PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, generic, discipline specific elective, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the university has been recently accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with Grade "A".

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Material (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English / Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requisioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed, and I congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish the venture a grand success.

Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar
Vice-Chancellor

NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

Under Graduate Degree Programme
Subject : Honours in English (HEG)
Course Title : Indian Classical Literature
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Board of Studies

NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

UG : English (HEG)

Course : Indian Classical Literature
Course Code : CC-EG-04

Module 1 : Introduction to Indian Classical Literature

Module 2 : *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

Module 3 : "The Dicing" by Vyāsa

Module 4 : Sudraka : *Mrcchakatika*

Module-1
Introduction to Indian Classical Literature

Unit 1 □ Classical Indian Drama—Theory and Practice

Structure

1.1.0 Introduction

We have all grown up hearing that the origins of Indian drama are very old. But how old is that actually? And how do such origins connect us with the roots of our ancient civilization? The answers to these might seem like stories, but they are indeed necessary to be recalled if we are to understand why the tradition of drama has always had a special place in Indian culture. In this Unit, we will first situate the supposed origins of drama, then look into how its theoretical frames have developed, and how that is put into practice. As such, you can look upon this Unit as basic to your understanding of the Classical Indian dramatic tradition.

If we go back to the origins of drama in Indian context, the traces lead us to the divine cause. It is held that at the behest of the gods, led by Indra, Brahma, the Creator himself, took this charge to create the fifth Veda out of the existing four ones. He distilled the element of recitation from the *Rgveda*; the element of music from the *Sāmveda*; imitation and representation from the *Yajurveda*; and the sentiment from the

Atharvaveda. This is how we have the creation of the Nāṭyaveda. Later on, this was handed over to the sage Bharatmuni, who, out of this *veda* compiled *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a voluminous work comprising about six thousand couplets and divided into thirty-six Chapters. It contains all the conceptual, theoretical and physical ideas of traditional Indian theatre. It is also believed that Lord Shiva contributed the *tānḍava nṛtya* (dance) and Lord Vishnu invented the four dramatic styles (verbal, energetic, graceful, grand). Thus in the religious origin of drama Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh standing respectively as the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer come together. The classical conception of Indian drama is therefore linked to the origins of our culture.

1.1.1 Essentials of Ancient Indian Drama

The popularly accepted English rendering for the word *Nāṭya* is 'drama.' The moment we hear the word 'drama' we are reminded of the Greek dramas and the Aristotelian definition of tragedy. In spite of certain similarities with the Greek drama, the ancient Indian theatre differs considerably from them. In the theory of drama, Bharatmuni's *Nā ̄ṭyaśāstra* stands unparalleled in world theatre and literature in that it anticipates, analyses and answers in detail to almost all the problems pertaining to dramatic presentation and production. In its circumference, it involves the origin of the theatre, construction of the playhouse, preliminaries to a dramatic performance, choreographic elements, make-up, costumes, poetics, music, songs, characterisations, sentiments, etc. Thus it talks about the technical and poetic aspects of drama and in that only lies its uniqueness and distinction. The meaning and theory of *nāṭya* becomes clear as we sketch its distinction from Greek drama.

We have seen in the introductory section that Lord Shiva contributed *nṛtya* (dance) to it, so Indian drama comprises of dance and action both. Thus, it lays equal stress on plot and spectacle (dance being directly related to the eyes). In Greek drama however as you know from Core Course 2, the emphasis is laid majorly upon the plot, as plot is considered to be the soul of tragedy. All classical Indian drama was meant to be performed on the stage and that is why the spectacle is no less important than the plot. In the following sections we will talk about the elements such as gestures, postures, words, etc. which are essential in giving the drama its salient form. These elements necessitate the requirement of decorations which include make-up, costumes and even the set or scene. This embellishment is altogether neglected in Greek drama and even if they refer to them, the reference is least.

Ancient Indian drama was a composite production of *nṛtya* (dance), *gīta* (song), and *vādya* (music). Therefore, it demands a constant engagement on the part of the spectator with his various senses actively participating till the representation goes on. Though in Greek tragedy they have introduced chorus, part which is a sort of dance and song, but their function differs considerably from the ancient Indian drama. Indian plays were a combined production of words, gestures, postures, make-up, costumes, song, dance, etc. It was not however that the drama was loaded with them through and through. During the dramatic performance, the instruments were played only when necessary. According to the propriety and need of the scene these elements were chosen and all the elements were not given equal importance all at once. As the words or situation demanded or required, that part of the play partook the nature accordingly. Due to this unique nature of ancient Indian drama, it has a literary form of its own different from that of classical European drama. But it was not only on account of its literary form the classical Sanskrit drama stood apart, technique also plays equal important role which the following section consists of.

1.1.2 Techniques of Sanskrit Drama

A Sanskrit drama is essentially and primarily a spectacle so it is essential for the playwright to be aware of the rules that are indispensable in its production. Ancient Indian drama is performance based, so every action and spectacle should be suitable for stage performance. Bharatmuni was very conscious about this connection between the technical and the literary aspects of dramatic production. That is why he treated both of them with equal care and gave them equal importance. Therefore, one should not wonder if one comes across a reference to *Nāṭyaśāstra* while reading aesthetics, drama, rhetoric, poetics, dance, etc. As part of the dramatic convention, different aspects of drama, unity of time, place and action, the different stages through which the plays develop—all of these are included in the dramatic technique. According to the scale of importance, they deserve to be treated separately, though, in brief for the sake of our understanding.

1.1.3 The Dramatic Convention

It was a problem for the ancient Indian theorists whether to stick to the realistic nature or the theatrical nature in the production of the play. Bharatmuni talks about two types of *dharmī* (nature): *Lokadharmī* (realistic nature) and *Nâtyadharmî* (theatrical

nature). When the dramatic performance is represented following the realistic standards and does not deviate from this, when the natural behaviour of men and women is performed naturally, it is called the realistic nature. When in a dramatic representation the realistic standards are violated / surpassed, it is called theatrical nature. If a role of a woman is performed by a man or a man's by a woman, it will be an example of theatrical nature. This is acceptable as drama is an art form that expresses in order to affect. To create that desired effect it allows certain degree of artificiality in a dramatic performance. With the help of other elements such as—make-up, costume, gesture, posture, etc. it should look perfect in representation. It is not only applied to the behaviour of men and women but also to the presentation of natural events as well. For example, in the first act of *Abhijñ̃āna-Śākuntalam* the king appears at a distance from the hermitage but shortly afterwards is seen entering it by taking few steps only on the stage. The realistic standard is being violated here for the sake of theatrical nature. In reality it seems unnatural but in the dramatic performance it does not appear to be so. This should be and has been the practice of dramatic performance of ancient Indian theatre.

1.1.4 Four Aspects of Drama

To understand the technique of dramatic production we need to discuss the four different aspects of drama which are based on the style. According to the Kashmiri aesthete and philosopher Abhinavagupta (950-1016 AD), *nāṭya* differs from everything experienced at an empirical level. It is not a mere reflection, imitation or pictorial presentation of the things of the outer world. It is altogether a different experience, it is essentially *rasa* that is sustainable aesthetically only. We will come to a detailed discussion of *rasa* in the subsequent Unit. For now, it may be said that the aesthetic experience which Abhinavagupta talks of comprises the experience of basic emotion in form of *rasa* which affects the soul that is in a way de-individualised. The four styles that we are going to talk about are directly related to the sentiments.

Bharatmuni uses the term *vṛtti*, the English equivalent of which would be 'style.' In Chapter VI of *Natyasastra*, he introduces them and talks about them in detail in Chapter XXII which are of four types:

- Bhāratī (the Verbal)
- Sāttvatī (the Grand)
- Kaiśikī (the Graceful)
- Ārabhaṭī (the Energetic)

Based on these four styles we have four forms of action. In dramatic performance the Verbal style is characterised by significant and powerful use of speech. Bharatmuni explains the Verbal style as that which is enacted by the male characters and that which is not to be applied by the females and that which has prominence in the speeches made in Sanskrit and that which is used by the eponymous actors (*bharatas*) is Verbal (*bhā ˉratī*). This style is applicable to evoke the Pathetic (*karuṇa*) and the Marvellous (*adbhuta*) sentiments. This verbal style is taken from the *Ṛgveda*.

The Grand style (*sāttvatī*) is endowed with the quality of high spirit (*sattva*) which is proper, uses metre and has exuberance of joy and gives no place to the state of sorrow (no pathetic subject-matter should find a place in this style). This style presupposes verbal and physical representation which focuses primarily on words and gestures. In other words we can say, "the presentation which depends for its effect on various gestures and speeches, display of strength as well as acts showing the rise of spirit, is considered to be in the Grand Style." (*Nāṭyaśāstra* trans. by M. Ghosh). The Furious (*raudra*), the Heoric (*vīra*), and the Marvellous (*adbhuta*) sentiments are marked by this style. It has been incorporated from the *Yajurveda.*

The Graceful style (*kaiśikī*) is interesting on account of its characteristics that lend grace to it. On account of charming costume worn especially by the women that look elegant; that has incorporated different types of dance, song and music and the themes acted are mostly the practises of love and connected with it, and its subsequent enjoyment, is what is characterised by the Graceful style. This style is derived from *Sā ˉmaveda.* It is proper for the Erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) and the Comic (*hāsya*) sentiments.

The Energetic Style (*ārbhaṭī*) has at the centre of it a bold person, the word *ārbhaṭa* standing for a 'bold person.' According to Bharatmuni the style that includes mostly the qualities and speeches of a bold person such as: use of altercation or verbal duel, usage of deceptive suggestions, behaviour characterised by excessive pride, falsehood and braggart is known as the Energetic Style. Further he says that the style

in which there is "a representation of falling down, jumping, crossing over, piercing, deeds of magic and conjuration and varied ways of fighting, is called Energetic." (*Nā ̄ṭyaśāstra* trans. by M. Ghosh). This is to evoke the Terrible (*bhayānaka*), the Odious (*bī̃bhatsa*) and the Furious (*raudra*) sentiments. *Athrvaveda* is the source of this style.

On having a closer examination one will find that except the Graceful, the other three styles do not have exclusive application as some of them seem apt for more than one sentiment. In *Nāṭyaśāstra* we have ten kinds of plays and on analysing their description we will find the presence of almost all the styles in the presentation of *Nā ̄ṭaka*, *Prakaraṇa*, *Samavakāra*, etc. while in others only some of these. Now to some, it may seem to be a defect but so far as the understanding of the prevailing character is concerned it helps greatly as it not only adopts one or more styles but also gives importance to one or the other.

1.1.5 Unity of Time, Place and Action

The purpose of classical Indian drama was not merely for the sake of entertainment but for preserving and raising the moral standard of the society as their maintenance was necessary for the healthy growth of the society. In that sense there is a close parallel between the purposes of classical Indian drama with classical European drama, where the twin principles of edification (knowledge) and gratification (pleasure) were identified. Keeping this in mind, classical Indian playwrights did not attempt to follow any hard and fast rule regarding the three unities. They did not limit the fictitious action to the length of time or place as had been observed by the Greek tragedians. In the development of the plot the Sanskrit dramatists do not have restriction of 24 hours on the length of time. It is stated in *Nāṭyaśāstra* that in an individual act (*aṇka*) there should be those incidents only that could take place in one single day and there should not be any interruption in the routine duties such as prayer, meals, etc. It means that the incidents should be arranged in such a way as to add to the act and not clash even with the routine work. Further Bharata says that there should not be over incidents infused in the course of a single act. So far as the characters' appearance on the stage is concerned during an act, they should retire only after they have performed the things related to the purpose of the play and in such a way that they should have led to the

relevant sentiment. If there are several incidents that cannot be completed within the duration of a single day, then the playwright should complete that act and after completion they should be presented in the introductory scene. Incidents taking place in a month or a year's duration should also be presented by closing that act but if they take more than one year they should not be presented like this. For example, if a person starts on a long journey for business, etc. it should also be included in the introductory section. Understandably, this detail is important as a backdrop for understanding the context, it cannot be an event proper within the play. Therefore, what has been stated regarding time looks more like a logical necessity than any restriction.

Similarly there was no restriction regarding place or locality as we see sometimes the action moving from earth to heaven. Bharatmuni just had to say this much that the scenes of the play that have celestial heroes (gods in human form) should be laid in India (Bhārata Varṣa) be it scenes of capture, killing, etc. The reason for this is not related to any rule but an aesthetic one. He says that Bharata Varsa should be chosen as locale because it is a land of charm, sweet smell and golden colour. But those scenes of sport, enjoyment in the company of females can be laid in other subcontinents because there is neither grief nor sorrow there. As modern readers, we can of course debate on such assumptions, but it needs to be understood that the upholding and glorification of a particular tradition might have been uppermost in the mind of the theoretician.

If there was any principle that could not be violated in Sanskrit drama, it was unity of action. These plays rely heavily on creating the spectacle so as to leave an impression on the spectator and this could have been achieved only when there was congruity in action. The aim of the playwrights is the presentation of a permanent mental state in such a way as to bring identification of the spectator with the spectacle. Therefore, every action should be directed in harmony with the permanent mental state. Along with this it should also be maintained that the act should not be infused with too many incidents and subsidiary events which might affect this unity. As said earlier, additional details that are not strictly a part of the plot should not be directly presented on the stage, they should rather be reported in the introductory section. To clarify the upcoming events (so that it might not come as a shock or surprise to the spectator) short explanatory devices can be put in before the act. All these help not only in getting the unity of impression, but also impart a proper movement to the play which is must for a successful dramatic

representation. It is in this regard also Sanskrit drama differs from Greek tragedy because the latter restricts the action to fit in the confinement of time (24 hours), place (the play should end where it begins from), and action.

1.1.6 Concept of the Five Stages

Regarding the development of the action Bharatmuni does not say much neither he lays any rule for the dramatists. It may be because the nature of *Nāṭyaśāstra* which has been written in *sūtras* (aphorisms), the chief characteristic of which is brevity. We rarely find any scholar writing aphoristic literature illustrating rules. In one of the greatest grammarian, Pāṇinī's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* we do not find illustrations. However, this is only one way of justifying, in reality we do not know why it went missing in *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Therefore, the five stages, through which the plot develops, have been taken from King Harṣa. He is the writer of *Harṣa Vārtika* which is a commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra*. He illustrates these five stages of development from his own drama of *Ratnāvali* and later commentators have simply followed him. Following is a brief description of each of the five stages.

The Beginning (*Prārambha*)

There are two ways to begin the action in Sanskrit drama. One starts with the means that has already been got through and that helps the protagonist to achieve his goal. Now the protagonist may have got through this means either by the help of his ministers, etc, or by his own personal efforts. In the second type of beginning this means is yet to be achieved. In the first type the action begins with the recollection of the means and as this means is to help the hero realise his goal, it is further ascertained that they are sufficient to lead to the desired goal. Thus with the firm determination of utilizing them the action proceeds. In the latter case where the means are not yet at the disposal of the character, the action begins with the mental attempt to chart out a plan to acquire them. Since their efficiency is ascertained, the characters' main concern is to secure them. It is not necessary that the beginning is to be initiated by the hero only. The king may entrust this task to his ministers thereby keeping himself aloof from the action. Not necessarily the action has to be begun by the king or his minister only, but it is possible even by the heroine or the adversaries who are created in the attainment of the means by the divine power/being.

The Effort (*Yatna*)

This second stage, the Effort, concentrates on the hero. The beginning, as you just read, can be made by anyone besides the protagonist, but the efforts have to be made by the central character of the drama only. Here, the protagonist contrives the only way to realise the desired end and then starts following it whole heartedly. This effort constitutes the major and important section of the play and plays pivotal role as the success of the end will be determined by this only, however simple or common it may seem to be (as it is not necessary for the effort to be adventurous all the time).

The Height (*Prāptyāśā*)

The effort demands action on the part of the protagonist and the other characters who may be related directly or indirectly. Although at the centre of the effort is the protagonist, but there are other characters as well who either emerge as helpers or act antagonistically towards the desired aim. That is why in the drama we have two groups of characters. It may be possible that we have this division from the very beginning, or it might develop later in the drama. In one group are included characters who help the central figure in the attainment of the objective, and in the second group are those who try to create obstacles in order to turn down the effort. Therefore, this stage, the Height, represents the struggle and strife between the two contending groups. This makes the action complex as it seems for some time that the protagonist is advancing speedily but then there are reversals. Again, there is advancement followed by another setback. After the repetition of this, the central figure emerges to be more confident and hopeful because he has the means at hand. Simultaneously he is afraid of yet another failure because of the presence of the opposite party that is determined to frustrate the designs of the protagonist. As you proceed with your texts in this Course, you should try to understand these generic movements within the plays.

The Consequence (*Niyatāpti*)

Thus at the height of the action, we see the exploits of the hero/heroine being met with disappointment time and again by the intervention of the opposition which sets the cause back. This set back obtrudes the attainment of the objective so it leads to the search for the possible means at hand whereby the protagonist and his/her helpers could marshal those resources to remove the hindrances and overcome the oppositions that

restrict them from realising their goal. And the hero somehow manages to get through all of them as it is a prominent characteristic feature of Sanskrit drama that ultimately the protagonist has to succeed, he has to come up with a successful application of his plan and therefore **there is no tragedy in classical Indian drama**.

This removal of obstacles which is the Consequence is of two types, or we should say that there are two ways to it. One way of removing is by destroying it completely and this is what popularly happens in Sanskrit drama. To destroy something, courageous demonstration is needed and the permanent mental state evoked in such a situation is the Heroic one. The second way is by reconciling with the opposite party where those who are with the protagonist and those who are against them, by mutual consent, reconcile with each other. But just by mere reconciliation the goal is not attained immediately as it would look unreal and undramatic. From this point to the actual realisation of the goal the protagonist has to unravel the entangled plot by solving certain mysteries.

The Close (*Phalāgama*)

The action undergone through the previous stages naturally leads to maturity. The things proposed, have been accomplished, the goal realised, complexities dissolved, mysteries solved, now the action proceeds to the closure. It takes time to reach to this stage but this stage itself does not take much time. If the story narrates separation of the lover and beloved it has its close in their union. The protagonist is rewarded for his/her efforts, and that is why it is said to be *phalāgama*.

As an interesting activity, make a cross study of the 5 stage structure of classical drama under the model of Freytag's Pyramid that you have read of in Core Course 2 with this structure of Indian Classical Drama.

1.1.7 Types of Drama

There are ten kinds of drama which are further divided into two main types. In the first types are included those kinds which are full of different forms of action complete in all their aspects and the two kinds of drama included here are—*Nāṭaka* and *Prakaraṇa*. In the second type we have those dramas which have one or two forms of action incomplete in some of their aspects. The rest eight types included under this

category are—*Aṇka, Vyāuoga, Bhāṇa, Samavakāra, Vīthi, Prahasana, Ḍima,* and *Īhā mṛga*. Keeping the requirement of the unit in mind, it is necessary to discuss some of them so we shall discuss the major types which are *Nāṭaka* and *Prakaraṇa,* while the other types will be dealt with in Module 1 Unit 3 in detail.

The *Nāṭaka*

The subject-matter of *Nāṭaka* must be based on some well known story, meaning that, it must be based on stories from Purāṇas, History or any such celebrated work the hero of which should be equally celebrated and exalted in nature. The point behind this is that the lineage of the protagonist could be traced to the royal sages and seers. The hero may have divine help and protection but is not a divine being himself. Production of *rasa* for delight, and the presence of instruction are two major purposes of drama. Several sentiments as the Pathetic, the Heroic, the Comic, the Marvellous cannot be realised in relation to the divine being, as they cannot get into the kind of situation that would be responsible for such and kindred emotions. Moreover, gods are free from suffering. Even if a divine person has to become the hero, then for the sake of identification which leads to aesthetic experience, he should be more human than divine. Therefore, he who has the character of a king whose exploits are represented along with the sentiments and various mental states, and the kind of person whose acts are expressive of their joys and sorrows is called a *Nāṭaka*. It was mostly meant for presentations before kings.

Prakaraṇa

The play which is devised by the intellect of the dramatist and has an original and genuine plot which is worked out and elaborated by its hero, is called the *Prakaraṇa*. In the development of plot the role of the sentiments as was there in the *Nāṭaka* is applicable here as well. The only difference is that the plot here is newly created, thus it is an outcome of the dramatist's own imagination. In case the subject-matter is borrowed, there are certain things to keep in mind–i) it should not be based on history or Purāṇas, ii) in case the dramatist has borrowed, he must incorporate and introduce certain qualities of his own which makes his creation stand apart from the existing ones.

The hero need not be a person of a very high rank and exalted character. He can be a trader, a minister, a priest, a brahmana, officer of a king. However rich he may be,

he is not presented enjoying luxuries like a king and can have servants to help him. A courtesan or a respectable woman can also be heroine in this context. And if, in the play, we have the presence of both male and female characters corresponding to the required type, then a person in the company of a respectable woman should not meet the courtesan and vice versa at the same time.

Nāṭaka, therefore, is basically different from *Prakaraṇa* in its subject-matter. While the former is historical in origins and ancestry and therefore has to abide by establishable facts, the latter is fictitious and is based on imagination. *Nāṭaka* presupposes kings as its spectators whereas *Prakaraṇa* is for the middle class. Both of these should have various sentiments and psychological states, and the number of acts should not be less than five or more than ten.

Based on the mixture of the qualities of *Nāṭaka* and *Prakaraṇa* there is one more type known as *Nāṭikā*. Being a blend of the two it becomes different in that its plot is invented but the hero is a king. Further, it should be based on incidents relating to music or affairs of the harem. It has four acts and many female characters.

1.1.8 Types of Acting

Acting or *abhinaya* presents playwright's ideas put in words and made perceptible for the sake of the spectator. According to Bharatmuni *abhinaya* should neither be completely realistic nor artificial rather it should be a combination of the two. He realised the importance and requirement of both. He knew that to create a spectacle, the dramatic presentation needs to look realistic, but the temporal and spatial limitations cannot permit realistic presentation of everything. That is why he approves of artificiality too, and also the development of theatrical conventions to facilitate artificial presentation of all that which could not be presented within the limited course of action. Accordingly, there are four types of acting (*abhinaya*):

Physical Gesture (*Āṅgika Abhinaya*)

Physical gestures are exhibition and manifest forms of the psychological movement. What goes on in the human mind ideally gets reflected through physical gestures. Sometimes this expression is voluntary and sometimes involuntary. The body parts through which one expresses in *abhinaya* include—hands, head, breasts, waist, eyes,

eyebrow, lips, feet, nose and chin. Through the physical gesture is represented the central idea of the sentence, therefore, it is necessary for the actor to know exactly when and how to move the hands, etc. at the beginning of a sentence and as it draws to its close. This becomes even more accurate at the time of dance, as dance movements have to be in harmony with song and music, while simultaneously conveying facial expressions.

Verbal Acting (*Vâcika Abhinaya*)

The second type of *abhinaya* deals with language, another important part of dramatic presentation. Language is the carrier of ideas that are made perceptible by the gestures. It is an important aspect of vocal music as well. If *rasa* is the soul then presentation in words is said to be the body of drama. The importance of language itself becomes clear by the fact that Bharatmuni has talked about it in five different chapters and leaves almost no area on language untouched. His discussion of language starts from letters, to various forms of composition to rhetoric and prosody, etc. The major topics which he covers in this context are figures of speech, metres, diction, quality, rules regarding usage of different language, ways of addressing different characters, recitation, intonation, accent, use of punctuation, etc.

Gesture Flowing from Other Mental States (*Sāttvika Abhinaya*)

An actor enacting his part on the stage is a trained one. He has been trained to move his body parts in accordance with the flow of idea in a sentence. It is however important to understand that these movements are only parts of the enactment, they do not actually take place in him. There are certain other physical reactions which do not involve the direct movement of hands, etc. they are the result of the inner mental activities. *Sāttvika abhinaya* stands for that only which flows from the inner mental activities. Though they are physical reactions only but because of being different in type (related to mental state) they are categorised separately from the physical gestures. Because of being an internal aspect of aesthetic configuration, it is of great importance. It is also important because of its being the controller of the physical and vocal actions. For example: ‘trembling,’ and ‘change of colour’ these reactions are generally the outcome at the feeling of horror or our being overpowered by the inner mental state. Now in such a condition our physical and vocal actions will definitely be affected, it might as well so happen that we are not even able to speak for that moment of time.

Costume and Make-up (*Āhārya Abhinaya*)

Costume and make-up are no less important in the dramatic presentation. There would be different types of heroes and characters in drama, and to give a realistic presentation of the permanent mental states of each type, costume and make-up are important. Clarity and effectiveness of the presentation of a mental state is the result of the imitation of action by the actor who has been given the look of the hero with proper costume and make-up. Though the action changes according to the situation and time, yet the costume and make-up remain same so as to help the spectator identify the hero in different situations and help arousing the permanent mental state. Therefore, from the point of view of aesthetic configuration it is an essential aspect.

1.1.9 Death of the Protagonist?

Bharatmuni and Abhinavagupta both are of the opinion that death should not be presented on the stage. According to Bharatmuni the death of the hero (*nāyaka*) should not be presented on stage but if there has to be a death of any other character it should be in form of information only and not on-stage presentation. Abhinavagupta considers the depiction of death on stage as disturbance in the aesthetic experience, which in turn can adversely affect the very core of drama. He may suffer utmost adversity; he may be presented as fleeing or surrendering sometimes but never dying at any cost. From both these points we get the conclusion that there is no tragedy in Sanskrit drama as we have in Greek and Shakespeare.

1.1.10 Activity for the Learner

You will have noticed in course of this Unit that there are several parallels as also differences between the Indian and European Classical traditions, the latter having been part of your syllabus for Core Course 2. Your reading of Elizabethan drama texts in Core Course 1 is also relevant in this regard. With help from your counsellor, try and make a comparative study of Eastern and Western Classical traditions, and how we see its evolved manifestations in plays by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare.

1.1.11 Summing Up

In this unit we have therefore seen the origin and development of classical Indian drama and the essentials of it that mark its distinction from the Greek tragedy. We have given ample reasons why *Nāṭyaśāstra* is and should be considered as treatise on Indian dramaturgy and histrionics as it ranges from the literary to the technical aspects of drama. We have seen what the dramatic conventions have been and what the different aspects of drama are. What is action, how does the action develop through various stages, how is the action made presentable and perceptible (a striking feature of classical Indian drama), what are its types and what are the types of drama, these are some of the inquiries that have been the target to answer here. This discussion has started and ended with the striking features of classical Indian drama which gives us solid background to compare and contrast this with the Greek tragedies.

1.1.12 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type

Q.1. What are the essentials of ancient Indian drama that give it its strikingness as compared to the Greek tragedies? Discuss at length.

Q.2. What are the different ways of presenting action on the stage? Does the role of costume and make-up help in it?

Q.3. Elaborate the conception of the five stages.

Medium Length Answer Type

Q.1. What are the four different aspects (style) of drama?

Q.2. Violation of unity of time and place affects the development of action in a negative way. Do you agree with the remark? Give reasons to support your answer.

Q.3. Compare and contrast the Nataka and Prakarana in short.

Short Answer Type

Q.1. The Grand Style (sāttvika) corresponds to the Gesture Flowing from Other Mental States (sāttvika abhinaya). How?

Q.2. What is your take on the death of the protagonist?

Q.3. Discuss Costume and Make-up (āhārya abhinaya) in brief.

1.1.13 Suggested Reading

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Unit 2 □ Understanding Indian Aesthetics—*Rasa* and *Alaṁkāra*

Structure

1.2.0 Introduction

We have all heard of or used the term 'aesthetics' at some point of time or the other, either very loosely to imply something pleasant, or in its more informed sense. In this Unit, we will try and understand its application in the realm of Classical Indian Literature. But first, let us briefly form an idea about the origin of the term and its evolution of meaning(s).

The term aesthetic is borrowed from the West and it became an important term in the discussion of *Saundarya Śāstra*. It was Alexander Baumgarten who first used the word aesthetic way back in 1735 to refer to the science of sensory consciousness, which appeared to him as the most important aspect of fine arts and literature. This term gradually came to signify the science and philosophy of fine arts. In Indian context, the word 'aesthetic' stands for the scientific and philosophical inquiry of fine art. This, at first hand, reminds us of Hegel for

whom fine art is an art that represents the Absolute in sensuous garb. Among the fine art, Hegel includes music, poetry, painting, architecture, sculpture, etc. But so far as Indian aesthetics is concerned we find the emphasis being laid primarily upon poetry, music and then architecture. Therefore, aesthetics broadly deals with the philosophic perception of these arts. Accordingly, the philosophic perception of poetry is known as *Rasa-Brahma Vāda,* that of music is called *Nāda-Brahma Vāda* and architecture is *Vāstu-Brahma Vāda*. In this Unit we will confine our study particularly to poetry and dramaturgy with special reference to *rasa.* Further we would like to introduce you with the basics of Indian aesthetics, aesthetic experience, and its pervasive impact on the human mind.

1.2.1 Basics of Indian Aesthetics

In India, at the very beginning, the study of aesthetics was confined and restricted to the realm of drama only. But we all agree and the scholars have all agreed upon it that poetry is the highest of all arts, and drama in turn is the highest form of poetry. Drama is and has been a composite art with *vāstu* (architecture), *citra* (pictorial representation), and *saṁgīta* (music). All the three involve and appeal to the eyes and the ears (the senses). Therefore, Indian study of aesthetics does not draw its origin from any abstract or disinterested desire for knowledge; rather it draws from motives which are of a purely empirical nature. Even Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Judgement* opines that every reference of representation is capable of being objective, even the sensuous ones too, so far as it signifies the real in an empirical representation. Thus we can say that aesthetics is a branch of philosophy where, "....beauty and art are understood in terms of essential philosophical ideas, while philosophy itself is taken to be at least in part constituted by aesthetic reflection." (*Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings in Aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger,* by Albert Hofstadter and Richard Kuhns).

1.2.2 *Nāṭyaśāstra* : The Earliest Compendium of Aesthetics/ Aesthetics : An Offshoot of *Nāṭyaśāstra*

In the earlier Unit you have already been introduced to the most ancient Indian treatise on drama, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* written almost more than two millenniums ago (4th or 5th Century A.D.?), which is ascribed to the mythical sage Bharatmuni. You also

know by now that it is an encyclopaedia of Indian dramaturgy as it encompasses all subjects connected with the stage, be it stage, dance, music, movement, make-up, gestures, postures, etc. It doesn't only have abundance of thought but also is infused with integrated subject matter. Divided into thirty-six chapters, this voluminous collection of observations and rules is concerned mainly with the production of drama and training of actors and poets. Apart from these, one of the salient features or remarkable achievement of *Nāṭyaśāstra* is its classification of various mental states or emotions of human soul and the way they are transformed from practical to aesthetic plane. That is why this encyclopaedic collection of fine arts has animated the great consciousness for arts in India. Thus, it is a work of great psychological insight. The reason why drama is considered as the highest form of art is because it appeals specifically to two of the senses, which are eye (sight) and ear (hearing). According to the Indian thinkers these are the senses that contribute towards rising above the boundaries of the "I." Compared to any other form of art, in drama the aforesaid senses together arouse in the spectator that state of consciousness which is unique in itself. This state of consciousness transformed from practical to aesthetic plane is conceived concretely and intuitively, and is known as *Rasa*.

In Chapter Six of *Nāṭyaśāstra* we come across this Indian conception of aesthetic experience known as *Rasa*. Those sensations which are almost devoid of any mental representation and are proper to the senses of taste and touch are considered to be states of consciousness which are more familiar and removed from any abstract representation compared to the ordinary ones. That is known as aesthetic experience. That is why the analogy of juice or flavour suits aptly in context of *rasa*. Aesthetic experience derived out of *rasa* by the spectator or the reader is savoured just like the juice. Therefore, the function of *rasa* is to transform a commonplace emotion into an aesthetic experience so that it can be tasted, chewed and that way assimilated into one's self. The pleasure of tasting *rasa*, therefore, is as aesthetic experience. How a commonplace emotion is transformed into an aesthetic one will be discussed in the subsequent sections of this Unit.

1.2.3 *Rasa*: Theory and Explication

Bharatmuni in his famous aphorism defines *rasa* as—"vibhāvānubhāva-vyabhicāri-saṁyogād rasa-niṣpattiḥ" which means that the *rasa* is produced from the

combination of *vibhāva* (determinants), *anubhāva* (consequents), and *vyabhicārī bhāvas* (complementary mental / psychological states). Now this aphorism involves lot of questions in the minds of the readers, like, if *rasa* is **produced** (*niṣpattiḥ*), then what does the word production stand for? What is the nature of *rasa*? What are the *bhāvas* (psychological states) and how do we feel them? What is the relationship among the determinants, consequents and other complementary mental states, etc.? These are some of the questions on which debates in Indian aesthetics are rooted. But before we proceed to answer these questions, we would expound on this empirical psychology of Bharatmuni.

According to *Nāṭyaśāstra*, there are eight fundamental feelings or durable psychological states which Bharatmuni names as *sthāyī bhāvas*:

Sr. No.	**Sthāyī bhāvas**
1	*Rati* (Delight)
2	*Hāsa* (Laughter)
3	*Śoka* (Sorrow)
4	*Krodha* (Anger)
5	*Utsāha* (Heroism)
6	*Bhaya* (Terror)
7	*Jugupsā* (Disgust)
8	*Vismaya* (Wonder)
9	*Śama* (Serenity) **This was not given place in Nāṭyaśāstra and was added later**

These eight states are supposed to be inborn in a man's heart. They exist permanently in every man's mind but in a latent form and therefore, these are called *sthāyī bhāvas*. According to later speculations, the ninth rasa was included, the *sthāyī bhāvas* of which was *śama* (serenity). Now because these *sthāyī bhāvas* reside in every human but in latent form, they need to be evoked or stimulated. Once evoked they manifest themselves and it is in their manifested form that they are transformed into *rasa*. That is why every *rasa* has its corresponding *sthāyī bhāvas*. It is therefore the manifest aesthetic representation of the *sthāyī bhāvas* that is known as *rasa*. That is why, the permanent mental states are not created but just stimulated because they are already there in our psyche in dormant form. Once enervated, they start conveying the concurrent emotions in the form of feelings. This is the aesthetic manifestation of the

abstract emotions which can be chewed, tasted and digested in form of *rasa*. Following is the list of the nine *rasas*, that correspond to the *bhavas* or the dormant states of the human mind:

Sr. No.	Rasas
1	*Śṛṅgāra* (The Erotic)
2	*Hāsya* (The Comic)
3	*Karuṅa* (The Pathetic)
4	*Raudra* (The Furious)
5	*Vīra* (The Heroic)
6	*Bhayānaka* (The Terrible)
7	*Bībhatsa* (The Odious)
8	*Adbhuta* (The Marvellous)
9	*Śānta* (The Quietistic)

Thus, the theory of *rasa* gives expression to nine fundamental and distinguished human emotions and temperaments by stimulating the permanent mental states. Though, rather informal, but a very suitable example of relishing *rasa* would be that of 'tea.' Many condiments are needed while making a good cup of tea, but at the time of having it we just enjoy the taste without focusing our attention to the ingredients and the procedure involved in its making. We do not taste milk, water, tea leaf, ginger, sugar, etc. separately. Same analogy is applied to the aesthetic experience of *rasa*, where we forget the complicated and multilayered structure involved in the presentation of the spectacle. Everything is so synchronised and complementary to each other that we rarely pay attention to them and just get engrossed in the wholeness of the situation. But they do exist and contribute to evoke the durable mental states into the sentiments. That is why we need to proceed to each category step by step so that we may unfold them and understand the structure. So the following section involves a detailed discussion on *vibhā ̄va*, *anubhāva*, and *vyabhicārī bhāvas*, which as we said earlier, are the generic components that combine to produce the *rasas*.

1.2.4 Nature, Form, and Function of Vibhāva, Anubhāva, and Vyabhicārī Bhāvas

The manifestation of each of the feelings is accompanied by three elements— *Vibhāva* (determinants), *Anubhāva* (consequents), and *Vyabhicārī bhāvas* (complementary mental states). These three respectively stand for causes, effects and concomitant elements. The causes are the situations by which the *bhāva* is excited; the effects are the visible reactions caused by it and the concomitant elements are the temporary mental states accompanying it. The various modulations of our mental states which the *bhāvas* go through are extremely complex as it is accompanied by various other mental states. So it becomes necessary to unfold them one by one so that we can have a comprehensive idea about them all.

***Vibhāva* (Determinant)**

On the basis of the function that the *vibhāvas* perform they are known as the causes of which *ālambana* and *udvīpana* are the two types. They work as a stimulator to the permanent mental states (*sthāyī bhāvas*). *Ālambana* is the person or the object responsible for the arousal of the emotion, and *udvīpana* is the surrounding, the environment used to heighten that emotion or feeling. It is the *vibhāva* that stimulates the *sthāyī bhāva*. To take an example from your syllabised text, Śakuntalā is an example of *ālambana* and the garden, flowers, birds chirping, mild sweet air blowing, etc. are examples of *udvīpana*. Thus the actual cause behind an outcome is determined basically by the *vibhāvas.* We can take the example of tears which roll down from the eyes because of happiness, grief or of certain infection in the eyes or even while chopping onions. Now, to trace the genuine reason of this outcome (i.e. tears rolling on the cheek) we will have to rely on our perception of the determinants so as to become sure of it, otherwise it will not be easy for us to surmise.

***Anubhāva* (Consequents)**

As consequence to the causes, the physical changes that come as reactions are known as consequents. The *anubhāvas* communicate the basic emotion in form of effects. It is of three types:

- *Vācika* (Verbal Impression)
- *Āṅgika* (Physical Reaction)
- *Sāttvika* (Other Physical Reactions)

Because all the three reactions are physical only as they all communicate through body language, be it *vācika, āṅgika* or *sāttvika*, they are conducive too in nature.

So far as the types are concerned *vācika* and *āṅgika* stand for verbal expression and physical reactions respectively but the *sāttvika* is also kind of physical reactions but those that do not involve any movement as such. Some of its examples are—perspiration, trembling, change of colour, etc. The emotion evoked by the determinants (*vibhāvas*) gets communicated successfully by the consequents (*anubhāvas*), thus the consequents' function becomes important in the sense that it concretises the abstract emotions. For example the emotion *rati* (delight) is abstract as such but when it is communicated through physical reactions, it gets a face of its own.

Vhabhicārī Bhāvas (Concomitant Elements)

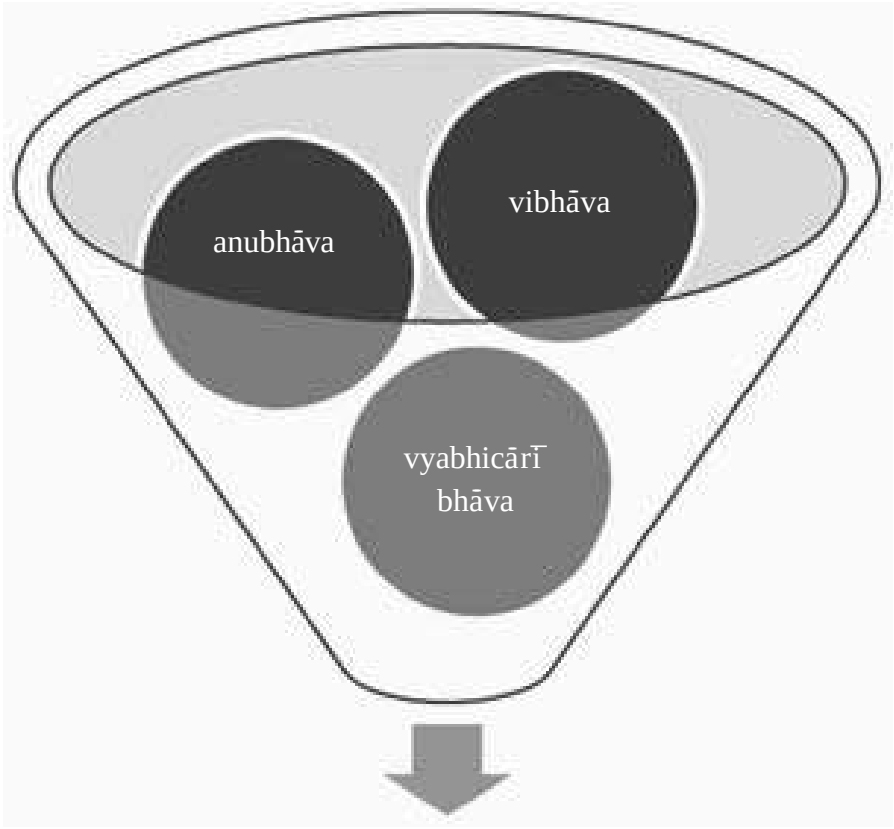
Vyabhicārī bhāvas are the transient emotions. Though they are mental states, they are different from permanent mental states in that they do not persist for long, and are rather temporary in nature. As we come face to face with the situation or words, they sustain themselves till that point of time only. As we pass on from one to the other they also pass on. We can illustrate this with the example of the following verse lines:

"We are not now that strength which in old days,
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic heart,
Made weak by time and fate but strong in will.
To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield". (Tennyson's 'Ulysses')

"Now the one dominant *rasa* here is that of *vīra* (utsāha) but the other *vyabhicārī bhāvas* are also there. The first line quoted here evokes the feeling of discouragement, the second evokes the feeling of intoxication, the third that of arrogance, fourth that of despair, but, by the time we finish reading the last line we are left with the *utsāha bhāva* which is the dominant one. The others are called *vyabhicārī* because they carry the sentiments which are connected with words and temperament" (Singh). According to Bharatmuni these complementary mental states are thirty-three in number.

This is the nature, form and function of *Vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicārī bhāva*. Though we have discussed them separately as being the causes, effects and

concomitants elements, we must remember that they do not function independently. As the very definition of *rasa* says, "out of the union of the Determinants, the Consequents and the Transitory Mental States, the birth of *Rasa* takes place," therefore, they produce *rasa* only in unison.



1.2.5 Concept of Generalisation

Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, a Kashmiri thinker who lived presumably in the first half of the tenth century, is credited to have formulated the concept of generalisation. Out of the several commentaries on *Nāṭyaśāstra,* especially on *rasa,* Abhinavagupta rejects every stand except this concept of generalisation. Since aesthetic experience tends to be *sādhā ̄raṇī ̄kṛta* (generalised), we need to first understand this concept of generalisation before coming to a detailed discussion of the nature of aesthetic experience.

According to this principle, the spectator or "subject enjoys being into the situation by observing the *vibhāva*, *anubhāva*, etc. irrespective of the characters, time and domain. For example, while watching Lear's suffering in the play *King Lear*, the audience as subject cannot claim that the suffering belongs particularly and solely to Lear who is the object, and not to him (spectator) as the subject. The *sthāyī bhāva 'śoka* (sorrow),' thus being available to all, is felt by them all alike. There do not exist two separate feelings, rather the feeling of the subject and that of the object gets merged into each other and the distinction between the two is lost. Therefore, the realisation of *rasa* is called extraordinary" (Singh). There is no practical reason involved on the part of the subject as he/she gets disconnected from any kind of pain, frustration or happiness. Secondly, we as a particular person cease to retain our particularity and become universal. We lose our particular entity and become one with the spectacle.

1.2.6 Nature of Aesthetic Experience

The concept of generalisation or *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* in itself contains the characteristic feature of an aesthetic experience. It encompasses one of the basic qualities of an art / aesthetic experience—unselfishness, and should give a kind of experience which is pure and unstained by anything practical. The situation represented does not have such specification as, 'this is related to me,' 'this does not relate to me,' 'this relates to my enemy,' 'this relates to someone who is indifferent to me,' etc. The *vibhāvas* and *anubhāvas* differ from any ordinary causes and effects on account of this state of generality because this leads us beyond the limited self.

Going beyond the limited self thus means transcending the boundaries of the limited "I." The consciousness of the subject or spectator, while having an aesthetic experience, is devoid of any practical desire. The spectacle is not felt at any particular individual level but at a general plane because of its power to terminate the confined, particular individuality of the spectator, who, then, for that moment of time, becomes one with the spectacle. It is this connection, assimilation and association that lead us to the realisation or *rasa* as an aesthetic experience. For example, let us suppose we are watching the character of Rama being enacted on the stage. Even if the scene presented on the stage is actually artificial, it appears to be real to the spectator. Putting aside his

own personality, he associates himself with the spectacle, as the perception of Rama is very much there. And therefore, he/she enjoys being into that situation. This is the power of revelation which according to Abhinavagupta is a "special power..... that words assume in drama and poetry. This faculty has the capacity to suppress the thick layer of mental stupor of our consciousness" (*Gnoli*) and the things presented or described in their general and universal form.

Abhinavagupta, in his *Abhinavabharatī* (a commentary on *Nāṭyaśāstra*) states that the aesthetic experience is marked by three basic characteristics—*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* being the first (which we've already covered), *sākṣātakārātmaka* being the second and *mukhya mahābhūta rasa* being the third. The reception of aesthetic experience is based on the senses because it is through the senses that we grasp the spectacle or the object. In the absence of the determinants, consequents and concomitant elements the spectator / subject cannot infer or anticipate. Even if he/she meditates upon it, it will be impossible for them to get affected because *rasa* is direct in nature. This is the meaning of *sākṣātakārātmaka*. By *mukhya mahābhūta rasa*, we mean that there is only one dominant *rasa* present. The determinants, the consequents and the concomitant elements should all be channelized towards the manifestations of the one dominant *rasa* and not multiple or more than one. We can use the analogy of different pearls strung together with one bead to explain this. The position of the one dominant rasa is like pendant in a necklace, there might be multi coloured pearls woven in it but they all should contribute to magnify the beauty of the pendant in spite of diminishing or clouding it. Such should be the position of the *mukhya mahābhūta* rasa in presence of *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicārī bhāvas*.

Thus when the subject/spectator, "without any personal prejudices and devoid of terrestrial bondages, relates himself to the vibhāvas that have undergone the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, then being engrossed in that situation, he/she starts relishing the rapture of rasa" (Singh).

1.2.7 Alaṃkāras: Their Function

The poetic figures or *alaṁkāras* are credited to Bhāmaha a Sanskrit poetician supposedly of the 7th century, whose *Kāvyālaṁkāra*, by common consent is considered to be the earliest available authority on poetics. In his definition of poetry Bhāmaha maintains that words and meanings together form poetry, and in order for the

meaning to be striking, embellishment or *alaṁkaraṇa* is the most essential element of poetry. It is only through *alaṁkaras* that even a simple idea can be rendered striking with equally striking words. Thus Bhāmaha's object is not on defining the nature of aesthetic experience but to state the poetic embellishments. Broadly, he is of the opinion that these poetic embellishments should be put in such a manner as to create a pleasant experience.

Poetry is not just thought, rather it gives the airy nothing a local name and habitation. In poetry along with emotion, imagination is also necessary not only for the perception but also for the presentation of facts. Poetic figures have that power to make plain feelings or facts look catching by embellishing them. All poetry requires being useful, but primarily it has to be attractive; and this is the reason that Bhāmaha, while describing poetry, excludes ordinariness in expression. A literary figure can be said to be a deviation from the ordinary or plain way of speaking for the sake of greater effects. This striking deviation is expressional as it is related to words and ideas and gives beauty to the poetic form. Another thinker of the 11th century, Bhoja says in *Śṛngāra Prakāśa* that 'poetry does not reveal the truth in logic but in light.' Mere thoughts, emotions and facts by themselves are unattractive and are proper for science and scientific inquiry. They may bring us face to face with the reality but the poets teach us as they please and charm. Pleasure (*ānanda*) and charm (*cāru*) are essential characteristic features of aesthetic experience. Because *alaṁkāra* is associated with poetics, there may arise questions whether poetics and dramaturgy are different, or if things applicable to dramaturgists hold no good for poeticians. But it is a historical fact that after Abhinavagupta and Ānandvardhana, *rasa* has been able to establish its supreme position in poetry along with drama. While examining the field of poetry, Bhāmaha found *laṁkā ̄ras* (poetic figures) present everywhere and therefore considers them to be the soul of poetry.

The earliest authority to this aesthetic element in poetics is Bharatmuni himself. In *Nāṭyaśāstra* he counts the poetic figures to be four only. Later, thinkers like Abhinavagupta and Ānadvardhana also expressed their views on poetic figures. With the analogy of building a palace, Abhinavagupta compares the different stages in the production of poetry. According to him the *lakṣaṣas* (property) are the walls in the palace and the *alaṁkāras* are just like paintings used to adorn them. Later in *Abhinavabharatī*, highlighting this adorning function he says that *alaṁkāras* are like garlands which are different from the body, but are essential in making it beautiful. As an example of this beautifying function of poetic figures, you can go through this translation of a verse that Abhinavagupta has used:

> "O beautiful lady! Thou seem to have born out of a mild banana plant and thy body seems filled with honey. Thy eyebrows move like the bow of Kāmadeva and the arrows pierce my heart. Thy face is just like lotus with drops of water all over it, the mere fragrance of which makes me feel enchanted. O lady! Thou art a peerless creation of Brahman" (Singh).

Now just by reading these lines you can feel the delicate and piercing beauty of the lady.

Ānadvardhana, in Chapter 2 of *Dhvnyāloka* says that although, the poetic figures are the body (*śarīra*), they can be made the soul (*śariri*), but that is only when the poetic figures are suggested and not expressed. Thus, when the poetic figures like—simile, metaphor, paradox, etc are deeply and richly embedded in poetic expression and through words and ideas that come into expression, they are known as *alaṁkāras*. But the poetic figures have their meaning only when they keep to their places. Just as a pearl necklace beautifies only a full bosom otherwise it cannot add to the beauty, only a poetic figure which is appropriate to the meaning, which yields to the *artha* (relevant meaning) can be of any beauty. Abhinavagupta says in this regard that although the poetic figures are like the external ornaments on the body, they can be like the saffron (*kumkuma*) smeared on the body for the sake of beauty but only when it is organic and suitable to the structure.

Thus we see that whether it is Bharatmuni, Bhāmaha, Abhinavagupta or Ānandvardhana, they all agree that the basic and particular function of *alaṁkāras* is for the sake of adornment. We have already pointed at the outset that poetry is not mere emotion, thought or manner; it finds completeness only when appropriately transformed into a beautiful expression. This is the definition of the poetic figure, this is the place that it occupies, and this is the function that it performs. In the following section, let us look at the types of poetic figures.

1.2.8 Types of Alaṁkāras

According to Bhāmaha, there are **thirty-eight types alaṁkāras** which have been placed under two major divisions which are ***Śabdālaṁkāra*** (Verbal Poetic Figures) and **Arthālaṁkāra** (Ideal Poetic Figures). While the first category includes two poetic figures—*anuprāsa* and *yamaka*; the remaining thirty-six poetic figures are included in the second category. Of these, only some of the poetic figures find importance from the

literary perspective as well as from the point of view of our understanding them. These major ones are listed below in a tabular form:

Sr. No.	Name of Alaṁkāras	Brief Definition	Example
1	*Anuprāsa* (Alliteration)	Similarity of letters or repetition of consonants	In a somer seson, when soft was the sonne
2	*Upamā* (Simile)	Direct comparison of two different objects on the basis of similarity of properties	O my love's like a red red rose
3	*Rūpaka* (Metaphor)	Comparison based upon extreme likeness between two objects whose difference is not entirely concealed. It is a kind of indirect comparison	She has a heart of stone
4	*Śleśa* (Paronomasia)	When in a single sentence, there are several meanings, it is Paronomasia	"It is no matter if the tied were lost; for it is the unkindest tied that ever any man tied". (Richard III)
5	*Atiśayokti* (Hyperbole)	When the object compared is recognised as swallowed within the 'object compared to' it is Hyperbole	Not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten my little hand.
6	*Ākṣepa* (Hint)	When something desired to be said is suppressed for the sake of conveying a special idea, it is Hint	Omens, like broken mirror or prophecies
7	*Arthāntaranyāsa* (Transition)	Where either a universal or particular is supported by its converse, either through similitude or otherwise	A person suffering from bile sees the snow-white conch also as yellow

8	*Dīpaka* (Illuminator)	When a common property belonging to several objects is mentioned only once, it is Illuminator	The wealth of misers, the head-jewel of serpent, the mane of lions—how can these be touched until they are dead?
9	*Virodh* (Contradiction)	When something is spoken contradictory, even when there is no contradiction	The Child is the father of the Man

1.2.9 Activity for the Learner

Identity the types of *Alankaras* in the texts that are on your syllabus.

1.2.10 Summing Up

In this Unit, we have therefore learnt the origin of the term aesthetics and its connotations with special reference to Indian aesthetics which is more empirical experience than mere abstract philosophy. We also have seen how this aesthetic experience is best delineated with the theory of *rasa* which was formulated in *Nāṭyaśāstra* but later on developed as an independent and unique discipline. We have dealt upon its different component parts how individually as well as collectively they make the theory happen on practical plane. What is role of generalisation? How the aesthetic experience tends to be? We have tried answering all these inquiries. And in the second part of this unit we have dealt upon the poetic figures and their function and have seen how the alaṁkāras are used by the poets to heighten the effect of poetic expression by making them beautiful.

1.2.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type

1. What is the nature of the aesthetic experience that prevails in our realisation of Rasa?

2. Delineate the form, function and nature of the Vibhāvas, anubhāvas, and vyabhicā ˉrīˉ bhāvas at length.

3. Indian aesthetics dwells upon the empirical and concrete rather than on abstract concepts. Do you agree with the remark? If yes then give reasons to support your answer.

4. Discuss the theory of rasa as foundation of Indian aesthetics.

Medium Length Answer Type

1. On what ground the sthāyī bhāvas are different from the rasas?

2. What aesthetic function do alaṁkāras have to perform?

Short Answer Type

1. Discuss in brief the concept of generalisation.

2. Discuss in brief the types of the alaṁkāras.

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Unit 3 □ Characteristics and Forms of Classical Sanskrit Drama

Structure

1.3.0 Introduction

The primary purpose of this Unit is to provide the learner a basic acquaintance into the different types of drama that were theoretically practiced in the ancient and classical Indian theatrical tradition. In its way, a learner opting for a specialized study of European literature would be able to correlate the Indian theatre aesthetics with the western ones and would be in a better position to understand the variety in dramatic

representations across the globe. Further it is to acquaint the learner with the oft forgotten occidental tradition in drama and then make one well versed into several dramatic forms widely used in vernacular drama in India even today.

1.3.1 General Characteristics

The Indian Classical Drama, a term which broadly designates the dramatic literature that came after the Ancient Indian dramatic literature, has its origin in the second century BCE and has several distinctive features that mark it as unique in the history of Indian drama. Classical drama usually consists of stock characters like the *Nayaka*, the *Nayika*, *Bidusaka* and characters like *Vita* and *Cheta*, who are largely social marginals and flat types. In fact, the greatest source on the characteristics of Indian classical drama, as you know by now, is *Bharat Natyasastra* a treatise on the different aspects of ancient and classical drama by Bharata Muni, the father of Indian theatrology and performing arts. Bharata is supposed to have lived between 1500 BCE and 1400 CE.

Perhaps the most profound influence that any theorist had on ancient Indian and classical performing arts is Bharata Muni. Of course, performing arts did develop before Bharata in a major way; but he is the one who is supposed to have systematized, codified and given it a local habitation and a name in his *Natyasastra*. The *Natyasastra* consists of thirty six chapters and is widely considered the fifth *Veda* in the world of performing aesthetics. Bharata is no less important to ancient, classical and modern day Indian performing art as is Aristotle in the history of Greek drama or epic. The subdivisions done below are of the ten types of play is contained in different chapters of the *Bharat Natya Sastra*. The ten different kinds of *Rupakas* Bharata speaks about are *Nataka, Prakarana, Samavakara, Ihamrga, Dima,Vyayoga, Anka, Prahasana, Bhana* and *Vithi*. In the remaining part of our discussion of these ten types of performances, or *Dasharupaka*, we would basically focus on Bharata's subdivisions.

Bharata's *Natyasastra* which is a broad compendium written by Bharat Muni is the most important addresses many aspects of drama like acting performance, dramatic composition, make up, costume, props and other elements. Ancient Indian drama was professional in nature. The Director was a kind of stage manager called *Sutradhara* who

also was often an actor. The metaphor over here is quite clear. The word *Sutradhara* means one who holds the strings. Thus actors are to almost be like puppets, stringed to the stage manager' hand. Acting normally consisted of two styles. One was realistic or *Lokadharmi* and the other was traditional, or the *Natyadharmi*. The realistic style was not that popular, rather *Natyadharmi,* the conventional stylized manner was more in vogue. However, the most important aspect of Classical Drama is the theory of *Rasa* which has been propounded by Bharata. While the word in the context of theatrical performances meant sentiment, it also broadly took within its ambit the emotional and aesthetic flavour of the performance. Bharata in Chapter VI of *Natyasastra* speaks extensively on the *Rasa* and this has been given more elucidation later by the Kashmiri Shaivaite philosopher, Abhinavagupta who can be said to have immortalized it in his wonderful treatise called *Abhinavabharati* which is actually a commentary on the *Natyasastra* with its focus on the *Rasa* theory. Bharata holds in the *Natyasastra* that while enlightenment and entertainment are the desired goals of performing arts, the main object is the idea of transporting the audience into another reality which can only be experienced by the evocation of *Rasa* caused by *Bhaba* or the state of mind. This leads Bharata to frame the *Rasa Sutra* which wonderfully formulates the way these emotions work. He also divides the *Rasas* into nine types, actually talking about eight *Rasas* in chapter six and later adding a new *Rasa* called *Santa Rasa* or the sentiment of tranquility in a later place in the treatise. These *Rasas* derived from *Bhabas* which are basically of three types, the *Sthayi Bhaba,* the *Sanchari Bhaba* and the *Satwika Bhaba* are the fundamental components of Indian classical drama. In the following parts we will see how Bharata also contributed to the categorization of the different forms of classical drama which are mainly based on these *Bhabas*, *Rasas* and, more importantly, on the structures of the plays.

1.3.2 Classifications of Drama according to Bharata

The *Dasharupaka* or the ten types of plays find their mention and treatment in Chapter 20 of the *Natyasastra*. At the beginning of the chapter, Bharata makes a declaration that the classification is in accordance with the names, functions and the mode of production of the plays. He also names the ten different kinds of plays. These are, as already enumerated above, *Nataka, Prakarana, Samavakara, Ihamrga,*

Dima,Vyayoga, Anka, Prahasana, Bhana and *Vithi*. Bharata also mentions that these plays are differentiated from each other on the basis of their stylistic features and in this respect he draws the analogy from the world of music. Just as the musical notes come together to build up the scales, the difference existing in the scales, not so much in the notes, similarly, the difference among the different types of plays exists in the style of production rather than the thematic import of these plays. This analogy with music is quite intriguing over here. Bharata breaks down the concept of differentiation into its component elements. Just as any scale movement in music can be broken down into the component notes, just as the notes remain inviolatable, unalterable and constant, similarly, it is the permutation and combination of the different elements that create the components of difference in the plays. Like the notes in music, the basic subject matter remains the same.

Bharata further continues the analogy of music to distinguish between the different modes of production in drama. He points out just as the tonal and the fifth chord in music includes all the notes, similarly the first two kinds of grammatical composition, the *Nataka* and the *Prakarana* include all the styles of dramatic production. These are the two production forms which are instinctively associated with grace and gravity. Bharata mentions some other specific forms like the *Bhana*, the *Sambakara*, the *Vithi*, the *Ihamgra*, the *Vyayoga*, the *Anka*, the *Dima* and the *Prahasana* not to be associated with grace and grandeur. This is the reason why he begins his specific analysis of the production form with the *Nataka* and the *Prakarana* who are considered to be the most dignified of these forms.

As noted earlier, the most profound influence that any theorist had on ancient Indian and classical performing art is that of Bharata Muni. Of course performing arts did develop before Bharata in a major way but he is the one who is supposed to have systematized, codified and given it a local habitation and a name in his *Natyasastra*. The *Natyasastra* consists of thirty six chapters and is considered the fifth *Veda* in the world of performing aesthetics. The subdivisions done below of the ten types of play are contained in his *Natyasastra*. In the remaining part of our discussion of these ten types of performances, or *Dasharupaka*, ten different kinds of *Rupakas*, we would basically focus on the subdivisions propounded by Bharata and later developed by Dhananjaya about whom we will deal in the next part.

1.3.3 Dhananjaya's Contributions

When it comes to Dhananjaya of the 10th century C.E., writing almost 1200 years after Bharata, his *Dasharupakam* is a treatise which can be taken as a development over Bharata. Like Bharata, Dhananjaya also divides drama into ten categories and in *Dasharupakam* he provides a detailed analysis in four chapters (*Aloka*) on the different types of heroines and the different aspects of the *Srngara Rasa* evoked in each type. *Dasharupakam* adds a different dimension to the study of the *Natyasastra* in the fact that it reads the plays and the aspects enumerated in the *Natyasastra* from the standpoint of the *Vastusastra*, the standpoint of what he calls the *Nayikaveda*, the distinction between the different characters, particularly the heroes and the heroines, and that of *Rasa*. Dhananjaya accepts all of the ten subdivisions enumerated by Bharata but only changes the order of his treatment of these. While *Dasharupakam* can be taken as a commentary on the *Natyasastra*, it has its own commentary in a work called *Avaloka* written by Dhanika who was Dhananjaya's younger brother. Dhananjaya does not add much over Bharata's subdivisions; he only provides a development on the same categories in the four chapters of his *Dasharupakam*.

1.3.4 Forms of Drama : *Nataka*

The *Nataka* normally has a well known story of which the audience is already aware. The hero is a person who is not only socially dignified but also morally elevated. Most often he is a member of the royalty or the nobility. He has many superhuman abilities and often relies on has divine protection. Gods are fond of him. He goes through heroic exploits like the epical heroes. He is also a great lover, very successful in his amorous dealings. Another requirement by Bharata is that a typical *Nataka* should be divided into a number of acts or *Ankas* and should have an introductory scene which is called the *Pravesaka*. Bharata has also given a definition of what he calls to be a *Nataka*. It will be an action of kings and will be divided into acts. It will be evoking many *Rasas* to create a definitive psychological impact in the audience. Now we shall come to each of these features.

An act is actually a division in the play and it is the way the plot is divided. It is a part of the play where the incident takes place but the scene is not finally resolved.

Bharata also makes clear that an act which deals with heroic exploits should not be too long. It should also contain more than one *Rasa* and the characters who would cause the sentiments are either the hero, or his consort or members in the royal court. He also tells what should not be there in an act. An act should not be describing any miracle, any marriage, terrified flight, a curse, grief or anger, a battle, death, seize in the city, the murder of the hero and the like. Almost in a way reminiscent of the unity of time attributed to Aristotle, and act should cover the events that can take place in the course of a single day. And it should not be cluttered with too many of incidents. The action of the different acts should be distributed almost equally during the length of the day which is divided into *Skhanas*, *Yamas*, and *Muhurtas*.

Bharata's concept of the introductory scene is quite different from that of a traditional introductory scene. In fact, in Bharata, when the events that are to be represented cannot be accommodated in a particular act, these events should be presented in an introductory scene subsequent to that act. A typical introductory scene performs multiple functions. Announcements regarding the change in time or motivation of characters, the reversal of action (something that Aristotle calls Anagnorisis) or even the beginning of some event. Sometimes this introductory scene is presented as a condensed form of action that cannot be represented on the stage often because of the involvement of many characters in it.

Bharata also talks in detail about the supporting scene or the *Viskambhaka* in a typical Nataka. Since these scenes generally deal with middling characters and are generally of two types, the pure and the mixed, the *Suddha* and the *Sankirna* respectively. The pure variety of supporting scenes normally deals with exclusively middling characters, whereas the mixed type deals with both inferior and middling characters. Bharata also specifies the number of of the attendant of the heroes who should be there in the *Nataka* or the performance of the *Prakarana*. They should not be of a huge number, not exceeding four or five in all. He also adds a special note on the introduction of chariots and palaces on the stage. Bharata prohibits the presentation of chariots, elephants, horses and palaces on the stage for theatrical representation. He is in favour of men and women who would impersonate these roles. Thus, his idea of theatre is somewhat very close to the abstraction of the Brechtian stage. However Bharata is flexible in his use of props and the bare stage need not be bare for all the time. He

allows the use of models in these cases if human impersonation is not possible. If one has to represent an army on the stage, this again has to be symbolically done. Only four to six persons would represent the total army. Bharat also makes it clear that at the end of a typical Nataka the sentiment of the marvelous (*Adbhuta Rasa*)should also be presented.

1.3.5 *Prakarana*

Bharata defines *Prakarana* as a play in which the playwright makes up his own plot, completely original, and the hero does not come from the royalty or the nobility. Thus, *Prakarana* involves the exploits of Brahmins, merchants, ministers, priests, officers etc. Another abiding aspect of the *Prakarana* is the absence of any divine character in the play. Gods and goddesses who frequent the *Nataka* are conspicuously absent in the *Prakarana*. The play written in *Prakarana* form should also have the character of one or more slaves. Bharata specifies that the deeds of the central character in the *Prakarana* are those of Brahmin, a trader, a priest, a minister, and not usually of kings and nobilities. *Prakarana*, thus, represents a cross section of the social life it deals with. In most cases the heroine will be a courtesan leading the life of almost a commoner. The introductory scenes are the same in the case of the *Prakarana* as in *Nataka*. Examples of typical *Prakarana* plays are *Malati Madhava* by Bhababhuti and *Mrcchakatika* by King Sudraka. *Prakaranas* are most often divided into five to ten acts and have *Srngara* as the dominant *Rasa*.

Sometimes we find an intermediary between the Rupaka and the Prakarana. These are plays where the central protagonist comes from a royal family but the plot of the story is completely a product of the playwright's imagination, and not a familiar one drawn from traditional literature. Sometimes, these plays feature the heroine as a member of the royal family. These plays were popularly called *Natikas*. They are generally divided into five acts and they represent the follies and foibles, the achievements and the aberrations of the royalty.

1.3.6 *Samavakara*

The third form of *Rupaka* that we will deal with has been called by Bharata *Samavakara*. It basically features popular gods and demons in the role of its heroes. A

Samavakara is a dramatic form that is based on what may be called the principle of three. It is a three act play; it depicts three forms of deceit, three incidents of calamity and three types of love. It has is many as twelve heroes, mostly drawn from divinities and is generally a petty long play spanning in time over eighteen *Nadikas*, each *Nadika* being twenty four minutes long.

The difference in duration between the three acts has also been fixed in the case of a *Samavakara*. The first act generally consists of twelve *Nadikas*, the second, four and the third, only two. This makes up the total of eighteen *Nadikas*. The dominant *Rasa* for *Samavakara* is the *Vira Rasa* which is often mingled with the *Srngara*. Regarding the use of the metres in these plays, Bharata particularly prohibits the use of the *Usnik* and the *Gayatri* metres, since they would be too complex for the dramatic form. The great poet Bhasa is credited with the composition of two very well known *Samavakaras*, the *Samudramanthanam* and the *Pancharatnam*.

1.3.7 *Ihamrga*

Ihamgra comes next and is generally a four act play. It consists of characters which are essentially divinities, -the gods, goddesses, the *apsaras* and the *gandharvas*. It has also a plot that involves the *Vira Rasa*, most often a hero hails from the divinity entering into the conflicts of love, life and war for a divine lady, though a final decisive battle consisting of multiple deaths is to be avoided in the plot. The plot will often involve a lady who is forcibly abducted. It is very close to the *Vyayoga* in the content of the plot though the prime difference lies in the fact that *Ihamgra* has goddesses as its female characters. However, as in most other types of *rupaka*, actual scenes of graphic conflict do happen off-stage. One adequate example of Ihamgra is the play called *Rukminivijaya* by Vatsaraja.

1.3.8 *Dima*

Dima generally consists of four acts and are constructed around a familiar plot with familiar and dignified heroes in it. It has in it all the sentiments enumerated by Bharata but two among them called *Srngara* and the *Hasya* are strictly prohibited. A typical *Dima* has as many as sixteen characters who come from different fields of divinity and

the underworld like the Gods, the demons, the *Nagas* and the *Rakshasas*. the plot is generally sensational. It has elements of eclipse, earthquakes, battles and conflicts and the use of dangerous weapons. A *Dima* is a play with an extreme element of grandeur and many emotions are present in it. One very well known instance of *Dima* is *Tripuravijaya* of Vatsaraja. According to Bharata, a Dima should ideally represent a multiplicity of psychological states.

1.3.9 *Vyayoga*

A *Vyayoga* is a play where there are very few human characters and a pretty well known hero who comes from quite a high family in terms of hierarchy but is not a member of divinity. Sometimes he is a member of the royalty or a sage who belongs originally to a royal family line. The *Vyayoga* normally covers itself in one day of action and it is similar *to Samavaraka* in the fact that many of the male characters take part in it whose roles are however confined only to act one. the numbers of the female character in a *Vyayoga* is typically meager. A *Vyayoga* generally features conflict in the form of wars, battles, fights and individual confrontations. Thus the dominant *Rasa* in a typical *Vyayoga* is the *Vira Rasa* or the heroic Sentiment. Two very well known. *Vyayoga*s are are the *Madhayama Vyayoga* of the well known dramatist called Bhasa and *Saugandhika Harana* which has been composed by Viswanatha, another classical dramatist.

1.3.10 *Anka*

Anka (also known as *Utrstikanka*) is similar to *Vyayoga* in the sense that the hero is often a well known character but not a divine one and the action is confined in the span of one day. However, the departure from a typical *Vyayoga* lies in the fact that while the *Vira Rasa,* as said above, is the dominant sentiment of a *Vyayoga*, the Karuna Rasa or the sentiment of Pathos dominates the action of an *Anka*. Like the *Vyayoga*, the *Anka* also finishes the action within the course of a day; but the focus here is not on the conflict but on the lamentation of the women at the casualties of war. *Unmatta Raghava* is a representative *Anka*. A typical *Anka* generally includes scenes of celestial heroes being involved in cosmic battles set in Bharatabarsha.

1.3.11 *Prahasana*

A *Prahasana* is basically a one act play with *Hasya Rasa* as a dominant sentiment. the *Prahasana* is normally divided into two kinds, the pure or *Suddha Prahasana* and the impure or *Sankirna Prahasana*. Since the form is very close to satire, the *Suddha Prahasana* takes as its subject the follies and foibles of people belonging to the religious discipline. thus for its subjects, it focuses on Gurus, monks and Brahmins and evokes laughter at them by the way of ridicule. The language used, the costume, the stage props and the dialogues prescribed by Bharata for the *Suddha Prahasana* come very close to the European concept of naturalistic drama that developed in the 19^{th} and 20^{th} centuries. The *Sankirna Prahasana* ridicules people belonging to lower social order like the courtesans, servants, vitas, eunuchs and other social marginals. The decency and the geniality of representation that we find in the *Suddha Prahasana* is conspicuous by its absence over here. It has as its subject matter, deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy and miserliness. One very well known *Prahasana* is *Mattavilasa Prahasana* by *Mahendravarma*.

1.3.12 *Bhana*

The *Bhana* is close to what is called a solo acted play in modern theatrical parlance. A *Bhana* has a single character at its centre and the play emerges from the whole narration of its experiences. Often the character would impersonate itself as other characters and sometimes carry out a dialogue between the two while playing both the roles itself. A *Bhana,* usually, is a single act play though it is often episodic in the way a picaresque narrative is so. The dominant sentiments in a Bhana are either *Sringara* or *Adbhuta* and often both. There is preponderance of music and dance though most of the things are represented in the form of a monologue. One very well known *Bhana* in this regard is the *Sringarabhusana Bhana* by *Bamanabhatta*. Bharata stipulates that a *Bhana* should contain characters of the types of *Dhurta* or a *Vita*.

1.3.13 *Vithi*

Vithi is similar to a *Bhana* in the fact that this is also an one act play but it is different from the latter in that while in *Bhana* we only have one person often

impersonating many others, in *Vithi* we may have two persons as well. The characters belong to different rungs of life and are generally divided into three categories in accordance with their social standing. They are those of the highest social category, the middle ones and the lower ones. *Vithi* is generally of thirteen types. They are Accidental Interpretation (*Udghyataka*), Transference (*Abalagita*), Ominous Significance (*Avaspandita*), Incoherent Chatter (*Asatpralapa*), Compliment (*Prapancha*), Enigma (*Nalika*), Outvying (*Adhivala*), Deception (*Chala*), Declaration (*Vyahara*), Crushing (*Mrdava*), A Conversation of Three Men (*Trigata*) and Foul and Illegitimate Arrangement of Words (*Ganda*). *Premabhirama* written by Ravipati is an example of *Vithi*.

1.3.14 Summing Up

The *Dasharupaka* or the ten types of drama clearly lay bare the fact that performing arts, particularly the art of the theatre was extremely diversified in ancient or classical India. Bharata's enumeration of the ten types of drama are dependent on the theory of the Rasa and form almost an organic part of his conception of the evocation of aesthetic emotion and the final culmination of aesthetic performance into a kind of a divine bliss. All these theatrical forms are a sort of accessories to this. they not only show us the diversity, range and the richness of the dramatic form of ancient and classical India, they also help us to correlate between the present modes of drama widely practiced all through the subcontinent and the various streams of origin from which it has ultimately emerged. On your part dear learner, it is very important to grasp the individualizing features of each of these types, in order to have a proper understanding of the nature of texts that you will be taking up in this Course.

1.3.15 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type

1. How does Bharata classify the *Rupaka*. What are the classifications? Write briefly on any two of them with proper examples.

2. Which two forms of *Rupaka* does Bharata consider the major ones? Write briefly about them.

3. Describe any four types of play after Bharata's subdivisions of *Rupaka* in Chapter XX of *Natyasastra*.

4. Describe the impact of the theoretical categorization of the classification done by Bharata on modern Indian drama.

5. Indian classical drama, in all its variety, is considered to be the highest achievement in Sanskrit literature. Elucidate with particular reference to Bharata's classification of drama.

Medium Length Answer Type

1. What is meant by *Dasharupaka*? What is the most common type of *Rupaka*?

2. What is Bharata's contribution in the categorization of different forms of drama?

3. What are the contributions of Dhananjaya in the field of *Dasharupaka*?

4. Compare and contrast between *Nataka* and *Prahasana* with suitable examples.

5. Write a short note on *Prahasana*.

Short Answer Type

1. What is *Viskambhaka*?

2. Name two Prakarana plays in classical Sanskrit literature.

3. What is the dominant *Rasa* for *Samavakara*?

4. Who are the characters in a typical *Ihamrga*?

5. What is the difference between *Anka* and *Vyayoga*?

6. What is *Suddha Prahasana*?

7. What is the difference between *Bhana* and *Bithi*?

8. How many types of *Vithi* Are there? Name them.

1.3.16 Suggested Reading

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NOTES

Module-2

Abhijnanasakuntalam

Unit 4 □ An Introduction to Kalidasa's Works

Structure

2.4.0 Introduction

In this unit we will try to form some preliminary idea about the life and works of the maestro of classical Indian literature, Kalidasa, and try to understand his use of varied sources materials and mythology in order to compose a unique literary and theatrical composition that has transcended time and space and has been appreciated worldwide. In course of that, we will also try to fathom what aspects of the text have given it this abiding stature.

2.4.1 Introducing Kalidasa

The works of Kalidasa may now be categorised in the groups—canonical and apocryphal. There might have been a number of poets in ancient India bearing the same name or some lesser poets might have used Kalidasa's name for securing fame for themselves. Even some commentators have shown the tendency of assigning any anonymous composition that they did come across, as the work of Kalidasa. In fact, the widespread glory of Kalidasa's works had gained him such proverbial fame that he was considered to be the undisputed monarch of ancient Sanskrit literature. A widely

circulated anonymous anecdote tells us that while counting (considering) the greatness of the classical poets, Kalidasa being the first, occupied the little finger; the ring finger (anamika) remained unnamed (unoccupied) simply because his second could never be found. Whatever the reason may be, a considerable number of works which were once assigned to Kalidasa have now been detected by scholars to be certainly not composed by him. Lack of authentic biographical details and the poet-playwright's silence about himself in his works have given rise to such controversy about the body of works produced by him. In his editorial introduction to *Abhijnanasakuntalam,* M R Kale lists forty one works which were indiscriminately assigned to Kalidasa (Kale 11). Only seven among these have been authenticated by scholars to have been definitively composed by Kalidasa. This means that the larger gamut, containing works such as *Ambastaba, Kalistotra, Chandikadandastotra, Kavya-natyalamkara, Ghatakarpara, Durghatakavya, Navaratnamala, Puspavanavilasa, Srngaratilaka* and many more are now proved to be spurious. The canon, of seven works, consists of three long lyric poems, three plays and an incomplete epic. The poems are *Rtusamharam* (The Gathering of Seasons), *Kumarasambhavam* (The Birth of Kumara or The Birth of the Son), *Meghadutam* (The Cloud Messenger); the plays are *Malavikagnimitram* (Malavika and Agnimitra), *Vikramorvasiyam* (Urvasi Won by Valour), *Abhijnanasakuntalam* (The Recognition of Sakuntala); the epic is *Raghuvamsam* (Raghu's Dynasty). We will introduce the poems first and then the plays.

2.4.2 The Major Poems of Kalidasa

- ***Rtusamharam*:** Generally acknowledged as the first work of Kalidasa, *Rtusamharam,* is an assimilation and poetic description of the six seasons of India. The title is suggestive of this assimilation, *samaahaar* in Sanskrit (not to be confused with *samhaar*, meaning 'slaying'), of seasons, *rtu*: summer, rainy season, autumn, late autumn, winter and spring. The poet appears here as debutante but not novice by any means—the varying beauty of nature through the cycle of seasons has been explored along with the way in which this change touches the human mind, especially that of the lovers. We are overwhelmed with the extraordinary details with which the flora and fauna of phenomenal nature are described in its multiple colours, smell and sound. Scorched under the burning sun and the resulting drought,

replenished by the life-giving rain with its 'verdurous gloom', mellow in late autumn's ripe gold or shivering and pale under the cold moon's foggy veil—all the descriptions of the seasonal and human nature are perfectly attuned. Thus the poem ceases to be a mere description of nature and takes on the role of harmonizing the beauties of nature and woman with a passionately felt experience: "Seeing the glow of the beloved's dark eyes / in the blue lotuses; / hearing the tone of her gold girdle bells / in the love-mad murmur of wild geese: / recalling the rich red of her lower lip / in the Bandhuka's flame clusters …" (Kalidasa *Rtusamharam* 3:24). Nature and woman complement each other, each enhancing the other's charm. Moreover, whereas the beauty of nature magically heightens the loveliness of the beloved, the human and phenomenal nature celebrate together both a happy festival of love and a painful lamentation of separation. We should keep in mind that in Kalidasa's work, the animating force generates not merely from seeing nature as a mere backdrop of human drama, but from seeing nature itself as animated and interacting to the human drama in a number of complicated ways. Therefore, if in *Rtusamharam*, woman and nature imbue each other in their colours, in *Meghadutam*, they are amalgamated and identified as one: landscape becomes the beloved. These two poems treat love from two opposite perspectives; 'love in union' and 'love in separation' and it is interesting to note that these two mark, respectively, the beginning and the end of Kalidasa's poetic career. While the former is celebrations of love's fulfillment without any sense of languish, the latter is all about the separation and anguish that love brings. However, the most comprehensive view of love could be found in the play we are concerned with in this Module—*Abhijnanasakuntalam*. It takes into consideration not only love's ecstasy and fulfillment but also its anguish in the separation resulting the anger and bitterness of betrayal followed by a moment of epiphany, restoration and reunion. The play goes farther in presenting the child, the symbol of continuity of love and the self.

- ***Meghadutam*:** Divided in two parts- Purvamegha and Uttaramegha- *Meghadutam* is probably Kalidasa's most widely known poem dealing with the separation and longing of lovers. Kuvera's gardener Yaksa was cursed and banished for neglecting his duties that resulted in spoiling the former's garden. From the Himalayan region of Alaka, Yaksa was separated from his wife and was banished to the Mount

Ramagiri in Southern India for a year. After eight months, on the first day of Asadha, seeing the 'billowy-bosomed cloud', Yaksa decided to make cloud his messenger to his wife. Kalidasa provides a splendid description of the route through which the cloud was to travel from Ramagiri to Alaka: via Malakshetra, Amrakut, Vidisha, Ujjayini, Kurukhsetra, Kankhal and Kailasa; across Narmada, Sindhu, Saraswati, Sipra and Vetravati. This is subject of Purvamegha. Uttaramegha consists of the description of Alaka, represents the lovelorn wife of Yaksa and his assurance of reunion with her. *Meghadutam* remains so special in the entire range of Sanskrit literature because of its heartfelt expression of separation perfectly conveyed in Mandakranta meter that complements the slow-moving verse appropriately.

- ***Kumarasambhavam*:** The birth of Kartikeya (Kumara) to destroy the tyrant Tarakasura is the argument of *Kumarasambhavam*. Of its existent seventeen cantos, the first seven are generally accepted to be the authentic part and the rest has been interpolated later, may be by more than one poet. For the evidently inferior quality of the last ten cantos, the annotators and the rhetoricians have skipped them; whereas the first seven cantos have widely been explained and cited by them. The obscenity that stains the description of the union of Siva and Parvati, strengthens the interpolation theory. The first canto of *Kumarasambhavam* begins with a picturesque description of the Himalayas. In the second canto, the tyranny of Tarakasura drives the gods to pay a visit to Bramha who suggests to employ Kamadeva (the Hindu counterpart of Cupid) to divert the attention Siva, then absorbed in his meditation, so that he could be informed about the emergent situation. An untimely spring is being introduced by Kamadeva to ignite the passion of Siva. A distracted and furious Siva opens his third eye to find his distracter who is instantly reduced to ashes. The fourth canto is all about the lamentation of Kamadeva's wife Rati, the fifth is centred on Parvati's asceticism for having Siva as her husband, the sixth contains the proposal of marriage and in the seventh, the grand marriage of Siva and Parvati actually takes place. The consecutive, unauthentic cantos describe the union of the couple and the birth of Kartikeya.

2.4.3 Kalidasa's Epic Poem

***Raghuvamsam*:** Taking into account the chronicles of twenty-nine rulers of the solar dynasty (*Suryavamsam*)—from Dileep to Agnivarna - *Raghuvamsam* is Kalidasa's

longest poem containing nineteen cantos. Although the poet planned to focus on the life and character of Rama, through canto eleven to fourteen, he considered king Raghu to be the greatest of this dynasty. Hence the title glorifies Raghu, the warrior who conquered a significant part of South and central Asia. More than encapsulating the entire story of the *Ramayana*, Kalidasa's epic is significant because it stretches forward and backward to depict the saga of a dynasty, using twenty-one varieties of Sanskrit meters. The overall effect is simply magnanimous. As learners of this Course, you should feel the urge to read further in this area to discover how/ in what ways Kalidasa's treatment of the theme can be paralleled or compared in contrasted studies of the *Ramayana*.

2.4.4 The Plays of Kalidasa

- ***Malavikagnimitram:*** This five-act play is based on the love story of Malavika, the princess of Vidarbha and Agnimitra, the king of Vidisha. On the present day map of India, Vidharbha would correspond to the north eastern region of Maharastra, while Vidisha is an ancient city in present day Madhya Pradesh. Once upon a time, Madhavasena, the king of Vidarbha, lost his kingdom. Being helpless he decided to send his sister Malavika to Agnimitra. Malavika's entourage was attacked by outlaws on the way but she was rescued, co-incidentally, by Agnimitra's general Veersena who appointed her in the service of Agnimitra's wife Dharinee. By now Agnimitra came across a portrait of Malavika and instantly fell in love. Apprehending the nature and subject of the king's passion, Dharinee imprisoned Malavika. In the meantime, Veersena helped Madhavasena to regain his kingdom and Agnimitra's court jester helped Malavika to gain freedom. Eventually, Malavika's identity as princess is unearthed and the queen Dharinee bestows Malavika to Agnimitra and accepts her as co-wife. The female characters demand special mention in this play, which is otherwise lagging behind in terms of dramatic and aesthetic qualities present in Kalidasa's other plays like *Vikramorvasiyam* and *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
- ***Vikramorvasiyam***: The love between king Pururava and the heavenly nymph (Apsara) Urvasi forms the subject matter of this play. Pururava rescued Urvasi from a demon called Kesi who wanted to abduct her. The title of the play (Urvasi Won by Valour) hints at this act of valour (Vikram) by dint of which Pururava wins

Urvasi. Although Pururava and Urvasi fell in love at first sight, they had to remain separated since the king was to return to earth and the nymph was to stay on in heaven. Her heart and soul remained so engrossed in the thought of the king that she made a mistake while acting in the role of goddess Laxmi in a play entitled 'Laxmiswayambara'. When her co-actress Menaka's dialogue was: "Whom do you love?", Urvasi was to reply: "Purusottamam", i.e, Visnu. Urvashi forgot that she was acting and uttered the name of her true love: "Pururava". Bharata, the sage and originator of drama, cursed and exiled her to earth. By Indra's permission she could now be united with Pururava but only until the king begot a son. They lived happily for some time till Urvasi one day saw Pururava casting a fond look at another woman. Anger and jealousy tempted her to enter a forest prohibited to women: she was transformed to a creeper. In his mad pursuit Pururava went on to ask every animate and inanimate object about Urvasi. Ultimately with divine intervention Urvasi was restored her form and they were united. In course of time, they had a son and ironically, it was time for her to bid adieu to her dearest. She now told him about the condition and the heart-broken king decided to leave human society forever and to become a forest dweller. In the form of *deus ex machina* (divine intervention), Narada descended on earth with the assurance that Indra has permitted Urvasi to stay permanently with Pururava. The depiction of separated lovers, especially the plight of Pururava has been conveyed with extraordinary skill by the playwright. Interestingly, the entire fourth act has been given to Pururava's lamentation, most of which is expressed in the form of songs that give the play an operatic tone.

- ***Abhijnanasakuntalam***: By critical consensus as well as fame, this remains the prime achievement of Kalidasa in his literary career. The plot is concerned with the love, separation and re-union of Duhsanta (also spelled as Dushyanta in some editions), the king of Puru dynasty and Sakuntala, the daughter of the heavenly nymph Menaka. During a hunting expedition, Dushyanta while chasing a deer comes to the hermitage of the sage Kanva by the river Malini. There he meets and falls in love with Sakuntala; marries her in absence of Kanva according to 'Gandharva' rites and after the marriage is consummated, he goes back to his capital with the promise of receiving Sakuntala at his palace with proper pomp and

grandeur befitting his queen. As token (**Abhijnana**) of their love he leaves his signet ring with Sakuntala. She remains so lost in the thought of her beloved that she fails to pay proper attention to the short-tempered sage Durvasa who came to the hermitage as guest. The angry sage curses her that oblivion will erase all her beloved's memory of her. On her companions' repeated prayer Durvasa considers to restore the king's memory of the episode of love only on the presentation of the signet ring. Kanva comes back, approves of the marriage and when the signs of Sakuntala's pregnancy become explicit, without waiting any more he decides to send her to Duhsanta's capital Hastinapur. In present day cartography, Hastinapur would fall in the Merut district of Uttar Pradesh, and presumably the Ganges flowed by the city. On her way to Hastinapur, the capital of Duhsanta, Sakuntala loses the ring, without her knowledge, in water. She was refused, humiliated and left alone before a mysterious hand took her into the sky. Meanwhile, the king got the signet ring from a fisherman who found it inside a fish that he had captured. He was instantly reminded of his lady love. However, the bitterly repentant king was invited by Indra to participate in a fight against the demons in heaven. While returning victorious from heaven he was miraculously re-united with his wife Sakuntala and his son Sarvadamana in the hermitage of the sage Marica.

Since the chronological order in which Kalidasa's works were composed, his evolving and maturing style as expressed through the works may be taken as clue to establish the chronology. We will follow Chandra Rajan's line of argument as put forward in her 'Introduction' to *Kalidasa: The Loom of Time*: "That *Malavikagnimitram* is an early play and that it followed *Ṛtusamharam* is fairly certain. It was probably followed by *Vikramorvasiyam*, the incomplete epic *Raghuvamsam* and *Kumarasambhavam*, also incomplete. *Meghadutam* and *Sakuntala* are clearly the last works of the poet. In these, Kalidasa's vision has mellowed and deepened and the language responds like a finely-tuned instrument to every touch" (Rajan 44).

2.4.5 Sources of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

At least three sources of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* have been pointed out by the scholars; of these the *Mahabharata* is undoubtedly the chief source upon which Kalidasa's imagination, aesthetics, dramaturgy and obviously ideology, worked.

Padmapurana and *Kattahari Jataka* are the two other texts which are referred to in discussing the sources of the play. In the 'Svargakhanda' of *Padmapurana* we get the story of Sakuntala, resembling in points such as the ring, the curse of Durvasa, Menaka's help, the fisherman and the law keepers, the death of Dhanamitra, Duhsanta's fight against the demons on the invitation of Indra, the hermitage of Marica, the episode with the lion cub etc. These similarities have prompted some scholars to conclude that *Padmapurana* worked as the source material in the making of Kalidasa's play under consideration. But before we accept this opinion, some points are to be considered regarding the 'source' text and its composition. First of all, there are major differences between the two texts in terms of plot: in *Padmapurana*, at the beginning, Kanva is absent in the hermitage only for a brief period of time as he goes out to collect fruit, before taking a bath at the river Saraswati, Sakuntala gives the signet ring to Priyamvada who accidentally drops it into water and loses it, at the court of Duhsanta, Sakuntala gives a long argumentative and indignant speech, the re-union takes place as the sage Marica himself introduces Sarvadamana to the king and thereby attests the filial bond. Moreover, the dates of the composition of the Puranas have not yet been established and accepted unanimously by the scholars. *Padmapurana* is definitely known to have incorporated Post-Puranic stories and the Anandasrama edition of *Padmapurana* does not include the Sakuntala story in it. It could even be that the author of the Sakuntala story in *Padmapurana* was acquainted with the epic version and saw some new and innovative things in Kalidasa's play and incorporating elements from both created a new story and interpolated into *Padmapurana*. Hence, this 'source' itself could be a Post-*Abhijnanasakuntalam* composition.

The *Kattahari Jataka* story, apart from having certain core features in common, is significant for introducing the ring motif, central to Kalidasa's play. In the said *Jataka* story, Brahmadatta, the king of Varanasi, once saw a beautiful woman in a forest and immediately fell in love with her. He married her and before leaving her after some time, gave her a ring telling her that if a daughter was born, she should sell the ring for the maintenance of the girl and if a son was born, she should bring him with her to the king's court. Bodhisattva was born as the woman's son. When the woman went with her son to the royal court and producing the ring, asked for her acceptance and the rights of her son, the king refused her although he could recognize her. The woman sought for divine intervention and the king had to accept her wife and son. Here we should keep

in mind that the use of ring as a token of love and recognition was fairly common in ancient Indian literature. Even in the Ramayana, Rama gives his ring to Hanumana for showing it to Sita at Lanka so that she could be assured and consoled.

The *Mahabharata* is widely acknowledged as the primary source of Kalidasa who worked a lot on the small tale and developed it into a full-fledged drama. In Book I (*Adiparva*: chs 62-69) the bard Vaisampayana tells this story to the monarch Janamejaya, descendant of Bharata, at the Great Sacrifice that the monarch was performing. Duṣyanta, (Dushyanta is mentioned thus in the epic) out on a great hunt, arrived at Kaṇva's Hermitage, deep in the forests by the river Malini, to pay his respects to the revered sage. There he met Sakuntala who was alone, her father having gone out of the hermitage to gather fruit. She offered the King due hospitality and in response to his questions about herself, told him the story of her birth as she had heard it from her 'father's own lips'. The Apsara Menaka, had abandoned her as soon as she was born and some birds (Sakunta) taking pity on the new-born babe had protected and fed it, until Kaṇva found the child and brought it up as his own daughter. The king infatuated with Sakuntala's uncommon beauty and grace, persuaded to marry her according to the Gandharva mode of marriage—a recognized form of marriage based on love and mutual agreement. Ṣakuntala replied that if it was not against the Law, she would become his wife on one condition, that the son born to her would be the heir apparent and succeed him as king. The king agreed and took her as his wife, and then left for his capital promising to send for her with the proper retinue accompanied by a detachment of his army. Kaṇva on his return to the Hermitage soon after was pleased by the news of marriage and felicitated Ṣakuntala on her excellent choice of a husband. But Duhsanta, apprehensive about how the sage Kaṇva would react to this union contracted during his brief absence from the hermitage did not send for her.

A son was born, blazing like fire; years went by until Kaṇva noticing the extraordinary strength and energy that the boy displayed, advised Ṣakuntala that it was time to take him to his father and get him consecrated as the heir-apparent, and sent her with her son in the company of some hermits to the capital. Ṣakuntala arriving at Duhṣanta's palace had herself announced, and having duly honoured him, presented her son to him. Duhṣanta, although he remembered his promise and every detail of their meeting and marriage, pretended to remember nothing and in the cruellest and most insulting words asked her to take her boy and get out. Ṣakuntala, shattered by Duhṣanta's treatment of her, stood dumbfounded, but being a girl of great spirit and

courage decided to fight for her son's rights. Even though she could have destroyed him by the power of her penance, she remained calm and explained the Law to him and laid out what his duties and obligations were under the Law to his wife and son. Seeing that all her arguments were of no avail, she flung these last words at him, that she would not have anything to do with a man like him, but that in the end her son would be sovereign, and prepared to leave. At that point, an aerial voice spoke testifying to the truth of Ṣakuntala's words and demanded that the king keep his promise to her. The nobles, ministers and priests at the Court heard the aerial voice and accepted its testimony. Relieved, Duhṣanta welcomed her with costly gifts and received her and his son with honour, making Ṣakuntala Queen and consecrating the boy as heir-apparent. The story ends with Duhṣanta explaining to Ṣakuntala as to why he had acted as he did. The marriage having been a secret one, un-witnessed by anyone on public eye, his ministers and people would have doubted the legality of the marriage and the legitimacy of the prince (Rajan 320-1).

2.4.6 Use of Myths in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

Like most of ancient classical Indian literary texts, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is replete with references to Hindu mythological stories. Right from Act 1, Verse 6 - alluding to Siva (Pinaki), with his arrows and bow chasing and decapitating the Sacrifice of Daksha, disguising itself as a deer whose head was transformed into a star (*Mrga-Siras*) - throughout the play mythological stories have been referred to either as vehicles of comparison or as allusions to enhance the magnanimity of the play. Since the characters and situations are often presented in a 'larger than life' frame and deities and sages are frequently referred to, they are expected to be dealt with 'no middle flight' and therefore, the use of myths serves the dual purpose of devotional and aesthetic uplift. We will mention here two mythological stories: The Churning of the Ocean and Bali and Visnu's Triple-Stride.

The Churning of the Ocean, (*Samudra Manthana* in Sanskrit) is one of the most widely known mythological stories, originally described in *Bhagavata Purana*. At the beginning of the creation, gods and demons - *Devas* and *Daityas*—contested each other to obtain the elixir of immortality, Amrta. Visnu advised them to throw all the renowned medicinal herbs to the Milky Ocean, i.e the Milky Way of the Space Ocean and churn it with the help of Mandara, the Cosmic Mountain as the stick and Vasuki, the serpent as the rope. Visnu himself, in the form of tortoise (Kurma) supported the mountain, preventing it from sinking down. After much toil, wondrous items started coming out

of the foaming Ocean. First came Surabhi, the cow of plenty, who fulfilled all wishes; then Varuni, Wine; then Parijat, the Tree of Paradise, bearing innumerable, unfading flowers with everlasting perfume; next the Apsaras, the Nymphs rose followed by the moon that Siva place on his head. The ocean then produced *Halahala*, the deadly poison that Siva swallowed to preserve the creation. The retained the poison in his throat that turned blue with its effect. Thus he came to be known as *Nilakantha*, the blue throated. Sri (Laxmi or alternatively, Beauty herself) rose seated on a lotus and then Dhanwantari, the divine physician came with the nectar, *Amrta*. Immediately a battle ensued between the gods and the demons for the monopoly of the nectar. Again Visnu came to favour the gods; he took the disguise of Mohini, an exceedingly beautiful damsel who started enticing the demons while the gods drank up the entire ambrosia thereby becoming immortal. There are other slightly differing versions of this story (including more items emerging from the ocean such as, Airavata - the elephant, Uccaisrava—the seven-headed horse, conch, Koustubha—the divine jewels and so on) available in *Visnu Purana*, *Mahabharata* and other regional, ethno-cultural re-telling of the story.

The daughters of Daksha were Aditi and Diti; both married to Kasyapa, the Primal Parent. The sons of these sisters were known as Devas or gods and Daityas or demons respectively. Gods and demons were always fighting for the supremacy over the universe. Bali was a demon king who, with the power of his penance and devotion, had defeated Indra in war, subdued the gods and extended his dominion through the Triple-World of heaven, earth and under world. This virtuous and just demon king was known for another quality: no one who came to him asking for alms was sent back empty-handed. Now the gods were powerless and feeling terribly oppressed; their mother Aditi prayed to Visnu for reinstating the powers of the gods. Visnu was moved and promised Aditi to be born as her son, Vamana (dwarf) to overpower Bali and restore the heavenly glory to the gods. Bali once performed a great sacrifice on the banks of the river Narmada and gave wealth and land in galore to anyone who came to him seeking help in distress and need. Vamana came and asked for some land measuring only the length of his three strides. Although warned by his preceptor, Bali consented, readily. Vamana put his foot out, multiplied himself enormously in size and covered the whole earth with his first stride and the heaven with the second. Standing balanced with an uplifted foot, he asked Bali to show him the place where he would place his third stride. Realizing who the Vamana was, Bali meekly bowed down and offered his head for placing the third step. Visnu disguised as Vamana, put his feet on Bali’s head and pushed him down to the nether world (*Patala*).

2.4.7 The Uniqueness of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

The source materials on which Kalidasa based his play were all too prosaic and lifeless. The playwright has transformed this known story with his dramatic as well as poetic skill into one of the best-known plays of the world. Like the ancient Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, Kalidasa has used a story the ending of which is already known to the spectators as they watch the play being performed, but like those masters he has also succeeded in making up an ingenious plot by introducing new characters, incidents and certain turns and twists that have changed the entire perspective of the playgoers. It is in this imaginative transcendence of a coarse story into an artistically perfect classic lies the uniqueness of the play as Kalidasa's masterpiece. Hence the German poet Goethe's words of appreciation, as he read *Abhijnanasakuntalam* that "the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted and fed" (qtd in Kale 45), are quite justified.

Here we would like to go through the significant changes introduced by Kalidasa in the plot of the play. Kanva's absence, to begin with, was unknown to Duhsanta who was informed by Sakuntala that the sage was out for a while to collects fruits. In the meantime, Sakuntala herself narrates the story of her birth and being fostered by Kanva. Duhsanta falls in love with Sakuntala, instantly proposes and convinces her to marry according to Gandharva rites, the marriage is consummated and the king leaves the hermitage before the sage comes back gathering fruits. These incidents as found in *Mahabharata* are artistically dissatisfactory—Kalidasa spares Sakuntala the embarrassment of narrating the story of her own birth which includes the distraction and lust of her biological father, the sage Visvamitra and her being deserted by her mother at the moment of birth. The playwright introduces Anasuya and Priyamvada, the confidantes of the heroine, for the purpose of more than just informing the pedigree but also the nature and passion of Sakuntala, the incarnation of beauty, truth and innocence. The love and physical union of two persons completely unknown to each other within such a short span of time would have appeared incongruous to any spectator with artistic sensibility. Therefore, Kanva has been sent to Somatirtha in the play to provide the love affair to mature into fruition. And when he comes back to his hermitage, after a brief absence in the epic version of the story, Sakuntala herself confesses to her father about her marriage and the resultant union. In this play Kanva comes to know all about it

through his spiritual power; Sakuntala is once more saved from being abashed. The marriage in the original seemed more like a contract; Sakuntala makes Duhsanta promise before marriage that the son born out of their union would be his heir apparent. In *Mahabharata* only four of these characters, namely Dushyanta, Sakuntala, Kanva and Sarvadamana are mentioned, whereas Kalidasa introduces almost ten times more characters to mature the somewhat sketchy story into a full-fledged drama. Two of the most determining factors in Kalidasa's play were absent in the epic—the ring as token of love and recognition (*abhijnana*) and the curse of Durvasa. The dramatist succeeds in introducing organic change and immense theatricality in the plot by the first and he redeems the character of Duhsanta - from someone who deliberately refused to acknowledge his secret marriage, his wife and son because of his public image—to a repentant hero who suffers a loss of memory because of a curse of which he was unaware. To heighten the element of pathos, Kalidasa makes his heroine humiliated and rejected in a pregnant condition by her husband, Duhsanta. In this situation she is left alone by Gautami and the young hermits who accompanied her from Kanva's hermitage to Dushyanta's capital. The lamentation of this innocent sufferer moves the heavens; she is rescued by supernatural power to the hermitage of Marica, later to be re-united with her husband. In *Mahabharata*, Sakuntala was sent to Duhsanta's capital with her six-year old son Sarvadamana whose consecration was due by then. In the royal court she stood alone, begged and argued for acceptance and finally, being embittered, was about leave her husband for ever when an ariel voice testified the truth and ordered Duhsanta to receive his wife and with due respect. Naturally, no episode of re-union follows, depriving the readers of the repentance and separation of the protagonist(s) that complete the circle of a love story.

2.4.8 Summing Up

Thus, taking the storyline from the *Mahabharata*, *Padmapurana* and *Kattahari Jataka*, and yet skilfully deviating from the sources to strike his point, Kalidasa creates, in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, a rare combination of tradition and individualism while building up his plot, drawing his characters and leading the play to a union through separation. Religion, politics, philosophy and love—all find a place in the theatrical design of the poet-playwright.

2.4.9 Comprehension Exercises

- **Essay type questions**
  1. Write an essay on the chief sources of the play *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
  2. Write a note on the major works of Kalidasa, except *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
- **Mid length questions**
  1. Discuss how Kalidasa deviates from the sources in constructing the plot of his play.
  2. Write a note on the playwright's use of mythology in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
- **Short answer type questions**
  1. Write a short note on *Kumarasambhavam*.
  2. Briefly state the subject matter of *Vikramorvasiyam*.
  3. Comment on Kalidasa's use of the *Mahabharata*.
  4. Write a short note on mythological story of the Churning of the Ocean.
  5. Consider *Padmapurana* as one of the sources of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.

Unit 5 □ Plot and Characterisation

Structure

2.5.0 Introduction

This Unit will initiate a discussion on three aspects of the play. It will begin with a dual aim of narrating the story in brief along with a critical analysis of the plot using the guideline provided by Bharata in his *Natyasastra*. In that sense, you need to keep referring back to Module 1 Unit 1 to understand and establish the vital links. Next the focus shifts to the significant episodes that shape the play and finally, we conclude with Kalidasa's art of characterization with special reference to Duhsanta, Sakuntala, Kanva, Madhavya, Priyamvada and Anasuya. Cumulatively, the first two Units of this Module should prepare you to delve into deeper thematic issues that are taken up in the subsequent ones. The text of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* that has been used in this module (in the entire discussion of the play as well), is the English translation by Chandra Rajan published by Penguin Books.

2.5.1 Plot Construction in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

You know by now that the most important text on the theory and practice of drama that ancient India produced is the *Natyasastra,* traditionally ascribed to the sage Bharata (Bharatamuni) and composed sometime between 200 B.C and 200 A.D. It is the most comprehensive work of its kind to survive time and dealing with all probable fields related to drama—right from stage management, to classification and aesthetics of drama, up to costume, diet and even exercises for the actors. Here plays have generally

been categorized as *Drisya*, having *Rupaka* and *Upa-Rupaka* as its two divisions. *Rupakas* are of ten kinds of which *Nataka* is the first. The play we are discussing here belong to this genre called *Nataka*. Plays in general are made of three things—*Vastu* (Plot), *Neta* (Hero) and *Rasa* (Sentiment). The plot or *Vastu* is regarded as the 'body' of the drama itself, composed by arranging the story in a cause and effect order. It matures through five stages of development. Since *Natyasastra* maintains that the primary objective of the plot is to present the hero's struggle for and obtaining of the object of his desire, the first phase of the development of the plot, known as the beginning ('Arambha'), refers to the desire of the hero to attain his objective. In *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, Duhsanta's objective is to marry Sakuntala and to beget a successor to his throne. By the end of Act 1 we are clearly conveyed about obtaining this object. The second stage shows a determined effort on the part of the hero to achieve the fixed object of desire ('Yatna'). Duhsanta's determination in Act 2 demonstrates his resolution to court and marry Sakuntala. The third part consists of a hope of success ('Praptyasa'); in Act 3, the king is confident of winning Sakuntala although she does not commit herself to fulfilling his wishes. The fourth segment is about attainment through removal of obstacles ('Niyatapti'). In Acts 4, 5 and 6 Duhsanta's original desires are thwarted and delayed. In Act 4 we come to know that Sakuntala is cursed to be forgotten by the king. Act 5 shows, as a result of the curse, he fails to recognize her when she comes to his court for acceptance and after being humiliated in public she is taken by a heavenly pair of hands to an unknown place. In Act 6, the recovery of the king's signet ring that he gave her as a token of their love restores the king's memory and he is full of remorse. Act 7 leads us to the fifth and final part of the plot, known as attainment of the object of desire ('Phalagam')—Duhsanta is reunited with Sakuntala who has, by then, given birth to their son Sarvadamana.

The significant points in the development of the plot of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* are: i) the visit of Duhsanta in the hermitage of Kanva, ii) the mutual 'love at first sight' between Duhsanta and Sakuntala, iii) their marriage according to 'Gandharva' rituals, iv) the curse of Durvasa that sows the seed of separation, v) the departure of Sakuntala for Duhsanta's capital, vi) the accidental loss of the token-ring, vii) the repudiation of Sakuntala and her being whisked off to an undisclosed sanctuary, viii) the discovery of Duhsanta's signet ring and the restoration of his memory, ix) Duhsanta's celestial journey to overpower demons and his return journey in Indra's chariot, x) his landing

at the hermitage of Marica and coincidentally meeting young Sarvadamana for whom the king feels an unexplained yet strong filial affection, xi) the search for the magical amulet which proves Duhsanta to be the father of Sarvadamana, xii) the king's meeting with Sakuntala and finally, xiii) the reunion that resolves all the complications of the plot.

The plot is constructed carefully maintaining a structural scheme that satisfies both artistic as well as moral purposes. The union, separation and re-union of Duhsanta and Sakuntala are the three main parts of the play. The fourth act which follows the union and leads to the rejection forms the dramatic centre of the play, conjoining the first three and the last three acts. M. R. Kale explains in his editorial introduction to the play how the plot construction helps to maintain a perfectly balanced pattern in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. A close similarity can be seen in the construction of the first two and the last two acts. In Act 1, as the king enters the hermitage of Kanva his right arm throbs giving him the sign of something unexpectedly good; he meets Sakuntala. In Act 7, while entering the hermitage of Marica the same physical sign is repeated and the king is reunited with Sakuntala. Both in the second and the sixth act, Duhsanta and Madhavya talk about Sakuntala and in both these acts the king is eager to meet his lady-love. At the end of Act 2, the disciples of Kanva come in with a request that helps the king to meet Sakuntala. Similarly at the end of Act 6, Matali comes in with a request that leads to Duhsanta's re-union with Sakuntala. The third and the fifth act also share similarity in the sense that in Act 3, friends hand Sakuntala over to Duhsanta; both have some discussion and at the end Gautami enters to lead Sakuntala away. In Act 5, Sarangarava and Saradvata hand over Sakuntala to Duhsanta; both have some discussion, although the matter of this discourse is much different from the previous one and at the end Menaka takes her away to a heavenly asylum. Thus the complete framework of the play displays a consciously knit symmetry although the background, sentiment and situation differ naturally from act to act. In the first act the lovers see each other and fall in love though there is hardly any conversation between them. In the third act they meet and are united mentally. The second act stands between the two. Again, in the fifth act they are separated and in the seventh act re-united. The sixth act stands in between. Both in the second and the sixth acts which intervene in the progression of the play's action, we see what is going on inside the king's mind.

2.5.2 Significant Episodes in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

As we have just discussed, the plot structure of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is an artistically unified whole where the intersections of different episodes have carefully been amalgamated, we should simultaneously keep in mind that the play consists of a number of such significant episodes which determine the course of the play. Some of them, like the ring motif—its use as the token of love, the 'Abhijnana' of the title– and the curse of the sage Durvasa resulting the loss of memory of Duhsanta and the separation of the lovers, and the entire episode relating to the re-union were absent in the epic source of the play. These are the innovations of Kalidasa and should be seen as corollary to his view of life and art. Since the dramatist constructed a full-fledged play out of a brief sketch of Duhsanta and Sakuntala, he had to imagine, elaborate and construct a lot of incidents and characters.

In Kalidasa's works the motif of curse has repeatedly been used not only to determine the course of the poem or the play in which they occur, but also to allow us scope to understand character of the persons who are accursed. In *Meghadutam*, Kuvera's gardener Yaksa was cursed and banished for neglecting his duties that resulted in spoiling the garden of the former. In *Vikramorvasiyam*, Urvasi was cursed and banished by Bharata, the sage and originator of drama, for being absent-minded while performing a play in heaven before Laxmi and Narayana. And in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, Sakuntala is being cursed by the angry sage Durvasa who was not attended properly by the former as she was engrossed in thoughts of her lover. In all the three cases love in the common factor that leads to the slackness in duty or attention—Yaksa forgot his responsibility as he was lost in the thought of his beloved wife; Urvasi's mind was so preoccupied with the thought of Pururava that in her dialogue in the play she uttered 'Pururava' (a classic example of Freudian slip) instead of 'Purusottamam', i.e Visnu; Sakuntala's thought was so immersed in Duhsanta that she did not even pay attention to Durvasa's curse. In fact, she did not know anything about it until the re-union scene where Duhsanta was explained the reason of his loss of memory.

Now, the question that may come to our mind in the first place is why and what did Kalidasa think about curses? In other words, how did he define and employ curse in his texts? Chandra Rajan explains in her afore-mentioned 'Introduction' to the play: "The neglect of duty under the stress of an obsessive love (or passion) that bears within itself

the seeds of its own unhappiness and leads to near-tragic consequences seems to have engaged the profound concern of the poet [Kalidasa]. For we see him returning repeatedly to a consideration of it in varying situations to explore it in slightly different ways: in *Meghadutam*, in *Sakuntala* and in *Vikramorvasiyam*". … But in, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* Durvasa's curse neatly phrases the failure of duty (wrongdoing in his eyes), in balanced clauses. The punishment is far in excess of the negligence of which Sakuntala was guilty; there were extenuating circumstances in her case. … However, the point that is subtly made in the play is, that Sakuntala was also not sufficiently appreciative of the esteem in which her father held her and which prompted him to *entrust her*, rather than one of his pupils, with the important duties of welcoming guests and offering them hospitality during [Kanva's absence in the penance grove] … . Anasuya has to remind her more than once of her obligations to perform the duties of hospitality and in fact, it is she and not Sakuntala who actually performs them when the King arrives at the Hermitage as a guest. A traditional interpretation would treat the disregard to appointed duties in the cases of both the Yakṣa and Sakuntala as a betrayal of trust" (Rajan 51-52). We should also keep in mind that without Durvasa's curse the play would have been a typical love story lacking the much- needed elements of separation and conflict in it. The separation of the lovers and Duhsanta's remorse and lamentation were necessary for him to realize the difference between lust and love. Duhsanta, the philanderer whose character has aptly been summed up through the song of Hamspadika (5.8), ultimately asks to Marica, at the end of the play: "May the Self-Existent Lord who unite in Himself / the dark and the Light / … / annihilate forever the round of my births" (7.35). This growth of Duhsanta from 'Raja' to 'Raja-rsi' would not have been possible without Durvasa's curse. The introduction of the curse allows Kalidasa, the court poet, to gloss over the character of the philanderer king who, in the epic source of the play, denied accepting Sakuntala and her six year old son simply because of his public image. Sakuntala, on the other hand, did ignore all her familial, social and ethical responsibilities for her passion; she ignored all that she had been taught at the hermitage since childhood. Therefore, their separation and suffering were moral and artistic necessity.

Like the ring motif, the re-union of Duhsanta and Sakuntala, as we have already discussed in Unit 4, was absent in the epic source of the play. Since in *Mahabharata*, the king accepted his wife and son at his court after the aerial instruction, the episodes of separation and re-union were out of question. But Kalidasa's play moves in different

way to depict more detailed picture of love and life. The recovery of the king's signet ring from the fisherman in Act 6 leads to the re-union of the husband, wife and son in Act 7. Although immersed deeply in sorrow and penitence, he performs all his royal duties and responsibilities. While returning victorious against the demons in a war he fought for Indra, Duhsanta stops to pay his respect to the sage Marica in his hermitage at Mount Hemakuta. On seeing a boy at the hermitage he king feels an unexplained filial affection for the child whose name, he in being informed, is Sarvadamana. Duhsanta is astonished to mark the similarity of appearance between himself and the boy in whose hand he observes the signs of a sovereign king. The king comes to know that the boy belongs to Puru lineage and his mother is related to an apsara and she has been deserted by her husband. Coincidentally he comes to know her name and when his picking up of the protective amulet of the child proves that he is one of the parents of Sarvadamana, the dramatic tension reaches its climax. On one hand, Duhsanta's hopes soar high and on the other, he is reluctant to believe that fortune has smiled upon him once again. To complete the suspense, enters Sakuntala, lean and withdrawn through keeping of vows, wearing dusky garments and the hair done in a single plait. The son introduces the father to the mother and they are re-united. Marica explains the reason of Duhsanta's repudiation of Sakuntala and all misgivings come to an end.

2.5.3 Major Characters in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

- **Duhsanta**

In Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, it is through the character of Duhsanta that the ideals of kingship and heroism have been examined. A close examination of his character and personality shows that he is more complicated than a typical 'Dhirodatta Nayaka' (an ideal kind of hero) of the ancient classical texts on drama, like Bharata's *Natyasastra*. Duhsanta's physical appearance, his strength, courage and skill as a warrior, his sense of duty, responsibility and justice towards his subjects and his respect for the ascetics co-exist with his philandering nature as is evident from Hamsavati's song in Act 5, Verse 8. The playwright also prepares us for a scrutiny of the concept of an ideal ruler, a 'raja-rsi', through the character of the male protagonist of his play as it unfolds through his union, separation and re-union with Sakuntala.

Duhsanta is presented as the great king that he undoubtedly was in the popular imagination fed on story and legend. His personal appearance is described in terms of uncommon beauty, grace, majesty and strength. In fact, the very first image used by his

charioteer to describe Duhsanta presents him as a godlike hero by comparing him to Siva himself chasing the deer with bow and arrow (See: The Use of Myths, in Unit 4). But as alert reader and audience, we should keep in mind that this 'public image' is largely constructed by his subordinates, poets and hermits. There is another 'private image' of the king; a 'private face' which is quite different from the 'public mask'. This private face is revealed in the 'asides' given to the king, as well as in his relaxed conversations with his close companion Madhavya, the jester. It is often found that the two faces, two selves, are commenting on each other through carefully arranged juxtapositions as seen in Act 2. A curious interplay of these two selves are at work as Duhsanta courts, renounces and is re-united with Sakuntala. He at first knew her carnally, only as an object of pleasure. It is only at the end of the play that he sees and knows her truly as a person. Something has to be added to his view of her to enable him to see her as a person of intrinsic beauty. Duhsanta was unable to correlate outer beauty with inner until his prolonged separation and grief at losing Sakuntala and their child. An intense sense of guilt gives him eyes to see beyond appearance. The play itself could be seen as an examination of relation between the ideal and actual, semblance and truth, appearance and reality. It is in this context that Duhsanta's private and public selves are to be seen and judged.

In a system where statecraft manuals like Kautilya's *Arthasastra* explicitly recommend for princes the wearing of mask of virtue while practicing deception as an essential part of retaining and exercising power, the concept of 'raja-rsi', royal sage, is bound to be problematic. Kalidasa, however, does not remain enigmatic about the idea of a royal sage. In *Raghuvamsam*, Dilipa, the founder of the solar dynasty, has been presented as an ideal monarch, a royal sage. But the same term cannot be applied for Duhsanta in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. The repudiation of a pregnant Sakuntala by Duhsanta forms not only the crux of the play; it also throws ample light on the un-heroic side of the king, a deconstruction of the character being both possible and necessary in our modern understanding. Kanva is a revered sage, a 'kulapati' or head of a community of ascetics and Duhsanta himself has expressed his profound respect for the sage. His ministers and other subjects would certainly have shared his view. Yet his veneration for the sage finds no reflection in Duhsanta's behavior towards and judgment of Kanva's daughter. The curse and the manner in which it operates are related to the problem of recognition—a problem on which the play rests. It should, therefore, not be treated, as is often done, simply as a device to gloss over the unpleasant side of Duhsanta's

character—his tendency of philandering, the streak of callousness in him bordering on cruelty, his self-indulgence—or to exonerate him from the blame of harshly rejecting Sakuntala and in doing so, showing disrespect to Kanva. To see the image of a great monarch, a hero of the celebrated Puru dynasty which held a special place in legend and therefore, in popular imagination, tampered by ignoble behaviour without cause, must have been emotionally difficult to accept for the audience of Kalidasa's time and it seems that it still is for some. But since the curse of Durvasa, one of the most significant elements Kalidasa added to his epic source, can be interpreted in multiple ways, scholars like Chandra Rajan are of the opinion that the introduction of the curse "ought to be considered as the means which Kalidasa uses to explore different states of consciousness and to probe beneath the surface of Duhsanta's personality. … He directs us to question the whole idea of furnishing tangible proof for all those things in life we take on trust: love, constancy, fidelity" (Rajan 95-96).

Duhsanta is grief-stricken because of his separation from Sakuntala but he faints only when considering the case of Dhanamitra and foreseeing in it his own fate of dying without successor of his dynasty. He was particularly repentant because he repudiated a pregnant wife who could give him the much coveted son. This desire for the son runs as a leit motif right through the play—from the hermit's blessing the king as he withdraws his arrow aimed at the deer of Kanva's sanctuary ("May you be blessed with a son who will turn the wheel of empire") to Duhsanta's promise before leaving the hermitage of Kanva that his son by Sakuntala would be the heir of his throne up to the king's feeling of strong filial bond, in the hermitage of Marica, with Sarvadamana whose identity was yet to be disclosed—all circulate around a strong patriarchal bias that only a son/male child can be the true inheritor. This is also reflected in *Kattahari Jataka*, one of the play's sources where Brahmadatta gives his signet ring to his wife before departing, telling her to *maintain* the child by selling off the ring if it is a girl and to *bring* it to him along with the ring as evidence if it is a boy. Kalidasa exonerates Duhsanta from the glaring defects the latter suffers from in the play's epic and legendary sources to restore his stature in the public imagination as an omnipotent sovereign of Puru dynasty, but at the same time he leaves gaps for his audience/readers to explore and re-cast their opinion about the hero.

- **Sakuntala**

Sakuntala is the character around whom the whole play moves. The playwright makes it a point to remind us that she is not merely a mundane character like us, rather

she is made up of the qualities of a holy sage (Visvamitra) and an *apsara* (Menaka)—belonging to two different worlds. She thus inherits the innocent beauty and spontaneous creative energy of nature and at the same time, a hermit's self-control and stoicism that cause her transcendence from the level of a beautiful heroine of a romantic play replete with love's passionate expression. Deserted as a new born babe, Sakuntala was protected and taken care of by birds (her name comes from 'Sakunta', meaning 'bird' in Sanskrit) until the sage Kanva could rescue and adopt her. Throughout the play she has been depicted as the child of Nature, representing as well as protecting and caring for Nature it its varying forms—from deer to herbs. The scene of her leaving the hermitage of Kanva, at the end of Act 4, is poignantly accurate evidence of this where the human and phenomenal nature interact and feel for each other. An inhabitant of the Green World, she is an emblem of both nature and nurture, spontaneity and restrain. Not only has her beauty been described in floral terms, she herself has been imagined consistently in terms of a flower—jasmine. Sakuntala and jasmine are even represented as siblings, both are daughters of Nature. And before she departs for Duhsanta's capital Sakuntala asks the question that the audience/readers apprehend: "Rent from my dear father's lap like the sapling of the sandal tree uprooted from the side of the Malaya mountain, how can I survive ever in an alien soil?" (Act 4). The Fifth Act shows that she is uprooted only to be trampled, publicly humiliated beyond limits till she is rescued to some heavenly shelter by a shaft of light. Sakuntala in fact, never belonged to the artificial, bejewelled world of royal luxury.

Being brought up in a hermitage Sakuntala has never learnt to lie or deceive. She is young and naturally falls in love at first sight with Duhsanta who is indeed experienced in the game of love and has enjoyed many women. She surrenders herself completely to him not before he assures her of the sanctity of the Gandharva rites of marriage. He also promises to take her to his capital soon as his chief queen in a stately manner. But her trust is shattered as Duhsanta refuses to recognize and accept her as wife. The reason of this is, in Kalidasa's play, the curse of Durvasa—a powerful dramatic element that was introduced by the playwright with certain plans in his mind. Sakuntala stands for her trial in the enclosure surrounding the royal Fire Sanctuary (Agni- Sarana) which is a pious place in itself. The king's behaviour and his distrust of the words of the ascetics, endorsed by the sage Kanva, are not at all befitting with one who is the avowed protector of the holy groves.

Duhsanta's distrust of Sakuntala's moral character and the resulting banal verbal lashings on her find expression through his comparison of her with the cuckoo that

abandons its offspring in the nest of crow to be taken care of. The point of comparison brings in not only her mother Menaka who deserted her child after birth, but also Sakuntala herself who, in Duhsanta's opinion, is trying to pass off her unborn child, conceived through someone else, as his child. Sakuntala's trust, dignity, modesty—all are lost irretrievably. As she fails to produce the only substantial proof of their relationship, the signet ring or the 'Abhijnana' gifted to her by the king, she is humiliated and deserted not only by the king but also by the ascetics who decide to return to Kanva's hermitage leaving her alone, in tears, in "an alien soil" that she herself was suspicious of. Even if the king had lost all his memory regarding his love and union with Sakuntala, he could have considered the marriage valid because of at least two factors - the sanctifying place of judgment and the recommendation of the sage Kanva who was held in utmost reverence by Duhsanta: "A point that should be noted is, that Sakuntala in on trial in a very special place. It is not the King's hall of justice, where in other circumstances, the fisherman might have stood trial for having a valuable ring, the royal signet ring, in his possession. It is the 'raised enclosure of the Mystic Fire—*Agni*, which witnesses men's deeds and words—which the King himself has selected as the place 'proper to receive ascetics'. The Mystic Fire has already announced Sakuntala's marriage to Duhsanta to Kanva, and prophesied the greatness of the son to be born of this union. The marriage is therefore a sanctified one" (Rajan 93).

The Sakuntala of Kalidasa's epic source, the *Mahabharata*, is a different kind of person who narrates the story of her own birth to Duhsanta, makes him promise before their physical union that her son will be the heir of the Puru dynasty, goes with her six-year old boy to the king's court to claim her position, fights for the rights of her son referring to the law of the land and when she finds the king obdurate, she makes the king taste her venomous tongue and finally is about to leave such an imposter (Duhsanta) who is afraid to take the responsibility of his secret deeds. It is at this climactic moment that an arial voice testifies her claims to be true and instructs Duhsanta to accept Sakuntala and her son. *Abhijnanasakuntalam* presents a meek and docile Sakuntala who believes in self erasure and considers fate to be responsible for her suffering. Even after receiving such maltreatment from Duhsanta, she undertakes the vow of leaving an ascetic wife's life. As the king meets her in Act 7, he is struck by her bleak appearance, dusky clothes and her hair done in a single braid. Sakuntala surrenders herself unconditionally to Duhsanta without caring for any proof of their union. She even never asks for any token or proof of the relationship itself which, for

her, is based completely on trust. It is Duhsanta who introduces the idea of having a proof and hence, he gives her his signet ring as the token of their love and marriage. The loss of this ring, along with the curse of Durvasa, leads the play towards its climax. It is important to remember at this point that the word 'abhijnana' of the title of the play, means, in Sanskrit, 'a token or a mark of recognition' - it may be any mark whatsoever and need not necessarily be an ornament. In fact, Sakuntala herself could be the mark of recognition to remind Duhsanta of his emotional and physical attachment to her. But Kalidasa makes Durvasa mention an ornament: " 'My curse cannot prove false; but its power will cease the moment she presents some ornament as token of recognition' " (Act 4).

The emphasis on ornament is not negligible: it consists of a powerful double irony that we often tend to miss. An ornament is being made the mark of recognition of a woman who has never known and valued ornaments in her life at hermitage. And interestingly enough, the signet ring was originally given by Duhsanta, rather casually, to Priyamvada to release Sakuntala from the debt of her turn of watering plants. Such an ornament which he could offer so casually to any woman and which Sakuntala never desired, is being considered to be the only tangible proof of a relationship which was based on absolute trust, at least on the lady's part. Of course, those who value true love, like Sakuntala, never feel the need for any mark or proof of recognition to establish their fidelity. It is precisely for this that she refuses to accept the signet ring of Duhsanta which he is about to offer her again towards the end of the play when he is reunited with his wife and son: "No, no, my lord, I don't trust it [the ring]. Let my lord wear it himself" (Act 7). There is an unmistakable note of satire in Sakuntala's reconciliatory words that aim at the society's demand of proof: "Where I failed in convincing my lord, this ring has succeeded and done just that" (ibid.). Kalidasa invites us to lay not much trust on ornaments or such footling tokens of love, but on love itself which is "an ever fixed mark". Thus, the play ends with a kind of divine intervention—the tragedy is averted but the tragic tone resounds.

- **Kanva**

Sage Kanva (also known as Kasyapa) is the foster father of Sakuntala whom he rescued from the forest and raised as his own daughter, although he was a celibate. Kanva is a great ascetic and a patriarch who heads the hermitage which is the play's locale for the first four Acts. Renowned for his spiritual powers, he is essentially humble

and affectionate, much unlike Durvasa who is quick to take offence and ever-ready to curse. As the play opens we find him gone to Soma-tirtha to appease the gods so that some impending yet unforeseen catastrophe in her foster daughter's life could be avoided. At the beginning of Act 3, we are being informed that Kanva loves Sakuntala more than his life. Perhaps that is why when he returns to his hermitage and by his spiritual power comes to know about Sakuntala's marriage with Duhsanta (for which she did not await his permission) and about her pregnancy, he happily accepts the marriage and arranges for her departure to Duhsanta's capital. In spite of being an ascetic Kanva is well-versed in the customs and protocols by which familial and social relationships are informed. He, therefore, does not delay in sending Sakuntala back to her husband's capital as he considers only that to be the befitting residence for a married woman. He commands Sarngarava to deliver the following message to Duhsanta: "Consider us, who are rich in self-restraint, / and consider your own exalted lineage, / consider well her love, spontaneous, / that flowed towards you unprompted by her kin. / Regard her then as worth equal esteem / as your other consorts; more than that rests / on what Fortune has in store for her: / The bride's kin ought not to speak of it" (4.20). At the same time, he provides guideline for Sakuntala's behaviour at her husband's home - she should serve elders, be friendly with her co-wives, never ever argue with her husband, be courteous and never be proud: "Thus do girls attain the status of mistress of the home; / those who act contrary are the bane of their families" (ibid. 21). Though Kanva is overwhelmed with the grief of separation from his dearest daughter, his advice reflects the classic masculine desire to 'domesticate' women. When Sakuntala asks when she will re-visit the hermitage, Kanva's reply implies that she will come there only to spend the period of 'Vanaprastha', the third stage (retirement from family) of the four-fold way of life that the ancient Indians followed. We are shocked considering the attachment Kanva has had with Sakuntala but the moment she is gone the sage controls all his emotion and concludes: "A daughter is wealth belonging to another" (ibid.25). Kanva's relief does not last long as Sakuntala is repudiated by Duhsanta and the sage must have been reported by the hermits and Gautami about the bitter episode enacted at the royal court. However, the re-union in Act 7 is being transmitted to him by the sage Marica.

- **Madhavya**

Madhavya is the professional jester or 'vidusaka' appointed by Duhsanta. In Sanskrit drama the jester has usually been a close companion of the hero and he serves

two-fold function in the play: he creates the atmosphere of laughter and merriment by his peculiar appearance and witty words and at the same time, he is a detached observer whose sharp satirical jibes spare none. In *Abhijnanasakuntalam* Madhavya, a hunch-back, is being laughed at by others and he too laughs at others through his witty observations. Significantly, he laughs at himself too. Perhaps the most striking thing about this jester is the deep bond of affection between him and the king Duhsanta who considers him not only as friend and confidant but as brother. Putting away his mask of public image the king can open his mind in front of Madhavya who never hesitates to talk to the king without caring for the former's status of a sovereign. When Duhsanta narrates to Madhavya the event of losing his heart to Sakuntala whose beauty he describes in terms of fragrant jasmine, the jester's prompt reply utterly deflates the romanticism by introducing a completely different kind of comparison: "Like one whose palate jaded by enjoying delicate candies made of the sweetest dates, hankers after a taste of the sour tamarind, you too, Sir, sated with the pleasure of the Inner Apartments … are consumed by this passion for a hermit-girl" (Act 2). Thus Madhavya provides the much-sought element of relieving humour in an otherwise romantically charged play. He is the only one in the court who does not deify the king; his barbed satires are directed even to the king.

Unlike the typical jester of Sanskrit drama, Madhavya is never involved in the jealous intrigues of the court. He has gained the exceptional freedom of entry in the inner apartments of the palace. Coincidentally, for this reason we find him absent during the trial scene (in Act 5) as he is invested with the responsibility of pacifying Queen Hamsavati who felt dejected by Duhsanta's neglect of her. Since Madhavya had known all about the affair between Duhsanta and Sakuntala and had seen her portrait drawn by the king, it was he who could testify the truth that Duhsanta forgot. However, the demand of the plot was something else. Thus, at the end of Act 6 Madhavya is entrusted to convey the king's command to his chief minister Pisuna to continue administration on behalf of the king who departs to fight a battle for Indra against the demons. Madhavya leaves with the message and he is never seen again in the play as the king no longer needs amusement and distraction.

- **Priyamvada and Anasuya**

Priyamvada and Anasuya are the two female characters who have been drawn by Kalidasa to complete the portrait of the female protagonist Sakuntala. They were not

mentioned in *Mahabharata*, the epic source of the play, and are the products of the creative imagination of the playwright. They have grown up as friends and close companions of Sakuntala at the hermitage of Kanva situated by the river Malini. Apparently they are of same age but while Priyamvada is light-hearted, extrovert and an intelligent orator, Anasuya is mentally more mature, insightful and sensitive. It is Anasuya who enquires about Duhsanta's identity and intention as he comes to Kanva's hermitage as visitor concealing his identity. It is she who informs the king about Sakuntala's parentage and her upbringing whereas Priyamvada conveys to him Kanva's plan to get her married off properly. Again it is Priyamvada who plans to consummate the relation between Duhsanta and Sakuntala by her advice to the latter to write a letter expressing her desire. When the angry Durvasa's curse of oblivion falls on Sakuntala, lost in the thought of Duhsanta, Anasuya's strong presence of mind sends Priyamvada to pacify the angry sage with her words and Priyamvada succeeds to extract some remedy in the form of the signet ring of the king, gifted to Sakuntala as a token of their love. Although they have never gone out of the hermitage, they are conversant with the way of the world. Anasuya ensures that the king will give Sakuntala the position of his chief queen and when Sakuntala is being sent to Duhsanta's capital, they prepare her with garments and floral ornaments using their drawing skill. Their lamentation during Sakuntala's departure, at the end of Act 4, is indeed touching. Their part in the play ends with the departure of the heroine from the green world of the hermitage to the golden world of the royal court where the alienated Sakuntala is repudiated and humiliated by Duhsanta as Durvasa's curse makes him oblivious of the entire episode of meeting, courting and marrying her.

2.5.4 Summing Up

Dear learner, hope you have got some idea about the form as well as the content of the play, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. While the structure of the plot shows Kalidasa's command in constructing his play in such a way that the dramatic effects are maximum, his creation of situations and characters complement the effects to make the play such a work of art which his contemporaries and future generations have found equally fascinating. This discussion on plot and character should enable you to comprehend the important thematic issues in the play that will be discussed subsequently.

2.5.5 Comprehension Exercises

Essay type questions

1. Would you consider Duhsanta ‘an ideal hero’? Argue your answer.
2. Sakuntala is the dramatic centre of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. Discuss.

Mid length questions

1. Write a short note on the role played by Kanva in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
2. Write a brief essay on the points of development of the plot of the play.
3. Discuss Kalidasa’s use of the motif of curse.

Short answer type questions

1. What are the different stages of the development of plot according to Bharata?
2. How does Kalidasa develop the episode of re-union of Duhsanta and Sakuntala?
3. Madhavya rises above the level of a jester in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. Comment.
4. Consider Priyamvada and Anasuya as perfect companions of Sakuntala.

Unit 6 □ Nature, Society and Codes of Relationships

Structure

2.6.0 Introduction

In this Unit, we will basically aim at understanding three significant areas of the play—representation and role of nature, nature of human relationships at personal and social levels, and society itself as represented through the characters belonging to different layers of the society. You will notice how nature becomes almost a character; it not only affects other characters but also moulds the action of the play. Again, the hermitage society and the urban society demonstrate how and why human values differ. In the light of this animated perception of nature, human interactions assume significance, and thereby the understanding of social order gains importance. Belonging as it does to an entirely different space and time, the text in this analysis will be perceived almost as a cultural document of the time.

2.6.1 Nature in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

The dramatic and poetic worlds of Kalidasa have found their best expression against the backdrop of nature. Among his poems *Rtusamharam* and *Meghadutam* are exclusively nature poems where human passion glows brightly because it is set against such a vividly throbbing nature with all her flora and fauna. As a representative work of Kalidasa, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is no exception. Apart from the fifth act, all the acts of the play are set amid nature. The play begins at the foothills of the Himalayas, at the penance grove of the sage Kanva and it ends in the Hema-Kuta, at the hermitage of the

sage Marica. At the very centre of the play is Sakuntala in whom the Nature-Nurture dichotomy has been resolved by presenting her as the guardian deity of the hermitage (asrama) of Kanva.

The play opens with the black buck being saved by the ascetics from the arrow of Duhsanta. As the action moves into the hermitage of Kanva, we see deer roaming fearlessly in and around it; nests of birds abound in trees like Kesara and in creepers like Navamalati. Near the hermitage, we have a seat covered with the dense shade of the Saptaparna trees. A thickly interwoven creeper bower, in the forest and outside the camp of Duhsanta, forms the background of the second act. In the third act, Sakuntala is be found on the banks of the river Malini, in a creeper bower enclosed by canes and here the cool breeze brings in the fragrance of lotus. The forth act, in brief, reveals the entire world of nature in front of the audience. Only the fifth act, as has already been mentioned, is set in the capital of Duhsanta—his royal palace at Hastinapura. People from the lap of nature do not feel at home there; Sakuntala is humiliated and rejected by her husband whose world of glory and gold stands in sharp contrast with the blessed environment of the penance groves. The sixth act, however, resumes in the Pleasure Gardens attached to the royal apartments of the king. Spring is at the full bloom as the king and his jester Madhavya converse in the bower of the Madhavi creepers. In the seventh act Duhsanta comes to the sage Marica's hermitage which beautified with trees like Mandara, Kalpavrksa, Asoka and the lakes of golden lotuses.

The audience will agree that the most interesting representation of nature in *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is, perhaps, the heroine Sakuntala. She is not only at the centre of the play, around whose love, suffering and reconciliation the play moves, she is an important part of nature herself. She takes care of not only the trees, herbs and creepers of the hermitage of Kanva, she is also the nurse and protector of the timid animals like deer. Her affection for the fawn whose wounded mouth she nurses with Ingudi oil, has been represented through the words of Kanva as he mentions: "It is the little fawn, your adopted son, / whom you fondly reared with handfuls of millet, / whose mouth you dabbed with healing ingudi oil / when lacerated by sharp blades of kusa-grass: / It is he who will not move out of your path" (4.16). And her pain of separation with the creeper is similarly touching:"O, Madhavi, beloved sister, twine your branching arms round me; from today, I shall be far, far away from you, Dear Father, do care for her as she were me". In fact, the closure of Act 4 becomes so poignantly touching because of Sakuntala's attachment not only to the human beings, like her foster parents and companions, but also, if not more, to the nature surrounding the hermitage of Kanva

whose words echo the essence of her love of nature: “Hear, O Hear, all you noble trees of the Holy Grove with indwelling divinities:

She who never had a drink of water
before you had all drunk your fill,
she who never plucked your tender buds
for love of you, though fond of adorning herself,
she to whom it was a joyous festival
when you first burst into bloom; she, Sakuntala,
leaves us today for her husband’s home:
All grant her leave to go. (4.11)

Sakuntala’s question whether she would be able to fit herself in the gilded world of the Paurava monarch Duhsanta, is in this respect one of the most important part of the present play that deals with the contraries like innocence and experience, nature and nurture and so on: “Rent from my dear father’s lap like the sapling of the sandal tree uprooted from the side of the Malaya mountain, how can I survive ever in an alien soil?”

Sakuntala has a bitter experience during her brief sojourn in the gilded world of the court; she is rescued from humiliation and desertion to the holy world of Marica’s hermitage at Hema-Kuta (meaning ‘golden peak’). But there is a distinction between the green world of Kanva’s hermitage and the golden world of Marica’s. The world of Act 1 is the world of nature with trees, herbs, creepers, flowers, bees and quiet animals like deer. The river Malini gushing by the ‘asram’ provided it a cool breeze. Nature here symbolizes youth and its charms represented not only by the flora and fauna but also by Sakuntala herself who is constantly being referred to in floral terms - jasmine to be precise. On the other hand, in Act 7, the metaphors are drawn largely from the worlds of gold and gems belonging to an elemental world differing sharply from the shallow, scintillating world of the royal court of Duhsanta. Glitter of rain drops, liquid gold of snowy peaks, golden lotuses abound in this region where “the places of meditation are not green meadows where deer roam or the roots of trees under the green shade of leafy trees, but jewelled caves with celestial nymphs, gorgeously dressed and jewelled and seductive, walking about. It is a world of austere beauty, luminous with the light of the spirit; it is not a world of Nature, spontaneous, informed by instinct, but of nature *perfected* by restraint and discipline” (Rajan 85).

2.6.2 Codes of Relationship in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

It is the relationship between Sakuntala and Duhsanta that forms the dramatic centre of Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. Whereas the ideals of kingship and heroism have been projected through Duhsanta, Sakuntala stands for not only beauty and innocence but more importantly, for unconditional love and moral integrity—qualities which are so significant for amalgamating human relationships that in turn, make up the society.

Duhsanta is presented as the great king he undoubtedly was in the popular imagination constructed by stories and legends. His personal appearance is described in terms of uncommon beauty, grace, majesty and strength. In fact, the very first metaphor used by his charioteer to describe Duhsanta, presents him as a godlike hero by comparing him with Siva himself. But we must keep in mind that this 'public image' of the king is largely constructed by his subordinates, court poets and the hermits whom he protects. There is another 'private image' of the king; a 'private face' which is quite different from the 'public mask'. This 'private face' is revealed through the 'asides' given to the king, as well as in his relaxed conversations with his confidante, the jester Madhavya. It is often found that the two faces, two selves, are commenting on each other through carefully arranged juxtapositions as seen in Act 2. A curious interplay of these two selves is at work as Duhsanta courts, renounces and is reunited with Sakuntala. He at first knew her carnally, only as an object of pleasure. It is only at the end of the play that he sees and knows her as truly as a person. Something has to be added to his view of her to enable him to see her as a person of intrinsic beauty. Duhsanta was unable to correlate outer beauty with inner until his prolonged separation and an intense feeling of guilt. The play itself could be seen as an examination of relation between the ideal and the actual, semblance and truth, appearance and reality. It is in this context that Duhsanta's public and private selves are to be seen and judged.

In a system where statecraft manuals like Kautilya's *Arthasastra* explicitly recommend for princes the wearing of mask of virtue while practicing deception, as an essential part of retaining and exercising power, the concept of 'raja-rsi' (royal sage) sounds like an oxymoron and is bound to be problematic. Kalidasa, however, does not remain enigmatic about the idea of a royal sage. In *Raghuvamsam*, Dilipa, the founder of the solar dynasty, has been presented as an ideal monarch, a royal sage. But the same term cannot be applied for Duhsanta in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. The repudiation of a pregnant Sakuntala by Duhsanta forms not only the crux of the play; it also throws ample light on the un-heroic side of the king. Kanva is a revered sage, a 'kulapati' or

head of a community of ascetics and Duhsanta himself has expressed his profound respect for the sage. His ministers and other subjects would certainly have shared his view. Yet his veneration for the sage finds no reflection in Duhsanta's behaviour towards and judgment of Kanva's daughter. The curse and the manner in which it operates are related to the problem of recognition—a problem on which the play rests. It should, therefore, not be treated, as is often done, simply as a device to gloss over the unpleasant side of Duhsanta's character—his tendency of philandering, the streak of callousness in him bordering on cruelty, his self-indulgence—or to exonerate him from the blame of harshly rejecting Sakuntala and in doing so, showing disrespect to Kanva.

It should be kept in mind here that the incidents of both the curse and the loss of the signet ring were absent in the epic *Mahabharata*, generally considered to be the primary source of the play. Kalidasa made these significant improvisations in order to probe deep into some of his society's accepted norms and values which depended (and still do rely) too much on what is apparent rather than what is real. Sakuntala, being brought up in the hermitage has never learnt to lie or deceive. She is in deep bond of love with all the living things around her—human, animal and even phenomenal. With her innate sense of honour and modesty, she objects in Duhsanta's approaches towards physical union. She agrees only after he assures her of the validity of the Gandharva rites of marriage. It is to be noted in this context that Sakuntala surrenders herself unconditionally to Duhsanta without caring for any proof of their union. She even never asks for any token or proof of the relationship itself which, for her, is based completely on trust. It is Duhsanta who introduces the idea of having a proof and hence, he gives her his signet ring as the token of their love and marriage. The loss of this ring, along with the curse of Durvasa, leads the play towards its climax. It is important to remember at this point that the word 'abhijnana' of the title of the play, means, in Sanskrit, 'a token or a mark of recognition' - it may be any mark whatsoever and need not necessarily be an ornament. In fact, Sakuntala herself could be the mark of recognition to remind Duhsanta of his emotional and physical attachment to her. But Kalidasa makes Durvasa mention an ornament: " 'My curse cannot prove false; but its power will cease the moment she presents some ornament as token of recognition' " (Act 4).

The emphasis on ornament is not negligible: it consists of a powerful double irony that we often tend to miss. An ornament is being made the mark of recognition of a girl who has never known and valued ornaments in her life at hermitage. And interestingly enough, the signet ring was originally given by Duhsanta, rather casually, to Priyamvada to release Sakuntala from the debt of her turn of watering plants. Such an ornament

which he could offer so casually to any woman and which Sakuntala never desired, is being considered to be the only tangible proof of a relationship which was based on absolute trust, at least on the lady's part. The playwright's drastic changes may very well be his mode of conveying his own idea about the falsities of life that disturbed him deeply. While the loss of the ring and the loss of memory resulting from the curse provide the necessary complications in the plot structure, there is something else to which Kalidasa seems to have drawn our attention. He directs us to question the whole idea of furnishing tangible proof for all those things in life we take on trust: love, constancy, fidelity and so on. Through Misrakesi's observation in Act 6, the poet-dramatist seems to ask: "Does a love like this need a token of recognition? How can that be?" Of course, those who value true love, like Sakuntala, never feel the need for any mark or proof of recognition to establish their fidelity. It is precisely for this that she refuses to accept the signet ring of Duhsanta which he is about to offer her again towards the end of the play when he is reunited with his wife and son: "No, no, my lord, I don't trust it [the ring]. Let my lord wear it himself" (Act 7). There is an unmistakable note of satire in Sakuntala's reconciliatory words that aim at the society's demand of proof: "Where I failed in convincing my lord, this ring has succeeded and done just that" (ibid.). Kalidasa invites us to lay not much trust on ornaments or such footling tokens of love, but on love itself which is "an ever fixed mark". Now we would like to see, in the next segment, how the codes of relationship are manifested in the representation of the society as found in the play.

2.6.3 Representation of Society in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

Since literature is considered as the mirror of society, it reflects the social systems, rules, codes of conduct—the social life itself, to be precise. *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, recognized as a literary masterpiece worldwide, is no exception. But as twenty-first century audiences/readers we must be aware of the complex time frame through which the play is to be judged: the time of *Mahabharata*, the source of the play, the time of Kalidasa, the playwright and finally, the time of the audience/reader who is appreciating the play. For example, a contemporary audience/reader would hardly agree with Kanva when he asserts, as Sakuntala leaves for Duhsanta's palace, that girls are someone else's property deposited in the father's home till marriage.

The first thing that strikes us about the social system represented in the play is the division of the society in four principal categories—Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and

Sudras—the 'Varnasrama' system which originated among the Aryans according to professional divisions of society. As the play opens, we see even the king is showing unconditional respect and veneration for the sages and the hermits. Bowing down Duhsanta receives the ascetic's blessings of having a son who will carry forward the legacy of Puru dynasty. In spite of being informed about the 'Kulapati' Kanva's absence in the hermitage, the king is eager to pay his 'respect to her then. She will no doubt inform the great sage of my profound veneration for him" (Act 1). On every single occasion he meets them, the king greets the hermits, even the young ones, with utmost respect and is ready to serve them without hesitation. The sages were considered to be possessing unquestionable powers and often even the minimum slackness in showing them due respect might result in curses as was the case with Sakuntala, so lost in the thought of her dear departed that she failed to pay proper attention to Durvasa. Among the first three sects of the society, life was divided in four parts—Brahmacharya (leaving home for residential schooling at the hermitage of the Guru), Garhasthya (entering the family life by getting married, having children and pursuing a career), Vanaprastha (handing over the responsibility of family to the offspring and retiring to a meditative life) and Sanyasa (leaving society for an ascetic's life in the forest). Although 'Varnasrama' system was maintained, we get references to inter-caste marriage as Duhsanta imagines in act 1, before he comes to know Sakuntala's parentage, that she might be Kanva's daughter by his non-Brahmin wife: "I wonder … could she be the Patriarch's daughter by a wife not of his own class?" Polygamy was in practice, especially among the first three classes of the society. In Act 3, Anasuya craftily reminds Duhsanta of his promised preference to Sakuntala over the other queens, lest her friend is not neglected by the king: "Sire, one hears that kings have many loves". The king also admits: "Though many a wife may grace our palace-courts …" (23). The case of Dhanamitra, the rich merchant who died without leaving any heir apparent (Act 6), is yet another example. The interesting point that we should note here, regarding Dhanamitra's inheritance, is that even the unborn son in the womb was considered to be a legal inheritor. In fact, a considerable part of the social life was governed by the rules as laid out by Manu in his *Manusmrti*. The validity of 'Gandharva' marriage (eight kind of marriages have been mentioned in *Manusmrti*) is attested by the king who shares, with the sage Kanva, the same knowledge about the 'law' that endorses such marriage without the presence and permission of the elders and based only on the mutual consent of the couple involved: "His Holiness Kanva is well-versed in the Law; you will not cause him any distress" (Act 3).

It is *Manusmrti* that endorses and justifies, by providing divine alibi, the exploitation of the working class (Sudras) and women. The 'Prelude' to Act 6, dealing with the fisherman, the Chief of the City Police and the two Policemen—Januka and Sucaka, exposes the judiciary and the legal framework that move on ruthless torture, bribery and social parasitism. The fisherman's occupation and his position at the fringe of the society make him a soft target of the policemen who readily dismiss his truthful account of how he got the signet ring from the intestines of a fish he was cutting to pieces. Yet the policemen have to be gratified with half of the amount rewarded by the king to the fisherman for restoring his memory. Women's rights and freedom were ascertained in accordance with Manu's dictum that women do not deserve freedom. Even a spiritually enlightened person like Kanva echoes, as Sakuntala departs for Duhsanta's capital at the end of Act 4, the same male domination and objectification of women in verses 21 ("even if wronged by your husband do not cross him through anger") and 25:

A daughter is wealth belonging to another;
I have sent her this day to him who took her by the hand
……
I have restored what was left with me in trust.

The form of rule that the king preferred was, of course, an absolute monarchy at every level, with the exception of the learned sages like Kanva whose words could not be challenged or refuted. In exchange, the Brahmins justified the rule of the king as divinely ordained and beyond human evaluation and critique. Such Brahmins were exempted from paying the usual tax of one-sixth of earning or production, and it was believed that the kings received, as tax from the Brahmins, one-sixth of their holiness achieved through penance. Thus, Duhsanta reminds Madhavya in Act 2:

They pay a tribute far richer than a heap of priceless gems for the protection we provide them; and we cherish that far more. Think:

Perishable is the fruit of the yield
raised from the Realm's Four Estates;
but imperishable is that sixth part
the hermits give us of their holiness (14).

The rich businessmen, like Dhanamitra, were one of the chief sources of the kingdom's prosperity. Naturally, their rights were well protected by the king. Before the property of the dead businessman Dhanamitra is being confiscated to the state coffer as per existing law, the king wants to be doubly sure that the former does not have any

legal heir, living or about to be born, anywhere in the country or abroad. The inflow of wealth supplied by the merchant class, through business inland and abroad, was indeed an important pillar of the kingdom and therefore, the king was cautious not to send any undesirable message to the merchants. Finally, while we estimate Kalidasa's representation of the society, his position as a courtly poet is to be kept in the mind. He was a court poet as well as a learned and sensitive person with an insight into human life and affairs. Thus, like a true artist who worships the truthful, the beautiful and the eternal, he characterizes the king, his hero, first as a frivolous womanizer who desires the heroine only carnally and then, the same king, as a remorseful husband who even does not hesitate to fall at the feet of his beloved wife whom he once humiliated bitterly in his court as she stood there, pregnant with his own son and awaiting justice, respect and honour. It is this growth, this maturity that makes him able to distinguish between love and lust, which transcends Duhsanta to the level of a hero.

2.6.4 Summing Up

As we can see, almost the entire action of the play unfolds in the lap of nature where the protagonists meet and interact. Unconditional love and absolute trust on the part of the heroine and demand for proof of love on the part of the hero show how nature conditions human nature. The penance groves and the society outside it often hold contradictory yardsticks to judge human bond and values. However, all conflicts are ultimately resolved as the king is reunited with her 'fancy's queen' and their son at the hermitage of Marica. This Unit therefore gives you an idea of Kalidasa's negotiations with contemporary social mores, albeit seen through the lens of Sakuntala-Duhsanta tale.

2.6.5 Comprehension Exercises

Essay type questions

1. Write a note on human relationships in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
2. Write an essay on the representation of society in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.

Mid length questions

1. Discuss briefly how Sakuntala has been presented as part of nature in the play.
2. Write short note on the playwright's introduction of the curse of Durvasa and the loss of signet ring in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.

Short answer type questions

1. Comment on the 'Private' and the 'Public' images of Duhsanta.
2. Duhsanta's repudiation of pregnant Sakuntala forms the crux of the play. Do you agree? Explain briefly.

2.6.6 Suggested Reading

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Unit 7 □ Major Thematic Issues

Structure

2.7.0 Introduction

2.7.0 Introduction

You have by now been well acquainted with Kalidasa as a literary artist in general and about the present text in particular. The purpose of this Unit is to further clarify the core thematic issues that are taken up by the playwright in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. As a modern reader it is your task to decide for yourself how most of the issues that Kalidasa deals with, still find relevance in contemporary society. While our times are a lot different, the nature of the fable changes as well, but on perusing this Unit you should be in a position to identify certain prototypes. Such identifiers basically give relevance to a text like this one in subsequent reception.

2.7.1 The Gamut of Themes

Banabhatta, the author of *Kadambari* has used the following words to praise Kalidasa

> When Kaidasa's sweet sayings, charming with sweet sentiment, went forth, who did not feel delight in them as in honeyladen flowers?" (Kale, 24)

Such was the repute of Kalidasathat for the first time Sir William Jones had acknowledged him as the Indian Shakespeare. The language of ancient classical drama found its best expression in Kalidasa and perhaps this is the reason why Sir Monier Williams, while writing about Shakuntala, writes the following words

> No composition of Kalidasa displays more the richness of his poetical genius, the exuberance of his imagination, the warmth and play of his fancy, his profound knowledge of the human heart, his delicate appreciation of its most refined and tender emotions, his familiarity with the workings and counterworkings of its conflicting feelings- in short more entitles him to rank as the Shakespeare of India" (Kale, 26).

Kalidasa has deliberately used both Sanskrit and Prakrit languages in his plays. This same technique was found in Sudraka's plays. The picture of Aryan India as part of Kalidasa's close adherence to Sankrit language is presented in a crystal clear manner in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. The life and thought of ancient India has been more explicitly pointed out by the dramatist in every form of 'naturalness' of the incidents and characters of the plot. Since Sanskrit literature, as representing an independent civilization entirely different from that of the West needs more explanation to talk about its vastness and originality; Kalidasa has made a sincere attempt to project that impression through his plays. The tradition of Sanskrit drama is suffused with lyrical passages, and Kalidasa's works follow that tradition. James George Frazer's words speak a lot about the unique quality of Kalidasa's writing. In his understanding, any natural tendency of classical drama to recognize and assimilate within itself the common life-history of the people and the modes of their thought and expression have repeatedly been thwarted by various modes of foreign conquest. To this effect,Kalidasa remains the sole unrivalled exponent of the purest classical mode of representing life and thought in the early ages.

Since Kalidasa has presented a more realistic picture of life in this drama, it has some sriking features which make it different from his other works. There is no melodramatic situation of creating a female rival for Shakuntala. He has not created a hindrance in the hero-heroine's meeting—it goes uninterrupted. Although later, several complications arise because of the sage's curse and the uninterrupted relation had to go through several ordeals.In this play he has not assigned any special role to the Vidushaka. Here he has deviated from his other plays but that has not interrupted the harmony of the plot. No maid-servants are introduced in connection with the love-intrigue. Language in Kalidasa's play is melodious, sweet. His thoughts are sublime, there is nothing vulgar in it. The true essence of love is revealed but he has avoided all sorts of indecency and vulgarity. Rather, it has addressed the 'celestial' essence of love.

If *Mrchchhakatika* is a Prakarana reflecting Sudraka'screative capability, *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is Kalidasa's "Nataka" in which he had dramatized the narrative of Shakuntala from the *Mahabharata*.Kalidasa, the ancient dramatist lived at Ujjain at the court of Vikramaditya in the 5th century. Sanskrit literary culture was both in its homogenized and consolidated form at that time. Sanskrit plays were among the first texts to be translated into modern European languages.Kalidasa was influenced by the *Jataka Tales* and his re-telling of Shakuntala's narrative in a dramatic form captures the readers' attention. This drama is supposed to be the first among Indian dramas to be translated into a western language, first by William Jones in 1789. It has been translated as *The Recognition of Shakuntala by a Token*.Kalidasa's dramas offer us a new way of looking at human experience by the contemplation of truth within human emotions. Shakuntala's plight of getting cursed was a part of her fate and this is the turning point of the drama where she loses the ring with which the king would recognize her. The ring gets lost and is found later when Shakuntala faced the king's ignorance. It is only the token, i.e, the ring which is finally found and Shakuntala is recognized. Goethe was quite impressed by this drama of Kalidasa and what he wrote in praise of Shakuntala is relevant to mention here

Wouldst thou the young year's blossoms and the fruits of its decline,

And all by which the soul is charmed, enraptured, feasted, fed,

Wouldst thou the earth and heaven itself in one sole name combine?

I name thee, O Shakuntala, and all at once is said. (translated by E.B Eastwick)

This brief view of the text from the point of view of its reception directs us to some of the key issues it deals with. We address some of the more salient ones in the forthcoming sections.

2.7.2 Love and Desire between *Purusha* and *Prakriti*

Kalidasa, unlike other Sanskrit dramatists, is an ardent worshipper of love, its essence and the charm of beauty related to it. Love in the form of "vegetable love" (to remember the metaphysical poet, Andrew Marvell) denotes love without sexuality whereas carnal love has its own dimensions. Procreation is not possible without the erotic, carnal part of love. Kalidasa has treated the theme of love in different ways -in *Abhijnanasakuntalam* love is treated in one way depicting the passion in King Duhsanta, in *Vikramorvashi*Kalidasa has depicted love of a mortal for a divine maiden. His lyrical poem "Meghaduta" has its appeal of love of a lover to her absent beloved.

The well-known philosopher and traveller Humboldt has rightly talked about Kalidasa

> "Kalidasa, the celebrated author of the Shakuntala is a masterly describer of the influence which nature exercises upon the minds of lovers. Tenderness in the expression of feelings and richness of creative fancy have assigned to him his lofty place among the poets of all nations." (Kale, 26, *AbhijnanaShakuntalam*)

His art of worshipping beauty in either the form of human being or nature is expressive of his profound love for both animate and inanimate objects. The treatment of love, therefore, is so exclusive in his writing.

The union between the courtly and the common has been popular since Chaucer's times and the same theme recurs in Kalidasa's play. Shakuntala is brought up at the hermitage of the sage Kanvaamidst pastoral surroundings as a common lass, while Duhsanta is the king who disguises while entering into the hermitage. It is how the two met and Kalidasa makes it possible to unite the purusha and the prakriti in the form of Duhsanta and Shakuntala. The cosmic being or consciousness in the form of a man gets united with prakriti, the matter, in the entity of a woman, thus the union of two identities make a perfect pair for propcreation through love.

Barbara Stoler Miller has significantly pointed out that "all of Kalidasa's plays focus on the critical tension between desire and duty that is aesthetically manifest in the relation of the erotic sentiment to the heroic" (Miller,65). Love as an eternal aspect of human life find its best dwelling place in someone's heart and here what is interesting to follow is both Duhsanta and Shakuntala are stricken by the arrow of Cupid at the same time and place. Duhsanta's charming sensation is expressed in his words after he viewed Shakuntala

> "… her charms cannot be hidden, even though, a robe of intertwisted fibres can be thrown over to her shoulders, and conceal a part of her bosom, like a veil of yellow leave enfolding a radiant flower". (Kale, Sacontala or the Fatal Ring, Act I, p 12)

The amorous heart of Duhsanta is so full of desire that when he sees Shakuntala for the first time he desired to marry her. The king's "purusha" entity becomes prominent as soon as he utters an aside

> My warm heart is so attached to her, that she cannot but be a fit match for a man of the military class. The doubts which awhile perplex the good, are soon removed by the prevalence of their strong inclinations. I am enamoured

> of her, and she cannot, therefore, be the daughter of a Brahmen whom I could not marry. (Kale, Act I, p 15)

Duhsanta's conversations with Anusuya and Priyamvada are actually a pretext to begin his words with Shakuntala. She attracts him with all her pristine beauty. His soliloquy secures the readers' attention about the true union of the lovers in the form of purusha (Duhsanta) and prakriti (Shakuntala)

> "Either she is affected towards me, as I am towards her, or I am distracted with joy. She mingles not her discourse with mine; yet, when I speak, she listens attentively. She commands not her actions in my presence; and her eyes are engaged on me alone". (Kale, 23)

Shakuntala's beauty ignites the passion of Duhsanta and he desperately tries to win her heart for a long time. The fire of love makes him utter the following words

> "…she is exquisitely beautiful! Such are the hearts of the young! Love and fun equally inflame us; but the scorching heat of summer leads not equally to happenings with the ardour of youthful desires". (Kale, 44)

It is not-only Duhsanta's heart that speaks out, after a long trial Shakuntala also expresses her love and desire for him

> "From that instant my affection is unalterably fixed on him- and thence I am reduced to my present languor." (Kale, 46)

The image of Shakuntala as a 'nayika' is explicit in the description offered by Kalidasa

"With ushira-balm spread thick over her breasts
And a single bracelet of tender lotus stalks
That hangs pale and withered on her wrist…
How exquisite she looks in her pale loveliness:
Summer's heat can strike as savage as love…
But to burn young girls into such splendour
I cannot think that lies in summer's power" (Kale, 54)

Shakuntala got equally attracted to Duhsanta but she hesitated to disclose it in front of him. It is Anusuya and Priyamvadawho asked about her feelings for the king so that the relation could materialize. Love has its own promises and fulfillments in the form of marriage to the couple. It leads to several other dimensions which will be discussed later.

2.7.3 Creation

Abhijnanasakuntalam focuses the theme of creation. Since the inception of civilization men and women live together, start a family and procreate. Even before they knew the meaning of marriage they lived together. As soon as the society was in the mode of transition, some of the rituals became customary to maintain the sanctity of relationships. Thus, the ritual of marriage became important to get a social sanction. The marriage between Duhsanta and Shakuntala followed the "gandharva" tradition which does not openly announce the marriage. It is the sanction of their mutual vows of being conjoined in a relationship in order to consummate the passion of love that gets precedence. Although their marriage was not public but Shakuntala celebrated the blessing of motherhood. It is on one hand the King's duty which bound him to return to his kingdom leaving his wife but he gave Shakuntala a ring through which she could reach Dushmanta. Shakuntala went to Dushmanta's kingdom with the misfortune of losing the ring. She remained unrecognized by her husband as part of sage Durbasa's curse for her being absent-minded. The glory of motherhood as part of creation made her proud but that also created enough pain. Her son, Bharata would come to know his father much later. Love has its own pains and glitches, so is childbirth. But the process goes on.

From the personal/human to the universal, Creation has also another significance in this play. Nature's creation has a special effect on the entire plot of the drama. The celestial beauty found in the hermitage life of sage Kanvawas a part of nature. 'Prakriti' or nature is imagined as a woman and it is the beauty of nature which attracts the visitors to this hermitage. This same nature has nurtured Shakuntala in such a manner that one gets the impression of pristine beauty while looking at Shakuntala. The creation of wild and domestic animals are also the blessings of nature. What is more surprising is that both these animals lived in a much compatible manner—without harming each other. It is also the blessing of creation which maintains a harmonious balance between the human character and the animals.

2.7.4 Duty

Kalidasa has severally hinted of the dutiful nature of Duhsanta and Shakuntala in the play. Duhsanta plays the dual role of both the king and the lover turned husband. Most of Kalidasa's heroes are royal. Duhsanta fulfills all the kingly qualities—he is a

brave and dutiful king, a passionate lover, an admirer of aesthetics, and above all his simplicity in leading life in a hermit's place truly shows his modesty. He has immense nobility of mind. His duty as a king is the most notable aspect of his personality. After being married to Shakuntala he went back to his kingdom because he could not neglect his kingly duties. On the other hand,he thought of his newly wedded wife Shakuntala whom he gave his ring for future use to identify her. He consoles the holy men to protect them when they complained of the "blood thirsty demons, embrowned by clouds collected at the departure of day, glide over the sacred hearth, and spread consternation around"(61). Duhsanta's nobility of mind, his graceful presence as a king and his sense of responsibility for everyone secures the readers' attention. Duty can be regarded as one's dharma- one's pledge to performthe responsibilities. 'Rajdharma' and 'patidharma' have got an inextricable connection with each other in Dushmanta's character. He was the king first and husband next and he has maintained that while performing his duties.

Sometimes duty is harmonized with love and there are several references to this in the text. In Act II, sage Kanva was absent and Duhsanta was asked to protect the hermitage for some days. He instantly agreed to do that although he had some personal interest to stay there for Shakuntala. He consented to perform his duty as a saviour in the absence of the sage but instantly a messenger came from his capital with his mother's proposal to take part in a fasting as part of a ritual. He was divided between duty and love- "I have to weigh my duty to the ascetics against the request of a revered parent and neither can be ignored". One could think of his sense of responsibility which made a split in his self. Finally,he decides to stay with Shakuntala and performs his duty as a saviour. In Act III the king faced a more critical situation which demanded his dutiful role: Shakuntala became love-sick and only the king's healing touch could cure her. "They say it is the king's duty to relieve the pain of those who live in his realm…So if you would save her life, you must take her under your protection"- Priyamvada's prayers didn't go futile. Duhsanta married Shakuntala and here his duty was not over. He was in a dilemma to select between his responsibilities as a king and a husband.

Duhsanta's sense of being 'just' is also another form of his dutifulness. He was not ready to leave truth for anything. He ordered his minister about the disposal of Dhanamitra's property and such kind of anxiety shows that he was not ready to acquire health with unjust means.

Shakuntala's role as a dutiful daughter of nature cannot be overlooked. She along with her two constant companions have ascetic responsibilities to receive the guests and attend them. Her devotion to the ashram life worried Dushmanta: whether she will agree to culminate their relationship or she should live an austere life. She fulfilled her wifely

duties. She went to attend Duhsanta's capital although the king could not identify her as a result of the curse of sage Durbasa. The way Shakuntala showered her affection for everyone in the hermitage presents that she seemed to love the whole creation. She lead an ascetic life during the period of separation with Dushmanta.

Although the dramatist has highlighted the duties of the main characters but Anusuya and Priyamvada were also dutiful. They were devoted to the hermitage. They continuously cared for Shakuntala and never left her alone. It is Anusuya and Priyamvada who made sincere attempts to materialize the relation between Shakuntala and Duhsanta.. Even after the gandharva marriage they were concerned about Shakuntala. Anusuya's words speak her concern for Shakuntala

> "This morning the pious prince was dismissed with gratitude by our hermits…he is now gone to his capital, Hastinapura, where, surrounded by a hundred women in the recesses of his palace, it may be doubted whether he will remember his charming bride".(Kale, 62)

Priyamvada's concern for Shakuntala is expressed repeatedly throughout the play unlike Anasuya's. She is quite alarmed about the curse fallen on Shakuntala

> "Our beloved friend was, though mere absence of mind, provoked, by her neglect, some holy man who expected reverence".(Kale, 64)

Both of them had a tremendous sense of responsibility. It is Anusuya who begged of Durbasa's forgiveness on behalf of Shakuntala

> "Holy Sage, forgive, I entreat, the offence of an amiable girl, who has the highest veneration for you, but was ignorant, through distraction of mind, how exalted a personage was calling to her".(Kale, 65)

Duhsanta's duty as a father needs time to get fulfilled since he forgot about Shakuntala as part of sage Durbasa'scurse. One can say that it was not intentional lapse on his part. He played his role as a father after some years when he met his son Bharata in the hermitage.

2.7.5 Superhuman / Divine Interjections Causing Obstacles to Duty

In the play all the characters have attempted to perform their concerned duties in their own ways but it is the inevitability of fate which forbids them from performing those duties in a flawless manner. Related to this is the role of the superhuman and (or) divine interjections. It is the ritual to be observed by Duhsanta's mother for which he needed to go back to his capital. Here he successfully performs his duty as a son but

his duty as a husband not to leave his wife gets ignored because of divine interjection. So it is evident that divinity not necessarily creates a positive effect upon an individual every time. In relation to this we also need to mention the role of the sages who are not always really up to bless living beings. They could also curse, if dissatisfied. When Shakuntala was so absorbed in Duhsanta's thought she couldn't perform her duty perfectly, therefore the sage Durbasa cursed her to suffer forgetfulness. Such fatal advancements create obstacles to duty to the characters. It is interesting to read the role of such superhuman figures as parallels to the role of Fate in Classical European tragedies.

2.7.6 Different Modes of Life

Kalidasa has artistically mingled the primitive with the advanced style of life in this play. The hermitage of sage Kanwa gives the essence of a bucolic beauty, a serene and pristine life surrounded by nature. All the inhabitants living there are absolutely calm and quiet, and are miles away from any sense of violence. Only peace dwells there. Tyranny, hypocrisy, debauchery were the forbidden words to imagine and utter. The characters over there are very much suited to this serene and artless way of life. On the other hand the advancements of city life are quite evident in Duhsanta's capital and on the way to that place. Shakuntala, the flamboyant daughter of nature receives the complex blows of life as soon as she steps forward to the capital of her 'husband'. Notwithstanding the curse of sage Durbasa that leads to her tragedy thereafter, it is also interesting to note the details of Kalidasa's description of how a young woman from a completely natural setting finds city life, and the ways in which she responds to it. It is possible to read these binaries through the contrasted frames of nature and nurture. Kalidasa must however be credited for finally bringing the play to a positive ending, so that the ignorant and the complicated are clubbed in a harmonious measure and the scales of life are finally balanced.

2.7.7 Summing Up

In this Unit therefore, you have been subjected to a detailed study of various themes of the play that will help you developing the ideas related to the concepts addressed. Notice that the thrust of this thematic analysis has been such as to enable a reading of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as a text that transcends its own time and finds relevance even to modern day readers. To end however, we reiterate the fact that as a learner you must substantiate all discussions on this great play with your reading of the text.

2.7.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Comment on Kalidasa's craft of handling various themes in *Abhjnanasakuntalam.*
2. How does Kalidasa address the binaries of nature and nurture in the play and bring them to a positive conclusion?
3. Show how Kalidasa makes adroit use of characters to develop the theme of duty and then to offset it with the representation of inimical forces beyond human control.

Medium Length Questions

1. Discuss Kalidasa's handling of the themes of love and desire in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.
2. How does the theme of love initialise the plot of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*?
3. What in your understanding are the multiple ways in which the theme of creation is operative in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*?

Short Questions

1. Name some of the dramatists who composed their plays in Sanskrit.
2. Name some of the plays by Kalidasa.
3. Who translated AbhijnanaShakuntalam for the first time and when?

2.7.9 Suggested Reading

Baumer, Rachel Van M. & James R. Brandon. *Sanskrit Drama in Performance*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1993

Dent, J.M. 'Introduction' to *Translations of Shakuntala and Other Works* by Arthur W. Ryder. London. 1920.

Kale, M.R. ed. *TheAbhijnanaShakuntalam*. Delhi: Motilal Banarasidas. 1969.

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MacDonell Arthur. *A History of Sanskrit Literature*. New York: D. Appleton and Company. 1900.

Unit 8 □ The Play as *Drisyakavya*

Structure

2.8.0 Introduction

This Unit will provide some ideas about *drisyakavya* according to ancient Sanskrit poetics, and try to locate Kalidasa's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* in the tradition of visual aesthetics in Sanskrit *kavya*.

2.8.1 What is *drisyakavya?*

The term 'Sanskrit drama' is itself hybrid in nature, used for the purpose of introducing to the English-speaking world some glimpses of literatures in Sanskrit. Originally, any kind of literary work in Sanskrit was called *kavya*', which could be classified in terms of subject-matter, technique or mode of enjoyment. In *Kavyadarsa*, Dandin refers to *kavya* as '*vakyam rasatmakam kavyam*'—utterance with rasa embedded in it, is poetry. According to Visvanatha Kaviraja, *Kavya* is of two kinds, classified according to its mode of enjoyment—*sravya* (to be listened to) and *drisya* (to be watched). *Drisyakavya* is chiefly to be watched; it is to be enacted on stage by *nata* and *nati*s (male and female actors). He specifically mentions *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as an ideal example of 'drisyakavya'. Terms like *nataka*, *driysakavya* and *rupaka* were used interchangeably, to denote this kind of literary/dramatic work. According to

Abhinavagupta, persons whose minds are clear as a mirror, persons with a pure heart can enjoy a *nataka* simply by listening to its poetic rendering. In fact, in classical Indian aesthetics the *rasa* of *sravya* is not something different from the rasa of *drisya*.

2.8.2 Features of *Drisyakavya*

In performance, a drisyakavya is essentially conveyed through *abhinaya*, which can be loosely translated as 'acting'. *Abhinaya* consists of four elements: *angika, vacika, aharya* and *satvika*. *Angika abhinaya* involves physical gestures and movements, which are subject to watching, *vacika* is the speech act, '*Aharya*' derives from '*Aharana*'—i.e., the kind of *abhinaya* manifested through costumes and make-up; and *Satvika* abhinaya reveals itself through finer expressions such as *stambha* (stillness), *sveda* (perspiration) and *romancha* (hair-raising, to indicate thrill or high excitement). Thus while all these three elements of *abhinaya* are to be appreciated visually and are therefore elements of the spectacular, only the *Vacika* element—the verbal part concerning pronunciation and dialogue-throwing, modulation—is subject to auditory appreciation. Besides, a *drisyakavya* is also called *rupaka*, where the *rupa* (tangible image) of characters are attributed upon the actors—this is called *aropa* (carrying the sense of investing with). Here we find another important feature of *drisyakavya* or *rupaka*—'*tat ruparopattu rupakam*'—that which attributes rupa (i.e., form and appearance of the characters upon the actors) is *rupaka*.

2.8.3 Tracing the Tradition: From Bhasa to Kalidasa

In *Natyasastra*, sage Bharata refers to *Amritamanthana* and *Tripuradaha* as the earliest examples of *nataka*, though we have no access to them at present. The cycle of Bhasa's nataka(s), a pre-Kalidasa poet, gives ample proof of *angika abhinaya* (physical acting). Scenes involving such physical acting are rather abundant in his plays, for instance wrestling (as in Madhyamavyaoga), beholding the images and describing them (as in *Pratimanatakam*) or even describing a dream (as in *Svapnavasavadattam*). Sudraka's *Mricchakatika* is rich in physical acting—the chasing scene, the act of stealing, Vasantasena filling up Rohasena's clay-cart with all her jewels, swapping of the carts—all these are to be enacted and watched; and the language is so scripted, that attentive readers also may have the feeling of visualizing the scenes in the play.

Kalidasa's other two plays, *Malavikagnimitram* and *Vikramorvasiyam* also present commendable instances of *angika* acting, especially in the scene where the Vidushaka makes up a show of fainting (in *Malavikagnimitram*) or where the king Pururava, missing his beloved wife, laments and roams across the forest, frantically rushing to each and every tree and vine, asking the whereabouts of Urvasi (*Vikramarvosiyam*). The language of these plays also betrays a pictorial quality, but all these elements find in *Abhijnanasakuntam* a profound aesthetic expression, which can delight the eye and the mind simultaneously. That is why, it is proverbially said in Sanskrit—"*kavyeshu natakam ramyam, tatra ramya Sakuntala*"—nataka, or in a broader sense, drisyakavya is beautiful among other kinds of poetry, and among nataka(s), Sakuntala (an abbreviated form of *Abhijnanasakuntalam*) is the most beautiful one. Kalidasa's worthy successor, Bhavabhuti excels in his pictorial skill of creating a 'visual drama', especially in *Uttararamacharitam*— in several scenes of this play, we may recognize the influence of Kalidasa.

2.8.4 *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as a *drisyakavya*

The status of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* as 'drisyakavya' needs little clarification. However, for the readers who read it as a play text for academic purpose, a discussion of the visual aesthetics embedded in it becomes all the more important. As a 'drisyakavya', the play needs to be 'visualised' while reading; otherwise much of its 'rasa' remains yet to be tasted. Let us begin with the use of stage-directions and dialogues that involve 'looking' or 'seeing'. The translated text of the play used here is the one by Chandra Rajan, from the Penguin edition of *Kalidasa: The Loom of Time—A Selection of His Plays and Poems.*

In the very beginning, enters the *Sutradhara* (director or stage manager), who, 'looking towards the backstage' (*nepathyabhimukhavalokya*), calls his wife, "Lady! If the preparations in the dressing room are complete, will you be pleased to attend us?" The *Nati*, on her turn, while singing a song of summer to delight the ears of the audiences, also appeals to their visual sensibility—"Exquisite are sirisa blossoms/see how they sway/crested with delicate filaments—/ kissed, lightly, lightly—/ by murmurous bees—"(Rajan 170)

The song ends, and the director, praising the melody, admits that his mind has been carried far away elsewhere by the songs, as was the king Duhsanta, attracted by the

antelope—and immediately follows the king entering the stage on a chariot, with his charioteer. The first thing the charioteer utters is also a word-picture: looking at the deer and the king in turn:

"O long-lived majesty!

Casting my eye on the fleeting blackbuck

And on you holding the taut-strung bow

I seem to see before my very eyes

Pinaki, the Lord, chasing the deer. (Rajan 172)

This is one of the many examples of picture-presenting through poetry, which is also subject to visual reception. Here, the attribution of *rupa* (image or form) is double-fold—the image/character of king Duhsanta is attributed upon the actor, which is called *aropa*, and further, the image of God Siva, also called Pinaki, with his divine bow and arrow, is attributed upon the king.

The entire play text of *Abhijnanasakuntalam* is embellished with a number of such word-picture-painting—which are indeed a treat to the eye—whether one reads it carefully, or watches it on stage. When the king describes the deer flying in fear of his arrows, he is not only a mere hunter but one who appreciates the creature's speed and movement, as if drawn in picture:

Arching his neck with infinite grace, now and then

He glances back at the speeding chariot,

His form curving fearful of the arrow's fall

The haunches almost touch his chest.

Panting from fatigue, his jaws gaping wide

Spill the half-chewed tender grass to mark his path. (Rajan 172)

The king is exulted, seeing his horses in motion, and gives voice to what comes as another brilliant picture-in-motion, a fascinating sample of Kalidasa's mastery of composing a *drisyakavya*—which we may even call 'cinematic', using a modern-day term: it depicts how the ground, the trees, and everything appear to a person riding a chariot in full motion—

See how they excel even Hari's bright horses; therefore:

What was minute suddenly looms large

What's cleft down the middle seems to unite;

The eye sees straight what's naturally curved

The chariot rushing along, nothing stays

Near or far, even for a moment. (173)

The king is stopped by two sages. At their request he withdraws the arrow and proceeds to visit the hermitage nearby. Coming nearer, he tells the charioteer that they have reached the outskirts of the hermitage, surrounded by the woodland (*tapovana*). The charioteer asks, "How can you tell, my lord?" The king replies:

Do you not see, Sir? Right here:

Grains of wild rice fallen from tree-hollows

Where parrots nest, lie scattered under the trees;

Those stones there look moist, glossy from the oil

Of ingudi-nuts split and pounded on them;

All around, deer browse in their tranquil haunts,

Unafraid of the chariot's approach, yonder,

Drops of water dripping off the edges of bark-garments

In long-lines, trace the paths to pools and streams. (174-5)

Since his entry, king Duhsanta displays an extraordinary sensibility to behold and get fascinated with beauty, which results in his 'love at first sight' for Sakuntala. His description of her grace and elegance, her movement and delicate limbs, her lips and eyes—everything is as if, "drawn in picture" (*citrarpita iva*). And this sensibility he channelizes into the art of painting her on canvas, against the beautiful backdrop of the *tapovana*, exactly recreating the scene of their first meeting. The king appears to be an accomplished painter as well, who seeks to achieve a sublimation of his bitter sense of guilt and remorse, when, after failing to recognize Sakuntala and sending her away, he gets back the signet ring and again remembers everything. The scene is doubly important for an ideal 'drisyakavya'—it gives a dramatic space to recreate a setting for recognition and reunion, thematically so significant, and at the same time, helps the audiences to visualize the 'lost' sense of a blissful setting. However, it is an incomplete picture: Duhsanta has painted Sakuntala, afraid of a bee—as he first saw her, and her two friends—Anasuya and Priyamvada. But there are things yet to be painted; as the king himself points out—the stream of the river Malini, the foothills of the Himalayas,

a blackbuck and a doe—and moreover, Sakuntala herself is yet to be complete. Holding the picture and contemplating on it, the king at times forgets that it is a picture, and when the jester Madhavya reminds him of the reality, with one of his typical witticisms, he laments:

With my heart wholly lost in her as if she stood
Right here before my eyes, what supreme joy was mine;
Waking up my memory you have trans-formed
My beloved into a lifeless image once again. (258)

The words, in a way, are supposed to replicate the feelings of the audiences, lost in the performance of the *drisyakavya*, as if it is occurring in reality in front of their eyes. This is indeed an aesthetic device to suggest to the audience that the *drisyakavya* itself, so far well-presented, is yet to show something more—the 'picture' awaits completion.

And the recognition is complete, though another picture comes up. The Sakuntala he sees now is no longer the youthful beauty that appealed to his senses, she is now a mother, a mature and dignified lady, yet the repentant and more sensible Duhsanta does not fail to recognize her:

Dressed in dusky garments
Her face fined thin from observing strictest vows
Her hair bound in a single braid; pure, upright,
She keeps the long vow of cruel separation
From me who acted so heartless to her. (Rajan 275)

Duhsanta falls at her feet, and raised by Sakuntala, wipes her tears. The child Bharata is now blessed with both his parents, and the 'picture' is complete.

2.8.5 Elements of *abhinaya* in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*

The four elements of *abhinaya*—namely, *angika, vacika, aharya* and *satvika* have their full scope of enactment in *Abhijnanasakuntalam.* In Act 1, Sakuntala and her friends are busy in watering the saplings, Sakuntala is tired, lifting and carrying the jars of water and drops of sweat fall from her brows. The king, while conversing courteously with Anasuya and Priyamvada, finds Sakuntala feeling embarrassed and teased by

Priyamvada's words. She prepares to leave, trying to avoid the king out of coyness. He makes a movement to restrain her, then checks himself for the sake of decorum, and says in a brief aside:

Eager to follow the sage's daughter
vehemently held back by decorum,
no sooner had I left but I returned
it seems, but not stirred from this very spot. (Rajan 183)

This is a brilliant combination of *angika* and *vacika* abhinaya. The king's character, both as a lover and a military hero, is given space enough to present a moving performance full of physical and verbal action. Now he droops and sighs, love-sick, the next moment he responds to the call of heroism— rushing to rescue someone in distress, whether in case of the sages, afraid of the monsters (Act 3) or his 'Vidushaka' Madhavya, held fast by Matali, in a prank— only to excite the king's valour, to revive him from his remorse and inaction (Act 6). The jester Madhavya, pretending as if his limbs are all broken, stands in a hilarious posture seeing the king, so that he may be relieved of running around with him (Act 2), later he assumes a comic 'heroism' and with his stick, assaults the arrows of love—the mango-blossoms (which are considered to be one of the five arrows used by Kamadeva, the god of love), to save his king-friend from pangs of lost love, forcing a reluctant laughter out of the king, even amidst his sorrows (Act 6).

The scene of Sakuntala's departure from the *tapovana* (Act 4) is a brilliant composition that reinforces the human-nature relationship—a theme so prominent throughout the play. And its visual illustration come to be so lively when the trees, as representatives of Mother Nature hand out garments and ornaments to dress their loving daughter, before she goes away to her husband's place. This comes as a description uttered by a hermit-boy, which nevertheless gives us an effect of *angika* abhinaya through the *vacika* mode. Anasuya and Priyamvada apply decorations on her face, deck her with the divine ornaments—here we have a combination of *angika* and *aharya* modes of *abhinaya*. *Angika*, *vacika* and *satvika* abhinaya come together when Sakuntala weeps and embraces the vine called 'Vanajyotsna' (the moonbeam of the forest) and her friends in the same spirit, and stops to console her adopted 'son'—the little fawn who is tugging at the hem of her garment; and Father Kanva, tries hard to maintain his

ascetic calm at the time of her departure but ultimately sighs, and gives way to his parental affection to Sakuntala, uttering from the deepest core of his heart:

How can my grief ever leave me,

O my beloved child, when I see

Grains of wild rice already scattered by you

Sprouting green shoots at the cottage door. (Rajan 228)

Again, the reunion of Duhsanta with his son (Act 7) involves all the four elements of abhinaya—beginning with his wonder and a strange feeling of filial gesture towards the boy who plays with a lion-cub, the boy's restlessness hearing the word 'sakuntalavanya' (beauty of a bird), with his childish eyes searching his mother, and finally Duhsanta and Sakuntala standing closely, she unable to utter the word "victory" with her choked voice, and he wiping her tears, which once he ignored.

On the whole, *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, being all that it is—a masterpiece of Kalidasa, an ideal cultural text representative of ancient India, which Goethe famously hails as "blossom of the season of youth and fruit of the ripe year" together—is, after all, a spectacular achievement in the tradition of 'drisyakavya', where the visual and the poetic are united in a happy marriage.

2.8.6 Summing Up

Abhijnanasakuntalam belongs to the ancient Indian tradition of *drisyakavya*, in which plays to be enacted are essentially considered as poetry which can be visualized.

- The play text bears ample scope for the performative and the visual.
- Description and dialogues reveal the poet's unparalleled mastery in creating word-pictures, creating a visual effect.
- The four elements of *abhinaya*— *angika* (physical), *vacika* (verbal), *aharya* (involving costume and make-up) and *satvika* (expression of finer sentiments through tears, sighs, perspiration etc.) are at full play in *Abhijnanasakuntalam.*

2.8.7 Comprehension Exercises

1. i) What is 'drisyakavya'?
   ii) Describe, in brief, the four elements of *abhinaya*.

iii) Discuss the tradition of Sanskrit *drisyakavya* in ancient Indian dramaturgy.

2. i) Bring out the importance of the prologue in setting the tone of 'drisyakavya'.

ii) Discuss, with suitable illustrations, Kalidasa's art of creating visual effect through word-pictures.

iii) Give two examples of *angika* and *satvika* abhinaya in *Abhijnanasakuntalam*.

2.8.8 Suggested Readings

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Visvanatha. *The Sahitya-Darpana or Mirror of Composition*. Tr. J.R. Ballantyne and Pramada Dasa Mitra. New Delhi : Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 2016.

NOTES

Module-3
"The Dicing" by Vyāsa

Unit 9 □ Introduction to "The Dicing" Episode of The *Mahābhārata*

Structure

3.9.0 Introduction

This unit is meant to provide you with a general outline of the origin, significance and form of the *Mahābhārata*, with a specific focus on "the Dicing" episode. After reading this unit you should be able to:

(a) understand the emergence of the *Mahābhārata* over a long period of history, and trace various socio-political and cultural issues relevant to the thematic and formal experiments in the epic.

(b) know about the ambiguous authorship of the *Mahābhārata* and the intriguing figure of Vyāsa as a father figure, who is assumed to be begetter of both the entire epic and some of its central characters.

(c) conceptualize the epical dimension of the *Mahābhārata* as a culturally inclusive text, characterised by multiplicity and open-endedness.

(d) locate "the Dicing" as a key episode within the overall plot construction.

(e) have some ideas about the legacy of the *Mahābhārata* and its varied receptions in our contemporary world.

3.9.1 Socio-cultural Backdrop

A central text of the Indian Classical Literature, the *Mahābhārata* is a production of a long and composite socio-historical process, involving a vast array of cultural forces. Writing in 1945 in *The Discovery of India*, Jawaharlal Nehru observed that the 'recovery' of the entire *Mahābhārata* had remained an incomplete task till that moment. He pointed out that even during the Second World War "a host of competent Indian scholars ... [had] been engaged in critically examining and collating the various available texts, with a view to publishing an authorized version" and "Russian oriental scholars ... [had] produced a Russian translation of the Mahābhārata" (106).

According to literary historians like Franklin Edgerton and Carroll Smith, the available form of the epic has its root in "an early Indo-Aryan provenance in oral bardic literature and possibly even in more ancient Indo-European bardic songs about warriors and wars" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xviii). This perspective explains the similarities between the narrative pattern of the *Mahābhārata* and European epics like the *Iliad* and *Bewoulf*. The scholars refer to a primary version of the *Mahābhārata* of eight thousand verses with the title *Jaya*, which was followed by another version of about twenty-four thousand verses, called *Bhārata*. As John D. Smith notices, "clearly something quite unusual happened to turn a bardic heroic narrative into a comprehensive 100,000-verse compendium of the Hindu lore of the day, a work of which it could be seriously asserted that 'what is not found here is to be found nowhere'" (Introduction lxvi). It can be apprehended that the changing length of the work reflects the changing socio-cultural settings of its long-term development. "Ancient Indian chronology is almost always problematical to establish, and the period of the *Mahābhārata*'s development is no exception: a plausible estimate is the eight centuries from 400 BC to AD 400" (Smith, Introduction lxvii). Furthermore, as more recent verses can be found to be added in a way so that they conform to earlier verses, it is not possible to make sharp divisions amongthe verses composed at different points of time. This creates a very intricate text which exemplifies what Sukthankar says "a mosaic of old and new matter," that is, in a typical part of the narrative "we may read a stanza of the second century B.C. followed by one written in the second century A.D." (Quoted in Smith, Introduction lxvii).

According to the freedom fighter and classical scholar Aurobindo Ghosh, the works of Vyāsa, Valmiki and Kalidasa may be considered to constitute the main cannon of the

ancient Indian literature, and among these three authors, Vyāsa in particular, represents the intellectual side of that literature (Pande, G.C. 49). The historical and cultural context of the *Mahābhārata* may be found in the late-Vedic and post-Vedic periods. Thus, the long historical period of the composition of the *Mahābhārata* was also a period of continuous socio-cultural transitions. Evolving over the ages, the epic constantly enquires into moral and psychological, ethical and metaphysical problems of these transitions. The contradictions in the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* partly derive from the review of the social and cultural ethos of an older time from the perspective of a subsequent and more critical age. This accounts for the fluidity of the *Mahābhārata* narrative that cannot be conveniently pigeonholed to represent a single socio-ideological framework.

The earliest hymns of the *Rig-Veda* can be dated to 1200 BC or even earlier. So during the earlier compositions of the *Mahābhārata*, those Vedic hymns had already become 'ancient'. The epic assimilates three main socio-cultural currents—bardic, priestly and ascetic. Consequently, the epic has remained the most significant literary product of a period when the old-order represented by the Vedas was definitely under threat due to religious transformations like the rise and spread of Jainism and Buddhism. The Gupta Empire, which covered almost the whole Indian subcontinent from the third century CE to 543 CE, was marked by the cultivation of Buddhist philosophy, art and architecture. But, sweeping across India since the first-century CE, a new socio-political and cultural challenge against both orthodox Brahmanism and Buddhism was put forth by the Bhakti movement. The later renditions of the *Mahābhārata* bears the Bhakti influence most prominently in form of the celebration of the Bhakti God Krishna.

The conflicting socio-cultural ethos of an evolving history figure prominently in the narrative of the *Mahābhārata*, which, nonetheless, differs significantly from the Vedas. Vyāsa's epic is a story rather than a collection of hymns. The society of the epic was divided into four social classes or *Varnas*: Brahmins, priests, scholars and teachers; *Ksatriyas*, rulers, warriors and administrators; *Vaishyas*, agriculturalists and merchants; *Shudras*, laborers and service providers to the people belonging to other three *Varnas*. The *Mahābhārata* raises serious questions regarding the social roles and responsibilities of any *Varna*, and ethical concerns related to them. Along with priests and teachers, hermits and mendicants, Brahmins are found to act as ministers, counsellors, warriors and servitors. On the other hand, *Ksatriyas*, traditionally associated with definite codes of morality, like hospitality, chivalry, honesty etc., are shown to be deceitful and indecent.

Predominantly a Ksatriya text, the *Mahābhārata* discloses an inner contradiction "between the professed morality of war and politics ... and the actual disregard of moral principles for the sake of expediency or niti" (Pande, G.C. 55). The epic imposes a frame narrative on a core text, and that frame narrative is meant to establish the Brahminist notion of purgation through the elimination of 'bad Ksatriyas' at the hands of 'good' ones. But, as we shall examine later, the deceitful practices of Śakuni and Duryodhana represent also a crucial historical turn in the Ksatriya dharma which inclines towards the Machiavellian practices. The complicated nature of dharma is exposed in the epic by a series of crisis faced by the embodiment of dharma in the epic, that is, the eldest Pā ndava, Yudhishthira, who, believed to be the son of god Dharma, is shown to be torn between Pravrittidharma, that is, "various rituals and codes that allow an individual to live his life fruitfully with the society" and Nivrittidharma, which is "the disposition to renunciation, of material values and relationships, a concept that corresponds to ideas like sanyāsa and later to ahimsa" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction li). This is to be further noted that the complex unfolding of dharma and niti, both as concepts and praxis, establishes the *Mahābhārata* as a contemporary work of Manusmrti, Kautilya's Arthashastra and Pānini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī*.

Despite underscoring the cultural heterogeneity, marked digressions and elaborations, the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* tends to produce a unified impression of 'Bhā rata', socially and culturally evolving from the more loosely formed 'Āryāvarta'. The production of the epic appears to coincide also with the vast scale demographic movements in this subcontinent from the Indus valley in the northwest towards the Gangetic basin in the southeast. The social landscape contextualizing the epic was mostly rural and sylvan—agriculture and cattle breeding, wood, stone and metal crafts and trade being the main forms of livelihood. The peasantry mainly came from the *Vaishyas*, although other *Varnas* participated in agriculture. Cattle raids play key roles in the narrative, which considers several sub-classes like *Sutas* who were both charioteers and bards. It may be assumed that cities emerged as the abodes of kings and courtly people and merchants and craftsmen. The text narrates Hastinapura, Ahichhatra, Indraprastha, Kashi, Mathurā, Mithila, Gandhar etc., and mentions the common ways of referring to townsmen and countrymen as *Paura* and *Janapada*, respectively. However, during the composition of the *Mahābhārata*, 'empire' was primarily a matter of deserving gifts from subordinate rulers and exhibiting authority through different forms of campaigning and the performance of sacrifices like the Rajasuya and the Ashvamedha. In Partha Mitter's words, "[t]he political map of India was changing, pastoral communities giving way to early states called *mahajanapadas* as tribal

republics fell before ambitious monarchs competing for control over North India. The situation was aptly described in the epic *Mahābhārata* as one 'where big fishes ate little fishes'" (13).

It is worth remembering that one of the prime narrative tropes of the *Mahābhārata* is hyperbole, contributing to its status as a fictional creation intended to embody a symbolic world order and not a historical one. In their analysis of the Vedic literature, Irfan Habib and Vijay Kumar Thakur show the conflicting sources of places, communities, events and characters of the *Mahābhārata*. For example, "the *Aitareya* ... tell[s] us of a horse sacrifice undertaken by Janamejaya, a descendant of the Kuru king Parikshit. The Kuru kingdom centred in Haryana seems in time to have assimilated the Krivi tribe, which had apparently migrated from the northwest. Reported to be on the Indus and Chenab in a hymn of the *Rigveda* ... the Krivis are said to have borne the name Pañchāla in later times", while, on the contrary, "[i]n the ... *Yajurveda*, the Kuru-Pañchālas... appear as an alternative to the Bhāratas, the larger tribe from the time of the *Rigveda*." Most importantly, "there is nothing in the main Vedic corpus" in support of the central war between the Kauravas and the Pāndavas (44-45). The fictional narrative of the epic looks far beyond its contemporary period and anticipates some of the most recent experiments in the literary art.

3.9.2 Intriguing Roles of Vyāsa

This is often said that epics are perhaps only forms of literature which we never read; and an epic like the *Mahābhārata* has been transmitted to us since our childhood in so many versions that it is literally impossible to hold an individual author responsible for all of them. It is quite obvious that a text continuously composed and recomposed during a period of at least eight hundred years could not be written by an individual poet singlehandedly. Now it is commonly assumed that Krishna Dvāipāyana Vyāsa, the biological father of Pāndu and Dhritrāshtra (fathers of the Pāndavas and the Kauravas respectively), is the 'author' of the epic, and his slokas were scribed by God Ganesha. Simultaneously, the figure of Vyāsa is that of a cosmic one in Sanskrit literature. Significantly, the literary meaning of the Sanskrit word 'Vyāsa' is compiler.

Now, the interesting part of the narrative is that when Janamejaya, the son of Parikshit and the great grandson of Arjuna, undertakes a snake sacrifice he is reported to request the great seer Krishna Dvāipāyana Vyāsa to tell the story of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas. Vyāsa instructs his pupil Vaiśampāyana to recount the story. Next, this story is heard by the Suta Ugraśrava, and when we begin with the first seven verses of

the entire epic, we learn about Ugraśrava's visit to the Naimisa forest where he meets a group of holy seers requesting him to retell the story of the Bhāratas. Thus the epic we come to know is supposed to be narrated by Ugraśrava: "The Suta spoke". As John D. Smith observes, "'So-and-so spoke' ... occur throughout the tale" as it is "a distinctive feature of the *Mahābhārata*" (Introduction xlvii). And, T.R.S. Sharma observes that "[t]he story we get is already at three removes from the supposedly original story-teller" (18). Experiments with narrative voices and techniques involve the shifting roles of the master narrator, Krishna Dvāipāyana Vyāsa, and the interventions of multiple narrative voices. As T.R.S. Sharma explains, "[h]is is a disembodied voice, often muted through surrogate voices of other narrators to whom he delegates his power of narration. He comprises both texts and contexts" (15).

The fact that Vyāsa is himself a crucial character in the epical narrative relates to his complicated function. When Vichitravirya, heir to the throne after the death of elder brother Chitrāngada and their father Sāntanu, dies childless, mother of Chitrāngada and Vichitravirya, Satyavatī assigns her pre-marital son Vyāsa, whose father is the sage Parashara, to levirate on Vichitravirya's two widows, Ambika and Ambālika. The offspring are Dhritrāshtra and Pāndu, fathers of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas, respectively. In an international adaptation of the epic, the director Peter Brooks show Krishna Dvāipāyana Vyāsa and Krishna Basudeva are united in a cosmic dance. These two Krishnas are interconnected because they are the authors of the epic and the world. In the course of Ugraśrava's retelling of what Vaiśampāyāna had narrated in the court of Janamejaya, Vyāsa is introduced only after a certain development of events in a roundabout way that simultaneously confers supreme dignity to the work and its composer. To use John D. Smith's transcription:

> Vaiśampāyāna spoke:
>
> I shall proclaim, entire, the thought of noble Vyāsa, great seer of boundless ardour, honoured throughout the three worlds. These hundred thousand verses, composed by Satyavatī's son of boundless power, bring holy rewards: any man of learning who recites them, and any man who hears them, reaches Brahmā's realm and gains equality with gods. (1.56 11).

The authorial frame is thus suggested by projecting Vyāsa reciting the story to his five disciples, including his son Śuka. And the involvement of Ganesha to scribe the story lends the narrative a divine grace. On the other hand, "[a]ccording to *Bhagavata Purāna*, it is the intention of the author of the *Mahābhārata* and a key element in Vyāsa's ("thought entire") to convey the message of the *Vedas* to those who were formally

debarred from studying them, namely women and *sudras*" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xxii).

Vyāsa's entrances and exits, and his direct interventions in the lives of his characters seem decisive. For example, when the Pāndavas are in a dilemma whether they should marry a single girl, Draupadī, it is Vyāsa who gives them advice. And, when the entire narrative is said to be chanted by Vaiśampāyāna during ritual sacrifice, Vyāsa plays the role of a listener to his own story. Furthermore, the model of a narrative within a narrative is continuously repeated in the epic, as there is a series of substitute narrators who are given the charge of telling different portions of the text. At least two instances may explain this kind of narrative technique. Events of the war of Kurukṣetra are narrated by Sanjaya, blessed with divine vision by Vyāsa, to Dhritrāshtra, and Sanjaya also re-tells the entire *Bhagavad-Gita* that Krishna Vāsudeva delivers to Arjuna on the battlefield. After the war, Yudhishthira, accompanied by Krishna, meets Bhīsma lying on his bed of arrows, and Bhīsma teaches Yudhishthira the intricacies of *dharma* in form of sermons and a great number of short and long tales. In the *Ādi Parva,* Vyāsa can confidently claim his work's all-inclusiveness, while in the *Svargarohana Parva* (The Book of the Ascent to Heaven) he gives expression to his sense of futility, forlornness and despair. In John D. Smith's transcription: "Here I cry out, arms raised, and no one hears me: 'Both wealth and pleasure spring from *dharma*, so why is *dharma* not followed?'" (18.5 790). Thus, the very notion of 'authenticity' of an overarching author is consciously questioned by the epic poets by the employment of author/ character duality, involvement of multiple narrators, composite storytelling, and numerous narrative divergences and deviations.

3.9.3 Epical Features and Narrative Multiplicity of the *Mahābhārata*

By its sheer size and myriad narrative layers, the *Mahābhārata* is one of the most complicated creations of human imagination. This epic is three times the Homeric epics, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, put together. The *Mahābhārata* is also claimed to be eight times the *Bible*. Furthermore, the *Mahābhārata* is also almost five times of its preceding Indian epic, the *Rāmāyana*. In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India*, "Great as the Ramayana is as an epic poem, and loved by the people, it is really the Mahābhārata that is one of the outstanding books of the world. It is a colossal work, an encyclopaedia of tradition and legend, and political and social

institutions of ancient India. ... It is full of varied, abundant and bubbling life" (106-07). Indian English poet and critic A.K. Ramanujan, too, in "Repetitions in the *Mahābhārata*" stresses the importance of assessing the epic not simply as another text but as a text epitomizing overlapping cultural traditions of the sub-continent.The *Mahābhārata*'s narrative intention "to embrace all manner of 'extra' material has also led to the incorporation within it of substories, freestanding narratives that do not always form a part of the overall story of Bhāratas, but that are told by one character within that story to another, often to reinforce some point the teller wishes to make" (Smith, Introduction li).

The evolving structure of the *Mahābhārata* directly relates to the question of genre, as this text should not be studied in equal terms with Homeric epics and the European epical tradition. Y. V. Vassilkov writes on how to approach the uniqueness of the *Mahābhārata*:

> The *Mahābhārata* went through the stage of the classical heroic epic and was partly transformed into a religious didactic épopée. But during this process, the Indian epic paradoxically retained some features typical of the epic folklore at the archaic stage. There is no other epic in the world which combines in the same way the features of all three main historical stages of development: archaic, classical and late. (255)

Drawing upon the primitive folk tales of heroic deeds and the critical approach in later aesthetics, the *Mahābhārata* becomes a unique example of the 'primary epic'. The term 'epic' here corresponds to what Alexander Klose calls the 'container principle' of generic classification: "[t]he container exists irrespective of what is put into it, but it is relevant only to the extent that something is put into it, and its identity depends on what this something is" (Chattopadhyay *et al* 3). This inclusive aspect of any genre of being defined by what is contained in it, is best characterized by the *Mahābhārata*, which nevertheless maintains its own cultural ingenuity.

3.9.4 "The Dicing" and the Plot construction

'The Dicing' episode is included in the '*Sabhā Parva*' ('The Book of Assembly Hall') of the *Mahābhārata*, which is divided into eighteen *Parvas* or Books, the '*Sabhā Parva*' being the second one. This *Parva* is preceded by the '*Ādi Parva*' ('The Beginning'), which acquaints us with the origin of the great Bhāratas and the growth

of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas into maturity as they come to participate in the central action of epic in the "*Sabhā Parva*" and the subsequent *Parvas*. Against the narrative bifurcations the nucleus of the epic is a succession feud, started with the very first generation of the Bhārata dynasty with king Sāntanu begetting three sons.The legitimate heir is Devavrata—the son of the river goddess Ganga—whose vows of never becoming a king and eternal celibacy make him Bhīsma. This enables Sāntanu to marry a fisherman's daughter Satyavati and give birth to Chitrāngada and Vichitravirya. The family feud continues and ultimately results in the devastating war between the Kauravas and Pāndavas.The *Mahābhārata*, to be more specific, is divided into three sections of comparable lengths: "The first five books recount the events that led up to the great war at Kurukṣetra; Books 6-10 describe the course of that war and the night-time massacre that followed it; Books 11-18 tell of the war's long aftermath" (Smith, Introduction xlvii).

The opening Book of the *Mahābhārata* is one of the epic's longest Books. It introduces us to an epical model of the origin of the universe, and also the various provinces and numerous human inhabitants to focus on the puzzling genealogy of its characters, particularly, the Bhāratas or the Kurus. As mentioned before, Devavrata, the rightful heir swears to sacrifice his succession right, when his father, the scion of the Bhārata dynasty Sāntanu, marries Satyavati. However, the offspring of Sāntanu and Satyavati die childless, so the seer Vyāsa fathers a son on each of two widows of Vichitravirya, the youngest son of Sāntanu. Dhritrāshtra is the elder, but he is born blind, and becomes the king only after the death of his brother Pāndu. Dhritrāshtra's wife Gāndhārī bears him a hundred sons, known as the Kauravas, but Pāndu is unable to be a father because of a curse. Pāndu's elder wife Kuntī bears three sons and younger wife Mādrī, who walks into her husband's pyre, bears two sons, all fathered by individual gods. Five sons of Pāndu are the Pāndavas. The eldest of the Kauravas is Duryodhana, and the eldest of the Pāndavas is the son of the god Dharma, Yudhishthira. Kunti has another pre-marital offspring, fathered by god Surya—his name is Karna, brought up by a Suta named Adhirata. In the *Ādi Parva* we also follow the early strife between the Kauravas and the Pāndavas, who are, however, trained by *Guru* Drona, who also teaches his own son Aśvatthāman. The conflict between two groups of children grows as they themselves grow up and it culminates when Arjuna wins Draupadī, whom all the Pāndavas marry and thereby form an alliance with the kingdom of the Pānchalas. The Kuru kingdom is divided, and the Pāndavas are sent to the Khāndava forest on the outskirts of the capital; Hastināpura is now turned into an exclusive domain of the

Kauravas. The Khāndava forest is cleared by Krishna and Arjuna, where the new city of Indraprastha is established. The chief architect of *asuras*, Māyā designs the new city and builds the royal palace. Duryodhana befriends Karna, who is seen as a potential competitor to Arjuna.

In the second Book, as J. A. B. Van Buitenen observes, for the first time "the heroes are on their own and begin to act in their own right; their natures are wilful" (qtd in Gupta and Pande, Introduction xviii). The *Sabhā Parva* introduces us to two royal courts of Indraprastha and Hastināpura where crucial events of this Book unfold, "in contrast to the unbridled expanse of the *Ādi Parva*, (and) represents a far tighter narrative structure with few extraneous digressions" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xxx). The plot structure of this Book also bears certain similarities with the tragic drama, and as this part unfolds it reinforces the intricate relationship between the cosmic and the terrestrial. The Book opens with a visit of Nārada, the divine agent to the earth, to Indraprastha and his instructions to Yudhishthira to practise *Ksatriya dharma* which is appropriate to the ruler. Nārada therefore advises Yudhishthira to perform the *rājasū ya*. Though J. A. B. Van Buitenen opines in his introduction that Yudhishthira "is the representative of his [Kuru] family, and if he becomes suzerain, his family [including both the Kauravas and the Pāndavas] becomes the suzerain dynasty" (28), the ceremonies like *digvijaya*and *rājasūya* represent the Pāndava's pride—their hubris—in their newly acquired wealth, too. Yudhishthira thus requests Nārada to describe the greatest palaces of the cosmic world, and the latter considers Indraprastha—meaning the seat of Indra, the king of heaven—as significant as the four ends of the cosmos. Pāndavas's kingdom is now designated as the centre of the earth.

Yudhishthira performs the imperial ritual of royal consecration, involving the killing of his enemy kings and unconditional submission of them, and showcases his opulence, which fills Duryodhana with jealousy, further ignited by his maternal uncle Śakuni. The next set of events of the *Sabhā Parva* happen in another assembly hall which is in Hastināpura. Indraprastha and Hastināpura can be designated as the palace of illusions and the palace of deceit respectively. Finding it impossible to defeat the wealthy and martially accomplished Pāndavas in direct fight Duryodhana succumbs to Śakuni's advice to invite Yudhishthira to Hastināpura and make the eldest Pāndava participate in two rigged dicing games. The *Sabhā Parva* leads to the *Vanā Parva*, suggesting great uncertainty of worldly power, and indicating the play of fate. After thirteen years the Pā

¯ndavas return to claim their patrimony but they are rebuffed. War becomes inevitable, and both parties raise armies and forge alliances. The war, in which all the world participates, ends after eighteen days in total defeat of the Kauravas, and a mutual annihilation creating space for the emergence of a new Bhārata.

3.9.5 Cultural Legacy and Contemporary Receptions of the *Mahābhārata*

According to Partha Mitter, the Mughal emperor Akbar, as part of "his objective of gaining Hindu confidence ... turned to the Sanskrit epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* soon after the arrival of learned Brahmins at the House of Worship in Sikri in 1580. These were translated, and provincial governors were instructed to make copies of them in an effort to disseminate Hindu classics throughout the empire." In addition to this endeavour, a "major painting series, for the *Razm Nama*, the Persian translation of the *Mahabharata*, was commenced in 1582 under the supervision of Daswanth, the emperor's favourite" (117).

It was mainly because of Mahatma Gandhi's ideological inclination, the *Ramayana* was mainly absorbed into the anti-colonial discourse of the nationalist struggle. On the other hand, perhaps due to its extraordinarily bloody and extensively scattered narrative and overriding pessimism, the *Mahābhārata* had been inconsistently present in the collective imagination of the Indian subcontinent in the first half of the twentieth century. And, as John D. Smith examines, "[t]here is also regional slant: the *Mahābhārata* has largely retained its standing in South India, while in most of the North the parallel story, that of Rāma, has far outstripped its popularity" (Introduction xiv). For instance, a South Indian version of 'the Dicing' is a part of what is known as "Janapada *Mahābhārata*", a sort of folk ritual performed by a peasant community of the state of Karnataka. This version shows Draupadī as "the incarnation of the goddess 'Adi Shakti'—after Dharmaraya loses everything, she takes his place in the game of dice and wins back everything" (Ramachandran 334).

In the second half of the twentieth century the epic entrapped people's imagination when, in 1988, Doordarshan screened a serialization of the tale. "The Dicing," being one of the most crucial and action packed moments of the narrative of the epic, created an instant sensation among the viewers of almost all ages and creeds.The tragic suffering of Draupadī turned her into an eternal symbol of the victimized female; and,

Śakuni became the household name for villainy for an entire generation. Directed by Ravi Chopra and produced by B.R. Chopra, the serial brings an important change perhaps in order to show affiliation to the exaltation of Krishna. Another interesting serialised version of the epic was produced by Siddharth Kumar Tewary and shown on Star Plus in 2013. Siddharth incorporated a new angle of studying this epic by choosing mental conflict as the underlining theme of the epic, and gave a brilliant analysis of the psyche of a host of humans caught up in the vortex of epical conflict of the mind.

Le Mahabharata, a French play by Jean-Claude Carrière, was translated into English and staged worldwide in 1980s by the British director Peter Brook, who also transformed it into a six-hour movie for small-screen in 1989. Characters and events of the *Mahābhārata* have traditionally influenced Indian classical dance. In a recent adaptation, "Aj ki Draupadi", the Kathak exponent Surabhi Singh uses digital screening and live performances, involving acting, mime and dance poses.

Whereas, Pandavas: The Five Warriors is the first computer animated film to be produced by an Indian movie firm, Pentamedia Graphics, the event of the attempted disrobing of Draupadī has been commercialized in the world of online-marketing to such an extent that a 2016 advertisement depicts Lord Krishna scrolling through the Myntra app on his cell-phone for extra-long sarees for Draupadī to save her from embarrassment.

3.9.6 Summing Up

Primarily a product of the late-Vedic socio-cultural developments, the epic tells us the story of the Bhāratas. Though deriving many of its elements from the Vedic texts, the *Mahābhārata* is distinct in narrative structure and contents from the Vedas. Such a long and multi-layered text is obviously compiled by many authors; the assumed status of Vyāsa as the epic poet is also intriguing: he is both the begetter of the central characters and the master creator under whose supervision the epic is continuously retold. Among the eighteen books, the Second Book contains "the Dicing," representing a culminating stage in the succession feud between the Kauravas and the Pāndavas.The continuing legacy of the epical ambivalence itself provides different art forms with scopes of introducing multiple turns and twists in the tale across the centuries.

3.9.7 Comprehension Exercises

Long-answer type questions:

1. How did the multi-layered composition of the *Mahabharata* over the centuries contribute to the formal and thematic complexity of the epic?
2. Critically estimate the shifting social roles and ethical positions of four Varnas in the post-Vedic Indian society as represented by the characters of the *Mahabharata.*
3. How does the complex relation between Vyasa and his epic reflect on the intriguing nature of authorship?

Medium-length-answer type questions:

4. How was Vyasa's tale told and retold according to the narrative structure of the *Mahabharata*?
5. Briefly situate episode of 'the Dicing' within the *Parva*-divisions of the *Mahabharata*.
6. How can the plot of the *Mahabharata* be divided into three broad segments?

Short-answer type questions:

7. Name two major commentators on the *Mahabharata.*
8. What is the central theme of the '*Ādi Parva*'?
9. Mention two major adaptations of the *Mahabharata.*

Unit 10 □ "The Dicing" : Narrative Structure

Structure

3.10.0 Introduction

This unit offers a close reading of the narrative structure of "the Dicing" episode. After reading this unit you should be able to:

(a) divide "the Dicing" episode into specific segments in terms of the development of the epic.

(b) conceptualize the multiple narrative levels of the episode in concern.

(c) relate different narrative elements like settings, events, characters and language to the Indian classical aesthetic.

(d) find the interaction between the terrestrial and celestial in this episode.

(e) follow the tragic consequence of the two games of Dicing.

(f) comprehend some of the major themes of the epic, like state-power, patriarchy, illusion, intrigue, deceit, sacrifice, revenge, (ir)responsibility, beauty and chastity, destiny and apocalypse.

3.10.1 Duryodhana's Despair and the Scheme of Śakuni

The events of "the Dicing" episode unfold with a feeling of shame and despair on part of Duryodhana, who has been tricked by the spectacle in Yudhishthira's palace where the eldest Kaurava is also reported to have been mocked for his puzzled movements. Duryodhana shares his unhappiness at the prosperity and power of his cousins with Śakuni who accompanies the former during the visit to the kingdom of the Pāndavas. The Indraprastha offers a series of marvels which work on the borderline of

the real and imaginary: "...seeing a pond with crystalline water with crystalline lotuses, he thought it was land and fell into the water with his clothes on.... He once tried a door, which appeared to be open, and hurt his forehead; another time, thinking the door was closed, he shrank from the doorway" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 43 07). Though Yudhishthira—the Pāndaveya—does not mind anything, Bhima and Arjuna laugh at Duryodhana, and, therefore trigger off the resentful attitude of the son of Dhritrāshtra. The theatricality involved in this description establishes the relation between an ancient epic and theatre. In this respect, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (*The Treatise on Drama*) of the seer Bhārata, which is estimated to be written sometimes in between 200 BC to 200 AD and considered, as Chandra Rajan notes, as "the oldest surviving text of the theory of drama and dramatics", treats poetry, music, dance and drama on the same platform. "The chief goal of drama is to produce *rasa*, the aesthetic emotion, evoked by the appropriate mood built cumulatively thorough not only words" but also by gestures and spectacles among many other things (Rajan, Introduction 29). The art of make-believe seems to contribute centrally to the varied dispositions aesthetically arranged in the epic to achieve a view of the world, which is unstable and transient, and men and women "divested of particularities of characters" as in a play (Rajan, Introduction 29). Chandra Rajan further observes that "[w]ith various traditions converging around this time [that is, by the first millennium BC]: the literary tradition of the Vedas and epics, the popular and folk play traditions centering perhaps round vegetation rites..., the ritual drama and the dance with its story-line, it was inevitable that drama as we understand it should have been evolving into its final form" (Introduction 33).

However, what enrages Duryodhana most is the fact that Yudhishthira exercises absolute authority over a great number of provincial kingdoms, with the aid of the military strength and diplomatic skills of his brothers and friends. Duryodhana expresses his torment in the following terms to Śakuni:

> I saw the earth entire under Yudhisthira's sway, conquered by the majesty of the weapons of the great-spirited white-horsed Arjuna.... Rancor has filled me, and burning day and night I am drying up like a small pool in the hot season. ... What man like me who sees their sovereignty over earth, with such wealth and such a sacrifice, would not burn with fever? All alone I am not capable of acquiring such a regal; nor do I see any allies, and therefore I think of death. (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 43 8)

After the assassination of Jarāsandha, the king of the eastern land of Magadha, the royal consecration of Yudhisthira is performed. The killing of Shishupala by Krishna Vā

sudeva at the court of Indraprastha further threatens Duryodhana, as it signifies the kind of power the Pāndavas enjoy by virtue of their friendship with Vāsudeva. Against this display of power Kauravas growingly consider destiny as reigning supreme in their lives. The game of Dicing is also schemed and accepted as a 'fateful game'. So, in reply to Duryodhana, Śakuni exalts the Pāndavas as favourites of fortune, and refers back to previous failed efforts of Duryodhana to destroy them. Śakuni further discourages his nephew to take arms against the Pāndavas: "Dhanamjaya, Vāsudeva, Bhīmsena, Yudhisthira, Nakula and Sahadeva, and the august Drupada cannot be defeated in battle by force, not even by the hosts of the Gods. They are great warriors and archers, know their weapons, and are battle-crazy. But I know by what means Yudhisthira himself can be defeated, king. Listen and employ it" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 44 9). Thus, on Śakuni's part this is an intervention into the scheme of things to turn the destiny, though his actions later evolve to be only parts of a greater cosmic plan on which he has no control. Another important aspect of this narrative is the dialogue between Duryodhana and Śakuni.

It is Śakuni who after disclosing his plan of robbing Yudhisthira of all his power and wealth as stakes of a game of gambling, to which "Kaunteya" is known to be greatly attached, informs Dhritrāshtra about Duryodhana's misery. This is again narrated in third person by Vaiśampāyāna to Janamejaya, retold by Ugraśrava, followed by another dialogue between Dhritrāshtra, Duryodhana and Śakuni. Dhritrāshtra becomes disheartened seeing Duryodhana unhappy in spite of so much luxury accorded to the latter. Duryodhana now describes the huge tribute kings and Brahmins brought to the palace of Indraprastha—"the limitless flood of wealth of my enemy" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 45 12)—and how countless Brahmins were served in a feast organized by Yudhisthira. When Śakuni's scheme to make the first Pāndava to bet his wealth is proposed to Dhritrāshtra he decides to consult Vidura against Duryodhana's will. The entire anxiety of the Hastināpura—the city of elephants—over the growing affluence and rule over a vast tract of land of Indraprastha is directly related to the geopolitics of the *Mahābhārata*. Sheldon Pollock explains that "the political exists in space, and what exists in space is unavoidably related to the domain of power, whether as something inviting or something resisting incorporation. Thus the plotting of an epic geosphere ... forms one of its central subjects.... and the space to be controlled is thus a fundamental control of power" (132). In the light of this observation we may conceive the place to throw the dice as a symbolic site that provides the space on which power-equations are settled. Conquering space for acquiring more riches is also identified by Duryodhana as a

central motive: “they had got it by going to the eastern and southern oceans, and likewise they went and obtained it at the western one... And since I have seen the all-surpassing wealth of the Pāndava, I find no peace in my burning heart” (Buitenen, “*The Dicing*”: 45 13).

An image central to the events associated with “the Dicing” is that of the doomsday, which is connected with the cosmic time-frame underlining the narrative pattern of the *Mahābhārata*. In the third Book of the epic, Yudhisthira has a long interaction on various issues with ascetic Mārkandeya, whom the former requests to describe the characteristics of the *Kali* age. The epic suggests the approach of the *Kali yuga* which is supposed to follow the *Dvapara yuga*. Mārkandeya “describes how the whole world will degenerate into barbarism and ruin; then, at the end of the Kali Age, a new Krta Age will begin, and a Brahmin named Kalki Visnuyaśas will destroy the barbarians and bring peace” (Smith, *The Mahābhārata*: 3.188 200-01). The very occasions of *ashvamedha* and *sarpamedha* also symbolize annihilation. Thus, in Vaiśampāyāna’s narrative to Janamejaya, assuming Dhritrāshtra’s weakness for his deceitful son, “the sagacious” Vidura senses an apocalyptic future: “When ... Vidura heard that the Gate of Kali was upon them and the Maw of Destruction had opened, he hastened to Dhritrā shtra” (Buitenen, “*The Dicing*”: 45 13). Vaiśampāyāna’s narrative, in fact, implies a larger cosmic-cycle of apocalyptic violence, revenge and fresh creation. “The Dicing”, as an event, plays a pivotal role in this narrative movement.

Dhritrāshtra’s infirm character becomes evident as he orders the construction of a magnificent hall and tells Vidura,

> Holy or unholy, beneficent or maleficent, the family game of dice shall proceed, for certainly it is so destined. When I and the bull of the Bhāratas Bhīsma are near, no foul play ordained by fate can possibly occur. Go at once on your chariot, with steeds that match the wind in speed, to the Khāndava Tract and bring Yudhisthira. (Buitenen, “*The Dicing*”: 45 14).

On the other hand, Dhritrāshtra tries to convince Duryodhana that following the advices of Vidura (who being a man of divine vision and right judgement should not be disobeyed), Duryodhana should restrain his impatience and avoid the fatal gambling. It prompts Duryodhana to embark on another long account of Yudhisthira’s supremacy against which no enjoyment at Hastināpura can satisfy one. It is significant to notice that we are allowed to have the glimpses of the glory of Indraprastha from the perspective of Duryodhana, the self-proclaimed arch enemy of the Pāndavas. The epic, in this sense,

puts forth the question of the narrator's dependability. Duryodhana's description is characteristically full of superlatives, and it also suggests geo-political cartography:

> I have seen all of earth subject to Yudhisthira's sway, and still I stand steady here, still alive! I speak to you in pain.... The Himālayas and oceans and marshes that produce all the gems serve like the lowliest in Yudhisthira's household, lord of the people! Yudhisthira deemed me the elder and his better, and paying many compliments he charged me with the collection of the tributes.... Listen, Bhārata, what treasures I saw at the Pāndava's, the choicest treasures that kings had brought from everywhere. (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 46 15-16).

Duryodhana provides his listener with a long list of names of provinces and rulers, and also valuables varying from animals to gems to metals to spices and dry fruits produced in surrounding places. Moreover, Yudhisthira is reported to have received tributes from other *varnas* and also the learned ones: "The *Śū*dras of Bharukaccha brought as their full tribute a hundred thousand slave girls from Kārpāsika... expounders of the *Veda*, cleansed in the concluding bath of the *Upanisads*... wait on him!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 49 21). When Krishna anoints Yudhisthira by blowing the ancient Vāruna conch all the kings, except the Pāndavas and their allies, turn humble subjects. Listening to all these details, Dhritrāshtra again advises his eldest son not to hate his cousins. But Duryodhana argues that the growing power of the Pāndavas may one day destabilise the position of the Kauravas: "Ājamī dha! Bhārata! Don't let the enemy's luck please you!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 50 24). And, as Śakuni again proposes to play dice, Dhritrā shtra refers to Viduara, whom Duryodhana considers an enemy within the Kaurava household always preferring the Pāndavas. Through a series of arguments Śakuni's plan is accepted and Viduara is sent to fetch Yudhisthira and others. So Duryodhana declares, "This expert gambler stands ready, king, to take their fortune from the sons of Pāndu in a game" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 51 24).

3.10.2 The First game of Dicing

The over-determining role of fate regulates the action of individual characters in the concerned episode. Dhritrāshtra, fully conscious of the grave outcome of the entire course of action, invites the dreadful end; "fate-smitten in mind", as Vaiśampāyāna describes him, the Kaurava king tells his son Duryodhana : "A disaster you deem a profit, prince, / This horrible knotting together of feuds. / Once it starts, in

whatsoever a fashion, / It will let loose the swords and the arrows." A kind of tragic withdrawal from meaningful action is evident in Dhritrāshtra's comments: "No quarrel bothers me. Steward, here, / For otherwise fate would run counter to dicing. / This world submits to the Placer's design, / And thus does the world run, not by itself" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 51 25-27). A same kind of tragic acceptance of fate characterises the conversation between Vidura and Yudhisthira:

Vidura said:

I know that the game will bring disaster.
I have made an effort to stop him from it.
But the king has sent me to your presence:
You have heard, you are wise, now do what is best.

...

Yudhisthira said:

Most dangerous gamblers have been collected,
Who are sure to play with wizard tricks.
But this world obeys the Placer's design—
I do not refuse now to play with those gamblers.

In his brief study on the *Bhagavad-Gita* in *The Argumentative Indian,*Amartya Sen shows how Krishna insists on "the priority of doing one's duty ... irrespective of his evaluation of the consequences" (04). Now, in relation to the issue of 'the consequences' the role of destiny seems to be upheld at different parts of the epical narrative: "'Fate takes away our reason / As glare blinds the eye'" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 52 28-29).

Now, in reply to Janamejaya's query, "[h]ow come about that fateful dicing match of the brethren where my grandfathers the Pāndavas incurred that calamity?" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 46 14). Vaiśampāyāna recounts how a necessarily Vedic game is reemployed by the epic poet(s) as part of the ritual of the *rājasūya*. Thus, Yudhisthira unhappily accepts the invitation assuming a miserable end, and proceeds with his brothers and courtly ladies to the newly constructed hall of Hastināpura. In J.A.B. Van Buitenen's words, "[o]ur knowledge of the rules of gambling in ancient India is extremely limited: but the present dramatization in *The Assembly Hall* gives us at least some idea of this particular games' rules. Two parties, rather than two individuals play, for Duryodhana's uncle Śakuni may play for him: it is Duryodhana who pays in the stake. The two parties pay in the first stake the same amount. The loser adds to his stake

while the winner's presumably remains the same.... implicit is this game's rule that it will go through twenty plays which are presented as two phases of ten each" (Introduction 29). So we observe in this drama an epical losing streak after which Yudhisthira finds himself to have lost all his possessions in front of Bhīsma, Drona, Krpa and Vidura: his treasures, ornaments and coffers; his cattle; his male and female servants; his chariots and warriors; his city, country and his people's property. After each play the single word that Śakuni utters is 'Won!', and his policy is stated at the very outset, "[a] scholar surpasses a nonscholar only through *his* trick...." This also suggests late-Vedic debate on the play, as Yudhisthira himself reminds, "Asita Devala, greatest of hermits who frequents at all times the gates to worlds, has said, 'To game with gamblers who play tricks is an evil, but victory in battle according to Law is a good game and superior to it'" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 53 31). Thus, when in the first ten rounds Yudhisthira loses most of his wealth, Vidura makes a plea to Dhritrāshtra to stop the game, and Vidura is accused of treason by Duryodhana in the strongest terms: "You always boast, Steward, of the fame of the foe / And in secret revile Dhrtarāstra's sons.... Never lodge a hater from the enemy party, / Especially, Steward, if he wishes ill. / Now, Vidura, go wherever you wish" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 57 38-39). The loss of Yudhisthira could be estimated against the fact that he sent his four brothers to conquer four directions, and in the confusing cartography of the epic Arjuna defeated the powers of the North, Bhīma went to the Eastern rulers, Sahadeva to the South and Nakula to the West.

In the fourteenth stake Yudhisthira loses sons of Draupadī, and in the final course of the play he is found to be obliged to stake Nakula, Sahadeva, Arjuna, Bhīma, and himself. And, when Śakuni suggests next he should stake Draupadī, Yudhisthira replies: "She is not too short or too tall, not too black or too red, and her eyes are red with love—I play you for her!" The *cakravartin*—'the wheel-turning emperor'—turns into "a slave." Suggesting the complex class structure of the period of the great epics, Karna, who has himself climbed up the social ladder, thus says, "There are three who own no property, / A student, a slave, a dependent woman" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 63 61). Yudhisthira's announcement creates great roar of disapproval on part of the elder members of the court: "The hall itself shook... Bhīsma, Drona, Krpa, and others broke out in sweat" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 58 44-45); but, paying no heed to them Duryodhana orders Vidura to bring Draupadī. She is subjected to public humiliation and is attempted to be disrobed though the power of her virtue replaces her skirt; simultaneously, she places one of the most difficult riddles of the epic. Vidura, the only courtesan who represents the conscience of the assembly hall of Hastināpura refuses to follow Duryodhana's order and warns that the latter by using a series of metaphors

drawn from Nature: “You dumb deer to anger tigers! ... Dhrtarāstra’s son the prince bears fruit, / Like the bamboo, only to kill himself ... For this goat, they say, dug up a knife, / When a knife was missing, by pawing the ground. / It became a means to cut its throat” (Buitenen, “*The Dicing*”: 59 45-46). The acts of the Kaurava brothers not only disturbs the moral codes of society, but also create disturbance in the larger Natural and cosmic worlds; the epic, like a Shakespearean tragedy, continuously relates these multiple planes. A sense of moral and biological / environmental disorder is further established by the fact that an usher of the court is sent to summon Draupadī, who is reported to be menstruating and in a single cloth. But the escort returns with a query that “dumbfounds the entire wisdom of the assembly: did Yudhisthira stake himself first, or Draupadī; and having lost himself [before], was he at liberty to stake her?” (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xl). Even Bhīsma, the supreme patriarch, continuously evades a straight forward answer to this challenging question: “As the Law is subtle, my dear, I fail / To resolve your riddle the proper way: / A man without properly cannot stake another’s- / But given that wives are the husband’s chattels?” and “Yudhisthira may give up all earth / With her riches, before he’d give up the truth....” (Buitenen, “*The Dicing*”: 60 52). Only Vikarna—one of the Kauravas—and Vidura insist the court to find a logical reply to Draupadī.

Draupadī ultimately enters the court being summoned secretly by Yudhisthira. She is addressed by the second Kaurava, Duhśāsana, who approaches her to physically possess her, as, according to him, Draupadī should “love the Kurus” for she has been “won under Law”. Vaiśampāyāna describes, “In despair she ran where women sat... And quickly the angry Duhśāsana / Came rushing to her with a thunderous roar; / By the long-tressed black and flowing hair / Duhśāsana grabbed the wife of a king” (Buitenen, “*The Dicing*”: 60 49). She is rebuked as a whore by Karna and lasciviously insulted by Duryodhana. An ethical balance is sought in the narrative by employing the two figures from each side who strongly oppose the treatment of Draupadī: Vikarna and Bhīma, who is again restrained by Arjuna. Questions even rise regarding Yudhisthira’s conduct, and Bhīma swears to break Duryodhana’s thigh as the latter invites Draupadī to sit on his bare thigh. The entire proceeding represents a general lawlessness, feared to unsettle *dharma* in the later-Vedic period. The *Mahābhārata* thus throws light on a number of critical issues but leave them unresolved. The game of Dicing also remains incomplete. As Vidura repeatedly warns the Kaurava side about the fatal outcome of enraging the Pāndavas, Duryodhana suggests Draupadī can be freed if Bhīma and Arjuna cease to consider Yudhisthira their master; and in reply, Arjuna refers back to Draupadī’s

question: "The King was our master when he first played us, / Great-spirited Dharma, the son of Kuntī; / But whose master is he who has lost himself? / *That* you should decide, ye Kurus assembled!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 63 63).

In Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in the night of the rightful king Duncan's murder an owl killed a falcon; and Duncan's beautiful, well-trained horses behaved wildly and ate each other; Lady Macbeth, too, listened to an owl's shriek. On the other hand, as Vaiśampā yāna narrates, "And there in the house of the king Dhrtarāstra / At the *agnihotra* a jackal barked / The donkeys, they betrayed in response... and so on all sides the grisly birds. / ... And Bhīsma and Drona and wise Gautama / Made loud declarations of 'Peace!' and 'Peace!'" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 63 63-64). Dhritrāshtra, horrified by these omen, declares the game as undecided, and offers Draupadī three boons. Still maintaining her moral integrity, Draupadī accepts freedom of her husbands and their weapons back, but refuses the third boon. The statuesque being restored the Pāndavas are sent home. Another important aspect of this part of the epic is its use of moral tales to establish certain argument. One such instance is Vidura's telling of the story of the contest between Sudhanvan, the son of Angiras, a hermit, and Virocana, son of Prahlāda, the king of the Daityas: Virocana "ran into Sudhanvan Āngirasa over a girl". To resolve the issue Prahlāda seeks Kaśyapa's advice, and the latter warns, "they who explain the Law falsely, Prahlāda, to the one who brings the question, kill their own offerings and oblations for seven generations upward and downward" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 61 56-57). Prahlāda gives judgement in favour of Sudhanvan.

3.10.3 The Sequel to the First game of Dicing

It is the logic of the narrative structure which demands a sequel to the inconclusive gambling match. The listener to the tale of the *Mahābhārata* Janamejaya asks the teller Vaiśampāyāna about the state of the Kauravas after the departure of the Pāndavas. Duryodhana, Karna and Śakuni are now described to be engaged in another plot, for Duryodhana knows the "policy of Śakra" which in fact implies the radical changes in social and ethical orders during the post-Vedic period: "'...enemies must be cut down by any means before they, with war or force, can do you evil!"' The eldest Kaurava also mentions the potential threat posed by Bhīma and Arjuna, and other brothers, who being once offended and humiliated will never spare the Kauravas. So, it is decided to "[l]et the dice roll again" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 66 70-71), and Dhritrāshtra be approached again. The only solution available to escape the wrath of the Pāndavas

seems to gamble again with them for a stake of exile for twelve years in the forest followed by a thirteenth year in the open incognito. This is how the Kauravas will be able to get the mighty Pāndavas out of power, and in the meantime Kauravas may gather military strength in favour of themselves. Accordingly Yudhisthira and accompanying members of his family are recalled from their way back home. Yudhisthira agrees to play again and accepts Śakuni's conditions regarding stakes of the game. The eldest Pā ndava duly loses, and the Pāndavas and Draupadī, taunted by Duryodhana and Karna, bid the Kuru family farewell. Viduara insists Kunti to stay at home and offers his blessings to the sons of Pāndu.

However, Vidura's narration of the manner of their going signals the impending disaster: "...the Pāndava king goes with his eyes covered, 'lest I burn these folk down to the ground if I look at them with my evil eye.'... Bhīma ... is going that way, with his arms extended wide, showing his arms as he does. ... Arjuna, the left-handed archer, follows his king while scattering about sand to forecast the number of enemies that will burn with his arrows. ... Sahadeva has streaked his face and ... Nakula has covered his whole body with dust...." While the Pāndavas wear deer skins, Draupadī leaves in single cloth "wet and besmirched with blood" and utters a horrible curse: "'They because of whom I got this way, thirteen years from now their wives will have their husbands dead, their sons dead, their kinsmen and friends dead! ...'" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 71 82). Thus "The Dicing" episode anticipates the inescapable catastrophe of the war of Kurukṣetra. This is followed by the ceremony of death, as Dhaumya, the family priest sings the chants dedicated to Yama and predicts the repetition of the same song after the war. And, the narrative circle is completed with the appearance of the divine agent, Nārada to forecast the carnage: "he spoke this ghastly word: 'Thirteen years from now the Kauravas who are here will perish, through Duryodhana's guilt and Bhīma and Arjuna's might'" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 71 83). Drona, common teacher of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas, admits his own indebtedness to Hastināpura, but knows the futility of the Kaurava's attempt to avert the revenge of the sons of Pāndu. Drona confirms that "'the Pāndavas, who are sons of Gods, cannot be killed'", and recalls the story of Draupadī's birth. King Drupada, who is also known as Yajñasena, "offered up a sacrifice for the sake of a son" who would kill Drona and obtained his son Dhrstadyumna and also, from the middle of the alter, appeared Draupadī; so in the fourteenth year Drona, along with the Kauravas will be slaughtered (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 71 83-84). In this predestined movement of the epical action the temporal frame is also fixed beforehand. At a moment of the greatest

tension Dhritrāshtra, advised by both Drona and Samjaya tries in vain to convince Duryodhana to make peace with the Pāndavas. Dhritrāshtra blames those who brought Draupadī into the assembly hall in a dishevelled condition, and asserts that he has never wanted a war between Kauravas and the Pāndavas.

As observed by Radhavallabh Tripathi, the epic "itself accepts that it is not about pleasure and happy times. It claims that it is going to describe something sad and awful. Vyāsa, at the very opening of the narrative, approaches Satyavatī, his mother, and tells her that most unhappy times are approaching". The text raises "perennial questions of existence. But there is this warning note which resounds again and again in the texture. The sense of utter waste persists" and this "very feeling of a sheer 'colossal waste' and uselessness of all human efforts" has also a tendency to make one prefer renunciation (125-28).

3.10.4 Summing Up

The Dicing is basically a Vedic game which is re-employed by the epic poet with specific narrative purposes. But the rules of the game of dice in ancient India are not historically known to us. All crucial events of the second Book of the *Mahābhārata* take place in two assembly halls of Indraprastha and Hastināpura, and are set around two games of Dicing, taking place in Hastināpura.

The scheme to rob the Pāndavas of their wealth and power is set by Śakuni as a part of Duryodhana's revenge for his experience of frustration and humiliation during the royal consecration of Yudhisthira at the magical hall of Indraprastha that proudly exhibits the glory of the Pāndavas. Moreover, it is Dhritrāshtra's infirm character and weakness for his son that makes him to sanction such a deceit irrespective of repeated warnings of Vidura. This results in a dramatic turn in the narrative progress of the epic, and in the two consecutive games of Dicing, Śakuni challenges and defeats Yudhishthira. The two gambling matches, by disturbing the ethical norms and the social balance, also disturb the Natural and Cosmic orders, and lead the narrative movement towards an inescapable tragic disaster in form of the war of Kurukşetra.

An ethical collapse is suggested by the assault of Draupadī by the Kauravas after she is staked by Yudhishthira. Draupadī, however, maintains her divine beauty and chastity, and asks a question which the entire assembly at the hall of Hastināpura fails

to answer satisfactorily. When the first match of gambling is dissolved, and the Pāndavas are restored to their previous position by Dhritrāshtra, a second match is set in motion. The wrath and despair of the Pāndavas as they are sent to an exile of thirteen years sets the time-frame for the predicament that the characters of this epic are going to suffer.

Comparable to Shakespearean tragedies, this episode establishes central tragic themes of the epic: the futility of human achievements and colossal waste. It is also symptomatic of radical changes in social and religious structures and the concept and application of *dharma* in the post-Vedic period *Aryavarta*.

3.10.5 Comprehension Exercises

Long-answer type questions:

1. Critically explain the conflicting relationship between the exercise of power and ethical responsibility in the 'Dicing' episode.
2. How do the two games of Dicing suggest an apocalyptic vision of cosmic, ecological and social disorder?
3. Evaluate the role of destiny in this episode.

Medium-length-answer type questions:

4. Briefly explain how is the episode of 'the Dicing' divided?
5. Comment on the significance of cloth in 'the Dicing'.
6. Bring up the contrast between two assembly halls in 'the Dicing' episode.

Short-answer type questions:

7. Who were the children of Yajñasena?
8. Why was 'Dhrtarāstra's son' compared with a bamboo tree?
9. "I know that the game will bring disaster.

   I have made an effort to stop him from it."—Identify the speaker? Whom did he address? Who is referred to as 'him'?
10. Who was the family priest of Kauravas? What did he perform and predict after the game of Dicing?

Unit 11 □ Central Characters and Commentators

Structure

3.11.0 Introduction

This unit acquaints you with central characters and commentators of "the Dicing" episode. You, however, are advised to consult other units of this module as well, to develop your assessment of each character from varied perspectives. After reading this unit you are expected to:

(a) have specific ideas about the physical and psychological traits of all the central role-players of the episode, their early life and their dualities and ambiguities in this episode.

(b) compare and contrast the characters according to their functions and motives.

(c) assess a number of characters as incarnations of divine forces of either good or evil and their socio-political roles.

(d) understand the nature of divine commentary on the course of action through agents and sages.

3.11.1 Bhīsma, Vidura and Drona

A. K. Ramanujan "ingeniously divides the principal characters of the epic into a two-fold typology of 'watchers' and 'actors'.... It is a useful binary for reading the dicing

sequence and the role of various characters placed in the assembly hall. What is the (status of the) blind king Dhritrāshtra, for instance—a 'watcher' or ironically because he does not 'see', an 'actor'?" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xxxix). In this respect the characters of the senior members of the Kuru court exemplify different levels of helplessness in terms of their shifts from the role of actor to that of watcher. In order to consider this factor, we are to assess Bhīsma, Vidura and Drona separately below. We would treat Dhritrāshtra in the next sub-unit in respect of his greater presence in 'the Dicing' episode.

- **Bhīsma:** As observed by John D. Smith, "Bhīsma has to live in a world that he has largely renounced" (Introduction xxx). However, Bhīsma is also the grand old man—the patriarch, supervising all the affairs of the Bhārata clan. The twelfth and the thirteenth books of the epic are entirely devoted to contain Bhīsma's deathbed sermon to Yudhishthira, in which the former discusses 'the dharma of kings', 'dharma in times of trouble', 'the dharma of final release' and 'the dharma of giving'. In contrast to this image of a great and well-built man as leading the world of action and discoursing on all the nuances of dharma, we watch the helplessness of Bhīsma's character in "the Dicing" episode, who continuously refuses to arrive at something conclusive and passes the responsibility to Yudhishthira, in 'the Dicing':

  > I have said, good woman, that the course of Law is sovereign. Great-spirited Brahmins on earth fail to encompass it. What a powerful man views as Law in the world, that do others call the Law at a time when Law is in question. I cannot answer the question decisively, because the matter is subtle and mysterious as well as grave. ... Drona and the other elders who are wise in the Law sit bent over as though spiritless with empty bodies. But Yudhishthira, I think, is the authority on the question: let he himself speak out and say whether you have been won or not. (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 62 59).

Draupadī, at the height of her debasement, declares, "'There is no mettle in Drona and Bhīsma'..." (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 60 51). In this episode Bhīsma's angst is characteristic of a patriarch who fails to deliver at the right moment. In this sense, Bhīsma can be contrasted with Draupadī.

- **Vidura:** Complementing the play of dices and corporeal cruelty, a strong argumentative pattern evolves in 'the Dicing' episode. Yudhishthira, although a king, appears more acted upon than acting, particularly when he accepts twice

> the challenge to throw the dice even though he can easily apprehend the outcome. This happens also when he stands by and watches while his wife is assaulted and insulted, and a long debate follows to address her question. In contrast the most learned sage in the Kuru court of Hastināpura, Vidura is found to be always vocal to argue in protest of Draupadī's humiliation, and is therefore mainly characterized by a series of speech acts he utters in this specific episode. The birth of Vidura itself allots him a distinct place and identity in the family as well as the epic. When Vyāsa was requested to father the children of two queens of Vichitravirya, he was greeted first by a maidservant, "who lay with him with honour":
>
> Vyāsa was delighted by the sexual pleasure she gave him, and the great seer stayed the whole night with her as she made love to him. When he arose, he said to her, 'You shall be a servant no longer! And, fair lady, a glorious child has come into your womb; he will be righteous, foremost of all the world's wise men.' So was the son of Krsna Dvaipāyana Vyāsa born, Vidura by name, brother to Dhrtarāstra and Pāndu, boundless in understanding. Wise in the ways of men, free from desire and anger, he was the god Dharma born in Viduara's form because of the curse of the noble Māndavya. (Smith, *The Mahābhārata*: 1.10039).

Referred to as 'the Steward' Vidura acts as a sort of prime minister to the king Dhritrā shtra; and because of parentage Vidura seems to be both accepted to and debarred from the Bhārata kingship. For obvious reasons, Duryodhana depicts Vidura with negative shades:

> You always boast, Steward, of the fame of the foe
>
> And in secret revile Dhrtarāstra's sons.
>
> We know whose friend you are, Vidura,
>
> You despise us all, as though we are fools.
>
> That man stands known whose love lies elsewhere,
>
> For that way he bends both his praise and his blame.(Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 57 38-39).

Vidura is, however, characterized in this specific episode by the power of interpretation—he performs the role of temporary narrator, too. Notwithstanding the kind of treatment he receives from either of the Bhārata factions, it is his capacity to interpret

of a particular situation that guides him to warn Dhritrāshtra and his sons, to whom Vidura's sense of commitment is exhibited by his act as the Kuru king's emissary to Yudhishthira. Vidura thus insists at the climatic turn of the events that "Draupadī, having raised the question, now weeps piteously as though she has none left to protect her. If you do not resolve it, men in this hall, the Law will be offended. The man who comes to the hall with a grievance is like a blazing fire: the men in the hall must appease him with true Law" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 61 56). Although maintaining the patriarchal hierarchy, this statement provides us with a more subtle interpretation of Law, whose objective is affirmed to please the subjects rather than simply exercised for its own sake. Vidura's binary between the men in the hall and men outside the hall—the implementers and the seekers of justice—forms a crucial part of the evaluation of the political *niti* in the epic.

- **Drona:** Along with Bhīsma, Drona appears to be a helpless observer for the most of the time in the episode. Bhīsma refers to him in the following manner: "Drona and the other elders who are wise in the Law sit bent over as though spiritless with empty bodies" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 62 59). Draupadī, too, expresses her disgust at the conspicuous silence of the common teacher of the Pāndavas and the Kauravas. Frightened by the ominous signs accompanying the departure of the Pāndavas from Hastinapura after their defeat in the second match of gambling, Kaurava princes seek refuge with Drona, who, though grants it and assures that he will fight on the side of the Kauravas, predicts his own death. The character of Drona—the Brahmin warrior and teacher—is thus governed by an overwhelming consciousness of the predestined nature of actions and events and their fatal consequences. Drona, in association with Dhritrāshtra, vainly tries to arrive at a negotiation and avoid the current conflict between the warring cousins.

3.11.2 Dhritrāshtra

According to the social stratification implemented by the feudal rule, Draupadī, a courtly lady, notwithstanding all her virtues, is dependent on choices made and moves taken by active male agents. Dhritrāshtra, the ruler, on the contrary, should enjoy the freedom of taking independent decisions. But, within the complex narrative structure of the epic, all the major characters are marked by nuances and ambivalences. As stated above, Dhritrāshtra was not offered the throne first-hand for his visual impairment, and

his physical disability sometimes turns into a metaphor for his moral infirmity and blindness. In the episode of 'the Dicing,' we are introduced to two *ksatriya* characters with impairment: Dhritrāshtra and Śakuni. This narrative dynamic suggests how in the literary tradition an "interest in the exceptional and differently embodied features of the disabled body grounds it in the strategic deployment of power by the normative majority to overcome the anxiety towards a social minority" (Ray 139). Dhritrāshtra's loss of moral integrity due to 'blind' compassion towards his own son, whom Dhritrāshtra repeatedly fails to restrain, is emphasised in Vaiśampāyāna's narrative that clearly categorises the characters in terms of their reactions to Draupadī's humiliation:

> When the King Dharma had spoken this word, Bhārata, the voices that were raised by the elders spelled of "Woe! Woe!" The hall itself shook, king, and talk started among the kings. Bhīsma, Drona, Krpa, and others broke out in sweat. Vidura buried his face in his hands and looked as though he had fainted; he sat, head down, brooding, wheezing like a snake. But Dhrtarā stra, exhilarated, kept asking, "Has he won, has he won?" for he did not keep his composure. Karna, Duhśāsana, and their cronies were mightily pleased, but of others in the hall the tears flowed freely. But Saubala, without hesitation, with the glow of the winner and high with passion, again addressed the dice and cried, "We have won!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 58 45).

Vidura and Gāndhari both bewail the molestation of Draupadī and speak to Dhritrāshtra to do justice; Dhritrāshtra is also scared of the Pāndava's fury, and when, after the second match of gambling, the Pāndava depart for forest he, sensing the menacing signs, blames those who brought Draupadī into the assembly hall and asserts that he has never meant an enmity towards the sons of Pāndu. The episode ends with an exposition of Dhritrāshtra's absolute lack of confidence:

> They are protected by Vāsudeva, who is true to his promises; and the Terrifier will come, protected by the Pāñcālas. Amongst them Bhīmsena will come, the mighty archer, brandishing his club as Death his staff. And when they hear the whirr of the great-spirited Pārtha's Gāndīva and the whoosh of Bhīma's club, the kings will not be able to bear it. Therefore I have never wanted war with the Pārthas, for I have always believed that the Pāndavas are stronger than the Kurus. (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 72 86).

3.11.3 Yudhishthira

The *Mahābhārata* depicts how the 'good *ksatriyas*' emerge as winners in their battles against 'bad *ksatriyas*' but only at the cost of lots of dualities and hesitations. Yudhishthira, son of god Dharma himself, mentioned in the narrative mostly as 'Dharma', lacks heroic attitude towards the power and the glory. As Kanav Gupta and Meha Pande observe,

> Many studies compare Arjuna with Hamlet, given his torn convictions before the commencement of the war, which leads to the *Bhagavadgitā*. A close reading of the *Mahābhārata* will make it apparent that more than Arjuna, it is Yudhishthira who is perennially in a Hamlet like condition. Hesitation becomes Yudhishthira, putting his personality in a comic paradox with his name—'the one steady in war'. Clearly the *yuddha* (war) he is skilled at is not the armed one on the battlefield that his brothers Bhīma and Arjuna are renowed for. ... It is obvious that the nature of the *yuddha* where the eldest Pāndava is *sthira* (steady / unwavering) is *ātmadvandva*, the war within. *Dharma* is most visible when it is most vulnerable. This situation is called *dharmasankat* which can be translated as the *dharma* problematic. (Introduction liii).

Before the first throw of dice, Yudhishthira is fully conscious of the trickery that is going to be played with him, but it is his dharma that leads him to participate in the game: "Once challenged, I will not desist—that is the vow I have taken. The injunction is powerful, king. I am in the power of what has been decreed. Whom shall I have to play in this encounter? What is the counterstake? Then let the game begin!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*" 53 31-32). But, the epic was written in a period when dharma itself had been replete with self-contradictions and inner crises as a result of the growing prominence of Jainism and Buddhism, and also the Brahiminical revisionist approach to the old Vedic culture. This is significant to notice that though participating in the central action of 'the Dicing' Yudhishthira has nothing to but be defeated repeatedly by the trick-master. However, it must also be borne in mind that he might have staked the liberty of his sons, brothers, himself and his queen, but he does not gamble away the freedom and wealth of the Brahmins of his kingdom at the game of dice. Torn between conflicting moral principles and ethical demands, Yudhishthira mostly remains silent during the heated arguments following the first match, and gives consent to participate even in a second match. Both the games, along with the kinship—in the textual plan he

replaces Karna as the eldest son of Kunti—and rules of *rājdharma* are thrusts onto Yudhishthira as sorts of cosmic injunctions to be followed to serve some predestined pattern.

3.11.4 Duryodhana and Śakuni

In "the Dicing" these two characters act together with the same objective. They collaborate also in form of the relationship between the body and the mind, because if Duryodhana embody the corporeality of the evil prowess Śakuni represents the psychic part of it. We should remember that Duryodhana acts as the receiver of the tributes at the court of Indraprastha on behalf of Yudhishthira, both acting as the representatives of the entire family of the Bhāratas. On the other hand, prince Śakuni, brother of Duryodhana's mother Gāndhari, seems to have been at Hastināpura since he married off his sister there, not just as Duryodhana's evil spirit. However, the jealousy of Duryodhana, who is meant in the narrative plan to identify strife, against the Pāndavas is ignited by his sense of humiliation and frustration at the court of Indraprastha, the city of illusions. Determined to ruin his cousins, Duryodhana takes recourse to his maternal uncle, who according to the conventional codes of kinship always seeks the fortune of his sister's issues. Such a law of relationship is suggested also in "The Travels of Sānudāsa" in *Brhatkathaslokasamgraha* (translated as *The Tales of Ancient India* by J. A. B. van Buitenen): "When a man is in need, his mother's people are his only refuge. An intelligent man leaves his agnates alone, for they are his born enemies" (228).

It is from this point of the narrative the course of action is gradually seen to be controlled by Śakuni, who suggests the most deceitful way to dispossess the Pāndavas and whose inner greed for absolute control over the opposition finds a sexual overtone in cruel exhibition of physical strength by Duryodhana. If Yudhishthira throws the dice of chance, Śakuni throws the dice of trick and skill. Thus it is Śakuni who first refers to Draupadī as a final option left for Yudhishthira to stake: "Yet there is your precious queen, and one throw is yet unknown. Stake Krsna of Pāñcāla, and win yourself back with her!" Śakuni's words correspond to Duryodhana's lust: "Let her sweep the house and run on our errands—/ What a joy to watch!—with the serving wenches!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 58 44-45). Paradoxically, arrogant Duryodhana fails to follow the larger implication of the very primary suggestion of his maternal uncle that as **"Dhananjaya**, Vāsudeva, Bhīmsena, Yudhisthira, Nakula and Sahadeva, and the august Drupada cannot be defeated in battle by force, not even by the hosts of

the Gods" they must not be infuriated and provoked to take revenge in future (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 03 09-10). Though the strategy of Śakuni and Duryodhana seem to be victorious in "the Dicing," the episode in its characteristic dramatic turn also suggests the eventual failure of their diplomatic skills. The moral bankruptcy of Duryodhana and his associates and its disastrous results are most poignantly implied by Draupadī's victimized body. As Janaki Sreedharan writes, "[m]ore than all the passages reprimanding Duryodhana ... the message relayed through the body of Draupadi as *ekavastra* (in single cloth), *muktakeshi* (loosened hair) and *rajasvalah* (menstruating) is more emphatic" (107).

3.11.5 Draupadī

Each of the former character analysis refer to Draupadī, who seems to be a central magnetic field to which other characters are attached. In the assembly hall of Hastinā pura Draupadī is molested and humiliated, but she appears as self-confident, critical of her male relatives and skilled in verbal presentation. Although treated as if she is a passive stake in the male game of power, she stands in contrast to the gender norms laid by patriarchal Law.

Draupadī addresses the entire assembly with verbal aplomb and dignity, reminding the Kurus as to her status and honour. She declares that until her *swayamvara*occurred, she had not ever been exposed to public eyes, and since that occasion, she had never again made public appearance; nor had she ever been touched by another man apart from her husbands, before Duhsaśana dragged her into the assembly hall. Draupadī "refers to herself as *ahamstrīsatīśubhā*, meaning, 'I, a woman, decent, beautiful', abused in the midst of their assembly. 'Where now is the dharma of great kings', she enquires (*kva nu dharmomahīksitām*).... She continues her measured and formal denunciation, citing that she is the 'friend' (*sakhī*) of Krsna, and 'virtuous sister' of her brother, and wife of the sons of Pāndu" (McGrath199 -200).

In this regard it is also noteworthy that though absent during the proceedings of the gambling, Draupadī seems to have a total perception about the throws of the dice by two players with unequal capacities. And, her queries raise the issue of basic justice: "In the meeting hall he was challenged, the king, / By cunning, ignoble, and evil trickers / Who love to game; he had never much tried it. / Why then do you say he was left a choice? ... He did not wake up to the playing of tricks" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 60 52).

The steadfastness in Draupadī's character and her active resistance to male power surprise a number of male characters including Bhīsma and Vidura and Vikarna and even Karna. And, irrational exhibition of masculine strength of Duryodhana and Duhśāsana ultimately surrenders to her virtue. As an active participant in the action of "the Dicing," Draupadī regains her strength to request Dhritrāshtra to free her five husbands and return their lost riches and positions. Dhritrāshtra urges her to ask for further favours, but she desists by reminding the king of the dharma of giving gifts: only a king can be favoured thrice, and for an ordinary *ksatriyas* and a woman two should suffice. Thus through the character of Draupadī patriarchal order is both challenged and reaffirmed in the text.

3.11.6 Karna and Duhśāsana

Each of the above characters appears in the concerned episode as a round character, that is, he or she is complex and undergoes development, sometimes sufficiently to surprise the reader**.** Even the character of Duryodhana, however steadfast in his enmity, has turns and twists and is found undecided at several moments of the narrative. While Duryodhana is driven by ambition and resentment, Karna has had to find friendship and recognition where he can, and will never betray it. Significantly, betrayed at different stages of his career for his supposedly 'low' pedigree—Bhīma rebukes him for being "a *sūta's* son"—Karna himself conforms to the laws of ownership deriving from the class structure of the late / post-Vedic society: "There are three who own no property, / A student, a slave, a dependent woman" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 63 62, 61). In fact, Draupadī challenges the same laws: as Kanav Gupta and Meha Pande put it, "[b]y what decree do individuals possess / own other individuals—kinship, primogeniture, matrimony, feudal authority?" (Introduction xli).

We find another shade of Karna's character when he is surprised at the potential of Draupadī, whom he has already marked as a "whore" for submitting "to many men" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 61 55), to survive all the sufferings and save her household. If Karna ranks among the round characters in the episode, Duhśāsana appears to be a flat one—a two-dimensional character, relatively uncomplicated and does not change throughout the course of action. Duhśāsana simply displays the irrational masculine strength and the resultant exhaustion, both having sexual implications:

> And quickly the angry Duhśāsana
> Came rushing to her with a thunderous roar;

> By the long-tressed black and flowing hair
>
> Duhśāsana grabbed the wife of a king
>
> ... Then Duhśāsana forcibly laid hold of Draupadī's robe, O king, and in the midst of the assembly began to undress her. But when her skirt was being stripped off, lord of the people, another similar skirt appeared every time. ... A pile of clothes was heaped up in the middle of the hall, when Duhśāsana, tired and ashamed, at last desisted and sat down.(Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 6049; 61 55).

3.11.7 Vikarna, Bhīma and Arjuna

Easily ignored by his elder brothers, Vikarna is the only moral voice from among the Kauravas. He significantly accuses Yudhishthira for his addiction to gambling and staking Draupadī when he had already lost himself with all his rights as a husband: "Ye best of men, they recount four vices that are the curse of a king: hunting, drinking, dicing, and fornicating. A man with those addictions abandons the Law, and the world does not condone his immoderate deeds. The Pāndava was under the sway of his vice when the gamblers challenged him and he staked Draupadī.... and the Pāndava staked her when he already had gambled away his own freedom" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 61 54). Two important aspects of characterization are shown here: first, Law continues to be central preoccupation of the verbal debate among the characters, and second, Vikarna as flat character represents a single trait of ethical correctness while exposing the complexity of a round character, that is, Yudhishthira.

Like Vikarna, Bhīma, too, is a character who believes in the direct correspondence between the moral conscience and the world of action, as established in his wrathful proclamations that he will take revenge in the cruellest manner. Though he accepts Yudhishthira as the master, he cannot pardon Yudhishthira for allowing the enemies to debase Draupadī: "she is now because of you plagued by Kauravas, mean and cruel tricksters! It is because of her that I hurl my fury at you! I shall burn off your arms! Sahadeva! Bring the fire!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 61 53). Bhīma's response to insults of Draupadī is to take two dreadful vows: to break Duryodhana's thigh and to drink Duhśāsana's blood; and though they do not follow rules of the war, both are duly enacted. Arjuna, who prevents Bhīsma from hurting their eldest brother as that serve the enemies' scheme, seems to overcome his agony by his characteristic integrity as a committed brother and a subject warrior: "no one may overreach his eldest brother by

Law. The king was challenged by his foes, and, remembering the baronial Law, he played at the enemy's wish"Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 61 53).

3.11.8 Divine Agents and Commentators

When the second match of gambling is over, and the Pāndavas, wearing deerskins, depart from Hastinapura, Nārada appears to predict the destruction of the Kauravas. He is joined by Samjaya, the priest, who warns also of the ominous future. These characters are the tools of a cosmic plan, unfolded in terms of human actions. The story tellers / narrators are also characters for two reasons: first, Vaiśampāyana's audience includes Vyāsa and Ugraśrava, besides the King Janamejaya, and this initiates a process teller-listener dialogic interaction; and the story-tellers themselves become characters by virtue of the fact that they do not remain indifferent to the events happening in their story, rather they analyze them with occasional suggestions.

3.11.9 Summing Up

The characters of the episode containing two gambling matches may be divided among watchers and actors; however, such a binary is undercut by several other factors. Class, kinship, gender / sexuality and the state play key role in the art of characterization. Around the central character of Draupadī, all other characters revolve round. Law remains to be a central preoccupation for all the important characters. Another division among the characters exists that some are characterized by physical actions and some by verbal speeches, and some by both. Flat characters are sometimes there to shed light on the round characters and to provide alternative course of actions based on ethical choices.

3.11.10 Comprehension Exercises

Long-answer type questions:

1. Write a critical note on the mental ambivalences of Dhritrāshtra and Yudhishthira.

2. Examine the factors of law, class, kinship and gender in the characterization of different individuals in "the Dicing" episode.
3. Critically assess the roles and functions of commentators in the episode of 'the Dicing'.

Medium-length-answer type questions:

4. Explain how Duryodhana and Sakuni complement each other in ‘the Dicing’ episode.
5. Comment on the character of Vidura.
6. Explain the moral helplessness of Bhīsma during the humiliation of Draupadī

Short-answer type questions:

7. Which characters are mainly engaged in the argumentative pattern of the episode of ‘the Dicing’?

8. What did Duhśāsana represent in the episode of ‘the Dicing’?
9. Why is Karna rebuked by Bhīma?

Unit 12 □ State, Kinship and Gender

Structure

3.12.0 Introduction

Divided in two broad sections, this unit familiarizes you with different aspects of power-structure as explored in "the Dicing" episode, in connection with the entire epic. After reading this unit you should be able to:

(a) understand a complex chain of political authority that interlinks the state and family through negotiations and conflicts and exercises authority over the individual's body.

(b) trace how the epic focuses on the intricate position of an individual in relation to his/her domestic and social ties, in relation to the discourse on power.

(c) conceptualize the psychological effects of power-mongering in "the Dicing."

(d) perceive the patriarchal institutions of law, state, family and religion, and the crisis in conventional gender equations leading to the subversion of patriarchal codes and conducts, as shown in this episode.

3.12.1 State and Kinship

The *Mahābhārata*, as explained in previous units, is primarily concerned with a succession feud, through which the administrative control over land and people are sought. The epic is contextualized against a series of socio-political changes from "religious organizational modes based on Swa-dharma, the hierarchy of the social order integrating the four varnas of brahman, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra towards a semblance of governance on the kingdoms"—or, the *mahajanapadas* (Mohanty 134). This brings decisive changes in the nature of kinship under political pressures to form and hold the position of political, economic and military authority. Vyāsa thus warns

Satyavatī in the *Ādi Parva*: "Gone are the times of happiness / the terrible times are nearing in, / each coming day is going to bear / more and more horror / and the youth of the earth / has already been exhausted" (1.119 quoted in Tripathi 126). In the horrible and adult world of Vyāsa's epic, the boundary between the public and the private is grossly violated, both being subject to power equations. While the *rājasūya* performed by Yudhishthira in the first part of the *Sabhā Parva* signifies the attempt to consolidate the state power of the Bhāratas, the following gambling matches implicate underlying strife among several fractions that leads to dire consequences of the civil war.

To use Sheldon Pollock's observations, in spite of its encyclopaedic ambition to touch everything that "exists in the world", the *Mahābhārata*, "over the course of tens of thousands of verses, never loses sight of the narrative core—the struggle between two sets of cousin-brothers for succession to rulership in the Kuru capital, Hastināpura—or of the central problematic upon which it is so adamantly insistent, the anatomy of political power: *arthasya puruso dāso dāsas tv artho na kasya cit* / Man is slave to power, but power is slave to no one" (131).The emerging geo-politics underlying the narrative structure of the epic makes it necessary that the power is to be realized in form of the command of space, which is again directly related to the state authority. Pollock points out that "the most harrowing of all pre-modern political narratives in the world", the "*Mahābhārata* is about a war fought at home" (132). Political interests in this text therefore affect family relations and rivalries, both being settled in terms of the command over land, wealth and people. Thus the equation between politics and kinship in "the Dicing" unsettles all conventional ethical and household codes to suggest a frightening slavery of power. In this particular section, we also find power as a sort of pathology, regulating the mental (im)balance of the character, and, on the other hand, the conventional codes of duties and responsibilities are found helpless in countering the destructive logic of gaining authority.

One of the most significant Western commentators on the 'archaeology of power' in modern history, Michel Foucault suggests divisions between different stages of the state / social exercise of power. In respect of Foucault's study on different forms of state, "disciplinary domination—became 'one of the great inventions of bourgeois society'." And, this is "[u]nlike random sovereign power, which was concentrated on 'human bodies and their operations'" in pre-modern social mechanisms. "So, instead of discontinuous levies, modern man got constant surveillance. (Merquior 113).The notion of power in the *Mahābhārata* may be compared and contrasted with Foucault's observations. The epic, whose historical setting is constituted by the rise of early feudal rules during the late-Vedic period and subsequent consolidation of feudal states, exposes

the conflicting and overlapping forces of a complicated mechanism of feudal power itself. For instance, while in performing the *rājasūya* Yudhishthira depends on both diplomatic negotiations and direct military strength to hold the state authority—as symptomatic of the *Ksatriya dharma*, which is taught by the cosmic agency of Krishna and Nārada as a way to maintain the balance of contesting power blocks—Śakuni proposes a completely different strategy: "I shall take it from him, let the enemy be challenged! I shall take no risk, nor fight a battle in front of armies: I shall throw the dice and, whole of body and wise, defeat the fools! Be sure, the dice are my bows and arrows, the heart of the dice my string, the dicing rug my chariot!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 51 24). Thus, Śakuni replaces the direct exercise of physical power by a cunning use of mental skills to dispossess the enemy and establish new dominion. The epic, in fact, suggests the limitations of both the policies, and the ethical issues connected with each of them. Moreover, as in its fictional interface with history, the second book of Vyāsa's epic exhibits, 'human bodies and their operations', involving the interactions among friends, foes and kin. This of course is a complex issue, characterised often by inconsistencies, in relation to the political order shown to be established by the Kuru family.

Besides the internal strife between different factions of the Bhāratas, "the Book of Assembly Halls" throws light on the general operations of the state authority, which appears to include a system of taxation, a professional army and an administrative apparatus at central and local levels. The state administration is also expected to be held responsible for the safety and security of the subjects, falling into different *varnas*. In *Ancient Indian History and Civilization*, Sailendra Nath Sen notices that in the post-Vedic civilization "Vaishyas and Shudras formed part of the standing army. According to the *Sabha Parva* the king should provide suitable salary and food provisions for the upkeep of the army" (63). As the feudal king's duties are in the epic integrated with the *Ksatriya dharma* and the hierarchical relations among different *varnas*, fighting and administration are regarded as the chief functions of the state authority. The king is entitled to receive gifts and tributes which could also be distributed among favored subjects, especially Brahmins.Duryodhana's narrative of the affairs in Yudhishthira's court to convince Dhritrāshtra about the threatening emergence of the Pāndavas as supreme rulers gives us some impressions of the extent of the state rule. The Brahmin priests enjoy great prestige in this court, and the subordinate kings, who "wait on" Yudhishthira, are described to bring "the stipends of the priests". So as Yudhishthira could bring a great number of provincial rulers under his authority, a balance between the political and spiritual authority could also be achieved. Prafulla Kumar Mohanty

points out that the "word Rajasuya derieves from 'Rajaswa' or revenue or tribute" (138). Duryodhana narrates, "[t]he great seers attended the function with pleasure. Others, steeped in the *Veda*, came with Rāma Jāmadagnya, uttering spells, to the great-spirited king of the generous stipends" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 49 21). Thus Yudhishthira's power is defined by both what Duryodhana calls "all the many and manifold gifts" he obtains from other rulers as tokens of their acceptance of the Pāndava's suzerainty and "the Pāndava's dependents" to whom Yudhishthira is supposed to provide food and security (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 48 20). This further suggests that Yudhishthira remains ethically answerable in not only staking his kin but also staking all those dependent on and serving his rule in Indraprastha.

The fact that the control over the individual's body is a pre-condition for the maintenance of authority is explored in European classical tragedy like Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and English Renaissance tragedies of Christopher Marlowe. In the *Mahā bhārata* the discipline of the suzerain state of Indraprastha is maintained at the cost of sacrificing the dissenting bodies of the 'enemies'. In the world-conquest of Yudhishthira, his brothers "conquered many kings, they took from them tribute and their consent to dharma's [that is the son of Dharma, Yudhishthira's] suzerainty, invited them, to be guests at the [ceremony of] sacrifice and returned" (Karve 165). But, this is represented also as a show of martial strength, and the resistance on part of any provincial king must be suppressed with the full exercise of power, as exemplified by the suppression of Jarā samdha, the king of Magadha, a suzerain kingdom in itself:

> Unwounded, well-armed, triumphant over his enemy, Kṛṣṇa now mounted that heavenly chariot and set out with the rescued kings from Girivraja. With Kṛṣṇa for charioteer, and accompanied by his brother Bhīma, the ambidextrous warrior Arjuna, handsome and skilled at slaying, was invincible to all kings. ... invincible Kṛṣṇa met Yudhisthira … and joyfully said to him, 'Truest of kings, by good fortune Bhīma has laid low the mighty Jarā samdha, and the kings have been released from their bondage... (Smith, *The Mahābhārata* 2.22 102-03).

When the court of Indraprastha is given a shape by Yudhishthira by elevating Krishna as the supreme of all lords, who have come to attend the *rājasūya*, the former's decision is objected by another king, Śiśupāla, and this is followed by the killing of Śiśupāla at the hands of Krishna himself. The individual body in agony becomes significant in a completely different manner when Duryodhana feels himself humiliated as being tricked by the magical show of the palace of Indraprastha and mocked at by the courtesans

there. Henceforth the fate of the entire process of the *rājasūya* is decided by the old rivalry for succession between the two main factions of the Bhārata family, and crucial relation between the state politics and kinship is explored in the central episode of "the Dicing."

Kinship remains a problematic issue throughout the text, signified by the double parentage—divine and human—and premarital and/or extramarital lineages. For example, as indicated before, respective fathers of the Kauravas and the Pāndavas are the biological sons of Vyāsa, and Vidura is also a brother of Pāndu and Dhritrāshtra. Significantly, Vidura is always addressed as a steward—by virtue of his position in the court, notwithstanding his family ties—and also a dependant by Duryodhana. On the other hand, Karna is rebuked by Bhīma for the former's assumed low-birth: "I do not anger at a *sāta's* son" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 63 62). How the question of kinship can be a matter of encounter between the contending power groups is most powerfully explored in "the Dicing," which engages all the main figures of the complex family tree of the Bhārata. Ernst Kantorowicz in a book on the medieval political theology, *The King's Two Bodies* (subtitled, *A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*), 1957, distinguishes between two bodies of a king, 'body natural' and 'body politic'. Now, when Yudhishthira is invited to the game of gambling, he acts as both a close relative—in fact, the eldest son of the family, so enjoying natural bonding with everyone in Hastināpura—and a sovereign ruler, embodying a distinct body politic. Again, just as in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in connection with the royal family the biological progressively becomes the political. At the outset of the first match, Śakuni, claims that his mastery over dicing is purely a scholarly one: "A scholar surpasses a nonscholar only through *his* trick, Yudhisthira, so does a wise man surpass a fool; but people don't call that a trick" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 53 31). But, the match, being continuously won by Śakuni, turns into a cruel exercise of autocratic power, which is particularly evident when adding to the enjoyment of the winning side and having lost his own royal possessions, Yudhishthira is obliged to stake those individuals with whom he has blood relations. Śakuni irritates Yudhishthira by mentioning the delicate issue of kinship: "I have now won, king, these two dear sons of Mādri. Yet methinks Bhīmsena and Arjuna are dearer to you" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 58 42). The throws of the dice thus let loose what has been identified by Michel Foucault as the random exercise of the monarchical power. We may also point out that in the second match the stake interestingly suggests that the losers have to escape the surveillance of the winner.

Significantly, application of coercive power on the bodies of the nearest kin by Duryodhana, Duhśāsana and Karna, the last one justifying others' almost crazy

exhibition of masculine strength, scares the elder members of the Bhārata family, who represent the conventional feudal morality. These people can forecast the apocalypse when Yudhishthira ultimately stakes Draupadī and Kauravas immediately attempt to assault her:

> *Vaiśampāyana said:*
>
> When the King Dharma had spoken this word, Bhārata, the voices that were raised by the elders spelled of "Woe! Woe!" The hall itself shook, king, and talk started among the kings. Bhīsma, Drona, Krpa, and others broke out in sweat. Vidura buried his face in his hands and looked as though he had fainted; he sat, head down, brooding, wheezing like snake. (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 58 45).

"The Dicing" shows how the uncontrolled and random celebrations of power, based on the opposition's situational helplessness, result in a disjuncture in the power structure itself. Thus Vidura, the sage in the hall of Hastināpura, predicts:

> The incredible happens through people like you,
>
> You don't know it, nitwit, you are tied in a noose!
>
> You hang over a chasm and do not grasp it,
>
> You dumb deer to angry tigers! (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 59 45).

The authority of Duryodhana and his side is not sanctioned by the cosmic order, too. The state and kinship are therefore interlinked by a power structure that takes into account every exercise of power in terms of possible consequences. In "the Dicing" the Kauravas fail to understand an entire network of power relations that underlies individual actions. And, by suggesting the instability of power relations, the narrative of the *Mahābhārata* anticipates modern cultural subversion of the same relations.

3.12.2 Gender and Sexuality

The complex interface between power and human relationships finds a more complicated pattern in relation to the text's complex treatment of the equations set by gender norms and roles. The definitions of gender, gender relations and patriarchy provided in the *Oxford Dictionary of Gender Studies*, compliedby Gabriele Griffin, are given below:

- **Gender:** The notion of what it means to be male or female. In some language such as French and German, words have a grammatical gender which may be

feminine, masculine, or neutral. Within feminist theory, gender has been contrasted with sex. Gender here expressed the acculturation of an individual into femininity or masculinity as practised in a given culture; that is, it was regarded as socially constructed, whereas sex was viewed as biologically given through female or male bodily traits. This binary distinction has come under increasing pressure since the early 1990s when Judith Butler argued that both gender and sex are cultural constructions, as queer and LGBT people in particular proposed that there are more than two gender identities….

- **Gender relations:** The relationships between females and males within the family, community, and wider social context. In many cultures, as well as historically, gender relations are structured along lines that give men more power and access to resources than women, for example by making the line of inheritance male centred. Gender relations are cultural constructs and vary from culture to culture, and context to context.
- **Patriarchy:** A system of social organization where men dominate both the public and the private spheres. Women are considered secondary and dependent on men within patriarchal societies, and in consequence lack power, authority, and resources. Inheritance usually takes place through the male line, and women may be viewed as men's possessions rather than as people in their own right. Many feminists, particularly radical feminists, regard patriarchy as the source of women's oppression…. (E book. no pag.)

Although written within a patriarchal framework, the *Mahābhārata* offersa close scrutiny of some very problematic aspects of gender relations, which seem also to suggest anxieties about sexuality in the Ancient India. In this text gender roles and identities are further associated with the power strategy of the socio-political organization that utilizes male or female bodily traits of an individual subject according to its purpose. This specific textual stance underscores the historical fact that control "over the woman was a unit of the political vocabulary of the language of Kshatriya ethos" (Sreedharan 102). On the other hand, there are individual femalecharacters, who challenge the patriarchal power structure by exposing some of its inner contradictions and limitations, and questioning them. At the outset of our discussions on gender equations in 'the Dicing', we may briefly consider the course of life of Amba, princess of Kashi, whose changing gender roles and identities undermine contemporary patriarchal distribution of power and resources by taking advantage of patriarchal restrictions and reservations. Primarily forming a crucial subplot in the narrative structure of the

epic, Amba's story is directly linked with the roles of the central woman character in the main plot, Draupadī and it affects the internal strife in the Bhārata family in multiple ways. Amba had had a secret love relationship with Salva, the king of Saubala, but she was, along with her two sisters Ambika and Ambālika, abducted by Bhīsma from the ceremony of the *swayambhara* of these three princesses. Bhīsma's intention was to marry these three sisters off to Vichitravirya. However, when Amba objected and expressed her secret passion for Salva, Bhīsma made arrangements to send her back to Salva, who only rejected to marry Amba. Considering Bhīsma responsible for her misfortune Amba adamantly pursues Bhīsma's destruction, and to fulfilher goal she is reborn as Shikhandin, primarily a girl child but is brought up as a son and married off to the daughter of the king of Dasharnas by Drupada, father of Draupadī. Shikhandin is later transformed into a male by the boon of Yaskha after several critical turns in this story. So, Amba's life can be seen as a long struggle to embrace masculinity in order to fight against male power independently; but during the great-war it is Bhīsma who narrates the entire subplot to Duryodhana as the reason behind his own reiteration that he cannot slay Shikhandin even if the latter attacks him. In Bhīsma's view Shikhandin, with several 'births', is not a male, but through such dispositions the epic tends to signal the fluidity of sexed and gendered roles, identities and norms.

The shifting roles of Bhīsma as a typical representation of masculine power are also of significance to understand the gender equation. AsJanaki Sreedharan points out,

> Ironically, this code of chivalry which disparages violence on women is the obverse of the very same code which prompts Bhishma to kidnap the princesses at the *swayamvara* … [and the] private grief of Amba becomes magnified into a public conflict of values in Draupadī's sorrow, imbricated within a war of succession. … There is a continuity in the oppositional spaces of Amba and Draupadī as both spaces happen within an absence—the absence of female choice at critical junctures. … As Amba's self-willed destiny fulfils itself to a dubious closure, Draupadī's destiny (voiced by *ashariri* at the moment of her birth) comes upon her in the Dyutaparva [-the *upa parva* within the '*Sabhā Parva*', containing the matches of gambling -]. The game of dice which enslaves all the Pāndavas and most questionably their wife, rouses the ire of hitherto silent Draupadī. Her articulation of dissent, her refusal to conform to the hazy legal code invites violence on her body… The *Mahābhārata* draws heavily upon the sacred / dangerous female experience of menstruation and the relevance of marital

> symbolism to women, to metaphorise the political destabilisation instanced by the dice-game. What we see here is an erasure of the exclusivity of the private and the public domains. (102, 106-07).

The gravity of Draupadī's questioning requires to be understood at the proper context of her specific treatments by opposite gender in the episode of 'the Dicing'. Now, while staking Draupadī at the end of the game of dice, Yudhishthira, the incarnation of god Dharma, offers almost a catalogue of the attractive features of Draupadī's body, with mention of the caring but sound personality of the queen. Most of his narration seems to transform Draupadī, in particular, and by implication any wife into what Claudia von Werlhof calls "simply a sex as such", and having representing her as an object of desire it also declares her attributes 'natural' (104):

> She is not too short or too tall, not too black or too red, and her eyes are red with love... Eyes like the petals of autumn lotuses... Yes, for the lack of cruelty, for the fullness of her body, for the straightness of her character does a man desires a woman. Last she lies down who was first to wake up... Her … face shines like a lotus. Her waist shaped like an altar, hair long, eyes the color of copper, not too much body hair... (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 58 44).

Thus, Draupadī has all the characteristics of a 'perfect' woman, which ironically form the basis of gender inequality. In Aristotle's views, the "biological" feature of "a woman also makes her inferior in her capacities, her ability to reason and therefore to make decisions" (Ehrenreich and English 19). The same line of thought is found in the opinion of Bhīsma, the patriarch—"wives are the husband's chattels" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 60 52). And, as Alf Hiltebeitel points out, Karna's declaration that women are not independent resonates "with a famous verse in *The Laws of Manu* (9.3) that describes women as 'non-independent' (*asvatantra*)" (162). Karna also marks Draupadī a polygamous and, therefore, a whore. It is this gender equation that Draupadī challenges when she, interrogating the scope of the supreme 'Law', stands also for the entire community of Kuru brides across their individual statuses: "They stand here, the Kurus, they stand in their hall, / Proud owners of sons and daughters-in-law; / Examine ye all this word of mine, / and resolve my riddle the proper way!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 60 52). Significantly, none of the ladies present at the Hastināpura court is found to participatein the entire debate on Draupadī's question regarding Yudhishthira's authority to stake her. Consequently, Draupadī's riddle remains unresolved, as it questions the equation of possession existing among two genders: "He attended the session and when he'd lost all, / Only then he agreed to hazard me" (Buitenen, "*The*

Dicing": 60 52). This is also related to the issue of responsibility for the male control over female body: the attempt at controlling is justified as safeguarding the so-called fairer sex by keeping her outside the public domain of action. These law-given promises are grossly violated in the case of Draupadī, who is, in fact, the joint wife of five brothers and, therefore, deserves more security from her in-laws. Physical and mental insult of Draupadī exposes the underlying coercive nature of gender inequality and the ethical unsteadiness of social order: "The Kurus allow—and me thinks that Time is out of joint—their innocent daughter and daughter-in-law to be molested! What greater humiliation than that I, a woman of virtue and beauty, now must invade the men's hall? From the old, we have heard, they do *not* bring law-minded women into their hall. This ancient eternal Law is lost among the Kauravas" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 62 59). This makes the Kuru patriarchs to face the paradox of their own gender roles, and the well-settled balance between private and public morality is undermined. Thus the oppositional energy released through Draupadī is negotiated within the narrative strategy by a sense of fatal inevitability that overrules all the relationships and equations in the text. The resultant dilemma is most poignantly expressed by Bhīsma, who, on the one hand, tries to neutralize Draupadī's rebel by foregrounding her chastity and her submission to her male guardians, and, on the other hand, apprehends that "the end of this lineage is in sight, for all the Kurus have become so enslaved by greed and folly" and Law remains ineffective (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 62 59).

Bhīsma admits his failure that he "cannot answer" Draupadī's "question decisively, because the matter is subtle and mysterious as well as grave" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 62 59). However, the subtlety of the situation leads to varied reactions from male characters, reflecting on various aspects of the male gender role. When Vikarna stands out among Kaurava brothers for his effort to restrain his elder brothers and his suggestions of reconciliation and peace, he is rebuked by Duryodhana as "only a child, blabbing of wisdom!", so not a completely mature man. The emasculation of Draupadī's five husbands in forcefully confirmed by Duryodhana's exhibition of his thigh to Draupadi—"a symbol of phallic insolence grounded in political power" (Sreedharan 109). Robbed of their wealth and in deerskins, the Pāndavas are later compared to a bunch of eunuchs, and "no longer men to Yājñaseni!" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 68 75). Bhīma, on the other hand, exhibits the typical *Ksatriya* chivalry and sense of moral responsibility designed to uphold patriarchal codes of conduct. His agony, however, brings out the extremity of Draupadī's humiliation before all the stake holders of the Law. He does not even spare Yudhishthira: "There are a lot of whores in the country of gamblers, Yudhishthira, but they never throw for them, for they have pity

even for women of that stripe. ... But you went too far, I think, when you staked Draupadī. She did not deserve this! After she had won Pāndavas as a girl, she is now because of you plagued by Kauravas, mean and cruel tricksters! It is because of her that I hurl my fury at you" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 61 53). The great sons of Pāndu being stripped of their clothing find their gender identities challenged.

The gender equation of woman's dependence upon man is reversed when Draupadī, the active woman with the power to reason, independently wins back the freedom of her five husbands. When the Pāndavas prepare for their journey to the forest, Vidura suggests to Yudhishthira that Draupadī "walks in the Law and is wise both in Law and Profit" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 69 78). Draupadī, by giving advices on Law to male partners, make us recall the ladies of exceptional knowledge of the Vedic period. As Karna notices with wonder, "Of all the women of mankind, famous for their beauty, of whom we have heard, no one have we heard accomplished such a deed! While the Pārtha and the Dhritrāshtra are raging beyond measure, Krshnā Draupadī has become the salvation of the Pāndavas! When we are sinking, boatless and drowning, in the plumbless ocean, the Pāncālī became the Pāndavas' boat, to set them ashore!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 64 65). Estimated as a sort of private property of the Pā ndavas, Draupadī thus turns into their rescuer. The narrative, however, reinstates the patriarchal equation between two genders in the suffering and mourning figure of Draupadī after the second match of gambling whose honour needs to be restored by the male revenge: "'So shall it be,' said the queen, spotted by her flowing tears, and in her sole garment, besmirched with blood, she went out, her hair undone. As she walked away weeping" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 7080). Simultaneously, the decision regarding the state of Kunti, again represented as a passive mourner, is taken by Vidura.The narrative of the *Mahābhārata* in this crucial episode of catastrophic consequences thus focuses on the instable nature of the existing gender equation while seeks what V. Geetha calls, "way of displacing as well as managing fears about female power and sexuality" (15).

3.12.3 Summing Up

The *Mahābhārata* gives us a very composite notion of power, which engulfs all other human relationships. 'The dicing' shows how the uncontrolled and random celebrations of power, based on the opposition's situational helplessness, result in a disjuncture in the network of state, kinship and cosmic power.

The gender equations that are exposed in 'the Dicing' are centred on the physical and psychological assaults on Draupadī, and her query regarding the patriarchal law of the male possession of the female. *Varna*, gender and kinship are interlinked by a complex interaction between the political body and biological body, as management of the body of subject and enemy becomes a chief political concern. Draupadī's 'question' disturbingly forces the stake-holders of the Kuru court to feel helpless in facing the self-contradictions of the patriarchal codes of sexuality and chastity. Both Amba and Draupadī unearth the instable gender roles and norms.The text displaces its fears about active female power and sexuality in form of a sense of inevitable fate.

3.12.4 Comprehension Exercises

Long-answer type questions:

1. How does "the Dicing" relate state, family and cosmos within a network of power?
2. 'The universal Law of patriarchy has been historically formed to justify female dependence on male. As 'the Dicing' shows, this Law fails to keep its avowed promises'—Discuss the above argument.
3. Examine the relation between gender, sexuality and moral principles in terms of Draupadī's 'riddle' in "the Dicing" episode.

Medium-length-answer type questions:

4. Give two textual references to the state management of the subject and enemy bodies in the episode of 'the Dicing'.
5. Compare and contrast Amba and Draupadī.
6. How did Draupadī relate Law with profit?

Short-answer type questions:

7. What is the etymology of 'Rajasuya'?
8. What was Sakuni's concept of a scholar?
9. Who did represent martial strength in Yudhishthira's court?
10. When were the conventional gender roles reversed in the episode of 'the Dicing'?

Unit 13 □ Divine Authority and Machinery

Structure

3.13.0 Introduction

This short unit is intended to discuss the machinery by which the cosmic power intervenes into and maintains its authority over the world of human action as portrayed in the episode of "the Dicing". After reading this unit you are expected to:

(a) conceptualize more specifically the aesthetic and religious context of the *Mahā bhārata*.

(b) understand the overwhelming presence of Krishna to ensure that the divine purpose be served in the epic, with special reference to "the Dicing" episode.

(c) find the relationship between the social division and the cosmic division.

(d) comprehend the cosmic ordaining of the game of Dicing.

(e) re-estimate central characters of the episode in terms of their cosmic images and roles.

(f) find a comprehensive list of reference books to cover the entire module 3 on "the Dicing" by Vyāsa.

3.13.1 Epics and the rise of Devotional Hinduism

The Gupta Period has often been celebrated as a golden era in the cultivation of art and literature. Although this period saw the mature form of Buddhist culture, "the most innovative ideas were connected with the rise of Hindu temple, a product of Bhakti or

devotional Hinduism" (Mitter 33). New deities were introduced by the Bhakti movement during this time.The most prominent among these new deities was Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, whose images were introduced to two main classical epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahābhārata* in around first-century CE. There was a strong political and economic side of this turn in religious art. For an evidence, one of the most impressive images of Vishnu in the Gupta art is the image of boar incarnation of Vishnu, whose major example is the rock-cut image, dated fifth century CE, in the caves of Udayagiri, Malwa, Madhya Pradesh. Now, "Vishnu as the cosmic boar saving the earth from the ocean was possibly a political allegory of the conquest by the Gupta emperor Candragupta II (376-415 CE) of the Scythian kingdom of Malwa on the west coast. Not only did the conquest complete Gupta control of northern India, but it also gave them access to the lucrative Mediterranean trade" (Mitter 47).

The Vedic gods lost their control over earthly actions with the ascendancy of post-Vedic Bhakti gods and goddesses, most importantly Vishnu, Siva and Devi. The Vedic gods "were now reduced to the level of mythological figures" and "the three great deities of Hinduism" were now held "solely responsible for human redemption" (Mitter 33). Significantly, whereas Bharata's *Nātyaśāstra* (*The Treatise on Drama*), which is the most important classical treatise on dance, music and drama, "closely corresponds to Siva's iconography, from the graceful *lalita*dance to the ecstatic *catura*, and ultimately to Siva's dance of death (*tandava*)" (Mitter 33), the action of the *Mahābhārata* gives supreme importance to Vishnu, in his human form or *avatāra*, Krishna.

It was from around the period of Bhakti movement, the Vaishnava branch of Hindu religion started considering Vishnu as a life-affirming god. And, the "earliest expression of Bhakti is Vishnu's epiphany in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krsna, Vishnu's incarnation, assures his devotee, Arjuna, of the power of devotion in attaining salvation without the need for Vedic rituals" (Mitter 37). Thus the *Mahābhārata* participates in the confirmation of Bhakti and Vaishnava ideology which replaces the late-Vedic ritualism. It was much later the pastoral image of Krishna was associated with the image of Radha.

3.13.2 Krishna and divine purpose

The Sanskrit word for the purpose of Gods is *daiva*, which is derived from the source word *deva*, or *devtā*, meaning God. The concept of *daiva*involves also the concept of fate by suggesting a preordained future. But, *daiva* indicates a master mind

behind this preordaining. There is a parallel term, *paurusa* (a derivative of the source word *purusa*) meaning man. The word *paurusa* signifies what is pertaining to a man, and it has a synonym, *purusakāra*, conveying the sense of human efforts as well. Although *daiva* and *purusa* are both engaged in power politics they may not always appear in unison. The purpose of gods, as established in the design of the epic, is over-determining to reorganise apparently disjointed human efforts to a preordained goal. The epic, therefore, introduces *avatāra* (derived from *avatārana* meaning descent) Vishnu in this context. As John D. Smith writes, "[v]iewed through human eyes, the war at Kuruksetra is fought to settle the dispute between two sets of royal cousins; from the point of view of Krsna and the other gods, the entire world of men is merely the theatre in which their latest battle with their old rivals has to be played out. The Gods are not engaging in that battle for our benefit, but for their own, and the niceties of particular human *dharmas* are not high among their priorities" (Introduction xli). We should note here that the palace of Indraprastha, which plays a key role in the entire strife, is said to be built by Māyā—the *Vishvakarman* of the *asuras*—and his eight thousand *kinkararākshasa* assistant in fourteen days to follow the instruction of "Krishna to 'build an assembly hall, where the designs of the Gods are laid out, and the designs of *asuras* and men"'(Gupta and Pande, Introduction xxxii). The hall, therefore, represents a harmonious combination of three machineries to serve the divine purpose.

In fact, as Prafulla Kumar Mohanty notices, "Krishna rises as a master visionary with a distinct political focus.... He knew that the greatest enemy of dharma in politics was Jarasandha who had imprisoned a hundred thousand kings for sacrifice to God in his bid to immortality. He was the negative symbol of royal power, hence, the Pāndavas must eliminate him..." (137-38). Therefore, the entire course of action suggests how the cosmic plan is imposed upon the power-politics involved in the royal consecration of Yudhishthira. Although during the two gambling matches Krishna remains absent, it was Śakuni, the prince of darkness, who continues the cosmic fight between good and evilby deceiving the Pāndavas.

3.13.3 Cosmic game and the Dicing

The game of "the Dicing" both encapsulates and provides the setting of the Great War in multiple ways, and thus can be seen as a part of the divine ordaining of the

human conflict for power. Significantly, while the query of Draupadī, the victim, shocks the guardians of Kuru court, the victimizer Duryodhana, who according to the cosmic / symbolic order represents the *asura* Kali, or strife, enjoys the powerlessness of his opponents. He instructs Duhśāsana, "Fetch and bring yourself Yajñasena's daughter, / How can our powerless rivals prevent you?" Duhśāsana proceeds further by challenging even this divine power, "To Krsna and Jisnu, to Hari and Nara, / Cry out for help! I shall take you yet!" (Buitenen, "*The Dicing*": 60 49, 50). That unattended and uncared Draupadī is saved from nudity by her own virtue is therefore suggestive of the cosmic plan to show the good defeating the evil. Such plan lends the narrative a unique movement, characterized by a series of problems inconclusively resolved. Every resolution leads to a new problem, and finallyYudhishthira again faces the riddle regarding the occupants of the heaven and of the hell. The strategy is therefore that of deferral, and this partly explains why Yudhishthira, who as a divine agent helps the actions of the epic to reach the final conflict, accepts the Kaurava invitation to the game, despite his assessment of its true nature. The untenable nature of his decision raises a series of questions, and we "should have hoped for Yudhishthira to offer some explanation, but he maintains an agonizing silence even through the terrifying events of their peripeteia" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xxxvii). The passive and apparently 'unheroic' approach of Yudhishthira serves also to foreground the potential of Draupadī , who emerges in the hall of Hastināpura as one of "the three Krishnas who protect the Pāndavas": "Krishna Dvāipāyana Vyāsa, Krishna Vāsudeva, and Krishnā Draupadi" (Gupta and Pande, Introduction lv). The coordination between these three Krishnas forms the circle of *daiva* around the world of *paurusa* of the sons of Pāndu.

Draupadī is dishonoured by Duryodhana and his associates in a manner that is beyond forgiveness, and after the two gambling matches all pretentions of friendliness between two factions of the Kurus are dropped. Hastināpura is left under by the awful shadow of doom, which is signaled by the howling of scavengers and the appearance of Nārada. This Vedic musician sage, who is also the main messenger as well as follower of the Lord Vishnu, acts as an important part of the divine machinery; and his appearances at different crucial moments of the narrative signify one form of the direct divine intervention. He functions as a seer as well as a communicator between the *devas* and the *purusas*. As the second match ends with the Pāndavas' defeat, and the period

of their exile starts, the divine sage thus announces the time frame for the destruction of the Kauravas:

> *Vaiśampāyana said:*
>
> Now Nārada appeared in the middle of the hall and stood before the Kurus; and amidst great seers he spoke this ghastly word: "Thirteen years from now the Kauravas who are here will perish, through Duryodhana's guilt and Bhī ma's and Arjuna's might." Having spoken, the greatest of divine seers, wearing about his person the ample fortune of the Brahman, strode up to the sky and soon disappeared. (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 71 83).

The scene of Nārada's appearance involves a lot of theatricality, comparable to the appearances of the supernatural beings on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stages in case of the English theatre; however, in the classical world of epics the divine intervention more directly engages mortal beings. Thus Nārada's arrival is preceded by the Pā ndavas' departure amidst a commotion involving mythical and heavenly bodies and natural cycles as well as terrestrial wild beings, who haunt the temples and the royal palaces, all acting as ominous signs of coming destruction. Significantly, this specific scene of turmoil is narrated by the sage Vidura, who is able to decode "the grave portents" that "spell" the doom of the Kauravas: "... lightning flashed on the cloudless sky and the earth trembled, Rāhu swallowed the sun when no eclipse was due ... Meteors exploded widdershins around the city. Beasts of prey roared forth with vultures, jackals, and crows around the temples and sanctuaries of Gods and the watch towers of the palaces" (Buitenen, "*The Sequel to the Dicing*": 71 83).

The attire of Nārada, being identified with his *varna*—he is said to be "wearing about his person the ample fortune of the Brahman"—is significant in relation to the struggle of the upper-most *varna* in maintaining their authority over the rest of the society. The fourfold *varna* system as a central practice of *dharma* in the post-Vedic period seems to signify that the role and position in social hierarchy of each *varna*is determined and fixed; as this system was supposed to maintain the cosmic equilibrium. Such an ideological emphasis on the identification of *dharma*—which is allotted a derivative meaning, 'to segregate'—with the maintenance of social and cosmic order is, however, a reaction to the post-Vedic historical threats on the socio-cultural authority of Brahmins. In the words of Kanav Gupta and Meha Pande, the epic "is replete with

stories of Kshatriyas not recognizing the dignity, special position, and special contributions that Brahmins endorsed with." This crisis is, therefore, 'solved' by "an *avatārana*—a divinely commanded purge—of the 'bad *kshatras*', the armed men who had abandoned the ideals of *dharma* and the socio-political morality" (Introduction xlix, xxxi). The role of Kshatriyas is part of an entire discursive plain, as Ashok Chousalkar points out, "In the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya there is discussion on the calamities or *vyasanas* befalling seven constituent elements of the state and ways and means to overcome them. But Kautilya did not discuss the theoretical aspects of calamities and the moral issues involved in the duties of a king" (118).

In this sense, the contest between the two factions of the Bhārata family is also the contest between hundred demons and their associates ('bad Kshatriyas' and, therefore, by implication, *asuras)* on the one hand and five sons of gods (*devtās*—befriended by Lord Vishnu himself) on the other. Yudhishthira, the chosen leader of 'good Kshatriya' always safeguards the Brahmin superiority; and, as Nārada's short declaration implies, the two prime warriors on the side of *devas* are Bhīma and Arjuna. The divine scheme of things is perfectly suggested by the different manners in which these two groups of cousins are described to be born:

> Gandhari carried the hundred Kauravas for two years in her womb only to later abort the 'grotesque fetal mass' ... The levirate father of the fathers of the two clans, Krishna Dvāipāyana Vyāsa divides the mass into a thousand pots filled with *ghī*, an experiment which eventually leads to the birth of thoroughly wicked and strong young men, the Dhritrāshtra Kauravas. The one hundred Kauravas and their confederate Karna constitute the core targeted group of the 'avatāra mission' of the *devtās*. (Gupta and Pande, Introduction xxxii).

The human elements of the narrative of this great epic—for example, the hesitation of Yudhishthira and Arjuna, and the tragic heroics of Karna—continuously undermine any teleological scheme like the above one. Simple polarization between the good and evil may be erroneous too. But on the whole, the divine mission and machinery—the agents and events it employs to achieve its goal—undoubtedly set the broad framework of the entire development of the epic. The human conflict is just a transposition to the earth, which is described as 'trembling' in fear when the Pāndavas are driven out of

their palace, of the unending cosmic conflict between *devas* and *asuras*, which results in the great carnage of Kuruksetra.

However, from the humanistic standpoint, such a resolution is never an optimistic one. The model of divinely sanctioned formal codes of *dharma* that upholds the older forms of distribution of power between the upper *varnas* against volatile forms socio-political mobility, is revised in many respects by the epic. This, in spite of its adherence to the social and cosmic fixity as the purpose of the gods, indicates tumultuous changes that could no longer be disciplined by the divine machinery. Critics have pointed out the inexplicable absence of Krishna from this crucial event—the games of dice—in the Pā ̄ndava's life. One possible answer to this may be the replacement of the incarnation of the preserver god Vishnu in this scene by the god of destruction, Shiva. As the narrative suggests towards the end of the text, no side becomes successful in escaping this destruction. This reveals that, even the purpose of the gods, as it has been mythologized, is rifted by conflicts of interests; and, an apocalyptic vision can never be escaped in spite of all sorts of resolutions devised by the divine machinery.

3.13.4 Summing Up

The divine project of the epic is centred around the mythological figure of Krishna. Though he is absent in the episode of 'the Dicing', heremains a crucial force all through; because by robbing the Pāndavas of the wealth and glory achieved during the *rājasūya*, the Kauravas establish themselves as antagonistic to Krishna himself. The divine machinery is formed by mortal agents and terrestrial events, too, which are reorganized to serve the *daiva,* which remains inexplicable and over-determining. The mortal characters are meant as the incarnations of their heavenly counterparts and human conflict on the earth is a sort of outsourcing of the divine fight to maintain social and cosmic order. In the world of epic, the divine intervention through various machineries is a direct one, engaging the mortal beings and cosmic bodies in unison. The most powerful form of the divine intervention is the *avatārana*. The narrative tendency to uphold the social and cosmic discipline through the prescribed rules and rigidity of the varna system suggests a specific power politics involving the two upper varnas: 'good kshatriyas' do honour and protect Brahmins, and 'bad kshatriyas' require to be eliminated. At the symbolic level this is also a fight between *devtās* and *asuras*. The human

elements of the epic continuously undermine any teleological scheme and uncover various contingent factors of socio-political mobility and signs of tumultuous changes that give birth to a new and challenging ethos.

3.13.5 Comprehension Exercises

Long-answer type questions:

1. How do human characters take part in the cosmic battle between *devtās* and *asuras* in "the Dicing" episode?
2. Comment on the relationship between the epic, religious and aesthetic upheavals during the Gupta period in India, as they are represented in the *Mahabharata*.
3. Comment on the Krishna factor in the epic and the significance of the interplay between his presence and absence.

Medium-length-answer type questions:

4. Briefly comment on three Krishnas.
5. Bring out the contrast between the 'good kshatriyas' and the 'bad kshatriyas' according the episode of 'the Dicing.'
6. Estimate the role of Narada as a divine agent.
7. How did tragic mental ambiguities and tragic sufferings of some characters undermine divine polarization of good and evil in 'the Dicing'?

Short-answer type questions:

8. What could be a possible cause behind the absence of Krishna during and after the games of Dicing?
9. Explain the term '*avatārana*'.
10. What was the condition of Nature during the departure of Pāndavas?

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NOTES

Module-4

Sudraka : *Mrcchakatika*

Unit 14 □ An Initiation

Structure

4.14.0 Introduction

This unit offers some introductory information regarding Sudraka's time-honoured 'prakarana' titled *Mricchakatika (The Little Clay Cart)*, along with a brief bio-history of the author, as far as gathered from his own *Nandi* or benediction in favour of divine powers, at the beginning of the playtext, and some other ancient sources. For the benefit of the students, here is also a brief summary of the text.

4.14.1 Sudraka—A Bio-brief

Little is known about Sudraka, except the details he himself provided in the introductory verse to his most famous work, *Mrcchakatika*. He is considered as a pre-Kalidasa author, and his dates are uncertain. *Skandapurana* locates him in the Kali year 3290, which can be considered as corresponding to 188 AD, approximately. Some scholars consider him to be a legendary or mythical figure, while others, especially Sten Konow, seek to identify him with a third century Abhira king. The discovery of *Charudata* by Bhasa, in the early years of the 20th century, had thrown an unexpected light on the age and authorship of *Mrcchakatika.* Other plays attributed to him are: *Vinavasavadatta*, and *Padmapravritaka*, a *bhana* (a brief monologue of one act.) The following details are based on Sudraka's benedictory address, *The Indian Drama* by Sten Konow and *The Sanskrit Drama* by A. B. Keith. Materials from a published paper by the present Unit writer herself, have also been used here (See "Sudraka's *Mrcchakatika*: a Journey with the Text under the CBCS", *Middle Flight*, Vol 8, No. 1, November 2019).

Some scholars are of the opinion that Sudraka engaged two court-pundits, Somila and Ramila, to help him in the composition of *Mrcchakatika*. The benedictory verse, and the play itself give ample proof of his various talents. A king and an author, a man of several virtues, he was an expert in the *Rigveda*, the *Samaveda*, mathematics, the arts regarding courtesans and the science of training elephants. In the prologue, it is further said that he was cured of some ailment, and after nominating his son to succeed him, and performing the *Asvamedha-yajna*, he willingly entered the fire and breathed his last at the age of a hundred and ten years. From other sources, too, we get to know interesting things about a king named Sudraka. The existence of a lost work called *Shudraka-katha*, thought to be jointly composed by Ramila and Somila has been come to our knowledge through other sources—chiefly from a verse by the 10th century poet Rajasekhara in *Suktimuktavali*. However, Rajasekhara refers to this work as 'katha'—which tends to pint towards its fictional status: it is probably a fiction based on the life of a legendary figure, not a 'historical' source. Another text bearing the same title, *Shudraka-katha*, attributed to one called Pancha-shikha, is also mentioned by A.K. Warder, in *Indian Kavya Literature: The Early Medieval Period (from Sudraka to Visakhadatta).*

Another well-known text, *Avanti-Sundari-katha* by Dandin *also* provides references and allusions to several legends related to Sudraka, probably based on the lost works attributed to Ramila-Somila, and Panchasikha. A paraphrased version of Dandin's work, *Avanti-Sundari-kathasara* claims that Sudraka was born a Brahmana, and his original name was Indranigupta. However, he did not like the Brahminical vocation, and became a soldier instead, ultimately gaining a kingdom. From *Kavya-mimansa* by Rajasekhara, we come to know that the king Sudraka was a patron of art and cultures, well-known for his grace bestowed upon the circle of poets. Banabhatta's *Kadamvari* mentions him as the king of Dasarna, and in *Avanti-Sundari-katha* he is placed in the Malava-region. However, all these 'Sudraka'-s may not be the same person.

Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* places him beside Vikramaditya, the *Vetalapancavimsati* refers to his age of living as hundred, and his capital as either Vardhamana or Sobhavati. Dandin, in *Dasakumaracarita*, relates his several adventures. These varying references seem to suggest that Sudraka was a merely legendary person. Nevertheless, Konow treats him as a historical figure, and identifies him with the Abhira king Sivadatta, who, or whose son, Isvarasena had overthrown the Andhra dynasty, and established the Cedi era from 248-249 A.D—according to Fleet. So it appears that Sudraka belongs to the middle of the 3rd Century A.D, and Konow argues that he finally established his rule in

Pratisthana, the modern Paithan in Hyderabad. It also corresponds to the fact that *Mrcchakatika* was the first Indian drama which used Maharastri Prakrit, widely in use in the region where Sudraka, according to Konow, established his kingdom. Sudraka's supposed association with the Abhira dynasty also goes fairly with the element of socio-political change as celebrated in *Mrcchakatika*—where a rebel-hero from the cowherd community escapes from prison, ends the rule of a tyrannical *Kshatriya* king, and assumes power himself—with the hopes of a new rule with a more 'democratic' orientation. In the age of *Mahabharata*, the Abhiras were originally considered as low-born people, living on agrarian activities and cattle-grazing. Later some of them assumed political power in certain parts of central India.

4.14.2 *Mrcchakatika* : Plot Summary

The play, being a notable example of *prakarana* (a term with which you are by now acquainted) is realistic in its depiction of ordinary city life, and it runs for ten *anka(s)*, which we may call 'acts'. Following the tradition of Sanskrit drama, it begins with a customary *Nandi* (benediction) in praise of God Siva, also featuring some details about the author, as already mentioned in the previous section. The main play-text starts with a conversation between Sutradhara (director or stage manager) and the *Nati* (generally the wife or mistress of the director), on the plight of impoverished people. The subject of poverty leads the audience to sympathise with Charudatta, the *nayaka* (male-protagonist)—whose over-generosity and honesty have exhausted his provisions, and turned him poor, with few friends left now.

The first four acts of the play are a more or less reproduction of Bhasa's *Charudatta*. The names of the characters are slightly changed, the king's brother-in law is called Samsthanaka, and the thief, Sarvilaka. **Act I** projects Charudatta, a noble Brahmana-merchant living in the ancient city of Ujjayini, once rich but now reduced to poverty, who laments his present situation in front of his friend Maitreya—a comic character, the typical 'Vidushaka' in Sanskrit drama. Charudatta is not so much grieved because of his penury, what ails him more is that he is no longer able to help others, and friends have left him in crisis. On the other side, a dramatic scene is enacted on the street: Vasantasena, the city's celebrated courtesan, is running through a stormy night, pursued by the vile Sakara (the evil king Palaka's brother-in-law) and his associates. A woman running to save herself from a band of rogues—the situation itself is serious and

condemnable, but the crude reality of the villain Sakara's lustful language, and his constant misappropriation of words and allusions from myths, offer elements of laughter as well. Finally, the desperate Vasantasena enters into a cottage and saves herself. Fortunately, it turns out to be Charudatta's house. Charudatta behaves like a gentleman, and takes care of her safety. Further pleased with his noble attitude, Vasantasena deposits her casket of jewels in Charudatta's custody. Thus we have a tyrpical situation of a damsel in distress being pursued by a rogue, and the use of chance and coincidence leading her to find refuge in a noble man.

Act II opens with Vasantasena sharing with Madanika, her maid, her feelings for Charudatta. She admits to Madanika that she saw Charudatta in the temple of Kamadeva (the god of love, a mythical deity, somewhat corresponding to the Cupid-figure in Roman mythology) during the spring festival, and got fascinated with his looks and virtues. However, their love has taken a definitive course since the last night's incident. The character and situation of Vasantasena show up in bright colours: she is a self-dependent, rich courtesan, who manages a big household and a number of servants. However, she longs for true love, and when she is really in love with a man like Charudatta, it is clear that she adores his qualities, and does not mind his poverty. While the conversation is going on, a shampooer, in order to escape the street-gamblers, runs into the house of Vasantasena. Learning that the shampooer was once in the service of Charudatta, she helps him to pay his debts. Moved by her generosity, he resolves to become a Buddhist monk. Leaving her house, on the road, he is attacked by a mad elephant, and rescued by Karnapuraka, a man who serves Vasantasena. He gets as reward a cloak which Vasantasena recognizes as Charudatta's. Notice the fast pace at which events of the plot move in this play!

In **Act III**, while Charudatta and Maitreya are asleep, Sarvilaka enters the house as a thief, and steals the jewels of Vasantasena, kept in Charudatta's custody. Sarvilaka is not a hardened criminal, he steals because he is also poor, and needs money to free the woman he loves. Interestingly, he considers his skill in stealing as an 'art'. The next morning, Charudatta discovers the hole in the wall, and finds the casket missing. His wife Dhuta, in order to protect her husband's honour, wishes to give her own pearl necklace to Vasantasena, since her casket of jewels has been missing from their house. Charudatta, though unwilling to bear his wife taking pity on his situation, ultimately finds it the only suitable way to compensate Vasantasena's loss, and sends his friend Maitreya with the necklace in exchange for Vasantasena's casket.

Act IV shows that with the stolen casket, Sarvilaka goes to buy the freedom of his beloved, who is Madanika, the maid of Vasantasena. The maid recognizes the casket, and requests Sarvilaka to return it to her mistress, saying that Carudatta has sent this back. Overhearing their conversation, Vasantasena is pleased with the loyalty and honesty of her maid, and sets her free to marry Sarvilaka. On the way, Sarvilaka hears that his friend Aryaka has been imprisoned, and he rushes off to help him, keeping his bride in another friend's house. Just as Sudraka's use of chance and coincidence is a repeated occurrence in the plot, similarly from the point of view of characterization, it is interesting how he binds the characters in close ties that are either personal or at best within a close-knit society.

In the meantime, Maitreya comes to Vasantasena with the necklace of Charudatta's wife to compensate the loss of the casket, which has already been restored to her by Sarvilaka. So she sends the necklace back, with a message that she wishes to see Charudatta.

Act V celebrates the lovers' union at night, following a short scene of language-play at the moment of her arrival. The lovers are supposed to enjoy their clandestine meeting. Due to a heavy storm outside, Vasantasena has to spend the night in the house of Charudatta. Act VI opens in the next morning— while leaving Charudatta's place, Vasantasena finds Rohasena, Carudatta's son, crying over a clay-cart. He wished to have a golden cart—like the one owned by a rich neighbour's son, but his father is unable to buy him one. Vasantasena's motherly feelings allow her to fill the clay cart with all her jewels, to stop the boy's crying. The incident is significant, for it points towards a stronger bonding between Vasantasena and Charudatta's family, and Vasantasena's growing motherly instincts for the son of the man she loves. Thus Vasantasena and her jewels become a motif in the play, serving different sets of purposes. It is also interesting that as a single woman with economic agency, she is not deterred in her amorous interest by the fact that Chardudatta is a man who has a family to upkeep.

Now it is better to capture the major dramatic movements of the play, which take an interesting turn from the end of the **Act VI** to that of **Act VII**. Charudatta, waiting for Vasantasena, has sent a cart for her. He is surprised to find a man called Aryaka coming out of that cart. It is the same Aryaka, the rebellious cowherd-hero whom the king had put into prison, but he has set himself free. Understanding the situation, Charudatta unchains him, and lends him the cart to escape to safety.

On the other hand, while waiting for Charudatta's message for the next meeting, Vasantasena boards an empty cart, under the wrong impression that it has been sent by Charudatta, and reaches a public garden. There she falls in the hand of the evil Samsthanaka (Sakara), who had been after her since the beginning. Sakara at first seeks to win her affections by fair words, but angry at her stern refusal, forces her to become his mistress, and when Vasantasena resists, he tries to kill her. Vasantasena, even at the moment of crisis, wishes to die with the name of Charudatta in her lips. When she falls unconscious, Sakara leaves her there, considering her to be dead. Sakara's servant, the Bita, witnesses this and condemns the act, but the villain clears his way and leaves.

Act IX contains the trial: with a vengeful desire to defame and punish Charudatta, Sakara goes to the court of justice to accuse Charudatta of murdering her. Charudatta is arrested, he proclaims his innocence but admits the truth that he knew Vasantasena. It is also discovered that Vasantasena has given her ornaments to Charudatta's son. Without any strong proof to justify his innocence, it is assumed that he, being an impoverished man, has murdered Vasantasena to secure her wealth. He is sentenced to death.

The **last Act** takes the dramatic excitement to its climax, and draws a positive conclusion. Charudatta is being taken to the slaughter-place by two headsmen. Sadly he says farewell to his friend and little son, while his wife prepares to enter the fire. Suddenly Sakara's servant appears, and pricked by his conscience, betrays the truth he has witnessed. Nobody is willing to believe him, but now, just at the right moment, Vasantasena, rescued by the shampooer turned monk, reappears on stage and exposes the evil Sakara. Then comes the news that Aryaka has freed himself and overthrown the king, and he has ordered to set the innocent Charudatta free as well. As a token of gratitude, the new king also places Charudatta in an important position in his court. The lovers are reunited, Carudatta's wife also accepts Vasantasena as a 'sister', and at the noble hero's request, Sakara is spared, too. Finally Charudatta speaks the Bharata-vakya (the goodwill-speech at the end) proclaiming the virtues of honesty and charity.

Even this brief summary is expected to make us conscious of the varied thematic concerns of the play: though basically a love-story, it is rich in various other elements of social life, customs, rituals and practices in ancient India, involving people from different classes, with a political subtext involving the overthrow of an evil king by hero rising from the common folk.

4.14.3 Summing Up

- *Mricchakatika* is attributed to Sudraka, who appears to be a legendary figure. His dates are uncertain, but scholars agree to place him chronologically before Kalidasa. Several legends about him are known through other sources.
- Sten Konow identifies him with a third century Abhira king.
- The play, set in Ujjayini, is realistic in its portrayal of the common people's life in an ancient Indian city. It features the love story between a noble but poor Brahmana-merchant and a dignified courtesan, generous and loving at heart. Charudatta's wife Dhuta, self-sacrifycing and ever-loyal to her husband, and finally accepting the courtesan as her co-wife, completes the family-bond.
- Another love-story between Sarvilaka and Vasantasena's maid comes as a suitable sub-plot. Other characters include Charudatta's little son, a villain called Sakara and his associates, a Visushaka-friend of the hero, a thief who later acts virtuously, a shampooer turned a monk, a rebel-cowherd who kills and supplants an evil king, gamblers, guards, people at the court and so on.
- Instrumental to the title of the play, a significant incident occurs when Vasantasena gives all her golden ornaments to fill up the clay-cart of Charudatta's son, who is crying to have a golden-toycart like the own possessed by a rich neighbur's child. It is the moment where she passionately gets involved in the joys and sorrows of Charudatta's family.

4.14.4 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Bring out some characteristic qualities of Charudatta and Vasantasena, which qualify them to be the *nayaka* and *nayika* of the play.
2. What role does the sub-plot involving the love-story of Sarvilaka and Madanika play in *Mrcchakatika*? How will you establish its parallels with the main plot?
3. What picture of contemporary society do you get from Sudraka's play?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. How in your opinion is the conversation between the *Sutradhara* and *Nati* related to the major theme of the play?

2. Discuss in detail about the sources, other than his own introduction to this play, which provide some glimpses of Sudraka's life as a legendary figure.
3. What idea about Sudraka can we form from the introductory verse of *Mrcchakatika*?
4. Discuss the incident of the little clay cart and its significance in the plot of the play.
5. Briefly discuss theft of the casket, and its subsequent restoration to Vasantasena.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. What information do we have regarding the possible dates of Sudraka?
2. Write in brief about other works by Sudraka that you know about.
3. Bring out the significance of the political subtext involving Aryaka.
4. With references from the text, show how Sudraka uses chance and coincidence to shape the plot of *Mrcchakatika*.

Unit 15 □ The Play as a *Prakarana*

Structure

4.15.0 Introduction

This Unit on Sudraka's play *Mrchchhakatika* will offer students the opportunity to know about Sudraka's style of writing as part of the tradition of Indian classical drama. A study of the background of Indian classical literarture, the role of various playwrights in depicting the society, plot, character and incidents of that particular genre will also help them finding the similarities and differences between European and Indian classical literature and its various traits. It will also help them understanding the intertextual concepts in different traditions and how those concepts merge according to the diversity of cultures. A further reading of the play will let them know that this play was translated into English by Arthur W.Ryder in 1905 as *The Little Clay Cart*. Horace Hayman Wilson translated it as *The Toy Cart* in 1826. It has several stage productions on both sides of the Atlantic. Gerard de Nerval and Joseph Mery adapted this play for their French production Le Chariot de'enfant, premiered in Paris in 1850. Ryder's version was enacted at the Hearst Greek Theater at Berkley in 1907, in New York City in 1924, at the Potboiler Art Theater in Los Angeles in 1926, at the Theater de Lys in 1953. In India Girish Karnad, the great playwright, actor, director and theatre personality has directed a film Utsav in 1984 based on Mrchchhakatika.

A close reading of the text on the lines of this Unit will help you, dear learner, in following the technicalities of classical plays such as prologue, epilogue, the presence of the Sutradhara and so on and so forth. In all, it is necessary to comprehend the why

and what of a *Prakarana*, and how the text qualifies as one, and thereby factoring in what the text gains by virtue of being a *Prakarana*.

4.15.1 Sanskrit Drama and Sudraka

In the previous Unit, you have been given a fair idea of where Sudraka stands in the history of classical Indian drama, here we will further pursue that understanding from a broader cultural perspective to arrive at the concept of *prakarana*. Sanskrit drama has its cultural heritage and it symbolizes India's glorious past. The ancient literary tradition has its roots in poetry, dramas were performed following the verses. Drama, i.e, 'natya' is based on the 'nat'—the 'actor' and the performance is based on the literary compositions. The word 'sanskriti' denoting culture essentially signifies the enriched cultural aspects of the scriptures, life described over there and also the moral values which could make a perfect human being. With that expectation the dramatists tried to incorporate their individual thoughts, although not entirely making themselves free from the ancient traditions. The Sanskrit plays- the 'nataka' were written and performed following the movements of the body, some rude pantomime were also incorporated. Dance, songs, evoking the 'bhabha' (mood) and creating 'rasa' were some of the salient features of Sanskrit drama. Sanskrit drama had influences from Greek tradition and when the lyrics and dialogue are blended, it produces similar influences as *Gitagovinda* in Bengali. Such lyrical verses, while performed were highly inspired by the scriptures composed in Sanskrit.

The origin of Sanskrit drama as a classical tradition reveals the thematic significance- the secular and religious elements are inextricably linked with each other. In order to trace the source of Sanskrit drama some interesting observations may be brought into consideration. It is Professor Piscel who thinks of puppet-play as the origin of Sanskrit drama. He also assumes to think of India as the source of those puppet plays. He justifies his point with sources drawn from the epic the Mahabharata. Some of the characters of Sanskrit plays have been originated from this source- such is Piscel's claim. The Sutradhara, the Sthapaka, the Vidusaka, according to Piscel, had their origin from puppet play. Although such an argument has failed to find supporters but ultimately it offers the thinkers some digression to view it from such an experimental angle. It is also significant to note that Sanskrit drama came into being when India

experienced Greek influence. Arthur Mcdonnel in *A History of Sanskrit Literature* describes the form of Sanskrit drama in the following manner:

> The Sanskrit drama is a mixed composition, in which joy is mingled with sorrow, in which jester usually plays a prominent part, while the hero and the heroines are often in the depths of despair. But it never has a sad ending. The emotions of terror, grief or pity, with which the audience are inspired, are therefore always tranquillised by the happy termination of the story. Nor may any deeply tragic incident take place in the course of the play; for death is never allowed to be represented on stage…. (348)

The characters in Sanskrit plays speak in a language following hierarchical position. Sanskrit and Prakrit are used by the characters according to their status in the society. They speak in different dialects. Thus it is seen that men of high rank, priests, kings and other men of high pedigree speak in Sanskrit whereas women, men from lower strata of the society speak in Prakrit. Even in the use of Prakrit distinctions are made. Women of high social position employ Maharashtri in lyrical passages, otherwise women from lower classes, children and the servant class speak in Sauraseni. Magadhi is used for attendants in royal palace, Avanti by rogues or gamblers, Abhiri by cowherds, Paisachi by charcoal burners,

The dramatists weave the plots of Sanskrit dramas either following history or from any epic event. But there are certain cases where the dramatist composes something free from the influences. Like the epic tradition the hero of a Sanskrit drama is of high birth, he is involved with a beautiful woman (in spite of being married), some sort of hidden affair goes on between the hero and the heroine and the plot finally leads to certain confusions and hazards which is finally resolved. The presence of the court jester is also one of the significant features of Sanskrit drama and here we could remember the presence of the jester or the fool in Shakespearean dramas.

Since Sanskrit drama is influenced by Greek drama and English drama has its origins from Greek drama so it is possible for you to find points of similarity between English and Sanskrit drama. Sanskrit drama has its inception from epic poetry. In an epic there is a tradition of invocation- the poet asks for divine benediction at the very beginning and then proceeds. Similarly, in Sanskrit the play begins with a prologue or introduction with the invocation to the gods and goddesses to engage the audience and their belief at the very outset. Then a dialogue opens between the stage manager and the actors (one or two) to narrate in brief the context of the play, the past incidents and the

present happenings in order to follow the future. The acts and scenes of Sanskrit drama marks the shift from one situation to the other which also shifts the characters' realm of looking and the realm of thinking- one may be happy while the other sad. Thoughts and deeds are not always equally balanced, it must not be, otherwise the harmony of the drama may get disrupted, because as Alexander Pope says in *An Essay On Criticism*,"To err is human…". Since madness is an essential feature of music, dissimilar calculations between the plots and sub plots create a harmony within the dramatic components.

The characters are always present on the stage and the exchange of their dialogues indicate the change of situations. Before a new act the dramatist introduces an interlude. At the end of the play the characters ask for peace and prosperity from the divinity and reconciliations are made between the characters and their situations.

In Sanskrit literature, most of the genres are considered as 'kavya'. Poetry, in Sanskrit language, as an intrinsic merit and in its inherent nature is divided into two kinds- 'drishyam'- what is capable of being seen or exhibited and 'shravya'- what can only be heard or chanted. The growth and development of Sanskrit drama has its roots in the time line or the chronology of Sanskrit literature. But it is still in an unsettled condition. The dates of very few writers are offered either by themselves in their own works or by their contemporaries. But it may not bring satisfactory conclusions. There has been a lot of controversy regarding the origin of Sanskrit drama. Some scholars have opined that Sanskrit drama has been originated from the SambadSukta of the Rig Veda. There are some Suktas in the Rig Veda where we find the usage of script.

Among the significant Sanskrit dramas Vasa's *Charudatta*, Sudraka's*Mrichchhakatika*, Kalidasa's*Abhijnanshakuntalam* and *Malavikagnimitram*, Bhababhuti's*Malatimadhava* bear special claim. In his Prologue to *Malavikagnimitram*, Kalidasa is not only referring to Bhasa but here we are introduced to some of his predecessors. They are known as Saumilla and Kaviputra. Saumilla's name suggests an origin in Maharashtra, is mentioned by Rajsekhara along with Bhasa with a third poet Ramila. The Kaviputras, a pair were collaborators, drawing a curious parallel with Somila and Ramila. After Kalidasa, Sanskrit drama has been enriched with the presence of some very talented playwrights. They include Sudraka, Sriharsha, Bhababhuti, Bishakhdatta, Bhattanarayana, Krishnamishra, Khemiswara, Damodar Mishra, Murari and Rajasekhara.

Although it has been earlier stated about the dramatists but in the context of *Mrchchhakatika* it will not be irrelevant to mention some details of Sudraka. The life

of Sudraka the dramatist has been mentioned in the *Prastavana* or Prelude of the play itself although there has been a lot of controversy regarding his identity. It is mentioned that Sudraka was a Kshatriya king, though of what country is not known; he was brave and handsome in appearance, he knew *Rigveda, Samaveda,* Mathematics; the arts regarding courtesans and the science of training elephants. He was a devotee of God Shiva, he has also performed the *Ashwamedha* sacrifice. It is also written that he died at the age of hundred years and ten days. He is the person who composed the story of the love of Charudatta and Vasantasena although the play is a document of the social life of the contemporary times and it is more than a love story. It is stated in Act I that the poet or the author Sudraka was a famous scholar and who was the very best of the twice born and of unfathomable mental caliber. His gait was like that of an excellent elephant; his eyes resembled those of a chakora bird; his face vied with the full moon in beauty and he possessed a handsome body.

The *Prastavana* is a later interpolation of the play and it is still under doubt that how far the statements made in the play are historically true. Some critics, while researching on the true identity of Sudraka, have pointed out that it is true that some person named Sudraka wrote the play, he might not be identical with Sudraka the king. They have also found that in a later age the comparatively unknown poet might easily have come to be identified with his better known namesake Sudraka, the King.

While conducting a research to find out the real identity of Sudraka to whom the play is ascribed and what may be the age in which he would have written down the play one faces the difficulty to settle the chronological problems in the plurality of the writers bearing the same name. Examples can be drawn of Kalidasa. Many poets bore the name Kalidasa, and one could hardly escape being confused with the one Kalidasa, known for Shakuntala and his namesakes. Sudraka has met with the same fate. Some of the scholars have supplied new and additional details mentioned below

a) A passage from the Kumarika khanda of the *Skandapurana* mentions that a great king named Sudraka would reign in the year 3290 of the Kali era, i.e in 190 A.D. Col Wilfred was the first to identify this Sudraka of the *Skandapurana* with the founder of the Andhrabhritya dynasty whose name is given as Simuka.

b) In the *Avantisundarikathasara*, a work of Dandin recently discovered in Madras, a life sketch of King Sudraka is given. He is described as a Brahmana King of Ujjayini and a great poet, and is said to have defeated Svati, a prince of the Andhrabhritya dynasty. It appears that in Dandin’sdays it was understood

that Sudraka's writings consisted of autobiographical matter. Thus it has been pointed out that the *Mrichchhakatika* embodies several incidents from Sudraka's life. Charudatta is said to have represented Bandhudatta, who was Sudraka's intimate friend and frequently assisted him in times of danger.

c) The adventures of a King Sudraka were sung by the poets Ramila and Somila who were probably his contemporaries or lived after him.

d) The famous name of Sudraka soon acquired a legendary halo of antiquity and was freely introduced into numerous tales; it is found mentioned in many well-known Sanskrit words.

e) Vamana, in his *Kavyal- S-V*, mentions Sudraka by name as famed for writings. He does not state whether Sudraka was a king or what.

f) Prof. Konow, in his work on the Sanskrit drama, has stated the theory that Sudraka is to be identified with an Abhira prince called Sivadatta who ruled in the 3rd Century A.D.

4.15.2 Sources of *Mrchchhakatika*

Mrchchhakatika seems to be the enlarged and completed version of Bhasa's drama *Charudatta*. This play has been highly popular not only in India but also in the West, especially the lovers of classical literature. The reason behind this may contain the significance of the title, the element of the supernatural, larger social and state surroundings, assimilation of people of different occupations in the society, the metaphoric presence of several factors, the rapid progression of the incidents and the art of characterization.

Mrchchhakatika, a play originally written in Sanskrit by Sudraka has opened up a new vista in the field of drama which has been one of the most significant and popular genres of classical literature. This play has been translated by various people in various times and from the time when it was composed up to the present day its reception is immense.

The play was inspired by Bhasa's *Charudatta*. The plot of *Mrchchhakatika*is entirely *lokayata.* Its root lies in *Brihatkatha*.Several threads are also found in *Kathasaritasagara*. In this work a poor brahmin from Ujjayini was attracted to a courtesan named Kumudini. In the same work we also find another reference where another courtesan Rupanika is attracted to another brahmin. In the Ninth Act of the

Mrichh the king is Palaka where as in the Tenth the king is Aryaka, the son of Gopal. In *Kathasaritasagara* the two sons of Pradyot and Angarbati are Gopal and Palaka. The play *Charudatta* by Bhasa is finished in Four Acts, it has brought the plot of *Mrichh* up to the Fifth Act.

Mrchchhakatika and *Charudatta* both these plays have some *slokas* which Vamana has mentioned in his *Kavyalankarsutra*. These are the probable sources of *Mrchchhakatika* that inspired Sudraka.

4.15.3 Title of *Mrichchhkatika*

The title of any work is generally based on the main incident of the play. It is related to either to the theme or any of the characters' special or noble deeds. The name of a Prakarana may either be inspired by the hero or the heroine. *Malatimadhava* is a play which follows such tradition. In *Mrchchhakatika* Sudraka has intentionally deviated from this tradition. He has neither taken any of the main incidents of the plot as the source of the title,nor has he named the play after the name of the hero or the heroine. Rather he has selected one of the incidents which has more or less nothing to do either with the main plot or the sub plot. In the Sixth Act of *Mrchchhakatika* there is one incident which is used here as the source of the title of the play. When Vasantasena met Charudatta's son Rohasena for the first time, she wore many ornaments. She found Rohasena crying and she asked him the reason.Rohasena wanted to know about her identity and Vasantasena replied that she is his mother. Rohasena explained that she cannot be his mother because his mother does not have so many ornaments. This touched the heart of Vasantasena. Rohasena was upset then because he did not have a golden cart to play with but his friend had one such cart. He only had one 'mrchchhakatika' which means a cart made of clay. Then Vasantasena removed all of her ornaments and gave it to Rohasena's governess so that she could make arrangements to make one golden cart for him. It is interesting how Sudraka makes use of visual representation to read, reflect upon and represent the psyche of a child.

There can be some justifications behind Sudraka's naming of his play. First of all the incidents of the five acts of this play is adopted from Bhasa's four-act play *Charudatta.* Bhasa's play ends before the two lovers met. In *Mrchchhakatika* all the crucial incidents started taking place from fifth act onwards and it is in the sixth act that Sudraka's thoughts take a new dimension. It is in this act we come to know about the

clay cart which will soon be transformed into a golden one with Vasantasena's ornaments. At one point this act is a pretext to know about her motherly feelings on one hand and her noble heart on the other. This Act is definitely a turning point to give Sudraka's ideas a new dimension. After this act the plot is further developed which leads to various crucial incidents indicating a departure from Bhasa and moving on to what is exclusively Sudraka's independent observation. That is why in this Act, through the mentioned incident Sudraka offers us the justification of the title.

4.15.4 Language of *Mrchchhakatika*

Although the plot of *Mrchchhakatika* is developed around Ujjayini but in the social background of language mostly the influence of the Decans is found. There are many dialogues built on the pride of Ujjayini. It may be possible that the play and its contents were known and became popular as the incident of Ujjayini, therefore the plot is based on this region. The effects of the Decans are found in this play. Charudatta, SarvilakaAryaka, Adhikaranika has spoken in Sanskrit and even Basantasena has spoken it once in the fifth Act. Vasantasena, Sutradhara, Viraka, Chandanaka, Shreshthikayastha, Madanika, Dhuta and the mother of Vasantasena has mainly spoken in Shouraseni or Prakrita which is mainly dramatic in its nature. Maitreya mainly speaks in Prachya; Samvahaka Karnapuraka; Vardhamanaka, Sthaviraka, Radanika speaks in Magadhi where as Samsthanaka speaks in lowest form of Prakrita and Shakari.Shakara speaks in Shakari whereas the Chandalas speak Chandali. Dhakki is used by the gamblers.

4.15.5 *Mrchchhakatika* as *Prakarana*

According to the Alankara Shastra of Sanskrit, *Mrchchhakatika* is a Ten Act Prakarana. According to the *Natyashastra* of Bharata when a poet composes a play with the help of his imaginative faculty, not following a historical or epical work, it is called Prakarana. There are two types of Prakarana- Suddha and Sankirna (Pure, and Narrow) (My translation). The following Sanskrit shloka from *Natyashastra* states about different types of prakarana.

Yatra kabiratmabuddhyabastushariranchanayakameba cha

Utpattikangprakuruteprakaranameetitadbudheyyeiram (*Natyashashtra* 20/48) (Bhattacharya, Sukumari)

The shlokas are roughly translated as, if the heroine of the play is a wife then it is a Suddhaprakarana and if she is a courtesan then it is a Sankirnaprakarana. It can be stated in the following words offered by *Natyashashtra*:

After 1500 years, in the 14th century, Biswanath had mentioned about the incidents of prakarana in his book *Sahityadarpan*. The following Sanskrit shloka expresses that sense.

Bhabetprakaranebrittyangloukikongkabikalpitam

Shringarohanginayakastubiprahamatyohathobabanika

Sapayadharmakamarthaparodhiraprashantakah

Nayika kulajakkapibeshyakkapidwayangkachita (6/253-54) (Bhattacharya, Sukumari, *Sudrak Birochito Mrichchhakatik)*

This shloka can be roughly translated as that the incidents of prakarana will be 'loukik'(related to human beings), based on the imagination of the poet, the main rasa will be 'shringar', the protagonist or hero will either be a brahmin or he will be engaged in religion, materialistic gain (money), lustfulness and salvation (moksha). He will be a man of quietude. The heroine will be either a wife or a courtesan or there could be the presence of both.

According to Biswanath, Prakarana will be of three types. On the basis of the presentation of the protagonist, prakarana will be of three categories. In the third category of prakarana characters such as Dhuta, Beeta, Sakara, Dyutakar will be amply present. According to the types of the nayaka or the hero, Biswanath has mentioned three categories of prakarana in *Sahityadarpana*

1. Bipranayaka (Example—*Mrichchhakatika)*
2. Amatyanayaka (Example—*Malatimadham*)
3. Banikanayaka (Example—*Pushpabhushitam*)

It is observed that between Bharata and Biswanath's time, some prakaranas were composed and the definition of prakarana has also gone through certain modifications. So it has become possible to insert both the social identity and the character of the hero; to mention the presence of both wife and courtesan in the same play and to direct clearly about the nature and presence of the main 'rasa' (mood). In the words of both Bharata and Biswanath the plot of a prakarana will be based on the poet's imagination. In addition to this, Biswanath included the theme of 'loukik', therefore the hero or the

protagonist is not the king here; he can either be a merchant or a bipra, full of morality and religion. According to Bharat the Acts of a Prakarana will be between five and ten.

So, stating all the specificities of prakarana and to judge *Mrchchhakatika* on that basis it may be concluded that this play fulfills all the conditions of a prakarana. Therefore, it is also a Prakarana.

4.15.6 Summing Up

In this unit we discussed Sanskrit drama as part of classical literature and the role of Sudraka in enriching Sanskrit drama through the composition of plays like *Mrchchhakatika*. The play has several dimensions. It is divided into the main plot and the sub plot. The main plot is based on romance, comedy, intrigue whereas the sub plot contains the state politics which states the detailing of the overthrow of the city's despotic ruler by a shepherd. All these issues in this play are in some ways related either to Bhasa's play or it may also have a different source. The conflict between good and evil is an ever present theme in literature and Sanskrit drama is not an exception to this. The same thing happens in *Mrchchhakatika*. Avarice, treachery, licentiousness, lust for powerare some of the dimensions controlling the entire plot.

On one hand Sakara is the embodiment of evil, on the contrary Charudatta, Maitreya, Basantasena, Beet stands for the good. Charudatta's life has its own dimensions- he is happy with his wife Dhuta but his love for the courtesan Basantasena cannot be overlooked. Apart from the main plot *Mrichchhakatika* contains sub plot which occupies the incidents of the playing of dice, theft, story of the elephant—all such incidents nourish and increase the grandeur of the main plot. One significant point is that there has always been the presence of certain symbols which have recurred either in the main plot or in the sub plot of the play. As for example we can take the motif of chase. In the First Act we find Samsthanaka is chasing Basantasena,.The elephant is chasing the sage and in the Seventh Act Aryaka is chased by the royal guards.

We also discussed the source of *Mrchchhakatika*, the title, the language and above all how this play can be judged as a Prakarana.

A further reading of the play will let them know that this play was translated into English by Arthur W.Ryder in 1905 as *The Little Clay Cart*. Horace Hayman Wilson translated it as *The Toy Cart* in 1826. It has several stage productions on both sides of the Atlantic. Gerard de Nerval and Joseph Mery adapted this play for their French

production Le Chariot de'enfant, premiered in Paris in 1850. Ryder's version was enacted at the Hearst Greek Theater at Berkley in 1907, in New York City in 1924, at the Potboiler Art Theater in Los Angeles in 1926, at the Theater de Lys in 1953. In India Girish Karnad, the great playwright, actor, director and theatre personality has directed a film Utsav in 1984 based on *Mrchchhakatika.*

4.15.6 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answers

1. Give a brief account of Sanskrit drama and locate Sudraka as a dramatist.
2. Do you think that Mrchchhakatika is a representative social document? Justify your answer.

Medium Length Answers

1. How is the main plot of the play related to the sub-plot?
2. What is a Prakarana? Do you think *Mrchchhakatika* is a Prakarana? Justify your answer.
3. Comment on the language of *Mrchchhakatika*. How do the characters use language in the play?

Short Answers

1. Justify the title of *Mrchchhakatika.*
2. *Briefly* mention the source of *Mrchchhakatika.*

Unit 16 □ Thematic Issues and Characterisation

Structure

4.16.0 Introduction

You are aware by now that *Mrchchhakatika* is a playdealing with several complex themes, all of which evolve around intricacies of human relationships. In this Unit we will see for ourselves the gamut of issues, and how Sudraka's art of characterization leads to the unfurling of such issues as emerge in the play. At the end of the Unit, learners should be able to analyse the nuances underlying the characters, how that complicates the situation as also brings about the final disentanglement of the plot. For all textual references in this Unit, we follow M. R. Kale's translation (1924) of *The Mrichchhakatika of Sudraka*, published by D.M Tilak Booksellers, Bombay.

4.16.1 Thematic Issues

Assessing *Mrichchhakatika* as a Sanskrit drama, its significance is immense. It is absolutely a social drama although one cannot figure it out as the first social drama. Bhasa wrote *Charudatta* (not a fully developed drama) much before Sudraka has written his play. It can be considered as the illustrated edition of *Charudatta*. Based on this category *Mrichchhakatika* cannot entirely be considered as a unique work. Most of the Sanskrit plays have been composed to reveal the great deeds of the king and the main

theme of such plays was the life and activities of the king. But *Mrichchhakatika* was not composed on this basis. It is important to note that this play does not highlight the life and activities of a king or a royal figure. The elements of the plot have been adopted from the contemporary social life. The plot is mainly based on the love relationship of Vasantasena and Charudatta and Vasantasena's receipt of the honour of a wife. Neither Charudatta nor Vasantasena is a historical figure. So *Mrichchhakatika* can undoubtedly be considered as a social drama. Keeping in mind this point of departure from most Sanskrit plays, we will now take up the major thematic issuesin *Mrchchhakatika*:

- **Benediction**

The art of seeking divine benediction is an everpresent theme in literature. It has been a convention which is termed as invocation. Various gods and goddesses are invoked and the writer seeks for blessing so that the venture is successfully finished. Milton's invocation to the Muse in *Paradise Lost* or Alexander Pope's invocation in his mock-heroic epic *The Rape of theLock* are well known instances in this regard that you have read about in other Courses. *Mrchchhakatika* also begins with a benediction and it is as follows

> May the abstract meditation (Samadhi) of Siva, concentrated on Brahma owing to the (intense) absorption produced by the absence of any perfection, protect you!—(of Siva) whose knees are wrapped round with the doubly-tightened fold of the snake, while he sits having formed a knot (with his legs) in the Paryanka posture (by bending them cross-wise) : (the operation of) whose sense is so suspended as to cause the cessation of all perception, by reason of the vital airs being confined within (Kale, 6)

Thus the play begins with benediction and the presence of the Sutradhara initializes the plot. At the end of the benediction he begins to state that a play named *Mrchchhakatika* is going to be performed. It reminds us of Girish Karnad's plays which are also structured around the presence of a Sutradhara and divine benediction plays a significant role. In *Mrchchhakatika* in the benediction part Siva is in absolute meditation, therefore his samadhi is invoked to grant blessings.

- **Humour**

Humour is an indispensable ingredient to provide relief to the reader/audience from the serious undertones carried out through the text. *Mrchchhakatika* also offers the readers the humourous intervention of certain characters who release the audience from the tension and pathos developed from the progression of the plot. It also reminds us of the concept of comic interludes in a play, such interludes lessen the tragic note built

around. On the other hand it also provides the audience an opportunity to experience diversified feelings and emotions. The conversation between the Sutradhara and the Nati creates banter and mirth among the audience. Samsthanaka's proposal to Vasantasena fails to create a serious appeal and the audience is entertained with boisterous mirth. There are exchanges of dialogues throughout the play which indicates humourous undertones. Beginning from the first act up to the end humour has been a constituent element in the play. The First Act Gems Are Left Behind is comic enough. It was constructed with lack of mythological knowledge of Samsthanaka. The pursuing of Vasantasena by Samsthanaka, Courtier and Servant are interesting pieces of humour. Samsthanaka repeatedly fails to impress Vasantasena using all sorts of wrong mythological references which evoke enough humour. The Second Act produces humorous episodes between the Shampooer, Mathura and the Gambler. The shampooer loses ten gold coins in the gambling. He couldn't pay it to the gambler and starts running and this entire episode is humourous enough to entertain the audience. In the Fourth Act Madanika and Sarvilaka engages in humourous episodes. Sarvilaka's act of theft is presented with humour, fun and laughter. In the next act Maitreya and Kumbhilaka is the chief exponent of humour. They used adjectives with irrelevant nouns and changes the parts of the words that makes lot of humour. In the next act the scene of swapping the bullock carts creates curiosity and delight to the audience and it is a part of humour as reflected in the play. Thus almost all the acts have humourous contents to entertain the audience.

➢ **Class Conflict**

The thought of a classless society is an impossible one and Thomas More's *Utopia* truly focusses this issue. *Mrchchhakatika* is not an exception to this. The play focuses upon the principal characters from the upper-middle class, whereas the subordinate characters hailed from different class as well as caste. Charudatta is a Brahmin, signifying the upper-caste. The Brahmins used to enjoy power, privilege and people had some sort of reverential fear for them. Sarvilaka declines to rob a brahmana of his gold, to him it might be like committing a sin. The Kayasthas hold a comparatively lower position in the society. Buddhism, although in a state of decline, still continued to be accepted by a larger number of people in society. Their presence in the social gatherings considered auspicious although the upper classes were not entirely moved by the Buddhist bhikshus and monks. The existence of the trading class, gamblers, prostitutes were part of the class-caste system.

Charudatta, being the representative of the once affluent classes, used to donate a lot of wealth as charity. A large portion of his stored property passed into the hands of

the courtesan class. Vasantasena owned a palace from Charudatta and such a splendid palace indicates the luxuriousness of such people on a grand scale. Drinking, gambling, prostitution- everything was a part of this society. Merchants could give golden toy carts to their sons- such was their economic condition. Courtesans could afford such luxury- if not entirely through money but through their generous heart. Vasantasena gave away all her ornaments for making a golden cart for Rohasena.

The caste system was fully recognized during those days. The Brahmanas were the highest rank holders and they used to enjoy certain privileges. They were entitled to dominate the lower castes and it went beyond description. Sarvilaka declines to rob a Brahmana of his gold (accumulated for sacrificial purposes) and it shows the influence of the upper classes in the society. They often took commerce as their occupation. References can be drawn from Charudatta's ancestors who were Brahmanas, got rich through trade and were known as *sarthavahas*. Among the other castes the kayasthas occupied lower status than the Brahmanas but they had certain opportunities. Viraka and Chandanaka's encounter with each other is indicative of the rigid caste system which establishes its influence on lower class people. Commerce was carried on an extensive scale, Indian ships sailed to the furthest ends of the earth and as a result people used to enjoy prosperity of the land. Trading classes were extremely wealthy.

Slavery was a common practice. A slave could be brought, sold and ransomed by the payment of money. Gambling was legalized; there was an association which formulated the rules of the play; keepers of the gambling salons saw to it that these were strictly enforced. The social, religious observances were indicative of the contemporary cultural and religious practices- balis, upavasas and utsavas being some of them. Sciences of astrology and augury were universally believed in. *Mrichchhakatika* contains references to music parties and drawing and painting competitions- thus showing the flourishing of fine arts on a large scale, indicative of a cultured wealthy society. The general economic condition of the people appears to have been prosperous on the whole, free from petty worries and minor troubles.

It is also significant to note that Sudraka unfalteringly elevates the status of a *nagarvadhu* (a courtesan here, Vasantasena)to a *kulavadhu*. Vasantasena'schanging role from a courtesan to someone's wife is undoubtedly the dramatist's attempt to improvise the caste issues in terms of the position of women in the society. This is one of the ways of understanding the efforts of some people like Sudraka who deeply think of improving the status of marginalized beings of the society. A courtesan lives on the margins of the society. Her position can be improved if someone of Charudatta's status accepts her as

his wife. Sudraka constructs such a plot. He addresses the marginality issue and tries to resolve it through Vasantasena'selevation as someone's wife.

➢ **Love and Romance**

To borrow from *Twelfth Night*, one of the romantic comedies of Shakespeare, "music is the food of love". It is such an eternal theme in literature that most texts at some point deal with love. Classical or modern whatever text it may be one could think of the famous phrase "amor vincit omnia'. Love conquers all—this has been proved in many ways. In Kalidasa's *Abhijnansakuntalam* it is the love of Shakuntala that finally conquers every hurdle. Sanskrit plays, unlike the English ones have a convincing spell to create on the audience with which to win their hearts. The dynamics of Charudatta and Vasantasena's love finally conquers everything. Dhuta, the dutiful and loving wife of Charudatta consciously sacrifices her husband to the courtesan because she knows she cannot seize her husband. It is love that has changed the essence of emotions. So love to Charudatta has a different meaning which surpasses all the ethics of being a loyal husband- to him it hardly matters if a husband loves someone else in addition to his wife. He feels the growing passion of desire and love for Vasantasena. Their amorous longing culminates and Vasantasena's words after witnessing the clouds gathering in the night sky are significant to mention here

> "Let clouds gather as they will; let it turn night; or let rain fall incessantly. With my heart yearning for my beloved, I care not for all of them". (Kale, 72)

The desire of union gradually developed within her has its clear cut revelation. She becomes the abhisarika nayika who is yearning for love's fire and ardours. Charudatta also utters something which indicates the rain as a source of erotic awakening and it is not irrelevant to mention here since it expresses Charudatta's heart full of desire and sensuality

> "Here, this red lightning, desiring to be united with the clouds, has appeared of its own will and is embracing the sky, like a beloved mistress who, being in love, desires union with her lover at the advent of clouds and goes to him, of her own will, embracing him" (Kale, 95)

Love for Dhuta has a sacrificial meaning otherwise she could have claimed her right over her husband. Instead of doing that she accepts Vasantasena. Sarvilaka's love for Madanika has also secured the readers' attention. Madanika beingVasantasena's maid, Sarvilaka could marry Madanika only if he paid her ransom. It was equivalent to pay the bride price which was one of the customs of the day. His love for Madanika worked as a provocation to steal ornaments from Charudatta's house. When Madanika found

that these stolen ornaments are Vasantasena's she requests Sarvilaka to return them and it is again the magic of love which forbade him to repeat such an act. He returned those ornamnets. Sarvilaka's unconditional love for Madanika reveals the promising sides of love. Apart from romantic love we could also think of the common people's love for Charudatta and the justifying nature of love which finally spared Charudatta's life. So both love and romance dominate the play in a positive note.

➢ **Diplomacy: Society and the State**

The society during Sudraka's time has all its popular practices. Lust for power and diplomatic relationships were the key features in state politics. On one hand the difference between the rich and the poor showed up as it was expected to be; and on the other it is the king who holds tyrannical power. King Palaka proved to be a ruthless and unsuccessful ruler and his false dictatorship enraged his country people among which one really challenged his autocracy. Palaka was the head of the the army. There were regular departments of the state mentioned in the play like revenue, justice, police. Aryaka, one of Sarvilaka's friends challenged the King and was imprisoned by him. Now it was Sarvilaka who tried freeing Aryaka from this hierarchical difference and from the filthy game of state politics. In the Ninth Act the readers get a clear picture of the judiciary system. Sudraka gives a vivid description of the function of the court performed by the judge. He was assisted by two men and he tried his best to adopt impartial means for unbiased judgement. Charudatta's case can be taken as an example for readers. The witnesses were interrogated in a faultless manner and witnesses were assembled in a systematic way so that no lapse is found. If it would not have been so then we would not have experienced Charudatta being set free. Act IX shows that if the facts were not clearly established by the evidence then there were certain ordeals adopted out of which one could think of the most severe for serious offences. Sudraka refers to this with the following description

> Hence, a judge..... Should be learned in law; expert in tracing (the course of) fraud; eloquent; never losing his temper; equally impartial towards friends, strangers and relatives, giving his decision only after (carefully) investigating the facts; a protector of the weak; a terror of the rogues; righteous; free from greed even when the means exist for him (to take bribes); sincerely bent in his mind on (discovering) the real truth, and able to avert the anger of the king. (Kale, 123)

It is also significant to note that a criminal punished capitally could be set free under suitable circumstances or with the paying of ransome only if permitted. The executioners also enjoyed some discretionary power. They would set the convict free if proper

evidence could prove his innocence and in that case then could punish the real offender. ThusSudraka has offered us the function of the judiciary and has talked about state politics.

➢ **Gambling**

Somadeva's *Kathasaritsagara* (1070), the epic *The Mahabharata* are some of the Sanskrit texts depicting the theme of gambling. In English literature some authors have addressed the theme of gambling in the form of fiction. Such fictions include Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* (1953), Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Gambler* (1866), Catherine Cookson's *The Gamblimg Man* (1975). Sudraka addresses the gambling issue in *Mrchchhakatika*and it is introduced in the Second Act of the play. In this Act we are introduced to Samvahaka who is running away without paying his debts and being pursued by his creditor and master of the gaming house. With the help pf his fellow gambler he manages to escape and finds shelter at Vasantasena's place. She helps him by paying off his debts, and at this point of time Samvahaka feels tired of relentlessly playing as a gambler and thus concludes his gambling life by choosing the life of a *Bhikshu* (Buddhist mendicant). But it would be relevant here to mention that in the next act Sarvilaka is seen as a burglar.

The most significant dimension of *Mrichchhakatika*, as mentioned in the earlier section,is a courtesan's receipt of the status of a wife. It is really noteworthy that how a woman of 'loose' morals finally gets the status of a noble man's wife. It is also quite bold on the part of Charudatta, an already married man to have fallen in love with a courtesan and finally showering on her the legitimacy of both a lover and a wife. It is a great attempt of the dramatist to bring such a social issue—a courtesan's acceptance as a wife. One of the aspects of society during those days is the question of the status of the courtesans. Prostitution as a profession was quite evident. Both the king, people belonging to the higher strata of the society used to go to the courtesans. Sometimes, they used to keep them in their own palace.

Another significant aspect offered by the playwright is the issue of polygamy. It was more or less customary during those days to keep more than one wife and wives used to nourish the feeling of jealousy among each other because neither of them would be ready to share their husband.

4.16.2 Art of Characterization and its Objectives

Sudraka's art of characterization in *Mrichchhakatika,* a text that can be perceived as much of a social document rather than being a mere story, offers us characters

belonging to different social strata. In the society as depicted by the playwright we find a variety of characters who are individualised in their own ways. Although in most of the Sanskrit plays the king is the hero or the protagonist, in *Mrichchhakatika* the king remains offstage. The rest of the characters of this drama have been depicted from all sections of the society. Different social conditions and occupations have been reflected in the characters. Such characters include once rich Charudatta, Vasantasena the affluent courtesan, Sarvilaka and Samvahaka, the new rich Samsthanaka, Darduraka who is now poor, Maitreya, the friend of Charudatta. There are other characters named Madanika, the servant Sthavaraka, Vardhamanaka, the maid Radanika, the poor Chandal. Regarding the occupations we find prostitution, merchant, beeta, cheta, adhikaranika, srenikayastha, the maids, thief, samvahaka, sramana, mahout, prabahanik, gambler, chandal. Regarding the varnas we can classify them as brahmanas, vaishya, kayastha and chandal. You are already acquainted with this occupation based division of society in the Units on Kalidasa. We can now try and understand the major characters, and how they contribute to the amplification of the key issues in the play.

4.16.3 Central Characters—Charudatta and Vasantasena

➢ **Charudatta**

Charudatta has been chosen by the playwright as the hero or the protagonist who is a young Brahmana, belonging to Ujjayini. His ancestors had amassed a large fortune in trade. But subsequently it disappeared. Besides this, the generosity of Charudatta had reduced him to a penniless individual. The meaning of his name is very much suited to his nature- Charudatta- 'one who gives nobly'. The play has shown how Charudatta has unlimited contribution to public utility in terms of donation which has resulted in the dwindling of his economic status. When Charudatta had nothing monetary to offer, he offered his cloak. If he could at all be considered a 'nayaka' of the play then there is some justification for that. According to Bharata's *Natyashastra*, there are four types of heroes or 'nayakas'- *Dhirodhata* (brave and haughty), *Dhiralalita* (brave and sportive), *Dhirodatta* (brave and generous) and *Dhiroprshanta* (brave and calm). Charudatta's nature and his qualities may classify him as a *Dhirodatta nayaka*.

At the outset Charudatta's gloom may disappoint the readers but one should follow that the gloom stems from his friends leaving him in poverty. Maitreya being his friend also act as a source of jolt for Charudatta. The coming of the storm transforms Charudatta, his love-stricken heart becomes poetic: "The untimely storm afflicts the

blackened sky / And the wistful lover's heart'. He is by nature a lover, the sprinkling of rain-drops produces musical effects for him.

Being asked by Vasantasena to hide her ornaments at Charudatta's house he almost warnsher : "This house is not a fit place for (keeping) a deposit" (52). To this she replies: "Sir, this is not true; (for) deposits are entrusted to persons, and not to houses"(53). His sense of honour was immense- when he found Vasantasena's ornaments stolen from his place, he replaces them with the valuable necklace." (53). Probably these are the reasons of Vasantasena's falling in love with him who finally had nothing to offer her except honour, love and the status of his wife. In the very First Act we see Charudatta mourning over his loss of wealth not because of his own happiness but because of his inability to offer wealth to the poor. It is also worthy to mention that his silence in the law court is indicative of his extreme tenacity and love for Vasantasena. Charudattahas thus directly experienced poverty and he considers it as 'a source of insult', it is 'the exciter of the hatred of his kinsmen and of the general public'. Between poverty and death Charudatta prefers the second one because that gives 'short lived' pain while poverty is unending misery.

Although Charudatta is a noble man by heart, one cannot overlook his flaws. He cannot be classified as a dynamic personality. His passivebehaviour in many ways goes against him and shows him to be a man full of emotions. His role as a father was justified, especially when he expressed his last wish to see his son. He could neither assert himself nor could he prove to be a loyal husband, though loyalty itself needs to be reconfigured in the contemporary context. Society during Charudatta's time did not consider a married man's second courtship to a courtesan prohibited, nonetheless a question can be raised on grounds of private morality. If Charudatta was as genuine a lover then his act of marrying a second time could not justify his nature as a husband. Polygamy was not prohibited then but at one point it is definitely an insult to the first wife. Although his allegiance to Dhuta may not be less but he has shared himself among the two. He might as well have resisted himself from marryingVasantasenain order to keep the honour of his wife, but he does not take any such step. One can raise a question at this juncture. If Dhuta would have done the same thing, would Charudatta accept her? But such questions are only fixed for women; men hardly face such situations. But even with such flaws in his character Sudraka justifies Charudatta as the 'nayaka' of the play. His final words at the end of the play would be relevant here to conclude

> The purity of my character is restored; this enemy of mine who had fallen at my feet (for protection), has been allowed to go free. My dear friend Aryaka, who has destroyed his foe from his very roots is now the king and

> the ruler of the earth. I have gained this beloved (Vasantasena) of mine. And you, that are in union with the dear friend (Aryaka) have become my friend. What more, then remains there to be obtained that I should now ask of you? (Kale, 403)

➢ **Vasantasena**

Vasantasena—as the name suggests, is the harbinger of Vasanta(spring) season. She is born and bred a professional courtesan but is a pure –minded lady and her soul's purity can be very similar to a noble woman's pure-mindedness. She is by profession a courtesan but at heart a lover. She caters to the needs of her male clients but mostly she does not have emotional attachment with them. Vita describes Vasantasena thus:

> She is the goddess Lakshmi, without the lotus (in her hand), she is the lovely weapon of the bodiless one (Cupid); She is the cause of the grief to high born (chaste) ladies and she is the flower of the excellent tree in the form of love" (Kale, 171)

That is why as soon as she falls in love with Charudatta she becomes devoted and loyal to him. The first time she sees Charudatta at a festival. From that day onwards she cannot accept the very idea of entertaining any other suitor. When Sakara repeatedly approaches her she cannot tolerate this and rejects his proposal. She is a generous hearted lady; she paid off the debt of Samvahaka and released Madanika from her bondage. Vasantasena can be paralleled with the famous and talented actress cum courtesan of colonial Bengal, Binodini Dasi. Although Binodini and Vasantasena's occupations were not entirely the same, and their circumstances also differ; at one point howeverthey are quite similar and that is their talent. Binodini came in close contact with the theatre maestro Girish Ghosh and she became an actress who was not only efficient in acting, she has also written down many poems. *Amar Katha* (*My Autobiography*) is her autobiographical writing. Vasantasena, as a contemporary courtesan was very enlightened because courtesans during those days used to get trained in the field of literature, song, dance- in short they were trained to master the skill of all forms of art. Her passion for Charudatta grows so intense in the end that she goes to visit him as an *abhisarika* (a woman making love expeditions*)*, in spite of raging thunderstorm; when in his house she gives a further proof of her generous nature by handing over her own ornaments to Charudatta's son Rohasena for making a golden toy cart. When, finally in Act VIII, Sakara persecutes her with his attentions, she is ready even to accept death at his hands rather than prove faithless to one who has won her heart; and, to all appearances, she dies with his name on her lips. She thus gives the greatest possible

proof that lay in her power of the depth of her affection and the loyalty of her love for which she receives recognition later at the hands of King Aryaka who bestows upon her the title of a *vadhu* (wife). One may remember her behavior when Rohasena declines to consider her as his mother because she happened to be wearing ornaments. She actually removes her ornaments and gives them to him so that on one hand she could fulfill Rohasena's wish and on the other by opening her ornaments she may look like his mother because her character was gradually being transformed, by means of social customs, from a *ganika* (courtesan) to a *kulavadhu* (wife).

4.16.4 Sakara: The Conventional Fool?

Through the characterization of Sakara the playwright has created a unique character in the canons of Sanskrit dramatic literature—the playwright has depicted him as a combination of the worst type of a fool and a villain. Sakara happens to be the king's brother-in-law. He is surrounded by various servants and parasites. But those parasites do not always sing in praise of him. They criticize him where necessary. Sudraka has created the background of Sakara's character by putting the Vidushaka as the conventional Fool and thus through the description of the Samsthanaka the chief element of humour is being represented in the play in the form of Sakara. He has entertained audience through his mannerism of speech; it has evoked laughter in them. Such humorous conduct includes his substitution of 'Sh' for 'S', his habit of using redundant words, his absurd sense of mythology, his inversion of the order of words and his quaint similes.

But apart from his mannerisms there is nothing entertaining about Sakara's behavior. He is a pervert debauchee and a cruel and remorseless villain and not at all a courageous person. He hurriedly withdraws from the scene in Act I, when he finds that his friend has left; and later, when the same friend shows fight, he is so much frightened that he falls down senseless on the ground. He is of course boastful enough to declare himself brave against the weaker sex. It is true that he has not much sense; for otherwise he would not have pursued Vasantasena when she refused his proposal, nor would he have so foolishly attempted to murder her in that way. His great desire for Vasantasena is expressed in the following words

> "… my poor heart is being burnt by passion, just like a piece of flesh fallen on a heap of burning charcoal" (Kale, 24)

Sakara's repeated failure to possess Vasantasena made him deeply frustrated and he variously considers her as a 'flesh eater', 'a flat-nosed maiden', 'a destroyer of families'

(of her lovers) ; ‘an untamable’ (shrew); ‘a casket of love’, ‘a courtesan’, ‘an inhabitant of the fine harlot’s quarter’ (or a repository of fine ornaments), ‘a prostitute and a concubine’ (30).

Within the limits of his understanding, however, he possesses a deep cunning and is in no way a common fool. The manner in which he tries to shift the guilt on Charudatta and thus to save himself and at the same time have his enemy sent out of the world, clearly establishes that. Moreover, the trick that he plays on the Vita in Act VIII lulling him into a false sense that all was well and the device that he employs to secure the silence of the Cheta by putting him in chains, the alacrity with which he seizes the opportunity to point out the ornaments as a link in the chain of evidence and in particular, the cleverness with which, by the episode of the bangle, he hoodwinks the Chandalas, abundantly prove that he had more sense that he finally begs and cringes and throws himself on the protection of those very persons whom he had most injured, merely serves to bring out his abject cowardice in full relief. Certainly, one almost wishes, with Sarvilaka that Charudatta had not taken pity on such a scamp and saved him from a fate which he richly deserved. Sakara’s attitude and its subsequent failure produce his caustic comments against Vasantasena such as

> “Being hard pursued by us, like a female jackal by dogs in the forest, you are running away quickly, and with speed hastily taking away (with you) my heart together with its stem” (33)

When he was not able to create any effect on Vasantasena he became vindictive and brutal and he wanted to play the role of Duhshasana:

Hereby seizing you by your massive hair, I am going to play (lit. imitate) Duhshasana (34)

Such Sakaras are frequently seen not only in the time of Sudraka, they are eternally present everywhere.

4.16.5 Maitreya—The Trustworthy Friend

Maitreya is neither a glutton nor a buffoon entirely but possesses a bit of these qualities. In *Mrchchhakatika* he appears in the role of Charudatta’s faithful friend and his trustworthy aide.Maitreya is ready to defend him at all times and even to lay down his life for him if needed. The sorrows and joys of his friend arouse corresponding emotions in his heart. He is a simpleminded and lovable companion of Charudatta. It is his blunders rather than his jokes which raise laughter among the spectators. He

neither fully supports Charudatta's acceptance of Vasantasena as his second wife nor does he grant his friend's liberality of responding to a courtesan's love. He protests in both cases but not as an offence, in that sense acting as the conscientious voice. His behaviour in the last Act, including his offer of self immolation again proves his love, attachment and allegiance to Charudatta. Maitreya's allegiance, love and oneness to Charudatta remind us of Banquo's attachment to Macbeth although Macbeth and Charudatta are not same by nature. As for Maitreya, the Vidushaka: "a smile is produced by two things: by a woman reading Sanskrit and by a man singing in a low, sweet tone" (105).

4.16.6 Sarvilaka—The Faithful Lover

Sudraka has depicted a diverse range of characters in *Mrchchhakatika*. On one hand Sarvilaka is a Brahmin and on the other he is a lover. There is no conflict between these two identities but there is a method in his work which surpasses the ethical parametres of an individual. He loves Madanika, the maid and constant companion of Vasantasena and he has consistently tried to make out something to set her free. He was a brahmin, stealing something went beyond his ethics but his profound love for Madanika forced him to steal ornaments from Charudatta's house. He turned into a burglar finding no other alternative. Above all, to set Madanika free by paying a ransom was his sole intention at that point of time. He stole the ornaments which happened to be Vasantasena's. Stealing it from Charudatta's house indicates that Vasantasena, after her first meeting with Charudatta, intentionally kept her ornaments to pay the next visit to him. Sarvilaka, the poor brahmin lover was entirely innocent to know all these, he delivered the ornaments to Madanika as an amount of ransom to set her free. Sarvilaka was not only a faithful and devoted lover, his honesty was his resource. Being asked about the source of money he confessed to Madanika about the theft and on her request returned the ornaments. Madanika on his behalf returned the ornaments to Vasantasena to avoid further complications and she was ultimately set free because of Vasantasena's noble heart. But Sarvilaka's role is not only restricted to a devoted lover, he was also a true friend. His friend Aryaka rebelled against king Palaka for his vulnerability towards his countrymen and when he was in need of Sarvilaka to rescue him from a situation, he immediately left Madanika to help his friend. So, in fulfilling the responsibilities of a lover, a friend and above all a sensible human being Sarvilaka's contribution is immense.

4.16.7 Minor Characters and their Scope

The minor characters in *Mrchchhakatika* have their scope in individual ways.Dhuta, though not frequently mentioned in the play bears special traits that distinguish her from other minor characters. She is shown to be the devoted wife of Charudatta. She gives her most valuable ornaments to her husband when he was in great need. She is projected by Sudraka as a submissive all enduring wife who accepts her husband's faults, if there be any! She observes the rituals such as *Ratnashasthi* for the sake of her family's well being. She does not make any protest when her husband declares his love for the courtesan Vasantasena. She is not even reluctant to share her husband with Vasantasena who will become Charudatta's wife. On one hand Sudraka has empowered Vasantasena regarding her work and also the uplift of her rank while on the other the playwright has disenfranchised Dhuta by making her a mere stereotyped wife who smilingly accepts her husband's flaws, without any protest. It is not that only Vasantasena was an intelligent courtesan, Madanika's words also express her sharpness: "But, Madam, do the female honey bees frequent a mango tree which has lost all its blossoms" (61)

Such remarks prove his taste of appreciating someone of Vasantasena's worth. The Nati plays a balanced role in the play. She, on the course of her conversation with the Sutradhara intimates the audience about several incidents. So her role in the opening scene is important. Samvahaka, although efficient in gambling turns to be a Buddhist monk and proves to be of great help in future by saving Charudatta's life through delivering certain information. The king is not present in the play but left his impression as a ruthless dictator for which Aryaka rebels against him. Sudraka has assigned a special role for Aryaka. He acts as a mouthpiece of the common people and dares to challenge the hypocrisy of King Palaka. So he challenges the force of the state and raised his voice against the arbitrariness of the king. He was imprisoned but that did not wither his spirit away. Finally he became the king. Rohasena, Charudatta's son had helped the readers to justify the title by the mention of the clay cart. It is the context of Rohasena's clay cart which furthers the idea of the golden cart with Vasantasena's financial help. Vasantasena's mother utilizes the scope of being an evidence to the court when she was summoned by the judge to tell the truth about Charudatta. It is she who gave the information to the judge about the love affair between her daughter and Charudatta. The judge could form some concrete impression from Vasantasena's mothers' evidence. The executioners or chandalas played their roles quite appropriately. Sakara's men Vita, left him much earlier and joined Aryaka and Cheta, the another one revealed the truth of Sakara's villainy and Charudatta's innocence in front of the judge, thus helping to save Charudatta's life with his contribution. Thus the minor characters

play their individual roles to initialize the plot and Sudraka has successfully given the representative characters denoting the ranks of society.

4.16.8 Summing Up

From the above discussion of thematic issues and the art of characterization in *Mrchchhakatika* it can be said that Sudraka was much concerned about the changes happening in society and he appropriately inserts them in his text so that it could be used as a relevant social document. It is on this principle of alignment with and understanding of contemporary society that the discussion has been framed here. Additionally, this is a play with relevance for all times, because it deals with issues and character traits that can be universalised. As learners, you need to supplement the discussion here with a thorough reading of the text.

4.16.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answers

1. Discuss the thematic issues of *Mrchchhakatika.*
2. Comment on Sudraka's art of characterization with reference to any two characters of the play.
3. How does justice win over evil in the play? Substantiate your answer with suitable illustrations.

Medium Length Answers

1. How does the author depict the society in *Mrchchhakatika*?
2. Assess the contribution of Sarvilaka in *Mrchchhakatika.*
3. How does the state politics effect the plot of *Mrchchhakatika*?

Short Answers

1. Assess the contribution of minor characters in *Mrchchhakatika.*
2. Love and romance dominate the plot of *Mrchchhakatika*. Do you agree? Justify your answer with suitable illustration.
3. Can Sakara be assessed a true villain? Justify your answer.

Unit 17 □ Society and Gender Equations

Structure

4.17.0 Introduction

Literature's close proximity to the society has always enhanced the scope of the representing the highest intelligent and intellectual social beings, i.e, the human beings of flesh and blood. Society consists of certain components among which gender is a significant one. The nature of most of the societies is patriarchal and such a structure inevitably highlights the gender equations. Such a purpose informs the idea of this Unit, so that learners are able to get a clear conception about the gender issues of *Mrchchhakatika.* They will also be able to compare the position of women in society at that time with the position of women in the 21st century. This will help them forming an idea about the autonomy of women which can be viewed both during Sudraka's time and in the present day society.

4.17.1 Society and Women in Sudraka's Time

An interesting point to commence this discussion is by drawing your attention to the fact that in Sudraka's play, it is not the wife of an otherwise good Brahmin hero but the courtesan who comes into his life and eventually becomes the heroine of the play. The sage Vatsayana, in his treatise on *Erotics* devotes a chapter to the description of the courtesan as a category, which in his understanding, had a certain recognized social status. This perhaps explains why Charudatta did not hesitate to develop an affair with Vasantasena; and how it finally led to their marriage. A courtesan finally receiving the

title of a wife is a dimension offered quite intentionally by the playwright. This is a significant angle of the play and it indicates mixed marriages practiced during those days. Since this play is Sudraka's brain child he had used much of his calibre in reducing caste, class and gender gap from the society.

Going back to the earlier times (the period of *Yajurveda*) the position of women in society was satisfactory. They enjoyed freedom to some extent. During that time women had the freedom to select their husbands. They also gave leadership in the battlefield. Those who were not married and became spinsters till late age were considered as 'kulopa' or 'amaju'. Such terms are found in the works of the famous TheogonistSukumari Bhattacharya. It is true that women at that time did not enjoy a very high status but they were more or less honoured. Marriage was not compulsory till then. But such freedom for women did not last long. The Aryans had experienced the presence of goddesses such as Usha, Ila, Bharati, Saraswati but the presence of those goddesses were soon dominated by the gods. The Vedas present the fact that there were relations between men and women outside marriage and those relations were not prohibited. Sati was not encouraged and widow marriage was in practice. Over all women enjoyed some status.

But the situation did not remain the same during the later periods. The position of women started deteriorating, as society came to increasingly restrict her mobility. Theoretically women did not enjoy property rights. Whatever rights they used to enjoy was gradually being taken away from them, one of the most significant being the denial of rights over her own body. Their direct relation to agricultural production gradually lost its way when the Aryans captivated the prisoners in war and used them in the fields for agriculture. Finally a woman's role was reduced to that of a commodity. She was considered to be a market product that could be brought and consumed by men. She was described in literature as an epitome of beauty but that whole concept of beauty was utilized by men- she did not have any personal access to her body. Her qualities were not at all recognized, she was only valued for her body. Her personal feelings and desires became least significant and she did not have any opportunity to express her opinion. Women in households were mere child-bearing machines, that also preferably to produce male children. She did not have the opportunity to read, and there was no question of her employment. Very few men behaved well with women but mostly showed arrogance and that was much appreciated by the patriarchal society.'Vritya' and 'bharja' were used in a synonymous way. The first denoting a servant and the second

denoting a wife were used in the same status which means the role of a wife was equivalent to the role of a servant. During the Gupta period women from lower class societies enjoyed some freedom to work outside hope to earn money but upper class women enjoyed no such liberty. In Kalidasa's drama *Malavikagnimitra* two women dancers had appeared for a test in dance. Such instances give some idea about women in society.

The number of courtesans, devadasis, dancers, kept women were increasing day by day. One woman with the identity of wife was not sufficient to satisfy her husband. The husbands were in need of such women who could cater to their needs (both physical and intellectual), and who could also entertain them in various ways. Without the presence of such women the vanity and desire of the male were not satisfied.

Courtesans used to be an indispensible part of the society. Many critics consider them as an incurable disease which has to be removed otherwise the marital relationships would soon collapse. The importance of the wife to her husband was gradually decreasing. The courtesans and women of similar professions were greatly accused for casting their spell on the aristocratic male. But there is another side of the coin. Many of those courtesans earned their livelihood by means of this profession. So it is nothing but the biased nature of the society which only accuses the women; not the men who went to them to satisfy their needs.

During the time of Alexander's invasion to India and the subsequent attacks made by Persia, China the safety of women became an issue. The outsiders not only only plundered the land, they used to take women away forcefully from their families and made them their kept. In order to protect women from such menace their mobility was restricted. One can think of the ruthless prescription of Manu on women. According to him, women are not entitled to education and their sole aim of life will be to serve their husbands. She must give birth to a male child. She would always be ready to serve her in-laws. She must not resist to any of their words. She would enjoy no access to her parents' property. She must be accepting the courtesan her husband brings home, and if her husband marries that woman she has to readily accept that. Sudraka portrays women in *Mrchchhakatika* in a way that reflects an amalgamation of all the previous discussions made on women in society during various ages. So one can find that he has gone through the history of the position of women in society and made use of that in this text in a way so that it can give some insights to readers.

4.17.2 Vasantasena—An Exception to the Stereotype?

Vasantasena primarily secures the readers' attention in terms of her beauty. Her mesmerizing beauty attracts lovers from every nook and corner of the society but she deserves more than this. Sudraka, well aware of the position of women in the society of ancient India portrays Vasantasena as an exception to the stereotypical role of a courtesan. Women playing the role of courtesans is an ancient tradition and the term 'courtesan' was used as a 'cultural marker' to differentiate it from the term 'prostitute'. One could also remember the name of Umrao Jan Ada as a reputed courtesan. The courtesans were educated, they used to enjoy various facilities. They used to receive a handsome amount of money from the state, it was the liability of the state to appoint teachers to educate them. Some of them had huge properties either by earning them or by acquiring them from their male suitors and they used them for donation purposes. The society had no objection accepting donations from such courtesans but their position in the society could not be termed 'prestigious' because they provide service using their bodies. Courtesans like Ambapali charged higher rates for every night and this was a sanctioned profession. The Jain texts like *Gnata Dharmakatha* reveals that the courtesans in the Jain society were not only beautiful, they were educated and cultured enough. Although their profession was never valued by the conservationists but the greatest paradox is that those conservationists did not hesitate to appoint courtesans for their needs. History bears enough example to this. It is either in an epic like *The Mahabharata* or any work based on religion we find references to courtesans. Many of them used to donate either for the monasteries or for any noble work. But marriage of a courtesan was not so easy. It is Vasantasena who is blessed with marriage in spite of being a courtesan. And here lies the exception- she is able to break the stereotype of a courtesan who will provide lifelong service to men but ultimately live with venereable diseases and thus ending life with a tragic note because this is the plight of most of the prostitutes and courtesans of all times. Sudraka has empowered her with the virtue of marriage. Vasantasena is therefore Sudraka's answer to the ambivalence surrounding the courtesan as a figure in contemporary society.

Vasantasena does not fit to the submissive category of a courtesan who unwittingly accepts her fate. Sakara offers a large amount of money to her only for one night but she denies because she does not like Sakara. His villainy, lecherousness developed an

impression on her that a woman like her status is not supposed to show. Vasantasena's refusal of Sakara could strengthen her position in society as a courtesan and here lies her departure from the stereotypes. She gives Sakara a blow when irritated and attacked by him. She offers her body to her suitors but not mind. It is only Charudatta whom she willingly offers her mind. The signs of love have become evident in Vasantasena's face as Madanika asks her

"I can see from your ladyship's absent-mindedness that you have fallen in love with somebody whom you have treasured up in your heart"(Act II)

To this she answered, "Rightly have you guessed."(Act II) It is significant to note that woman of her background generally seeks someone who is rich and affluent but she has chosen someone as her true lover who is poor and noble.

Vasantasena's feelings deviate in many ways from a stereotypical courtesan. Mostly courtesans spoke to their maids about how to please the suitor, about their love interest, their manner of wearing dresses but Vasantasena's nature was different. She spoke to Madanika about female desire and her talk was highly professional. A conversation between the two expresses the above-made remark

> Vasantasena: Madanika, girl, do you say this because courtesan courtesy demands it?
>
> Madanika: But mistress, is the courtesy of a girl who lives in a courtesan's house, necessarily false?
>
> Vasantasena: Girl, courtesans meet so many kinds of men that they do learn a false courtesy. (58)

She not only provides such moral support to Madanika, she also set her free with her own money the moment she comes to know that Sarvilaka loved her and wanted to marry her. For a courtesan love hardly matters, it is the body which matters but Vasantasena values feelings of the heart. When Madanika talks about worshipping the male it is Vasantasena who emphasizes on the feelings of heart, therefore instead of worshipping, she would prefer loving a man and that also according to her choice. In most of the Sanskrit dramas it is the heroine or the *nayika* who is in a mode of worshipping someone as her lover first and husband next. She totally submits her 'self' in front of her lover. But to Vasantasena it is absolutely her own choice. Such a standpoint is quite rare among women of Vasantasena's status. It is she who approaches

Charudatta and her boldness in making ‘abhisara’ with him is a rare virtue. Mostly it is men who approach and dominate women in a relation but Vasantasena breaks the conventional role playing of a woman in general and of courtesans in particular.

Vasantasena is exceptional in other ways too. She is not engulfed in darkness for Charudatta’s arrest rather she tries to save him with the help of others. She fights a symbolic battle to transform her role from a courtesan to a lover turned wife and she wins it. So Vasantasena can be considered as an exception to the stereotype, fulfilling almost all the aspects of a modern woman who could take her own decisions, select her lover and above all benefit the society in her own ways. She is modernity re-visited.

4.17.3 Where are the Modern Vasantasenas?

In the previous sub-unit we discussed Vasantasena’s role in breaking the stereotypes of society. She was an icon of her time and this may be one of the reasons why she is still referred in the literary interpretations. *Mrchchhakatika*’s reception is immense and so is Vasantasena’s. Sudraka has portrayed her in a way that she is always relevant. The grooming of the courtesans during those days secures the attention of many to pursue further study on their lives to know them more. If she represents the modern woman then it is definitely to find out if there is any courtesan of Vasantasena’s worth in present day society. Vasantasena could work as a source of inspiration to those who try to get back to the mainstream society and wipe out the tag of the prostitute because it is still a profession treated withambivalence bordering on hypocrisy. Vasantasena in one way has departed from the pages of history and become a living symbol. It is not only Vasantasena, but love and interaction between characters from two different class and caste has been well addressed by Sudraka. One could think of Madanika’s love affair which finally leads to marriage, indicating some sort of positive social change.

4.17.4 Summing Up

All the discussions related to society and women in Sudraka’s time gives us a comprehensive idea about man-woman relationship, its various aspects and also the position of the courtesans. This unit works as a source to know about society’s attitude to such women, and above all it develops the question of women’s empowerment.

4.17.5 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Discuss the position of women in society during Sudraka's time.
2. Do you think Vasantasena defies the stereotype? Justify your answer.

Medium length Questions

1. Comment on how Sudraka deals with the issue of courtesan culture in *Mrchchhakatika*.
2. Objectification of woman perpetuates gender politics. Do you agree? Justify your answer with illustrations.

4.17.6 Suggested Readings

(Comprehensive list for Units 19–21)

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Unit 18 □ The Play in Subsequent Reception

Structure

4.18.0 Introduction

Mrcchakatika, the masterpiece of Sudraka enjoyed an active life on stage, through translation and many adaptations. This unit proposes to provide some information regarding the subsequent reception of the text, both in India, and in the West. The purpose of reading through these subsequent adaptations is to locate the contemporaneity of the classical text.

4.18.1 *Mrcchakatika* in Translation

It is difficult to determine whether the original version of *Mrcchakatika* was exactly the same as we read it now. The present version of the playtext took its form around the thirteenth century CE, when a scholar from Mithila named Prithvidhara, wrote a commentary on it. As we have come to know from Prithvidhara, Mricchakatika uses a wide range of Prakrit dialects. Besides Sanskrit, eight Prakrit dialects can be recognised in *Mricchakatika*: Sauraseni, Maharashtri, Avantika, Pracya, Magadhi, Sakari, Candali, Dakshi. Prithvidhara's commentary, along with those by Lalla Dikshita and Jivananda Vidyasagar (both in the early nineteenth century) became a major source for the later scholars while working on subsequent translations of *Mricchakatika*. Other regional poets have also adapted the play in several ways— for instance, we may refer to the 14th century play *Bhairavananda,* by the poet Manika from Nepal. The second half of this play seems to be based on *Mrcchakatika*. [Some portions of this unit are drawn from

the present module writer's previously published paper, "Sudraka's *Mricchakatika*: a Journey with the Text under the CBCS"—full citation given at the end of the unit]

The play, with its dynamic representation of life and realism, attracted foreign scholars since the colonial times. Horace Hayman Wilson, a surgeon general employed by the East India Company, was perhaps the first British translator who rendered it in English in 1826 before it came to be translated into French, German and other modern Indian languages, too. Another version of Mricchakatika in 1896 was made by Narayan Ballal Godbole; he used all existing versions of the play available from different places like Tanjore, Nagpur and Jeypore in Bengal.

For the early twentieth century readers and audiences in England and America, the most popular version of *Mrcchakatika* was Arthur William Ryder's translation (1905). This was based on a 1904 Sanskrit version adapted by Kashinath Pandurang Parab. While translating the play, Ryder used an admixture of prose and verse (like the Sanskrit original) attempted sincerely to retain the drama, humour and sensibility of the original In this version, Sakara's pronunciation of 's' as 'shh', under the guise of country slang in English, somehow manages to render the original flavour—not fully, however. Arthur Symons' translation, which came out in 1919, was also popular in the western academic circle.

Among the Indian scholars translating or writing commentary on the text, the great Sanskritist scholar Sukumari Bhattacharya deserves a special mention, for her Bengali translation and extensive discussion on the play. Jaya Sankar Lal Tripathy's work is also commendable for his extensive Hindi commentary on the Sanskrit original. Reader curious to know more about the play's interesting production history, may also look into the version edited by Arvind Sharma, which contains an English translation of the play" as adapted for the stage by A. L. Basham" (State university of New York Press, 1993). Another good translation, academically much acclaimed, was made in the 1970s by the noted scholar M.R. Kale, published by Motilal Banarasidas, the reputed publishing house of Sanskrit literature in translation. With commentaries and annotations, it has long been held as an authentic translation, which has recently been edited by Kuljeet Singh for a Worldview edition, first published in 2015.

4.18.2 Adaptations in the West

Of many a gems extant in the rich oeuvre of Sanskrit drama, *Mṛcchakaṭika* is one of the most widely performed in Europe, which confirms its positive reception among

the western audiences. The play has been a major performative stance which successfully generated the western peoples' interest in ancient Indian dramaturgy. In the nineteenth century, through the colonial connections, the play travelled to Europe and came to be widely adapted for stage productions. In 1850, Gérard de Nerval and Joseph Méry brought to stage a French adaptation titled *Le Chariot d'enfant*—basically emphasizing the romantic plot, which suited the French audiences' fascination with amorous storylines. Victor Barrucand, on the other hand, emphasized the rebellion-oriented political theme. His production was an "anarchist" version titled *Le Chariot de terre cuite*, produced by the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris (1895). In English, A. W. Ryder's version was performed several times, for instance— at the Hearst Greek Theatre in Berkeley in 1907, and later at the Neighbourhood Playhouse in New York, in 1924. This off-broadway performance in New York included two Indian musicians, with their *sitar* and *esraj*, playing the background score, along with an otherwise American cast.

Ryder's version of *Mrcchakatika* never failed to attract the American audiences. In 1926, it was again successfully performed at the Potboiler Art Theater in Los Angeles, starring such notable actors of the American stage as James A. Marcus, Symona Boniface and Gale Gordon. Another successful production was staged in 1953, at the Theater de Lys.

4.18.3 Adaptations on Indian stage and screen

During the colonial period, the play's first Marathi production, based on the version, *Sangita Mricchakatika* by Govind Ballal Deval, was performed by the Lalit Kalotsav Mandali in Pune, in 1887. For his adaptation, Deval chiefly relied on an earlier version by the noted scholar and lexicographer Parashuram Godbole, published in 1862.

In the post-Independence period, the Hindustani Theatre Group staged a Hindi-Urdu version of the play in 1958. This version, called *Mitti ki Gadi*, was translated by Begum Qudsia Zaidi and Noor Nabi Abbasi; and the play was performed under the direction of Habib Tanvir, a celebrated theatre-personality. Tanvir brought together professional, urban actors with a group of folk artistes from Chattisgarh. Highlighting the play's political subtext, this adaptation merged the 'dhrupadi' tradition of Sanskrit drama with modern dramaturgy and folk theatre idioms, rich in music and dialogue. It was staged in Bengali by the Bohurupi theatre group, with Kumar Roy as director. The performance produced by the theatre group called 'Samikshan', also deserves mention. This produc-

tion revived the Bengali translation by Jyotirindranath Tagore, elder brother of Rabindranath.

Another famous translation by Mohan Rakesh, the noted Hindi playwright, has been successfully staged several times by the National School of Drama in 1992, 1998 and 2008. The 1992 adaptation sought to redefine Sanskrit theatre as an "ensemble of alienation, connection, speech, story-telling *et al*" (Singh, 'Introduction' xvii), which are considered to be essential elements for modern-day acting as well. The 2008 production focused mainly on the erotic elements in the play, introducing erotic gestures and sculpture-based postures through physical acting (*angika abhinaya*). The Worldview edition contains a photographic essay, which may give some ideas about the performative approach undertaken in this particular production. A recent adaptation of *Mricchakatika*, translated into Bengali as *Matir Gadi*, was produced by 'Naye Natua', with Gautam Haldar as the director and script-writer (2019). This version, chiefly in Bengali, sometimes uses a multilingual form, inserting Odiya, Hindi and even some English words in the mouth of characters. 'Naye Natua' also used the folk-theatre form, whereas scenes featuring Vasantasena's singing and dancing betray forms of *dhrupadi nritya* (poorly translated as 'classical dance').

The text has also been adapted for the silver screen, more than once. Based on *Mrcchakatika*, and directed by Mohan Dayaram Bhavnani, *Vasantasena* was the first Kannada silent film, made in 1931, starring Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay in the lead role, and Enakaasi Rama Rao, Nalini Tarkhad in other important roles. Another film version of *Vasantasena*, also in Kannada (not a silent film, a 'talkie'), appeared in 1941, featuring Laksmi Bai and Subbayyah Naidu in the lead roles, Nagendra Rao as Sakara, and Chandramma as Dhuta. It was produced by Meyappa Chettiyar, R. Nagendra Rao and the lead actor himself; Rammyyur Shirur was the director. The same title and the fact that both movies were in Kannada, sometimes create a confusion between the 1931 and the 1941 versions. In 1967, the Telugu film called *Vasantha Sena* featured as a successful production, directed by B. S. Ranga, and produced under the banner of Vikram Studios. Akkineni Nageswara Rao and Krishna Kumari were in the main roles, and S. Rajeswara Rao was the music director. Girish Karnad adapted the text with a modern interpretation: his *Utsav* (1984) was not a commercial success, but well-performed—with Sekhar Suman as Charudatta and the iconic Bollywood heroine Rekha Ganeshan as Vasantasena, Sashi Kapoor as the villainous Sakara (projected as less

despicable in the movie) and Shankar Nag as Sarvilaka(Sajjal in the film). Lakshmikanta-Pyarelal composed some beautiful tunes for the movie, including the one ("Main kyun bekha") sung by Lata Mangeskar and Asha Bhosle, and "Mere man baaje mridang" sung by Anuradha Pardhwal. Using Vatsayana (played by Amjad Khan), the legendary author of *Kamasutra,* as the narrator, the director touches upon an intertextual mode of narrative, focusing poetically on the amorous aspect of the story. The name *Utsav*, corresponding to the festive setting of the movie, refers to the revelries of Basanta Utsav, a spring festival in honour of the god of love—which is merely hinted at in the original play.

In many ways, this screen-adaptation retells the story from a radically different perspective, which received negative comments from the conservative circles. *Utsav* is a version that focuses chiefly on women, giving agency to both Vasantasena and Dhuta (named Aditi in this version, played by Anuradha Patel). Dhuta is no longer the all-accepting dedicated wife, she can give away her necklace to stand by her husband, but does not silently accept his liaisons with a courtesan. However, at one point in the film, the two women are face to face, showing a female solidarity. Aditi herself introduces Vasantasena to her son, as another mother-figure. The film creates a story around the background of Madanika, to throw light on the lives of 'dasi's in ancient India. Sajjal. Unlike Sarvilaka in the original, is a professional thief, not a first-time thief who steals simply to buy freedom for his beloved. However, his love for Madanika appears to be genuine in the movie as well. Rekha is wonderful in her role as the glamorous, noble-hearted courtesan, whereas the young Sekhar Suman looks somewhat timid in the role of Charudatta. The ending, however, is different: it shows the happy reunion of Charudatta and Aditi, and Vasantasena goes back alone, sad but independent, to her courtesan's quarter. She finds the humiliated Sakara, drunken and repentant, fallen at her door, crying and calling her name. She supports him to stand up, and takes him in.

Though critically acclaimed as a film-adaptation, retold from a modern and insightful perspective, presented with good screenplay, acting and music, *Utsav* failed at the box office, causing a huge loss to the actor-producer Sashi Kapoor.

4.18.4 Summing Up

In the tradition of Sanskrit drama, more than thousand years old, *Mrcchakatika* holds a unique position. It is not only a love story of Charudatta and Vasantasena; rather

it gives a powerful and vivid picture of life with all its social, political and religious elements, which gives the text, however ancient, a contemporary look. Its active stage life, both in India and abroad, continues to show its enduring quality across ages and cultures. The major points can be summed up as follows:

- *Mrcchakatika* has been widely translated and adapted in English, French and several modern Indian languages.
- Arthur W. Ryder's translation held popularity on the American stage for the first half of the twentieth century.
- In India, the play's several versions, using a mixture of folk-theatre and modern dramaturgy, came to be adapted and directed by worthy theatre-personalities like Habib Tanvir, Kumar Roy and Girish Karnad. *Utsav*, Karnad's radical film version, however, failed at the box office.

4.18.5 Comprehension Exercises

1. i) Discuss the early translations and commentaries on *Mricchakatika*.
   ii) Comment briefly on the translation by A. W. Ryder.
   iii) Discuss the major productions based on *Mrcchakatika,* in the West.
2. i) Comment on the stage adaptations of *Mrcchakatika*, in India after the Independence.
   ii) Briefly discuss the Kannada film versions of Vasantasena.
   iii) Discuss how Girish Karnad's *Utsav* has retold the story from a different perspective.

4.18.6 Suggested Reading

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