

CHAPTER: 5

THE THEATRE OF RATAN THIAM:



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ARTISTIC JOURNEY AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE OF RATAN THIAM:



- Ratan Thiam is an Indian Playwright and Theatre Director, and one of leading figures of the "Theatre of Roots" movement in Indian theatre, which started in 1970s. Ratan Thiam is known for writing and staging plays that use ancient Indian Theater Traditions and Forms in a contemporary context. Ratan Thiam is a multifaceted and versatile artist not only from the view point of theatre, but also from the field of creative art.
- Ratan Thiam works as a designer, music composer, choreographer, lightning expert, costume designer, architect and also a playwright, painter and poet; Thiam is often

considered one of leading contemporary theatre gurus. He is also the founder-director of 'Chorus Repertory Theatre', formed on the outskirts of Imphal, Manipur in 1976. 'Some Roots Grow Upwards' a 2003 documentary by Kavita Joshi and Malati Rao, was based on the life and work of Ratan Thiyam, especially his political ideologies, and his use of theatre as medium of political protest.

➤ **EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION:**

- Borne on January 20, 1948 at Nabadwip West Bengal, Naida District and brought up at Haobam Dewan lane, Imphal. He grew up surrounded by art and art-making as was born into a family of artists, his father being most respected gurus of classical Manipuri dance Shri Thiyam Tarunkumar and mother Bilasini Devi a renowned dancer. Apart from being surrounded by art he was also amidst the privations that went with the performative life. At the age of 23 came the most important phase of his literary career as he joined the cultural Forum during 1960s. He started publishing his short stories and poems in a journal called 'Reetu', and hoped to become a great professional writer. He published again his 1st noel "Unnsads Nungsiba" etc. Ratan Thiyam graduated of dramatic Arts from National School of Drama, New Delhi in 1974.

➤ **EARLY ENCOUNTER WITH THEATRE:**

- One of his distinguished attribute is that he can speak very fluently Urdu, Bengali, Hindi, and English including Manipuri. Many critics have commented about his works. Shri Longjam Joychandra expressed his views and comments that Ratan Thiyam's published collection of poems reveals his deep philosophy on life and about this materialistic world. Shri Joychandra said there is always a note of melancholy and loneliness in his poems. But his use of highly impressive similar, metaphors and rich imagines conveys a lot to the readers. Shri B. Jayantkumar Sharma also uttered a few more speeches regarding Ratan's diction used in his poems. His imaginations are quite significant and his poems have the capacity to bind the old and the new.

- He was greatly inspired by his father and his mentor Ebrahim Akazi in reaching this elevated status. His works are strongly influenced by Natya Sastra, an Indian Theatre style propounded by Bharata during the second century B.C., as also ancient Greek drama, and the Noh theatre of Japan. His approach to theatre has been shaped by years of study under the tutelage of several major exponents of the Traditional Manipuri performing arts.
- In the midst of the political chaos in the modern world his works profess a deep concern for social welfare and spiritual yearnings. His plays infuse rationalized and multifaceted analysis of myriad perspectives. His plays are tinged with literary beauty and meaning using ingenious theatrical stagecraft. Most of Ratan Thiyam's plays are thematically 'Indianised' and are profound plays with 'Universal Appeal'.

➤ **THE CHORUS REPERTORY THEATRE:**

- The **Chorus Repertory Theatre** was established in the valley of small hill state, Manipur that is surrounded by the great nine-folds of mountains guarded by mighty tribes on the top in the easternmost part of India in April 1976. Located on the outskirts of Imphal, Manipur's capital city, Chorus Repertory Theater's two-acre campus has been slowly built and six times rebuilt after disastrous monsoons to accommodate a self-sufficient way of life, with housing and working quarters for the company. It is now and important regional and national center for contemporary theatre. In 2001, its 25th anniversary season, the company dedicated its first permanent theatre, a 200 – seat auditorium '**The Shrine**' designed by Shri Ratan Thiyam with space for set construction and storage inspired from the architecture of Southeast Asia specially the house design of tribal of Manipur, Thailand and Myanmar.
- Thiyam's 1984 Chakravayuha, performed more than 100 times around the globe, thrust the company into the global spotlight. With 'Uttarpriyadarshi', equally acclaimed as a masterpiece, Thiyam continue his examination of the human condition, expanding his explorations of war and power to embrace the search for enlightenment, reconciliation and peace.

- Equipped with its most outstanding performances in many International festivals in India and abroad, this repertory has able to earn the prestigious "Fringe Firsts Award, 1987" from Edinburgh International Theatre Festival, "Indo-Greek Friendship Award, 1984 (Greece), "Diploma of Cervantino International Theatre Festival, 1990 (Mexico), and participated in Pan-Asiatico, 1984 (Rome), Indo-Greek Symposium, 1984 (Greece), East-west Encounter, 1986 (Mumbai), Dublin Theatre Festival, 1987 (Dublin), Festival of India in USSR, 1987, Cardiff International Theatre Festival, 1987 (Cardiff), Glasgow Festival, 1987 (Glasgow), Mitsui International Theatre Festival, 1992 (Japan), Toga International Theatre Festival, 1994 (Japan), Festival d'Avignon, 1995 (France), International conference on "Culture of Peace: The Experience and Experiments" 1996 (New Delhi), Festival of India in Thailand, 1996, South Asian Theatre Festival, 1997 (Bangladesh), 50-years of Indian Independence Day celebration in Srilanka, 1997, Festival of Perth, 1998 (Australia), Telstra Adelaide Festival, 1998 (Australia), New Zealand International Festival of the Arts, 1998 (New Zealand), Festival Theatre of Nations, 1998 (Switzerland), 7th International Festival of Scenic Arts, 1998 (Brazil), Indian Trade Fair Exhibition at Dhaka (Bangladesh), 1999, 50-years of Indian Independence celebration in Nepal, 2000. Fall 2000 North American Debut Tour and presented the public performances in the following venues during the entire tour – Kennedy Centre, Washington DC; University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA; Ordway center for the Performing Arts & Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; University of California, Berkeley, CA; UCLA performing Arts, Los Angeles, CA; University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ; Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York¹.
- The Company participated in the BeSeTo International Theatre Festival, 2001 (Japan) and Barbican International Theatre Event (BITE) 2001, London (United Kingdom), 2001. The repertory has also been performed with great success in various places and cities including- London, Delphi, Kalamata, Thessaloniki, Kavala, Athens, Yaroslavl, Leningrad, Minsk, Barisova, Southampton, Omag, Amsterdam, Gainsborough, Bradford, Querentaro, Guanajuato, Cruz-A-Zul, Guaquil, Quito, Havana, Manizales, Cuba Bogota, Lima, Thimpu, Haa, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Wellington, Zurich, Kathmandu, Tokyo, Toga, Toyama, etc.

- His production of Ajneya's Uttar Priyadarshi in Manipuri was staged at the 1st Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM), the annual theatre festival of National School of Drama (NSD), Delhi in 1999., his presentation of Kalidasa's epic poem Ritusamharam was closing production of 4th BRM in 2002. , subsequently the 10th BRM in 2008, which also marked the golden jubilee of NSD, opened at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi, with a performance was "Prologue", the first part of his "Manipur Trilogy", when all past alumni has gathered for the festival. The 12th BRM in January 2010 featured Ratan Thiyam's "When We Dead Awaken".

➤ **THE PLAYS OF RATAN THIYAM:**

- Thiyam has created astonishingly contemporary theatre which relies heavily on highly charged visuals with the rich folk and classical traditions of Manipur. After Shanarembi, a poignant tale of the fragility of innocence and its exploitation in an upper class family, Thiyam presented Uchek Langmeidong (1978) where the worlds of birds and men are brought together to underscore the cruelty inherent in human relations. The complicated patterns of battles and warriors, blood fends and intrigues in KhambaYelhou (1980) were a further attempt to expose the exploitative tendencies of rules.
- The motif of corruption in society transforming into an instrument of religious terror was the theme of Leima Yenlingai Khuna Kaba (1980). Amongst his most successful productions are two classics – Bhāsa's Urubhangam (1981) and Bertolt Brecht's Antigone adapted by Thiyam as Lengshonnei (1986). In Antigone the Greek text is visualized in terms of classical and traditional Indian forms with tribal rituals and symbols. Chakravyuha (1984), drawn from the Drona Parva in the Mahabharata, is perhaps the most completely realized production where text and structure, theme and form are a seamless whole.
- Thiyam is also known for his use of traditional martial arts, of Thang-Ta in his plays, such as in Urubhangam (Broken Thigh), of Sanskrit playwright Bhāsa itself based on an episode from epic, the Mahabharata, which along with Chakravyuha is considered one of his finest works. In 1986, he adapted Bertolt Brecht's Antigone as Lengshonnei, a

comment on the personal behavior of politicians, failing to handle political situation in the state. Uttar Priyadarshi (The Final Beatitude), an adaptation of Hindi verse play by playwright and poet Agyeya in 1996, based on a story of redemption of King Ashoka, a man's struggle against his own inner dark side and a plea for peace, knowing its impact on future generation.

- His play Andha Yug, known for creating an intense and intimate experience, around the epochal theme, was famously staged in an open-air performance, at Tonga, Japan, on 5 August 1994, a day before the forty-ninth anniversary of Atomic Holocaust in Hiroshima. His major plays include Ritusamharam, seeks solace and sanity amidst chaos and violence of today's world.
- All kind of experiments were taking place at Chorus Repertory and for years the process of artistic experiments went on. One cannot fully appreciate Thiyam's theatre without understanding his relationship with his repertory company, and with actor training. He sees theatre as “collective expression”. While talking of the ideal actor, he says: ‘Theatre is a composite art, and actor a vehicle for expression of the thematic content, so the actor must be a composite man. He need not master all forms of art but he must acquire the basics of aesthetics so that he can utilize the experience as a vehicle of expression in a space called the performance stage’.
- Thiyam’s works are tightly choreographed; his actors must physically push the limits of character and always found human expression more convincing when it is physically portrayed, when there is a body rhythm. Emphasis on physical stamina and control, as well as on vocal and breath techniques, provides the means to accomplish impressive aural and movement feats. His works profess a deep concern for social welfare and spiritual yearnings in the midst of the political chaos in the modern world. Most of Ratan Thiyam’s plays are thematically ‘Indianised’ and are profound plays with ‘Universal Appeal’².

➤ **MAJOR PLAYS:**

- Karanabharam (1979) (Karna-bhara: Karna's burden by Sanskrit playwright Bhasa)
- Imphal Imphal (1982)
- Chakravyuha (1984) (Army Formation)
- Lengshonnei (1986) (An adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's Antigone)
- Uttar Priyadarshi (The Final Beatitude, by Hindi playwright Agyeya) (1996)
- Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama (Nine Hills One Valley)
- Hey Nungshibi Prithibi (My Earth, My Love)
- Ritusamharam (Ritusamharam by Sanskrit playwright Kalidasa)
- Andha Yug (The Blind Age, by Hindi playwright Dharamvir Bharati)
- Wahoudok (Prologue)
- Ashibagee Eshei (based on When We Dead Awaken, by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen) (2008)
- Raja (2011) (The King of Dark Chamber by Rabindranath Tagore)
- Macbeth (2014) (Macbeth by William Shakespeare)

➤ **CONTRIBUTION IN SOCIETAL INSTITUTION:**

- He has rendered his service for many premier art and cultural institutions of the country and Govt. Body apart from theatre performances. He has served as a Council Member of Manipur State Kala Akademi, Imphal; Advisor All India Radio, Imphal; Senate Member Manipur University; Member Manipur University Court; Member of the First Court of Nagaland University, Nagaland; Member of the Governing Council, ICCR, New Delhi; Chairman Review Committee North East Zone Cultural Centre, Dimapur; Member of the Programme advisory Committee of All India Radio, Imphal; Member of the Society and the Governing Body of the National Science Museum, Kolkata; Departmental Advisory Board Member of the Education in Arts and Aesthetics of NCERT, New Delhi; Chairman Heritage Foundation, Imphal; Vice-Chairman of the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Culture, Manipur among other post.

- And formerly Member of the Advisory Board, Member of the Academic Council, Director and Chairperson National School of Drama, New Delhi; Executive Council Member Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi; Member of the Advisory Committee National Handicraft & Handloom Museum, New Delhi; Member of the Tribal Development Committee, New Delhi; Member of the Advisory Committee of the Rangamandal, Bharat Bhavan; Advisor Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Imphal; Vice Chairman, Jawaharlal Nehru Manipur Dance Academy, Imphal etc.

➤ **MAJOR AWARDS AND RECOGNITION:**

- In recognition to Ratan Thiyam's contribution in the field of Theatre he has been adorned with following prestigious awards and titles:
 - 1984: Indo-Greek Friendship Award, 1984 (Greece)
 - 1987: Sangeet Natak Akademi Award Theatre Direction
 - 1987: Fringe Firsts Award, from Edinburgh International Festival
 - 1989: Padma Shri
 - 1990: Diploma of Cervantino International Festival, (Mexico)
 - 1997: La Grande Medaille, (France)
 - 1998 – 99: International Man of the Year in the field of Theatre and Humanism
 - 2005: Kalidas Samman
 - 2006: SIU-KA-PHA National Award
 - 2008: John D. Rockefeller Award
 - 2011: Bharat Muni Samman
 - 2012: Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (Akademi Ratna)
 - 2013: Bhupen Hazarika Foundation Award
- Mr.Thiyam has received Fellow and special invitations from Ford foundation (USA), Manipur State Kala Akademi (Imphal), Japan foundation (Japan), Korean Foundation (Seoul). And he has made his special study tour in USA, UK, Japan, Hong Kong, Greece,

Philippines, Thailand, Burma, Indonesia, Yugoslavia, Spain, USSR, France, Australia, and Cambodia.

- He has also been participated as Visualizer, Choreographer and presenter in Asian Arts Festival (Hong Kong), Festival of India in UK, Festival of India in USSR, Festival of France in India, and also Artistic Director, Designer, Choreographer in Festival of India in Germany. Ratan Thiyam with special invitations has been to Italy and New York to teach the theatre students at Orvieto, Italy and Fordham University, New York (USA).
- Ratan Thiyam is ranked among the best Directors of the world like Peter Brook, Tadashi Suzuki, Arianne Mnouchkine, Grotowsky, Euginio Barba and Robert Wilson. He is known to be most prominent theatre directors both in National and International scene. His productions achieved most prestigious awards including "Indo-Greek Friendship Award (Greece), 1984"; "Fringe Firsts, 1987 from Edinburgh International theatre Festival"; "Diploma of Cervantino International theatre Festival, 1990".
- The US Debut Tour in fall 2000 with "UTTAR-PRIYADARSHI" has drawn worldwide attention in bringing peace and non-violence through theatre and received fantastic reviews in the media including LOS ANGELES TIMES, NEW YORK TIMES, WASHINGTON POST, etc.

VISION, IDEA AND METHODOLOGY OF THE THEATRE OF RATAN THIAM³:

- Here Ratan Thiyam shares his views on his "Vision, Idea and Methodology" of the Theatre:

➤ MOTTO:

- Our motto is an "only bread if no butter" theatre. That is why we have to know how to do everything. The theatre is our religion. But I'm not a messiah for all this work. I share my experience of the good and bad things in this so-called civilized world, where we are losing our spirit and balance.

- Modern man is supposed to know something about everything, but he has created a world where he is restless and suffers from being surrounded by technology. There has never been any balance with the spiritual and the mind becomes violent.
- As an individual, I feel I must get control. I share the kind of power games we play, the way modern man feels in his way of life. Through theatre, I try to share it with my audience, as if to say, “Let us think together”.

➤ **FORM:**

- I don't utilize any particular form. Whatever I create on stage is not a tradition by itself. The fact is that after breaking the original temper of a traditional form, I utilize them accordingly to the suitability of a particular situation. To me tradition is always a source of inspiration. But I am doing everything keeping in tune with time and space and according to the psychology of modern audience.

➤ **MANIPURI GENRE:**

- Every director should carry a signature of his own while carrying out experiments with which it could be stamped as his creation. I look at tradition as a colour which I paint my theatre in my own way. Utilizing tradition by itself is not my tradition, rather utilizing it as a re-interactive tool is my tradition.

➤ **THEATRE ACTIVIST:**

- An artist is born to attack the system. For years I have been concentrating on war based plays because, given the situation in Manipur, we must present arguments for peace and solidarity. But I don't care for fancy, intellectual ideologies in my plays because they are not practical with the economics of theatre in Manipur. If your actors are starving, you can't contribute to society.

➤ **ETHNICITY:**

- My plays are not on traditional Manipuri forms alone. I draw my inspirations from many sources. But ethnicity is that original quality inside you. Without which you have no identity. You can't escape it. And if I'm not different from others, where is my signature? As for exporting theatre to other countries, I would like to export my theatre to another planets. Once you are on the international circuit, your work has to be stronger in order to compete. My theatre tries to be a bridge between Eastern and Western theatre. I come from a small state, but I communicate to the world.

➤ **PRODUCTION STYLE AND AESTHETIC:**

- Theatre is a composite art, and the actor only a vehicles for expression. So the actor must be a composite man. He need not master all forms of art but he must acquire basics of aesthetic so that he can utilize the experiences as a vehicle of expression in a space called the performance stage. To achieve this all members are trained in dance, acting, martial arts, stagecraft and designs embracing traditional Manipuri forms as well as other methods developed over time to time. Emphasis on vocal and breath techniques and in physical stamina and control, provide the means to accomplish impressive aural and movement feats. My works are lightly choreographed, actors must physically push the limits of character.

➤ **AUDIENCE PERSPECTIVE:**

- There may be a process of playwriting; there may be a process of doing a production or even training of actors, designers. There is no way of training an audience, there is no school provided. Whoever is coming to see the production and that is why he is interested. He feels that his own experience of the world equips him to see any kind of production. So the experience serves as a kind of training. In my theatre the audience is very important. But before that I become more important than the audience. If I'm not

satisfied, I don't think the audience will be able to understand and grasp the play and I will not be able to satisfy them. I become the first audience, so it doesn't matter if others recognize my theatre or not.

➤ **TRAINING METHOD:**

- The approach adopted by Thiyam for his Chorus Repertory lays great stress on the training process to relate traditional modes of expression to the original environment before using them in his work. The actor must enter the source of the traditional form whether it is the Rasa, the Thang-ta, the Moirang Parba or the Wari Leeba narrative style of recitation. Actors are rigorously trained and invested in, making it hard for them to leave. They create masks, learn dance and music and theatre, cook their own food and maintain their own kitchen garden ("art is a composite form"), often having to reclaim it from vicious floods that threaten to sweep away the entire structure housing them, which they have only recently been able to afford to build. The members make their own sets, with the hewing and splicing of wood becoming as integral to the performance as the show itself.
- He must have perfect knowledge of all forms, He need not master all forms of art but he must acquire the basics of aesthetics so that he can utilize the experience as a vehicle of expression in a space called the performance stage. "An actor may know everything about the forms but still be incapable of expressing. This requires training, a training of the body and mind so that the combination can accelerate either aspect according to the demands of the situation. This is important for any production. A good actor is not enough. She or he must have a sound relationship with the energy levels of the rest of the cast" asserts Ratan.
- The company also read the Mahabharata, the Natyashastra and the Abhinaya Darpana for days under the guidance of Kalacharrrd Shastri to understand how to use body and mind to penetrate to text.
- Ratan concerned with the inner circle of energy and its external manifestation. The characters projected an inner energy that flowed as rays emanating from the inside to movements beyond the torso, the limbs the face illuminating the space with exotica.

- He says that: "I think of the stage as a space. That space is where you produce everything. To penetrate that space, you need craftsmanship. You need music, lights, movement. No space should be left un-penetrated." It is for this reason that his performers are trained in dance, acting, martial arts, stagecraft, design and traditional Manipuri forms. He does not single out his theatre as "regional", but asserts, "Regional Theatre is National Theatre".
- He asks: "How long will you go on sinking into darkness and longing for a sun ray?" But this is an incongruous strain in his tone and Thiyam soon steadies himself to talk of his spontaneous and deeply felt protests and his dream of leaving behind a legacy of liberty and freedom to future generations. All these thoughts of his heart portrays his deep concern and attachment towards theatre which is seen in his work also.

MAJOR PRODUCTIONS OF RATAN THIYAM:

- Considering the study regarding the form and style used by Ratan Thiyam in his play and practiced at Chorus Repertory, here discussed his own style used in his play by reviewing his work which may lead us towards the Ratan Thiyam's own traditional style.

➤ **CHAKRAVYUHA:** (*Images – 1 To 5*)

- Thiyam's Manipur is eternally present in Ratan's dramas, even those based on stories from the Mahabharata. His concern for the youth and its continuous betrayal by the order generation is predominant in the depiction of Abhimanyu in Chakravyua the play that shot Ratan into international limelight. The 15 year – old son of Arjuna trustingly enters the Chakravyuhaa created by Drona. His uncles Yudhishtir and Bhima are aware that he does not know how to get out of the martial configuration, but they provoke his sense of daredevil courage and Abhimanyu succumbs. Does he, as the Epic portrays, die a martyr or is Abimanyu a scapegoat? Ratan is pointing to the political power in Manipur that, to further their own ambition, incite youth to suicidal acts in the name of heroism⁴.

- According to Ratan “The story is important, but the aesthetics of performance is equally important in the prologue”. The Sutradhara likens the Mahabharata to Kamadhenu, the heavenly cow; its milk the rasas (sentiments); Vyasa the writer is the milkman, and Krishna his helper in the drawing process; and the audience is the calf. Then the Sutradhar comes to the myth of Parikshit and Janmejaya. He continues “Through them I point to the younger generation. They represent the calf that will help to draw forth the rasas to be shared. The Sutradhara has to graphically explain this in the poorvaranga and for this I go to the precise and concise style of narration in the Wari Leeba, Thang-Ta apparently may seem to be a mere physical exercise”; however, as far as its Tantric origin is concerned, its main objective is to bring an end to the incessant struggle between the body and the soul and dissolve them to form a new entity. In Thiyan’s own words, “We are not doing this as part of martial art per se. What we are trying to gain from these exercises are the power that controls the distribution of energy to different parts of the body, and the powers of concentration and meditation. The establishment of a deep relationship between body and mind is essential Chakravyuhaa does not display merely the Thang-Ta martial art; rather it succeeds in projecting the subtle introvert feelings through intricate body movements – Angikabhinaya. By performing different Mudras and gestures, the artists present the underlying motive of the play to ‘Sahridaya Darshka (Keen Audience)’. This also incorporates Nandi. ‘Nandi’: so called because by invoking the blessings of gods, Brahmans and kings these latter three are propitiated Trigatha, says the Natya Shahstra, is followed by Prarochana in which the Sutradhara appeals to the audience and invites them to cooperate (Upanimantrana) for the success of the play and mentions the name and the plot of the play.’ Ratan does not give the names of the play in the prologue but makes it known that Abhimanyu will be a victim through Abhinaya and the speech pattern as the Sutradhara describes Abhimanyu’s flag and his antecedents. He also combines the roles of the Sutradhara and the Sthapaka⁵.
- The play incorporates the various gestures representing the heroic sentiments (Vira Rasa) through the Manipuri martial art Thang-Ta. The delicate movements of the body parts which are used to express the dialogues more comprehensively are imitations of the gestures dictated by the Natyashastra and the Abhinaya Darpana. But in some places

Thiyam has reduced the frequency of the Natyasastric body gestures and has stressed upon the use of dialogues. The Prologue of this play follows the Ankur pattern of Angikabhinaya, where the inner feeling of a character is first expressed by gestures. Thus, in order to exemplify Lord Brahma, one Pariparshvika signifies the lotus with his combined-hand-gesture – Udvastita and the naval with his single-hand-gesture – Sanketa. The two Pariparshvikas and the Sutradhara, with a combined-hand-gesture called Sankha represent the conch-shell. Even the Sutradhara's greeting the audience with a combined-hand-gesture Anjali, and the mime of the monkey-god performed by the Pariparshvikas and the Sutradhara's enacting and explaining the 'milking process' through a mime – are all according to the gestures mentioned in the Natyashastra.

- But here I would like to mention that one hand gesture Ratan thiyam gave to the Abhimanyu when he was saying to Yudhisthir he will break the Chakravyuha that point Abhimanyu brushing the both hand with charged energy like clapping and pronounce “chhaakkrravyuha” with given more stress on word, now this is not the Natyashasttric gesture it is creatively invented by the Thiyam which proves his statement that “I create my own tradition and classic”.
- The parallel between this narrative and the violence in the contemporary Manipur is established in the prologue itself through an invocation of the political symbolism of the (coercive) modern nation state: as the Sutradhar says, “national flags conceptualize politics...This is a war of flags...This is a war of power grabbers”⁶. Indeed, Thiyam’s topicality becomes heavy-handed when Shakuni talks about the deceptive art of “politics” and refers to one of the cornerstones of Jawaharlal Nehru’s national policy, the economic five-year plans, as “colorful dreams heralding a bright future” that are never implemented but that enable a politician to “become a leader, a king”.
- He not only transforms the rituals and tradition but his day to day affairs and experience in to his production here in this play the flag dance was choreographed before the prologue was also the modern concept. In his own words: ‘My concept of the flags emerged from the Olympic Games, where too there are two super powers. Under their flags are the warriors who will battle for them. On the side of the Kauravas will be Drona, Karna and Jayadratha as well on the Pandava side Ghatotkacha and others. Each

warrior has his own banner which proclaims his special prowess. So the two big powers have let loose their horses for the Ashwamedha sacrifices and they will conquer each small country.

- Ratan thiyam as he said using the tradition with his own perceptive, in Chakravyuha after the exit of Sutradhara the first scene of the play begins with the arrival of Duryodhana and his comrades at Dronacharya's camp where Dhrona performs the ritual remembering Keshava here the shloka was sung by the chorus from the back stage. After Duryodhana comes with Shakuni, Jayadrath and Dushashan they confront with Drona and which ends with the latter's vow to construct the Chakravyuha. This scene depicts a unique amalgamation of Thang-Ta and Natyasastric gestures. The two soldiers salute the king which shows the Thengou pattern of Thang-Ta, with a Thang and a Chungoi. The entry of the Kauravas in Drona's camp while dancing in meiti pung tala, which "is charged with energy, bursting with the lust of power", presents the Thang - Ta tradition. The exchange of meaningful glance which is known as Jihma (crooked) is reflected through the gestures between Dushshana and Jayadratha who are attempting to provoke Drona to construct Chakravyuha. The dependence of Drona upon the Kauravas and leading a life with royal favours are portrayed through various Natyasastric gestures. On being unable to avoid defeat in the hands of the Pandavas, Duryodhana blames Dronacharya and condemns him too. But Drona could not provide a definite answer to it. The psychological despair of both the characters is expressed through their glances.
- The enraged glance of Duryodhana upon Drona and the helpless glance of Guru Drona are respectively known as Vitarkita (conjecturing) and Sunya glance. The scene culminates with Dronacharya's vow to construct the Chakravyuha and accordingly his combined hand gesture (Samyuta Hasta Mudra) Cakra conveys the context to the audience effectively.
- Shakuni's monologue, also spoken in the kneeling position, is an anguished cry to Krishna to save Abhimanyu from certain death. Here Ratan uses the Wari Leeba tradition speech, swift and indicative. 'I use traditional speech for shakuni because his graph will gradually go down and Duryodhana's will rise. They are very different people and should be noticed thus by the audience. Shakuni is a narrator of the war, so I employed the Wari

Leeba. This pattern is broken when Duryodhana use the Indian realistic style! Shakuni has pangs of conscience but he is also very cleaver. He follows the streams.'

- The second scene of the play has depicted the incidents at Abhimanyu's camp. At the beginning of this scene Abhimanyu is sleeping with his head resting upon the lap of his charioteer Sumitra. Here in the beginning of the scene Sumitra sings a song based on the Manipuri song based on the folk tune, which I feel the gives audience to a sympathetic feel and also create seriousness of the coming scene. Here Abhimanyu was seeing something fussy in his dream and missing his mother, this incident indicate the emotion of Abhimanyu towards his mother and dramatically creates the atmosphere of his important dream sequence next to come. The use of the music is very creative in this scene the cymbals and gong are very effectively use by the Thiyam. The middle part of this scene delineates the discussions between Abhimanyu and the two elderly Pandavas Yudhishtira and Bheemasena regarding the strategy to penetrate the Chakravyuhaa and accordingly provoking Abhimanyu for the same, thus thrusting him towards his inevitable demise. The scene fades out to the very effective scene of Arjuna –Subhadra.
- In this scene he used another Manipuri narrative style of singing called Pena. There is a special portion in the Pena called leirol where several types of flowers are described. Here Shubhadra describe the night comparing with silvery moonbeams and further with the different flowers like Mallika, Jati and Pushpa. To make it more meaningful presentation Ratan refereed the Sanskrit literature-Meghadootam, Ritu-Samharam, portions of Shishupalavadham, where literature featuring the description of beautiful flowers. Further to describe the intimacy of Arjun-Shubhdra the atmosphere of Shringarrasa created through the music, choreography and movement was used. To describe this Ratan also reefer the erotic literature like the Amaru-Shataka to be able to portray shringara rasa in its sublime serenity. The scene has to be erotic without losing sight of the fact that we are dealing with Arjuna and Krishna's sister and their child Abhimanyu who was born to die.
- In the 'Flashback' part of the second scene, Thiyam brilliantly projects the prenatal stage of Abhimanyu by placing him amidst his assassins, the Saptarathis. According to Thiyam's description, "Abhimanyu goes down in a foetal position in the centre of the red

circle of light. The seven actors holding large tasselled cymbals kneel around him. These are the seven who will become the attacking charioteers in the Chakravyuhaa." From the contemporary perspective, Abhimanyu's vain effort to break through the Chakravyuhaa is representative of an individual's unfortunate submission to the system after failing to cope up with it.

- In the 'Flashback' part, the intimate moment between Subhadra and Arjuna depicts the erotic sentiment (Shringar Rasa) by the composure of their eyes, faces and graceful movements of limbs. In this part the body movement of Abhimanyu in the 'womb scene' exemplifies the Sarit Sarak, the unarmed variety of Thang-Ta. Where the seven soldiers were kneeling down with large tasselled in his hand and who is going to form a Chakravyuha and will be the attacking charioteers in the Chakravyuha. Abhimanyu sits in the middle the circle formed by theses seven called Saptarathi. The movement of the here by Abhimanyu is the example of the Sarit Sarak.
- Through the flashback technique, the scene also incorporates the affectionate conversation between Arjuna and Subhadra prior to Abhimanyu's birth, where Arjuna reveals the strategy to invade the Chakravyuhaa to Subhadra. Coincidentally, Abhimanyu came to know of it since he was lying in the womb of his mother, Subhadra. In this part of the scene Abhimanyu has been presented upon the stage in his pre-natal state. The scene ends with Abhimanyu's advancing towards the battlefield. In this scene, the guards of Abhimanyu's camp present the Ta-Khousarol part of the Thang-Ta tradition by decorating themselves with Ta (Spear) and Chung (shield). In the discussion between Yudhishtira, Bheemasena and Abhimanyu, the actors employ different gestures to signify the features of other characters. Abhimanyu's adaptation of the Mrga-Sirsa mudra to signify Krishna, Yudhishtira's acquiring of the Suci mudra to imply the Chakravyuhaa and Abhimanyu's Ankurabhinaya (the use of Smayukta Hast Mudra mention in Natyashastra) to indicate Bheemasena by lifting a mace and Nakul-Sahadeva by taking up the bow and arrows are exclusively according to the tenets of the Natyasastra. It starts when the singers, at the beginning and on stage, sing the benediction.'

- In the next scene again the Drone camp shown where the formation of the Chakravyuha is about to begin. Chakravyuhaa starts with the rendering of the Guru Vanda. Here the flag dance is shown again where the entire seven Charioteer was present this dance in the folk of Holi Cholan. In this the movement is such; they are moving backward, forward in rhythmically. Another important source material for speech is Lairik Haiba Thiba, a narrative form performed by two characters. One actor narrates the original text and the other interprets it. The modulating of speech and the use of different pitch patterns create its own drama. In following scene of Chakravyuha formation the Jaydrath who are the first Charioteer perform the ritual Siva-Stuti which is the adaptation of the Larik Habathiba narrative tradition.
- After this Abhimanyu enters and fight begins between them. At this juncture in the background chorus sings a song and that is drawn from the Nat Sankeertana. In the next four scenes, the actions primarily revolve around the battle of Abhimanyu with the Saptarathis. The fights are basically representative of the Thengou and the Ta Khousarol categories of Thang-Ta martial art. However, the martial art employed in the play is much more structured, systematic and elegantly choreographed than the original.
- Some special body movements in the play actually add contemporaneity to it. In the first scene of the play, the questions related to Dharma and its ideals have been presented through the 66th Shloka in Astadash Adhyaya (chapter 18) of the Gita⁷:

सर्वधर्मन परित्याज्य मामेकमशरणम ब्रज।

अहंत्वं सर्वपापेभ्यः मोक्षायिष्यामी मा सोचन।

“Abandoning all obligations whatsoever, take refuge in me alone:

I shall liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.”

- Duryodhana questions this assertion of Krishna to his followers and accuses him for adopting Adharama to kill Vishma. He further questions the ability of an Adharmika to redeem the distressed mass. Naturally, Duryodhana's Dharmika faith seems to sway and

stagger and this dilemma is expressed through a unique body movement. According to the stage direction, "As he speaks the shloka, Duryodhana kneels down and sweeps the floor with the palms of his hand like a blind man searching for a needle. There is a poignant irony in the movement. From the contemporary perspective, we can deduce from these body movements the perpetual corrupt administration and the equally corrupt political situation. The leaders placed in the authoritative hierarchy, just as Krishna, are frequently seen to be engaged in Adharmika practices while conducting lessons of Dharma, humanism and idealism on the common mass. Duryodhana's search for Dharma indicated by his floor sweeping posture is an ironic representation of the search for greatness in a representative of the highest stratum of the society. This body movement has been repeatedly used as a leitmotif in the play.

- At the end of the play, as the dead Abhimanyu wonders in his moment of farewell whether he is scapegoat or martyr and heralds the arrival of kaliyug (echoing Bharati's Andha yug, which Thiyam had already produced in Manipuri), the umbrellas that have been ubiquitous on stage are re-symbolized as "canopies of power," which were given to the "great Kings and emperors of this world....as shields to protect truth from the blistering acid of sinful lies.
- This fusion of the verbal-thematic with the visual-aural in Thiyam's theatre craft sets him apart from other contemporary Indian directors and has made Chakravayuhaa the most successful and well-documented of his Mahabharata plays. One of the highlights of the play, the Kauravas' entry is a superb example of Ratan's sense of dramatic alienation. Shakuni's cunning design culminates in Duryodhana's question on truth and loyalty.
- The music is composed in terms of the spatial content. The basic beat is from Laiharaoba, which is a festival conducted by priestesses called maibis to propitiate the sylvan gods who are the preservers and creators of the world after invoking the gods the maibis dance the Laiching jogai (laiching dance). The beat goes "dhan tang tang, dhan tang tang, dhantrika, dhantrika, dhan tang tang". The audience associates it with the joyous laiaraoba and Ratan keeping the basic changes the "boles" to express the cunning plans with which the Kauravas "propitiate" Drona.

- Apart from the music bits he explains that “speech is not enough to portray this inner excitement. So he adds the Taal or Rhythm to the words. Then come the steps and torso movements. Now there is no tradition of creating a movement in this manner. It is my tradition evolved for this particular scene”. Ratan Thiyam further explains that ‘I am trying to relate to tradition, not as a dead artefact but a living throbbing beautiful part of my heritage’ and “In a realistic play you have a sequence of small reactions. But in this dialogue the issue is dharma, Duryothana’s inner turmoil enhances his speech pattern, enlarges the alphabets and expands gestures accordingly, you may call it stylization, but for me it is an answer to a dramatic demand”.
- In Samanya Abhinaya the Natyashastra details six kinds of acting through the body. Almost all styles are used variably in Chakravyuhaa. In the Drona Camp scene you will find Shucha, Ankura and Shakha; Natyayita is in their entry and what else is Sumitra but a spokesperson for Subhadra? What however is of paramount importance is the fact that the abhinaya is neerbahya (external). In every situation it is superbly abhyantara (internal). The movements and gestures are neither hurried, nor clumsy. They are in tune with the laya and tala of the play.
- In the other plays of Thiyam as well, the underlying statement has been conveyed through bodily gestures adopted from different traditions. This blending has facilitated Thiyam in originating a new language which can communicate the theme of his plays with the audience. Thiyam completely relies on the ‘Natyasastric’ Angikabhinaya to project the entangled condition of the common mass within a political system. Ratan believes that Natyashastra is the base of all tradition and folk form of India. It gives you roadmap to run and jump to find your own way to reach towards your goal and also to create your own source for your tradition and rituals. The identity crisis, alienation and the pursuit of honour, that batters the contemporary man have been presented through a collage of classical body gestures and the Pung Cholan dancing style in Karnabharam . Thus, through the application of unique bodily gestures, Thiyam promulgates a movement in Indian drama where the gestures untying themselves from the orthodox Laxman-rekhas are able to delineate the contemporary socio-political situation of the world and thus formulates a new language for the future generation of playwrights.

➤ **HEY NUNGSHIBI PRITHIVI (MY EARTH, MY LOVE):** (*Images – 6 To 10*)

- The wheel of time rolls on. The present is a small link connecting the eternal chain of the past and the future. But, who knows what is there in store tomorrow for us, the mankind. If we look at the mirror of the past to see the image of the future, the future of the Earth, eaten bare to the bones by the humans, is very bleak – an uncertain gloom hangs in air. On opening the pages of the history of mankind, horrendous images of the past unfold one after another. Closer at home, seven-year devastation of Manipur by the Burmese is clearly etched in the history of Manipur. Hordes of children had been suffocated to death with the smoke of burning chilies. Thousands of people tied with cane-splits passed through slits in the ears and palms had been dragged away as slaves. In other parts of the world, many more terrifying incidents had happened. Hundreds of thousands of people had been packed in concentration camps and starved to death by the Germans. They had taken revenge for killing five hundred thousand men, women and children after raping fifty thousand of their women at Stalingrad by the Russians. The Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour. The Americans retaliated by dropping atom bomb at Hiroshima and Nagasaki causing damages of untold magnitude, and injuring and killing hoards of innocents. Genocide during the Khmer Rouge regime in Kampuchea has also marred the history of mankind⁸.
- There is no dearth of such horrendous incidents written with blood in the history of Mankind. Prophecies of wise men for the recurrence of such incidents in future reverberate in air. Isn't the duty of the present generation to reform, and bring peace and harmony to the Earth for a better future of the mankind? In the play, seven sisters, celestial nymphs (mythological characters), weave a cloth, the traditional symbol of love, peace and honour, in a loom for offering to the Almighty with a prayer to put a stop to war and bring peace to the Earth. History is personified as an old man. The nymphs, who can assume any form, fly around the Earth as birds and incarnate as human beings to open the chapters from the past, soaked in blood. They also fly to West Asia and Europe to see the demolished Ottoman bridge on the Neretva River built by Suleyman, the Sultan of Moster.

- The play ends with nymphs, symbolizing the peace loving citizens of the world, offering the cloth they have woven so meticulously to the Almighty with a prayer for peace and harmony. Assuming the form of pigeons they fly off to collect dust from the place at Bamiyan where the colossal Buddha once stood peacefully and sprinkle it over Ground Zero, twin towers of World Trade Centre once stood firmly. History, crippled with the atrocities on women and children, is reduced to an open book in a wheelchair. Are the flags of UN fluttering?

⇒ **Prologue:**

- Hey Nungshibi Prithivi opens with Shikaplon Ishei (prayer song in distress) to the accompaniment of Pena, a traditional Manipuri bow and string instrument, asking the Almighty for forgiveness. Seven dignitaries armed with spears and shields perform war dance bidding to narrate a part of the never ending story of bloodshed.
- Seven females with golden masks enter slowly, dancing to the tune of Pena. The song in the background introduces them as seven sisters, celestial nymphs (mythological characters) who can assume any form they want. Assuming the form of birds, they had flown all over the world and carried out their duties, incarnated as human beings.

⇒ **Scene – I:**

- The sisters, while weaving a cloth, recount their experiences and sightings - the frightening scenes of multiple deaths all over the globe. Unable to bear the ghastly acts of the humans, even nature seems to have shied away from them. Dead worried about the gruesome scene on the Earth, the nymphs acting as Maibis, priestesses, try to communicate with the Unseen Force to foresee what the future holds for mankind.
- Puwari, an old man personifying history, relates the prophecies of Nostradamus - the birth of Hitler, the leader of the Nazis; putting hordes of people to death by slowly starving them in concentration camps; dropping of atom bomb at Hiroshima Puwari re-enacts the scene of the B-29 bomber's flight to Hiroshima to drop atom bomb. Hí Leima, the third nymph, flies off to Japan to collect first-hand account of the war.

⇒ Scene – II:

- Hí Leima, incarnated as a survivor, describes the tragic incident of the dropping of atom bomb at Hiroshima and the agonizing scene in the aftermath, before her eyes. Trapped under a fallen tree, she is immobile. She ultimately manages to free herself and flies back home. She reaches home parched with thirst.

⇒ Scene – III:

- Puwari fixes crosses at the graves of war victims, offers flowers and reads out the epitaphs. He then pays homage to martyrs.

⇒ Scene – IV:

- Puwari pays a visit to the nymphs' house. They talk about the sorrowful state of the Earth caused by the never-ending war and bloodshed. Yai Leima, the fourth nymph, informs about her intension to visit Angkor Watt and see the genocide in Cambodia, during the Khmer Rouge regime.
- A worried Hí-pokpi, the eldest nymph, tries to stop her. Puwari forbids her to do so and consoles her by saying that he too is going to Cambodia. He pulls away Yai Leima in his cart. Hí-pokpi muses about the wisdom of the human society and untold sufferings caused by war. She expresses her desire to listen to soothing lullaby.

⇒ Scene – V:

- Yai Leima, incarnated as a widow, a victim of Khmer Rouge regime, laments and tries to nurse her starved and dehydrated child. The child, already dead, does not respond to her loving care.
- Four of the younger nymphs fly off to West Asia and Europe to see the remnants of devastating wars. Hí-Pokpi is worried that her four sisters may land into trouble. Soldiers chase four women, war victims, incarnated by the four nymphs. After capturing, they are kept in prison cells and tortured. Because of the soldiers, their enemies, forcing their way on them they become gravid. They love and hate the babies they carrying in their wombs. They take the extreme decision and discard the babies after giving birth. Unable to bear

the pang, they commit suicide. Mother Teresa enters and accepts the discarded baby.

⇒ **Epilogue:**

- The sisters complete weaving the cloth. They cut it from the loom and offer it to the Almighty with a prayer for forgiveness and depart. Puwari bids them farewell with a request to spread the message of LOVE and PEACE all over the world. Puwari, crippled with the atrocities on the wicker sections, is reduced to an open History Book in a wheelchair, with the flags of the UN on the platform. The nymphs, messengers of PEACE, white doves, frozen in flight, with green twigs in their beaks, are also there.

⇒ **Directorial:**

- How far the human race is going to tolerate the atrocities of war where most of the time women and children are the major victims? And when peace will really come to this world?
- This play does not tell a story. It makes an attempt to share human sufferings and emphasize on the need of human understanding where a serious collective effort is very much required to bring peace in this world. Not a conventionally woven play, it crosses the barrier of time and space to highlight a statement.

➤ **WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN: (Images – 11 To 15)**

- Instead of staging the 'Play – When We Dead Awaken' in a conventional manner, he chose to focus on the theme. The play is suffused by an intense desire for life, but whether it can be achieved is left problematic, given the play's ironic conclusion.
- The story of the When We Dead Awaken is in an around the four character Rubek, Maja, Ulfheim and Irene. The relationship between these characters is unique blend of happiness and sorrow. Arnold Rubek is now old but a celebrated sculptor. He has achieved great height and international fame with his sculpture "The Day of the Resurrection" where his model for this masterpiece of sculpture was Irene, who earlier had considered it her lifework to accompany Rubek and help him in his work. They had a

strong binding as an artist and also appear to have had strong feelings for each other at that time. As Rubek was fully focused on his work so he refused to consider Irene as anything more than his model. This lead Irene disappointed and angry and she left him. The downfall of Rubek start from here the day she left him, Rubek's creative power has diminished, and since then Rubek had a feeling that now he can no longer create art of any significance. He also believes Irene alone, holds the key to his creativity and now he is no more have creativity for his art.

- After Irene left Rubek in due course of time he has married Maja, a considerably younger woman, and the two of them have lived abroad in a marriage that has gradually become somewhat cool. The play opens with Rubek and Maja staying at a seaside hotel in Norway. Where Rubek is playing with an old song on Gramophone and Maja making a Dolls. During the stay in Norway they meet Ulfheim, a landowner and bear-hunter, who invites Maja to get up into the mountains with him. One of the guests at the hotel is a mysterious woman dressed in white and accompanied by a nurse. This turns out to be Irene. She has been married twice, and has been in a mental hospital. She seems to be in the grip of a "living death"⁹, and in a painful confrontation she accuses Rubek of having ruined her life and stolen her soul.
- Here Rubek keenly waiting for her to come back and begs her for that, so that he can regain his creative power. Due course of time, they meet again and go up into the mountains to become lovers again. The dramatic moment comes here when on the same mountain near the top they meet Maja and Ulfheim.
- The atmosphere there was stormy and winds blows up, for safety Maja and Ulfheim go down the mountain, and while Irene and Rubek go on towards the peak remembering olden days, where they die in an avalanche. A western dramatic text or epic can be blended with a specific traditional theatrical form of a non-Western country. A western text can be blended with elements and techniques from one or more nonwestern traditional theatrical forms or other traditional living are forms like music, movements, dance, etc. Ratan Thiyam proves in through this production that any text can be transform in to any traditional performance text. It is the form; which is important and how you perceive.

- During interaction with him he describes the traditional forms as Water. He explains his view “there is one water, which we use for drinking, for bath, for washing cloths and cleaning floor etc... but the water is common in all but we use it according to our needs and requirement. The same way I use the traditional elements which are traditional in a sense but I convert into my own tradition and use according the need of my text.”
- A western text can be blended with elements, materials and techniques etc. from a non-Western art form as well as with elements and techniques of modern western art forms. Thiyam does thus not make use of a particular traditional theatrical or ritual convention but picks elements. Materials and techniques from his own culture and place them within a proscenium theatre frame along with Ibsen’s text and western elements.
- In the play there was a sweet marriage song at the begging and starting on a very low sweet and evacuative note, and rising. Rubek was present. And then there was the funny moment when the gramophone collapsed. He went back to the gramophone and then we heard the first dialogue of Maja. Maja was the one who spoke out and interestingly, did so with line from the second act.
- The dolls Maja is working on consist of a man and a woman in wedding costumes. Here Ratan uses these dolls as symbolic representation of their relationship in the play. There are three finished dolls in the process of being made, which suggests a fundamental man and woman relationship in the future, while at the same time group of three dolls represents the present situation with the triangular relationship between Rubek, Maja and Irene. It is also interesting to note that up-stage there is a big image of a bird along with deformed human images. The symbolic representation of this dolls and gramophone gives a clear idea to understand the situation to the audience.
- However, despite all these structural changes Thiyam maintains a concept of three step progression in terms of space as the locale is changed from studio to waterway to a spiritual space. It should be noted that according to Indian conceptions, the spiritual space is infinite and exists above reality that is at the highest elevation. Thiyam connects the persistence of memory in the production to the Hindu and Bhuddist concepts of the wheel of death and rebirth. Simultaneously there is a movement from a realistic to a surrealist atmosphere.

- Ratan Thiyam has been inspired by transformations in Hindu mythology in which gods and goddesses appear both as creative and destructive powers as is especially the case with Shiva and Durga. He himself is preoccupied with the transformation from life to death. The other reflection is that Thiyam's emphasis on freedom as represented through Maja's relationship to Ulfheim within an Indian setting requires that Ulfheim appears as a positive and sympathetic character. On the contrary, does not make use of any specific time concept.
- Let us discuss that there are few thing in this play that need discuss. Firstly, the self-confined episode is replaced by what Thiyam calls a "unit" which may not necessarily tell a complete story. The story may thus be covered in more than one unit. An illustrative example is that he shifts from one unit – "painting" to the next in the middle of what in this production emerges as one continuous dialogue between Rubek and Irene and one unit taking place in the boat.
- Thiyam's love for painting can be seen in his most of the production. His paint stroke is thicker and stronger than typical for traditional theatre in the sense that the visuals are more prominent and shift frequently. He used his visuals so creatively as moving frames. As he explain me during the personal conversation that he take the scene like a painting on canvas, one he creates then wash it and recreate again. Whereas visuals in traditional theatre are fixed and created only with the help of a multi-purpose prop which for most traditional theatrical forms typically remain on the stage throughout the entire performance.
- According to Thiyam there were several things came across during this production, first was the European atmosphere or environment. The western concept of life and death juxtaposed with our own concept of life and death, our own metaphors, elements and materials. The most important for him was how to get acceptable this play in Indian atmosphere, environment. Also tradition is not separate from us so how can Ibsen fit into our tradition. It's a challenging task to present Ibsen in front of our audience. But then he came out with the thought that anything that is universal, anything written by genius or painted by a painter who is genius doesn't make any difference whether it is Ibsen, Shakesphere, Tagore, or Kalidas all these will carry a universal message¹⁰.

- In India we have different customs different traditions, different languages even we don't know how many languages we speak in India but we all also have the Ramayana and Mahabharata. And Ibsen is Ibsen. We can interpret him in our own way but he remains Ibsen. He further discussed about our belief of rebirth. According to the Indian philosophy rebirth occurs only when a person has accumulated a lot of good karma during our whole life. If we don't have good karma we won't be able to take rebirth as a human being that is the Indian concept. Resurrection is a very western.
- During the process of this production the important for him was working process, was the realization that this was not the realistic play as Ibsen's work may have been considered earlier. This play has no realistic or naturalistic writing, no portrait like characters which is why; even though there is an Ibsenite structure of the three act play the development of character is not as it was in earlier work.
- He clearly stated that "I tried to discover a language of expression specifically to this play and make the actors work towards it because it is neither a realistic play nor a highly stylized Indian classical play. It is something in between, by placing it in a modern context I tried to make the contemporary acceptable to myself, because at the end, it is I who I am trying to satisfy.
- In the play performance there was a clock used in one scene at actors left, which has very important story itself described by Ratan Thiyam in his own word during the personal conversation "on day while I was writing I fell asleep and, suddenly when I got up I felt like asking Salvador Dali, what do I do, can I borrow your clock? So he told me – I felt that he told me well if it is for a play by Ibsen, then you can borrow it. So I felt very happy because all this is about memory about time and about coming close to Rurik. And I was thinking of time – where time itself is the juxtaposition of the physical body and how Iren could express this with the help of hanging clock of Dali. This idea goes back again to Manipuri tradition of the rituals, like Liaharoba, where the human being meets the god and so on. Many things come together in my head again and again sometime as an image in a very physical way and sometime in a completely nonphysical manner.

- A hero acquiring superhuman qualities and becoming a measuring stick for behavior and morals has Indian parallels in the myth of Karan and the related conversation between Krishna and Arjuna described in the scripture Bhagavad Gita. Moreover, swans are central in Hindu myths. The “swan boat” in Thiyam’s production, inspired by Ibsen’s text, is thus a symbol which the local audience can connect with their own myth. In this way, Thiyam connects human existence and spiritual conceptions of cosmos.

CREATIVE USE OF MANIPUR’S MAJOR PERFORMATIVE ART FORMS IN RATAN THIYAM’S THEATRE

- There are number of traditional narrative forms in Manipur that have been used as teaching exercises for the Chorus actors and are directly and indirectly used in speech patterns. It draws pictures in words, syllables, via variable intonation and enunciation with the aid of gestures. Both the epics are distinctly bound within the Manipur ethos.

➤ **WARI LEEBA:** (*Images – 16 To 18*)

- Wari Leeba is a traditional form of narrative art articulating the Hindu Puranas, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and the Manipuri chronicle. The Wari Leeba narrates, sitting with one or two bolsters as his props. His gestures are small and limited, and the emphasis is on the speech pattern through which he creates visual pictures. The language is Manipuri with a fair sprinkling of Sanskrit and Bengali for embellishment.
- There are several traditional performing art forms that represent the Mahabharata. In Manipur the Wari Leeba narrative form is the most important carrier of the Mahabharata, and also a fascinating performance text. It would not be wrong to say that without the Wari Leeba the Ramayana and Mahabharata may not have become known as scriptures in this region.

- For instance when the Wari Leeba describes Bheema he will name the types of food a big strong man would eat in Manipur. 'Bheema will eat hot chili food with plenty of dry fish and raw vegetables. Dishes like Uti, Shingju, Chagempomba, and Iromba. In Karnataka he may eat idli sambhar. When the narrator places characters in certain surroundings he makes sure that his audience can associate with each feature of locate he has created.'
- On the level of style the most important dramatic element is the speech pattern. The Wari Leeba paints pictured with words. A physical visualization of that image came later. Manipuri folk song is known as 'Khulang Ishei'. It is popular for its thematic and romantic contents. The folk songs are commonly sung by the rural folk and hill men at the time of harvesting, collecting firewood, hunting and fishing.

➤ **RAS LILA:** (*Images – 19 To 21*)

- With the introduction of Vaishnavism, new temple structures called 'Mandapas' were built where people gathered for 'Keertana'. Slowly the Maibas and Maibis began singing and dancing at the mandapas using pungs, kartals, mandilas, giving rise to the 'Cholam Dances Ariba Pala', an old form of 'Sankeertana' with devotional songs dedicated to Lord Rama, became popular. King Bhagyachandra, being an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna, saw a vision wherein Lord Krishna was seen dancing the Rasa dances with the gopis. Inspired by this dream, he composed the 'Rasa Lila' dance of Manipur that was first performed at the Govindji Temple at Imphal.
- King Bhagyachandra is accredited with the composition of three out of the six Rasa Lila Dances. These are the Maha Rasa, Vasant Rasa and the Kunj Rasa. Bhagyachandra sought to give life to his vision that resulted not only in the compositions but also in the style and technique of dancing. The Govinda Sangita Leela Vilas is an important text on the details and fundamentals of Rasa dances of Manipur and is supposed to have been authored by King Bhagyachandra himself.

⇒ **TECHNIQUE:**

- In technique, Manipuri dances avoid sharp jerks, straight lines and edges. There is seeming continuity of action throughout Manipuri performance. Every action flows into the other, every hasta too flows in to other. Therefore, all movements seemingly form patterns of S or 8 without ever compromising with the vertical median of the body. The abstract figure of 8 that is incessantly drawn through Manipuri movements almost seems like an intertwined serpent kundalini chakra. The only geometrical pattern that is employed is that of a circle. Straight lines or triangles are avoided. The women never jump while the men are known for their swift movements, leaps and sudden sitting positions.
- The calis are given great importance in Manipuri as it involves sustained training in simultaneous use of the feet, torso, body and hands. The Bhangi pareng is a series of movement (Bhangi = dance poses and pareng = series) akin to the angaharas of the Natyashastra. That builds up gradually in tempo. Every ruler added his own to the cluster of Bhangi Parengs that today total five in number. These are¹¹:
 - **Bhangi Pareng Achoubar:** Sometimes known as big Bhangi Pareng it represents dance postures and movements employed in Rasa. It starts with 14 beats and then goes to 6 and 8 beat patterns.
 - **Khurumba Pareng:** This series of dance movements represents a string of prayers to Krishna and Radha
 - **Brindaban Pareng:** Here the movements are lofty as it represents singing of praises to Vrindaban, the abode of Krishna.
 - **Goshtha Bhangi Pareng:** This represents Krishna's activities as a child in Vrindaban.
 - **Goshtha Vrindaban Pareng:** This represents Krishna's sportful activities with the cowherds of Vrindaban.
- All the angas of the Abhinaya Darpana classification of Natya (drama), Nritya (dance with expression) and Nritya (pure rhythmic dance sequence) are visible in Manipuri

dance. Expression emoted through the face can be categorized as the highest state of controlled display of emotion, cloaked in serenity, for all feelings seem to emanate from the movements of limbs. In the delineation of abhinaya (expressional statement), the dancers in Manipuri dance lay stress on expression through graceful movements of the body. There is an emphasis on sarvangabhinaya (total body expression).

⇒ **TYPES OF RASLILAS¹²:**

→ **Vasant Rasa:**

- It is performed on a full moon night of spring (usually March) and revolves around the union of Radha and Krishna after a painful separation. Hurt and infuriated at Krishna's faithlessness, she initially refuses to accept him but later relents after he implores her to forgive him. Actions depicting throwing of colour at each other that is associated with the Holi festival is seen to be used.

→ **Kunj Rasa:**

- Performed in early autumn during Dussehra, this Rasa revolves around the daily life of Radha and Krishna who are seen as ideal lovers, amusing themselves unmarred by separation. It is light in spirit.

→ **Maha Rasa:**

- This is performed on a full moon night in November-December and depicts the separation of the divine lover. Radha threatens to kill herself whereupon Krishna returns in his multiple forms and each gopi including Radha, dances with her Krishna.

→ **Nitya Rasa:**

- This can be performed on any evening at any time of the year. In this Rasa, it is Krishna who is waiting so lovingly for his beloved Radha.

→ **Divya Rasa:**

- This can be performed during the day.

→ **Sharada Rasa:**

- This is performed during full moon night of autumn.

→ **Natna Rasa:**

- This Rasa dance has eight gopis who dance with one Krishna.

→ **Ashta-gopi ashta-Shyama Rasa:**

- As the name suggests there are eight gopis dancing with eight Krishnas.

⇒ **RASLILAS FORMAT:**

→ Krishna appears and dances

→ Radha appears and dances

→ Krishna and Radha dance together (this is the proper Rasalila)

→ Bhangi: Now an argument between the two ensues and one of the two refuses to join the dance. This is followed by great persuasion.

→ Milan when the two reconcile with each other and dance together in gay abandon.

→ Prayer when Radha and the gopis pledge their eternal devotion to Krishna.

- Every Rasa dance is preceded by a Nupa Pala (a male Sankeertana). In Manipuri Rasa, the singers are both men and women. But dancers are only women.

➤ **LAI HAROBA:** (*Images – 22 To 24*)

- Lai Haroba meaning Frolic of the Gods, is usually danced by the Maibas and maibis. These priests and priestesses respectively are considered to be embodiments of purity. Both Maibas and Maibees are temple dancers. Unlike the devadasis of southern India,

women temple dancers of Manipur namely Maibeas could simultaneously lead a normal married life even while sanctified as a temple dancer. The Maibas and Maibeas are usually dressed in distinctive white costume.

- Essentially a ritualistic dance, mirroring tantric and early Hindu cultures, Lai Haroba unfolds the story of creation, based on the Meiti concept of cosmology which believes that the earth was brought down from heaven by nine gods, Laibungthou Mapan and seven goddesses, Lairura Taret. It unfolds the story of the birth of Asiba and the emergence of the universe and the gods from within Sidaba. Danced during the month of Chaitra (spring), a performance usually spreads over several days and nights.
- The first part of Lai Haroba is the Laihunba (scattering of flowers) symbolic of infusing life in the deities wherein the dancers move in an anticlockwise circle, the jagoi. The Laiching Jagoi is an invocatory dance where the maibis stand with their hands in the yoni mudra signifying the woman's regenerative organ. This dance builds up to a climax ending with the sikhara mudra (fist with thumbs up) that is symbolic of the male regenerative organ. The Lai Pou that follows commences with the words, Hoiru and Hoya. These words are sung seven times in seven different notes. Dance of the union of the heaven and earth is known as Leitai Nongdai Jagoi for it is derived from Nongdai Jagoi (hand movements) and Leitai Jagoi (feet movements) Then there is mythological story of how Haraba, another entity created by Sidaba kept destroying works of Asiba. Frustrated, Asiba requested Sidaba's help whereby Sidaba created a woman of unusual beauty, by the name of Nongthang Leima, who caught Haraba's attention that allowed Asiba to finish his works of creation¹³.
- The love duets between Nongpokningthou and Panthoibi are reminiscent of duets between Lord Krishna and Radha respectively. In the last stage, the dancers dance for the pleasure of the gods depicting various sports. Throughout, the dancers perform before the invisible intertwined snake (Pakhangba) that is considered to have potent supernatural powers and which can be utilized for both, constructive and destructive purposes. Secondly, it was formless and therefore, fitted well in the pre-Vaishnav and post Vaishnav psyche for it could not be identified with any Hindu God. The Thougan Jagoi is a dance of worship by the devotees.

- There are three kind of Lai Harobas, namely the Chakpa, the Konglei and the Moirang, each a little different with its own particular flavour. The Moirang Lai Haroba owes its birth to Khamba and Thoibl who, it is believed, were fond of dancing the Lai Haroba.

➤ **THANG TA:** (*Images – 25 To 27*)

- ‘Thang’ means sword and ‘Ta’ is the spear. ‘Thang’ also stands for a dexterous and tactical use of hands with footwork. It epitomizes the ritual, spiritual and philosophical psyche of the Meitei people. It is considered the soul of all the arts as it brings into balance and sharpens the activities of all the vital limbs of the body.
- ‘Ta’ means spear, which in the rhythmic movements becomes Ta-Khousaba. Spear battles reflect the chivalrous past where a single warrior battled many enemies. There are many techniques of this art like Maram Nungsetpa, a glimpse of which is evident in Chakravayuhaa. In this basic Ta exercise the spear is held high up in the right hand. The right leg is bent at the knee with the sole of the foot inwards; the other leg is stretched out backwards. From this position the actor jump up to four directions on his toes, stretches the spear forward and then back, lifts the left leg in a semi-circular motion, crouches firmly on his feet and jumps up with the feet hitting the rump to land on his toes.
- The proper name for Thang-Ta is HUYEN LALLONG ("method of safe-guarding"). As the name implies, Huyen Lallong is more than just the training of fighting skills. It is an elaborate system of physical culture that involves breathing methods, meditations, and rituals. Some of the sword and spear forms are entirely ritualistic, although they are composed of material techniques. They are to be performed only at special occasions or under special circumstances. For example, there is a spear form that is performed at funerals. Perhaps the most famous form is the ritual spear dance done by King Bhagyachandra (ruled 1759-1798) on a mountain top during his exile due to the Burmese invasion in 1762. The Manipuris believe that the ritual was instrumental in driving the Burmese out of Manipur¹⁴.

➤ **PUNG AND KARTALA CHOLAM:** (*Images – 28 To 30*)

⇒ **PUNG CHOLAM:**

- The use of percussion instruments are used in Indian Classical dances and is stated to be a legacy of ritualistic practices where its sound was considered essential in warding off evil. Thus in any classical performance, the purifying sound of the conch shell is followed by the reverberating sound of the drums. Furthermore, the incessant sound of drumming also produces a hypnotic effect. This therefore became part of Sankeertana and Pung Cholan, utilizing the pung (local mridanga drum), became part of ritualistic dances. Here the drum becomes the focal point of veneration. In addition to Pung Cholan, there are the Duff Cholan and the Dhol Cholan where the Duff is a kind of tambourine while the Dhol is a kind of large barrel- shaped drum.
- Pung Cholan is usually performed at the start of Sankeertana and Rasa dances. Dressed in white dhoti, with a white ball shaped turban on the head, the male performers simultaneously play complicated rhythmic patterns on their drums as they dance. Their dance is punctuated by leaps and twirls; graceful and vigorous body movements that lead to ecstatic heights. The modulation of sound from their drums is tremendous as it goes from a soft whisper to a thunderous climax. While playing, the fingers of the right hand of the drummers are covered with a waxed cloth while there is a protective padding on the fingers of the left hand.

⇒ **KARTALA CHOLAM:**

- Similarly, as part of Sankeertana, was the use of cymbals. These slowly developed into an art that included dance, which came to be known as Kartala Cholan. This was particularly given patronage by King Jayasingha. Some believe that it was he who initiated this form of worship. They are also known as the Khubal Isei cholan or Khubal cholan in short. Traditionally, this formed part of the procession in the chariot festival of Lord Jagannath. The initial movements of this dance are soft and serene that slowly

gathers momentum. It is performed by a group of Maibas, clad in spotless white dhoti and white ball-shaped turbans, using cymbals as they sing and dance to accompaniment of the ancient classical drum Dhak. Important members of the Pala Sankeertana group are the Ishalpa or main singer, the Duhar or leader of the cholam part and the Dhuties who perform the keertana.

- Kartals are large cymbals whereas mandillas are smaller cymbals. Usually, the maibis who perform the Mandilla Cholam dance and sing devotional songs while their hands strike the cymbals. Group dance of women wielding small cymbals, punctuated by clapping of hands are seen in nupi khumbak ishal and the nupa khumbak ishal. These are known as Nupi Pala in short. When performed by men, it is known as Nupa Pala. The group formations are the pindibandhs of the Natyashastra.

THEATRICAL LANGUAGE OF RATAN THIAM'S THEATRE:

- Contemporary in thought, technically dashing, with themes featuring universal concerns expressed via a dramatic idiom rooted in tradition, yet inventively creative and continuously experimental is perhaps as appropriate description of Ratan Thiam's theatre in brief. In play after play these elements surface skillfully placed in context to time, concern and content. Another distinctive feature is the connection to his social milieu and how it transcends Manipur to include the world.
- The empty space is Ratan's preferred performing arena, his source of energy. This space is constantly in a state of active mobilization of emotions through alterations in design and colour, lights, sound and movement. The concept of moving through space and time where most Ratan Thiam plays have an earth-hugging quality in the use of acting space, here the theatrical adjuncts and the actors appear to be levitating. The scenes of horror are viewed as if through a telescope – images in sharp focus to be minutely observed for knowledge and consideration. Costumes and colours of drapery are vitally important as are the properties, both handheld and stage.

➤ **RITUALS AND TRADITION:**

- During conversation with Kavita Nagpal the focus was on ritual and tradition in theatre and to accusations that Ratan's theatre is exported as exotica' Ratan replies sharply. What is exotica? The exotica' they speak about is external with ornaments, alankara. My exotica are internal. It is exotic energy.
- Ratan emphatically says, "Rituals and Tradition! They are mine Ratan's ritual and traditions. Neither do they have any direct bearing to any particular Manipuri tradition nor to the Natyashastra. I am creating my own tradition. According to the Natyashastra there will be parstavana, a nandi etc. In my prologue, I am using the Natyashastra as source of inspiration for creating an impressing of tradition.
- Artist has to discover his own style through various types of interactions and create his own tradition. And this tradition is not a tradition but a composite reaction to artistic experience. "You must liberate yourself to incorporate Indonesian, Balinese, Japanese, Mexican or any other form that excites to create theatre, create your own theatrical score. Not everyone will respond to the stimulus and certainly not in the same way" says Ratan in a conversation with Kavita Nagpal.
- While discussing about the form he says, he don't utilize any particular form. According to him whatever he creates on stage is not a tradition by itself. Fact is that after breaking the original mould of a traditional form, he utilizes them accordingly to the suitability of a particular situation. Tradition is always a source of inspiration for him. But he tries to do everything keeping in tune with time and space and according to the psychology of modern audience.
- According to him every director should carry a signature of his own while carrying out experiments with which it could be stamped as his creation. He looks a tradition as a colour which he paints his theatre in his own way. Utilizing tradition by itself is not his tradition, rather utilizing it as a re-interactive tool is his tradition.

➤ **CONTENT AND FORM / STYLE:**

- For him even with his own text, words are merely the base on which Ratan builds movements. His language goes far beyond the mere conveyance of the meaning of a word. As a part of Ratan's larger design feels that beyond the literal meaning is the denotative quality of the word, it's placing in space, the aural tone, the trust given by the actor in relation to physical movement and gesture invests it with a distinctive purpose. Beyond the simple oral effect, there is physical thrust to words, the actor's entire body is involved in creating a meaning for the word he is speaking, or the sentence he is constructing, this physical portrayal is a distinctive feature of Ratan's style. The actor's body moves in internal and external rhythm to the performance text. Ratan works his actors through varied breathing techniques to create a distinctive language of expression for each character.
- As Ratan has explained several times and as is evident from the changing theatre language of his plays, the word, 'tradition' in its usage as deriving from 'traditional' Manipuri forms does not apply to his usage of formal attributes from folk or classical arts. Whether it is Nat Sankirtan, the processional Lai Haroba, the Thang Ta or martial art, the Wari Leeba or the narrative singing style called Pena, when it appears in Ratan's plays it has transformed itself into a Ratan ritual/tradition. The process of appropriation has not been simple. Ratan invited Gurus from different disciplines to work with his actors from the very beginning, and continues to return to them even today to understand the nuances of the actor's relationship to the space to the tradition, as it mutates with the text and content¹⁵.
- The vigour, intensity, electrifying patterns of rhythm, speech, movement, scenic design, a rare sense of colour, style and drapery in costume, emanating from Ratan's interaction with Manipuri tribal and Meitei culture through a singular appropriation of classical text and folklore had reached its pinnacle in Chakravyuhaa where the actors related to postures and gestures of the Natyashastra without imitating them. Whereas Urubhangam was sophisticated, Chakravyuha was free of any improvisation.

➤ **CONCLUSION:**

- The work of Ratan Thiyam may be describe in short as, Contemporary in thought, technically sound, with themes featuring universal concerns expressed via a ‘Theatrical Idioms Rooted in Tradition’, yet creatively and continuously experimental is perhaps as appropriate description of Ratan Thiyam’s theatre in brief. In play after play these elements surface skillfully placed in context to time, concern and content. Another distinctive feature is the connection to his social milieu and how it transcends Manipur to include the world.

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HEY NUNGSHIBI PRITHIVI (MY EARTH, MY LOVE) (6 To 10)



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9



10

WHEN WE DEAD AWAKEN (11 To 15)



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12



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14



15

WARI LEEBA (16 To 18)

16



17



18

RAS LILA (19 To 21)

19



20



21

LAI HAROBA (22 To 24)



22



23



24

THANG TA (25 To 27)

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26



27

PUNG AND KARTALA CHOLAM (28 To 30)

28



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