

Historical Consciousness in *Nāṭya* Literature: A Study of Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭīkam*

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Abstract

R. D. Karmarkar traced some historical connections in the sub-plot of the natya literature entitled the *Mṛcchakaṭīkam* for the first time in India in 1937. The present article expands the idea of historical consciousness citing the Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭīkam* beyond themes, plots, subplots and characters to the past and present in depicting contemporary society, economy, polity and culture. From this perspective, Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭīkam* is full of historical materialism, which indicates that it belongs to a particular time connected to historical time. Historical consciousness is deeply rooted in language and intertextuality of the play.

Keywords: Natyashastra, Historical consciousness, *Mṛcchakaṭīka*, Intertextuality, *Manusmṛti*

Drama or *nāṭya* is one of the main but distinct genres of *kāvya*. It is a visible representation, which separates it from other forms of *kāvya* such as epic (*sargabandha* or *mahākāvya*), lyric (*nibandha* or *khaṇḍakāvya*), biography (*ākhyāyikā* or history) and novel (*kathā* or story). Controversy surrounds the origin of *kāvya* literature including drama itself. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* indicates that the drama is much more ancient than *kāvya*. A. K. Warder also dates the development of dramatic art to not later than 400 BCE.¹ Based on plots, early plays could be divided into two categories: (a) inventive type, and (b) selective type. Inventive types are those plays wherein plots are of the author's invention, while selective type plots are selected from historical or literary traditions. Invoking themes, characters or events from the past, whether historical or mythical, was an important aspect of the selective-type plays. Inventive types are mostly fictional with some embedded history and mythology.

¹A. K. Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, vol. 1, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1989, p. 124.

The Center for the Study of Historical Consciousness defines historical consciousness as an individual or collective understanding of the past, the cognitive or cultural factors which shape those understanding, as well as the relations of historical understanding to those of the present and the future.² Directly or indirectly all ancient religious and non-religious literature bears historical consciousness in its content. It is for historians to sense it and make it available for the present and future generations. On historical consciousness, Romila Thapar says that it slowly gives way to the recognition of a historical tradition, initially in the *vaṃśānucarita* section of the *Purāṇas* and the early inscriptions.³ Apart from Brāhmanical literature, Shamanic literature such as the Buddhist and Jain literature provides an alternative narrative on the events of the past, contributing to historical consciousness.⁴ Thapar says that it is possible to treat some plays based on historical themes as *itihāsa*. She further says that few of the plays, different from other Sanskrit dramas, are to that extent a distinct turn to the historical, although not history. She categorically says that there are two types of history: embedded and externalized or embodied history. Externalized or embodied history is a distinctive genre associated with historical writings.⁵ Thapar says that in the first millennium CE, of the many literary forms that emerged, historical tradition was tentatively introduced into literature and the drama genre deployed some themes from the historical tradition⁶. She considers Bhāsa's *Svapnavāsavadattam* and *Pratijnāyaugandharāyaṇa*, Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitra* (a play about Śuṅga court) and Viśākhadatta's *Mudrārakṣāsa* and *Devīcandraguptam* (plays about the history of Mauryas and Guptas respectively) as plays based on historical themes.

The majority of plots or stories of drama were taken from tradition. Warder says that the public recitations of epic never lost their popularity, but dramatized versions of epics had been produced in the early period.⁷ Warder classifies dramas based on the tradition into four categories- (a) history play (*nāṭaka*), (b) heroic play, (c) pathetic play and (d) street play (*vithi*). The early Indian dramatists borrowed many religious and secular stories from traditions and freely used them in their compositions. The 'secular' plays were mainly

² www.cshc.ubc.com.

³ Romila Thapar, *Past Before Us: Historical Traditions in Early North India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2014, p. 353.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 353-54.

⁵ Ibid., p. 353.

⁶ Ibid., p. 354.

⁷ Warder, *Indian Kāvya Literature*, p. 127.

comprised of comedy (*prahasana*), satirical monologue (*bhāṇas*), street play (*vithi*) and fictional play (*prakaraṇa*). Out of the ten types of plays, *Rūpaka* recognized from the time of *Nāṭyaśāstra* onwards historic plays or *nāṭikā*, having five to ten acts and taken from traditions or recent history, are called plays par excellence by Warder. Despite being borrowed from the past, these plays were reinvented according to the wish of authors. The *Prakarāṇa* or a fictional play has a purely invented story by the dramatist but has a strong resemblance with the *nāṭaka* in other terms. Though the invented story is a corollary to traditions or history, it has embedded reality insofar as it depicts the social, economic, political and cultural milieu of its time.

Not only Bhāsa, Kālidāsa or Viśākhadatta, but most of the dramatists had mastery over basic historical or literary consciousness that they encountered and invoked in their plays. Each dramatist was familiar not only with prior authors or dramatists that he invoked but also with another kind of literature, historical events, characters; and he consciously chose to build his plots as reference points to authenticate his writings. This tradition of invoking earlier writers was carried out by almost every dramatist after Bhāsa. How Śūdraka invoked historical writers, events and other characters in his *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is the prime objective of the paper. If the author quotes another author or his text or any episode from the past, he or she is assumed to have a good knowledge of the past before him. Historical literacy does not require any sense of chronology on the part of the creative author, but depends upon the nature of content s/he is invoking from the past. This paper is also aimed at exploring the historical consciousness embedded in the play *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is a relatively less explored text from the historical perspective. The study of the text has been arguably neglected by historians for a long period. Though historical consciousness is not explicit in *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, it is implicit and visible upon closer inspection.

Śūdraka's *Mṛcchakaṭikam*

The first word of the title, '*Mṛcchakaṭikam*', is the Sanskrit word *mṛd* which has been altered for reasons of euphoric combination and which means clay, while the second word, before euphoric combination, and is *śakaṭika*, which means a small cart, a child's cart or a toy cart.⁸ The title, thus, means 'the little toy cart', 'the clay cart' or 'the little clay cart'.⁹

⁸ Stephan Hillyer Levitt, 'Why are Sanskrit Play Titles Strange?', *Indologica Taurinensia*, vol. 31, 2005, p. 196.

The play is named after the little toy cart made of the earth for Rohasena, the little son of Cārudatta as mentioned in Act VI of the play.¹⁰ Every drama consists of three parts: (a) the plot, (b) the hero and (c) the *rasa* or sentiment. The *Mṛcchakaṭikam*'s plot is an Accessory type, not a Principal type, where the title of the play is not related to the central characters or of essential interest. Each of its ten acts conveys a distinct message. The plot is part historical and part-fictional, with no mythological characters. The title of the play is derived from an episodic incident of limited duration and minor importance.¹¹ The central character or the hero of the play does not figure in four acts (II, IV, VI and VIII), though it is prescribed that the hero should appear in every act. It is a drama in ten acts, but every action has its individuality. It is a romantic drama based on the love of Vasantasenā, a beautiful courtesan (*gaṇikā*), and poor Brahmin Cārudatta.

The Author and the Date

The author of the play is more or less shrouded in mystery. Indian tradition attributes the drama to Śūdraka. The *prastāvanā* of the play gives some curious and scrappy details about the author. He is a *Kshatriya* king, but his country is not mentioned. He knows the *Rig-Veda* and the *Sāmaveda*, mathematics, the art of courtesans and the science of training elephants. He is a devotee of Siva and had performed the *Aśvamedha* sacrifice. He died at the ripe age of hundred years and ten days and composed this story of the love of Cārudatta and Vasantasenā. Whether Śūdraka personally wrote this drama or some other person at his court wrote it for him, cannot be determined exactly, but it is safe to assume that Śūdraka was a king.¹² The *Skanda-purāṇa* mentions a great king named Śūdraka who reigned in the year 3290 of the Kali era, i.e. 190 CE. Col. Wilfred was the first to identify this Śūdraka of *Skanda-purāṇa* with Simuka, founder of the Andhrabhṛitya dynasty. V. A. Smith dated the founder of the Andhrabhṛitya dynasty to about 200 BCE, a date that does not match with that derived from the *Skanda-purāṇa*.¹³ M. R. Kale says that it is highly probable that Śūdraka, the founder of Andhrabhṛitya dynasty who ruled in about 200 BCE was the author of *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. In ancient India, we have many kings who composed literary works; so, Śūdraka might be a litterateur king like others. In the absence of any

⁹ Arthur William Ryder in his 1905 translation calls it 'The Little Clay Cart', while P. Lal calls it 'The Toy Cart', and M.R. Kale also prefers to call it 'The Little Clay Cart'.

¹⁰ *Mṛcchakaṭikam* VI, p. 217.

¹¹ M.R. Kale, *The Mṛcchakaṭikam of Śūdraka*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 2015, p. x.

¹² Kale, *The Mṛcchakaṭikam*, pp. xviii-xix.

¹³ Kale, *The Mṛcchakaṭikam*.

contradiction about his authorship of the play, we may assume that the text was authored by Śūdraka.¹⁴ However, G.V. Devasthali says that it is almost impossible to be definite about the identity of Śūdraka with any king of ancient India¹⁵ Identifying the author/s of text/s is a serious challenge for historians dealing with Sanskrit texts, since a large number of authors bear the same name, and chronological problems remain unsettled at the end. Kālidāsa is the best example of this problem and Śūdraka is another.

Besides authorship, the chronology of Sanskrit dramas is also an unsettled issue. Very few playwrights mention the dates of their plays. In most cases, the dates of texts are retrieved from either their contemporaries or from a huge mass of literary material. But in all cases, inferences are not satisfactorily conclusive. The same applies to *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. The exact date of the play is not known; different translators attribute different dates to the play¹⁶. P. Lal locates Śūdraka's birthplace in Andhra and dates the historical events described in *Mṛcchakaṭikam* to 485 BCE, though he fails to date the author¹⁷. In his translation of the play, M. R. Kale thinks that *Cārudatta* of Bhāsa is the original version and forms the basis of *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. Based on *Cārudatta*, the superstructure of *Mṛcchakaṭikam* was written. Leaving aside the controversy over the authorship of *Cārudatta*, he thinks that it is a genuine work of Bhāsa which belongs to 6th century BCE. He also places Śūdraka to a period between that of Bhāsa and Kālidāsa, i.e., around 200 BCE.¹⁸ Shonaleeka Kaul dates the text anywhere between the third and fifth century CE.¹⁹ Based on reference to *Manusmṛti* in the play, G.V. Devasthali says that Śūdraka cannot be placed earlier than the beginning of the Christian era.²⁰

¹⁴ Prof. Levi suggested that the author of *Mṛcchakaṭikam* lived after Chandragupta II Vikramāditya, the patron of Kālidāsa, but had chosen the name Śūdraka to make himself before Vikramāditya. This suggestion is rejected by Prof. Keith without offering any explanation. On the occurrence of a single common verse, Dr. Pischel theorized that the poet Dandin, the author of *Dasakumaracharita*, also authored *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. Recently it was argued that Bhāsa himself authored *Mṛcchakaṭikam* on account of his being a Sudra caste. But this is a wild guess nothing else as other works of Bhāsa do not mention Śūdraka. R.D. Karmarkar also supports Pischel and Macdonell's belief that Dandin is the real author of *Mṛcchakaṭika*.

¹⁵ G.V. Devasthali, Introduction to the Study of *Mṛcchakaṭika*, Poona Oriental Book House, Poona, p. 4.

¹⁶ H. H. Wilson ascribes it to 1st century BCE, while Monier-Williams ascribes to 1st century CE.

¹⁷ P. Lal, *Great Sanskrit Plays in New English Translation*, A New Directions Book, New York, 1964, p.79

¹⁸ Kale, *The Mṛcchakaṭikam*, pp. xxxvii-xlvi.

¹⁹ Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2010, p. 42.

²⁰ Devasthali, *Introduction to the Study of Mṛcchakaṭika*, p.6.

Some Historical Connections

When Arthur William Ryder was translating the text in 1905, he was not aware of any kind of historical connection of the text and said that ‘the little clay cart’ is only a drama with a fictitious plot.²¹ But when R. D. Karmarkar translated the text in 1937 he could trace some historical connections in the sub-plot of the text. He thought that the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is a *Prakarāṇa* play and the plot of the *Prakarāṇa* must be an invention of the poet. As regards the sub-plots where Gopāla and Pālaka are mentioned, he adds that Gopāla and Pālaka are known to be real historical personages (about 500 BCE) and the poet may have been indebted to some work for the story of revolution. He justified this thesis by arguing that Śūdraka might be describing some recent event under the garb of an earlier similar event.²² Subsequently, G.V. Devasthali also produced his translation titled *Introduction to the Study of Mṛcchakaṭikam* in 1951, but she was silent on the historical connections of the text despite knowing that Śūdraka had referred to *Manusmṛti* in his play. P. Lal also translated some of the classical plays including *Mṛcchakaṭikam* and published his work titled *Great Sanskrit Plays in New English Translation* in 1957. In the preface, he again highlighted that the story of *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is partly historical and partly invented, with no mythological ingredients.²³ But it is M.R. Kale who produced the most comprehensive analysis of the text, encompassing all historical connections of the text.

The plot of the text is not determined by history, although reminiscences of any historical fact could have some part of it, as Tadeusz Pobożniak²⁴ argues. Not only do the author and some of the characters of the play have historical links, but some other texts also hint at its historical associations. Śūdraka, the author, is mentioned in the *Skanda-purāṇa*, as a great king who reigned in the year 3290 of the Kali era, i.e. 190 CE and identified as Simuka, founder of the Andhrabhṛitya dynasty. In the *Avantisundarīkathāsāra*, a recently discovered work of Daṇḍin, a life-sketch of Śūdraka is also given, wherein he is a *Brāhmaṇa* king of Ujjayinī and a great poet. He is also said to have defeated Savati, a prince of the Andhrabhṛitya dynasty. The particulars given by Daṇḍin neither contradict nor support what we have found in the *prastāvanā* of the play. Daṇḍin describes Śūdraka

²¹ Arthur William Ryder, *The Little Clay Cart*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1905.p. xix.

²² R.D. Karmarkar, *Mṛcchakaṭika of Śūdraka*, Poona, 1950, p. xii.

²³ Lal, *Great Sanskrit Plays*, p. 77.

²⁴ Tadeusz Pobożniak, ‘*Mṛcchakaṭikam* as a Drama of Individual Characters’, *Indologica Taurinensia*, vol. 6(1978).

as Brāhmaṇa, and in the *prastāvanā*, he has been called *dyjamukham* or the best among the Brāhmaṇa. The poet Rajaśekhara also mentions that the adventures of king Śūdraka were sung by the poets Rāmila and Somila. Somila is said to be the same as Saumillaka, mentioned by Kālidāsa in *Mālavikāgnimitram*. The name Śūdraka has also surfaced in the titles of three lost works: (a) *Vikrantsūdraka*, a drama by an unknown author, (b) *Śūdrakavadha*, a *parikathā* referred to by Rāyamukuta and (c) *Śūdrakacarita* by Pañcaśikha. The name Śūdraka became so famous in history that many Indian rulers including those of Pallava and Western Gaṅga dynasties adopted it as a title to showcase their valour. Later, he also became the inspiration for authors such as Daṇḍin, Vāmana (8th century CE) and Kalhaṇa (12th century CE) who mention him. For later authors such as Kalhaṇa and Daṇḍin, Śūdraka had become a mythical character and lost his historicity. Though the identity of the poet-king is not yet conclusively determined, he certainly had some historical connection with the text and the plot of the play. The *Mr̥cchakaṭikam* embodies various incidents from Śūdraka's life. In the backdrop of the main story, a revolt is stated to have been staged by Āryaka, a *śūdra* rival of Pālaka, the king of Ujjayinī, who is eventually dethroned. These two characters and the coup also have some historicity. *Harivaṃśa*, a Jaina text of 4th century BCE, mentions Pālaka and Āryaka. The king Pālaka who ruled in the 6th century BCE was dethroned by a political upheaval just after the death of Gautama Buddha. So, both these characters do not appear to be imaginary. Cārudatta, the hero of the play, is said to be *bāndhavadatta*, the intimate friend of Śūdraka and Āryaka is said to be Śūdraka himself. Despite not being a historical play, it appears to have embedded history. Internal shreds of evidence support that the drama refers to the period when Buddhism as well urbanism was flourishing. Since the play has a courtesan named Vasantasenā as the central character, the heroine, it cannot be placed before *Kāmasūtra* and Vātsyāyana, the author of *Kāmasūtra*, cannot be placed later than 100 BCE. The play also has references to astronomical information which is older than that contained in the works of Varāhamihira who cannot be placed before 500 CE. Hence, *Mr̥cchakaṭikam* must belong to the period before 500 CE.²⁵

Language, too, provides key to one of the historical connections of the text. The use of different dialects of Prakrit highlights the height of urbanism in Ujjayinī. It also serves the purpose of making distinctions among characters. Saurasenī is spoken by the *sūtradhāra*, the *naṭī*, Vasantasenā, Dhutā, Karṇapūraka, Sodhanaka, Madanikā, Radanikā, and the

²⁵ Kale, *The Mr̥cchakaṭikam*, p.xxx.

assessors; Avantikā by Vīraka and Candanaka; Prācyā by the *vidūṣaka*; Māgadhī by Samvāhaka (the *bhikṣus*); Caṇḍālī by two Caṇḍālas and Dhakki by gamblers²⁶. Most of the women and low-caste characters are shown as using Prakrit dialects to show their cultural inferiority. The most interesting part of the play is that only five characters (Cārudatta, the courtier, Āryaka, Śarvilaka and the judge) speak in Sanskrit, while the rest of the characters speak in vernacular languages such as Saurasenī, Māgadhī, Prācyā, Pavanti, Sakari, Caṇḍālī and Dakka.²⁷ On linguistic grounds, the plot seems realistic.

Another important historical connection embedded in the text is still unexplored. The internal evidence indicates that the author of the *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is much aware of *Manusmṛti* while dealing with the judicial proceedings. Patrick Olivelle says that *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is the early classical literature that provides the clearest reference to *Manusmṛti*²⁸. Act nine of *Mṛcchakaṭikam* is devoted to a murder trial. In. here Śūdraka directly quotes Manu's code of law. This is a clear case of intertextuality where one author is quoting another one to validate his story. This intertextuality could be used to read both the text and could bring methodological intervention in the study of the early legal system. In the fourth act of the play, Śūdraka is also quoting another character from the past that is Yaugandharāyaṇa²⁹. Bhāsa has devoted a full -fledged play to Yaugandharāyaṇa titled *Pratijnāyaugandharāyaṇa*. it seems that most of Bhāsa's play is available before Śūdraka, which provoked him to enlarge the play *Cārudattam* and to bring Yaugandharāyaṇa as an example as in *Mṛcchakaṭikam*. Āryaka is the captive of king Pālaka, servilika who is one of the associates of Āryaka wanted to release him in the same way as Yaugandharāyaṇa released king Udayana of Vatsa. We know that Udayana is a historical personality contemporary of Buddha. Romila Thapar also thinks that *Pratijnāyaugandharāyaṇa* hinted at historical theme wrapped in the romantic exploits of Udayana of Vatsa³⁰ Invoking the story of Udayana with the reference of Yaugandharāyaṇa shows that Śūdraka is not only well conscious about literary tradition but also history.

Historical consciousness could not be limited to themes or plots or subplots or characters only but also to the author's understanding of the past and present in depicting

²⁶ Kale, *The Mṛcchakaṭikam*, p. lxi.

²⁷ Lal, *Great Sanskrit Plays*, pp.76-79

²⁸ Patrick Olivelle (tr.), *Manu's Code of Law*, Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 6-7.

²⁹ Kale, *The Mṛcchakaṭikam*, p.153.

³⁰ Thapar, *The Past Before Us*, p. 354.

contemporary society, economy, polity and culture. From this perspective, Śūdraka play is full of historical materialism which indicates that it belongs to a particular time. Urbanism and urban values are deeply rooted in the text. His cultural contour is larger than life when he depicts various aspects of culture like urban food, clothes, both visual and performing arts in the form of music concerts, an exhibition of play, dance, paintings, architecture, temples idols, arches, pillars etc. His religious spectrum is much wider than anyone dramatist when he refers such a large number of gods, deities, aesthetics, Buddhist mendicants ranging from household deities Śambhu, Śiva, Śankara, Īśvara, Kāma, Kubera, Kārtikeya, Kanakaśakti, Bhāskara, Nandin, Yogācārya, Viṣṇu, Keśava, Lakṣmī, Buddhist monks, sannyasin, the mother goddess of the public square, Brahmā, sun, moon, goddess Pārvatī, Kṛṣṇa sylvan deities to heterodox sects Buddhist monks, nun, and mendicants.

His knowledge of the physical and non-physical landscape of the city can surprise anyone. The vast corpse of flora and fauna he has mentioned in the text makes the city a living entity. References of a large number of wild as well as domestic animals, birds, trees, creepers, seeds, fruits and vegetables in the form of bulls, buffaloes, rams, pea-hen, female cranes, camels, donkey, cats, goats, elephants, cows, cocks, wild deer, hogs, female snakes, frogs, monkeys, dogs, jackals, foxes, swans, rats, parrots, peacocks, quails, partridge, peacocks, chakravaka birds, sharks, alligators, doves, Kanka birds, Chasa bird, domestic pigeons, pumpkins, Kalama rice, Kapittha fruits, plants-Campaka, Yuthikā, Śephālikā, Mālatī, Mallikā, Navamallikā, Kurabaka, Alimukta, Aśoka tree, Nīpa tree, Tamāla tree, Kadamba, lotus, Kapittha fruit, sylvan tree, Kulithha grain, Panasa fruit, cumin seeds, orris root, ginger, mango tree, Palāśa, Kimśuka, Mādhavī creepers, etc. The physical landscape of the city is well represented with palaces, mansions, gardens, public roads, court, marketplace, court-room, stables, gambling salons, harlot quarters, merchant quarters, king's road, Buddhist *vihāra*, etc.

His social canvas is much wider than the political and cultural one. He not only presented the city as a heterogeneous space but also contrasted one. The representation of various castes, classes, tribes, groups, identities makes him distinct from other dramatists. Representation of lower caste-like *chandalas*, upper-caste men like a *brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *vaisya*, *dhanika*, low-caste man, rascals, bastard-page, butcher's boy, mendicant, spy, gambler master, thieves, shampooer, bitches, servants, slaves, prostitutes, courtesans, servants, *mleccha* tribes such as Askhasa, Khatti, Khada, Khadaththa, Vida, Karnata, Karna, Dravida, Chola, China, Barbara, Khera, Khana, Mukha, Madhughata and others, chief of police, Buddhist mendicant, *upāsaka*, barber, shoemaker, nun, etc. His

socio-political canvas is wider, peopled by kings, his relatives, ministers, rebels, spies, officials such as policemen, guards, watchmen, investigating officers, judges, *fresh thin*, executioner, scribes (*Kāyastha*), etc.

Summing Up

In summing up we can say that Śūdraka used a variety of sources when he wrote his play. First, he consulted the great dramatist Bhāsa's play *Cārudatta* to re-invent his play with a different name. *Cārudatta* is a four-act play with nine male and seven female characters, while *Mṛcchakaṭikam*, its expanded version, is a ten-act play with 26 male and seven female characters. He also introduced characters from Jain traditions to enlarge his imagination. The two characters, Āryaka, a *śūdra* rebel, and the king Pālaka of Ujjayinī are mentioned in *Harivaṃśa*, a Jaina text of 4th century BCE. Śūdraka gives firsthand information about the use of *smṛti* literature when he quotes *Manusmṛti* in the ninth act while dealing with judicial proceedings properly. Based on the evidence of intertextuality, it can be said that *Mṛcchakaṭikam* must be written only after *Manusmṛti*. And this incident of intertextuality might be used to settle the issue of the chronology of the text to some extent.

The theme or plot of the play might be of Śūdraka's imagination but not all characters, incidents, material milieu and the dramatist himself. Neither this is a historical imagination in the true sense nor ahistorical one. Historical connections or linings are deeply rooted in the text in connection with the poet, characters, narratives, intertextuality and material milieu of the text. Śūdraka's understanding of the past is not only shaped by some cognitive or cultural factors that he imagined but also by some hardcore historical facts or realities that were present before him. The historical characters like Āryaka and king Pālaka and the episode are not part of Bhāsa's play and retelling the same story with some historical characters from the deep past made it more fictional than a historical play. It is important to note here that Śūdraka is not directly engaged with a historical theme like Viśākhadatta dealing with *Mudrārākshasa* but consciously dealing with the little-known incident from Jain tradition. His decision not to take either from mainstream religious or secular tradition validates his play. The essence of history was kept intact in witting the play and the play remained partly selective and partly inventive type or in other words partly fictional and partly historical type if not a historical play.