# Mrchchhakațika

Q.1. Write a short note on Śudraka.

Answer:

King Šudraka was one of the best Sanskrit dramatists and author of the famous play *Mrchchhakațika*. He was probably born in Andhra Pradesh in Southern India. Like King Vikramaditya, Śudraka has also remained, so far, a legendary figure. The play *Mrchchhakațika* tells of him as a Kshtriya, versed in many sciences and as one who died by self-immolation at the age of over a hundred years. He was known to be the author of at least half a dozen Sanskrit works, but nothing definite can be said either about his authorship or the date of the *Mrchchhakațika*. It is even difficult to say whether the drama was composed before or after Kalidasa. However, most scholars are of the opinion that *Mrchchhakațika* preceded the works of Kalidasa. His date varying between first century B.C. (H .H. Wilson), first century A.D. (Monier Williams), and the utter uncertainty (Keith). Some scholars are of the view that the historical events described in the *Mrchchhakațika* belong to 485 B.C. Śudraka is said to be the author of a one-act play called *Padmaprābhṛtaka* which portrays the love of Devadattā and Mūladeva, a past master in thieving . He is supposed by some scholars, to have written yet another play, entitled *Vinā-vāsavadattā* dealing with Udayana legend.

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Q.2 Recount the plot of the play Mrchchhakatika in your own words.

# Answer:

The *Mrchchhakațika* is a drama in ten Acts composed by the famous playwright Sudraka. He paints his picture in a vast canvas and presents a complex plot. The principal theme is the love between Chārudatta and Vasantasenā. There are two sub-plots in the story: the love-affair of a Brahmin youth Sharvilaka and Vasantasenā's maid Madanika, the other sub-plot concerns a political revolution in Ujjayinī in which the rebels are trying to overthrow the tyrant king Palaka and install Gopaladaraka Āryaka on the throne. Despite the complicated plot-structure, the three threads are skillfully interwoven and the story is well organized and unified.

Chārudatta and Vasantasenā were in love with each other. But their love was not likely to reach a smooth conclusion. Vasantasenā was born to a courtesan who was denied respectable social status. Her protestations of love for Chārudatta would always be suspect due to the stigma associated with her profession.

Secondly, Chārudatta had been reduced to poverty by his acts of generosity and philanthropy and has nothing to offer to Vasantasenā except his name and renown. But there was one more complication. Shakara, the low-born brother-in-law of King Palaka, was lusting for Vasantasenā. He was pursuing her relentlessly, and fortified by royal favour, his overtures of love carried a menace.

Vasantasenā gets an opportunity to visit Chārudatta when she seeks the shelter of his house to escape from Shakara on a dark night. She leaves her ornaments with Chārudatta . Unfortunately, these ornaments are stolen by Sharvilaka. He wanted money badly to buy freedom of Vasantasenā's maid Madanika whom he wanted to marry. Madanika persuades Sharvalika to return the ornaments to Vasantasenā posing as Chārudatta 's messenger. Chārudatta , on his part, sends Maitreya to Vasantasenā with a precious jewel-necklace to replace her lost ornaments.

Vasantasenā seizes this opportunity to visit Chārudatta in a thundering storm and rain and spends the night in his home. The next morning she finds Chārudatta 's little son Rohita crying because he has only a clay-cart while the neighbour's boy is playing with a golden cart. Vasantasenā takes the child in her lap and fills his cart with her ornaments. This incident, which has given the play its title, the little clay-cart (*mrid-shakatika*) filled with

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Vasantasenā's jewels, symbolizes her acceptance of Chārudatta 's household and is an augury of a new life.

Chārudatta had fixed a rendezvous to meet Vasantasenā in the old garden of the city. Vasantasenā enters Shakara's cart by mistake. When she arrives in the old garden, the frustrated Shakara strangles her, covers her body with leaves and runs away. Āryaka mounts into Chārudatta 's cart escaping from Palaka's prison and Chārudatta is unable to keep his appointment with Vasantasenā. The diabolical Shakara brings charge of Vasantasenā's murder on Chārudatta . Circumstantial evidence of a women's dead body in the old garden, discovery of Vasantasenā's ornaments with Maitreya and Chārudatta 's refusal to reveal his movements in order to protect Āryaka, all goes against him and he is sentenced to death.

Luckily, Vasantasenā had only swooned away. A Buddhist monk, whim she had formerly helped to see off his gambling debts, sees her and helps her to recover. The timely arrival of Vasantasenā at the place of execution saves Chārudatta 's life and also the life of his wife who was about to perform the act of sati. In the meantime, the political revolution succeeds. Sharvilaka kills Palaka; Āryaka is proclaimed the new king. Chārudatta pardons Shakara. Āryaka bestows the noble title of Kulabadhu on Vasantasenā, and, in this way, the near-tragedy turns into an occasion of rejoicing for all.

Q.3. Write a critical essay on the plot-construction of the play Mrchchhakațika.

#### Answer:

The *Mrchchhakațika* is a drama in ten Acts composed by the famous playwright Śudraka. He paints his picture in a vast canvas and presents a complex plot. The *Vastu* or the plot of the play is two-fold, (1) Principal, which is the love of Chārudatta and Vasantasenā, and (2) Secondary, which is the dethronement of king Palaka of Ujjayini and Āryaka's accession to the throne.

The predominant rasa is *Shringer* (Love), assisted by occasional introduction of *Karuna* (e.g. in Act X), *Hasya* (in the witticism of the Vidushaka and the dialogues of Shakara), *Bibhatsa* (in Act VIII, when Vasantasenā is strangled on the stage) etc. The play begins with a *Nandi* followed by a *Prastavana* (Introduction) in which the Sutradhara introduces the author and the play to the audience; then the ten Acts of the play follow in succession without any intervening *Vishkambhakas* or *Praveshakas*, whose absence is a noteworthy feature of the play. At the close there is the usual *Bharatabakya* or the valedictory stanza (X.61)

According to M. R. Kale, a close perusal of the story of the play reveals that the principal points in the development of the plot are—(1) the handing over of ornaments by Vasantasenā into Chārudatta 's keeping as a deposit, (2)Samvahaka's being introduced to Vasantasenā, who lays him under an obligation by paying his debt; (3) Sarvilaka's theft of Vasantasenā ornaments and their subsequent return by him; (4) Chārudatta 's sending of the necklace in exchange for the ornaments; (5) Vasantasenā's visit to Chārudatta and their union; (6) the interchange of carriages, owing to which Āryaka and Chārudatta become friends and which gives Shakara the opportunity to lay violent hands on Vasantasenā; (7) Vasantasenā's rescue by Samvahaka; (8) the charge of murder against Chārudatta , which is apparently proved by (a) the discovery of the female corpse, and (b) the finding of Vasantasenā's ornaments in the person of Maitreya; (9) the death-sentence passed on Chārudatta ; and (10) the arrival of the Bhikshu and Vasantasenā on the scene of execution , which brings about the denoument.

It is possible to find the broad demarcations of the five *Samdhis* of Sanskrit play in the plot of Mrchchhakațika .(1) The *Mukhasamdhi* is a combination of the *Veeja* and *Arambh* and it extends to the end of the First Act; the *Veeja* or the seed is contained in the meeting between Chārudatta and Vasantasenā in Cupid's shrine; and the *Arambh* is indicated when Vasantasenā takes refuge in the house of Chārudatta , when pursued by Sakara. (2) The

*Pratimukhsamdhi* indicated the further sprouting of the Veeja by some new incidents which maintain the continuity of the action; such as the receipt of the necklace by Vasantasenā through Vidushaka. It thus extends to the end of Act IV. (3) The *Garvasamdhi* consists the Fifth Act, while (4) the *Avamashasamdhi* covers the next four, and (5) the Nirvahanasamdhi , where all the events converge to the desired goal, forms the subject matter of Act X. It should be borne in mind that the union of the hero and the heroine which takes place towards the end of Act V, is not the real union, because it is temporary and of short duration. The permanent union is actually brought about in the final Act only.

M.R. Kale points out that the plot of the *Mrchchhakațika* has been constructed with considerable skill and the author has been quite successful in welding together a variety of exciting incidents so as to maintain the spectators' interest right up to the end. The *Mrchchhakațika* stands at the head of all Sanskrit plays in providing the audience with a plot that is neither poor nor colourless; it is a love –story full of adventures that stand apart by themselves outside the conventional class of super-human agency or insipid intrigues.

Śudraka himself was quite confident about the merit of the plot of the play and referred to it as something unique. (I.8.19). Most Sanskrit plays follow very closely the conventional ideas even in matters unimportant and there is a stereotyped atmosphere about them which leaves the reader utterly cold. In *Mrchchhakațika*, however, we find a very different atmosphere which is at once both pleasant and refreshing. Here we meet men and women, taken from different strata of the society, who act and speak like living human beings. Moreover, all these characters become all the more lovable for being a little bad. And there is such a variety of incidents taking place close upon one another almost at a breakneck speed, acting and reacting, but leading on at the same time towards the common goal.

*Mrchchhakațika* has two plots. In the plays having the main plot and the sub-plot, there is always the risk of the dramatist failing to keep a proper sense of proportion between the two plots. We may refer to the plot of *Mālatimādhava* as an illustration where the under plot almost threatens to overshadow the main plot. But no such anomaly is to be found in the *Mrchchhakațika*. Here the weightage given to the main plot and the sub plot can be termed to almost perfect. At no time of the play, does the sub-plot appear to enjoy the upper hand over the main plot.

However, one should not infer that the plot of *MrchchhakațikaI* is without any fault. Dr. Ryder has criticized the plot construction of the play as being too long. It has been pointed Devajit Das D out that the main action of the play halts through Acts II to V. During these episodes, the audience almost forgets that the main plot concerns the love of Vasantasenā and Chārudatta . Some critics are of the opinion that in *Mrchchhakaţika* there are actually materials for two plays. But R.D. Karmakar is of the opinion that most of these criticisms are based on a real misconception of the real purpose of Acts II to V which is to intensify the love of Vasantasenā for Chārudatta before she decides to play the role of an *Abhisarika*. The various events taking place in these Acts help Vasantasenā to make up her mind to offer herself to Chārudatta . Again, if the Acts II-V were removed, the rest of the Acts would show the character of Vasantasenā in a bad light. It is true that there is no action as such in these Acts. But it is merely a lull before the storm and the writer seems to conserve his energy here before he starts to run in the latter half of the play. That is why the dropping of the Acts II—V is not logically possible and, therefore, we cannot criticize the plot of the play simply because of their presence.

Q.4. Write a note on the characters of Chārudatta and Vasantasenā.

Answer:

#### <u>Chārudatta</u>

Chārudatta is the hero of Śudraka's play *Mrchchhakațika*. He is a very handsome Brahmin young man of Ujjayini. He was born in a rich family as his ancestors had amassed a large fortune in trade. However, Chārudatta 's riches disappeared over time and he has been left penniless. This poverty was, however, brought on him by his extreme generosity. The play shows that he had spent large sums of money in deeds of private charity and public utility. Munificence was a habit which had become a second nature to him, so that when he was left with nothing valuable, he donates the very cloak he was wearing.

According to R.D. Karmakar, Chārudatta is a hero of the *Dhirodatta* type. But Dr. R. Ganesh Shatavadhani considers him to be of Dhīraśānta type. He had a very high sense of honour and self-respect. It was his sense of honour that made him replace the stolen ornaments by a costly necklace. He was extremely considerate towards others including the thief who broke into his house. He cares for his good name above everything else and is prepared to stand by truth at all costs. As a matter of fact, it was through his acts of nobleness that he could win the love of a courtesan—young, rich and beautiful. In the play he was found brooding over his poverty every now and then, and, for this he has been criticized by some scholars. However, it should be remembered that he is not mourning his condition for he wants money for his own enjoyment, but because his poverty has deprived him of the opportunities of doing good to others.

Throughout the play *Mrchchhakațika*, Chārudatta comes out as a consistent character, as the beau ideal of a noble person, whom everybody knows and loves. From the Judge to the hangman—everybody admires him. He is considered to be the ornament of the city of Ujjayini. He is so large-hearted that he can even admire a burglar for his skill. He is portrayed as a very kind person who is ready to even incur treason by helping Āryaka to escape to safety. His magnanimity would not allow him to revenge himself on a fallen enemy. He does not think twice before pardoning Sakara who had spared no pains to ensure the death of Chārudatta .

In brief it may be said that he is an embodiment of all virtues, as expressively summarized by Vita in the gorgeous and impressive stanza (I, 48):

"To the distressed, he is the wish-yielding tree, bent down with the load of the fruit of his virtues. To the virtuous, he is the family-head. To the learned he is a mirror (reflecting learning). He is the touch-stone of moral conduct, and the ocean having righteousness for its coast-line. He is (ever) hospitable, and never shows disrespect. He is a treasure of all manly virtues, and is courteous and magnanimous by nature. By reason of his manifold virtues, he alone, deserving the praise, really lives; while others are (merely) breathing as it were."

However, it is not that the character of Chārudatta is without any fault. His silence in the law-court, when charged with murder, cannot be so easily explained. As a man of principles, it was expected that he would defend himself suitably, not merely to suit his life, but also to clear his personal reputation. Again, his affair with Vasantasenā, even after having a wife and a grown-up child cannot be accepted as logical. Not only this, he plays a more or less passive part in the play and somehow fails to impress the reader.

#### <u>Vasantasenā</u>

Vasantasenā is the heroine of Śudraka's play *Mrchchhakaţika*. No other heroine in Sanskrit literature can produce such a permanent impress on the mind of the reader as does this young, beautiful lady. Sakuntala, Sita, Parvati and others are undoubtedly ideal women and worthy patterns for the womankind. But their self-sacrifice and self-denial do not produce such a permanent impress on the mind of the reader as this beautiful, young jewel. She is a professional courtesan, born and bred as such; but she is as pure-minded as any lady of noble station. She falls in love with Chārudatta the very first time she sees him at a festival in Cupid's shrine. But when we find the most beautiful courtesan, rolled in wealth, and wooed with presents of ornaments worth ten thousand gold coins by the king's brother-in-law, deliberately falling in love with a poor Brahmin whose only possession are his noble qualities, and doing all the love-making herself, with all the discretion and circumspection of a lady of high birth, we rub our eyes in wonder and ask ourselves whether such a thing can actually happen. That is apparently the reason why any one cannot ever forget Vasantasenā and her love for Chārudatta.

Vasantasenā is not only a kind woman, she is also quite generous, as shown by her readily paying off the debt of Samvahaka, and releasing Madanika with equal alacrity. When in Chārudatta 's house, she gives a further proof of her generous nature by handing over her own ornaments to her lover's son for making a golden toy-cart. When, finally, in Act VIII, Sakara persecutes with his evil attentions, she is ready to accept death at his hand rather than Devajit Das Devajit

proving faithless to the one she loves from her heart. She thus gives greatest possible proof of the depth of her love and loyalty. It is for this reason that she finally gets recognition at the hands of King Āryaka who bestows upon her the title of *Badhu*.

The development of Vasantasenā's passion has been delineated by the poet with touches of such tenderness as raise her character to a very high degree in our eyes. With her unassuming nature, she secures the golden opinion of Chārudatta 's house-hold, tries to make friends with Chārudatta 's wife and in very charming words sends the *Ratnavali* to her, readily gives her ornaments to Rohasena to get a golden to-cart made out of them. She has a jolly temper and arranges for the offer of Madanika to Sarvilaka in a dramatic manner.

In fact, the more one sees Vasantasenā the more one thinks of her as a *Kulashtree* and less as a *Ganika*, so far removed she is from the ways naturally associated with the letter. And if we find the nature of Vasantasenā, not rising to the sublime level of Sita or Sakuntala that is because of the situation and environment are different. As a woman, she will always remain an epitome of love, beauty and innocence. Vita has beautifully summarized the character of Vasantasenā in the following words when he mourns her "death" at the cruel hands of Sakara:

O Vasantasenā! The river of water in the form of innocence... you who were an adornment of your ornaments, you with that sweet face, you that shone with your fondness for amorous sports! You that were the river of goodness, with laughter for the sandy bank, the refuge of persons like me! Alas! Alas! The market of passion, the treasure-house of merchandise of beauty, is now pulled down. (VIII, 38)

Q.5. Write a note on Śudraka's art of characterization in the play Mrchchhakațika.

## Answer:

According to a critic, one of the greatest elements contributing to the popularity of Sudraka's play *Mrchchhakațika* is its art of characterization which is more powerful and varied than any other Sanskrit drama. Sudraka has painted a large number of characters, almost a cosmopolitan crowd— it comprises a learned Brahmin, a rich courtesan, robbers, gamblers, and herdsmen, portly judges and royal rakes. With a few deft touches he brings out the salient characteristics of each. Dr. Ryder has aptly remarked, "As regards the characters drawn, it would be seen that the poet has been very successful there. He has given us all sorts of characters high and low and they are undoubtedly living men and women."

While Śudraka has been quite successful in drawing all his characters, his greatest triumph lies undoubtedly in the creation of the villain, the king's brother-in-law. His original name was Samsthanaka, but the poet endowed him with a drawl and a lisp and the expressive sobriquet of Sakara under which he is he is familiar to the multitude of play-goers. He is represented as an empty-headed fool; but the emptiness seems more put on than real, for where necessary he shows the devil's depth of cunning. According to Dr. Ryder, the character of Sakara is that of a "villain unmatched"— crafty, wily as a fox, but downright laughable.

Another character that has been set in quite a different mould is that of Chārudatta . He is the beau-ideal of a gentleman, with a high sense of honour and famous for his charitable deeds. It is because of his nobility of character that the title of *Arya* (the noble one) was applied to him by common consent.

The character of Vasantasenā has also been able to attract the attention of the readers and critics alike. She has been portrayed as a courtesan by profession, but almost a *Kulashtree* in her principles. Once her heart is attached to Chārudatta , she begins to love him the more for his poverty and disdains to look at any other suitor, not even one with royal connection.

In Maitreya, Śudraka has created a somewhat different type of Vidushaka. He is quite different from the common glutton and fool who plays antics on the stage. Śudraka's Maitreya is honest, simple-minded, and straightforward. His blunders are the result of his simplicity, and do not originate in a spirit of buffoonery. He is a faithful retainer of his patron

Chārudatta, to whom he clings through riches and poverty, sharing his joys and sorrows, ready to follow him even in death.

In his play *Mrchchhakațika*, Śudraka took great care while sketching the minor characters as well. The servants Sthavaraka and Vardhamanaka, and Radanika and Madanika have distinct characteristics of their own, which make them live before us. In fact, one almost fancies that the author has devoted as much care while portraying the slave Sthavaraka as he did in case of his master Sakara. Sthavaraka would obey his employer up to a certain point, beyond which he ceases to be a pliant tool, and, becomes a human being with a moral sense of right and wrong. Then he does not hesitate to assert his moral stand-point—he is even willing to lose his life in an attempt to save the innocent Chārudatta from being unjustly killed.

to a critic, most of the authors including Kalidasa, appear to bestow all their attention on their principal dramatis personae, and neglect the rest of the characters. But it is not so with Śudraka—he gives the same meticulous attention to each character of the play. As Professor Levi has observed, "Each of the twenty-seven personages who take part in the action bears a particular mark, a special trait which strongly characterizes him." Śudraka has been compared in this respect with Shakespeare and Moliere— two of the greatest names in the world of dramatic literature. That he is mentioned in such glorious company is sufficient proof of the esteem in which he is held by critics as well as of his unparalled skill in The gamblers, the Chandalas, the assessors and all other minor characters have been shown in their proper relief. According art of characterization.

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#### Q.7. Discuss Sudraka's Mrchchhakațika as a Prakarana.

#### Answer:

The *Prakarana* is one of the major forms of Sanskrit drama. According to the definition of the *Prakarana* as laid down Viswanatha Kaviraja in his *Sahityadarpana*, its plot must be the invention of the poet, based upon worldly life. The hero may be a Brahman or a minister or a merchant. The heroine may be a courtesan or a lady of noble birth. The number of Acts usually should be ten (not less than five nor more than ten). Love should be the sentiment prominently described. In addition to all these, the hero of a *Prakarana* was usually of the *dhiroshanta* (firm and peaceful) type. The *Prakarana* also featured characters like *Vita*, a stock character, the parasitic companion of a prince, of a dissolute young man, or of a courtesan. Minor characters include gambers, thieves and servants. Wider use of Prakrit dialect was another characteristic of the *Prakarana*.

It is not difficult to see that the *Mrchchhakațika* fulfills all the above conditions of the *Prakarana*. The first condition of the *Prakarana* that it should have an original plot is satisfied by *Mrchchhakațika*. Śudraka paints his picture in a vast canvas and presents a complex plot. The *Vastu* or the plot of the play is two-fold, (1) Principal, which is the love of Chārudatta and Vasantasenā, and (2) Secondary, which is the dethronement of king Palaka of Ujjayini and Āryaka's accession to the throne. The poet has shown extraordinary skill in combining both these plots so as to make them one united whole. According to R.D. Karmakar, there can be no doubt that the main plot with all its incidents is original and not borrowed. The idea of a courtesan falling with a poor Brahmana is found in the story of Kumudika and Rupanika in the *Brhatkatha* and also in the *Dasakumaracharita*. The description of Vasantasenā's mansion is likewise similar to that of Madanamala's house- hold in the *Katha*. Hiding in the temple is also referred to in the *Katha*. But all these do not, in the slightest degree, detract from the originality displayed by the author in constructing the main plot.

According to the definitions of the *Prakarana*, its hero may be a Brahman or a minister or a merchant. The *Mrchchhakațika* satisfies this condition quite well. The hero of the play is Chārudatta . He is a hero of the *Dhirodatta* type. He had a very high sense of honour and self-respect. He cares for his good name above everything else and is prepared to stand by truth at all costs. Again, by profession, he is a merchant. He was born in a rich family as his ancestors had amassed a large fortune in trade. In *Daan-Rupaka* , Part-III, it has been pointed out that Devajit Das Devajit Das

the hero of a *Prakarana* should undergo misfortune. In case of Chārudatta also we find him going through a period of intense financial crisis. He had been reduced to poverty by his acts of generosity and public philanthropy. As a result of this he had nothing to offer to Vasantasenā except his name and fame as an honest man.

The heroine of a *Prakarana* should be either a high-born lady or a courtesan. A *Prakarana* is called *Suddha* if the heroine is a lady of noble birth, *Vikrita* if the heroine is a courtesan, and *Samkirna* if both. From this point of view, *Mrchchhakațika* is a *Samkirna* or mixed *prakarana*. It has both the types of heroines—Vasantasenā, a courtesan, and, Dhuta, a kulastri.

Satisfying the definition of a *Prakarana*, there are ten Acts in *Mrchchhakațika*. Moreover, the predominant rasa in the play is *Shringer* (Love), assisted by occasional introduction of *Karuna* (e.g. in Act X), *Hasya* (in the witticism of the Vidushaka and the dialogues of Shakara), *Bibhatsa* (in Act VIII, when Vasantasenā is strangled on the stage) etc. In keeping with the tradition of a *Prakarana*, there are the Vitas of Vasantasenā and Sakara. Again, as the *Mrchchhakațika* is a *prakarana* of a *samkrina* type, we also find that it abounds in the characters of rogues (*dhurta*). Among the rogues, may be classified the three gamblers in Act II, and even Sarvilaka, in his character as a burglar. Moreover, the characters of the play make use of the *Sauraseni* and *Magadhi* dialects of the Prakrit language. *Sauraseni* is spoken by the Sutradhara, Nati, Vasantasenā, Radanika, Madanika, Vasantasenā's mother, Dhuta and Karnapuraka; while *Magadi* is spoken by Samvahaka, Sthavaraka, Kumbhilaka, Vardhamanaka, and Rohasena.

However, the *Mrchchhakațika* does not fulfill all the criteria of a *Prakarana* laid down in the rhetorical treatises. It is because of the fact of the fact that the play pre-dates most of these treatises. According to *Sahitya-Darpana*, a *prakarana* should be named after the hero and the heroine (e.g. Malati-Madhava). But Śudraka's play is named after a particular incident of the story. Again, the *Dasarupaka* prescribes that the hero should appear in every Act of the play. But in *Mrchchhakațika*, the hero Chārudatta does not appear in four Acts out of the ten. Similarly, in the *Dasarupaka*, the meeting of the high-born heroine and the courtesan on the stage has been expressly prohibited. But in *Mrchchhakațika*, Dhuta and Vasantasenā not only meet on the stage but also exchange greetings (Act X).

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Q.8 Assess Sudraka's depiction of the state of the society in the play Mrchchhakațika.

## Answer:

One of the notable aspects of Śudraka's play is the depiction of the society by the playwright. It has been pointed out by the scholars that the play offers a fair picture of the contemporary society in various aspects. The principal characters of the play are drawn from the upper middle class, while the subsidiary episodes introduce such low class people as gamblers, hangmen etc. This was inevitable in a *Prakarana* whose plot was to be *Loukika* or "drawn from real life". It is natural that we see therein an exact reflex of the conditions and manners of contemporary society, including its government and its laws in particular.

The play offers a detailed picture of the city of Ujjayini. It has been described a gay and prosperous city, attracting people from far off places (Samvahaka comes from Pataliputra). Both inland and maritime trade was flourishing and Ujjayini could boast of millionaire merchant princes who gave vast sums in charity (Chārudatta was reduced to poverty because of his reckless charity, IX. 22). The city was also the abode of rich courtesans like Vasantasenā whose wealth and pomp would be an object of envy for many a king. Naturally, the city was infested with gamblers, loafers, parasites and dare-devils who created a lot of disturbance.

The play shows that the caste-system exercised a great hold on the people. The Brahmans were held in great respect (III. 17-18) while the Sudras were not allowed to recite the Vedas (IX, 21).

The Kayasthas appear in an unfavourable light (they are compared to serpents, IX.14). The different castes could follow various professions. Chārudatta was a Brahmana, but he was a merchant by profession. Viraka and Candanaka, who are respectively barbar and shoemaker by caste, occupy the responsible post of *Senapati* (military commander). The Brahmanical religion, with its gods and goddesses, various vows and fasts, ideas about heaven and hell etc. was prevalent. Buddhism also seemed to flourish side by side. Various paraphernalia of Bhiksus and their manners and rituals have been accurately described in the play.

*Mrchchhakațika* also shows that some sort of slavery was prevalent in the society. The slave could be bought (Samvahaka offers himself for sale in Act II) or could be made a free person on payment. The slave could also be freed by the owner in special circumstances as is found

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in the case of Madanika. A slave can also be granted freedom from bondage by the state. In the play Stharvaka Ceta is released from bondage in this manner.

The play reflects that superstitions had a firm hold on the contemporary society. People had different types of superstitions and the following 'evil omens' are actually referred to in the play—the throbbing of the arm or the eye, the sight of a shramanaka, the crowing of a crow facing the sun, the sight of a serpent, the eclipse of the sun and the moon. The belief of the people in astrology and in the influence of the stars in the life of a person is shown in Act VI.

Thus, the play *Mrchchhakațika* is a good source of information about the society of Śudraka's time. Here we find the reflection of a lot of customs and beliefs prevalent in that society. What is even more significant is that the picture of the society provided in this play is quite real without any attempt by the writer to hide certain uncomfortable aspects of the contemporary society.