



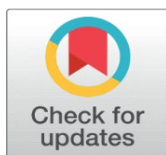


# SCENOGRAPHY AND SYMBOLIC MINIMALISM IN SWINGS OF LOVE: A PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF STAGE SPACE, OBJECT AND VISUAL MEANING

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## ABSTRACT

Scenography gives theatre its visible and spatial life. This article examines Premar Dolona (Swings of Love) through scenography and symbolic minimalism. It asks how a restrained stage design can hold emotional meaning in a physical solo performance. Using qualitative performance analysis, the study reads the recorded Guwahati production together with the published English translation of the play. The analysis focuses on stage space, the swing, bodily movement, costume, colour, sound and visual composition. The argument is that the production avoids decorative excess and builds its meaning through a few charged elements. The swing becomes a flexible theatrical sign, associated with love, memory, waiting, motion, tension and feminine experience. Its placement and the performer's movement around it shape the audience's attention. The study shows that minimal scenography can sharpen the viewer's focus on the actor's body, gesture, voice and relation with the object. It also suggests that simplicity can create depth when object, space and body work together. The paper concludes that Swings of Love offers a useful example of contemporary physical theatre where scenic economy produces layered visual and emotional meanings.

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**Keywords:** Scenography, Symbolic Minimalism, Swings of Love, Stage Space, Performance Analysis, Visual Meaning, Theatre Object, Feminine Experience



## 1. INTRODUCTION

Theatre creates meaning not only through spoken words and acting, but also through space, objects, colour, costume, light, sound and movement. These elements are part of scenography. Scenography is not only stage decoration. It is a meaningful part of performance. It helps to create the world of the play and guides the audience's feeling and understanding. Howard (2019) explains scenography as the making of a stage environment through visual and spatial design. In this sense, scenography becomes an important language of theatre.

The present paper studies Premar Dolona (Swings of Love), an avant-garde physical mono-drama presented by Aank\_A Creative Line, Assam, India and Inter Act Art, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The production draws on Manjula Wediwardena's Sinhala play, translated into English by Diloni Eriawala and first printed by Sandakada Publishing in

November 2017 (Wedwardena, 2017). In the Guwahati production, Jahnabi Borah performed the solo role and M. Safeer designed and directed the work. It was staged on April 28-29, 2024, at Sri Sri Madhavdeva International Auditorium, Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra Samaj, Guwahati, Assam.

The paper focuses on the way the performance turns simple visual means into expressive theatrical signs. As a physical solo work, it depends on the performer's body, rhythm, space and object relations. Its scenic language is deliberately restrained, yet this restraint gives weight to the central image of the swing. The object gathers ideas of love, memory, waiting, emotional movement and inner conflict without needing a crowded stage.

Symbolic minimalism means the use of few stage elements to create strong meaning. In this type of theatre, the stage is not filled with many objects. A simple object, an empty space, a movement or a colour can carry deep emotional value. Brook's idea of the "empty space" is useful here. Brook (1968) shows that theatre can begin with a simple space and a performer. This idea helps us understand how a minimal stage can become powerful when the performer and the object create meaning together.

The swing organises the visible field of the performance. The performer's contact with it - sitting near it, circling it, touching it, waiting beside it or moving through its rhythm - gives the object emotional force. It can suggest time, hesitation, hope, pain, freedom and limitation. Because the scenic field is uncluttered, the audience is drawn toward small physical details and toward the symbolic weight carried by the object.

The study of visible and audible signs is important in performance analysis. Pavis (2003) states that performance can be studied through its different signs, such as gesture, space, costume, object, music and stage arrangement. This view is useful for this paper because *Swings of Love* is a physical mono-drama where meaning is created not only by text, but also by body, object and space. The performance becomes a visual and physical text.

Hann (2019) also argues that scenography does not simply support performance; it actively shapes the way performance is experienced. This idea is relevant to *Swings of Love*. The minimal scenography does not remain in the background. It becomes part of the emotional structure of the performance. The swing, the actor's body, the space and the visual arrangement work together to create meaning.

This paper aims to analyse how *Swings of Love* uses scenography and symbolic minimalism to create theatrical meaning. The study focuses on stage space, the swing as a central object, body movement, costume, colour, sound and visual composition. The main argument of the paper is that *Swings of Love* creates strong emotional and symbolic meaning through simple scenic design. It shows that minimal scenography can be powerful when the relationship between performer, object and space is carefully designed.

For this reason, the production may be read as a contemporary example of physical theatre in which visual restraint becomes a source of emotional intensity. A single stage object, handled through bodily expression and careful design, is able to carry several layers of meaning.

## 1.1. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

The conceptual base of the study brings together four ideas: scenography, symbolic minimalism, the theatre object and physical performance. These ideas suit Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*) because the production relies less on narrative explanation and more on body, space, object, rhythm and visual composition.

Scenography is an important concept in modern theatre studies. It is not limited to scenery or background decoration. It includes the total visual and spatial design of a performance. Pamela Howard understands scenography as a complete relationship between space, text, research, art, performers, directors and spectators (Howard, 2019). This idea is useful for the present paper because *Swings of Love* does not create meaning through a large number of stage materials. It creates meaning through the careful relation between the actor, the swing and the stage space.

McKinney and Butterworth (2009) also explain that scenography includes stage structures, light, projected images, sound, costume, props, performing bodies, text, space and audience. This view helps us to study the performance as a complete visual experience. In *Swings of Love*, the stage object, the body of the actor, the movement of the swing and the open space together create the emotional world of the play. The performance therefore shows that scenography is not only what is placed on stage. It is also how the stage is used.

Rachel Hann's work is also important for this study. Hann argues that scenography is not only a fixed set or background. It actively shapes the experience of a staged event. She writes that scenographic traits "orientate, situate

and shape staged events” (Hann, 2019, p. i). This idea is very helpful for analysing *Swings of Love*. The swing does not remain a silent object. It orients the performer’s movement. It situates the emotional action. It also shapes the audience’s understanding of love, waiting, memory and inner conflict.

The second important idea is symbolic minimalism. Minimalism in theatre does not mean emptiness without meaning. It means using fewer elements with greater purpose. In such theatre, one object or one movement can carry many meanings. Peter Brook’s idea of theatre is useful here. He writes, “I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage” (Brook, 1968, p. 9). This statement shows that theatre does not always need a heavy set. A simple space, a performer and a spectator can create theatre. This idea is closely related to the scenographic world of *Swings of Love*.

Jerzy Grotowski’s idea of poor theatre is also connected with symbolic minimalism. Grotowski wanted theatre to remove unnecessary decoration and to focus on the actor’s body and the actor-spectator relationship. He writes, “By gradually eliminating whatever proved superfluous” theatre can find its essential form (Grotowski, 2002, p. 19). This idea is relevant because *Swings of Love* is a physical mono-drama. The actor’s body becomes the main source of expression. The stage does not need many objects because the performer’s movement and relation with the swing create the central meaning.

The third important idea is the theatre object. A stage object is not always used in an ordinary way. In theatre, an object may become a sign, a memory, a metaphor or an emotional centre. Patrice Pavis (2003) suggests that performance analysis should study not only text but also gesture, costume, space, sound, rhythm, object and audience reception. This approach is suitable for *Swings of Love*, because the swing is not only a real object. It becomes a theatrical sign. It may suggest love, time, waiting, pain, desire, feminine experience and emotional movement.

Within this framework, the swing functions as the central symbolic object. Its forward-and-back motion may point toward memory, emotional uncertainty and the return of unfinished feeling. When the actor approaches, uses or responds to it, the object becomes linked to the performer’s inner state rather than remaining a neutral prop.

The fourth important idea is physical performance. Since *Swings of Love* is described as an avant-garde physical mono-drama, the body of Jahnabi Borah becomes central to the performance. In physical theatre, meaning is not created only through spoken language. Gesture, posture, rhythm, silence, breath, movement and stillness also become important. Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008) explains performance as an event created through the bodily co-presence of performer and spectator. This idea helps us understand that the actor’s body is not only representing a character. It is producing meaning through its live presence and action.

The conceptual framework of this paper therefore brings together four connected ideas. First, scenography is used to study the visual and spatial design of the performance. Second, symbolic minimalism is used to understand how a limited stage arrangement creates deep meaning. Third, theatre-object theory is used to analyse the swing as a central sign. Fourth, physical performance is used to study the actor’s body as a major source of theatrical expression.

Based on this framework, the paper argues that *Swings of Love* creates meaning through simplicity. Its scenography is minimal, but not empty. The swing, the body, the space and the movement together create a layered performance language. The performance shows that a simple stage object can become powerful when it is used symbolically and physically. Therefore, *Swings of Love* may be understood as an example of contemporary theatre where minimal scenography produces rich emotional and visual meaning.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative performance analysis method. The purpose of the study is not to measure the performance through numbers. The purpose is to understand how meaning is created through stage space, object, body, movement, costume, sound and visual composition. This method is suitable because Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*) is an avant-garde physical mono-drama, where the visual and physical elements are very important.

The primary source for analysis is Goswami’s (2024) video documentation of the Guwahati production. The published English translation of Wediwardena’s play is also consulted to understand the textual background, but the focus remains on the recorded stage event as performance (Wediwardena, 2017).

Selected production photographs supplied by AANK A Creative Line are used as supplementary visual material. They help clarify the scenographic field, the performer-object relationship, the use of colour and the spatial rhythm of the production.

The study follows a close observation method. The recorded performance is viewed carefully to identify the major scenographic elements. These elements include stage space, the swing, body movement, costume, colour, sound, rhythm, silence and visual arrangement. Special attention is given to the swing because it is the central stage object of the performance. The analysis studies how this object works as a symbol and how the actor's body creates meaning in relation to it.

The method is also based on the idea that performance is made through many signs. Pavis (2003) suggests that performance analysis should look at different visible and audible elements such as gesture, space, costume, object, sound and rhythm. This approach is useful for the present study because *Swings of Love* is not only a text-based drama. It is a physical performance where the body and object carry important meanings.

The study also uses the idea of scenography as a complete performance environment. McKinney and Butterworth (2009) explain scenography as a field that includes space, light, sound, costume, props, bodies and the relationship with the audience. This view helps the paper to study the performance as a total stage experience, not only as acting or storyline. The swing, the empty space and the performer's movement are therefore analysed together.

The analysis is divided into four main areas. First, the paper studies the stage space and how the performance uses a simple scenic arrangement. Second, it studies the swing as a symbolic object. Third, it analyses the actor's body and movement in relation to the swing and the space. Fourth, it studies how symbolic minimalism creates emotional and visual meaning without using heavy stage design.

The study is interpretive in nature. This means that the analysis is based on careful reading of the performance signs. The paper does not claim that there is only one fixed meaning of the swing or the stage space. Instead, it studies possible meanings created by the relation between object, body, space and audience perception. Such an approach is suitable for theatre analysis because performance meaning is often layered and open to interpretation.

The study has one important limitation. Since the analysis depends mainly on a recorded version, it cannot fully reproduce the experience of spectators who were physically present in the auditorium. Live energy, scale, acoustic effect and the shared atmosphere of the hall may differ from the video experience. Even so, the recording provides adequate material for examining scenography, movement, object use and visual composition.

This method therefore allows the paper to read the production through visible and audible signs, while keeping attention on how the swing, the performer's body and the stage environment work together.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. SCENOGRAPHIC DESIGN IN SWINGS OF LOVE**

The scenographic design of Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*) works as a major part of the dramatic language. The production does not depend primarily on dialogue or realistic setting. Instead, meaning develops through the performer's body, spatial use, the central object, movement, silence, sound and visual rhythm.

Howard's view of stage space as something released into dramatic life by performance is useful here (Howard, 2019). In this production, the actor's entry, movement and attention activate the surrounding area. Space is therefore not a passive background; it becomes an emotional field shaped by bodily action.

The title already prepares the viewer for the importance of the swing. In performance, the object gains more than ordinary practical value. It can recall love, childhood, play, waiting, memory and emotional instability. Its motion adds another layer because it repeatedly moves away and returns.

The minimal use of scenic material makes the swing more powerful. If the stage were filled with many objects, the audience's attention might be divided. But in a minimal stage arrangement, one object can become very strong. Brook's idea of the bare stage is useful here because it suggests that theatre can begin with a simple space, a performer and an action (Brook, 1968). *Swings of Love* follows this spirit of simplicity. The performance shows how a limited scenic design can produce deep emotional meaning.

McKinney and Butterworth describe scenography as the "manipulation and orchestration of the performance environment" (2009, p. 4). They also connect scenography with space, light, sound, costume, objects, performing bodies and the audience. This idea helps us understand that the scenography of *Swings of Love* is not limited to the swing alone. The swing becomes meaningful because it works with the actor's body, the surrounding space, sound, rhythm and visual composition. The whole performance environment supports the symbolic meaning of the object.

The performer's relation with the swing gives the design its living quality. Movement around the object, contact with it and moments of response turn it into part of the action. In a solo performance, this object-body relation carries much of the dramatic pressure.

The stage area may be read as an inward or psychological space rather than a realistic location. It holds traces of memory, attachment, loss, desire and conflict. The uncluttered design makes these associations easier to notice, because attention stays with gesture, distance, object and rhythm.

Scenography also affects the way the audience experiences the performance. It guides what the audience sees and how the audience feels. Rachel Hann argues that scenography helps to orient and shape staged events (Hann, 2019). This idea is relevant here because the swing gives direction to the audience's attention. It becomes the point around which the performance is visually and emotionally organised. The audience does not only watch the actor; it also watches the changing relationship between the actor and the object.

The symbolic minimalism of *Swings of Love* therefore creates a strong scenographic effect. The performance does not need a large set or decorative background to express emotion. Instead, it uses a simple visual structure. The swing, the performer and the space work together. This simplicity helps the performance to become more focused. It also allows the audience to use imagination. The audience is invited to see the swing not only as a real object but also as a symbol.

The scenography therefore works through concentration. Its force lies in the careful placement of a few elements rather than in scenic abundance. The swing becomes the visual anchor and the actor's body gives movement and emotional charge to the space.

Figure 1 documents the wider scenographic field, where suspended structures, projection and open space support the minimalist design.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** Minimal Scenographic Field in Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*). Photo Credit: AANK A Creative Line; Photographer: Utpal Datta. Reproduced With Permission

### 3.2. THE SWING AS A SYMBOLIC OBJECT

At the centre of Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*) is the swing. The Assamese title itself announces this image as central to the world of the play. On stage, the object becomes a point where feeling, memory and action meet.

In theatre, an object can have more than one meaning. It may be used for practical action, but it may also become a sign, metaphor or emotional symbol. Pavis (2003) explains that performance analysis must look at different signs of the stage, such as space, body, gesture, costume, sound, rhythm and objects. This view is useful for studying *Swings of Love* because the swing is not just part of the stage setting. It becomes a sign through its relation with the performer's body and the emotional situation of the drama.

The swing carries several possible meanings. In everyday life it may evoke play, childhood, leisure or affection. In this performance, however, it becomes more complex. Its movement can suggest desire, hesitation, return, waiting and the unsettled nature of human relationships.

Its motion also gives visual form to memory. Love often moves between what has been lived and what is still imagined. The repeated return of the swing can therefore be read as the return of feeling, the return of an earlier moment, or the pull of an unresolved attachment.

The object gains its strongest meaning through the performer's physical response. Jahnabi Borah's gestures, pauses, postures and changes of rhythm build a relationship with it. The swing appears less like a neutral prop and more like an extension of the performer's emotional landscape.

This relation between body and object is important in physical theatre. Grotowski (2002) gives importance to the actor's body and the removal of unnecessary theatrical decoration. His idea of reducing theatre to its essential elements is useful here. In *Swings of Love*, the performance does not depend on many scenic materials. The performer and the swing are enough to create a strong theatrical image. The object becomes powerful because the actor gives life to it through movement and emotion.

The object also opens a reading of feminine experience. It may suggest tenderness, waiting, attachment and desire, but it may also imply restraint. The performer can move with it, yet the movement remains tied to one fixed point. This tension between motion and limit gives the image its emotional sharpness.

This double nature allows the swing to hold opposite feelings at once. It offers motion and pleasure, but also return and confinement. It can present love as an opening, while also showing love as attachment or burden.

The swing also functions as a visual anchor. In an uncluttered space, the audience returns to it again and again. The object gathers attention in the same way that memory gathers repeated emotional force.

Brook's argument on the bare stage helps us understand the strength of minimal theatre (Brook, 1968). A performance does not need many objects to become meaningful. One object can transform the empty space if it is used with strong imagination. In *Swings of Love*, the swing performs this function. It changes the stage from an empty space into an emotional space.

The object can almost be read as a silent partner. It responds only through movement and stillness, yet this response is enough to create a poetic exchange with the performer. The rhythm between body and object helps the audience sense changes in emotion.

The swing therefore works on several levels: object, image, memory, emotional rhythm and gendered sign. Its simplicity gives it strength. The performance allows one object to hold much of the visual and emotional weight of the stage event.

Figures 2 and 3 show how the performer's body turns the swing from a scenic object into an active emotional image.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** Performer-Object Relation with the Swing as a Central Theatrical Sign. Photo Credit: AANK A Creative Line; Photographer: Utpal Datta. Reproduced With Permission

**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** Bodily Balance and Emotional Rhythm Around the Swing. Photo Credit: AANK A Creative Line; Photographer: Utpal Datta. Reproduced With Permission

### **3.3. SYMBOLIC MINIMALISM AND PERFORMANCE MEANING**

Symbolic minimalism is central to Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*). The production builds its effect through restraint: a limited scenic field, the actor's body, the swing, sound, movement and rhythm. This economy of means gives the performance its intensity.

In theatre, minimalism is not the absence of meaning; it is the careful selection of what will carry meaning. Here, the reduced design prevents distraction and draws attention to the most expressive elements of the performance.

Adolphe Appia's idea of stage harmony is useful here. He writes, "In every work of art there must be a harmonious relationship between feeling and form" (Appia, as cited in McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, p. 9). This idea helps us understand the design logic of *Swings of Love*. The form of the performance is simple, but it is connected with deep feeling. The swing is a simple object, but it carries emotional and symbolic meaning. The form and feeling are not separate. They work together.

The performance also shows that scenography is not only visual decoration. It is a sensory and emotional structure. McKinney and Butterworth discuss scenography as a performance environment created through elements such as space, sound, costume, objects, bodies and audience relation. They also note that scenography is connected with both sensory and intellectual experience (McKinney & Butterworth, 2009). This is important for *Swings of Love* because the audience does not understand the performance only through story. The audience feels the performance through space, silence, movement and object.

The restrained design places greater responsibility on the actor's body. A small gesture, a delayed pause or a change of direction may become meaningful because there are few competing visual elements. The body and the object together form the dramatic language.

Such minimalism also keeps the meaning open. The swing may be seen as a real object, a trace of memory, a sign of waiting, a feminine image or a rhythm of feeling. The viewer is invited to complete some of the meaning through imagination.

The object's power lies in the contrast between movement and limit. It travels forward and backward but remains fixed to its support. This contrast can suggest love as energy and hope, while also showing attachment, waiting and emotional restraint.

The production works through concentration. Each visible element receives attention because the stage is not overloaded. The result is a more poetic mode of communication, where image and movement suggest what ordinary explanation may reduce.

Dorita Hannah defines scenography as "the dynamic role design plays upon the stage, orchestrating the visual and sensory environment of performance" (as cited in McKinney & Butterworth, 2009, p. 6). This idea is useful for understanding *Swings of Love*. The scenography of the performance works dynamically. The swing is not static. The body

is not static. The meaning changes as the actor moves, pauses, touches, waits and responds. The visual environment becomes active through performance.

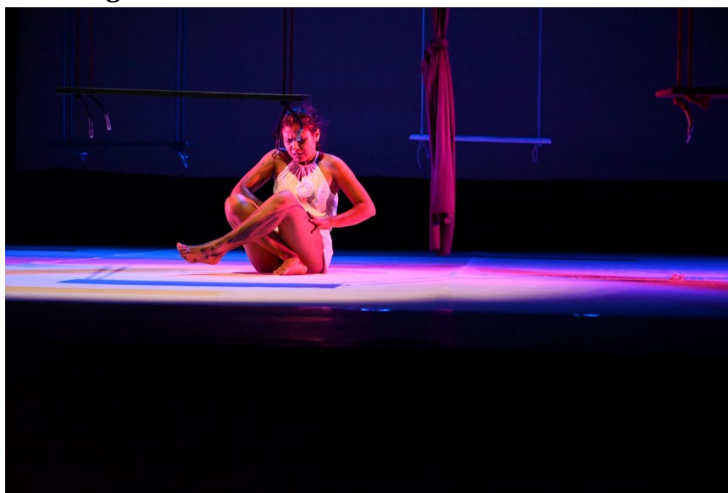
The restrained design also supports the emotional seriousness of the play. Too many decorative details could weaken the central image. By giving space to the object and the performer, the staging allows love, memory, conflict and feminine experience to appear with clarity.

The production shows that scenic simplicity can produce depth. It does not need a realistic set to build a complete theatrical world. Time, space and bodily relation are enough to make the swing carry symbolic force.

Symbolic minimalism is therefore not only a design style in this performance. It is a way of making meaning through silence, object, movement and space. It demonstrates how contemporary physical theatre can achieve force through carefully chosen scenic elements.

Figure 4 demonstrates how a reduced scenic field and colour lighting produce atmospheric depth without a crowded stage.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** Colour, Light and Spatial Economy in the Production. Photo Credit: AANK A Creative Line; Photographer: Utpal Datta. Reproduced with Permission

### **3.4. PERFORMING BODY, MOVEMENT AND SPATIAL RHYTHM**

The solo performer carries the main weight of *Premar Dolona* (*Swings of Love*). In this physical mono-drama, the body is not merely a support for dramatic action; it is the main artistic material. Movement, pause, balance, direction, weight and rhythm shape the spectator's experience. Bragantin (2026)

A solo performance places special pressure on presence. With no other actor to share the stage image, Jahnabi Borah's body becomes the centre of the composition. The viewer follows how the body occupies space, shifts energy and creates visual rhythm.

Theatre anthropology gives useful ideas for understanding this kind of performance. Eugenio Barba gives importance to the special condition of the performer's body on stage. He writes, "In an organised performance, the performer's physical and mental presence is modelled according to principles which are different from those of daily life" (Barba, 1993, p. 9, as cited in De Marinis, 2024). This idea is useful because the body in *Swings of Love* is not an ordinary daily body. It is a prepared and arranged performing body. Its movement is artistic, selective and meaningful.

The performer's body creates a physical score. A physical score means an organised pattern of movement, stillness, direction and rhythm. In such a performance, even a small turn, a pause, a shift of balance or a slow movement can become meaningful. The body does not need to explain everything through spoken words. It can suggest emotional states through action and rhythm.

Rudolf Laban's theory of movement is also helpful here. Laban gives importance to the inner force behind movement and shows that movement is connected with effort, energy and intention (Laban, 1988). This idea helps us understand

that stage movement is not only external shape. It also has inner energy. In *Swings of Love*, the performer's movement may be read through this relation between outer action and inner feeling.

Spatial rhythm is another important part of the performance. Spatial rhythm means the pattern created by movement in space. The performer may move close to the central stage object, move away from it, return to it, stop near it or create a distance from it. These changes create a rhythm of nearness and distance. This rhythm gives the performance a visual structure. It also helps the audience to follow the emotional movement of the solo figure.

In a physical mono-drama, silence can be as meaningful as speech. A silent pause may create tension. A slow movement may suggest hesitation. A sudden change of direction may create surprise. A still body may hold more emotional weight than a long speech. This is why the physical discipline of the performer is very important. The body must be able to speak through non-verbal signs.

Barba's idea of the pre-expressive level is also useful for this analysis. He states that "the pre-expressive basis constitutes the elementary level of organisation of the theatre" (Barba, 1993, p. 23, as cited in De Marinis, 2024). This means that before the audience reads a character or a story, it first receives the performer's energy, posture, rhythm and presence. In *Swings of Love*, this pre-expressive level is important because the performance depends strongly on bodily expression.

The solo body sets the emotional scale of the event. The audience watches not only action, but also the performer's control of time, distance, stillness and energy. This creates intimacy without requiring excessive scenic detail.

The relation between the body and the stage object is also important, but in this section the focus is mainly on the body's action. The object becomes meaningful only when the performer activates it through movement, attention and physical response. Without the performer's body, the object would remain still. Through performance, the object enters the rhythm of the stage event.

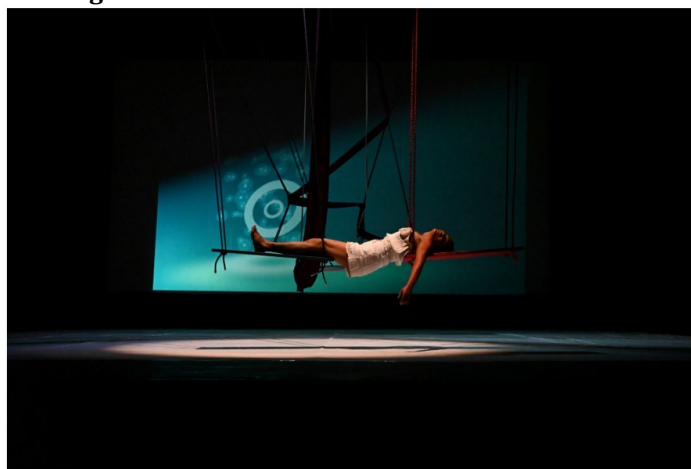
The body also creates a visual line on stage. Standing, sitting, turning, bending, stretching, walking and pausing create different shapes. These shapes are part of the performance design. They produce visual meaning and emotional tone. In this way, the body becomes both performer and scenographic element. It does not stand outside the design. It becomes part of the design.

The performance also suggests that physical theatre can communicate across language boundaries. Since movement, gesture and rhythm are important, the audience can receive meaning even without depending fully on verbal explanation. This is especially important in a collaborative performance connected with Assam, Sri Lanka and France. The body becomes a shared performance language.

The performing body is therefore central to the theatrical experience. It creates rhythm, tension, image and emotional direction. Through the body, the space becomes active and the object gains theatrical life.

Figure 5 records the performer's bodily extension within a wider spatial field, showing how body, swing and projection share the stage image.

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5** Performing Body, Projection and Spatial Rhythm. Photo Credit: AANK A Creative Line; Photographer: Utpal Datta. Reproduced With Permission

### 3.5. COLOUR, COSTUME, SOUND AND VISUAL ATMOSPHERE

The visual and sensory world of Premar Dolona (*Swings of Love*) is also shaped by colour, costume, sound and atmosphere. These elements may be understated, but they help the viewer enter the emotional tone of the performance.

Visual signs are powerful in theatre because the audience first receives the stage through sight. John Berger writes, "Seeing comes before words" (Berger, 1972, p. 7). This idea is useful for the present study. Before the audience understands the full dramatic meaning of *Swings of Love*, it first sees the actor, the stage space, the object, the costume and the visual arrangement. These visible elements prepare the audience for the emotional experience of the performance.

Costume is one of the important visual signs of the stage. It is not only clothing. It helps to create identity, mood, cultural suggestion and emotional condition. In a mono-drama, costume becomes even more important because the audience's attention remains fixed on one performer. The costume works with the body. It moves with the actor, changes shape with movement and becomes part of the visual rhythm of the performance. Through costume, the actor's physical image becomes connected with the inner life of the character or performance figure.

Costume in this production can be read as part of the performer's visual language. It moves with the body and helps create mood, vulnerability, strength or tension. It should not be treated as a separate decorative layer, but as part of the total performing image.

Colour also has symbolic value in theatre. A colour may create warmth, distance, softness, danger, purity, pain, desire or memory, depending on its use in the performance. Roland Barthes writes that "all images are polysemous" (Barthes, 1977, p. 39). This means that an image can carry more than one meaning. This idea is useful for analysing colour in *Swings of Love*. A colour on stage may not have only one fixed meaning. Its meaning depends on its relation with the actor, object, light, movement and dramatic moment.

The visual atmosphere of the performance is created when colour, costume, body and space work together. In symbolic theatre, the audience does not always receive meaning directly. Meaning often comes through suggestion. A colour may suggest emotional condition. A costume may suggest personal history. A shadow, distance or visual contrast may suggest inner conflict. These elements make the performance more poetic.

Sound is another important part of the performance atmosphere. Sound may include music, voice, silence, rhythm, breath or background sound. In physical theatre, sound often works with movement. It may support the pace of the body, create emotional pressure or mark a change in the stage situation. Sound can also make silence more meaningful. A sudden pause or absence of sound can create strong attention.

The semiotic study of theatre gives importance to these non-verbal signs. Tadeusz Kowzan identifies many systems of signs in theatre, including word, tone, gesture, movement, costume, scenery, lighting, music and sound effects (Kowzan, 1968). This is useful for studying *Swings of Love*, because the performance is not dependent on one element only. Its meaning comes from the combination of many stage signs. Colour, costume and sound work with the actor's body and the central stage object to create a complete performance experience.

The visual atmosphere also helps to shape the emotional distance between the performer and the audience. A simple design can make the audience feel closer to the performer. A strong sound or visual contrast can create tension. A soft rhythm can create memory or longing. In this way, atmosphere becomes part of the dramatic meaning. It is not only background. It affects how the audience feels the performance.

Atmosphere is especially important because the work is carried by one performer. Colour, costume, sound and rhythm help enlarge the performer's inner world and give emotional depth to the action.

The design elements of the performance may therefore be understood as a network of signs. The costume shapes the visual identity of the performer. Colour creates emotional suggestion. Sound creates rhythm and mood. The stage space holds these elements together. The actor's body connects them through movement. This network of signs gives the performance its theatrical strength.

Colour, costume, sound and atmosphere are therefore not secondary details. They form part of the same meaning-making system as body, object and space, turning the performance into a visual, physical and emotional event.

Figure 6 shows how costume, blue light and suspended lines shape the visual atmosphere of the solo performance.

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6** Blue Lighting, Costume and Visual Atmosphere in the Solo Performance. Photo Credit: AANK A Creative Line; Photographer: Utpal Datta. Reproduced With Permission

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study has read Premar Dolona (Swings of Love) as a case of scenographic economy and symbolic performance design. Using the recorded version as primary material, it focused on how a limited stage arrangement can create rich visual and emotional meaning.

The analysis shows that the production's strength comes from the relation among performer, swing and stage space. The design does not operate as background decoration; it actively guides the emotional reading of the performance.

The swing emerges as the main symbolic object. Through movement, pause and bodily response, it suggests love, memory, waiting, conflict and feminine experience. It becomes both a visual centre and an emotional sign.

The paper also finds that symbolic minimalism gives the performance focus. The reduced scenic field draws attention to gesture, rhythm and the performer's relation with the object. This makes the solo body more expressive and the stage image more concentrated.

The stage space works as an inward field of memory, desire and conflict rather than as a realistic location. The swing structures this field, while the performer's movement gives it life.

The study concludes that Premar Dolona (Swings of Love) is a meaningful example of contemporary physical theatre. It shows how a single object, a disciplined body and a restrained design can create a visually simple but emotionally layered performance.

#### **DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**

The primary video material analysed in this study is publicly available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9OuRND5WPg>. Production details are available in the YouTube description and on the AANK website (<https://www.aank.org>). The production photographs reproduced in this article were supplied by AANK A Creative Line with permission for academic use.

#### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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to reproduce production photographs of Premar Dolona (Swings of Love). Photo credit for all production photographs: AANK A Creative Line; photographer: Utpal Datta.

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