



The complex plot of Mrichchakatika by Sudraka

Ramen Goswami

Scholar, Magadh University, Bodh Gaya, Bihar

ABSTRACT

Mrichchakatika is a drama in ten Acts based on the story of the love of Charudatta, a prominent but poor inhabitant of Ujjayini, and Vasantasena, an exquisitely beautiful but pure-minded courtesan of the same city. The following is a summary of the plot as it is developed in the course of the various. In this way it placed its rank on the first epic traditional play. Somehow, it clearly clarifies the famous quote of 'Manusmriti' — "Nari tame narayani".

Keywords: love, escorted, exquisite, charming, debt.

Act I.

In the Prelude (Prastavana), after the Benediction stanza (Nandi), the Sutradhar gives some interesting parting about the author of the play which he is about to stage. A conversation between him and his wife (Nati), which follows: intended chiefly to lead up to the entrance of the Vidushake (Maitreya), at which point the action of the play properly begins. Maitreya is a poor Brahmana and an honest and sincere friend of Charudatta, a wealthy citizen of Ujjayini who, however, no longer observes his former wealth, having spent it all in noble and veritable deeds. One Charudatta's friend sends a cloak by Maitreya with instructions to give the same to his master. Charudatta enters, and the cloak is duly handed over to him. Their conversation for a while turns upon Charudatta's poverty; then Vasantasena comes upon the scene. She is being pursued by Sakara (Samstbanaka), the brother-in-law of king Palaka of Ujjayini, and the villain of the piece. He is a debar, a coward and a fool, with an exaggerated idea of his own importance and power; he is accompanied by two of his followers, Vita and Cheta. They entreat, cajole and threaten Vasantasena by turns, but all the same with great indignation she rejects Sakara's suit. She takes refuge in Charudatta's mansion; and in the darkness of the night her pursuers light on Radanika, a maid in Charudatta's employ, mistaking her for the object of their search. Maitreya intervenes and turns them all out. Vasantasena is next introduced to Charudatta; she had already heard of his virtues and fallen in love with him, contrary though it was to the profession of a courtesan to become attached to a penniless man. Wishing to keep up the acquaintance, she employs an ingenious device; she leaves her ornaments with Charudatta, ostensibly for safe custody, but really with the object that they should serve as an excuse for further communication with him. She then leaves, escorted by Charudatta who on returning makes over the ornaments to Maitreya for safe keeping.

Act II.

Vasantasena, talking in confidence with her maid Madanjika, reveals the warmth of her feeling for Charudatta, and also the real reason of depositing those ornaments with him. Then follows a scene introducing a number of gamblers; one of them, Samrahaka, is running away without paying his debt, and is being pursued by his creditor and the master of the gaming house. Assisted by another gambler, Samvabaka escapes and takes shelter in the house of Vasantasena, who in her kindness pays his debt for him and rids him of his pursuers. Samvabaka is tired of gambling, and leaves after declaring his resolve of dropping the robes of a Buddhist mendicant (Bhiksbu). Woe of Vasantasena's servants then enters and relates how he had just rescued a Bhiksbu (- e., presumably, Samvabaka -) and how his brave act was rewarded by Charudatta by the gift of his own cloak. This affords her another proof of the noble generosity of the worthy Charudatta; she takes the cloak and wears it herself, for she loves everything belonging to her beloved and worshipped hero.

Act III.

There was a man who having fallen in love with Vasantasena, wanted to pay her himself poor, he had turned a big amount of gold. He breaks when all are wrapped in the arms steal those very ornaments of Vasantasena to keep with himself. The theft is discovered by the king, not because there was a Brahmana in Ujjayini named Sarvilaka, fallen in love with Madanika, the slave-maid of I wanted to pay her ransom and marry her. Being he had turned a burglar to obtain the necessary everything as breakable into Charudatta's house by night crept in the arms of slumber, and happens to the ornaments of Vasantasena which Maitreya had into himself. The theft is soon discovered. Charudatta by the king, not because the money meant anything else because the ornaments were kept with him as a deposit, he was bound in honour to return on demand. His wife Dosta however, whose property is on a par with her husband's,

her own necklace to help him out of the difficulty. Charudatta thereupon asks the Vid. to go to Vasa with that necklace, which he was to offer to her in exchange for her own ornaments, which, he was to state, were lost by his master at gambling, under the belief that they belonged to himself.

Act IV.

Sarvilaka calls upon Madanika with a view to buy her freedom with those stolen ornaments. On being questioned as to the source of his sudden accession to wealth, he half-confesses that they belonged to Charudatta. Madanika, however, had recognized them as the property of her mistress; she recommended that Sarvilaka had better return them to where he had taken them from Sarvilaka, however, could not face Charudatta & declared thief; as an alternative, therefore, she urges him to see Vasantasena and offer them to her, professing that Charudatta had sent them back by him, as his house was thought unsafe. Sarvilaka does so; but Vasantasena, who has listened to the preceding conversation, is not taken in by the pseudo-messenger. Nevertheless in her goodness of heart she bestows Madanika on her adventurous suitor. Sarvilaka has to leave suddenly in a hurry to go to the assistance of his friend Aryaka, whom king Palaka had imprisoned for fear he might become the king, as a keen had predicted he would. Vasa is next visited by Maitreya, who, it may be remembered, is deputed by Charudatta to offer her his wife's necklace in exchange for those lost ornaments. Vasantasena is deeply touched by this irrefutable proof of Charudatta's nobility, and she sends word with the that she would be calling upon Charudatta that evening. (This gives the poet a terrible thunderstorm raging in the streets. an opportunity to introduce several fine stanza descriptive of rain, thunder and lightning). On reaching Charudatta's house, she returns those ornaments to him under the plea that she had lost his necklace, just as he had formerly lost her ornaments, thereby intimating that she had seen through the ruse, well-meant though it was. The lovers have now come together, and there is nothing left that can mar their happy union, with which consummation the control theme of the play reaches its climax.

Act VI

Vasantasena passes the night in Charudatta's house, in his company. In the morning Charudatta leaves home early, with instructions to his servant to bring Vasa. to the Pushpaka. garden, in a carriage. Before that is done, we have a touching scene, where Rohasena, Charudatta's son, is described as crying because he was given an earthen toy cart (Mrichhakatika) to play with, instead of a golden one desired by him. Vasa. gives him her ornaments out of which the boy is to get a toy cart made, and thus sends him away happy. [This is the incident that gives our play its title]. Then the servant Vardhamanaka comes in and announces that the carriage is ready; Vasantasena asks him to wait, while she finishes her toilet. He, however, suddenly remembers that he has forgotten the carriage cushions, and goes back to bring them. In the meanwhile there comes in Sakara's servant, Sthavaraka, who, too, is driving his master's carriage in the same direction. Vasantasena gets into his carriage, by mistake, without his being aware of it, and is thus taken to the garden (where she would reach a little later than she was expected to do). Just at this time Aryaka, whom Palaka had imprisoned, has escaped from his cell; he happens to meet the carriage of Vardhamanaka as the latter was coming back. While the back of the driver was turned. Arpaka gets into his carriage, Vardhamanaka believing that it was Vasa. who had entered. Thus they drive on, but are shortly stopped by two of the city's guards who insist upon inspecting the carriage. One of them, Chandanaka, looks in first; he recognizes the prisoner, but promises to help him therefore deliberately picks a quarrel with the other guard, Viraka, to escape; he whom he beats and drives off. The road now being clear, Aryaka escapes in safety, Vardhamanaka over discovering all the while whom he was really driving.

Act VII.

Vardhamanaka brings the carriage to the Pushpaka. garden, where Charudatta is awaiting Vasantasena; as it is, however, it is Arpaka, and not Vasa., who steps out of the carriage. True to the impact generosity of his heart, Charudatta promises him safety and advises him to proceed further to the same carriage, as that would allay suspicion; they two part the best of friends, Aryaka in gratitude and Char. in the consciousness of a good deed performed. Char. leaves without further waiting here for Vasantasena, for he did not like to be soon there after to be assisted in the escape of Arpaka, which was virtually tantamount to the king.

Act VIII.

The Bhikshu (Samvahaka) visits the Pushpaka garden to wash his robe, where he is variably harassed by Sakara and finally driven away. Sakara is waiting for his carriage, at length arrives; he is surprised to find Vasantasena as his bride, though of course it is a very welcome surprise, as it affords him an opportunity to renew his attentions to her. She spurns him; hereupon Sakara, like the fool that he is, conceives the idea of killing her by way of punishment. He asks his followers, Vita and Cheta, to do the killing, which they promptly and emphatically refuse. Sakara then decides to kill her himself; he gets rid of Vita and Cheta under one pretext and another, and then strangles the helpless girl. She falls down senseless, though not dead; he however, believes that he has killed her on the return of Vita and Cheta on the scene, Sakara boasts of his exploits; Vita is disgusted with his master and his ways, and leaves him to join the party of Arpaka. Sakara orders the Cheta to go to his palace, where he intends to hold him a prisoner, lest he might give out the secret concerning the real author of the crime. Finally, he hits upon the idea of proclaiming Charudatta as the murderer of Vasantasena; this would be sweet and complete revenge; for Charudatta was his rival in her affections, and it was for his sake that he spurned him as he believed. On the departure of Sakara, the Bhikshu comes back to the spot to dry his robe, and discovers Vasantasena. He restores her by rendering her first aid, and takes her to a convent (Vihara) to be nursed.

Act IX.

The scene is now shifted to the court of justice, where in the presence of a presiding Judge and two assessors, Sakara formally charged Cukrudta with having option Vana, to hide garden and there murdered her for the sake of her ornament. The Judge opens the case by calling for Vasantasena's mother, who gives evidence about the existence of a love affair between her daughter and the citizen Charudatta; she also states that so far as she knew Vasa was then supposed to be in Charudatta's house. Next Charudatta himself is sent for, who denies and exact knowledge of Vasantasena's movements. In the meantime Viraka arrives to lay information against his follow-guard Chandanaka who had mauled and shunted him while he was trying to inspect a carriage which belonged to Charudatta and in which Vasantasena was supposed to be travelling in the direction of Pushp. karandaka garden. The Judge sends him to find out if a woman's dead body was lying in the garden. As ill luck would have it, a dead body of a woman was lying there, who had been accidentally killed by the fall of a tree. Viraka comes back and reports what he has seen. This is sufficient evidence to charge Charudatta with Vasantasena's murder; he, however, makes no very serious effort to establish his innocence, so much weighed down he is with the thought that now that Vasantasena was no more, life would be without interest to him, and further that he, being penniless, would not be believed in what he would say to the contrary and that the Judge would not give him a fair bearing, and matter of fact, the Judge is quite favorable, but he has to investigate the truth; the guilt of Char. is already apparent by his balf silence; and further damning evidence is unwittingly given by Maitreya who brings with him Vasantasena's sornamental, the same that she had given to Robasena; the ornaments are pointed out by Sakera as the motive of the crime, and they belonged to Vasa. and came from Charudatta's house. The chain of evidence is now practically complete. Charudatta does not give any satisfactory explanation, and to Judge has to declare him guilty. King Palake, thereupon, pronounces the death-sentence upon the murderer, as Charudatta is now adjudged to be. He is to be taken to the cemetery and there impaled as a warning to all similar wrong-doers.

Act X

Charudatta is being taken to the cemetery by two Chandalas, who are to act as his execution, though they don't much relish their job. Charu.'s guilt is proclaimed at each proclamation -station on the way. Maitreya brings in Robasena that his father might bare a last look at his son's face; Maitreya entreats the Chandala to release Charu., which of course they cannot. Theo Sakara's servant Cheta, whom his master had put in irons, hears the proclamation; anxious to declare the truth, he resolutely jumps into the street, chains and all, from the room wherein he was caged. He denounces Sakara as the guilty party, but the latter arrives there at this juncture and somehow manages to prove, to the satisfaction of the simple-minded Chandelle, that the Cheta was a thief and a liar and that there. fore his statement was not to be relied on. Then they reach the place of execution, where Charu. is now about to be impaled. But the Bhikshu accompanied by Vasantasena arrives there in the nick of time; the charge of murder falls through and the innocence of Char. is at once fully established, as also Sakara's guilt. Sarvilaka then enters and announces That Aryaka had killed the wicked king Palaka and installed himself on his throne as his successor. For the valuable aid rendered by him in times up need, Char. is rewarded by Aryaka with the gift of the kingdom of Kunavati. The title of wife' is conferred upon the virtuous Vasantasena, to whom the stigma of being called a cour: tesan would now no longer attach. Similar suitable honours are also conferred upon Samvahaka, Sthavaraka, the Chandalas, Chandanaka, and even the villainous Sakara, for Char. was not the person to revenge himself on a fallen enemy. After this happy conclusion, the play terminates with the usual stanza (Bharatavakya) containing an expression of goodwill towards all and unhappiness for none.

The student will see, from the foregoing sketch of the story, that the principal points in the development of the plot are : (1) The handing over by Vasa, of her ornaments into Char.'s keeping as a deposit; (2) Samvahaka's being introduced to Vasantasena, who lays him under an obligation by paying his debts; (3) Sarvilaka's theft of Vasa.'s ornaments, and their subsequent return by him to Vasa. herself; (4) Charudatta's sending the necklace in exchange for the ornaments; (5) Vasantasena's visit to Char. and their union; (6) the interchange of the carriages, owing to which Aryaka and Charudatta become friends and which gives Sakara an opportunity to lay violent hands on Vasa.; (7) Vasantasena's rescue by Samvahaka; (8) the charge of murder against Charu. datta, which is apparently proved by (a) the discovery of the female corpse, and (b) the finding of Vasa.'s ornaments on the person of Maitreya; (9) the death-sentence passed on Char.; and (10) the arrival of the Bhikshu and Vasantasena on the scene of the execution, which brings about the denouement.

REFERENCES:

1. The Mrichchakatika- R K. jha, Rubika publication, 2003
2. The Meichchakatika-Asutoshdey, Binoy publication, 1990