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Reflection of Contemporary Society in M. R. Kale's English Translation of Sudraka's *Mrichchhakatika*

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ABSTRACT

Sudraka's classical play *Mrichchhakatika*, or *The Little Clay Cart*, is a noted work of art in the Sanskrit language. It has been rendered into English by a renowned Sanskrit scholar, Moreshwar Ramchandra Kale, who has retained the original text and context. The plot is woven around the backdrop of an impoverished yet virtuous Brahmin merchant, Charudatta, and his beloved Vasantasena, a rich courtesan. Both of them epitomize the course of a virtuous life. Charudatta is the protagonist, and Vasantasena is his female counterpart. Their life is disturbed when Shakespearean Iago-like antagonist Samsthanaka, also called Sakara, is after them. So, virtuosity faces a litmus test in the face of sinister maneuvers on the part of the villain. In his villainy, he is aided and abetted by his brother-in-law (sister's husband), King Palala. Now, with the ruling King in his favour, he thinks that he can take undue advantage of the law of the land and commit any crime without a jot of fear. The villain is notorious and lustful and thinks that he can lure away Vasantasena with the power of his money and royal association or kinship. But he is frustrated in his vain attempt to win the love of pure Vasantasena. Samsthanaka nurtures a grievance against her because she has ignored him and chose poor yet magnanimous man Charudatta. The crux of the conflict in the play is Samsthanaka's revenge on the innocent hero and heroine. But at the same time, Sudraka has shown the stark reality of poverty on the part of males, which snatches manliness from them and turns them effeminate and helpless to face family and society. This pennilessness is a phase of low morale and no self-esteem. People's attitude changes when their one-time near and dear ones pass from prosperity to adversity. But one thing has been established: virtue has its reward. The play also brings to the fore that however evil may appear to triumph, it is the truth that prevails in the long run. The proposed paper shall explore Charudatta-Vasantasena's mutual feelings of warmth and affection despite social, economic, and caste disparity. Religion, caste, class, and relative economic status should not be a barrier when it comes to the nobility of the soul. Sudraka attempts to champion this proposition through the warp and woof of the play. The play's one of the most epiphanic moments is the forgiving of the erring villain Samsthanaka by noble Charudatta even when he has been adjudged culpable by the law of the land. This reminds one of Shakespeare, who said, 'The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance.'

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The title of the play derives from a scene in Act VI entitled The Exchange of the Carriages where Charudatta's son Rohasena is playing with a clay-cart made by Charudatta's maid-servant, Radanika, for him. The clay cart was made as a replacement for the gold cart belonging to the son of a gentleman next door with which Rohasena was playing before he was given the clay cart to appease his tantrums at the sudden taking away of the gold cart. This episode is widespread yet very suggestive, with two words, 'gold and 'clay,' quite poles apart.Gold is indicative of wealth, prosperity and affluence and clay is suggestive of scarcity, impoverishment. On allegorical or anagogical level gold may be taken to be a symbol of vanity, pride and ostentatious life characteristic of the elite and aristocratic society and clay may be taken to be an indication of simplicity, earthiness and down-to-earth reality of life. Sudraka has exploited this situation to pinpoint poverty consciousness.The grim fact of not providing with the desires of a child of one's own and the child's discrimination between the two playthings of two different materials of gold and clay is very sympathetically and sensitively depicted. Mark the level of a child 's consciousness about the original object of play and its imitation.The child is rightly termed as being'the father of man'. When child Rohasena is crying, Vasantasena is asking Radanika about the cause of his crying, and the dialogue that follows between these two ladies is very very stark and pathetic:

> "Vasantasena: And for what reason he is crying?
>
> Radanika: He was playing with a small clay-cart belonging to the son of a gentleman who lives next door. And that was taken away by him. Then, as he asked for it again, I made this clay-cart and gave it to him. Thereupon, he says:'O Radanika, what do I care for this small clay-cart! Give me that same gold-cart.'
>
> Vasantasena: Oh, alas! oh, alas! He, too, should be distressed at the sight of other people's wealth! O divine fate, you do indeed sport with the fortunes of men, resembling the drops of water fallen on lotus-leaves!(tearfully)Child, do not cry; you will play with a cart of gold." (The Mrichchhakatika of Sudraka 149-150)

As it is a tradition laid down by Bharatamuni in his classical text dealing with the science of dramaturgy called *Natyashastra*, the play has to begin in an epical fashion invoking the mercy and blessings of God or deity, *Mrichchhakatika* too, begins with an invocation to Siva.We should know that Bharatamuni was an Indian sage, playwright, and scholar revered for his significant contributions to Sanskrit literature, theatre, and aesthetics. *Natyashastra* is his magnum opus comprehensive treatise on drama, theatre, and performing arts, covering topics like playwriting, acting, dance, music, and stage design.Following this, Sudraka divided his

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play into ten acts, with each heading of the act appended at the end.This design helps the audience to have the freedom to judge the performance rather than be biased or guided by preconceived notions.When you read through the first act, which involves the prologue too, you get the act name or heading as The Depositing of the Ornament at the end. Moreover, an invocation to Siva is solicited here.Siva is presented as meditating on Brahma with his knees wrapped around the doubly tightened fold of the snake.He is in Priyanka (cross-legged/vipassana) posture, having formed a knot with his legs. Just then, Sudraka introduces us to Sutradhara and his wife Nati. Sutradhara is the manager of Sanskrit theatre. Here, he is on the stage, addressing the audience with his long and sustained dialogue.Later, his wife Nati joined the conversation.These two characters play the role of narrator, just as Lockwood and Nelly Dean do in Emily Bronte's immortal Victorian novel Wuthering Heights.Their conversation starts when Sutradhara finishes by introducing the writer Sudraka, who is a man of knowledge and skilled in arts and sciences. He is a brave warrior, a Kshatriya.The play happens to be a prakrana play dealing with the social and domestic life of men and women who face the actual world.Sutradhara enters the house, announcing his hunger, and asks Nati for something to eat. Here we get the usual picture of a traditional family where husband and wife love kidding each other, sometimes quarreling, sometimes chiding, etc. Ultimately, the wife is revering her husband as next to nothing. This is a band that thrives on the soil of fellow feeling and selfless service.Nati's response to her husband's food demand is hilarious.She says in a jocular mood that everything is available to eat not here but in the market. This is very much in Dryden's mock-epic style.Sutradhara does not know why Nati is in such a casual mood.He also finds the house in a helter-skelter manner, unusually busy with some ritualistic look of some observances to be held in a while.She declares that she has observed a fast called Abhirupa-Pati in order to get her earthly husband in her afterlife too. Sutradhara also cuts jokes, saying that at the expense of the present husband's hunger, the future husband in heaven is sought. He becomes glad within, realizing the love and affection of his wife towards him.Then Sutradhara shows his reverence for the fast and helps Nati in arranging for the paraphernalia involved in the fast, such as searching for a Brahmin to eat, etc. Maitreya, also known as Vidushaka, is a bosom friend of Charudatta who stands by him through thick and thin.When Sutradhara invites him on a ritual feast for his wife's fast, he becomes very nostalgic about his friend Charudatta's previous condition of home where he used to be surrounded by so many people and eating, drinking, and merry-making would go on.This turn of fortune from up to low is pitiful.His condition has become so pitiable that even his wife, Dhuta takes pity on

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him.Since his wife regards his sentiment, she never resents his generous acts of giving and giving to the extent of the penurious condition.Now, with the decline in Charudatta's fortune, Maitreya feels hurt and doesn't want to eat like Brahmin at the door of others. So he excuses himself from eating at Sutradhara's door. Brahmins are regarded to be the top caste in the caste hierarchy. They are eligible to eat and get Dakshina from the houses to which they are invited.This act is seen as bringing blessings to the family which organizes the feast. But despite being offered a handsome Dakshina and a high-calorie meal with umpteen preparations, Maitreya is not accepting. This shows he is Charudatta's real friend while others are what we call fair-weathered friends or opportunists.Sudraka takes us into Charudatta's inner life, who was large-hearted and never knew a 'No' for anyone who came to him for help. Because of his helpful nature and milk of human kindness, he was surrounded by one and all and was very popular as a philanthropist. But now he has been reduced to poverty, yet his heart has reduced none of its lustre.He is pained not so much at his poverty as at the tone and tenor of people when they meet the same person who was once their help. Now, a very pertinent question takes birth in his mind.This society, by and large, hates the poor, however noble they may be. This is a world where unconditional love and friendship are few and far between.Those whom he helped deserted him in times of crisis. It was not that he wanted monetary help from them; he just wanted them to be around him.He loved his house to be alive and bustling with merry and mirth. But he understood deep within the importance of money, which is at the root of everything. A man is a man only because he has money, not just because he was born a man. A woman is by birth a female, but if she has money, she is a man, and she rules the roost.A man turns effeminate if he lacks money. A husband becomes a wife if he has no money, and his wife becomes his husband. Conclusively, those who have no money have no voice in society. Prosperity begets friends; adversity tries them.People in nine out of ten cases value your position and your pelf, which is ephemeral.They do not value qualities like honesty, integrity, and steadfastness, which Charudatta stood for.If they had valued these things and attracted towards him for these attributes, they would have been still with him. This is the way of the world, so you can't escape it. So, the play can be critiqued from a Marxist point of view as well.

Vasantasena, who is rich, beautiful, and as pleasant as spring is attracted to him when she hears from someone that there lives in Ujjayini, a man called Charudatta, a Brahmin merchant who has impeccable virtues of generosity, which left him poor; she rushes to him to help him out of

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his present predicament. She wants to offer him her jewelry and all her belongings. Today, where most women want to exploit men and peep into their thick pockets even before striking a relationship, here is a woman who is ready to offer her supreme sacrifice for a nobleman who is literally indigent of means but rich at heart. This is a metaphysical approach for Vasantasena to judge Charudatta. Shakespeare rightly said, "Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds." (Shakespeare 15) This gesture of Vasantasena is unique, although she belongs to the courtesan community. Courtesans are generally viewed with an eye of disregard in society because stigma is attached to them for their being mean, abominable, and lustful. But Sudraka's courtesan is well-versed in 'Vaishiki Kala'.She knows singing, dancing, painting, cooking, and all that an accomplished woman is supposed to possess. She is not a common girl. She has mind, heart, judgment, and prowess and can never opt for devious ways. She is like the content of English Metaphysical poetry, a combination of intellect and emotion, of ratiocination and feeling. This is shown in her alignment with Charudatta and departure from Sakara. Sakara tries to bamboozle her into his own trap. He dangles before her wads of crispy currency as bait to capture. He tries to convince that Charudatta has nothing material to offer. He wants Vasantasena to banish her thoughts about him. But she associates herself with Charudatta. When all his tricks to attract Vasantasena fall flat, he turns vindictive and is deeply aggrieved because his ego has been hurt. She cared a jot for his money, wealth or his royal association. So Sakara becomes like Shakespearean Iago. He tortures her, passes lewd and lascivious comments in her face in public, and threatens her with dire consequences, but hers for Charudatta is like the love of Catherine for Heathcliff, who says that she is Heathcliff. Even if Vasantasena has to opt for Sakara compulsively, her love will be constrained like Catherine's for Edgar Linton, which, like foliage, will be changed over time. Charudatta is as consistent and uncompromising in his goodness as Vasantasena is in her admiration for him. This feeling has been aptly captured in a Shakespearean sonnet: "O,no! it is an ever-fixed mark that looks on tempests and is never shaken;" (Shakespeare 15)

Sudraka has presented Vasantasena as a lovable, religious, cooperative, and sympathetic heroine who is split between her love and loyalty to Charudatta and her act of protecting herself from a notorious serpentine villain, Sakara.The writer has given him two names because he is also alternatively known as Samsthanaka.The intensity of Vasantasena's love and admiration for Charudatta is beyond measure, and Charudatta deserves this because he is a very religious, god-fearing, and helpful man.The very first chapter, The Depositing of the Ornament, shows

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Vasantasena running away with her ornament and Vita, Cheta, and Sakara, all notorious elements, chasing her like a wolf after an innocent and fragile lamb.Sakara is the head villain and wants to crush Vasantasena in his arms, not the gold she has on her. Beauty and feminine charm is more susceptible to theft than gold. I am reminded here of a scene from the Shakespearean Romantic Comedy *As You Like It* where the senior Duke has banished the junior Duke usurping his property. Celia is the daughter of the Senior Duke, and Rosalind is the daughter of the Junior Duke. They are very intimate and inseparable as 'Juno's swans'.Rosalind, too, would have been banished along with her father, but Celia is not going to survive without her. So he has retained Rosalind to give his daughter company rather than out of compassion, for he is bereft of any human feeling. Now, these two girls are trying to escape their house, which is not a house but a butchery. They run to the Forest of Arden, where the banished Duke is living like the 'Old Robinhood of England.'Both of them change their names, smear, and smudge their faces to avoid being recognized and also to avoid dangers lurking for young women on the way.Celia becomes Alina, and Rosalind becomes Ganymede.Shakespeare presents this wonderful reality through the mouthpiece of Jacques when he tells these young girls before starting their journey that 'beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold. 'Sudraka or Shakespeare feels that a woman's beauty sometimes becomes the 'Achilles' heel' in this corrupt society. We have seen this in Anand's heroine, Sohini, who is ravished by the village priest when she goes to fetch water from the well. Sohini is from a downtrodden society and is the sister of Bakha, who is a latrine cleaner. How is a society full of hypocritical people? The touch of a downtrodden male defiles a Lala Ji, the high-up in the society, and a Brahmin priest of the temple enjoys the touch of the same caste girl. Girls are treated as sexual objects, and so safety has to be maintained. A woman's love is earned, not snatched. Vasantasena Celia, or Rosalind, these women feel unsafe.The occurrence with Vasantasena at the hands of Sakara in Pushpakarandaka garden where he beats her bitterly and covers her body with pile of leaves thinking her to be dead is a glaring example of this. This incident in the play is a turning point in the story. Her death would have changed the whole direction of the story. However, she survived to establish the truth.The readers know it very well. Her death would have meant Charudatta's hanging because Sakara had been able to adjudge him culpable with his manipulation and Machiavellian design. But, thanks to Sarvilaka, who discovered Vasantasena and produced her in person before the stake in the nick of time where Charudatta was going to be hanged. So, fate or chance or destiny plays a great role in deciding a person's future. How inscrutable are the chances of life? However, precautions have to be taken on the part of

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females because society has ambivalent and ambiguous feelings towards them. Thus, Rosalind, in the Shakespearean play, disguises herself as male.Vasantasena is running away from a man called Sakara to another man, Charudatta. Both are males, but in the proximity of Charudatta, she feels very close to a pious and protective soul. She feels cloistered there. However, the shadow of Sakara from a far-off place nauseates her. So somehow or the other, Vasantasena manages to run away from these three idiots, Vita, Sakara, and Cheta, and reaches Charudatta's house, where she wants to deposit her ornament. Actually, she is desirous of gifting these ornaments to Charudatta by way of her help, but she knows that this man knows only to give and not to take. He wallows in self-pity when his wife, Dhuta, offers him help. When he feels awkward and humiliated in receiving his wife's help, who is his better half, and there is no division of belongings between a husband and his wife, how can he receive help from others? What belongs to the husband belongs to the wife as well, and vice versa. A husband and wife are each other's help, but Charudatta feels hurt. So Vasantasena is hesitant to gift her ornament to him. So she does not want to hurt his feelings and requests him to keep these ornaments because it is getting night, and scoundrels are after her. Now, here, two perspectives appear before me regarding Vasantasena's choice of Charudatta versus Sakara. On the one hand, she has the option of accepting Sakara's lucrative offer and leading a voluptuous life along with her surplus wealth. On the other hand, she must continue her admiration for Charudatta and lead an austere life. But she opted for Charudatta because Sakara, with all his wealth and royal association, cannot compete with Charudatta even in his poverty. This is the fragrance of Charudatta's character, which has permeated everywhere. One touch of love and charm of personality weighs heavier than all states and kingdoms taken together. This is the kind of trust, and faith Vasantasena has for Charudatta's infallibility. It is not for nothing that Shakespeare has established the supremacy of love over everything material, which is pertinent to quote here in the context of Charudatta's true personality and Sakara's wealth: "For thy sweet love remembered, such wealth brings,/That then I scorn to change my state with Kings." (Shakespeare 8) So Vasantasena emerges as a compelling character that cannot be judged by a common parameter used to judge a courtesan simply as an entertainment provider device or tool.Sakara's evil design may disturb Vasantasena, but she can never stoop low.The conversation that ensues when Vasantasena is depositing her ornament to Charudatta is very witty:

"Charudatta: This house is not a fit place for keeping a deposit.

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> Vasantasena: Sir, this is not true, for deposits are entrusted to persons, and not to houses." (Mrichchhakatika 82)

Mrichchhakatika has an auspicious beginning with Siva, Parvati, and Brahma. The writer invokes their benediction. It is here that Sutradhara describes Sudraka as a very versatile genius, adept in Vedas, Sciences, and Mathematics, equally skilled in warfare, handsome in appearance, and robust in personality. He was a king, and so was his father. The whole story can be succinctly summed up in the following textual observation: “Through Vasantasena and Charudatta,King Sudraka has excellently delineated the course of virtuous life based on the pleasures of true love,corrupt legal procedure,the nature of villains, and workings of Destiny.” (Mrichchhakatika 61) This shows that Sudraka keeps a watch on the nature of existence of human beings on different planes in the society as depicted through the virtues of the central characters as well as some minor characters besides the coterie of villains, the custodian of laws who are influenced in their verdict by external elements rather than the true fact of the matter.As for the workings of destiny, it is inevitable for people who are either good or bad. Charudatta never forgets his usual duties of worship and meditation, though he is hurt at heart because of poverty. He can pass a life of poverty as he does not attach himself only much significance to wealth, which is a man's temporal possession as against his nobility.Property always changes hands.Since a man has to exist in society and ensure an honorable life for himself and his family, his being in a financially sound position is a necessary prerequisite to getting a positive response from the family and society. The heroine does not love wealth or power unquestioningly. She knows how the opium of power and wealth obfuscates people's vision. So, she declines Sakara's offer and is drawn towards a poor yet noble man, Charudatta. She suffers a lot for kicking Sakara.She has made Sakara her enemy, and she always threatens her.He mentally harassed her. But, she is ready to die rather than be an object of pleasure for him.Their union is impossible because one is gold while another is dust.Had Vasantasena been greedy for money and power, she would have easily fallen victim to Sakara, who would have violated her chastity.Having sated his carnal cravings with her body, he would have thrown her out as we do banana peels and gulp banana. This was his immediate need.Sakara's behaviour shows that he is a corrupt man whose only intention is to play with Vasantasena's body. Sudraka has underlined the course of a virtuous life as well as the course of a vicious life in the play.We can never forget Maitreya, also known as Vidushaka, who is just a replica of his friend Charudatta.He is an embodiment of virtue and selfless love. Radanika, Charudatta's maid-

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servant, is equally lovable and keeps a soft corner for Charudatta's family.She is kind-hearted, like Chaucer's Prioress.Churnavriddha, Charudatta's friend, wants to help him silently by offering a cloak through Maitreya. And this, too, disturbs him. Everybody intimately attached to Charudatta knows that he has been a very pious soul through the thick and thin of his life. He can never stoop low. People want to help him, but they fear it because they know that Charudatta always believed in giving rather than taking. Even in his miseries, he lives like a king.They respect him, and the fragrance of his virtues has permeated far and wide among the merchant communities as well as others.He has enemies, too. The villain Sakara turns antagonistic towards him because Vasantasena desires him and hates Sakara. This irks Sakara, so he accosts her at Pushpakarandaka garden and beats her bitterly. Vasantasena is a girl and weak.She can not retaliate him. She falls unconscious, and Sakara thinks her to be dead and covers her body with a pile of leaves and scampers from the spot.Sakara is an astute villain like Iago. But, both Iago and Sakara will meet their tragic end. Their real face will come to the fore.Othello never realizes that Iago is hatching plans to topple him and Desdemona until he has smothered Desdemona. But Vasantasena knows from the very beginning that Sakara is against her. A less astute villain than Sakara or Iago could not have succeeded with all the external opportunities available to them. But, these two characters are so subtle that they could have succeeded even without opportunities available to them in the outside world. They know how to manipulate. So, after leaving behind a supposedly dead Vasantasena, his evil design is to defame Charudatta in public by establishing that he is a thief, a notorious murderer, and an ignoble creature.In his design, he is assured of being favoured by the existing King Palaka. So he has the temerity and impudence to enter into court and declares that Charudatta has murdered Vasantasena for her ornaments. But the situational irony is that the ornaments that were deposited at Charudatta's house were stolen by Sarvilaka to ransom off Radanika, Vasantasena's maid-servant whom he loved.Madanika and Vasantasena were very close, and at the beginning of the play, both of them loved talking about each other's love in a friendly, jocular fashion.Sarvilaka was initially a wicked man. But the Sarvilaka of the beginning is not the Sarvilaka of the end. He is a changed man altogether. He has reformed by turning into a Buddhist monk, a mendicant wandering around. During one of his wanderings in a forest, he comes across someone crying and writhing in pain under the pile of leaves. He uncovers the body and pities the person and, to his utter amazement, recognizes that she is none other than Madanika's mistress, Vasantasena. In the meantime, Charudatta is being tried by a judge in the 'Trial Scene.' Charudatta pleads his ignorance and innocence. He has no proof to defend

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himself. He feels helpless, caught in the web of conspiracy, takes the name of God, and curses the blind and corrupt legal procedure that fails to punish the culprit and harasses the innocent. This reminds one of Defoe and Dickens. After a series of dialogues between the judge and Charudatta, the fateful verdict is announced, which is an example of prostitution of justice. This reminds one of a problem play Justice by John Galsworthy where the culprit has been rewarded and the innocent suffered. The judgment that came for Charudatta is devastating and well-manipulated.Let us have a look:

> "JUDGE: " Sir Charudatta, we are authorized merely to give our decision in a case;but the rest depends on the King. Still, O Sodhanaka, let king Palaka be informed in these words:-'He is a sinner. But Manu has laid down that a Brahmin is not to be killed, so he might be banished from this country together with all his property intact.' (Mrichchhakatika 204)

Now like Shakespearean Shylock and Iago, Sakara is overjoyed at the victory of his astutely fabricated plan. No doubt, the court verdict has just defamed Charudatta and there is no clause stating his hanging or death. Now the climax comes reminiscent of the 'Trial Scene' of The Merchant of Venice where Shylock is sharpening his knife to cut a pound of flesh off Antonio's body even before the final verdict has come there. Portia, the girl, is pleading the case very cleverly and interprets the clause of the bond very intelligently. But within a matter of minutes, Shylock's joy changes into despair when his malafide intention is revealed in the very wording of the bond. Thanks to the wit of Portia there, who saved Antonio there and here, Sarvilaka deserves our thanks for catapulting an unfavorable situation into a favorable one. Similarly, it becomes very clear that Sakara has influenced King Palaka's decision to pass deterrent punishment on Charudatta because the judge has left it to Palaka's discretion after passing the verdict. The King disobeyed Manu also, which forbade the killing of a Brahmin. He ordered Charudatta to be executed. This shows his ego as well as a blatant disregard for the law of the land, plus the ancient legal text. Charudatta becomes sad and puzzled and thinks over the future of his family, who are passing through a challenging phase. The concluding or closing chapter dramatizes two Chandals(executioners) authorized to perform this sepulchral gory deed. They discuss Charudatta's nobility and magnanimity with mixed reactions. They say Charudatta was the son of such a great man, but he perpetrated this vice that was unsuitable to his status. Her Sakara is also bent on having Charudattahangd before his very eyes. He turns more and more sadistic in behaviour. He tortures him unlawfully to accept before the whole public that he killed Vasantasena. Who gave him this right to torture an already tortured man on whom both the law of the land and King have pronounced their separate judgment? Is he above two

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prominent institutions of the time? Or are these institutions giving their full support to him in order to behave the way he wants? Somehow or another, it is a big question mark on the law of the land and the King.Sakara orders Chandals to flog him to speak out.What emanates from Charudatta's mouth is full of pathos reminiscent of King Edward of Christopher Marlowe's tragedy Edward ll:

> "CHARUDATTA (mournfully) Having fallen in this fathomless big ocean of calamity,I feel neither terror nor sorrow in my mind. But only one thing - the fire of popular ignominy,burns me,when now I am asked to say- 'I killed my beloved.' " (Mrichchhakatika 215-216)

To the audience, it appears that an innocent person is going to be executed. This is an appalling feeling for them. All Aristotelian 'pity' and 'fear/terror' as well as 'Catharsis' is there. There is also 'hubris' and 'Hamartia' there. Maybe Charudatta's virtue and excessive goodness is his 'Hamartia.'The stage is grim. The Chandals are ready, but they tell each other to begin first. First, Chandal says that his father, the former executioner, always instructed him to wait for the other executioner to begin or linger purposefully. Never haste in hanging, though they have installed Charudatta at stake. Any moment, the lever may be pulled, and this drama of human life for Charudatta will end forever. But no they say that some good news of victory of the state or birth of a child may take place in King's family, or some such happy tidings may come for the state and King, and King wants to acknowledge God's thanks by an act of mercy. The King may announce following this event that all those going to be hanged today or incarcerated may be freed from the punishment. So, these Chandals are lingering deliberately under the impression of such anticipation. They would have to repent in the wake of such an announcement, if any. Chandals are usually hard-hearted, but they exude a human touch, unlike Sakara. In the meantime, the mendicant Sarvilaka appears on the stage along with Vasantasena, clearing the airs. Aristotelian 'Peripeteia'and 'Anagnorisis' happen here.Sakara becomes apparently perturbed. Like Shylock, he must be thinking to flee or complain of chest pain. But it is too late. His identity is revealed, and so is the true picture of the corrupt legal procedure. King Palaka's days of tyranny and self-willed rule come to an abrupt end. Justice and order are restored.Aryaka has replaced Palaka as King. The incumbent King admires Charudatta, and he tells him that he may choose for Sakara whatever punishment he deems fit. Sakara prostrates before Charudatta and implores his mercy and forgiveness. This reminds one of T.S. Eliot's phenomenal line from his poem Gerontion: 'After such knowledge, what forgiveness?' Charudatta again sets an example by replying evil with goodness. He forgives him. So this

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way, Charudatta remained noble throughout. The dialogue that follows between the two is remarkable:

> SAKARA(to Charudatta): Save me, sir, you who are the refuge of the helpless!
>
> CHARUDATTA (mercifully): Oh, pity! I promise safety to you who seek my protection! You are safe!" (Mrichchhakatika 224)

The whole story has kept Charudatta's wife, Dhuta, much in the background except for a few appearances now and then. The marriage of Dhuta and Charudatta is in perfect tune with their nature and character. But Vasantasena's affection for Charudatta far surpasses any affection shown by any character in the play towards him, and his for her is equally vibrant. The reader may ask why Charudatta's wife, Dhuta, did not figure much in the life of her husband. Or is Vasantasena's preoccupation with Charudatta not liked by Dhuta? So, she prefers to be in the background. These are the points open to debate and discussion. But Vasantasena, in the depth and intensity of her love, reminds me of Hamlet's feeling for Ophelia, who said that his love for her was greater than all the love of forty thousand brothers taken together. My impression of the play is that truth suffers a lot, but some divine miracle is continuously operating to salvage it from evil. Sakara's true face is before everyone sees it, and Charudatta and Vasantasena are shining. After such suffering at the hands of Sakara, both Vasantasena and Charudatta have legitimate reasons to punish the villain. King Palaka reaps his misdeeds. Charudatta sets the example of 'forget and forgive' reminding us of Shakespearean The Tempest, a reconciliation Romance written towards the end of Shakespearean career and encompasses the whole philosophy of life in one sentence: 'the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance.' This play may be considered one of the most important classical plays couched in Christian dictum. It is remarkable for its excellent treatment of innate human qualities on the one hand and corrupt social system on the other hand. It fulfills the requirement of a Prakrana play, a domestic play. People like Charudatta and Vasantasena are still suffering at the hands of men like Sakara. Ironically, our law and court also fail to know who the criminals are and thus depart from their vouchsafed duty. This play is a big slap on the face of the legal system, which always listens to the powerful and influential people in society, and knowing pretty well that they are punishing the innocent and letting off the guilty, they have no compunction at all. I say that the law has to strictly abide by its self-proclaimed, oft-quoted dictum: Onee innocent person may not be penalized, and a thousand guilty ones may go unpunished.' So, this play still holds relevance after a gap of thousands of years. It is a modern play, a social tragedy, and an

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excellent depiction of all spheres of life encapsulated in its compact ten acts that have ten catchy heads. The thought, diction, style, structure, and spectacle are very beautiful and well carved out. Dialogues, events, episodes, music, and melody are all witty and emotionally treated.

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