



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519

IJSR 2019; 5(3): 81-82

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www.anantaajournal.com

Received: 22-03-2019

Accepted: 24-04-2019

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The role of rohasena, a child character in the title of the play ‘*Mṛcchakaṭika*’ of śūdraka

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Introduction

The clay-car episode of Rohasena, a child character in Śūdraka’s *Mṛcchakaṭika* has a very important role in the title of the play. The Sanskrit word *Mṛcchakaṭika* means a car made by clay. The literal meaning of the title ‘*Mṛcchakaṭika*’ is ‘the Earthen Toy-cart.’

“मृदो मृत्तिकायाः शकटिका शकटं यस्मिन्निति मृच्छकटिकम्”¹

Generally, a play is named after the hero or the heroine in Sanskrit drama. The title is also decided with the help of the central theme of a play. But these general conventions are not followed by the dramatist Śūdraka. The incident which provides the play’s title occurs in the beginning of Act VI, i.e. the middle of the play. Initially, it might seem an insignificant incident but, undoubtedly, it is in the center of the play. It is also noteworthy that ‘the title of the play is ironic.’² The very first word of the title is ‘*mṛit*’ that means ‘clay.’ But the story of the play revolves around the golden ornaments. For a very short time, Cārudatta’s little son, Rohasena, is shown with a clay cart. Here, Rohasena’s desire for a golden cart becomes helpful in the development of the plot. However, the importance of the clay cart cannot be refuted and will be explained in the following paragraphs.

In the 6th act of the play we find the ‘clay-car episode’ in the context of in very unimportant incident. Rohasena is the son of a poor Brahmin Cārudatta, who was once very rich. One day he was playing with a golden toy car of a rich merchant’s son. After some time when the merchant’s son snatched his toy-car from Rohasena, he began to weep bitterly demanding “I want that golden car”.

“तामेव सौवर्णशकटिकां देहि ।”³

Cārudatta’s maid, Radanika, tried to soothe him by giving him a clay toy car, but in vain. Rather Rohasena angrily asked, “किं मम एतया मृत्तिकाशकटिकया।”⁴ “what shall I do with a clay-car? I want that golden car only”.

Radanika tried to soothe him again by telling him that his poor father could not afford a golden car for him.

“जात, कुतोऽस्माकं सुवर्णव्यवहारः । तातस्य पुनरपि ऋद्धया सुवर्णशकटिका क्रीडिष्यसि ।”⁵

But Rohasena did not stop crying. Then Cārudatta’s ladylove salankara Vasantasena came forward to stop his crying she unfurled all her ornaments, filled his toy clay-car and told Rohasena to make a golden car with those ornaments.

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“तद् गृहाणैतमलङ्कार । सौबर्णशकटिकां कारय ।”

In this context, the play has been titled ‘*Mṛcchakaṭika*’. However question arises whether the title of this play is appropriate or not. Vasantasena felt pity for Cārudatta’s son Rohasena out of her love for Cārudatta. So, she tried to console the boy by giving him all her golden ornaments and told him to make a golden car. If we judge from this context, the play should be titled ‘*Subarna sakatikam*’ instead of ‘*Mṛcchakaṭika*’. Perhaps the playwright had some specific purpose behind naming the play as ‘*Mṛcchakaṭika*’. In the 6th chapter of ‘Sahityadarpana’, in the context of the title of the play it has been said that, the title of a play expresses a deeper meaning of the ‘Nataka’.

“ नाम कार्यं नाटकस्य गर्भितार्थप्रकाशनम् ” 7

Here the word ‘Nataka’ has been applied metaphorically. In spite of violating the holy-custom, the play wright titled so for a significant introduction.

The conflict between good and evil of the society has been portrayed through symbols in the play in one side the king Palaka and his brother –in-law Shokar is rich, powerful and a villain. In other side, Cārudatta, Sharbilak, Sangbahak, Madanika, Radanika-all are honest but poor. The only exception is Vasantasena, because she is rich. In the sixth act, when she became devoid of any ornaments, then she became a part of that group and became eligible to be the wife of Cārudatta. Then the clay-car full of golden ornaments became the symbol of honest characters who were outwardly poor and fragile but inwardly very strong and valuable like pure gold. So, the title is appropriate.

Besides, when the clay-car turns into a golden car, it becomes a symbol of triumph of poverty over riches, decency over qualities and good qualities over bad qualities and decency over deception. The title is apt in these context also.

To conclude it can be said that the characters of *Śūdraka* are from the different sections of the society. The different sections of the society. The merchant turns into a common man by losing his wealth. The prostitute leaves his mansion and expresses her sympathy for the poor. The Brahmin leaves his profession and becomes a gambler. A cow-man acquires ‘Rajpada’ all these are exceptions for a traditional play. So, it is normal that the title of the play will be innovative.

Notes

1. *Mṛcchakaṭika*-edited by U.C. Bandyapadhyā & A.Bandyapadhyā- introduction
2. Wells, Henry W., ‘A Prakaraṇa: The Little Clay Cart,’ The Classical Drama of India. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963. pp. 131-166. Print. p. 141
3. ibid - 6th act, p-295
4. ibid -6th act, p-295
5. ibid - 6th act, p-295
6. ibid - 6th act, p-298
7. Sahitya Darpana, 6th act

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12. Karmarkar RD. *Mṛcchakaṭika* of Śūdraka (with English translation and notes). Delhi: Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, 2002.
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18. Wells Henry W. ‘A Prakaraṇa: The Little Clay Cart,’ The Classical Drama of India. Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963.
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