



The Little Clay Cart

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Characters Discussed

Charudatta, a wise and honorable young Brahmana left impoverished after spending his fortune for the welfare of others. In love with and loved by Vasantasena, he is falsely accused of her murder and condemned to die. As he is being prepared for execution, Vasantasena appears just in time to identify the true murderer and save her lover's life. Charudatta's fortune is restored, and he is made an official at court by the new and just king, Aryaka.

Vasantasena, a wealthy courtesan who is in love with Charudatta. When she goes to the park to meet her lover, she is set upon by Samsthanaka, who chokes her and leaves her for dead. She is rescued by a Buddhist monk. While Charudatta is being falsely accused and tried for her murder, she is being nursed back to health. She appears at the place of execution in time to save her lover's life.

Samsthanaka, King Palaka's brother-in-law. Enamored of Vasantasena and madly jealous of her attentions to Charudatta, he chokes her, leaves her for dead, and accuses his rival of the murder.

Aryaka, a captive prince freed through the efforts of Sarvilaka and Charudatta. He later deposes King Palaka and restores to Charudatta his fortune and his rightful place in the world.

Sarvilaka, a thieving Brahmana, Prince Aryaka's friend and liberator. He steals the jewels left by Vasantasena in Charudatta's care and buys his bride, Madanika, with them.

Madanika, Vasantasena's slave and confidant, whom Sarvilaka purchases as his bride.

Rohasena, Charudatta's son, to whom Vasantasena gives a little gold cart to replace a clay one, which is all his father is able to afford.

Maitreya, a poor Brahmana, Charudatta's friend and confidant.

Palaka, the unjust king deposed by Prince Aryaka.

Bibliography:

Buitenen, J. A. B. van, trans. *Two Plays of Ancient India: The Little Clay Cart, The Minister's Seal*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968. Buitenen's introduction describes how the purported author, Sudraka, employed what may, in the context of ancient Sanskrit literature, be called "borrowing" privileges in the creation of the play, which is a completion of an earlier, incomplete work. Offers a synopsis of the play.

Keith, Arthur Berriedale. *The Sanskrit Drama in Its Origin, Development, Theory, and Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Accessible and well-indexed guide to Sanskrit drama. Somewhat dated but still a good starting place for further study.

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Ryder, Arthur William, trans. *The Little Clay Cart (Mrcchakatika): A Hindu Drama Attributed to King Shudraka*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1905. Ryder's introduction discusses authorship, the method of translation, and an outline of the plot.

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