

*Discuss the Significance of the Plot of The Clay Toy Cart written by Shudraka.*

*Mricchakatika is a compound word, which can be translated as "The Clay Toy Cart." The title is significant at many levels. Mricchakatika has a pretty complex plot. The complexity lies chiefly in terms of the events, situations, and characterization. But given its complexity, it moves at a very quick pace. The several sub-plots that pepper the entire play are skillfully but logically interwoven with the main plot. The entire play is crafted around the life of Cārudatta, the protagonist while the sub-plots feature prominent secondary characters. It is impossible and futile to narrate the entire story of Mricchakatika in this space.*

*Mricchakatika comprises ten acts and reveals with two major motifs: the society during Cārudatta's time, and the political upheavals in his country, Ujjainī. Both themes are inextricably linked. Some scholars opine that the description of Ujjainī's political conditions in the play form invaluable (albeit indirect) primary sources to study the*

PG SEM- II  
CC-7  
Shudrak : The Clay Cart

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history of India of the period. It is also important to remember that the playwright, Sudraka was himself a king. Mricchakatika is peopled by the weak king, Palaka (literally: ruler) and his overbearing and villainous brother-in-law, Shakara (or Samsthanaka) whose reign impoverishes the economy and generates a seething rebellion.

Cārudatta the protagonist, is a Brahmin who was once a prosperous businessman engaged in overseas trading but has fallen on bad times. Cārudatta is respected by everybody for his generosity. We get an idea of his flawless reputation in the incident when Aryaka the rebel, sneaks into Charudatta's chariot. At the palace gates, the guards don't do a security check because it is Cārudatta's chariot. Cārudatta's character epitomizes the difference between life and living.

The other main character is Vasantasena, the renowned courtesan famed for her beauty and noble qualities. In the first act, Shakara, the king's brother-in-law, who lusts after

PG SEM- II  
CC-7  
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her, approaches her when she's strolling in the garden. When he tries to force her, she begins to flee, and manages to escape by hiding in Cārudatta's house. She hands her jewelry to Cārudatta for safekeeping. The jewelry is then stolen by Sharvilaka so he can free his beloved, Madanika who's employed as Vasantasena's maid. However, Madanika realizes that the jewels belong to Vasantasena and tells her that Cārudatta sent them through Sharvilaka instead of telling her the truth about the robbery. Yet, Vasantasena releases Madanika from her services after she listens to the lovers' conversation and is moved by it. When Cārudatta learns of the theft, his wife gives him her own necklace so he can compensate for the loss. Maitreya, Cārudatta's close friend and assistant-who also lives with him-agrees to deliver the necklace to Vasantasena.

Sudraka also tells us about an ex-servant of Cārudatta, who is a compulsive gambler. When creditors bay for his blood, he hides himself in Vasantasena's house. Vasantasena on hearing that he was employed with Cārudatta, is pleased

PG SEM- II  
CC-7  
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*and pays off his debts. This causes a transformation in the gambler, and he renounces the world to become a Bhikshu, a Buddhist monk. The dialogue and the situation leading up to his transformation is an extraordinary literary feat that evokes Rasa akin to a fine delicacy.*

*In the fifth act, love fully blossoms between Cārudatta and Vasantasena when she again visits his house on the pretext that she had gambled away the necklace (belonging to Cārudatta's wife). In place of the necklace, she offers him her own jewelry. The next morning as Vasantasena gets ready to leave, she notices Cārudatta's son Rohasena throwing a tantrum. He doesn't want the toy clay cart, which Cārudatta's maid has brought him; he only wants a toy cart made of gold. Moved, Vasantasena places her jewelry inside the toy cart, and the child is pacified.*

*The subsequent acts narrate how:*

*Vasantasena was tortured and strangled by Shakara  
She was saved by the bhikshu (the transformed gambler)*

*Cārudatta was implicated for Vasantasena's murder and the theft of her jewelry*

*The rebel Aryaka, overthrew the existing King*

*Cārudatta's was proven innocent and regained his prosperity under the new regime*

*What also interests us in this play is the superb characterisation. Cārudatta is a symbol of all that is magnanimous in this world. It is a magnanimity that inspires, spreads, and sustains goodness among other people. We have a few instances of this in Mricchakatika.*

*The first is the character of Vasantasena's mother, a despicable woman. She has an opportunity to help convict Cārudatta unfairly but doesn't do so the moment she looks at him. One is reminded of DVG's immortal line, "the flicker of goodness that shines in people at times is the translation of the Brahman."*

*Equally, the very mention of Cārudatta's name saves the gambler, and causes him to pursue higher goals, which in turn saves Vasantasena's life.*

PG SEM- II  
CC-7  
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*Cārudatta's finds humour even in his miserable condition. It is not hard to imagine the plight of a person used to a life of luxury suddenly reduced to penury. In the first act, Cārudatta laments at length on his loss of wealth but that lament is not for selfish reasons or out of self-pity. His anguish is because he suddenly finds himself unable to help those less fortunate than himself.*

*Such is Cārudatta's zest for life that he appreciates Sharvilaka's (the thief) ingenuity in carving a hole in the wall of his own house. He knows he has lost the jewels entrusted to his safekeeping, but doesn't grieve. At another level, it shows that he lives only in the present: he neither craves for the luxurious times he used to live in nor hopes for better days ahead. His large-heartedness, although taken to the extreme, comes to the fore when in the final act, he asks the (new) king to pardon Shakara.*

*Mricchakatika ends on a happy, hopeful note. It continues to remain an enduring classic of world literature and has earned world renown. It has been translated into multiple*

PG SEM- II  
CC-7  
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*languages both in India and the world and has seen repeat performances across the globe including in England, France, Germany, and the US.*