

A Note on the character of Charudutta :

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In Sudraka's Sanskrit masterpiece, *Mrichchhakatika* (The Little Clay Cart), Charudatta serves as a fascinating departure from the typical royal heroes of classical Indian drama. A "Prakarana" (a play of invention centered on the middle class), the work presents Charudatta not as a king, but as a noble-hearted Brahmin merchant of Ujjayini. To critically examine his character, one must look past his surface-level "perfection" to see a man caught between his inherited social status and the harsh realities of poverty, passivity, and passion.

The name Charudatta literally means "one whose manner of giving is noble." His primary character trait is excessive generosity, which acts as both his greatest virtue and the source of his tragedy. Charudatta is a "Dhirodatta Nayaka" (a brave and generous hero), but he is introduced in a state of deep melancholy. He has lost his fortune not through vice, but through relentless charity and the performance of religious sacrifices. His lamentations in Act I reveal a psychological vulnerability. He does not mourn the loss of money itself, but the loss of the ability to help others and the way poverty causes friends to desert him. He famously describes poverty as a "living death" and the "abode of all misfortunes."

Unlike the proactive heroes of epics, Charudatta is often critiqued for his passivity. Throughout the play, Charudatta rarely initiates action. He is a recipient of circumstances. It is Vasantasena who pursues him, Sarvilaka who robs him, and Samsthanaka who frames him. Charudatta's "heroism" lies in his stoic acceptance of fate rather than an active struggle against it. He is a Nagarak (man about town), deeply cultured in music, arts, and the sciences of the Rigveda. His appreciation for beauty and art—rather than military prowess—defines his masculinity. This is seen in his poetic descriptions of the storm and his deep, respectful love for Vasantasena.

Charudatta's character is defined by a rigid adherence to Dharma, even when it defies social logic. As a high-caste Brahmin, his love for a hetaera (courtesan) like Vasantasena was a "socially revolutionary" act for the time. However, he treats her with a chivalrous respect that transcends her profession, viewing her as a soul of equal virtue. During his trial for the alleged murder of Vasantasena, Charudatta's silence is profound. He refuses to falsely accuse others and stoically accepts the death sentence. His primary concern is not his life, but his reputation—fearful that history will remember him as a murderer.

A critical examination must acknowledge that Charudatta is not without flaws. His fatalism can be seen as a weakness; he is so resigned to his "misfortune" that he occasionally borders on self-pity. Furthermore, his "generosity to a fault" has left his family—specifically his wife Dhuta and son Rohasena—in a state of destitute vulnerability. While his charity is noble, his lack of pragmatism in protecting his dependents is a valid point of critique for a householder.

Ultimately, Charudatta represents the ideal human spirit in a decaying society. While the political world around him is rife with corruption (King Palaka) and malice (Samsthanaka), Charudatta remains a "beacon of integrity." His eventual rise to the position of viceroy under the new King Aryaka is not just a happy ending, but a symbolic restoration of "Dharma" to the state.

Charudatta is a complex blend of the traditional and the revolutionary. He is a Brahmin who breaks caste norms for love, a merchant who cares nothing for profit, and a hero who wins by losing everything. Shudraka uses him to prove that true nobility is an internal quality of the soul, independent of wealth or political power. He remains one of the most relatable and human protagonists in the history of Sanskrit literature.