This piece is on the play *Raja Lear* by Suman Mukhopadhyay where Soumitra Chatterjee plays the lead role.

Before starting to write this piece, in the interest of full disclosure, I should make some confessions. Sumana is related to me and Soumittra is very close to me personally. But what I am going to write here bears no relation to such personal relationships and is purely in the interest of art.

What prompted me to write this piece is a status update by Suman Mukhopadhyay on his Facebook page where he says “*Raja Lear is corroding*” and the comments that followed. If one is to recall major achievements in the last year or so in the Bengali cultural scenario one would definitely rate Suman Mukhopadhyay’s play as one.

Moreover, the performance of Soumitra Chatterjee in that play will be remembered for time immemorial. Those who have been lucky to catch the few shows which have taken place will vouch for that. In that respect Sunil Gangopadhyay’s piece in *Anandabazar Patrika* on the play is worth mentioning.

Unfortunately, the fate of *Raja Lear* hangs in the balance. After the last show on May 22, there is no word about when the next show will take place. Whatever might be the reason for that I will not go into a journalistic enquiry. But as a theatre buff who watches plays from all across the globe I really felt proud after seeing this play. That theatre of this standard is still being produced in *our* Calcutta. I have personally urged many actors to watch this play as a learning exercise as to what constitutes acting of the highest order.

Let me not beat around the bush and go straight to an uncomfortable point. One wonders whether this procrastination about the future of the play has got anything to do with Soumitra Chatterjee’s political leanings. If that is indeed the case then it is extremely sad. It is very unfortunate if we deprive lovers of theatre and good art for the political stance of the main actor concerned or for that matter maybe the director.

I do have long conversations with both Suman Mukhopadhyay and Soumitra Chatterjee but hardly ever have we talked politics. I have realised that their love for work drowns their political inclinations and that is what I intend to learn from them.

I hope there should not be any doubt whatsoever about the credentials of Suman Mukhopadhyay as a theatre director and about Soumitra Chatterjee, it will simply be ludicrous to say anything about an actor of that stature.

Knowing him very closely I know how much more he would love his present work even at this age to be accepted — appreciated or criticised — rather than being greeted with the customary garlands and numerous lifetime achievement awards. Thus it is my earnest request to the people concerned, and to numerous culture lovers of Bengal, to do something about the fate of *Raja Lear*.

Soumitra Chatterjee is unwell, but still at the age of 77 he has given us a historical performance. Delaying things more might “corrode” the project. Otherwise, maybe 20 years down the line people will lose the opportunity to say, “Yes, I had watched Soumitrababu on stage in *Raja Lear*.” Akin to what we hear now about the likes of Shombhu Mitra in *Raktakarabi* or Utpal Dutt in *Tiner Tolowar*.

Alas, Soumitrababu will not be there with us any more.

**SUMAN MUKHOPADHYAY ON RAJA LEAR**

*Raja Lear* was running at Minerva theatre and I don’t know why it has been stopped. We have not had shows for the past two months. The theatre is shut over some technical problem that I am not fully aware of. There seems to be some confusion regarding Minerva Natyacharcha Kendra, an autonomous body that was formed by the previous government. Minerva Repertory, which was set up as a part of it, had invited me to direct a play for them. *Raja Lear* is their first production. The repertory has 14 full-time artistes and now their future is at stake too.
The new government is quite active. It has taken swift action in several areas of governance, so I don't know why they are dillydallying about the Minerva issue. Maybe there is some prejudice at work. I would request the government to resolve this impasse. There is a huge demand for Raja Lear. We have had 20 shows, including two at Rabindra Sadan, and all of them were sold out. So there's no reason why we should not have more shows.

Besides, Soumitra Chatterjee is a veteran actor, one of the seniormost on stage. He wants to do some more shows and I think we should let him do them.

Who do you blame for the impasse over Raja Lear? Tell t2@abp.in