritual journey, encouraged by Surangama and Thakurda. Complexity of her tormented soul, her anguish and ignorance, her passion and offended pride, her desperation and self-will.
- King appears as an uncompromisingly cruel image.

➤ **SCENE – VI: Self – realization of Queen Sudarshana.**

- The kings assembled for the festival have their common objective of capturing the kingdom. They declare a war and fight among themselves.
- Sudarshana, now an impoverished figure passes through the street in a spiritual journey, encouraged by Surangama and Thakurda. Surngama reveals that the real Raja deals with human errors so strictly that he at times appears uncompromisingly cruel. Yet he is full of compassion.

- The warring kings fall down one by one fighting each other. Sudarshana realizes finally that the real king will never come down to her, instead she has to seek him and realize him. He is the very fire which engulfed her earlier. She has to shed away the last traits of her vanity and pride to attain the ultimate the goal.
- She seeks the blessings of Thakurda and gets it as a graceful culmination of her trials and tribulations.

➤ **SCENE – VII: Reunion between Queen Sudarshana and King / Dark Chamber Queen Sudarshana and King Scene.**

- Play closes is 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.

INTERPRETATION WITH DIRECTOR NOTE:

- As many of the writers on Tagore have suggested, the play ‘RAJA’ signifies the spiritual journey of Man. Tagore interprets through the theme the great Indian philosophic vision laid down in the Upanishdic verse:

असतोमा सद्गमय ।

तमसोमा ज्योतिर् गमय ।

Asato Mā Sadgamaya

Tamasomā Jyotir Gamaya

From Darkness Lead Me To Light

- From Darkness, lead me to Light; the mystical concept of the Dark Chamber, its allegorical meaning, its strangeness and symbolic significance arouse philosophic awe and dramatic curiosity in us.

- What does the dark chamber mean? How is it to be represented on the stage and how does it relate to life? Who is to behold anything in thick darkness in theatre? How to depict darkness and make it comprehensible? Can it be made possible without the active interference of light? Have we to intensify the density of darkness and make it all audio-centric? Or, are we to reduce its opaqueness and create translucent visuals, blurred images, shadows, and augment the sense of mystery?
- The parable nature of the theme has it that everyone can imagine his own way; and that is the very qualitative excellence of a classic. To the author himself the conceptual attributes of the king had developed through many a change. This enigma led me to innovate a stage-device in the form of a moving shell to represent the real King. The Raja is visible to many in different ways and at different times. He is cruel and at the same time full of benediction and charm.
- A similar form to represent spirits is available in the folk ritual art tradition in my region – Theyyam. The figure woven by hay in one of the above Theyyam items is burnt at the end of the ritual. I have adapted this stage – device in the form of the shell.
- In the Indian histrionics, the practice of effacing the visible from the eye of certain characters and making the same thing visible to others is very common. This depiction prevails at the auditory level too. Tagore definitely had known this Natyadharmi technique of acting.
- The stage version of the play is not strictly and cannot be a paraphrase of the written text. We have to build up our own chronological sequences to probe into the essence – the formless content. The layers that the parable weaves around have to be broken to reach out to the inner energy. So here the function involved in the reinterpretation is converting matter into energy which thus identified, is to be further in another medium.

SCENE WISE PICTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY:

SCENE – I: Dark Chamber Scene.



(1-2) Surangama, maid of Queen Sudarshana sings the song which is the key song dramatizing the divine lover's approach to human heart and perfectly integrated to the thematic idea.

**At a breath you can remove my veils, my lord!
If I fall asleep on the dust and hear not your call, would you wait till I wake?
Would not the thunder of your chariot wheel make the earth tremble?
Would you not burst open the door and enter your own house unbidden?**





(3-5) The dialogues between Queen Sudarshana and her maid Surangama are charged with tension.



Queen Sudarshana complains about the eternal 'Darkness' but Surangama tries to pacify the queen and says that she has witnessed the king only in the dark atmosphere and it is not possible to describe the beauty of the king

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.



(6-7) Surangama claims that she has the rare gift to identify the presence of the King in the dark chamber. However the Queen Sudarshana neither perceives him nor feels His presence. She feels hurt out of her characteristic vainglorious nature





(8-9) Surangama, hearing the voice of the King feels that he is right at the door and pays obeisance to him.



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

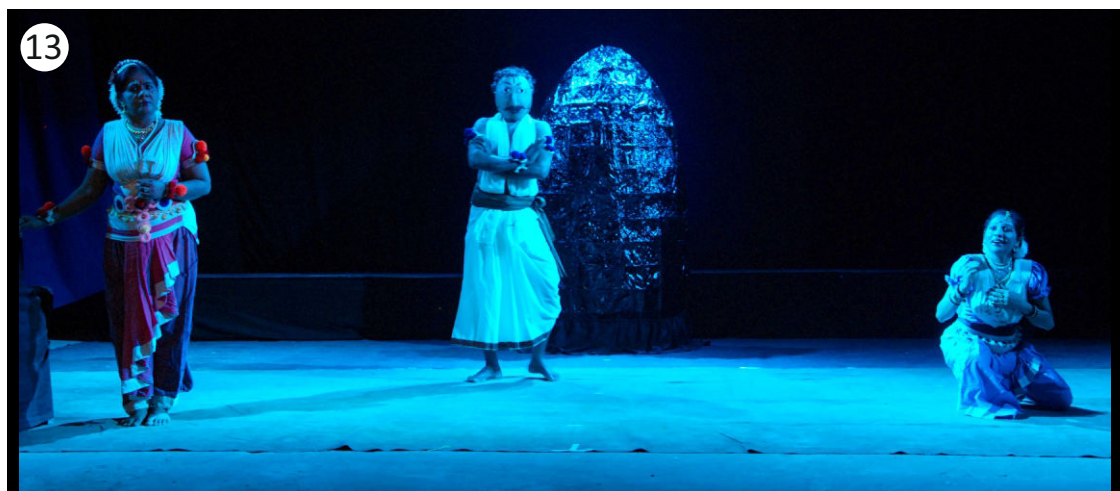
Surangama. Do you not smell a soft perfume?

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.



(11-13) Surangama recalls the days when she was put to ruin and then she came into contact with the King, who appeared a cruel terror in the beginning and later turned out to be as matchless in sweetness as in terror.



(14) 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?

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'.

Sudarshana. I shall know you; I shall recognize you. I shall find you out among a million men. I cannot be mistaken.

King. Very well, then, to-night, during the festival of the full moon of the spring, you will try to find me out from the high turret of my palace-- search for me with your own eyes amongst the crowd of people.

Sudarshana. Wilt thou be there among them?

King. I shall show myself again and again, from every side of the crowd.

Surangama!

[Enter Surangama]

Surangama. What is thy pleasure, lord?

King. To-night is the full moon festival of the spring.

**SCENE – II: Vasanta Utsav Scene / Kanchi as well as Other Kings and trumped-up
'King' Suvarna Scene.**



(15) 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.



(16-17) In the pleasure garden where the spring festival is on Thakurda makes his presence as a wandering pilgrim singing melodious songs conveying, profound thoughts on the colourful season that entralls the whole country.

Relation King and Thakurda:

**We are all Kings in the kingdom of our King.
 Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!
 We do what we like, yet we do what he likes;
 We are not bound with the chain of fear at the feet of a slave-owning King.
 Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!**



(18) Vasanta Utsav is in full swing where thousands of people enjoying the full moon night and the Utsav



(19) 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.



(20-22) The party of foreigners who enliven the stage and are skeptical about the existence of the King, are seen engaged in quibbling discussion which turns on actually seeing the King in the flesh. This prepares the stage for the appearance of a pretender laying claim to being the King, which is the concept of the reality of the King.



(23) Suvarna, the pretender King enters the pleasure garden in stately grandeur.





(24-26) Heralds Guards shouting at the people to stand off for the pretender King “is coming to command the festivities himself”. This causes a great commotion, for the people have never seen the King appearing in public. People, by and large, are taken in by the beautiful look of Suvarna, the pretender, posing as the King.



(27-28) People, by and large, are taken in by the beautiful look of Suvarna and pay homage to the pretender King.



(29-30) Under the leadership of Kanchi, Suvarna, the pretender King is exposed and forced to pay homage to them.

Do you really think that fellow spoke the truth? Anybody can pass himself off as the King of this kingless country. Can you not see that the man looks like a dressed-up King — much too over-dressed?





(31-32) Suvarna, the pretender King tries to escape from Kanchi and other Kings.



(33-34) The king of 'Kanchi' wants to use him as a pawn. The trumped-up 'King' Suvarna is also ready to betray his kingdom. The king of 'Kanchi' asks him to bow down his head in front of him and the dummy king gives in.



(35) Kanchi and other Kings forcefully decorates / establishes to trumped-up 'King' Suvarna as real 'King'.

SCENE – III: Queen Sudarshan and her companion Rohini,
Palace Garden Scene.



(36) Queen Sudarshan enters into the turret of the Royal Palace.



(37) Queen Sudarshana talks with her companion Rohini.



(38) The Kings conspire to accept him as the King of the land only to use him as a means to gain Sudarshana, the queen for them.



(39-40) From a far distance Queen Sudarshana wrongly identifies the pretender King – Suvarna, as the real King.



(41) Sudarshana allured by the outer beauty of Suvarna 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.





(42-44) Rohini goes to Suvarna only to find that he was sitting silent like an idol who did not show any sign of recognition.



(45) On the other hand Kanchi took the initiative in accepting the flowers.



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



(47-49) Kanchi took the initiative in seizing a necklace of jewels from Suvarna and he bestowed this upon Rohini.



(50-51) Rohini re-enters after presenting the Queen sudarshana's greetings. 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



(52) Queen Sudarshana looks at necklace of jewels.



(53-54) The Queen Sudarshana takes it as an awful insult. Highly Symbolic Scene where Surangama enacts like snake to represent necklace of jewels which depicts that the necklace of jewels gifted from trumped-up 'King'.



(55) Queen Sudarshana also enacts like snake which depicts that she has betrayed herself by necklace of jewels gifted from trumped-up 'King'.

The course of this transit brings out her passion, pride, delusion, conflict, suffering, humiliation, self-surrender to her final realization. Through a series of unexpected turns of events the play moves along with masterly ease to the paradoxical truth of self-realization through complete self-surrender.

SCENE – IV: Palace Garden Fire Scene.



(56) Gardeners works in Palace Garden.



(57) Kanchi enters with the false King Suvarna and instigates to set fire the palace garden with a view to take advantage of the confusion to accomplish his sinister object of possessing the Queen Sudarshana.



(58-59) Rohini has a doubt about all that is happening around. She believes something evil is about to happen. In the meantime, even the King of Avanti arrives.

The happenings are projected rightly through Rohini, who understands things only in their outer aspects. She finds things in a state of alarming disorder. The atmosphere is thick with fear, restlessness, envy, rivalry and premonition of something dire brewing.



(60) Rohini worries for the panic stricken gardeners who have served the King all their life are seen hectically running away from the garden.



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





(62-63) Fire spreads everywhere, Sudarshana seeks a way to escape from the fire and desperately calls for help from her beloved King

Sudarshana. [Entering] King, O my King! Save me, save me from death! I am surrounded by fire.

"King". Who is the King? I am no King.

Sudarshana. You are not the King?

"King". No, I am a hypocrite, I am a scoundrel. [Flinging his crown on the ground.] Let my deception and hypocrisy be shattered into dust! [Goes out with Kanchi.]



(64) Suvarna goes out with Kanchi and the anguished Queen gives vent to her turbulent emotions. In this distressful plight enters Rohini.

Sudarshana. No King! He is not the King? Then, O thou God of fire, burn me, reduce me to ashes! I shall throw myself into thy hands, O thou great purifier; burn to ashes my shame, my longing, my desire.

Rohini. [Entering] Queen, where are you going? All your inner chambers are shrouded in raging fire--do you not enter there.

Sudarshana. Yes! I will enter those burning chambers! It is the fire of my death! [Enters the Palace.]

SCENE – V: Dark Chamber Scene.



(65-66) 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.

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



(67-68) Sudarshana, now an impoverished figure passes through the street in a spiritual journey, encouraged by Surangama and Thakurda.





(69-70) Complexity of her tormented soul, her anguish and ignorance, her passion and offended pride, her desperation and self-will.



(71-72) King appears as an uncompromisingly cruel image.



(73) Sudarshana gets to understand only through pain.



(74) Surngama reveals that the real King deals with human errors so strictly that he at times appears uncompromisingly cruel. Yet he is full of compassion.

SCENE – VI: Self – realization of Queen Sudarshana.



(75-76) The Kings assembled for their common objective of capturing Queen Sudarshan. They declare a war and fight among themselves.





(77-79) They declares a war and fight among themselves. Battle / War between the Kings.



(80) The warring kings fall down one by one fighting each other.



(81) Queen Sudarshana realizes finally that the real king will never come down to her, instead she has to seek him and realize him.



(82-83) Thakurda's humour-laden remarks which appears the thickets of verbiage.



(84) Queen Sudarshana seeks the blessings of Thakurda and gets it as a graceful culmination of her trials and tribulations.

SCENE – VII: Reunion between Queen Sudarshana and King / Dark Chamber Queen Sudarshana and King Scene.



(85-86) Play closes is 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.



(87)

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तमसोमा ज्योतिर् गमय ।

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The mystical concept of the Dark Chamber, its allegorical meaning.