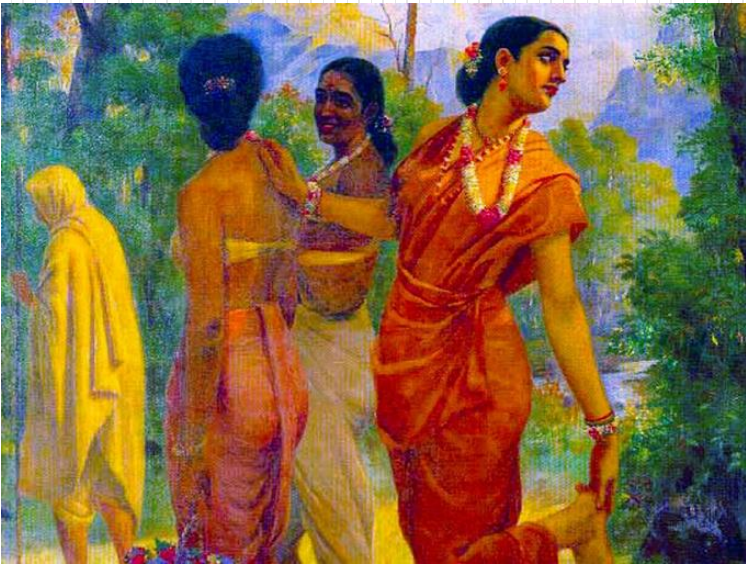
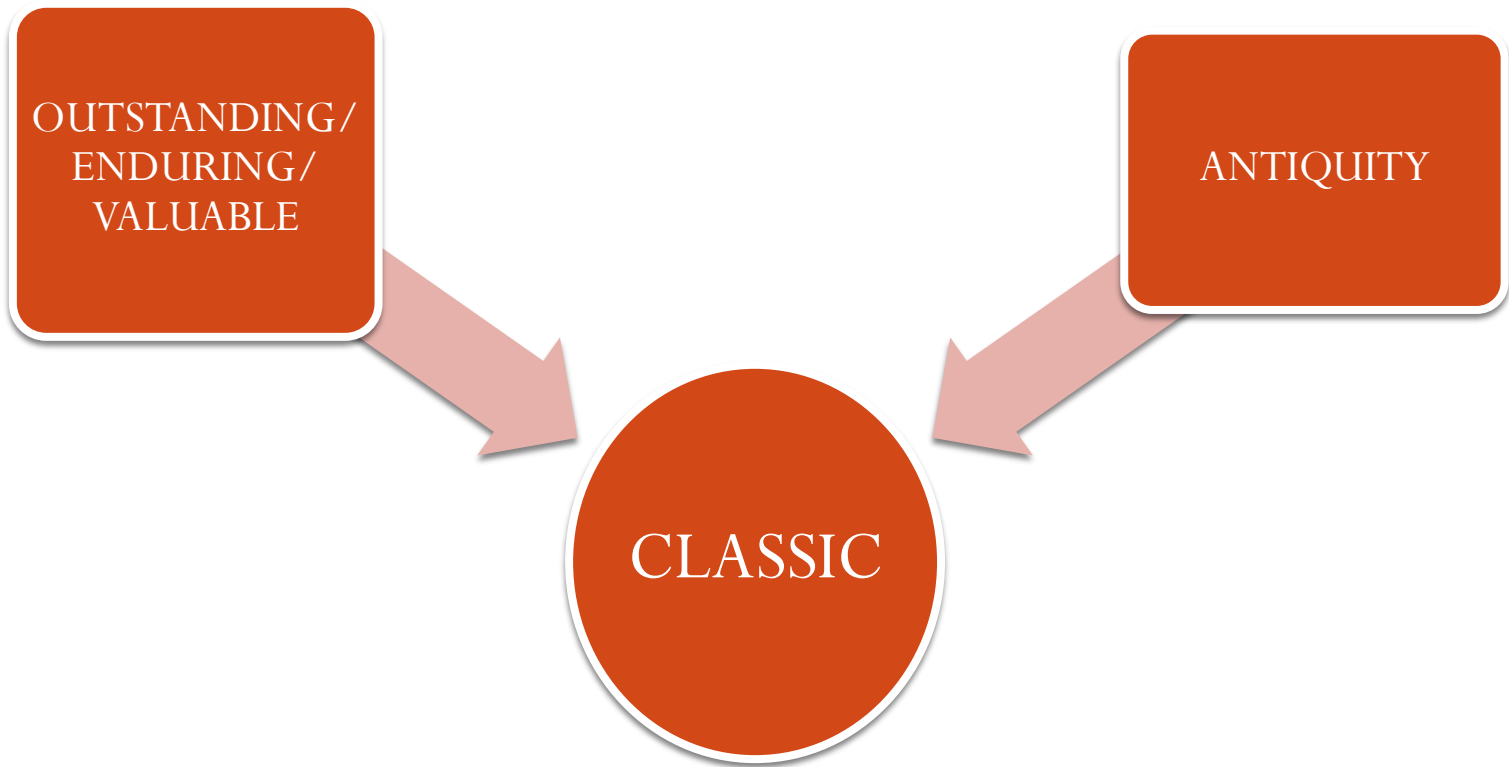


Orientation Lecture: Indian Classical Literature II



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WHAT IS CLASSIC?



CLASSICAL LITERATURE: INDIAN CONTEXT

(Literature written between 1000 BCE and 400 CE)

NORTH INDIA

- Language of Literature: SANSKRIT
- GUPTA ERA: Golden Era
- Book on Dramaturgy: NATYASHASTRA By BHARATA
- Epics: RAMAYANA, MAHABHARATA
- Plays: ABHIJNANASAKUNTALAM, MRICHCHAKATIKA
- Poets: KALIDASA, SUDRAKA

SOUTH INDIA

- Language of Literature: TAMIL
- SANGAM ERA: Golden Era
- Book on Dramaturgy: THOLKAPPIAM
- Epics: CILAPPATIKARAM

Gupta Era



- 320-467 AD
- Founded by Chandragupta I in Bihar
- This era is regarded as the pinnacle of ancient Indian civilization
- Empire reached its zenith in the reign of Samudragupta
 - 9 Gems (Navaratan) in the court: Aryabhata and Kalidasa

Gupta Era: Society



- Intensification of the social divisions into the four Varnas with recognition of Brahminical hierarchy
- Intercaste marriages were allowed
- Parents generally settled their children's marriages but *Gandharva* marriages were also prevalent
- Position of women: Girls of high castes had good opportunities of shaping their intellect though knowledge of the *Sastras* and other branches of learning. Equally trained in dance and music
- Languages spoken: Sanskrit (Brahmin and Kings), Prakrit (Kshatriyas, Vaishya, Women), Apabrahmasas (Others castes and Women)
- Reference to '*Nagaraka*', the urbane man who had refined taste in arts and lived a life of ease and pleasure

Sanskrit Plays:

Abhijnanasakuntalam and *Mrichchakatika*

- According to *Natyasashtra*, plays are sources of instruction through entertainment
- Sanskrit plays of the Gupta Period show glimpses of the society as well as the ideal society
- According to the categorisation of plays in *Natyasashtra*:

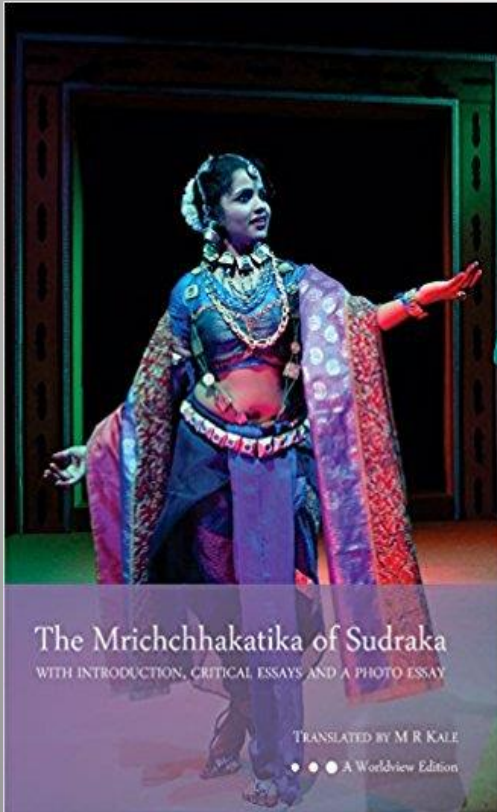
Abhijnanasakuntalam: Trotaka (Plays derived from epics with celestial beings as characters)

Mrichchakatika: Prakarana (Fictional work of playwright, characters drawn from real life who belong to respectable class of the society)

Mrichchakatika
(The Little Clay Cart)
-- Sudraka

As a Prakarana:

- A Prakarana, according to Visvanatha, is an original creation of the playwright. It is a realistic play, with no celestial/supernatural characters. It derives its theme from the society or the life of the ordinary people. There are 5 to 10 acts. The hero is a Brahmin, a minister or merchant and the heroine is a respectable lady, a courtesan or the two combined. The main rasa is srngara



- Two kinds of characters: the part of the centre – Charudatta, Maitreya, Sakara, Palaka, Dhuta; the marginalised: Vasantasena, Sarvalika, Samvahaka, Aryaka

- Charudatta: Represents a **‘nagarika’**: the city-dweller as described by **Vatsayana in Kamasutra**. He, according to **Robert E. Goodwin**, is a connoisseur of art and participates in the **‘goshitis’**, musical performances and hence is a **‘sahrdaya’**. He appreciates the music of the master Rebhilla. the sublime hero of a Prakarana. He is **‘Dhioprasanta’** and **‘Dhirasanta’**. Generous and honest, is patient even in the worst circumstances, conscientious enough to maintain the principle that death is welcome than slightest stain of dishonesty. But suffers from self pity. Only character who judges Vasantasena as a dignified person. He appreciates her beauty without objectifying her. She is respected despite her profession, unlike many others (Maitreya, Sarvalika, Sakara). He depicts the character of a **‘dhirlalita nayaka’ (lovesick hero)** according to **Goodwin**, after meeting Vasantasena. His generosity is awarded by Aryaka as he is given a kingdom, and the sanction to marry Vasantasena

Three kinds of women are described: Prakasanari (public women – courtesan), Aprakasanari (wife kulavadhu) and bhujisya (slave women)

Vasantasena: A courtesan by profession. Outcast. Sakara calls her a whore and a breaker of houses, abusively. But she exhibits the qualities of a chaste woman. Remains loyal to Charudatta. She is won only through ‘merits’ and not by money. Shows generosity towards Samvahaka which is paid off when the monk saves her life and produces her in front of Charudatta in the nick of time, saving Charudatta’s life. Her virtues are awarded by Aryaka in the “utopic” ending (**Robert E. Goodwin**), when she is allowed to marry the Brahmin Charudatta thus raising her position from a ‘nagarvadhu’ (prostitute) to a “vadhu” (wife). Her transformation from a ‘Prakasanari’ to a ‘Aprakasanari’

Dhuta: ‘Aprakasanari’ She is the wife of Charudatta and maintains fidelity in their marriage. A silent character, she never expresses her opinion about Charudatta-Vasantasena relationship. Her loyalty forces Maitreya to dissuade Charudatta from falling in love with Vasantasena. She accepts Vasantasena as her sister and as Charudatta’s wife.

Bhujisya: Madanika and Radhanika

As a Political Play

The *Prasangika* (sub-plot) about Aryaka. **Walter Ruben** in the essay “*Mrichchakatikam*, its Folklorist and Political Interpretations” point out that two parties are depicted: Palaka, Samsthanaka, Viraka, the judges and the Chandalas are on one side.

Other party is of Aryaka, Sarvalika and Chandanaka, who usurp the cruel Palaka’s kingdom. They are the have nots in the society who side with those who rescue them from their condition.

The utopic climax underscores the fact that ones virtues bear credits than one birth. Characters seem to break away from the Varna System, some raising above the limits of their caste to achieve greats other going below it.

Sources

- A Jataka tale
- c. Buddhist/Jain folk tale about a mad elephant being controlled by a monk. Here it is servant of Charudatta (Kumbhalika)
- d. The story of Samvahaka is a Buddhist story
- e. Aryaka's plot = myth of Krishna and his rivalry with King Kamsa
- f. Vasantasena as Abhisarika (Myth of Krishna)
- g. Charudatta carrying the pall on his shoulders before being killed=Christ

Sangam Age(s)

- Sangam: assemblies of poets founded by the Pandya kings
- According to popular Tamil belief: 3 Sangam Ages
 - First: lasted for 4440 years in now submerged South Madurai. Siva and other gods and sages were its members
 - Second: lasted for 3700 years in Kapatapuram (submerged in the sea). Gods had evacuated and mortals constituted a greater percentage of its membership
 - Third: lasted for 1850 years with Madurai as its center. The period lasted for 5 generations and produced a unique body of poetry classified under 2 heads: **Pattuppattu (10 songs)** and **Ettuthohai (8 anthologies)**
- Major themes of Sangam poetry: Love (**Akam**) and War (**Puram**)

CILAPPATIKARAM: THE TALE OF THE ANKLET

- Author: ILANKO ATIKAL (5-6 Century AD)
- A Jaina Monk
- Younger brother of King Cenkuttuvan (Cera Dynasty). The previous king wanted Atikal to be the king, but Atikal abdicated the throne for his brother.
- The epic is 'Re-Constructed History'

CILAPPATIKARAM: THE TALE OF THE ANKLET



- 3 Tamil Dynasties existed and were part of Tamilakam (Land of Tamils)
 - ❖ Chola: Main cities: Kanchi and Thanjavur
 - ❖ Chera: Ruled over Malabar Coast, Coimbatore, Namakkal, Karur and Salem District
 - ❖ Pandya: ruled initially from Korkai, a sea port on southern most tip of Indian penninsula, later moved to Madurai
- The epic is based in the CHOLA AND CHERA KINGDOMS

CILAPPATIKARAM: THE PLOT

The epic is divided into three parts:

- **BOOK OF PUKAR:** Kovalan, a young merchant, is married to Kannagi. They live in Pukar. Kovalan falls in love with Madhavi, a courtesan. Kovalan spends all his wealth on Madhavi and when in penury, Madhavi abandons her. Kannagi asks her husband to re-settle in Madurai
- **BOOK OF MADURAI:** Kannagi, gives one of her anklets to Kovalan to sell. Kovalan takes it to the goldsmith in Madurai who mistakes it to be one of the queens. He takes the anklet to the Chola King and accuses Kovalan as the thief. Kovalan is brought to the court and sentenced to death. Kannagi comes to know about her husband's death, she enters the court and curses the kingdom. She tears off one of her breasts and hurls it at the king, which turns into a ball of fire and burns down Madurai and ends the Chola dynasty
- **BOOK OF VANCI:** Kannagi then moves to the hillside of the Chera Kingdom where she is deified. The gods make her an immortal and she meets her dead husband again. The tribesmen see this transformation and report it to the Chera King, Cenkuttuvan. The king takes up the task of establishing Kannagi as a goddess. The stone is brought from the Himalayas and the temple is established in Vanci.

THE BOOK OF VANCI

- The BOOK tells the story of Kannagi's transformation from a mortal to a diety. It is about the establishment of the CULT OF KANNAGI
- CULT OF MURUGAN existed beforehand. Reference to MURUGAN and his mortal wife VALLI in the epic
- BOOK OF VANCI is also about the power and might of the Chera king Cenkuttuvan as he wages a war against the ARYANs and other Dravidian kings in order to get the stone for the idol of Kannagi
- It is about the conflict of the ARYANS and the DRAVIDIANS. Here, the DRAVIDIANS are triumphant and virtuous. Unlike RAMAYANA, where the Rakshasas (representing Dravidians) and the evil forces, Rama fights against



LORD MURUGAN



GODDESS KANNAGI

CILAPPATIKARAM AS A SOURCE TO MRICHCHAKATIKA

- Although in Tamil, resemblances to *Mrichchakatika*, the Sanskrit play, are obvious.
- ❖ Kannagi = Vasantasena (she saves Charudutt's life at the end, proves all allegations wrong)
- ❖ Dhuta = Vasantasena (she hides her ornaments in the clay cart at Charudutt's house which later becomes the proof that Charudutt has murdered Vasantasena and he is sentenced to death)
- ❖ Kovalan = Charudutta (he survives)
- ❖ Madhavi = Vasantasena (she is chaste and proves her love for Charudutt)

- The similarities prove that cultural and literary exchange was possible during the Classical era despite:
 - ❖ Distance
 - ❖ Language
 - ❖ Cultural conflicts
- The exchanges were possible owing to movement of people for:
 - ❖ Trade
 - ❖ Buddhist, Jain mendicants for religious purposes
 - ❖ Poets and Singers in want of recognition
- Indian Classical literature is a proof of the richness of Indian literary history and the integrity of Indian Literature(s)

Thank You!