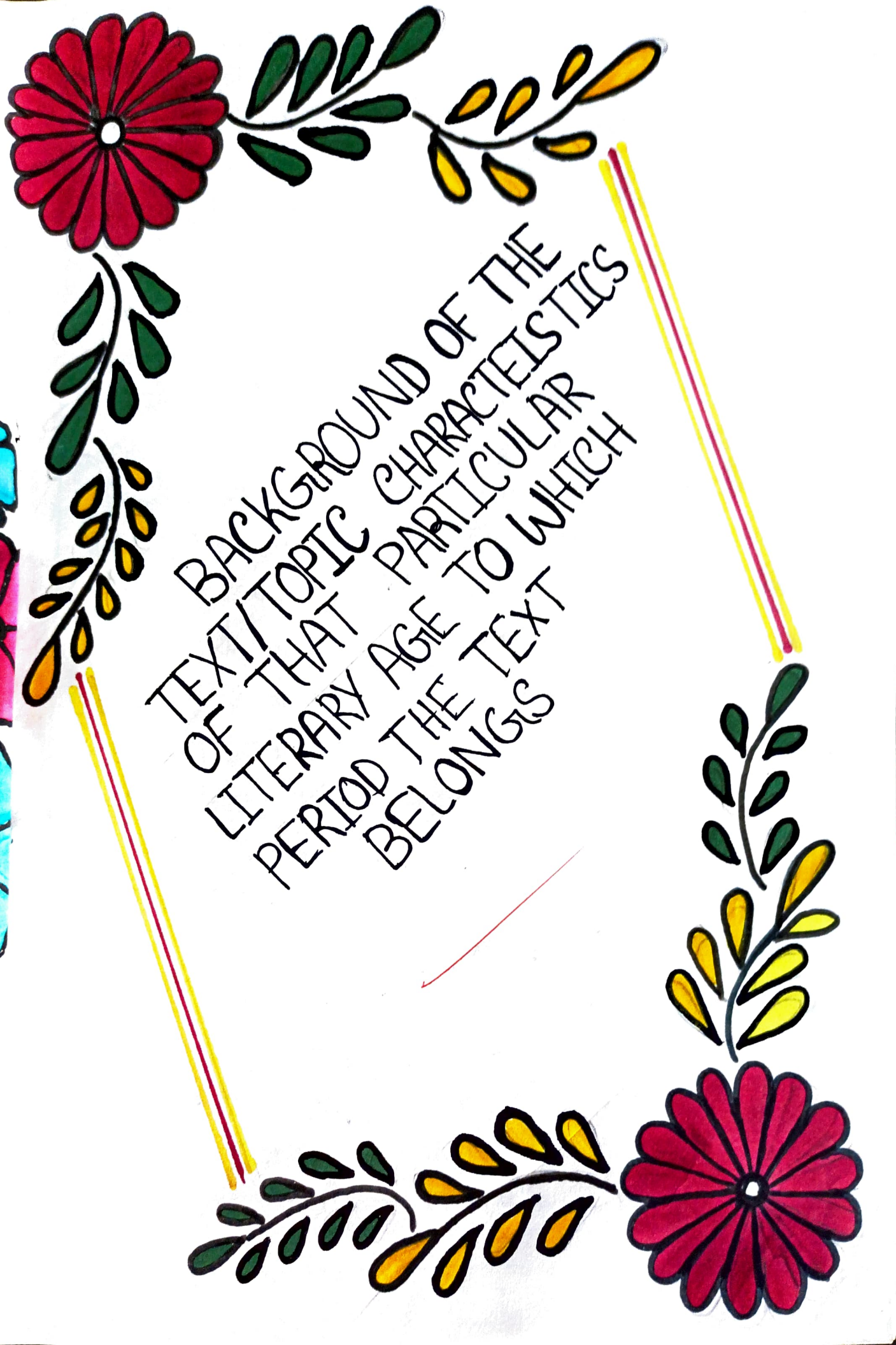


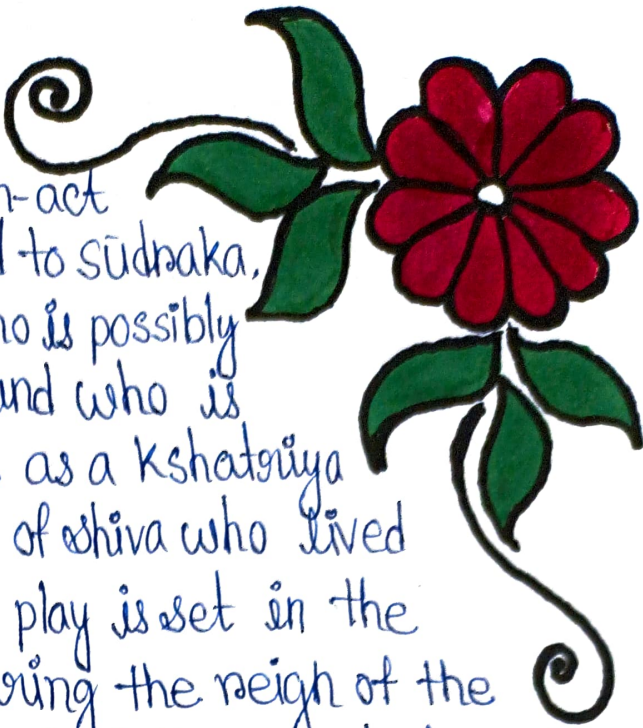


INDIAN CLASSICAL LITERATURE TOPIC -

मेघदूतम्



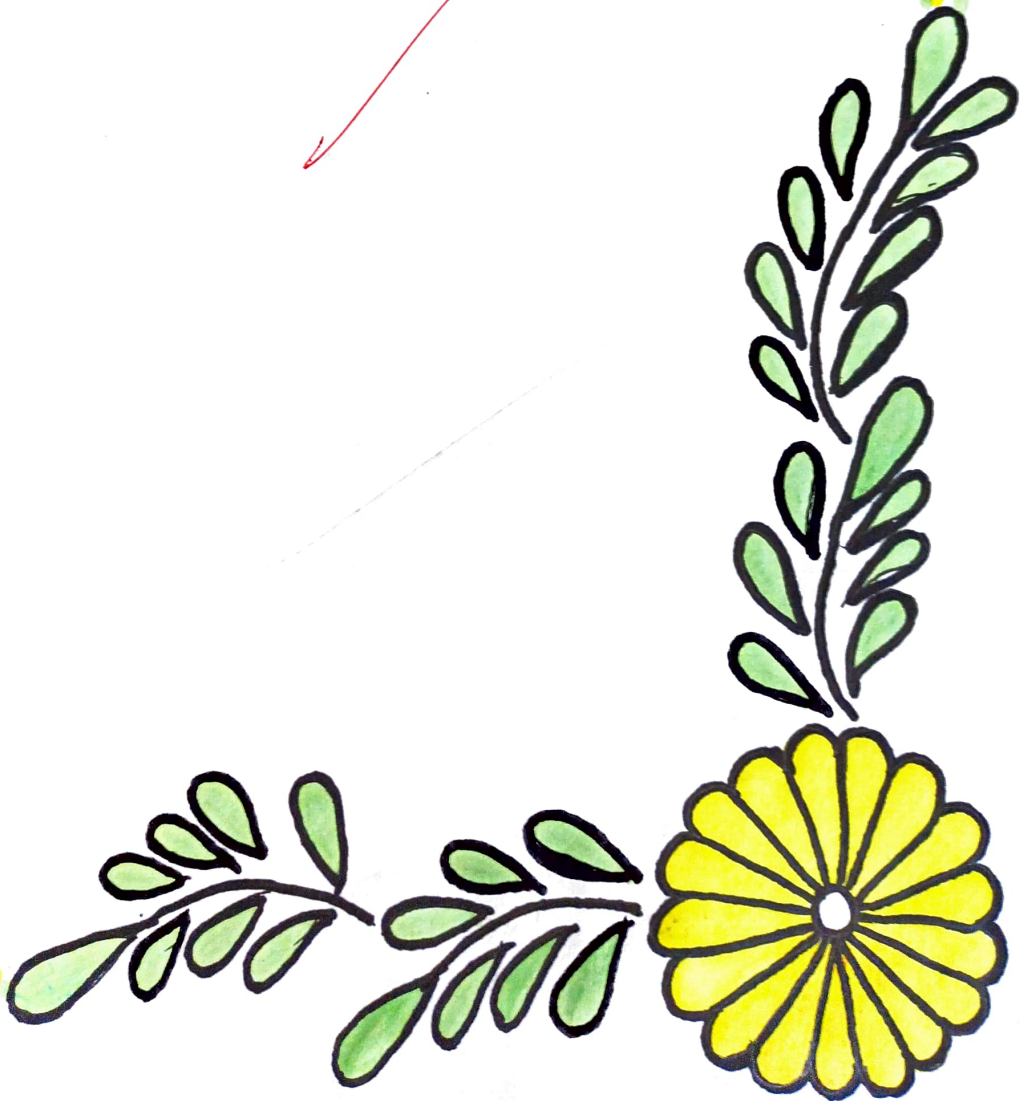
BACKGROUND OF THE
TEXT/TOPIC CHARACTERISTICS
OF THAT PARTICULAR
LITERARY AGE TO WHICH
PERIOD THE TEXT
BELONGS



Mṛicchhakatika is a ten-act Sanskrit drama attributed to Sūdraka, an ancient playwright who is possibly from the 5th century CE and who is identified by the prologue as a Kshatriya king as well as a devotee of Shiva who lived for above 110 years. The play is set in the ancient city of Ujjayini during the reign of the king Pālaka, near the end of the Pradyota dynasty that made up the first quarter of the fifth Century BCE. The Central story is that of a noble but impoverished young Brahmin, Sanskrit Cōrudatta, who falls in love with a wealthy courtesan or nagorvadhū, Sanskrit; Vasantasena. Despite their mutual affection, however, the couple's lives and love are threatened when a vulgar Courtier, Samsthānaka, also known as Shakara, begins to aggressively pursue Vasantasena.

There may be some connection between the name of the playwright and his background that tells us the story of his antecedents and source. Contrarily or otherwise, the range and

depth of the play suggest that he had a powerful literary imagination and was well acquainted with Sanskrit writings of his period, apart from being well-versed in the rich learning that ancient writing is known for.





Life with romance, Comedy intrigue and a political subplot detailing the overthrow of the city's despotic ruler by a shepherd, the play is notable among extant Sanskrit drama for its focus on a fictional scenario rather than on a classical tale or legend. *Meichehakatika* also departs from traditions enumerated in the *Natya Shashtra* that specify that dramas should focus on the lives of the nobility and instead incorporates many peasant characters who speak a wide range of Prakrit dialects. The story is thought to be derived from an earlier work called *Charudatta in Poverty* by the playwright Bhasa, though that work survives only in fragments.

Of all the Sanskrit dramas, *Meichehakatika* remains one of the most widely celebrated and often-performed in the West. The work played a significant role in generating interest in Indian theatre.

European interest in Indian theatre audiences following several successful nineteenth century translations and stage productions, most notably Gérard de Nerval and Joseph Méry's highly romanticised French adaptation titled *Le chariot d'enfant* that premiered in Paris in 1850, as well as a critically acclaimed "anarchist" interpretation by Victor Barucand called *Le chariot de terre cuite* that was produced ~~to~~ by the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in 1895.

Unlike other classical plays in Sanskrit the play does not borrow from epics or mythology. The characters of *Sudraka* are drawn from the mundane world. It is peopled with gamblers, courtesans, thieves and so on. That protagonist of the ~~rich~~ play, Chardutta, does not belong to the noble class or royal lineage. Though Vasantasenā is a courtesan, her exemplary attitude and dignified ~~behavior~~ impress the audience. The nobility of the characters does not stem from their social conditioning but from their virtues and behaviour.

PRESENTATION
OF THE
MRICHCHHAKATKA

TRADITIONS IN ANCIENT SANSKRIT DRAMA

Poetry in Sanskrit is divided into two kinds - 'drishya' and 'shravya'. 'Drishya' means something that can be seen or shown. On the other hand, 'shravya' can be heard or spoken. Dramas come under the 'drishya' category. Drama in Sanskrit is generally called 'nupak'. According to Bharata Muni's Natyashastra, a 'nupak' has three chief elements - 'Vastu' i.e. 'Plot'; 'neta' i.e. the 'hero' and 'rasa' or 'Sentiment'.

STAGES IN AN ANCIENT SANSKRIT PLAY

Like the five act Shakespearean play, the ancient Sanskrit drama also has five major stages but they are termed differently. These are: 'arambh' or beginning, 'yati' or effort, 'praptyasha' or expectation of accomplishment, 'viyatapti' or achievement through elimination of hurdles and, 'phalagam' or the final attainment of the desired object.

THE AUTHOR OF MRICHCHHAKATIKA



Shudraka is supposed to be the author of the play. The prologue to Mrichchhakatika mentions him as a great king and scholar with thorough knowledge of the Vedas. He also trained elephants and performed the 'ashwamedha' yajna. He died at the age of 100 years. However, there are no historical records to prove that there even was a king named Shudraka. There are only literary references.

SETTING

Place :- Ujjayini

Time :- probable 5th century Bc

PLOT



The play has complex plot. The principal or 'Mukhya' plot is that of Chorusdutta and Vasantsena. The secondary or 'prasangik' plot concerns King Palaka and Aranya.



RASA OR SENTIMENT IN SANSKRIT DRAMA

There may be eight or nine kinds of sentiment or 'rasa' - 'Sringari', 'hasya', 'karun', 'raudra', 'veer', 'bhayanak', 'vibhats' and 'adbhut'. One opinion is that the ninth 'rasa' is the absence of all the other 'rasas' i.e. 'shant'. In *Mrichchhakatika* the prominent 'rasa' is 'Sringari' accompanied by bits of 'karun' and 'hasya'. The strangulation scene has the 'vibhats' sentiment.

MALE AND FEMALE PROTAGONISTS

Natyashastra speaks about four kinds of heroes - 'dheerodatt', 'dheekalit', 'dheenshant' and 'dheeroddhat'. Choruodutta in *Mrichchhakatika* is a 'dheenshant' hero i.e. he is patient and calm in all situations.

The heroine or 'nayika' can be one of the three kinds - 'swakiya' i.e. the hero's own wife 'pankeya' somebody else's wife, or 'samanya' i.e. a common woman. Vasantisena in *Mrichchhakatika* is a 'samanya'.

TEN ACTS OF THE PLAY

(Arthur Ryder's translation: The Little Clay Cart)

1. The Gems are Left behind.
2. The Shamposers who Gambled.
3. The Hole in the wall.
4. Madanika and Shorvilaka.
5. The storm.
6. The Swapping of the Bullock Carts
7. Argyaka's Escape
8. The strangling of Vasantsena
9. The Trial
10. The End - The play ends with an epilogue.

THEMES

Poverty and nobility
Narrative of love
Personal relations
Contemporary social conditions
Regency and Common man
Position of women
Romance / comedy

CHARACTERS

Major Characters :-

Vasantsena (female lead) - a Cavtesan Charudutta
Charudutta (protagonist) - an impoverished Brahmin.

Maitreya (Charudutta's friend) - a poor Brahmin.
Samsthanaka/sakona (antagonist) - a Courtier,
king Palaka's brother-in-law.

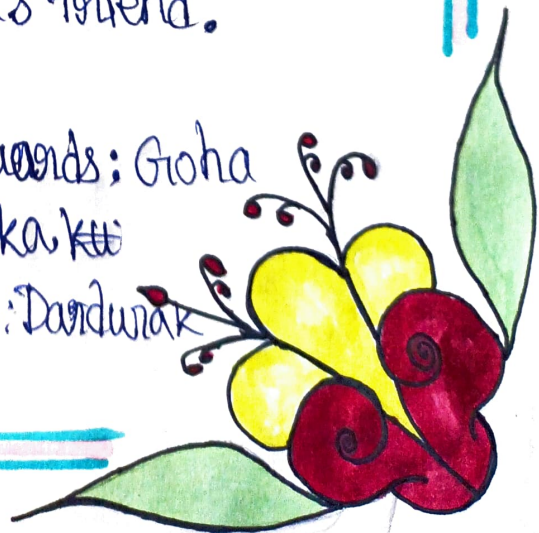
Minor Characters :-

Palaka - reigning king, Argyaka - prince
in exile, deposes Palaka, Dhuta - Charudutta's wife
Rohasena - Charudutta's son, Vardhamanaka -
Charudutta's servant, Madanika - Vasantsena's
Confidant and maid-servant.

Randanika - Vasantsena's maid-servant, cheta - Sam-
sthanaka's servant, Sharvilaka - a Brahmin thief
Mathura - a gambling den master, Samvahaka - a
gambler, vita - Samsthanaka's friend.

Other Characters :-

Vihaka, Chandanaka - Captains of guards; Groha
Ahinta - executioners, Karpuraka
Kumbhalaka - Vasantsena's servants; Dardurak
a gambler, judge, etc.



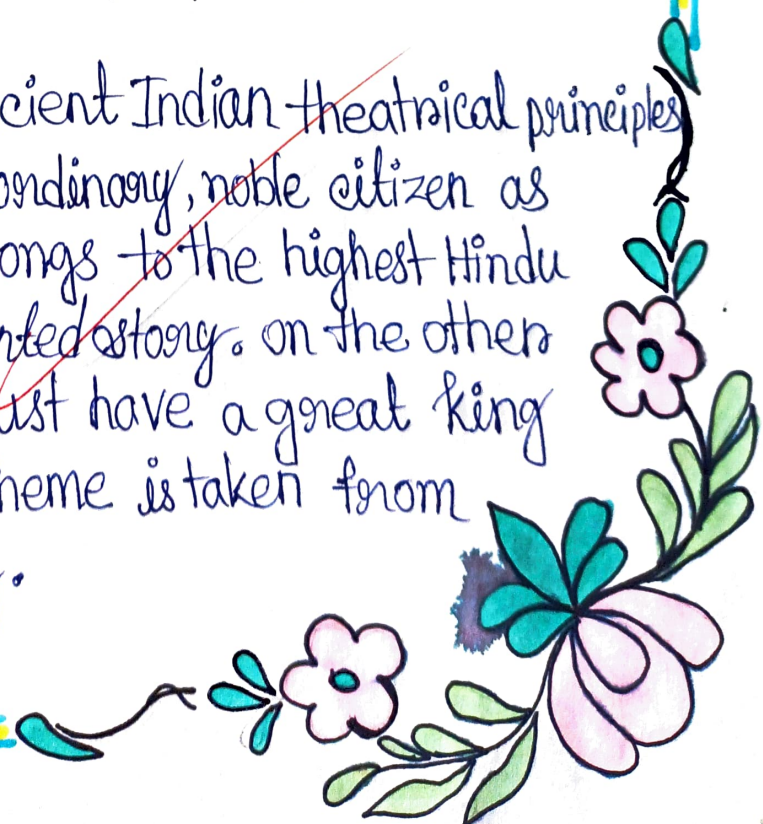
PROLOGUE AND SUTRADHAR

The ancient Sanskrit plays began with prologue. An initial prayer called 'nandi' was recited. The speaker of the prologue is called the sutradhar. He also mentions the author of the play. The prologue or 'prastavana' may be either 'prarochana' or 'amukh'. In the 'amukh' the sutradhar talks with one of the characters.

An ancient Sanskrit play has five to ten acts. The stage never remains empty. At the end of the play a prayer/benevolence is chanted. It is called 'bharat Vakya'. The death of the hero is never shown on stage. In fact, ancient Sanskrit plays never ended in tragedy.

IT IS PRAKARAN NOT A NATAKA

According to the ancient Indian theatrical principles a prakaran has an ordinary, noble citizen as protagonist but he belongs to the highest Hindu castes. It is an invented story. On the other hand, a nataka must have a great king as protagonist. Its theme is taken from epics or mythology.

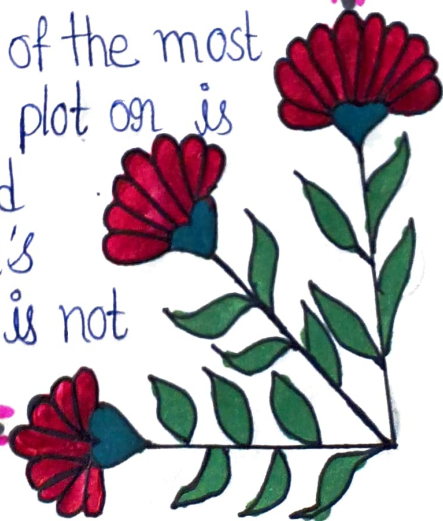


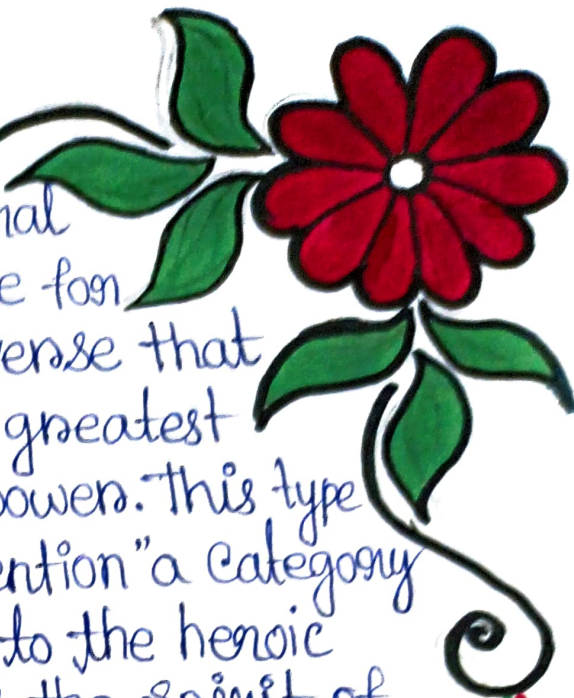
CRITICAL
NOTE ON
THAT PARTICULAR
MRICHCHHAKATIKA



Mṛichchhakatika or The Little clay cart is an ancient Sanskrit play written by King Sudraka (Ujjayini) in around 3rd Century A.D. It is one of the oldest of all the so far known Sanskrit plays in Indian Literature. Concerning the life the date and the very identity of the author King Sudraka, we are curiously ignorant. No other work is ascribed to him and we have no direct information about him till date beyond the somewhat fanciful and exaggerated self praising statements in the prologue of this play. Surely there are many tales, which cluster about the name of King Sudraka but none of them found so far represents him as an author. A few years back the age and even the authorship of this play was uncertain. After the unexpected discovery of the plays of Bhāsa provided us with new data and brought light to the drama Chārudatta whose enlarged and completed version Mṛichchhakatika seems to be.

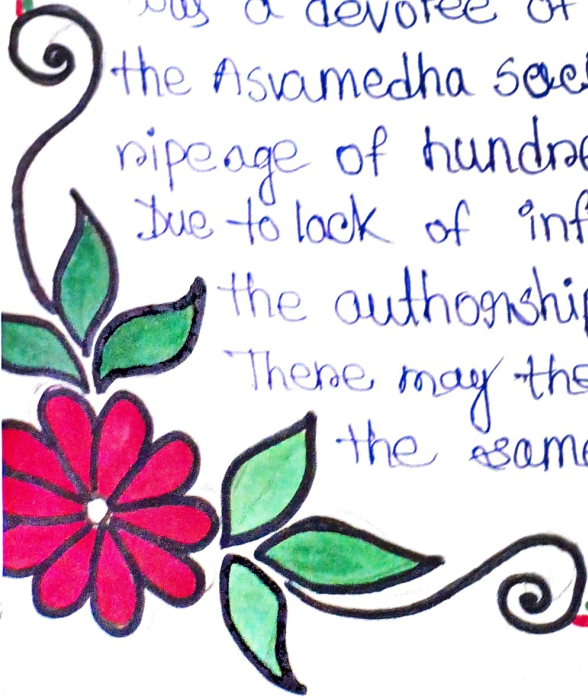
Mṛichchhakatika is one of the most famous prakaranas i.e. play whose plot or is partly derived from the history and partly is a creation of the author's fancy of the ancient India that is not





based on the epic material and is full of naseals. It is natural that Sudraka should choose for the expression of matters so diverse that type of drama which gives the greatest scope to the author's creative powers. This type is the so-called "drama of invention" a category curiously subordinated in India to the heroic drama, the plot of which fulfils the spirit of the drama of invention, as defined by the Sanskrit Canons of dramaturgy.

According to its prologue, Sudraka was a kshatriya king of some country brave and handsome in appearance knowing Rigveda, Samaveda and mathematics. He knew the art of regarding courtesans and the science of training elephants. was a devotee of Lord Siva and had performed the Asvamedha sacrifice. The great died at the ripe age of hundred years and ten ~~was~~ day due to lack of information, facts and evidences the authorship of this play is still uncertain. There may theories prevailing about the same, but none of them could be considered reliable.



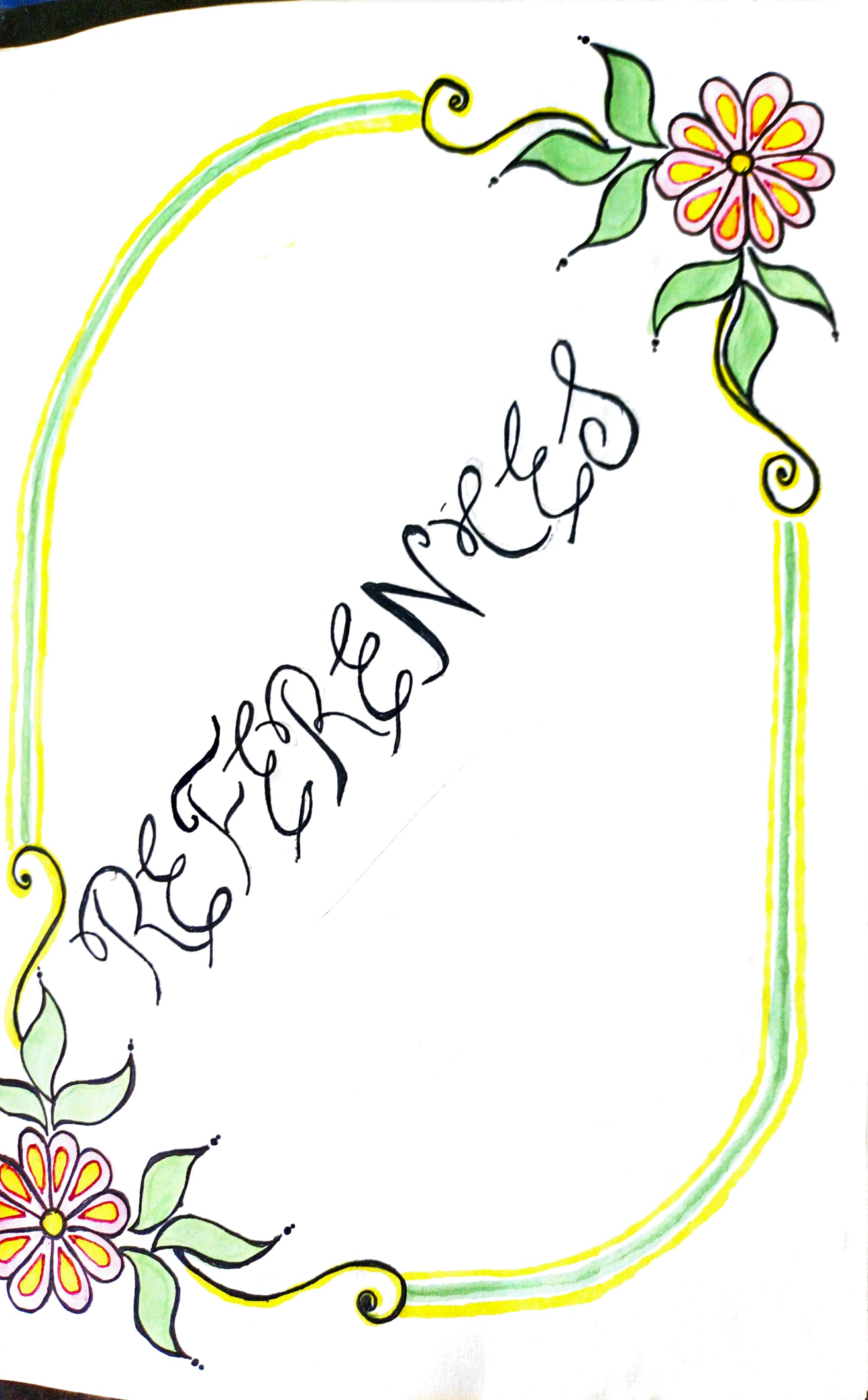


Kalidas - the grace of poetry "and Bhavabhuti - the master of eloquence" are far more intimately allied in spirit than is either of them with the author of *Murichchhakatika*. Kalidas and Bhavabhuti are Hindus of the Hindus: the *Sakuntala* latter Acts of Rama could have been written nowhere save in India, but *Sudraka*, alone in the long line of Indian dramatists.

At the same time, the play has characters who are weak ambitious individuals. They are driven by the urge to succeed and wield power in their world. It does not matter whether they adopt fair or unfair means in the pursuit of their goals, since morality to norms is not their strong points. Barring a few such as Choudatta, the people in the play bear resemblance to ordinary mortals given to pleasure of the flesh. If rich, they indulge in vices such as gambling, if poor they break the rules of the road and rob, waylay, resort to lies and half-truth, cheat & swindle.



We notice in this India, a full-fledged estate with a king the court, judiciary, traders servants, slave, among a whole variety of life pursuits including concubines doing business and courtesans entertaining clients in full view of the society at large the playwright sudraka has ensured that the action of the play is confined in the main to such a city as the one described but which at the same time takes its broader inspirations from the nearby villages and forests "the lifetime of the world of prosperity and comfort. In the next section, we shall look at the thematic richness in *Murichchakatika*.



The play was translated into English, notably by Arthur W. Ryder in 1905 as the little clay court. Ryder's version was enacted at the Hearst Greek Theatre in Berkeley in 1907, and in New York city in 1924 at the Neighborhood Playhouse, which was then an off-Broadway theatre, at the Theatre de lys in 1953, and at the Potboilers Art Theater in Los Angeles in 1926, when it featured actors such as James A. Marcus, Symona Boniface and Gale Gordon. The play has been adapted in several Indian languages and performed by various theatre groups and directors, like Habib Tanvir.

① Mrichha Katika, a silent film by Suchet Singh made in 1920.

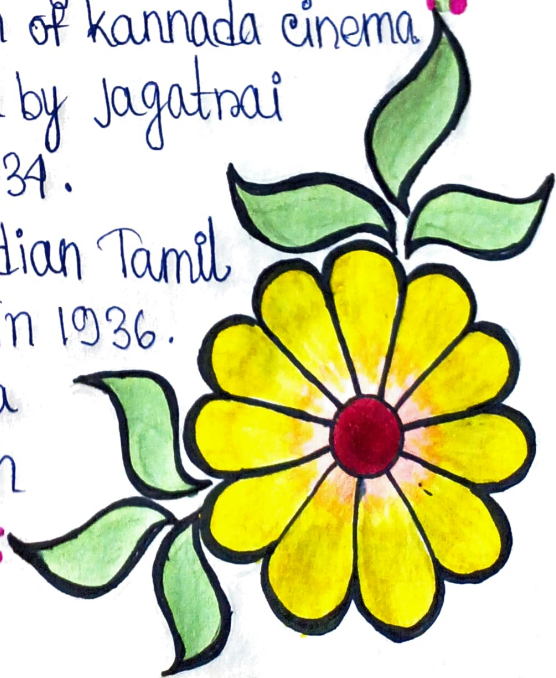
② Vasantsena, a silent film by Dadasaheb Phalke made in 1929.

③ Vasantasena, starring Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, first silent film of Kannada cinema

④ Vasantsena, a film by Jagatnai Pesumal Advani made in 1934.

⑤ Vasantasena, an Indian Tamil film by Raja Sandow P.K. made in 1936.

⑥ Vasantha Sena, a Kannada film by Ramayyar



Shirur made in 1941.

⑦ Vasantsena, a Hindi film by Gayanan Jagindar in 1942.

⑧ Sadhna, a Hindi film by B. R. Chopra in 1958.

⑨ Vasantha sena, a Telugu film by B. S. Ranga in 1967.

⑩ Utsav, a 1984 Hindi erotic drama film by Girish Karnad.

⑪ Vasantha Sena, a 1985 Malayalam film by K. Vijayan.

24/01/23

