



CLAY CARTS AND TRAFFIC JAMS

Among classical plays *Mrichakatika* of King Sudraka occupies a place of its own. Like few others it has a number of characters portraying the common people a type known as *Prakaranam* - one of the ten types of plays or *Dasarupakas*.

Mrichakatika or The Little Clay Cart holds a mirror to the social and political life of fourth century A.D. at which period, probably, the play was written. There is a richness of variety in the characters - the merchant, the proverbial king's brother-in-law, courtesans, masseurs, monks, thieves, executioners, rebels, gamblers, coachmen, *vitas* (men who seek pleasures) and court intrigues. And what is more even a traffic jam which we think is modern-day phenomenon - on which some action is based.

Thus the play is worked on a wide canvas and in intricate plot posing a challenge to the modern-day producers with a bevy of characters. To give it necessary period-flavour and produce it in English will be doubly challenging.

The Dramatic circle of Hyderabad which staged it for two days at Ravindra Bharathi in Hyderabad, on January 23 and 24 succeeded in bringing all these in its version. The mood locale symbolic stage-settings mime and stylized acting techniques contributed to the effective rendering of a classical play in modern theatrical terms.

Mrichakatika is essentially a director's play and Modali Nagabhushana Sarma, as director made use of the diverse methods of stage-craft to create an illusion of the fourth century social life with ease. The three-and-a-half hour production had to be on an epic scale.

Credit should also go to the numerous actors who, amateur though they are scaled professional height. Everyone of the 21 actors reproduced the necessary gait and stances and succeeded in creating the over-all visual picture of the ancient days.

Bashir Babu Khan as Maitreya, Ram Kumar as the monk, Rukshad Banaji as Shrivastika portrayed their roles well. Sankar Melkote as Samsthana (Sakara) brought out the fool-villain concept of the role through modulation of speech. But in a key role he should have been more agile.

Charudatta and Vasantasena are difficult roles to play but Raja Gopal as Charudatta maintained the fluctuating moods of the character. As Vasantasena,



Nandini Bedi lacked the physical features of a rich well-built blossoming courtesan of Ujjain. Still she carried the role with her in spite of these disadvantages. Among the other characters, B.S. Prakash as Mathura the gambling chief, Vijay Rao as Chandanaka, Singal as Sthavaraka, Ruksana as the maid and Mekhala as Madanika show fine acting.

In spite of some minor shortcomings, the play on the whole presented a good modern rendering of a classical play of epic proportions. Music by Srinivasan provided the classical flavour.

The director's attempt at reproducing the Vikrastha Madhyam, a three-part stage, as prescribed by Bhatara with a few modifications was a bold venture. And for a theatre group like Dramatic circle Hyderabad which produced such western plays as Twelfth Night, A Man for All seasons, The Glass Menagerie, The Crucible Importance of Being Earnest, The Visit, Don't Drink the water and Waiting for Godot and Indian plays like A Day in Ashadh Silence, Court is in Session, Hayavadana and Tughlaq, the attempt is a logical step. It could have been better but then remember a new theatre is in its birth pangs.



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