

Introduction

Cārudatta in Love,
or,
How to Appreciate *The Little Clay Cart*

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The play *Mṛcchakaṭīka* or *The Little Clay Cart*, attributed to a certain King Śūdraka, about whom we have no reliable information,¹ has always been praised for its “realism” in a body of literature—not simply drama (*nāṭya*) but all of Sanskrit poetry (*kāvya*)²—noted rather for its refined, idealizing, courtly sentiment centering in erotic fascination. We welcome *The Little Clay Cart*’s bourgeois setting and picaresque characters, more typical of the less exalted genre of story literature (*kathā*) than of *kāvya*. Critics likewise praise it for the sweetness of its protagonists, the Brahman merchant Cārudatta and the noble prostitute Vasantasenā, whose love for each other, in the words of S. K. De, is “pure, strong and tender” for all the simplicity of its presentation.³ Yet this blanket praise, which extends to Śūdraka’s “genius” as a constructor of plots and a writer of muscular verse, conceals certain problems. How realistic, for instance, can melodrama be? In what sense can Cārudatta’s love be called “strong,” even if we were willing to admit that it is “pure and tender?” What was the meaning to a contemporary audience of a play which celebrates the ascendancy of an obscure “man of heart” who never acts in his own behalf, though he spends a remarkable amount of time lamenting his condition? Criticism of the play has to this time hardly scratched the surface.

The principal problem posed by the play is the hero’s displacement, and this inevitably involves us in the question of his status as a lover.⁴

The Little Clay Cart

Like the hero (*nāyaka*) of every play treating love in a serious way, Cārudatta is a *rasika* ("man of feeling") or *sahṛdaya* ("man of heart")—synonymous terms for the idealized representative of India's classical aesthetic culture. But Cārudatta, an impoverished Brahman merchant, is different from most *sahṛdayas* represented in drama.

First of all, most of them are kings, whose charismatic centrality to the sociopolitical system is taken for granted. Cherished simultaneously as master, friend, childlike protégé, and lover, such a figure's sensibility represents the privilege of power and sets the standard of taste and feeling for the whole society. This situation is apt enough: few would disagree with the idea that India's aesthetic culture radiated out from the courts. But more important as a marginalizing factor than Cārudatta's hybrid social class as such—a Brahman functioning as a Vaiśya⁵—is his poverty. There are other nonroyal *nāyakas*, such as Mādhava of Bhavabhūti's *Mālatīmādhava* (eighth century), who like Cārudatta is a Brahman but nevertheless functions as a typical lovestruck hero (*dhīralalita nāyaka*).⁶ We should not forget either that when we speak of Indian court culture we are in fact referring to a hybrid of the courts and the urban elite.⁷ But Cārudatta cannot be a Mādhava primarily because he has the not-so-curious idea that beautiful women belong to the world of wealth and power in which he no longer has a share.

Thus, the problem of the hero's displacement hinges on the barrier lack of means creates between the refined *rasika* sensibility and the *nāgarika* life-style that typically goes with it. This in turn implicates love, because erotic feeling (*śṛṅgāra*) is at the very heart of the *rasika* sensibility and indeed of the whole classical Indian aesthetic.⁸ What does it mean to be a man of heart or feeling with tastes and inclinations that one cannot afford to indulge? No doubt there were many real-life *sahṛdayas* in Cārudatta's situation, and we would probably not be wrong in seeing this play as speaking directly to their concerns—and incidentally providing them with a wish-fulfillment conclusion.

Let us look first at Cārudatta's credentials as a *sahṛdaya*. We see from his appreciative remarks on music at the beginning of Act 3 (stanzas 3-5) that he has command over the technical vocabulary of connoisseurship, but, more important, that he has the *sahṛdaya*'s imaginative capacity, as when he praises the lute as "companion to the longing lover's heart" and "the delight that increases the passion of the impassioned" and hears in the singer's voice the hidden presence of a beautiful woman.

He thus exhibits that subtly erotic sensibility that Ānandavardhana sees as the lifeblood of the “poetic universe” (see note 8). Cārudatta also has clear—if erotically muted—links with the *nāgarika* as described in *Kāmasūtra* 1.4: I am thinking especially of the litter of musical instruments that makes the Brahman thief Śarvilaka think he has broken into the house of a dance teacher (3.18+). But more important than these more or less technical recommendations is Cārudatta’s tenderheartedness (*sānukrośatva*, *hṛdayasaṃvāda*). All *sahṛdaya* heroes and heroines have this quality to a marked degree, as when Udayana, the royal protagonist of Bhāsa’s *Svapnavāsavadatta* (*Vision of Vāsavadattā*), refuses to disturb a bough on which male and female bees may be enjoying love. The princess Padmāvati in the same play falls in love with Udayana simply by hearing an account of his agonies upon the supposed death of his wife Vāsavadattā. Tenderheartedness is thus a sympathy that unites all exemplary “persons of heart” in a self-conscious community of feeling. Cārudatta has this to an exceptional degree; indeed, we know from several passages that he has lost his father’s fortune by lavishing wealth on those who have provoked his sympathetic response, and throughout the play we see ample evidence of his generosity even with the little he has.

The point of this review is to see that the aesthetic, erotic, social, and ethical features of “being a person of heart” (*sahṛdayatva*) are all part of one emotional complex. The last item—the ethical perspective—is of special import in *The Little Clay Cart*. Much is made of Cārudatta’s “virtue” or “merit” (*guṇa*) in this play. But when we examine this concept we see that it is in fact a synonym for sympathetic generosity, that is, acting on the basis of “concord of heart” (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*)—what in aesthetic terms is the basis of *rasa*-feeling.⁹ In other words, here we have a concept of *dharma* (moral duty) that has little to do with ritualistic obedience to caste norms and such (*svadharmā*), but rather represents an aesthetic-sentimental ideal parlayed into a utopian ethical principle. If everyone were like Cārudatta—if everyone acted upon the impulses of a refined and generous sensibility—then *dharma* would mean the satisfaction of the heart’s desire for love, friendship, and an honored place in a world that set the truth of inner goodness over words and appearances. The ending of the play is utopian in just this sense: Cārudatta is made a prince, Vasantasena is released from prostitution, a fugitive becomes king, a former thief becomes a minister, and so on. All men of heart emerge from the obscurity where they had been marginalized by

The Little Clay Cart

a ruling class that cared only for money, power, and luxury, to inaugurate a new world order based on respect for the sentimentalized concept of virtue as sympathetic generosity (*guṇa* as *sahṛdayatva*). Cārudatta even extends his generosity to his former tormentor, the Śakāra, the previous king's brother-in-law and a grotesque parody of what it is to be a *nāgarika* without the inner sensibility that makes for true aesthetic taste and courtly erotism.

The mention of the Śakāra brings us back to the question of Cārudatta's character as a lover. Here we encounter a fundamental paradox. The logic of the play demands that we think of Vasantasenā as the ideal beloved (*nāyikā*) of Cārudatta. She is the beautiful woman not of the court who in the corrupt world order can only function as a prostitute, and whose *dharma*, we are reminded in the play (1.31-32), is to give herself to whoever can afford her. But beneath the veneer of appearances she is as true a heart as Cārudatta himself, praised by those who know as the virtual goddess of the city (1.27, 1.55+, 5.12, 6.14, 8.39). Thus we would expect Cārudatta, who in fact shares this view, to act upon it or at least to pine for her secretly. And to a limited extent he does. When accident takes her to his house in Act 1 he remarks to himself:

Ah, it is Vasantasenā—

The desire inspired by whom has, with the end of my wealth,
Subsided within my body like the anger of a coward.¹⁰

Such words would seem to indicate that he has longed for Vasantasenā even since he met her in the garden of the Love-god's shrine, as she has for him (e.g., 1.32+). But Cārudatta can never make up his mind which Vasantasenā he believes in—the fellow *sahṛdayā* or the venal prostitute who belongs to the power structure from which he is barred. To wit, the ninth verse of the fifth act:

The man who has money will be her lover
for she can be won with wealth.

(No, she can be won with virtues!)

As wealth has abandoned us,
so she will abandon me.¹¹

Thus Cārudatta as a lover is a great puzzle. Returning to the verse cited above ("Ah, it is Vasantasenā . . ."), we can say only that this is a very tepid response for any hero of Sanskrit drama who has been pining

for his dream woman. Externally his speech is elegant and deferential: disgusted by the Śākāra's pursuit of her he calls her rather a "women fit to be worshipped as a goddess" (*devatopasthānayogyā yuvatir iyam*), and Vasantasenā is sufficiently impressed by signs of his urbanity (*nāgarikatva*) to plan a strategy for seeing him again. But when he walks her home at the end of Act 1 he recites a verse on the moon that seems to raise erotic expectations only to dash them with a comic ineptitude worthy of his rival the Śākāra:

Behold the rising moon, pale as a lovely woman's cheek,
beacon of the highway, with his retinue of stars,
whose bright rays fall amidst the darkness
like streams of milk in liquid mud.¹²

And this is the way it goes throughout the play, with only one significant exception, which I will describe in a moment, in Act 5. Although we have ample evidence of Vasantasenā's pining for Cārudatta (absorption in a love-portrait, inconsequential conversation, virtual death with his name on her lips, etc.), there is not one direct indication in the play of his pining for her. In the scene mentioned earlier in which, walking home at night from a concert, he reveals a sensitivity to music's erotic overtones, one would expect this sensitivity to lead, as it would for any other love-hero in such a situation, to some recollection of Vasantasenā's beauty—but it never comes. He falls into an easy sleep a short time later, having thought of her only in connection with his promise to guard her ornaments. In fact his reference to her in this regard is hardly flattering: he wants the Vidūṣaka to keep the jewels out of the inner quarters because "they have been worn by a public woman" (*prakāśanārīdhṛta eṣa*, 3.7).¹³ In Act 7, though Cārudatta ostensibly waits for Vasantasenā's arrival in an abandoned garden at the edge of town (a situation fraught with potential for poetic expressions of longing), he never spares a thought for her, even before he meets the future King Āryaka who arrives in the coach that was supposed to carry her. In acts 9 and 10, when he is, respectively, on trial for murdering her and on the way to execution, his thoughts concerning her (with one formulaic exception) have nothing to do with her own plight but rather with the ignominy that has fallen on himself in being accused of murder and theft.¹⁴ Cārudatta is an extremely self-absorbed lover—not in the sense that he loses interest in the mundane world that surrounds him, as other love-heroes do,

The Little Clay Cart

but in the sense that he can only think of his own misery, society's apparent disregard and contempt of him.

Yet there is the blip in Act 5: Vasantasenā comes to his house as an *abhisārikā*¹⁵ and teases and cajoles him into making love with her. It is hard to avoid the impression of a certain maternal solicitation in this scene: a beautiful woman wise in the ways of the world doting on a bashful adolescent. But, surprisingly enough, Cārudatta rises to the challenge with the aplomb of an inveterate man of feeling (*rasika*), delivering several erotic (*śṛṅgāra*) verses on the torture of his lonely vigils, the ecstasy of her touch, the excitatory stimulus of the rains, and so on. We should not downplay this scene, because it does reveal Cārudatta's *rasika* soul in the classical pattern; yet we cannot help seeing it as something of an irregularity in this play. It establishes Cārudatta's credentials as a bona fide *sahṛdaya*, alive to the quasi-mystical satisfactions of erotic thrill, but it does not tip the scales in the direction of erotic love as a rapturous transcendence of mundanity as opposed to sentiment as an ethical principle.

To see this in all its clarity we have to move to the climactic moment in Act 10 when Vasantasenā virtually rises from the dead to save him. Just before she arrives, while he is still in the depths of despair, he invokes her in heaven to bear witness to his innocence:

If *dharma* still prevails for me,
ruined by Fortune through the lies of the powerful,
may she herself, in Indra's world or elsewhere,
remove my crime by her own true being.¹⁶

The structural opposition expressed here is between true being (*svabhāva*) and virtue (*guṇa*) on the one hand and false speech (*vākya*) and wealth-and-power (*dhana, artha*) on the other. Cārudatta has so little confidence in his own speech as to have allowed himself to subscribe to the confession that his enemy has put into his mouth. But whereas before this he has always tended to include Vasantasenā among those who live in and for the world of appearances, now he explicitly includes her in the circle of mute, inglorious *sahṛdayas* who constitute the inner substance, the *svabhāva*, of society. If *dharma* is a matter of *svabhāva* rather than *vākya*, then somehow a miracle will happen and Vasantasenā will penetrate the tissue of corrupt social discourse with the hidden truth. And, of course, this is precisely what happens. She arrives in the nick of time: he describes

her in two apt similes, like “rain to a withering crop” and “saving knowledge to a dying man.”¹⁷

Thus we must evaluate the significance of love in this play in the socioethical context we have described. The issue here is not momentary transcendence in an aesthetic-erotic bliss and its problematic consequences, as we find in other plays (e.g., Kālidāsa’s *Śakuntalā*). Rather, the accent is on love as the most concrete instance of *sahṛdaya* solidarity. Love is the *svabhāva*, the true being, that triumphs over deceptions. As Cārudatta says to his savioress:

You yourself have redeemed the body
that was being destroyed because of you.
How powerful is the lovers’ union,
when even the dead come back to life!¹⁸

For the *sahṛdaya* on the margins of wealth and power, true feeling (*rasa*) is both more and less than a rapturous shiver of delight. It is the ticket to utopia that the proprietors of the beautiful have corrupted by setting a price on it, that is, by making it a matter of style rather than substance.¹⁹

That Vasantasenā be the pursuer rather than the pursued in this love affair is, then, of critical importance for two reasons. Cārudatta is a symbol of the *sahṛdaya*’s essential purity, which in this context means a free-floating emotional sympathy devoid (at least ostensibly) of self-interest. Taking a hint from the vaguely Buddhist atmosphere of the play, we might refer to him as a secular Bodhisattva, interested in everyone’s salvation but his own. Such a function does not sit well with erotic infatuation, which removes lovers emotionally or psychologically from society into a charmed private sphere. Nevertheless, erotic feeling (*śṛṅgāra*) is too important to the *rasika* sensibility for it to be altogether absent. Thus it is given a certain scope to appear in its customary dimensions, but beyond that it is sublimated as a form of devotion to goodness (*guṇa*), not essentially different from—and on the whole inferior to—the all-male friendship bond.²⁰

The second reason is closely related to the first. Vasantasenā is one of several figures in the play who are implicated in the old order but change sides. A good example is the guard Candanaka, who lets Cārudatta’s coach pass with Āryaka safely inside. All of these people choose to follow the dictates of the heart to their own practical disadvantage, and all do so with a direct reference either to Cārudatta or to the affective

The Little Clay Cart

idea of virtue that he epitomizes.²¹ Seen in this light Vasantasenā's choice of Cārudatta despite his poverty and her rejection of wealthy but insensitive clients is an act of self-redemption. Thus, her "death" at the hands of the Śakāra symbolizes her complete severance of ties with the world of venal prostitution,²² and her recovery—aided by the Buddhist monk whom she had earlier helped in Cārudatta's name—is her decisive rebirth into the value-world of sympathetic generosity (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*). Cārudatta, we remember, was never able to decide who the real Vasantasenā was. This is because the burden of the decision has been entirely upon her shoulders. Cārudatta remains what he is throughout the play, the lodestar of virtue by which others guide their actions. His generosity to Āryaka, his fellow victim, is less a defining moral choice than another instance of his essential character (*svabhāva*).²³ It is for others to make such a choice, and in so doing they choose Cārudatta, the unsung hero of society,²⁴ or his proxy Āryaka, who regards him as the patron saint of the utopian order ushered in by the successful revolution.²⁵

But we cannot end this introduction without reverting to the play's incidental function as wish fulfillment. For all the ideality of his character we have no trouble seeing that Cārudatta himself is not really free of the idea that wealth and virtue are closely related. He spends an inordinate amount of time brooding on his poverty, with its concomitant loss of friends and reputation. Yet why should one who represents true being (*svabhāva*) over appearance (*vākya*) be so concerned with the judgment of superficial people? How, furthermore, can he be so blind to the general esteem in which he is held among all persons of heart? He is never so ashamed as when he cannot display his generosity in material terms. Thus, when he has to let the good news whispered into his ear by Vasantasenā's maid go unrewarded, it launches a series of verses on the theme of impotence:

Oh misery!

For a man without money what is the use
of living in this world at all?
In his inability to reciprocate
both his anger and favor are vain.

Furthermore—

A wingless bird, a withered tree, a waterless pond,
a toothless serpent: a poor man in the human world.

Introduction

Furthermore—

Poor men are like uninhabited houses,
waterless wells, withered trees,
for, forgetting their woes in union with a friend,
their moments of pleasure thus prove empty.²⁶

Again, at that point in Act 3 when his wife provides him with the means of compensating Vasantasenā extravagantly for the loss of her jewels, his first reaction is extreme embarrassment:

What, my wife pities me! Alas! Now I am poor—

My wealth destroyed by a personal fate
and pitied with a woman's wealth:
through wealth a man becomes a woman,
and a woman a man through wealth.²⁷

If we put all these hints together we emerge with the portrait of a man who sees generosity as a sort of sexual potency and a claim on the general admiration of society. Cārudatta is not vulgar, like the Śakāra and the corrupt ruling class the latter represents. There can be no questioning the sensibility that makes this meek, displaced hero a genuine *sahṛdaya*. But at the same time there is a psychological dimension that we cannot ignore. Cārudatta's version of potency is based on money, not as a means of directly purchasing aesthetic-erotic satisfactions but as a means of inspiring others to love him and act on his behalf. For this reason—and because his very desire for potency is surreptitious—he is essentially passive. It is no accident that when, in the scene mentioned above, Cārudatta reaches for a ring to reward Vasantasenā's maid and then shows embarrassment, Vasantasenā responds, "This is why I love you!" (*ata eva kāmīyase*), words that almost exactly echo her earlier response when the Vidūṣaka arrived at the brothel with the gift of Cārudatta's wife's heirloom (4.32+). The very manifestation of what he himself feels as impotence wears a charm that borrows power from the admiring beholder. Cārudatta's gestures have, directly or indirectly, the same effect on all noble souls, who rally to his cause, rescue him from his good-hearted passivity, and make him the prince he was always meant to be.²⁸ Thus the utopian order based on sympathetic generosity corresponds exactly with the acknowledgment and empowerment of the *sahṛdaya*, the secular Bodhisattva who, like fairy-tale heroes everywhere, gets the girl and the kingdom too.

The Little Clay Cart

NOTES

1. He is first mentioned as an author by the poetician Vāmana (fl. A.D. 800). For further information see Appendix I: The Author. It should be made clear here that this essay is based on the full play. The numbers refer to act and verse according to the readily available edition-translation of M. R. Kale (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1972).
2. Generically, *kāvya* includes *nāṭya* as one of its two principal forms—the other is *mahākāvya*, sometimes translated as “court epic.”
3. S. N. Dasgupta and S. K. De, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (University of Calcutta, 1975), p. 245.
4. I am bracketing problems of textual accretion, authorship, and where the play stands in relation to the fragment in the Bhāsa corpus called *Daridra-cārudatta* or *Cārudatta in Poverty*. Like most scholars I regard Śūdraka’s play as an elaboration of Bhāsa’s. Śūdraka’s dependence on the Bhāsa play was established by Georg Morgenstierne, *Über das Verhältnis zwischen Cārudatta und Mṛcchakaṭīka* (Halle, 1920), though some have contested it, most recently G. H. Schokker, “Śūdraka, the Author of the Original Cārudatta,” in *Pratidānam: Indian, Iranian and Indo-European Studies Presented to F. B. J. Kuiper*, ed. J. C. Heesterman et al. (The Hague: Mouton, 1968). See A. D. Pusalkar, *Bhāsa: A Study*, 2nd ed. (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1968) for further bibliography. Also see Appendix II: The Play.
5. In the classical schema the four classes (*varṇas*) are (1) Brahman (priest), (2) Kṣatriya (warrior prince), (3) Vaiśya (farmer, merchant, etc.), and (4) Śūdra (menial and servile occupations). Brahmans have the theoretical lock on society’s intellectual function, while Kṣatriyas protect it by force, Vaiśyas provide its material sustenance, and Śūdras perform the services.
6. *The Little Clay Cart* and *Mālatīmādhava* are the two prime examples in the extant literature of a type of play known as the *prakaraṇa*. The requirements of this subgenre are basically that the plot be invented or borrowed from popular stories (*kathā*) as opposed to history and legend (*itihāsapurāṇa*), and that the hero (*nāyaka*) be other than a king, typically a Brahman, a merchant, or a minister. The heroes of Sanskrit drama are divided into four basic types—exalted (*dhīrodatta*), amorous (*dhīralalita*), serene (*dhīraprasānta*), and vehement (*dhīroddhata*). According to most sources the hero of a *prakaraṇa* must be serene. Although not entirely artificial, these distinctions (1) are mainly *ex post facto*, (2) cannot be made to fit certain obvious cases, and (3) belie the fact that most *nāyakas* are composite types.
7. Thus the greatest of Sanskrit playwrights, Kālidāsa (probably fifth century

Introduction

A.D.), can have one of his characters call the royal hero of the *Vikramorvaṣīya* a *nāgarika* ("urbane townsman") in order to explain his sophistication (*dākṣiṇya*) as a lover (3.13+). It was the *nāgarika* for whom the *Kāmasūtra*, Vātsyāyana's celebrated treatise on erotics (third century?), was written. *Kāmasūtra* 1.4 describes the ideal day of the *nāgarika*, which was devoted entirely to refined amusements and capped by amorous sport. It tells us of *nāgarikas* who joined in *goṣṭhīs* (literary "clubs"), enjoying cultivated conversation with hetaeras, music, poetry, jaunts to the countryside, and so on. Such *goṣṭhīs*, or individual *nāgarikas*, provided important patronage for the arts including troops of actors. In *The Little Clay Cart* Cārudatta's friend Rebhila entertains the members of his *goṣṭhī* with a concert. There is incidentally a whole subgenre of drama devoted to the amorous exploits of the *nāgarika*: the *bhāṇa* or "monologue play." Unfortunately it has not received its share of serious study.

8. Cf. the well-known lines of the poetician Ānandavardhana (ninth century):

In the boundless world of poetry the poet is the sole creator,
and as it pleases him, so does the world appear.
If he has erotic feeling, that world is full of sentiment;
if he is passionless, it is entirely devoid of feeling.

(*apāre kāvyaśamsāre kavir ekaḥ prajāpatiḥ/
yathāśmai rocate viśvaṃ tathedaṃ parivartate//
śṛṅgāri cet kaviḥ kāvyē jātaṃ rasamayam jagat/
sa eva vitarāgaś cen nīrasaṃ sarvaṃ eva tat//*)

—*Dhvanyāloka* 3.42

"Sentiment" or "feeling" (*rasa*), borrowed initially from drama, is the key concept in the Indian theory of poetics from Ānandavardhana on. The *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the most important and earliest Indian treatise on dramatics (compiled over a long period from at least the fifth century B.C. to the third or fourth centuries A.D.), states categorically that "no purpose is achieved without sentiment" (*na hi rasād ṛte kaścid arthaḥ pravartate*).

9. Cf. the celebrated definition of Abhinavagupta in his commentary on Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanyāloka* 1.1:

Sahṛdayas are those who share in a concordance of heart, i.e., who have an aptitude for identification with what is depicted [by poets] in a mirror-like mind made clear by familiarity with the practice of poetry. (*yeṣāṃ kāvyānuśīlanābhyāsavaśād viśadibhūte manomukure varṇanīyatanmayibhavanayogyatā te hṛdayasaṃvādabhājah sahrdayāḥ*).

10. 1.55:

aye iyaṃ vasantasenā/

The Little Clay Cart

*yayā me janitaḥ kāmāḥ kṣīṇe vibhavavistare/
krodhaḥ kupuruṣasyeva svagātṛeṣveva sidati//*

11. 5.9:

*yasyārthas tasya sā kāntā dhanahāryō hyasau janaḥ/
(na guṇahāryō hyasau janaḥ)
vayam arthaiḥ parityaktāḥ nanu tyaktaiva sā mayā//*

12. 1.57:

*paśya—
udayati hi śāsāṅkaḥ kāmīnigaṇḍapāṇḍur
grahagaṇaparivāro rājamārgapradīpaḥ/
timīranīkaramadhye rāsmayo yasya gaurāḥ
srutajala iva pañke kṣīradhārāḥ patanti//*

13. It has been suggested that Cārudatta's status as an exemplary householder (*grhastha*) explains his apparent lack of erotic interest in the heroine: it would not be "appropriate" for such a hero to pine for a courtesan. There is much to this, yet surely the playwright would have been deft enough to infuse a little more eros into his hero (one or two pining soliloquies), if that had been his interest, without damaging our respect for him. After all, if propriety is the deciding factor, why not avoid the love of Brahman and courtesan altogether?
14. The exception is 10.13, repeated after 10.24 and 10.36, according to stage directions:

O woman with teeth white as pure moonbeams
and lower lip red as coral,
after drinking the nectar of your mouth
must I now drink the poison of infamy?
(śāsīvimalamayūkhaśubhradanti
suruciravidrumasaṃnibhādharauṣṭhi/
tava vadanabhavāṃṛtaṃ nīpīya katham avāśo hyayaśoviṣaṃ pibāmi//)

But even this, though it does raise the specter of her erotic charm, ends in the familiar refrain of self-lamentation.

15. A "woman who goes (to her lover)," one of eight types of heroine (*nāyikā*) classified according to her disposition to her lover.
16. 10.34:
- prabhavati yadi dharmo dūṣitasyāpi me'dya
prabalapuruṣavākyair bhāgyadoṣāt katham cit/
surapatibhavanasthā yatra tatra sthitā vā
vyapanayatu kalāṅkaṃ svasvabhāvena saiva//*

17. 10:39 and 42:

Who is this who has come to me
like rain to a withering crop,
when the sword was poised
and I was in the jaws of death?
(*keyam abhyudyate śastre mṛtyuvaktragate mayi/
anāvṛṣṭihate sasye droṇāvṛṣṭir ivāgatā//*)

Whence have you come
with tear-soaked breasts
like saving knowledge
to this dying man?
(*kuto bāṣpāmbudhārābhīḥ snāpayantī payodharau/
mayi mṛtyuvaśaṃ prāpte vidyeva samupāgatā//*)

18. 10.43:

*tvadartham etad vinipātyamānaṃ
dehaṃ tvayaiva parimocitaṃ me/
aho prabhāvah priyasamgamasya
mṛto'pi ko nāma punar dhriyeta//*

19. By pertinent analogy, one of the main issues of Sanskrit poetics is the distinction made between genuine poetry, which is suggestive and principally concerned with *rasa*, and pseudo-poetry, which does not get beyond rhetorical sport. Ānandavardhana calls all such poetry *citrakāvya* ("picture poetry"), alluding to poems whose syllables placed in certain arrangements form a schematic wheel or the like. The only criterion of true poetry is that it please the man of heart. See Ānandavardhana, *Dhvanyāloka* 1.1, 1.13, 3.41-42.
20. Note the terms in which the Brahman thief Śarvilaka makes his decision before exiting in Act 4 (4.25):

Two things—friend and woman—
are dear to men in this world,
but now I would choose my friend
over a hundred beautiful women.
(*dvayam idam atīva loke priyaṃ narāṇāṃ suhṛ ca vanitā ca/
samprati tu sundarīṇāṃ śatāḍ api suhṛd viśiṣṭatamaḥ//*)

He has willingly sacrificed his reputation as a Brahman out of love for Madanikā, Vasantasena's servant, yet no sooner does he win her than he gives her up because his friend Āryaka is in trouble. It is no accident, either, that he more than regains his social status as a result.

21. It might be helpful to refer here to the four "human goals" (*puruṣārthas*) under which rubric all human behavior can be classified in the Hindu

The Little Clay Cart

worldview: *dharma* (law, duty), *artha* (profit), *kāma* (desire, pleasure), and *mokṣa* (salvation). Under the old regime *dharma* is confused with *artha*: for example, it is Candanaka's "duty" to arrest the fugitive Āryaka, just as it is Vasantasenā's duty to surrender to the Śākāra, though both of these actions would really be only self-serving. But in the new order *dharma* will be aligned primarily with *kāma*, with the latter understood altruistically as sympathetic generosity (*hṛdayasaṃvāda*), though eventually *artha* follows suit, that is, once the revolution succeeds. How different is this notion of *dharma* for the model of *karmayoga* ("the discipline of action") in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, where the ideal is disinterested ritualistic performance of prescribed duty in the spirit of renunciation regardless of the heart's inclinations. Such a notion of *dharma* would offer no hope for Vasantasenā and the other *sahṛdayas* except in the ultimate sense of *mokṣa*. The affective model of *dharma* in this play is distinctly antinomian, because it offers the possibility of a more fluid social structure than the caste system.

22. Lest we dismiss this aspect of Vasantasenā as mere facade we should recall the Vidūṣaka's carnivalesque description of brothel decadence in Act 4. Even if this scene is an accretion it has hermeneutical value as an indication of the way the indigenous tradition understood the issue at point. Vasantasenā is by implication a queen who presides over a realm of emasculating decadence.
23. Āryaka is Cārudatta's active double, the revolutionary his sympathetic generosity does not allow him to be. By contrast the Śākāra is his "shadow" or "evil twin," absorbing all of Cārudatta's potential sexual aggressiveness, so that his love can be "pure" and "tender" (in S. K. De's terminology). Any anger Cārudatta might feel toward courtesans, who sell their beauty to the highest bidder rather than award it to those with the sensitivity to appreciate it, is transferred to the Śākāra.
24. See the references to his role as 'wishing-tree' (*kalpavṛkṣa*): 1.48, 9.30+, 10.30+ (cf. 2.15+. 4.32, 6.13-14, 10.4).
25. 10.52+: "Good sir, King Āryaka proclaims: 'I have acquired this kingdom by your goodness. Therefore receive [the principate I confer upon you].'" (*ārya nanvayam āryako rājā vijñāpayati—idaṃ mayā yuṣmadguṇopārjitaṃ rājyam/ tad upayujyatām/*)
26. 5.40-42:
bhoḥ kaṣṭam
dhanair viyuktasya narasya loke kiṃ jīvitēnāḍita eva tāvat/
yasya pratikarānirarthakatoṅt kopaprasādā viphalibhavanti//
api ca/

Introduction

*pakṣavikalāś ca pakṣi śuṣkāś ca taruḥ saraś ca jalahīnam/
sarpaś coddhṛtadaṃṣṭras tulyaṃ loke daridraś ca//
api ca
śūnyair grhaiḥ khalu samaḥ puruṣo daridraḥ
kūpaiś ca toyarahitais tarubhiś ca śṛṅgaiḥ/
yad dṛṣṭapūrvajanasaṃgamavismṛtānām
evaṃ bhavanti viphalāḥ paritoṣakālāḥ//*

27. 3:27:

*kathaṃ brāhmaṇi mām anukampate/ kaṣṭam/ idānīm asmi daridraḥ/
ātmabhāgyakṣatadravyaḥ stridravyenānukampitaḥ/
arthataḥ puruṣo nārī yā nārī sārthataḥ pumān//*

For further expressions of impotence, see 1.55 (cited in note 10) and 5.8.

28. Thus to his composite character of Brahman and Vaiśya he adds the quality of being a Kṣatriya: see note 5.

Translator's Note

The translation of the *Mṛcchakaṭīka* that follows was made by the noted Sanskrit scholar and author of *The Wonder That Was India* A. L. Basham, who held the chair of Asian Civilization at the Australian National University. He contributed the following program note when the play was staged:

The Sanskrit theatre flourished for about a thousand years, roughly during the first millennium of the Christian era. It evolved out of earlier mime and folk drama, and developed its own distinctive conventions. The stage had no scenery and few properties, and much use was made of formal gesture language, to indicate the background of the action. Plays were generally performed by professional companies, but as far as can be gathered there were no regular theatres. Performances were sponsored by kings and other wealthy patrons, and the audiences were invited ones. But dramas might be performed in the courts of temples, and these were generally open to the public. The dramatist did not cater entirely for an elite audience; he also considered the plain man who might be moved more by dramatic incidents and farcically comic situations than by fine poetry and subtle psychological touches. Plays were written in mixed prose and verse. The main dialogue was normally in prose, but occasional verses were employed to underline an emotion, to describe a scene, to drive home a moral, or simply to add a witty twist to a comic situation.

The Little Clay Cart (Mṛcchakaṭīka) is the work of a certain Śūdraka, who is said to have been a king, but of whom nothing reliable is known. Internal evidence suggests that it was written in the Gupta period (c. A.D. 300-600), the "Classical" Age of Hindu civilization, and probably early in that period, in the fourth century. Unlike most Sanskrit dramas, the plots of which are based either on heroic or religious legend or on the intrigues of royal

The Little Clay Cart

courts, this play reflects the ordinary life of bourgeois India, and as such it forms a most valuable historical document. It has a brilliantly devised plot, replete with exciting and comic incident, leading up to a climax as exciting as any in the drama of the world. We may compare Śūdraka with Plautus, Shakespeare, or Ben Johnson, but in some ways we may also see him as a remote precursor of Alfred Hitchcock.

The translation is a free one. The structure and idiom of Sanskrit is such that any attempt to adhere closely to the original results in a literary disaster. The full play would probably last for five or six hours, and the text has been drastically cut. Much dialogue has been abridged, and several incidents have been omitted altogether. The original play has an enormous cast, and to reduce this for practical purposes the parts of one or two minor characters have been combined or grafted on to others. A few slight alterations have been made to make the play more suitable for production on a modern stage, and a number of brief phrases have been added here and there, to explain obscure points and allusions to a "Western" audience. Otherwise an attempt has been made to interpret the lively dialogue of the original in contemporary idiom, while translating Śūdraka's complex Sanskrit stanzas into simple English verse. The costumes are not those of modern India, but have been adapted from those portrayed in the sculpture and painting of the period.

The drama reflects a way of life and a set of values in some ways surprisingly similar to those of the contemporary world and in others very different. We are introduced to a society where class and birth are really important, and where polygamy is socially acceptable. Domestic slavery is widespread, but the slave has his rights in law and is able to buy his freedom. Temporary slavery is a common method of paying off debts. Respectable women in general remain in the background, like Dhūtā, the wife of the hero Cārudatta, but the cultured courtesan is a familiar feature of better-class society, and receives a good deal of respect. This play reflects, like much other Indian literature, the symbiosis of the ascetic and the sensuous, the sacred and the profane, in the Indian mind. On the one hand the hero passionately loves the hetaera who is the heroine; on the other he dutifully follows all the Brahmanic domestic rituals and, in the penultimate scene, is ashamed to admit his love in public because this conflicts with the strict Brahmanic moral code.

The play reflects an urbane society which carries its morals lightly in some particulars, but in others sets very high ethical standards. In the

Translator's Note

theatres of Greece, Spain, France, and Elizabethan England it is unlikely that Cārudatta would have pardoned his enemy so magnanimously. The only really wicked character is also a ridiculous fool. Perhaps this play is more typical of the moral attitude of its times than many contemporary religious texts. The world is full of misfortune. Even good and generous actions may lead to sorrow and trouble. But for all this, life is well worth living, for the world contains many good and beautiful things and there is much happiness in it. The righteous man may suffer, but in the end he is stronger than the wicked, who is really a fool and who misses the wood for the trees. The man who, like Cārudatta, loves his friends and forgives his enemies, even if he is weak and often makes mistakes, will in the end find his reward in a full and happy life.