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MJC I

Unit-3: Sudraka Mrichchhakatika

Write Summary of the Play Mrichchhakatika.

1 "The Little Clay Cart" or Mrichchhakatika tells the story of a Brahman named Charudatta, who despite being a member of the highest caste, is not endowed with riches because he gave them all out to people in need. Despite his misfortunes, Charudatta continues with his duties as a Brahman, helping the people and giving advice where he can. Vasantasena, a courtesan, falls in love with Charudatta as he is preaching at one of the temples. Despite being happily married, Charudatta also falls for Vasantasena, and they start an affair. Vasantasena sees Charudatta in secret and gives him expensive gifts, one which puts him in trouble after it's used as evidence in a murder case. After Samsthanaka strangles Vasantasena, he thinks that she is dead and frames the murder on the Brahman. Charudatta refuses to be incriminated, but one of Vasantasena's knick-knacks is found at his house. The judges find him guilty, believing that he killed the victim to steal the jewellery from her. The tyrant King Palaka orders his execution for the crime, but before he is killed, Vasantasena reappears and saves him. The story ends with Charudatta's wealth and position reinstated by the new king Ryaka and his wife accepting Vasantasena as the Brahman's second lover.

Charudatta is a generous young man who, through his charitable contributions to unlucky friends and the general public welfare, has severely impoverished himself and his family. Though deserted by most of his friends and embarrassed by deteriorating living conditions, he has maintained his reputation in Ujjayini as an honest and upright man with a rare gift of wisdom and many important men continue to seek his counsel. Though happily married and the recent father of a young son, Rohasena, Charudatta is enamoured of Vasantasena, a courtesan of great wealth and reputation. At a chance encounter at the temple of Kama she returns his affection, though the matter is complicated when Vasantasena finds herself pursued by Samsthanaka, a half mad brother-in-law of King Palaka, and his retinue. When the men threaten violence, Vasantasena flees, seeking safety with Charudatta. Their love blossoms following the clandestine meeting, and the courtesan entrusts her new lover with a casket of jewellery in an attempt to ensure a future meeting. Her plan is thwarted, however, when a thief, Sarvilaka, enters Charudatta's home and steals the jewels in an elaborate scheme to buy the freedom of his lover, Madanika, who is Vasantasena's slave and confidant. The courtesan recognizes the jewellery, but she accepts the payment anyway and frees Madanika to marry. She then attempts to contact Charudatta and inform him of the situation, but before she can make contact he panics and sends Vasantasena a rare pearl necklace that had belonged to his wife, a gift in great excess of the value of the stolen jewellery. In recognition of this, Charudatta's friend, Maitreya, cautions the Brahmin against further association, fearing that Vasantasena is, at worst, scheming to take from Charudatta the few possessions he still has and, at best, a good intentioned bastion of bad luck and disaster.

Refusing to take this advice, Charudatta makes Vasantasena his mistress and she eventually meets his young son. During the encounter, the boy is distressed because he has recently enjoyed playing with his friend's toy cart of solid gold and no longer wants his own clay cart that his nurse has made for him.

Taking pity on him in his sadness, Vasantasena fills his little clay car with her own jewelry, heaping his humble toy with a mound of gold before departing to meet Charudatta in a park outside the city for a day's outing. There she enters a fine carriage, but soon discovers that she is in a gharry belonging to Samsthanaka, who remains enraged by her previous affront and is madly jealous of the love and favour she shows to Charudatta. Unable to persuade his henchmen to kill her, Samsthanaka sends his retinue away and proceeds to strangle Vasantasena and hide her body beneath a pile of leaves. Still seeking vengeance, he promptly accuses Charudatta of the crime. Though Charudatta proclaims his innocence, his presence in the park along with his son's possession of Vasantasena's jewels implicate the poverty stricken man, and he is found guilty and condemned to death by King Palaka. Unbeknownst to all, however, the body identified as Vasantasena's was actually another woman. Vasantasena had been revived and befriended by a Buddhist monk who nursed her back to health in a nearby village.

Just 'as Charudatta faces execution, Vasantasena appears and, seeing the excited crowd, intervenes in time to save him from execution and his wife from throwing herself onto the funeral pyre. Together the three declare themselves a family. Reaching the courts, Vasantasena tells the story of her near death and, following her testimony, Samsthanaka is arrested and the good Prince Aryaka deposes the wicked King Palaka. His first acts as the newly declared sovereign is to restore Charudatta's fortune and give him an important position at court. Following this good will, Charudatta demonstrates in the final act his enduring virtue and chancy, appealing to the King for pardon on behalf of Samsthanaka who is subsequently declared free.