

## MRICHCHHAKATIKA



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Mrichchhakatikam is famous as an interesting and colorful episode in Sanskrit drama writing. The great poet Shudraka has composed it on the basis of 'Prakarana' described in ten types of rupakas. In fact, in the tradition of drama writing, this is an prakarana which includes many political and social situations along with the main story in its plot.

Even on the present stage, after independence, Mrichchhakatikam has been the most popular drama form among Sanskrit plays, which has been adapted and presented in other languages as well as dialects by various institutions. It is very important to study about the Mrichchhakatikam episode, the most famous play of Sanskrit theatre. In this chapter we will discuss the author of the episode and the plot of the episode in detail because without discussing it one cannot claim to know Sanskrit theater completely.



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, you-

- know about Shudraka;
- know about the play Mrichchhakatika;
- know about the story of Mrichchhakatika; and
- know the characters of Mrichchhakatika.

### 11.1 GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO SHUDRAKA

In Sanskrit literature, the name of Shudraka has always been familiar among Sanskrit scholars in the field of story, drama and poetry. Shudraka's name is mentioned in many

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Sanskrit texts like Harshacharita, Kadambari, Kathasaritsagar, Skandpuran. Scholars have tried to determine the time period of Shudraka by studying various Sanskrit literature. Like other Sanskrit poets, Shudraka, the author of Mrichchhakatikam, has also not given any clear information about himself. In the preface of the play, Shudraka, like the poets before him, has given information about his eloquence and scholarship. It is mentioned in the preface that Shudraka the poet was a Dwija. He was handsome and handsome. He was an expert in Vedas. By the grace of Shiva, he attained knowledge. Shudraka was an ascetic and he was a completely healthy and fit person. Apart from this, there is no information about the country and time of the poet in his preface.

Scholars have linked Shudraka to South Pradesh. On the basis of the story, scholars believe that Shudraka was a resident of Ujjayani. He was an expert in astrology and religious scriptures. He also had knowledge about lies, art and the art of theft. He had made a detailed analysis about different sections of the society and the businessmen due to which he was very adept in folk knowledge also. Shudraka was not the king of a palace but the king of the people. He was well aware of the shortcomings of the employees and officers involved in state affairs. There was no dearth of literary knowledge in Shudraka. His composition Mrichchakatika is a high quality episode. This episode also demonstrates his excellent knowledge of Sanskrit and Prakrit languages. The use of Prakrit languages as well as Shudraka's in Mrichchhakatika is not found in any other play.

### 11.2 General Introduction to Mrichchakatika

When Mrichchhakatika was composed has been a subject of discussion among scholars. Some scholars believe it to be composed in the third century BC, first century BC, third century AD, while some scholars place it in the fifth century AD. Thus, there has been a lot of disagreement among scholars regarding the time period of Shudraka. Scholars have provided many evidences for determining the time which are as follows-

- Scholars have determined the time of playwright Bhasa to be fifth century BC. Bhasa also wrote a four-act play named 'Daridracharudatta' which is incomplete. Shudraka's play has ten acts and the first four acts contain the same story which is found in Bhasa's play 'Daridracharudatta'. In this way it becomes clear that Shudraka is a playwright after Bhasa.
- The rules of grammar of Prakrit language given by Acharya Vararuchi. Based on those rules, the language of Mrichchakatika is very similar. The time of Vararuchi is considered to be 300 years before Christ. Thus, Shudraka dates back to 300 BC.

- Acharya Vaman, whose time period is 800 AD, has mentioned Shudraka in his poetry. This also makes it clear that Shudraka must have lived before 800 AD.
- Varahamihir whose time was 589 AD. In his astrological treatise Brihatjatak, he has considered Jupiter and Angarak i.e. Mars as friends, whereas in the ninth issue of Mrichchakatika, both those planets have been called enemies. It is clear from this that Shudraka was situated before Varahamihir.

Thus, on the basis of the above evidence, the period of Shudraka has been determined to be sixth century AD. Probably Mrichchakatika was also composed during this period.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.1

1. Who are Shudraka?
2. What is the period of creation of Shudraka?
3. In which work of Acharya Vaman is Shudraka mentioned?
4. Whose creation is Daridracharudatta?
5. Whose composition is Brihatjataka?

### 11.3 THEME OF MRICHCHHAKATIKA

Mrichchhakatika is one of the ten types of metaphor described in Natyashastra. In this episode, the plot has been divided into a total of ten acts. The hero of Mrichchhakatika is Charudatta who is a very virtuous Brahmin and is poor. Its heroine is Vasantasena, who is a beautiful and virtuous courtesan. The basic plot of Mrichchhakatika is woven around the love story of Charudatta and Basant Sena. In this love story, Shudraka skillfully adds another story of a new revolution in the state through his imagination. There is an important incident in the story described in this entire episode, on the basis of which this episode has been named Mrichchhakatikam- Basantasena placing his gold jewelry in the child's clay cart.

The story of Mrichchhakatika has two parts. In the first part, there is the love story of Charudatta and Basant Sena and in the second part, there is the story of Rajviplav and Arya getting the kingdom. The plot of any episode originates from the supernatural or from the imagination of the poet. Its main essence is shringara. The hero can be a Brahmin, a minister or a businessman who is patient and devoted to religion, money



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and work even in adverse circumstances. The heroine of the episode is an ordinary woman or a courtesan. Is full of tricksters, gamblers, wits and cheats. Everything else is like a drama. If we assess Mrichchhakatika on this basis, then its story is also dependent on the people and imagined by the poet. The main essence is shringara. The hero Charudatta is a Brahmin but due to poverty, he is engaged in the activities of religion, money and work. Basantasena is a courtesan and a Kulastri is Dhuta. Both these are heroines and Shudraka has very skillfully planned the trick, the gambler, the wit and the cheat in it.

**Act-1**

In the city of Ujjayani, there lives a Brahmin named Charudatta who has become poor due to his misfortune. The very beautiful and famous courtesan Basantasena also lives in the same city. Basantasena is infatuated with Charudatta and loves him. The king's brother-in-law Shakara wants to control Basantasena by luring him with money, but Basantasena keeps rejecting his proposal. On a dark night, Shakara pursues Basantasena, due to which Basantasena gets frightened and takes shelter in Charudatta's house. Under the pretext of fear of thieves, she keeps all her gold jewelry with Charudatta as a heritage.

**Act-2**

The Samvahaka is an old servant of Charudatta. After losing all the money in gambling, he hides in the house of Basant Sena, clinging to the gamblers. Basant Sena frees him from his debt by giving money to the gamblers, but out of guilt, the Samvahaka renounces the world and becomes a Buddhist monk.

**Act-3**

A Brahmin named Sharvalaka is in love with Basantasena's maid Madanika. To free his beloved Madanika from slavery, SharvalakA breaks into Charudutt's house and steals Basantasena's jewelry. Charudatta's wife gives her precious gem jewelry in exchange to save her husband from public condemnation. The clown goes to Basantasena's house with the garland.

**Act-4**

Shervalaka goes to Basant Sena with his stolen jewelry. Basantasena, knowing the whole situation, keeps the jewelry and frees Madanika from her slavery. Shivalaka takes his beloved Madanika as his wife. Then he gets the news of his friend Aryak being made a state prisoner. He immediately sends his wife along with Rathwaan to the house of the captives and himself sets out to free Aryayak from the prison house.

The clown gives a metal necklace to Basant Sena in exchange of jewelry. Basantasena does not tell the clown the news of finding the jewelry and herself sends a message to Charudutt to meet him at night.

### Act-5

There is a very beautiful description of rain in this issue. Basantasena reaches Charudatta's house drenched in rain and spends the night there.

### Act-6

As soon as Charudatta wakes up in the morning, he goes to a garden and Basantasena sends his chariot to call the army there. Here in Charudatta's house, Basantasena finds Charudatta's son insisting on a gold cart instead of playing with the clay cart. She fills his clay cart with her gold ornaments and asks him to make a gold cart out of it. Hearing Charudatta's message, Basantasena leaves the house but accidentally climbs on the chariot of Shakaraa standing there. Aryak, who has escaped from the prison, hides himself in Charudatta's empty chariot. The chariot starts towards the garden. On the way, a soldier named Chandanak recognizes Aryak and grants him immunity and allows the chariot to move ahead. In this sequence, Chandan gets into a fight with another constable Veeraka and Veeraka goes to the court.

### Act-7

Arya meets Charudatta in the garden. Charudatta grants protection to Arya and after cutting his bonds, sends him off in his own chariot.

### Act-8

When Basantasena, accidentally seated in Shakara's chariot, reaches the garden, she finds Shakaraa in front of her. The evil Shakaraa seeks love from Basantasena. Basantasena rejects it. Shakaraa gets angry and strangles him. Thinking Basantasena dead, he covers him with a dry leaf and goes to the court to falsely accuse Charudatta of the murder. Meanwhile, the Buddhist monk conductor comes there and after seeing Basantasena, brings him back to life. The Samvahaka takes Basantasena to a Buddhist monastery for rest.

### Act-9

The court is described in this issue. Shakaraa files a case against Charudutt. Charudatta is called. He tries to prove himself innocent but ultimately the crime is proven against Charudutt and Charudutt is given death sentence.



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**Act-10**

As soon as the time comes to crucify Charudatta, Basanthasena along with the Buddhist monk reaches the place and proves the entire accusation to be false. She tells about the wickedness of hunting. Aryak also, with the help of his friends, kills Raja Palak and becomes king himself. Shakaraa receives death sentence for his wickedness but Charudatta forgives Shakaraa. With the king's permission, Basantasena becomes Charudatta's wife and the play ends here with Bharat Vakya.

**INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.2**

1. How many acts are there in Mrichchhakatika?
2. Who is a Buddhist monk?,
3. Who is Dhuta?
4. Who is Sharvilaka?
5. In which act we get the news of Arya being taken captive?
6. In which act the court is described?

**11.4 CHARACTERS IN MRICHCHHAKATIKA**

In the Mrichchhakatika, Charudatta, Dhuta, Basantasena, Shakaraa, Maitreya, Sharvilaka, Aryaka, Samavahaka, Madanika and Radanika are in the lead roles. Shudraka has shown his theatrical expertise in the portrayal of characters.

**Charudatta**

Charudatta is the hero of the Mrichchhakatika. According to the scriptures, the hero of any prakarana can be Dhirprashant or a king's minister or a businessman. All these traits are visible in Charudatta. His entire life is full of obstacles. Despite all this he always remains calm and serious. In this way, he is a calm hero. By nature, Charudatta is brave, noble, handsome and youthful, skilled at work, clever, polite and attracts people towards himself. Charudatta is a Brahmin youth from Ujjayani city. He is a Vaishya by work. Charudatta's ancestors were famous traders and had amassed a huge amount of wealth. Charudatta's heart is very big. He is so generous that he has given away all his wealth to the poor. His specialty was to help his close friends and acquaintances in their times of distress. As long as he had money, he never insulted anyone. In the story, Charudatta is a hero with a charitable nature.

Charudatta is of kind nature. The feeling of compassion for everyone keeps rising in his heart. In the play, there is a feeling of compassion in his heart towards his servants also. His servants express this feeling towards their master Charudatta. Charudatta knows the happiness and sorrow of his servants as well as himself. He also has feelings of compassion for animals and birds. He feels pity in blowing away even sitting pigeons.

Another important quality in Charudatta is to protect those who take refuge in him. Charudatta protects others even at the risk of his own life. Despite being poor, Charudatta remains very conscious about his character. He never thinks of cheating others. He accepts to live by begging but he is never ready to live by lies and deceit. Even if he tells a lie due to circumstances, the main motive behind it is the concern for the welfare of others. Even after loving Pariganika, good feelings are visible in Charudatta's character. He also loves his wife and respects her considering her sacred. By nature, he is an art lover. He also has knowledge about music. Even after seeing the theft done by Sharvilaka, he praises his artistry. He is also of religious nature. In the very first act, Charudatta is seen engaged in worshipping the gods. Thus, in short it can be said that Charudatta is a doer of welfare for the people, he is the best among men, the virtues of kindness and walking on the right path are included in his character.

### Basantasena

There are two heroines in the Mrichhakatika- one is Dhuta who is a family woman and the other is Basantasena who is a courtesan. In this episode, the character of Basantasena has been mainly portrayed. Basantasena is the most prosperous courtesan of Ujjaini city. There is enough wealth in his house. In a way his house appears similar to Kubera's house. Basantasena also rejects the ten thousand gold coins offered by Shakaraa without any hesitation.

The beauty of Basantasena is unique. Despite being a courtesan, her character is very pure. Before Charudatta she had never dedicated her love to anyone. He is completely indifferent towards work. The pursuit of money is not the aim of his life. She wants to fulfill her life by falling in love with a respected person in the world. Instead of living a prostitute life, she wants to become a noble housewife.

Basantasena also has a very big heart. By nature, she is of generous nature. When the Samvahaka comes to her refuge, then despite not knowing him, she gives him the gold bracelet worn on her hand to liberate him by donating him and saying that the conductor himself has sent it. Basantasena's character is that of an intelligent, artistically skilled and learned woman. She easily understands what is said through gestures. Her heart is devoted to Charudatta. Basantasena's behavior towards Charudatta's wife Dhauta



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also shows humility and admiration. Seeing Dhuta's elder sister in front of her, she does not hesitate to call herself a maid. Basantasena also loves Charudatta's son Rohasena with all her heart. Seeing the child's happiness, Basantasena takes off her gold jewelry and places it on an earthen cart to make a cart for him to play. It can be said that she is full of affection. In short, Basantasena is pure, of unique beauty, generous and loving.

**Shakara**

The villain of this prakarana is Shakara. He is very arrogant. He is proud of his relationship with the king. When the judge refuses to hear his case in the ninth act, he threatens that if he does not hear his case, he will ask his brother-in-law Raja Palak to get another judge appointed in place of him. The hunter is proud of his wealth. She is also very proud of her beauty. Being the brother of a beautiful sister, he considers himself extremely handsome. Shakara is illiterate. He doesn't even know what kind of things should be said to which person. He is unstable, stubborn and cowardly. His thoughts keep changing from moment to moment. Even his friends Wit and Chet don't believe him. He is a very cruel, merciless and arrogant person. His cruelty is visible when he attempts to kill Basantasena by strangulating her in private after tricking Wit and Chet. By killing him himself, he tries to blame Charudatta for the murder. Ultimately, Shakara's character can be understood in such a way that he is a mine of vices, a tease of women, gluttonous, ruthless, cruel and selfish. Elements like sharks are anti-social elements.

**Clown**

The name of the clown of Mrichchhakatika is Maitreya. He is a Brahmin by caste and is a friend and assistant of Charudatta. When Charudatta was rich, he used to live there with great joy, but when Charudatta became poor, he wandered here and there for food and only at night he took his gold. But under any circumstances he does not leave Charudatta's side. He always prays for the prosperity of Charudatta. Maitreya's nature is fearful and angry. When he hears, that Shakara had tried to grab Radnika's hair, he becomes angry and gets ready to kill Shakara. He is afraid of going into the dark. By nature, he is a person of common intelligence.

**Shervilaka**

Sharvilak is a Brahmin by caste and is an embodiment of courage and bravery. He believes that Goddess Lakshmi resides in courage. He is completely adept in the art of stealing. He has learned the art of theft from an Acharya named Yogacharya. But he is not a professional thief. He does not consider theft as a good work but due to his



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poverty and being trapped in the love of Madanika, he considers theft as a business. Sharvilaka is full of courage. He is the leader of the revolutionaries and breaks the prison gate and takes Aryaka away. It is also his job to enter the palace and kill the guardian and place Arya on the throne. Sharvilak is also a true and firm friend by nature. When he is leaving home with Madanika and Basantasena, he gets the news of Aryak being taken prisoner. He immediately gets down and sets out to free Aryak. In this case, 'Arvilaka also appears to be adept in conspiring. He also loves the courtesan, Madanika. He is adept in donning many disguises and also in speaking the language of other countries.

**Dhuta**

Dhuta is the married woman of Charudatta. Shudraka has shown her as a devoted woman by nature. She remains with Charudatta equally in happiness and sorrow. She is a follower of her husband. Charudatta is her husband who is in love with a prostitute. Even after knowing this, the loyalty in Dhuta's heart towards her husband has not diminished at all. When she learns that Basantasena's jewelry has been stolen, she brings the jewelry from her mother's house and hands it over to Maitreya to give to Basantasena. She is constantly worried to ensure that Charudutt's reputation is not tarnished in the society. Like normal women, Dhuta is also not greedy for jewelry. When Basantasena sends the jewelry back to Dhuta, Dhuta rejects it saying that Aryaputra has given it to you happily so it would not be right for me to take it. By nature, Dhuta is generous and loves her husband. She considers Basantasena as her sister and wishes her well-being. Dhuta is portrayed as an Indian woman with a noble character.

**Madanika**

Madanika is portrayed as Basantasena's well-wisher and his beloved. Both love each other very much. Basantasena tells the secret of her love with Charudatta to Madanika. Madanika is secretly in love with Sharvilaka. Sharvilaka steals from Charudutt's house only to rescue Madanika from the audience. Madanika is an intelligent and clever woman by nature. She advises Sharvilaka like a good housewife. When Sharvilaka expresses his desire to free his friend Aryak from imprisonment, Madanika supports him. She never wants to be a hindrance to her husband's duties. Despite being a courtesan, she is a good friend and lover.

**Buddhist Monk Samvahaka**

The monk of Mrichchhakatika is a Buddhist monk. Before this, he appears as a gambling Samvahaka. His full introduction is revealed when he talks to Basanthasena in the

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second act. He is a resident of Pataliputra and is the son of a householder there. Eager to see the country, he came to Ujjaini and took up a job in Charudatt's house. Initially, considering it an art, he learned body pressing and massaging. Later this became his means of livelihood. When Charudatta became poor, the Samvahaka started earning his living by gambling. One day he lost all the gold coins in gambling and out of fear of the winning gambler, he took refuge at Basantasena's house. It was Vasantasena who freed him from their hands. After taking renunciation, the Samvahaka appears before us in the form of a true ascetic and has complete control over the senses.



## INTEXT QUESTIONS 11.3

1. What are the main qualities in the character of Charudatta?
2. In what form has Vasantasena been depicted?
3. What type of character is Shakara?
4. Who is Madanika?
5. Why does the conductor become a Buddhist monk?

## 11.5 STAGE POSSIBILITIES OF MRICHCHHAKATIKA

Mrichchhakatika is an entertaining episodic composition of Sanskrit dramatic literature. Shadrach has composed it by strictly following all the rules of the episode. The subject matter is entirely created by the poet's imagination and Shudraka has successfully tried to give a social and political cover to the story through his imagination. In fact, he has woven both the stories, one a love story and the other a political story, in such a way that neither can be separated from the other. The kind of characters found in this episode are not seen in any other Sanskrit drama. All the characters represent different sections of the society. He has adopted a social perspective by using low class characters like a thief, a magician, a swindler, a ganika, a ganika in the episode. From the educated judge to the Chandal and from the ganika to the noble woman, he has given a very vivid description of the society of that time through generous and lowly characters.

The main essence of Mrichchhakatika is Sringara. He has beautifully used Veera Rasa in the adopted form of Sringara. The entire episode is full of interesting incidents. Another unique feature of this episode is that different types of Prakrit languages have been used in it. In this Shudraka has used seven types of Prakrit languages. The use of so many languages and dialects of Prakrit is not visible in any other Sanskrit rupaka.

Perhaps this is one reason why this episode has been translated into many languages and dialects and played in an interesting manner. Acharya Bharata has also given instructions to use Prakrit language as per the time, place and character. Shudraka is seen following this instruction beautifully. Thus, Shudraka's dramatic style in the Mrichchhakatika episode is very simple, graceful and devoid of artificiality. The dialogues of the play are poignant and successful in expressing emotions. The style of dialogues is also suitable for theatre. Due to its theatrical possibilities, this episode is becoming the center of attraction not only in Sanskrit dramatic literature but also in modern theatre.



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### WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

- The period of Shudraka is sixth century.
- There is mention of Shu Draka in Vamanakrit Kavyalankar Sutra.
- Mrichchhakatika is an episode written by Shudraka.
- There is a beautiful coordination of love story and political story in Mrichchhakatikam.
- There are ten points in Mrichchhakatika episode.
- The story of Mrichchhakatika is imagined by the poet.
- In Mrichchhakatika, Charudatta is the hero, Basantasena is the heroine and Shakara is the anti-hero.
- The episode has been named Mrichchhakatika due to the incident of Basantasena keeping gold jewelry in the child's clay cart.
- Mrichchhakatika describes characters like thief, gambler, swindler etc.
- Seven types of Prakrit languages have been used in Mrichchhakatika.
- The main essence of Mrichchhakatika is Sringara. Veera Rasa has been used as Angiras for Sringara. Comedy is also planned according to the incident. In the end, a poignant use of Karun Rasa is also seen.



### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What is the main story of Mrichchhakatika?
2. What did you know about Shudraka?

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3. Tell us about the character described in Mrichchhakatika?
4. Tell us about the dramatic style of Mrichchhakatika?



## ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

## 11.1

1. Creator of Mrichchakatika
2. Sixth century
3. Poetry
4. Bhasa
5. Varahamihir

## 11.2

1. Ten Acts
2. Samvahaka
3. Charudatta's wife
4. Thief
5. Act-3
6. Act-9

## 15-3

1. Brave, generous, kind, clever, skillful, polite, attractive personality
2. Qualities of the heroine, peerless beauty, good character, generous, kind, affectionate
3. Anti-hero, arrogant, deceitful, rude, cruel and merciless
4. One day, after losing everything in gambling, he takes refuge in Vasantasena out of fear of the winning gambler. Vasantasena frees him from their hands. Hurt by this incident, the conductor takes retirement.