
UNIT 2 *MRICHCHHAKATIKA*: PLOT STRUCTURE AND ANALYSIS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Prologue
- 2.3 Is the Plot in *Mrichchhakatika* Integrated Well?
- 2.4 A View of Acts I - IV in the Play
- 2.5 Expansion of the Theme in Acts V – VIII
- 2.6 Significance of the Storm
- 2.7 Integration of View of the State with the Theme in Acts IX - X
- 2.8 Plot, Structure and its many Dimensions
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Hints to Check Your Progress
- 2.11 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In the present unit, we get to know the plot-line primarily. At the same time, we may keep in mind that a dramatic plot is not merely its story, but a plan under which the playwright executes a design of presentation. Generally, too, the dramatic text shows to the viewer that which is required for narrating an account. In this unit, apart from considering the plot-line, we may offer for the young scholar a view of the happenings in a sequence. This will help us in placing the behaviour of the characters in context. This will win for us an entry point into the play - *Mrichchhakatika*. If we recall we discussed in Block I that **Bhasa** too wrote a play on the same theme – the courtship between *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena*. Let's look at the two plays briefly before we proceed further.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Before we begin to discuss the plot of this play, let us refer to the subject of comparison between **Sudraka**'s play *Mrichchhakatika* and **Bhasa**'s play *Charudatta*. The main similarity between the two plays is that they adopt the two central characters, *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena*, with respect to their identities. The two characters appear in both the plays mentioned as suggested by **Bannerjee**. But the dissimilarities are more prominent. **Bhasa**'s play is short and has only four acts, whereas *Mrichchhakatika* has ten acts. In substance and texture, too, the dissimilarity looms large with **Sudraka**'s play scoring over **Bhasa**'s. The same holds true about the neat division of acts in **Sudraka**'s play that has a large and balanced structure. Since our purpose here is not to go into the two texts to clarify text-related details, it will suffice that, as **Ankur** puts it, we tell ourselves about the existence of **Bhasa**'s play that preceded **Sudraka**'s.

The play *Mrichchhatikata* has a neatly laid out plot in the manner of the *Morality Plays* of the English tradition. As we know, in the *Morality Play*, a well-known form of literary expression in the medieval period, the viewer was familiarised with established social norms that would always keep people on track. Accordingly, the adversary in life would always be considered wrong and immoral and, therefore, etched in sharpest terms for the benefit of the good and virtuous. Such a clarity between two sets of behavioural norms added to the appeal of the play because of which the playwright could exercise his creativity within the given parameters. See that at the centre of *Mrichchhakatika*, there are two characters: *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena* around whom the action revolves.

To serve the necessity of convention, we find here that the division of characters adheres to the cluster of men and women based on their belonging to these two personages. *Charudatta*'s team of characters, so to say, constitutes *Maitreya*, *Vardhamanaka*, *Samvahaka*, *Radanika*, *Dhuta* and *Rohsena*. All of them are aligned to him in various capacities in a very precise and neat manner. Among these, a few are *Charudatta*'s companions in all that he does, whereas, there are others in the group who exist as a part of his household. The scheme is predictable and each member of the group performs the assigned roles he possesses. If, for instance, the pillar of the group undergoes a lean phase in life, the associates share the troubles visiting the main figure in the group.

Since the fate of *Charudatta* runs parallel to that of *Vasantasena*, she being tied to him in love, the duo form a yet larger group of positive characters. In the latter's cluster of associates are *Karunapuraka*, *Madanika*, *Kumbhilaka*, *Maid*, *Vita*, *Old Lady*, *Bastards*, and *Umbrella Bearer*—some are her maidservants keeping her company and being part of her secret or open schemes, whereas, the others provide to her, company, services and protection. Together, this big group revolves around the two protagonists who find themselves threatened by a common enemy in the form of *Sakara* or *Samsthanaka*, "the villain of the play." Significantly, he is the brother-in-law of the King of *Ujjayini*, the place where the protagonists live. The neatness we referred to is borne out by this well-defined line-up between the good and the bad in the world of the play.

As the play progresses, we take note of the larger change happening in the background. Yes, *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena* are partners in love, but behind them is enacted the drama of a political upheaval. The actual fight is between King *Palaka* and *Aryaka*. The latter is described as "A cowherd and insurgent, later the king of *Ujjayini*." The question arises as to why the playwright draws the picture of a king with evil designs who is finally ousted by an insurgent. The answer is not provided by the playwright, since that would give the play an entirely different colouring of serious intent.

Yet, the ouster of King *Palaka* from the state he heads serves a useful purpose in the play. It lends a realistic image to the restoration of *Charudatta* as a prosperous merchant later in life. Let us not forget that only a rich *Charudatta* will ensure stability to the relationship between him and *Vasantasena*.

It is assumed in the play that prosperity ensures happiness. It gives people importance and a sense of the world as a place to which one may belong. The old saying is that money and privilege enable a person to pursue *dharma*. *Charudatta* is always pained that he cannot entertain guests, cannot be with

good people in his world. The first scene has many assertions made by *Charudatta* linked to the condition of a new state of poverty. Even as he does not set much store by riches *per se*, being a man of simple habits, he requires facilities that will make him a man of consequence. Starting with the Prologue, we shall begin our journey into the world of the *Mrichchhakatika*.

2.2 THE PROLOGUE

To begin with, let us be clear about the purely aesthetic nature of the theatre in a specific social setting, a city or town where people assemble to watch a play. A *prologue* in the beginning of the presentation is a convention that facilitates a connection between the players on the stage and the audience sitting in front. It sets up an equation of relaxed communication between the play and the spectators. The audience that watches the movement of the action later in the presentation of the drama/play begin to take an interest in the story since the *prologue* places them in a situation of friendly ease. This also provides to the spectators a sense of the atmosphere the plot will work in. It is obvious that the play is going to cut off the audience from the outside world. The more the audience forgets their homes and families as well as their work, the better it would be for them to grasp the reality of the story unfolding on the stage. In this sense, the prologue is a necessary dramatic device.

We have called the prologue a dramatic device because it does not play any significant role in the dramatic action. Here, too, once the prologue comes to an end, the characters in it will not reappear later. Yet, *Sutradhar* and *Nati* tell the audience in no uncertain terms that what they are going to watch is a performance, not an actual part of life. Yet, the two characters appear so real that one starts believing in their veracity. However, we are given to feel that the play is an imaginatively created fantasy in which the audience will see something along the plane of an illusion. The audience who belong to different strata of society have come to snatch a few moments of pleasure from the performance and they should not feel that they are confronted with any specific question located in real life. The *prologue* draws a dividing line between the atmosphere of the play and the social life of which the audience is a constituent. The prologue enables the audience to remain free from the bindings of the presented spectacle and to assess the proceedings on the stage independently.

How important is the plot in *Mrichchhakatika*? The question is important and a general view of it is suggested in the preceding sections. But let us address it specifically.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What purpose does the prologue serve in *Mrichchhakatika*?

.....
.....
.....

2.3 IS THE PLOT IN *MRICHCHHAKATIKA* INTEGRATED WELL?

We have termed the play a fantasy. It is thus, meant to provide entertainment to the audience. What we call dramatic action has a limit—it begins at one

point and ends at another. Between these two points, many incidents are presented in terms as close to the real situation as possible. Also, there are actual people playing the part of characters. Imagine that real persons are on the stage playing the role of imaginary characters. The real persons playing roles temporarily transform themselves into some others so that, an illusion is created and then the same is shared with the audience. On their part, the audience forgets for a limited period of time that they have their independent lives to lead and to which they will go back after the play is over.

In the explanation above, we have made a mention of incidents. They are many. Even as they are separate, all of them are at the same time knit together in a single whole. This is what we might consider as the plot. The *rationale* of the plot is that incidents in it are interdependent and make a statement that the audience will interpret. The plot indeed is the crux, it might be called the play itself—the order of incidents, the efforts and standpoints of the characters, the clashes, agreements and disagreements residing in the action. In the next section, we shall look at the various Acts in the play.

2.4 A VIEW OF ACTS I - IV IN THE PLAY

Let us look at the mention of episodes in the ten acts constituting *Mrichchhakatika*. The First Act is described as dealing with “*The Depositing of the Ornament*.” It refers to the running away of *Vasantasena* from her home and seeking shelter elsewhere. But she successfully leaves her ornaments with *Charudatta*’s friend *Maitreya*. The Second Act is termed “*Samvahaka, the Gambler*” and the third act gets the name “*The Making of a Breach*.” We see in the second act possibilities of growth in *Samvahaka*’s character who, initially was a professional shampooer but later took to gambling. When caught by a debtor on the road and pressed to pay up for the losses he incurred, he helplessly looks around for protection. Finally, he is rescued. Thereon, he decides to leave the path of worldly living and become a Buddhist monk. The act acquaints the audience with shades of grey in his character as well as the sympathetic traits of other people caught in the logic of social conduct.

In the Third Act, *Sarvilaka*, a Brahmin by birth, breaks into *Charudatta*’s house to commit burglary. Interestingly, he observes conventions of good behaviour and checks himself many times while taking the cask of gold from the home he broke into. He has a purpose behind committing this act. With the money from the ornaments, he will pay for the release of his beloved from slavery. The woman he loves is *Vasantasena*’s maidservant. The third act gives enough space to *Sarvilaka* for showing his house-breaking skills. The profession of committing thefts has taught him many things useful for successfully robbing people of their belongings. At one place in the act, *Sarvilaka* says the following about his clever and skilful ways:

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!

Moreover—

*In movement I am quick like a snake, in steadiness, like a mountain;
in flying, I resemble the lord of birds. In surveying the whole country,
I am like a hare; in effecting a capture, like a wolf, and in strength,
a lion.* (Kale 107)

Mark the versatility of *Sarvilaka*. Also, see that many of his arts have been copied from the movements of birds. The observation is sharp and fully assessed from the point of view of usage. Hidden behind the character of animals, birds and inanimate objects such as the mountains are qualities one may learn from and imbibe. The focus, however, is on the “breach” in the wall that enabled the thief *Sarvilaka* to enter *Charudatta*’s house. In the spectacle, both *Charudatta* and his friend *Maitreya*, referred to as *Vidushaka*, too, stand out as important parts of the plot.

Act IV, which will be summed up at the end as “*Madanika and Sarvilaka*,” carries a statement by *Sarvilaka*. It is as follows:

*In some place I had to let go a man who was busy talking to his
servants; in another I passed by a house seeing that it was inhabited
by women only; and sometimes I had to stand like a wooden pillar
of a house when a posse of the king’s watchmen came near me. By
hundreds of acts, mostly like these, I turned the night into day.*
(113)

But this statement does more than give the information. It tells the viewer/reader *Sarvilaka*’s state of mind, which is that of a man working hard to earn for his beloved the freedom from slavery.

Another concern highlighted in the beginning of the act is *Vasantasena*’s dignity as a woman and lover. She is a courtesan and is bound to fulfil the professional role of entertaining anyone who can pay for her services. Here, *Vasantasena* faces the crucial dilemma of being a lover and a courtesan. Whereas she likes the first from the core of her heart, she despises the second strongly. *Vasantasena* is irked that the king’s brother-in-law *Samsthanaka* has sent an ornament as a gift accompanied by the request that she reach him by his carriage. The arrangement for this proposed act is under instructions from *Vasantasena*’s mother. We notice that the preparation of liberating *Madanika* from bondage and letting her go to her lover *Sarvilaka* is positioned parallel to *Vasantasena*’s decision that she would flout the norm of being a courtesan and to courageous enough to pursue undaunted, the cause of love. The next section examines Acts V – VIII.

2.5 EXPANSION OF THE THEME IN ACTS V-VIII

In the Fifth Act, *Charudatta* confronts in poetic terms the scene of gathering clouds. The same may also be happening in his mind where nothing but the love for *Vasantasena* has been growing. The courtesan *Vasantasena* is put on a pedestal by her lover. Quite dramatically, however, the counterpoint is made about her, the “harlot” as she is in the eyes of the society. *Vidushak/ Maitreya* calls her this after noting that she does not pay attention to him as he gives her the ornament sent by *Charudatta*. Note the following:

Never then shall I so much as even look at the face of that slave-born harlot! (sorrowfully) Truly, do they say: "A lotus-plant that grows without a root; a tradesman that does not cheat; a goldsmith that doesn't steal; a village-meeting that is without a quarrel; and a courtesan that is not avaricious—these are hard to be found.

(132)

Such statements as this provide breadth to the meaning of the text. What *Maitreya* has talked of is not philosophical, but a set of mundane acts witnessed in the surrounding world. We may relate the connection between the details of social behaviour contained in the popular saying. The point at the same time is made well. He has successfully emphasised the fact of a courtesan being greedy and petty, putting her profession before love or devotion. This shrouds the comment with a double irony. It throws light as much on *Vasantasena* as on the accumulated wisdom of the time; it says, for instance, that social acts are bound to one another as also with those tendencies that are observed in nature. The smallness of the comparison between the social happenings and the natural phenomenon puts the scholar *Maitreya* in poor light, as one who cannot see the qualitative difference between the processes of nature and conditions that are thrown at people because of circumstances. The latter are human-made and liable to change that will result from other decisions the humans might take under other inspirations. Human behaviour does not follow the kind of pattern we see in nature that has precise laws to govern its movement or intensity.

The visit of *Vasantasena* to *Charudatta*'s house is to return the ornament she received from him as also the other one that *Charudatta* thought was stolen from his house. How the other one, belonging to *Vasantasena*, lands up at *Vasantasena*'s home, though she had entrusted *Charudatta* with safe keeping is unknown to *Charudatta*. The question is presented in a manner that reflects the intense emotion of *Vasantasena* for *Charudatta* and on the other hand the latter's complete faith in her honesty. We referred to storm clouds gathering in the beginning of the section, in the next section we shall examine the significance of the storm clouds.

2.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STORM

Still more important in the Fifth Act is the storm following the gathering of dark clouds. As indicated earlier, it is presented as a mirror in which the passion of the lovers for each other is reflected. The grandeur of the storm is caught in words, and on stage in particular, it may be combined with music, human movements, and the scene of trees falling, and leaves flying around. Act V, called "*A Stormy Day*" ends on the following note:

Shrilly on the tala leaves, rumbling on the branches, harshly on stones and fiercely on the water; thus do the showers fall, resembling lutes played upon inmusical concerts to the keeping of time. (147)

The attention paid by the playwright to the storm symbolises the commonness between nature and humanity. We do not miss the fact that the appearance of natural phenomenon presented through the storm is fundamentally a human act—that is how nature is shaped by the help of the human imagination. On the other hand, the impact of nature is only registered in the human mind (the

picture of the storm is constructed because such a thing as the storm exists outside the human subject). Irrespective of how the storm is shaped by the human mind, it was already there as an objective fact. The point being made is that both humanity and the outside world of wind, vegetation, sounds and the facts of hardness or softness coexist and affect one another. For the playwright *Sudraka*, the storm is a happening of great proportions and makes him and the audience aware of the power and appeal hidden in nature. This is to be noted and equally well celebrated. The storm also arouses an aesthetic feeling, something that calls for definition and sways humans into participating in the domain of movements outside themselves.

Act VI begins with a long exchange of views between *Vasantasena* and her maidservants. The conversation is marked by wit and playfulness. However, there is a tinge of sadness in the voice of *Vasantasena*; that is caused by the distance that exists between her and her lover *Charudatta*. In this act, she prepares to meet him away from home in a garden. This is the crucial moment in the play—it is an occasion of mix-up of the two carriages, the one of *Charudatta* that waits at the door of the house for *Vasantasena* and the second that belongs to *Sakar/ Samsthanaka*, the villain of the play and the brother-in-law of the king. The mix-up helps the important prisoner of the state escape from jail and move out of the city. The prisoner is none other than the would-be king *Aryaka*, a coward and an insurgent. This act involves a lot of action and suspense. Would *Aryaka* be able to escape from the clutches of the king's officers, or will he be captured and brought back to the jail from where he has run away? The playwright has presented the sequence of events in such a way that one mistake on the part of the officers will lead to another and chance happenings too, will contribute to *Aryaka*'s great escape that will happen in Act VI.

Coming back to the sequence of acts, we are struck by the beginning of the VI Act; in it we get a glimpse of *Charudatta*'s son *Rohasena*, a young child who wishes to play with a toy-cart made of gold. *Rohasena*'s father having fallen on bad days cannot afford a golden cart. The maidservants of the house offer him a cart made of clay which *Rohasena* abhors. We mark that the play takes its title from this clay cart, a small detail that in no way reflects anything vital in the play. Yet, the play is called “the clay cart” or “*Mrichchhakatika*.” As the said “mix-up” that gives the impression of being evoked by the cart of the child, is central to the VI Act, rightly then the act is summed up as “*The Exchange of the Carriages*.”

Act VII is short and shows only the climax of *Aryaka* successfully escaping from the arms of the state. In it, we witness *Charudatta* coming face – to – face with *Aryaka*. The two exchange greetings. *Aryaka* is beholden to *Charudatta* since the latter has assisted him in slipping away from the city. The act also carries the seed of the final resolution of the play that hinges upon *Charudatta* – gaining his strong economic position; in this he will get the support of the new king. Also, the two men, *Charudatta* and *Aryaka*, impress the audience with their upright moral stance and indicate that the city will earn stability and peace under the able handling of issues by a new king and his associates. The Seventh Act also lets the audience see that the value of goodness and a balanced temperament is essential for the smooth running of life in the kingdom. We see how the message of happiness and tranquillity is conveyed in an artistic sense in the play. The summing up of the action of this part of the play is descriptive—“*The Escape of Aryaka*.”

What has been initiated as an episode of serious crime in the Seventh Act is taken further in Act VIII. Here, the plot is well laid out indicating the intentions of various characters at a deeper level. Till this moment, the servants or slaves in the play belonged to a category that gave them a simple and mechanical identity. In this act, specific lines of distinction are drawn. Have a look at *Cheta* (*Sthavaraka*) and *Vita*. The former is the driver of *Sakara's* carriage and the latter is described as a friend and associate of *Sakara*. The trio is engaged in immoral and unlawful activities in the city and the state protects them since its head *Sakara* is the brother-in-law of the king. Yet in this act, *Cheta* and *Vita* have a temperament of their own that comes out in clear terms. We can ascribe this to the crisis-situation in which they are placed, they emerge here in their individuality.

The main aspect of this act, however, is that it presents a crime involving murder and gives an altogether different turn to the play that is unexpected and horrifying. The state is to go through a turmoil leading to the change of guard—the present king will be ousted and new one, more humane and forward-looking one will replace him. This will then result in a total revamping of administration and the way will be paved for the merchant *Charudatta's* return to prosperity. This and the next two acts will work out this aesthetic strategy of the play and prove *Mrichchhakatika* to be an example of serious comedy and entertainment.

At this point, keeping in view the context of the humanity that resides in the heart of ordinary people, we may note the response of *Vita*, the friend of *Sakara* as follows:

Vita: Speak out, then, what it is.

Sakara: Kill Vasantasena!

Vita: If I kill her who is young, a woman, and an ornament of our city, and who, although a courtesan, bestows her love in a manner unlike that of the courtesans' quarter, and who is withal innocent, then with what boat shall I cross the river of the next world?

Sakara: I will give you a boat. And moreover, in this deserted garden, who would see you killing her?

Vita: The ten quarters are seeing me, and the sylvan deities, and the moon, and this sun with his brilliant rays, and Dharma, and Wind, and Sky, and the internal soul, and also the Earth, the witness to all holy and unholy acts. (174-5)

The dialogues here are stylised and the views, too, are closer to the positive notions of *Dharma*. Yet, the situation provides to them the aura of humanist ethics. Killing is a serious act and forbidden by law. When *Sakara*, the one enjoying the protection of the king, asks a servant to kill a woman, the various points of morality and ethics get raised and the scope is further widened by references to the five elements, the Earth, the Sun, etc. The situation is repeated a while later. See the following:

Cheta: Let my master speak out what it is.

Sakara: Kill this Vasantasena?

Cheta: Please, master, don't ask me that! This noble lady was brought here by my unworthy self owing to an interchange of carts.

Sakara: You, slave, have I no mastery over you?

Cheta: Your Honour is the master of my body, but not of my morals.

So please, master, excuse me; I am verily afraid.
Sakara: Being my servant, of whom are you afraid?
Cheta: Of the next world, master.
Sakara: What is that 'next world'?
Cheta: Master, it is the consequence of one's good and bad acts.
Sakara: Of what kind is the consequence of good acts?
Cheta: To be like my master, adorned with many golden ornaments.
Sakara: And of what sort is the consequence of bad acts?
Cheta: To be like me, who have become an eater of others' food.
So I will not do an unholy deed. (175-6)

In this quote, the terms are clear and well-defined. These are joined, too, with ones that are imposed from above by the powers that be. The intention of the individual servant *Cheta* impresses us because of its stress upon principles. He is able to see the bad and unholy deeds from the good acts quite crucially. This lends an edge to his standpoint. In the broader picture of the play, the perspective of *Vita* and *Cheta* merges with that of the high-placed in the city. The ideological picture getting drawn this way might eventually become an acceptable rationale. The play seems to strengthen such a value system. The scheme working behind Act VIII and Act IX becomes a foundation on which the new regime headed by the cowherd King *Arayaka* will stand strongly and bring stability to the city.

These details of the play add up to the scope of the plot that covers social, moral and administrative dimensions to the presented action. Even though Act VIII is given the title "*The Killing of Vasantasena*," we see the episode from the point of view of the moral-aesthetic standards laid down by minor characters. This contributes to the play's effect. The next section shall deal with Act IX & X.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Examine the significance of the "Gathering of Storm Clouds".

.....
.....
.....
.....

2.7 INTEGRATION OF THE VIEW OF THE STATE WITH THE THEME IN ACTS IX-X

Act IX of the play goes into the nitty-gritty of law, social structures and the way the mighty as well as weaker humans conduct themselves in the given sequence of happenings. We note that functionaries of the state such as the Judge, *Sreshthin* and *Kayastha* understand the issue of injustice well enough. As the act begins, the Judge announces in no uncertain terms the evil nature of *Sakara*. When *Sodhanaka* begins the court's proceedings and calls out, "Gentlemen, here is this king's brother-in-law come to the court, who wishes to present a case," the Judge remarks, "How! At the very commencement, there is the king's brother-in-law wanting to present a case! It is just like an eclipse at sunrise, foretelling the death of some great man!" Yet, the state seems paralysed before King *Palaka* and his family that is given to autocratic ways and at keeping the interests of citizens at bay. In the city, the whims and fancies of *Sakara*

hold sway. The court proceeds in one direction and the King's policies work as a deterrent to the smooth functioning of the judicial system. A dismal picture of the prevailing system emerges in the process. Later, praise is showered on *Charudatta's* antecedents—the names of his grandfather and father are mentioned to establish his worth and moral standing. Soon, however, the facts of the case of *Vasantasena's* supposed killing begin pointing towards *Charudatta's* hand, who is accused of committing the act.

Act IX offers a long narrative of *Sakara's* tricks that present a topsy-turvy world. Can sense be brought back to the case of *Charudatta* being fought in the court? It goes to the credit of the playwright *Sudraka* that negative features of life, in and outside the court are piled up and no hope seems to exist for *Charudatta's* deliverance as far as proceedings of the court are concerned.

But the playwright has an eye for detail. In the length of the text, he works out a pattern in which chinks finally emerge and tables are turned against *Sakara* potentially. But the might of privilege works to the detriment of *Charudatta* and the act ends on a note of despair. Neither the personal distaste of *Sodhanaka* and the Judge for *Sakara* nor the disapproval of the latter's ways by the general public hinders the anti-*Charudatta* campaign. The word of *Sakara* prevails. The court announces a death sentence to *Charudatta* who in turn bursts out with:

After my case had been investigated, by means of the ordeals of poison, water, balance, and fire, then with justice you might have today ordered a saw to be used on this body of mine. But as you are killing me, a Brahmana, relying simply on the words of my enemy, you will surely fall into hell, along with your sons and grandsons!

The final question remains whether *Charudatta* will be hanged for the crime he is accused of committing, and this gives a strong note of suspense to the play. From the point of the audience, it is a great moment of curiosity as punishment to the one they admire might bring intense pain to them. Act IX is rightly given the name "*The Trial*."

Act X opens with the two *Chandalas*. They are the lowest of the low. Proverbially, they are the messengers of death and represent only the snuffing out of life. It does credit to the playwright who provides ample space to them and in what they say is revealed their humanity and positive concerns for the virtuous and honest. In the play, they end up as executioners literally. Yet, they show control of temper and give the impression of carrying out the job professionally. A sort of dignity is discernible in their behaviour. The two *Chandalas* and *Charudatta* face each other moments before the execution is likely to happen. The exchange is meaningful. Read the following, for instance:

Charudatta: (listening; mournfully) O you, the chief of your caste. I wish to ask a favour at your hands.

Chandalas: What! You would take a favour from our hands?

Charudatta: Heavens forbid! Still, a Chandala is not like the ill-behaved King Palaka, who acts without due investigation. So, I request you for getting a last sight of my son's face, so that I might easily obtain heaven.

Chandalas: You may do so. (209)

This works to intensify anguish and present the situation as a severe indictment of the existing regime. But since the play is fast approaching the end, latent

expectations begin hinting at a resolution contrary to the one that is anticipated in the previous act. Soon, *Sakara's* servant *Sthavaraka* will have a change of heart and he will spill the beans. The most to be hurt by *Sthavaraka's* conduct will understandably be *Sakara* himself. It is finally stated that *Sakara* has killed *Vasantasena* and put instead the blame on *Charudatta*.

Expectedly though, there is yet an issue with the ending. A play of this kind cannot end in death and attendant misery. The poetics do not allow it. Literature is supposed to offer entertainment and episodes of distress are to only heighten the effect of representation. In the last pages, *Vasantasena* comes to life, as if emerging from the ashes like a Phoenix, to announce that she is alive. Accompanying *Vasantasena's* disclosure is the news of the fall of King *Palaka* and King *Aryaka* rising to occupy the throne. In this manner, "*The Conclusion*" is an appropriate summing up of the complex pattern of situations on offer in the play. How does the play holdup? Given the many happenings and a sense of tragedy does the play have a tight or a loosely woven structure? We'll look at that briefly next.

2.8 PLOT, STRUCTURE AND ITS MANY DIMENSIONS

What we come across in **Sudraka's** *Mrichchhakatika* is a dramatic rendering of a sequence of happenings that involve the love-alliance between *Charudatta* and the courtesan *Vasantasena*. This is presented in the background of different political happenings that are kept largely offstage. But the tussle between good and evil is squarely presented in a plot that is complex and virtue-driven. The sympathy earned by the lovers and the punishment visiting the villain is the staple of popular entertainment and the same has been achieved with effect. This is structurally built in at the level of the dramatic plot—it avoids all unnecessary details such as providing space to King *Aryaka* who will ascend the throne and King *Palaka* who will be ousted from power. At the same time, the long account of ups and downs as well as the re-creation of various scenes in the middle of the play's movement follows meticulous planning. This in brief constitutes the structure of the plot in which the happenings have been woven deftly.

It is evident that the play impresses on the strength of its density and richness. Each act is a cluster of varied situations that have characters moving in and going out even as the unity of action remains intact. **Biswanath Banerjee** has rightly observed that

Sudraka has given evidence of his skill in arranging his scenes in a way hitherto unknown but which has added to the attractiveness of his drama. Almost in every act he has several scenes, one connected with the other and staged simultaneously (28)

We may assume that such a view has noted the thematic integration that the play enjoys. Also, the points the characters raise and the decisions they take from one moment to the other in consonance with their behaviour traits lend cogency to the plot structure emerging out of the presentation.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Examine some of the aspects/dimensions of social life as highlighted in the play.

.....
.....
.....

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have gone into the sequence of situations and episodes in *Mrichchhakatika* under the overall framework of the plot. We have noted in detail the treatment the playwright metes out to the characters such as *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena*. The plot of the play follows assiduously the pattern of comedy that exalts the theme of love between *Charudatta* and *Vasantasena* as lovers. Also knitted in the fabric of the play are accounts of ordinary people such as thieves, stalkers, cheats and gamblers and, last but not least, the machinery of the law prevailing at the time.

2.10 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Read Section 2.2

Check Your Progress 2

1. Read Section 2.6

Check Your Progress 3

2. Read Section 2.6
3. Read Sections 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 & 2.7

2.11 QUESTIONS

1. Would it be correct to say that the love theme is central to Sudraka's *Mrichchhatika*? Give reasons in support of your answer.
2. Comment on the nature of the plot in *Mrichchhakatika*.