
UNIT 4 *MRICHCHHAKATIKA*: FACETS OF CHARACTERISATION

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall discuss a few characters in **Sudraka**'s play *Mrichchhkatika* from the point of view of their role and function in the text and their complexities. The unit will also examine the mental, emotional, and physical space that women share and analyse **Sudraka**' against the backdrop of the play.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

We shall be helped in achieving our aim by a close look at the way the characters conduct themselves in the play. There is also an angle from where the authorial understanding behind them can be revealed. In the latter sense, characters are not what they are supposed to be in real life. This is never the case. Instead, the characters are invariably forged by the author in his imagination and on the pages of the text. Thus, they may not be considered as characters, but as characterisations. Through this route, we reach not only the values and norms that characters observe, but also the mind of the author that picks up specific temperaments for dramatic depiction. We shall look at the protagonists of the play next – *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena*.

4.2 *CHARUDATTA AND VASANTASENA AS CENTRAL CHARACTERS*

Let us begin with a comment on these characters that have found a place in *Mrichchhkatika* for projecting the authorial intent. *Charudatta* is described as “a Brahmana merchant who is a citizen of Ujjayini.” Two things are important in his case—one, that he is placed in the highest caste, and two,

that he is a merchant by profession. The combination of these two raises his social level very high. This is a combination of qualities of heart (such as sympathy), and capability to conduct worldly activities. The pragmatic view shows him as a man of the world that is driven by the notion of success. He is placed in the category of a hero who is of evolved sensibility, tolerance, level-headedness and magnanimity. He is a leader of men. As such, he would be surrounded by people and would win credit for what he might do for others. The playwright **Sudraka** has chosen *Charudatta* in preference to the kingly figure meant to rule the city. Is it not idealisation of a person? The crucial characteristic in him that draws our attention is of his being a lover. He remains a lover till the end of the play, and nothing can deter him from his chosen path. The trait of love sustains him as a human being, and increases his appeal to the audience.

Love joins *Charudatta* with *Vasantasena*, a courtesan. Her job in life is of providing entertainment to the privileged in the city. To perform such a role, she is highly accomplished in the arts, such as dancing and singing. Her youth and good looks enhance her value in society. Such a person would not be ordinarily associated with love that might align her with an individual. Love might take her out of the ambit of entertainment she is supposed to provide. Love is a matter of choice, and from the point of view of the profession chosen by her, she is denied such a choice. A woman of entertainment available to the collective will is supposed to consider the citizens as her clients who will buy her company and attention. As a courtesan, her concern cannot be the pursuit of virtue and morality. But she loves *Charudatta* and, therefore, tries to gain virtue by leaving her profession aside and foregoing money and a life of luxury. From the character of *Vasantasena* stems the need for an analysis of the private space of women as society was still segregated between men and women and their respective gender roles.

4.3 THE PRIVATE SPACE OF WOMEN

As mentioned above, the action of the play reveals love as a purifying, and chastening venture. It involves self denial of good things and redefines pleasure on its own terms. This lays a emphasis on those qualities that cannot be measured by money or social standing. We shall later consider this as the yardstick with which to measure the significance of characters in the play. First, however, let us look at a small group of women characters engaged in talking about ordinary matters of living within the private space of the home. This will give us a peep into the creative nature of women in ancient India, even as the world of that time was governed by the hierarchical power of men. The following from Act II may be the starting point of characterisation:

Vasanatsena: Friend, what next?

Madanika: Lady, you have not spoken about anything. How, then, do you ask 'what next'?

Vasanatsena: What did I say?

Madanika: You asked, 'what next'?

Vasanatsena: (Knitting her eyebrows): Ah! Yes!

Maid (approaching): Lady, the mother asks that you should take your bath and go through the worship of the deities.

Vasanatsena: Friend, tell mother that I am not going to bathe today, let therefore the Brahmana himself perform the worship.

Maid: As Your Ladyship commands. (exit)

Madanika: Madam, it is my love that prompts me to inquire, and not the disposition to find faults; so tell me, please, what all this means.

Vasantasena: Madanika, what do you see me to be like?

Madanika: I can see from Your Ladyship's absent-mindedness that you have fallen in love with somebody whom you have treasured in your heart.

Vasantasena: Rightly you have guessed! Clever in fathoming the hearts of others, you are indeed Madanika. (Singh 84)

Let us pause here to see the behavioural norms of specific persons. We note that three women participate in the goings on, even as the mother in the wings (mother of *Vasantasena* presumably), is sending instructions for *Vasantasena* to follow (This adds up to four women whose job is to follow the household norms and do the chores. The rest is the conversation that gives these ladies their distinct identities).

In the beginning of the quote, we are struck by the mental alertness of the maidservant *Madanika*. She loves the use of words. Obviously, “*what next*” can be said only when the speaker is in the middle of the conversation. Here, however, the chat is started with the question “*what next?*” At the query of the maidservant *Vasantasena* wakes up from her reverie, and is forced to ask “*what did I say?*” That is an interesting way of starting a conversation. Indeed, *Vasantasena* is lucky that she has such a lively companion as *Madanika*. This would keep the mistress amused and happy all the time, particularly at a moment in time when she is lost in the thought of her lover. The next point in the exchange between *Vasantasena* and *Madanika* is the bathing ritual and being a part of the worship of the deity aspect. The instruction for this comes from *Vasantasena*'s mother. The carrier of the instruction is another woman not mentioned by name and is merely called “Maid.” The response of *Vasantasena* to the word from the mother is that she is not in a mood of getting up from her seat. Note that the mood makes *Vasantasena* say something that goes against the convention of performing the worship. Also, she suggests that the *Brahmana* alone do the worship and leave the house. Yet, the chat continues, this time in the direction of the mistress's absent-mindedness, and whether she is in love. It is clear from the exchanges between the two that love is closer to the heart of both. The interesting part is that the topic draws the two near each other and establishes a sense of equality and sisterhood between them. In this way, the wall of separation between the mistress and the maidservant breaks down and they now have a space of freedom to share. An author/the playwright creates the characters and gives them life. But how does s/he manage to convey a social reality through characterisation, if at all s/he does? The next section will address this question.

4.4 CHARACTERISATION

Before we move further in the discussion, let us explore the issue of characterisation in the hands of the playwright. The playwright has presented *Vasantasena* and *Madanika* as playmates that enjoy gossip around love. The subject also proves beyond doubt that women in ancient India would converse freely and intelligently if they were in private territory with no males to pry into their privacy. Also, that class means little when it comes to agility of the mind. The give and take between *Vasantasena* and *Madanika* shows that it is beyond doubt the fertility of imagination that is shared between women belonging to

the lower and middle rungs of society. It also points towards the fact that the playwright **Sudraka** was a promoter of decorum but he also gave scope to people of different sections to assert selfhood. This is clear from the way the mistress and the maidservant spend time together and secrets between the two are freely shared. Such characterisation helps build an atmosphere of close bonding, a hallmark of humanist representation. Aesthetically, too, it enables the viewer to enter the consciousness of characters on the stage where ideas, notions, sensations and feelings surge and win their own specific expression. Read the following to see how social, ideological and emotional areas are investigated—

Madanika: Well, I am glad indeed! Herein you are indeed obliging the mighty Cupid, who is a glorious festive joy to all young persons. So Your Ladyship will please tell whether he is a king, or a king's favourite, who is thus desired to be served!

Vasantasena: Girl, I want to enjoy, not to serve.

Madanika: Do you love some Brahmana youth, distinguished for his deep erudition?

Vasantasena: I have veneration for all Brahmanas.

Madanika: Do you then love some young merchant, who has amassed a great fortune by visiting many cities?

Vasantasena: Friend, a merchant causes great pain of separation, by going to other countries, leaving behind his beloved even though her love for him be very deep.

Madanika: Madam, he is not a king, nor a king's favourite, nor a Brahmana, nor a merchant. Who may he be then, that my mistress desires?

Vasantasena: Girl, you visited with me the garden of Cupid?

Madanika: I did, Madam.

Vasantasena: And still you ask me, as if you are stranger?

Madanika: I got it! Is he that same gentleman who favourably received my mistress when she sought his help?

Vasantasena: Well, what is his name?

Madanika: My lady, he—of auspicious name—is called the noble Charudatta.

Vasantasena (joyfully): Excellent, Madanika, excellent! You got rightly.

Madanika (to herself): Let me speak to her now. (aloud) My lady, it is heard that he is a poor man.

Vasantasena: Hence it is, that I love him. For a courtesan who fixes her affections on a poor lover would not incur censure from the world.

Madanika: But Madam, do the honey-bees frequent a mango tree which has lost its blossoms?

Vasantasena: And hence they are known as 'honey-suckers' (It means that honey-bee are bit examples of true lovers, since they suck honey – are interested only in honey)

Madanika: Lady, if you desire him, then why is it that you do not now approach him clandestinely, at once?

Vasantasena: Girl, if I were to go to him myself clandestinely, then, being unable to make an adequate return, he may probably make it impossible for me to visit him again, and that I wish to prevent.

Madanika: Is it for this very reason that you deposited the ornament in his hands?

Vasantasena: Girl, you have guessed it correctly!

The mention of Cupid as a “*glorious festive joy*” provides wings to the mind of the maidservant as well as to *Vasantasena*. It also facilitates the entry of the king, the nobleman, the merchant, the man with wealth, the “*Brahmana youth distinguished for his deep erudition*” and outside these, another person who could be a true possessor of dignity and honesty. The last characteristic belongs to *Charudatta*. Apart from characterisation, figures of speech and language too play a major role in a work of art. Let us look at the use of metaphor in the play.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What function does characterisation perform in a drama text? Give instances from *Mrichchhakatika* to explain your point.

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4.5 USE OF METAPHOR

In the previous quote, mark the metaphor of the honey-bees that *Madanika* has used to comment on the love of her mistress. It is teasingly evocative of the beauty and taste of love. In a larger sense, it covers different layers of relationship between *Vasantasena* and *Charudatta*. From the reference to honey-bees, *Vasantasena* takes the cue and frames her own version of false love and lovers. She achieves the interesting interpretation of bees being “honey-suckers” that contains the word-twist and shows the questionable side of love that usually means gaining worldly benefits. For *Vasantasena*, however, love is to be sustained as an enriching factor of life.

Again, in the quoted lines, the entire talk happens within the parameters of the two characters. It leaves an impact on the reader. Among the mentioned categories, *Charudatta* is described as a poor person. This is specifically underlined to hint at the sensitivity and richness of feelings in him. When his name is finally mentioned by *Madanika*, *Vasantasena* has a sense of thrill running down her spine. It also becomes clear finally that of the two women, *Vasantasena* is the more intelligent—note the way she has planned things with respect to continuing her visits to her lover. The revelation of the scheme to *Madanika* is appropriately strategised for meeting the ends of her desire. *Vasantasena* comes forth to the viewer as a deft combination of beauty and intelligence.

So far, we have analysed in brief a minor episode of the play from the point of view of the characters—the way they were conceived by the playwright and then taken further on towards the final execution in the text. In this is reflected the overall attitude of the author *via-a-vis* the world of his time carried by the characters in the play. See how characterisation is commented on by **Jagdish Chandra Mishra** in the following lines:

The significance of Shudraka as a poet-writer consists in the manner of characterisation of Charudatta, Vasantasena, Sarvilaka as well as Sakara. These are figures made of clay, as it were, that came from the contemporary society. The maker of the play in the pattern of Prakarana (a comic representation in the realistic mode) was a master scholar of religious thought, scriptures, old narratives, astrology,

political discourse, Hindu philosophy as well as Sanskrit and Prakrit languages. This is authenticated by the fact that social descriptions along with a highly-evolved language and an extremely appealing style witnessed in the play are rooted in day-to-day facts of life. ... The characterisation in the hands of the poet-author built up through the nature of society and its realistic, subtle and psychological knowledge prove this facet with telling effect.

(Prakash, A. (translation 25-26))

Mishra links characterisation gainfully with details of life that existed in **Sudraka**'s time. In fact, the author and the cultural patterns surrounding him are expressed through the characters in the play. Having looked at the central characters and other women characters we will now turn our attention to the other 'male' characters in the play.

4.6 EXPLORING SARVILAKA

We may now shift from specifically the women characters to a few others. We will also consider other dimensions of human experience and social structures in *Mrichchhakatika* and this may help us recognise and comprehend patterns shedding a new light on the play's happenings. A most outstanding and extraordinary episode in *Mrichchhakatika* is of *Sarvilaka* who is described as a "*Brahmana-adventurer who commits a robbery for obtaining money to ransom-off the servant-girl Madanika whom he loves*" (38). This takes us back to the previous discussion between *Madanika* and *Vasantasena* that tells us about the former's vivacity and wit. A young woman imbued with clever thinking that is at once steeped in friendliness and fair play lets the viewer feel sympathetic towards her. If the said *Brahman*-adventurer succeeds in his mission to set her free through his intervention, it would add to the positive impact that *Mrichchhakatika* as a *prakrana* might leave on us. We are told that the man is taken to robbing and stealing and over time has become a skilled practitioner of the art of thievery. It is indeed exciting to watch the man in action. This is how he announces his arrival in the play:

Sarvilaka: Having made a passage for my business, by the power of my training and physical strength—a passage large enough to easily admit a man of my build—I move about, my sides being scratched by my creeping along the ground, like a snake with his old worn-out body casting off his slough. (102)

This shows that *Sarvilaka* has worked hard to train as a thief. The effort has given him the "*physical strength*" that will come handy for "*creeping along the ground.*" A self-made man, *Sarvilaka* takes pride in having become like a snake that can move into any crevice of a house-wall, enter the house and move around stealthily in search of precious objects, ornaments etc and commit robbery. The metaphor of the snake is complete when casting off "*the worn-out body*" is mentioned. Is he not a well-read man in the know of discussions about literary expression? The answer would be in the affirmative, aptly corroborated by what follows. When *Sarvilaka* looks up and spots the moon "*about to set,*" he bursts forth:

Sarvilaka: This night, in which all the objects are hidden from sight by the pitchy darkness, is concealing me as fondly as a mother conceals her son, a mother in whom all other sentiments are overpowered by the intense blindness of love; I who walk about in

fear of the king's watchmen, and who, supremely brave, am bent upon burgling the houses of others.

**Mrichhakatika: Facets of
Characterisation**

Here, “*the pitchy darkness*” is a soothing phenomenon like that of the protection given by a mother to her son. The comment is extended to take in its fold the mother’s “*intense blindness of love.*” This gives an unconventional connotation to blindness that shines forth since it lights the heart of the child. It appears that *Sarvilaka* is in the heart of a poet using evocative images. Yet more indeed, *Sarvilaka* bears in his heart sharp contradictions of thought. When with the tools he is carrying, he makes a hole in the wall of the house and enters the *antahpur*, he exclaims about his dubious profession:

Let people call, as they will, this a vile trade, which thrives well when people are asleep, and that getting the better of people by cheating them when they are unsuspecting, is mere thieving, and by no means a brave deed. Still, even a condemnable position of independence is preferable to serving others with folded hands.

The case is presented in moral-philosophical terms. He calls thieving an act of cheating since it is done when people are asleep and unsuspecting and, therefore, cannot prevent the act. Note the expression “*a brave deed.*” It tells about the man who would rather think of carrying out great missions than deprive people of their earnings on the sly. But, then, he realises, as he goes into the complexities of the question, that an act of an independent man is better than that of a slave who renders service to his master with folded hands. There is dignity in the former deed, while the latter turns the man into an abject creature. Can we associate a person, with the ability to venture into high intellectual issues, with breaking into houses in the dead of night? In fact, *Sarvilaka* is a poet-artist and philosopher rolled into one. From this point, the playwright **Sudraka** takes him into the persona of an expert in the field of his choice that is taken as subject of deep study. “*Effecting a breach*” is the next step in his scheme:

Sarvilaka: What is that spot, which is loose soft by being sprinkled over with water, so that it would produce no sound when being bored through? Where could be made a hole in the wall, wide but not in sight of the passers-by? What portion of this building is dilapidated, having its masonry worn out by the corroding action of saline exudations? And where shall I not come upon women-folk, and still accomplish my purpose?

(touching the wall) Here's a spot, worn out by saline action, and weakened by being sprinkled every day with water at the sight of the sun and here's a pile of rubbish excavated by rats! My purpose in hand here is as good as accomplished! For this is the best omen of success for us thieves, the sons of Karttikeya, our patron-saint. Now I have to begin my job; what sort of hole shall I make here? In connection with this the divine Kanakasakti has laid down four modes of making a breach they are as follows: to pull out the bricks when they are baked, to chip them off if unbaked, to wet them with water if they are of common clay, and to cut them through if they are of wood. Now this is a wall of baked bricks, so I shall have to pull them out. Here seven kinds of holes are possible. (102-103)

The observance of the details is impressive that in effect builds up a scene of elaborate academic inquiry and the hard work necessary to take the mission

forward. Still more, ancient India had committed scholars in all fields of craft and the arts, including that of robbery. In the quoted lines, there is a reference to *Kartikkeya*. He was a known thinker and a rare genius. Thieves of the day started calling him their patron-saint and father. In this position, they would study his work assiduously and follow it to the last fragment. Imagine the seven holes out of which the appropriate one would be dug into the wall. In the present case, suddenly we see a comic turn, when *Sarvilaka* remarks:

Sarvilaka: When at night other walls were breached by me, as also hard structures, weakened by the action of saltpetre, the neighbours, seeing them in the morning, have condemned my crime, and praised my skill of handiwork as well. (103-104)

The artist in *Sarvilaka* defines the dialectics in his action—together they bring out his practice as subtle since it evokes a mixed response from those who would watch the breach in the wall later. The crime he has committed will obviously be criticised but the skill, as he calls it, will win their appreciation. What is the playwright aiming at if not that every human individual has an innate seed of energy that can only weakly be described as split? Really speaking, however, it is an integrated effort not induced merely by the evil intention but has a highly problematic aspect to it? In the present case, *Sarvilaka* dazzles the audience by the dialectic he carries within him. As such, the narrative is shaping up as an independent episode. It is a different matter, however, that it has a bearing on the central episode of love between *Vasantasena* and *Charudaata*. Both pairs have a close similarity—they are poor, helpless and yet seeking union in a world that works against the interests of each. Where the two pairs go in different directions is when *Sarvilaka* as a lover has taken to pragmatism for winning his beloved, *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena* have taken a moral and principled stand. The latter will not budge from the path of honesty that they have adopted. This explains their breadth of vision that might influence in the long run the larger audience tracking their movement. Let us delve into the character of *Sarvilaka* a little more in the next section.

4.7 SARVILAKA AS A PERSON OF ART AND IMAGINATION

Coming back to *Sarvilaka*, his evolution as a success-oriented individual has proceeded along the normal path till he reached the stage of poetic expression. At the specific point of nearing his goal, he turns blissful and fulfilled, even though partially. In a corner of the house, he sees a lamp burning. The question is if he should put it out. But, no! He is struck with its beauty and observes:

This flame of the lamp, yellowish like gold, emerging through the hole and lying across the ground, being surrounded by darkness on all sides, looks like a streak of gold scratched on a touchstone. (104)

The simile is constructed well even though he is pressed by the moment of making away with the booty. The aesthetics of his endeavour emanate from the surroundings. Is this the doing of the suspense, uncertainty and the villainy residing in his heart? Has it happened because he required a break from the consistent hard work he has gone through? We can only wonder. Still, a more plausible guess may be that *Sarvilaka* has a noble mission to pursue—it is

of love and the way in which the beloved *Madanika* can be set free from bondage. The combination of love and freedom from slavery render him capable of creating that beauty which he recognises in the flame of the lamp.

Later, at the completion of the thieving-scheme, *Sarvilaka* is in two minds again. He is visited by the guilt that he has committed an immoral act by going against the existing norms of not depriving a *Brahmana* of his assets. His comment on it is significant as before:

Sarvilaka: Worthy Brahmana, you may sleep for hundred years! Alas! For the sake of the courtesan Madanika, I have thus brought degradation upon my Brahmana family; or why, I have degraded my soul?

Fie upon poverty, on account of which one's manly nature ceases to feel disgust for unworthy acts! For instance, here I am censuring this ignoble deed, but am doing it all the same! (106)

As we see, the sense of guilt is short-lived. Indeed, it has been suggested by the self-pity in words “*but am doing it all the same!*” A man of the world that runs principally by rules of manipulation, *Sarvilaka* changes tack and expresses the following:

Sarvilaka: Well now let me return to Vasantasena's mansion to buy Madanika's freedom. (walking about and observing) Ah! It sounds like somebody's footsteps! I hope they are not policemen! Never mind—I'll become rigid like a pillar and stand here. Or rather—are the police of any account to me Sarvilaka? I, who—am a veritable cat in leaping, a deer in bounding off, a hawk in seizing prey and tearing it to pieces, a dog in judging of the strength of a man according as he is asleep or awake, a snake in crawling, magic personified in assuming different characters, postures and dresses, the goddess of speech in the various dialects of different countries, a lamp during nights, a dudubha in slipping away from intricate places, a horse on land, and a boat on water!

This is the moment of triumph for *Sarvilaka*, and he is pleased with himself. This mood has given him a swagger—he talks to himself and pays him glowing tributes. Through this self-praise, he also lets the audience know about the hard work one was supposed to put in if one had to pursue the career of a thief. Sometimes authors and playwrights also use characters to signify/change. **Sudraka** seems to be doing this with the character of *Sarvilaka*. Lets' look at this aspect next.

4.8 CHARACTER AS A CARRIER OF DYNAMIC CHANGE

Does the quoted passage also inform us about the state of crime in the ancient period that was an evolved area of strategic preparation and meticulous execution? This appears to be the case. There was concentration of money in the city and the state saw to it that the trade sector was safe and secure. However, money was in the hands of a few whereas the vast multitude was left to fend for itself. Many young men took to crime for this reason. It was a tussle between an elaborate system of administration and a mentally agile

populace. The emotional aspect of life added to the agony of the young people. *Sarvilaka* is in love with *Madanika* who is a bonded slave. In view of the existing law, she could buy freedom with money. The mission of *Sarvilaka* is twofold, to obtain his beloved and survive in the surrounding world as a person. In fact, he turns a new leaf after securing the release of his beloved from bondage. His espousing the cause of change and facilitating a new king to take over the reins of the city is significant. His love for *Madanika* brings about complete transformation in his life. This gives focus to his endeavour and fills him with creative energy. **Biswanath Banerjee** puts this aspect of his role succinctly. To quote:

A poor and ordinary citizen has been able to organise a revolution and leads it to success is a fact sufficient enough to project Sarvilaka as having a personality with indomitable spirit, exemplary courage, much resourcefulness, sense of duty and sacrificing nature. In the beginning we find him rash and impetuous but slowly and surely the dramatist has turned him into a lovable personality with all care and sympathy. He has become a real friend of the hero who gains everything through his efforts, and this character with youthful enthusiasm and chivalrous spirit may well be recognised as the sub-hero or upa-nayaka of the play. (Banerjee 64)

Sarvilaka's characterisation is such that it can envelop a whole series of actions moving in a specific direction. We see changes happening in his growth as a person through a clash of perspectives—he wants to remain true to his profession, and is also mindful of the established hierarchies that place the *Brahmana* at the top. The respect he accords to women in the scene is also noticeable. He holds a monologue with himself that reflects his intellect and morality. This makes him a typical as well as an individualised character, much in the manner of modern-day realism. The combination of goodness and evil in him sets him apart from *Sakar*, the king's brother-in-law who symbolises senseless violence, trickery and falsehood. The character of *Sakar* is interestingly drawn and requires some thought so let's look at how the purpose his character serves in the play in the next section.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Critically comment on the theme of love in *Mrichchhatika*.

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4.9 BACKDROP OF ART AS PROBLEMATIC CONFLICT-RIDDEN STRUCTURE

Sakara carries out his ill-conceived schemes with crudity and brute power. He stands for steamrolling opposition on the strength of closeness to the group that constitutes the state. The set of people keeping him company are equally cynical, not bothering about established norms of behaviour. They are safe because of the protection they receive from *Sakar*. Yet we see some difference between *Sakara* and his associates. The former runs a counter-narrative of his own, his concern being to prevent people living lives of dignity. Why is that shown as a lever to push the dramatic action?

In answer to this query, we might say that binaries of good and bad, intelligent and foolish, moral and immoral were sharply etched in the older sensibility. People

judged one another on the measuring rod of what helped them earn fulfilment and joy, as also in reverse what obstructed their chosen path. Dramatic writing, particularly that given to dealing with issues of social living, selected actual living patterns and categorised them as promoting virtue or vice. This neat line is discernible in *Mrichchhatika*. The division was moralistic and predictable in the context of representing reality. At the same time though, it left scope for the author to creatively engage with the questions of the day. In *Mrichchhakatika*, this tendency has indeed helped the playwright give free rein to his imagination and manufacture a world filled with vivacity, power and hopefulness against all odds. That goes to show that art had assumed great relevance in that period.

We could put him in the category of characters drawn in black and white. Set against the shining examples of *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena*, *Sakara* is a black character whose evil nature unfolds at each turn in the play. If he had his way, Both *Vasantasena* and *Charudatta* would have been dead as per the plan hatched by him. *Sakara* and his group/ associates are devoid of values of fellow-feeling, self discipline and sympathy for others. The attitude they have towards is one that perceives a change/ threat/ a challenge and something that needs to be met/ faced with all of one's power and might. Yet, like *Sarvilaka* who represents the intelligentsia suffering under the yoke of economic and political crisis, *Sakara* represents the unsustainable cruelty and oppression of the state. Thus, we see the picture of an uneven and crisis-ridden society worked out through a whole lot of characters who together let a positive vision and comic outcome emerge at the end of the play.

Check Your Progress 3

1. How do you visualise Sakara as an example of characterisation? Elaborate.

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4.10 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed characterisation in detail by picking up a few characters to illustrate the different points. It is an important area since this form of drama necessitates individuals who interact with one another on stage and weave a well-defined narrative around their actions. As they carry forward the plan of the playwright, they reveal significant traits hidden in their behaviour and sensibility. In this unit, we analysed extensively a complex character that could go in two entirely distinct directions. The reference is to *Sarvilaka*, the thief and a *Brahman* scholar as well as artist in pursuit of his beloved whom he plans to snatch away from bondage by means fair or foul. This has become an occasion to reflect on other characters, too. Yet, this unit dwells on the points of individuals picked up from society for projection of the theme and the point of view of the playwright.

4.11 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Read section 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4

Check Your Progress 2

1. Read section 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 & 4.6

Check Your Progress 3

1. Read section 4.7, 4.8 & 4.9

4.12 GLOSSARY

Madanika: Literally, the word derives its meaning from Kamadev (Cupid). Since it is a name given to a woman and is accordingly modified, it denotes a woman who understands the ways of love as an expert.

Prakrit: In ancient India, the language of common use as distinct from its standardized and refined version called Sanskrit. The two coexisted. *Prakrit* remained ever close to the surface of life and drew its energy and creativity from there. Such a language would take influence from the spoken word of the day and went on evolving with the changing life-patterns.

Dudubha: The Sanskrit word for the eagle

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