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Social State in the play Mrichchhakatika:

The ancient Sanskrit play Mrichchhakatika was written by King Sudraka (Ujjaini) in around 3rd century A.D. It is considered as one of the oldest of all the so far known Sanskrit plays in Indian literature. An exaggerated tongue-in-cheek self-praise by the author begins as:

"Who vied with elephants in lordly grace;
whose eyes were those of the Chakrabird
that feeds on moonbeams; glorious his face
as the full moon; his person, all have heard,"

No other work is ascribed to him and we have no direct information about him till date beyond the somewhat fanciful and exaggerated self-praising statement in the prologue of this play. According to the prologue, Sudraka was a Kshatriya king of some country, brave and handsome in appearance knowing Rigveda, Samveda and mathematics, knew the art of regarding courtesans and the science of training elephants; was a devotee of Lord Siva and had performed the Asvamedha sacrifice. The great king died at the ripe age of hundred years and ten days. Due to lack of information, facts and evidences the authorship of this play is still uncertain.

There are many theories prevailing about the same but none of one them could be considered reliable.

The play is set in Ujjain, an ancient city between the 3rd century B.C and 1st century A.D and during the reign of King Palaka. It is a story of Charudatta, an impoverished but charitable young Brahmin and a ~~very~~ very attractive and exquisitely courtesan, Vasantasena.

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Although they had a mutual amorous relationship, their love is threatened by the mischievous schemes of villainous and vulgar courtiers Sansthanaka, related to the tyrannical king Palak. Although they had a happy reunion and ultimately success at the end of the play.

The play differs from other classical plays in Sanskrit as it differs from the traditions, set in the *Natya Shashtra*, which deals with the fact that a drama should deal with the achievements of the nobility without any involvement of commonplace characters. This play is, on the other hand broadly social and realistic. The play deals with the people of various professions, society, in this play is very much highlighted. The play reflects on the state and situation of the society of that time and the social conventions, manners, practices, including the function of Government, administration of the existing legal system, political unrest, social conventions etc. As a matter of fact, unlike the other prominent plays, *Mrichchhakatika* does not follow any mythological or epical matters. The characters are drawn from the mundane world. The people belong from virtuous trades, gambling, thieves, slaves, selfish exploiters and many men and women from the same ground. Even the protagonist of the play, Chasudutta belong to a very common place not from a royal or noble family. The heroine Vasantasena is a courtesan, who enjoys comfort and riches but she also is very far from the social dignity. The dramatist is very much concerned about the overall state rather than the achievement of any particular heroic personality.

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Though, no king is bodily introduced, the political state of time as shown in the play was monarchy. The King made people discontent, ~~aggressive~~ and rebellious. The tyrannical monarchy led to an armed rebellious and the monarch was overthrown and a new one, usually from the rebels, was installed. The King had an administrative machinery with a number of counsellors, an army with a head. There was a regular system of judicial administration as evident in Charudatta's trial on the charge of the murder of Vasantasena. The sentence of the capital punishment, however, could be passed and revoked as done by Palak and Arjuna, respectively, in the play. An absolute power in the rule of the land was vested on the king, whose nature and performances shaped the destiny of the city state of the time.

The caste system was also prevalent at the time as indicated in the play. The ~~varnas~~ Brahmins formed the chief caste and were held in a high esteem. They were allowed high positions in the court and in the services of the government, as illustrated in the case of Charudatta, enjoyment of the royal favour from the new king of Arjuna. As far as religion was concerned, Hindu rituals and rites were the usual ~~practice~~ practice and performed with much zeal and interest. Yet, Buddhism though on its wane, existed and the Buddhist monks were seen and even respected. It was a Buddhist monk who saved Vasantasena, nursed her and gave her shelter in a Buddhist monastery.

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There are many rich and successful traders in the play as the trade and commerce were carried on in a large scale. Liberal donation by Charudatta well score out the same. The young rich boys plays with the toys made of gold. Charudatta's young son also wants to play with a golden cart like his other rich friends. Vasantasena used to live a life full of art, music and entertainment, they were unable to get a position of general woman like mother, sister, daughter or wife. Such a courtesan's requirement was a royal sanction to get herself adopted to the social status of a general woman. Only under the royal sanction, Vasantasena could be a legal wife of Charudatta.

The dramatist also is not found blind to the contemporary vicious activities, villainous schemes and intrigues. Thus gambling was very common at that time and the act of violence on a gambler for his default was allowed. Several gamblers, openly functioning, are found in the play, as for example, Samvahaka was failed to pay the amount which was a due, and its paid by Vasantasena, who was very kind to him. Samvahaka, a Brahmana, is shown indulging burglary to secure the release of his beloved woman Madanika the slave-maid of Vasantasena. The man stole ^{the} very ornaments of Vasantasena, by breaking in Charudatta's house, which was kept by Charudatta's friend, Maitreya. Later he returned the casket of Jewellery. Another evil was evil of slavery, which was quite common. At that time a slave can be bought and sold and ransomed by the payment of money or gold, as seen in the above case of Madanika and Samvahaka. However, the play, however exhibits music parties and love for art and painting, particularly common to the people of high standard and social eminence.



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