**Core Course 3: Indian Classical Literature & Indian Writing in English**

Kalidasa: *Abhijnana Shakuntalam*

Summary

**Prologue:**

The Prologue to the play *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* by Kalidasa is divided into— ‘Benediction’ a brief conversation between the Actor who happens also to be the director of the play and the Actress playing the lead woman character of the play. As we find that ancient Greek drama was part of a religious ritual (like honoring Dionysus), so there is a kind of religious aspect to classical Indian drama. The play begins with a hymn of blessing which might have been mostly sung rather than recited. The Indian plays were majorly enhanced throughout by dances and songs. The “Benediction” is addressed to Lord Siva in his eight *Rudras*, or forms, mentioned each in turn. The invocation of Lord Shiva is for protection and well being of all those present. It was performed by a Brahmin who acted as the manager/ director of the play. The eight primordial elements of Lord Shiva, hence also of all mortals, namely water, fire, the Priest, Sun, Moon, Space, Earth and Air are glorified in the Benediction. The play is more than a captivating love story: it is a religious drama on at least two levels. On the simplest level it teaches the doctrine of karma, that our experiences are influenced by our acts earlier in this life and in past lives. It is also an allegory of the relationship between the worshiper and the sacred. Each play is also expected to convey a certain set of emotions and attitudes called a rasa. Here the rasa is composed of various forms of eroticism and love.

The prologue which is a brief conversation which is in part a discussion between the director and the Actress related to the play of the day. It gives certain important information for the audience that is a new play has been staged by Kalidasa entitled ‘The Recognition of Shakuntala’. The Actress as directed by the director performs a song which is on the present season- summer. It prepares the audience for the play to come. At the end of the conversation the director very wittily paves the way for the main action to begin on stage-

**Act I**

The Act I of the play begins with King Dushyanta, on hunt in pursuit of a deer with his bow and arrows in a chariot. His aim gets obstructed by an offstage voice of an ascetic (named Vaikhanasa) praying for the life of the innocent antelope who also reminds him his duty of protecting and preserving his subjects including those of the world of nature by virtue of being the King. The King eventually realizes his guilt and drops his weapons.

Asceticism (piousness) and duty (rajdharma) get projected as the dominant theme of the play. Further the action is endowed with the ascetic’s prophecy, never failing in nature, that the King will have a son ‘destined to rule the world’. As invited the King decides to visit the hermitage of Kanva who is away on some business and the presently his foster daughter Shakuntala is in charge of service of any imminent guest to the hermitage.

While coming closer to the hermitage, Dushyanta gets throbbing in his arm indication of the omen being “presaging some woman’s charm.” He hides his royal identity and tries to look a humble and modest civilian.

Then the King encounters some hermitage girls coming for usual duties in the groves. Shakuntala and two of her friends- Anasuya and Priyamvada are engaged in nurturing the plants. This episode reflects the usual engagements of the hermitage dwellers.

Dushyanta observes from his camouflage, the charm of Kanva’s daughter. The playful tidying of her bark garment and the compliments by her friends helps the poet to romantically reflect the beauty of the heroine of the play, even erotically at length. This part is enriched with the romantic and picturesque rendering of beauty- natural and human. The romantic acquires its peak when it deals with a feminine vine climbing a masculine mango tree, the first with fresh blossoms and the latter with soft buds. The hermitage girls imagine them to be in nuptial bond. This is simply a parallel of the imminent love encounter between the hero and the heroine of the play. The King makes his appearance, though in disguise when her friends playfully ask Shakuntala to ask for the king Dushyanta to get rid of a disturbing bee.

Shakuntala along with her friends are startled and agitated at the appearance of Dushyanta before them, In particular Shakuntala feels like being shaken with a passion not appropriate for one under an ascetic life. She feels an erotic sensation just at the sight of the King who introduces to be the newly appointed minister in charge of religious affairs. As appropriate to the Indian classical dramatic convention, Shakuntala’s love-stricken condition is dramatized by her gesture and expression of “embarrassment”, not through dialogue.—is in keeping with the conventions of classical Indian plays, in which feelings like attraction were conveyed more through than through speech.

The King offers his signet ring in return of the hospitality towards him. Initially he refuses to introduce himself as the king. He tells them that the ring was a gift from the King. The meeting gets abruptly disrupted as a voice off stage warns the hermit dwellers about the king’s ensemble arriving towards the grove Dushyanta gets separated from the hermit girls as part of measures as called for by the warning. But he feels his intense desire to prolong his stay in and around the hermitage, enjoying the invaluable company of Shakuntala.

Act II

**King’s prolongation of the stay in the forest and when he refuses to go back to his capital to take part in rituals and deputes his friend Vidusaka to play his role over there.**

The King is love-stricken and prolongs his stay in the forest. Vidusaka (figure of comic relief in the play), the King’s companion, complains about the king’s prolongation. The King continues to obsess over his newfound love and that badly interfere with his official duties as the play goes on. He orders his hunting party not to disturb the ascetics’ grove in any way. Vidusaka blames the King for turning “the penance-grove into a pleasure-garden.” Dushyanta now cares only about his proximity to Shakuntala.

The King’s desire for lingering his stay in the grove by the messages from Kanva that evil spirits are disrupting the ascetics’ rituals, so Dushyanta (a minister in charge of religious affairs) has been asked to stay and protect the ashram for a few nights.

Karabhaka, the royal messenger, then brings a message from the King’s mother asking to attend the upcoming ritual fast to safeguard his succession. The dilemma with the King now is his preference between his duties as a king and a son and his urges as a lover. Finally he deputed Vidusaka to play his role in the royal rituals.

Act III

**Metaphorically Dushyanta explains her lovesickness. Love being becoming explicit *gandharva*marriage takes place between Dushyanta and Shakuntala.**

Shakuntala suffers from heatstroke. Actually her symptoms of heatstroke are the symptoms of her love sickness for her love for the King in disguise. Dushyanta wonders, “Now, is it the heat, or is it the heart, as it is with me?” The girls question Shakuntala about the source of her illness, since it appears she’s “feeling exactly what women in love are said to feel.” The King, full of doubt, anxiously waits for her response. Shakuntala says that from the moment she saw Dushyanta, she’s been filled with longing for him, so her friends must help her. The King rejoices.

As advised by the friends, Shakuntala composes a poem expressing her love. As she recites her poem aloud, the King suddenly reveals himself in their presence. As part of their plot she reveals her love for the King which the latter reciprocates.

Now that Shakuntala and the King have declared their love for each other, they can consider themselves married—according to the *gandharva* form of marriage, which could be legally contracted in secret between members of the princely class, even without a formal ceremony.

Act IV

**King is urgently called back to the capital. Shakuntala’s grief after her separation with king Dushyanta. Short tempered Durvasa’s curse falls on Sakuntala. Kanva learns about her daughter bearing the royal seed. Preparations for Shakuntala’s union with the King.**

Anasuya and Priyamvada apprehend: “Who can say whether he’ll remember what’s happened in the forest?” Shakuntala’s and Dusyanta’s marriage is going well, but the King has been called back to his duties in the capital.

The aggrieved Shakuntala fails to receive Durvasa, a short-tempered sage announcing himself. He is heard pronouncing a curse: “That man, though prompted, / Shall not remember you at all, / Like a drunken sot, who cannot recall / What he said in his cups the night before.” On being placated by Priyambada, Durvasa concedes that “the sight of a memento can lift the curse.” The girls relax, recalling the ring Dusyanta has given Shakuntala.

The threefold grief strikes Shakuntala is about her separation from her husband by gandharva marriage, Durvasa’s curse and her father Kanva’s possible reaction when he comes to know about the marriage now that Shakuntala is carrying Dushyanta’s child.

It turns out that Kanva, while making a sacrifice, heard a voice chanting the news: “For the world’s welfare your daughter / Bears the lustrous seed of King Dushyanta.” So he is happy to learn that his foster daughter carries a royal child, and he’s ready to reunite husband and wife with due honor. The women celebrate Shakuntala’s marriage and her impending departure to join her royal household. She tearfully says goodbye to Priyamvada and Anasuya, and they remind her to show Dusyanta the ring he gave her, in case he’s slow to recognize her.

Act V

**Kanva’s men arrive in the court with Shakuntala. The King gets puzzled and is unable to recognize Shakuntala Durvasa’s curse being in effect. Shakuntala’s last resort- the signet ring got lost. The King agrees to shelter Shakuntala till she gives birth to her baby but the latter disappears.**

As her party approaches the King, Shakuntala’s right eyelid trembles—an evil omen. The King just fails to recognize Shakuntala, rather he refrains from looking at ‘other’s wife’ too long.

Kanva through his messengers explains before the King how the sage accepts the gandharva marriage between his daughter and the King and how now he offers his daughter’s hand to him who is pregnant with his offshoot. But the King refuses to accept denying any such relationship. Because, he has no memory of their marriage and can’t accept a pregnant lady with whom he has no known connection. When all attempts go in vain, Shakuntala tries to show him the signet ring he’d given her, she discovers, to her shock that the ring is missing from her finger. Shakuntala, who doesn’t know about Durvasa’s curse, is heartbroken, and her grief turns to anger as Dushyanta denies any connection with her. Then she discovers, in the most dramatic moment of the play so far, that her ring, the object that would override the curse, has gone missing.

The more Shakuntala tries to spark Dushyanta’s memory, the more he accuses her of using “honeyed words” to deceive him: “Females of every kind / Have natural cunning to perform these tricks.” Shakuntala is angry, telling him that he sees “everything through the distorted lens of [his] own heart.” She reproaches herself for having entrusted herself to a man “with honey in his mouth but poison in his heart.”

The ascetics accept Dushyanta’s rejection since they believe “a husband’s power is absolute.” They even refuse to take Shakuntala back to the hermitage provided it is true what Dushyanta stands while rejecting her. Vulnerable Shakuntala is abandoned both by her beloved and by her father’s household.

Dushyanta, on the advice of a court priest agrees to shelter ‘the woman’ Shakuntala till she gives birth to her child. Because he has been predicted that he is going to have a son endowed with royal signs in his physic. The bewildered Shakuntala prays that the earth will swallow her up. Moments later, the court priest tells Dusyanta that the weeping girl has suddenly disappeared: “Close to the nymph’s shrine, a curtain of light / Shaped like a woman, whisked her away.”

Act VI

**A fisherman is arrested with the signet ring. Dushyanta recognizes and remembers his marriage with Shakuntala. The case of childless merchant lost in sea that is brought to the King intensifies his desire for Shakuntala and her child.**

Two policemen enter, leading a fisherman. He’s been accused of stealing a ring with the King’s name engraved on it. The fisherman, frightened, insists that he discovered the ring in the belly of a fish he was cutting up. One of the policemen taunts the fisherman that he’ll soon be executed, but soon the chief of police returns from the palace with news that the fisherman’s story has been corroborated. The fisherman is also to be given a sum of money equal to the ring’s value. The chief adds that when Dushyanta looks at the ring, he became “really agitated,” as though remembering someone important to him.

A nymph, Sanumati, enters. She’s a friend of Menaka, Shakuntala’s mother, and has promised to help Shakuntala. She wonders why the palace isn’t being prepared for the spring festival and decides to spy on some gardeners in order to find out.

The two young female gardeners, newcomers to the palace, are happily enjoying the scent of mango blossoms, when a chamberlain comes in and angrily scolds them for celebrating the spring festival in any manner. At the girls’ questioning, the chamberlain explains that the festival has been cancelled due to “the scandal of Shakuntala.” It turns out that when he saw the ring, Dushyanta remembered that he really did marry Shakuntala and “rejected her out of sheer delusion. And ever since, he has been mortified by regret” and depressed. Thus Sanumati learns of the King’s catastrophe.

Sanumati observes invisibly the King dressed as a penitent and wasted with remorse. She notes that Shakuntala feels the same grief. Vidusaka, looking on, calls the king’s illness “Shakuntala fever.”

The devastated King decides to refrain from court engagements and goes to the garden on the advice of Vidusaka. The remorse of the King gets reflected in the surrounding natural environment. Vidusaka tries to cheer the King with his sweet advices. His words here highlight the importance of supernatural influence on human life and demonstrate how divine plans can even be a comfort to mortals.

Then a maidservant, Caturika, enters, carrying a portrait of Shakuntala painted by the King. As Dushyanta resumes work on the painting, he laments that he rejected the living woman and must now obsess over her mere image. He notices a bee in the painting and warns it not to harm his beloved. The bee recalls Dushyanta’s first meeting with Shakuntala.

The case of a great childless merchant being lost at sea, and his wealth going to the King as brought before the King makes him realize “How terrible to be childless!” The wealth of Dusyanta’s own family will undergo a similar fate when he’s gone, because he abandoned his “fruitful wife” for no good reason. He wonders who will feed his ancestors in the afterlife. Sanumati wishes to console the king, but remembers that Indra’s queen plans to “maneuver matters” such that husband and wife will soon reunite; she must wait until the time is right. Childlessness was a failure to fulfill one’s duty to one’s ancestors, since one couldn’t guarantee offspring to continue paying homage to their forebears in future generations.

Just then, offstage, Vidusaka yells for help in a strangled voice. The doorkeeper runs in, explaining that an invisible spirit has seized Vidusaka and dragged him onto the palace roof. Dushyanta rushes to his aid, but can’t see his friend. Just as he’s about to shoot an arrow anyway, Indra’s charioteer, Matali, materializes. Matali explains that there’s a near-invincible brood of demons that Dushyanta must face. He threatened Vidusaka to try to rouse Dushyanta from his depression by making him angry. Dushyanta agrees to mount Indra’s chariot and fulfill his duty of protecting the realm.

Act VII

**On his way back from heaven fighting the demons, the King while visiting Marica’s garden meets Sarvadamana- a little boy with marks of a world ruler. Dushyanta’s family gets united and is bid farewell by Marica.**

Six years have passed. Dushyanta has successfully destroyed the demons. He and Matali are returning to earth in the chariot. The king’s mind, body, and soul are calm, and he admires the beauty of the earth below. They see the Golden Peak, “the mountain of the demigods, where asceticism ends in perfect success.” The king wishes to descend to honor its sage, Marica, Indra’s father.

While Dushyanta waits for an audience with Marica, he is distracted by the arrival of a little boy bearing the marks of a world ruler, (who later turns out to be Sarvadamana), playing with a lion cub and accompanied by two female ascetics. He is told that the boy’s mother is the daughter of a nymph and he belongs to the King’s dynasty. When the boy drops his protective amulet, Dushyanta picks it up unharmed making the ascetics shocked, because the amulet cannot be picked up by anyone except for the boy’s parents and the boy himself. The king at last realizes that he has “his heart’s desire.” It thus confirms that the boy is his son and that Shakuntala is near.

Shakuntala enters. The King recognizes her at once. Shakuntala doesn’t recognize the King instantly, but she quickly recognizes that her fate has been reversed. He offers back the signet ring—“let the vine take this flower back as a sign of her reunion with spring”—but Shakuntala, no longer trusting it, tells him to wear it instead. She no longer wants to wear the symbol of their youthful love—besides seeming untrustworthy, it also seems not to fit the maturity of their marriage.

The family of three goes together to see Marica. Marica and his wife, Aditi greet and bless Dushyanta and Shakuntala: “Fortune unites faith, wealth, and order: / Shakuntala the pure, her noble son, the king.” At that occasion the sages are briefed about the fate of the couple. Marica reveals the account of Durvasa’s curse while mediating their union.

Ultimately the couple is brought together stronger and more purified. Marica confirms that their son, Sarvadamana, will be a universal emperor who will later be called Bharata, “Sustainer.” One of Marica’s pupils is sent to tell Kanva the happy news of the broken curse and the reunited family. Marica bids farewell to the King along with his family. The play ends with the King’s prayer for freedom from rebirth and death forever.

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A few words about Rasa theory

The *Rasa*theory originates with Bharata in *Natyasashtra.*it has finds its root in vedic period in Atharvaveda (200BC – 100BC). It suggests that every object and meaning has an emotional effect which diverts human mind with its experience and controls the heart and mind of human. Bharata has described all the emotions and state of mind differently, he has analysed the structure of that emotions, and expressed his views upon the relations of that emotions and their effect on human’s being with the literary context. Thus the theory of *Rasa* has become a very important as literary theory, which has a connection with human experience and strongly rooted in reality.

*“Rasa” -* a Sanskrit word which suggests ‘juice’ or ‘essence’ and aesthetics, it denotes an essential mantle state when such emotions evokes in the mind of a human while reading such, watching or hearing such work of art. When a person listen or watch or read any kind of work there is a process in his mind which continuously going through and evokes such feelings which has different emotions, it considers as *Rasa,*there is a different kind of *Rasa,*there are nine *Rasa*which Bharatamuni has given description of, and he has connected all the *Rasa* with different Hindu God and different colours.

1] Sringaram- Love, Attractiveness,

2] Hasyam- Laughter, Mirth, Comedy,

3] Raudram- Fury,

4] Karunyam- Compassion, Tragedy

5] Bibhatsam- Disgust,

6] Bhayanakam- Horror, Terror

7] Viram- Heroic Mood,

8] Adbutam- Wonder

9] Shantam- peace, tranquillity

In addition to the nine Rasas, two more appeared later especially in literature,

      Vatsalya- parental love

      Bhakti- spiritual devotion

              Bharatmuni has presented his theory of Rasa in the sixth chapter of Natyashashtra, he has said that,

“No meaningful idea is conveyed if the “Rasa” is not evoked”

Further he adds that every dramatic presentation has an aim to evoke such aesthetic experience in the mind of the audience, it is a kind of the realization of beauty and art to the mind and awareness towards joy. Bharatmuni has scientifically presented the analysis of Rasa in his Natyashashtra. He said that Natya is the imitation of life, in which different human emotions should dramatically, presented to the audience and glorify such emotions in the mind of audience as it is about pain or pleasure.

                                          The production of aesthetic relish is calls ‘rasanishpattih’, which can be gain by combination of, determinates (vibhava), consequents (anubhav), and fleeting emotions (vyabhicharibhav). He has given two terms to experience the Rasa, first is which we can taste or flavour (asvadya) and the second is the well established dominant mood (sthayibhav). Dominant mood can be created by different *Bhavas* and *abhinayas*.

Briefly discuss the title of the Play.

Comment on the character of Dushyant and Shakuntala.

Comment on the ending of the play.

***Mrichachhakatika***

One of the earliest known Sanskrit plays is *Mrichchhakatika*, thought to have been composed by Sudraka, a king who is believed to have lived between the third century and the fifth century BC. Drama is a distinct genre of ancient Sanskrit literature. Bhasa, Sudraka, Kalidasa, and Asvaghosa are the famous Sanskrit dramatists. Though numerous plays written by these playwrights are still available, little is known about the authors themselves.

Regarding the life, the date, and the very identity of the author king Sudraka, we are eagerly

ignorant. *Michchhakatika* is a play in ten acts based on the love-story of the male protagonist

Charudatta, an honest but poor inhabitant of Ujjayini and Vasantasena, a beautiful and

pure-minded courtesan of the same city. The play is completely based on the imagination of

Sudraka and does not take its material from epics. *Mrichchhakatika* is unique in many ways

within the entire corpus of classical Sanskrit literature. The play is one of the best examples of Prakarana, one of the ten types of “rupakas”. In this present paper, my attempt is to

establish the point of view that Mrichchhakatika is a pure Prakarana.

*Mrichchhakatika* by Sudraka is a creation of outstanding brilliance and it occupies a very

high and distinguished position among the earliest known Sanskrit dramas in the history of ancient Indian literature*. Mrichchhakatika*, the famous Prakarana bears a plot which is partly

derived from history and partly is a creation of the author’s fancy of the ancient India that is

not based on the epic material. It is natural that Sudraka gives importance of his imaginative

creative power which offers the greatest scope of the type of drama called drama of

invention. *Mrichchhakatika* is the only drama which fulfils the spirits of the drama of

invention, as defined by the Sanskrit canons of dramaturgy. The play begins with a prologue

consisting of a benedictory stanza which basically is a prayer for the people of the world.

The author asks Lord Siva to protect the people from all kinds of pain and prejudice, free from all kinds of bounds of mind and body. We also know from the prologue that Sudraka was a

Kshatriya king of some country, brave and handsome in appearance knowing Rigveda,

Sama veda and mathematics. He knew the art of regarding courtesans and the science of

training of elephants. He was a devotee of Lord Siva and has performed the Asvamedha

sacrifice. The great king died at the ripe age of hundred years and ten days. As we advance

the reading of the play from the prologue to the final act, we get all the significant aspects related to the main issue.

A Rupaka has two meanings. It is both a symbol and an allegory, where one incident or figure of speech is meant to stand for another. The meaning is often extended to refer to an entire act of dramatic composition. An entire play was often referred to as a Rupaka in classical Sanskrit usage –the meaning being quite clear, the audio-visual experience of the play was meant to deliver something of a deeper and higher meaning, some philosophical insight. The meaning of Rupaka was often interchangeably used with “drishyakavya‟. The different kinds of Rupaka according to Bharata are Nataka, Prakarana,

Bhana, Vyayoga, Samavakara, Dima, Ihamriga, Anka, Vithi, and Prahasana. Nataka is the first of the different types of Rupaka that Sanskrit aesthetic theory talks about. It is the most grand and comprehensive, employing almost all forms of skills and possibilities that audio visual imitation has at its disposal.

Regarding the characteristics that delineate a Nataka, Viswanath states that its theme must be well known and taken from the epics, the puranas well known through written historical or popular oral traditions. Thus, the playwright is completely deprived of any imaginative connection of theme. It will have five forms of sandhis or thematic nodes, namely mukh, pratimukh, garbha, vimarsa and upsanghriti –roughly corresponding to the less strictly worked out Aristotelian beginning, middle and end. There will be vilasa and riddhi and it will be a source of both joy and despair and employ not one but multiple rasas. It will have no less than five and no more than ten acts. The hero of a Nataka will have the qualities of being calm, tranquil and of an open mind;he must belong to a well known and preferably royal family, and will be a rajarshi, or a king with the qualities of a sage. He will be either a god (devta), a god incarnated as a human being or a human being. The dominant rasa of Nataka will be veera or shringara. *Abhijnanasakuntala*  is a consummate example of a Nataka as it brings together all the strands and applies them to perfection. On the other hand, Prakarana is one of the major forms in Sanskrit drama according to Natyashastra of the sage Bharata, a large dramaturgical treatise with about six thousand verses and has been divided into thirty-six chapters dealing with all aspects of theory and performance. A Prakarana is different from a Nataka. The most important difference between a Prakarana and a Nataka is that a Prakarana does not draw its material from the epic tradition, but comprises characters that are mostly inventions of the playwright. The length is typically between five to ten acts of varying lengths. These characters are drawn from the middle and lower strata of society. A king is rarely, if ever seen in a Prakarana. The diction is the street patios of the time, and never reaches the lyrical height of a Nataka. The themes include mostly petty revenges, political intrigues, familial enmities and the like. In this way, there are clear similarities between a Prakarana and a classical European comedy as defined by Aristotle. The scene is outside the palace, and most of the action takes place on the streets. The setting is almost invariably urban. In many ways, a Prakatana is a better representative of the time, and includes as more incisive social critique than Nataka. Mrichchhakatika of Sudraka is the best known extant example of a Prakarana.

The play *Mrichchhakatika* is completely based on the imagination of Sudraka and does not take its material from the epics as a Nataka does. It comprises ten acts, and an urban setting. The play largely takes place on the streets of Ujjain and successfully captures the life and vibrancy of the city life. There different dialects, often comic and ridiculous are fore grounded. The political coup and personal intrigue play a major role in the play.The desire of

Sansthanaka for Vasantasena, his failed attempts at acquiring her, all form an important part

of the play. He comes across as a buffoon and a villain. However, his villainy is characterized

by pettiness. The scene of Sarvilaka the thief also adds to the comic rubric of the play. The play ends with the sudden turn of fate for Charudatta, the exposing of the miscreants, and finally a political coup. As a Prakarana, the hero of *Mrichchhakatika* is a Brahman named Charudatta, a generous young man who through his charitable contribution to unlucky friends and the general public welfare, has severely impoverished him. In spite of his deteriorating living conditions, he has maintained reputation in Ujjayini as an honest and upright man with rare gift of wisdom and many men continue to seek his counsel. The heroine of this play is a “ganika” or a courtesan named Vasantasena who is exquisitely beautiful and pure minded. *Mrichchhakatika* as a Prakarana also features characters like Vita, a stock character; the parasitic companion of a dissolute young man. The play includes gamblers, thieves and servants as minor characters. Wider use of Prakrit dialects is another characteristic of

*Mrichchhakatika* to be a Prakarana. In a Prakarana, the contemporary society must be reflected. So, *Mrichchhakatika* is not an exception in this regard and the play may be treated as a study in social realism. In choosing a theme of love between a bankrupt merchant Charudatta and a rich courtesan Vasantasena set boldly against a background of contemporary urban society, rather than deriving it on the copious literary wealth of Puranas and the epics. *Mrichchhakatika* stands unique within the tradition of the classical Sanskrit literature. It is a play as much about a realistic portrayal of the socio-political condition of urban India of the time. Ujjain was a city known for its beauty. Its buildings, temples, pyres, and beautifully designed pathways were an epitome of urban planning in the classical times. All these aspects are well expressed in the play. Regarding the social life in Ujjain, trades were held in high respect, as is obvious in a city that based its fame on wealth and prosperity, and was a seat of bustling commercial activity. The rich and famous ones formed the very bulwark of its admiration. This play, however, provides a more real picture. We see that Vasantasena is as cultured a courtesan as any in Ujjain, yet she is cursed as a common prostitute at a moment of heated argument; and her right to choose her patrons is ridiculed by two kinsmen cum agents–Chita and Vita. Their position was precarious. We find her attacked and manhandled by a drunk. No law comes to her protection, and it is only through her wit that she saves herself from being summarily violated. A kind of uncertainty is evident in the play’s treatment of the caste system as well. At the outset, it seems obvious that caste system is rigid. Every character seems to be overtly conscious of his or her caste status and acting according to its demands. In the play we see the Brahmin was revered by many, but unquestioned obeisance to him was not taken for granted. While many lay themselves prostrate before the Brahmin, it is hinted that they carry out rites in exchange of money. Sansthanaka, for one, despised anyone who laid themselves prostrate before a Brahmin. Therefore, *Mrichchhakatika* is a play of social realism that leads it to be treated as a Prakarana.

The political story and the love story which play a significant role are painted partly from history and partly from the imagination of the playwright. The union of Charudatta and Vasantasena through a chain of events is a picture of the happy ending that offers much importance to the play. Finally, the victory of the character Aryaka, the representative of common people is the victory of the ordinary mass of society. So, from the overall study it can be called that *Mrichchhakatika* is a successful Prakarana.

*In Custody*: Anita Desai

**About the Author:**  
Anita Desai was born in Mussoorie in 1937, educated in Miranda House, Delhi. She was prominent amongst the post - independent writers in India. As a novelist Desai looks at India and the Indian social scenario from an outsider’s perspective. It is this perspective that makes her novels distinct. Some of her famous works are *Cry, the Peacock*, *Fire on the Mountain*, and *Village by the Sea*. Besides novels she has also written short-stories and children’s fiction. She is also a visiting professor in prestigious international Universities.   
  
  
**About the Novel:**  
*In Custody* subtly deals with serious themes of the social and cultural repercussions of politically independent India. The novel is set in a suburb of the north of India. The protagonist Deven is a lecturer of Hindi at a private college. His love for the poetic language Urdu and his meeting with the legendary Urdu poet Nur is the main thread of the novel. The poverty and helplessness of both of these characters are woven with much elegance and touches upon the hegemony of languages (Language Orientalism).  
  
The novel initiates with an air of gloom hung over in the atmosphere of Mirpore, the small town giving shelter and occupation to the novel’s protagonist, Deven. Deven is a teacher of a college in the department of Hindi, a department that carried the capacity of high literature but, presently lies, almost in a dilapidated condition, firstly, due to the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the students to master the subject-a subject that had little or no value in the job market and secondly, due to the composition of the town itself, a town of the tea wallahs and the truck drivers, in short inhabited by a class of people that form a distant part in the desire to grasp the beauties of philosophy, art and poetry. Into this dismal world, comes a ray of hope in the form of his childhood friend and companion, Murad. Murad, is the editor of a Urdu magazine that aims to publish long lost unpublished pieces of poems of high artistic value of the once famous, decrepit poet Nur Shahjenahabad. Deven being an Urdu lover leaps in joy as Murad gives him the opportunity to interview the poet, something that he had wished since the time he relished the penmanship of Urdu poets and novelists.  
  
The twist in the tale occurs when he finds how the life of Nur whom he considered as the epitome of reverence and regarded as, the God of Urdu poetry, is fraught with misery and poverty. There was not only poverty in the sense of the lack of material goods but the poverty of the mind, the psyche and creativity. He is not only plagued by ill-health but also by his surroundings. The competition between his two wives, the noise and chaos of the fanatics, and the absence of decorum create a distorted atmosphere, an unaesthetic ambience.  
  
It’s Deven who gets entangled in the innumerable chains of difficulties surmounting Nur in the process of his interview. The interview turns out to be less of an oration of his lost poetry and more a revelry comprising rum, kebabs, biryani and gluttunous talks combined with an inefficient assistant and a second hand tape recorder meant to record Nur’s voice, in an attempt to make the work easier (as copying his words by hand would have been cumbersome). All this leads up to dismal failure, making him shell out money on food, on room rent, on bribing his first wife to fix up the appointment, followed by Nur’s letter back in Mirpore about his intention to visit Mecca and to inform about his cataract operation. The whole novel portrays a descending trajectory of Deven and the rise of miseries coupled with misfortunes.  
  
The novel questions the meaning of friendship that stands on selfishness and insensitivity as observed by Deven’s relationship with Murad, the bonds of marriage mirrored in Deven’s complacent behaviour towards his wife and the educational system of the nation where students with scientific backgrounds are meant for the luxuries of life whereas those with a knack for humanities are shown to rot in dingy classrooms. This fact is also revealed in the way in which Deven’s hindi students take technical classes outside in order to get employment, giving least importance to the learning of the subject within the college premises. This is a reflection of the fact that the art, culture, heritage and history of the country lies threatened in front of the emerging technological boom of the globe. The novel can be regarded as an optimistic tale of Deven and Nur in spite of the repeated pessimisms hovering in their lives. This is because Nur at the end finds himself a custodian to breathe to him his life as it actually is and Deven gets the opportunity to take the custody of the divine poet whom he almost worshiped. This is an achievement in itself .Composed by Anita Desai, the novel is a portrait of human lives as it exists in their own exclusive circumstances, of the hypocrisy and pretension lying within the human spirit, of the difference between the town and the city life, of human helplessness and oppression on the road to ones aspirations.  
  
  
**Outline:**  
This is a novel about a small-town man, Deven, who gets the opportunity to go interview his hero, the great poet Nur, the greatest living Urdu poet. Having always loved Urdu poetry and missed the chance to be an Urdu language professor, he is charmed into going to Delhi the big city. Even though he shrinks at the idea of possibly being exploited by his sharp and selfish friend Murad, the dream of meeting Nur draws him on. So he sets off on a number of adventures on Sundays, the one free day that he should have spent with his wife and son.  
  
What Deven finds at his hero's house is misery and confusion. Having sunk into a senile old age, surrounded by fawning sycophants, married to a younger calculating wife who wants to use his glory to win herself fame, Nur is not what he once was. Or perhaps he always was this.  
  
Deven, a shrinking and weak man, is somehow drawn to this old poet, wishing to help and protect him even as he cannot defend himself. Perhaps it is the tie of Urdu poetry that he remembers from his treasured times as a child with his father.  
  
In order to save the name and works of Nur for posterity, he decides to record his voice on tape for his small-town university. In the process Deven is exploited monetarily and emotionally, where Nur's family and hangers on demand money to keep themselves happy, Murad refuses to pay him for submissions to his self-proclaimed literary magazine. His wife Sarla is indignant at his time away, his fellow professors think he is having an affair in Delhi or push him to get a taping of Nur's voice. The saddest part is the result of the sessions. Drunk and encouraged by his admirers who follow him along to the sessions, Nur offers nothing new or novel.  
  
 **Theme:**  
Identity and language rientalism  
Post-Partition  
Hindi- Muslims poetry  
Social and cultural repercussions of politically independent India  
Poetry  
Language  
Culture  
Decadence  
Identity  
Conflict between Fantasy and Reality  
  
Themes of identity and language are explored and developed. This is vital considering the context in which Desai sets so many of her novels, which is post-independence and post-Partition and the massive upheaval that occurred as Pakistan was created as a separate nation and many Muslims and Hindus had to relocate and an imaginary border was created in a nation. The focus on language is shown in Deven, who focuses on Hindi poetry because he has no choice but to teach the language of the majority where he is based. However, he has a love for Urdu poetry, and when he tries to interview a famous old Urdu poet, Nur, he is insulted by his head of department. He says,the language you speak and your interest in it becomes a vital signifier of religious and national loyalty. The violence in the head of department's words reveals just how much language was such a massive issue in post-Partition India, and how expressing even a love of old Urdu poetry was seen as a mark of betrayal and being a traitor. Desai in this novel then writes of the way in which nationalism became a vehicle for the annexation of important cultural roots that form such an important part of the tapestry of India.  
  
  
**Summary**  
Indian Literature in English has journeyed a long way to achieve its present glory and grandeur. Beginning with the trio of Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand; today it is assimilated in the rubric of Post Colonial Literature. At present it is enriched by a sizeable number of women writers read and acclaimed all over the world. Their works offer penetrative insight into the complex issues of life. The fictional concerns of these women writers are not limited to the world of women and their sufferings as victims of male hegemony but they also express social, economic and political upheavals in Indian society. Among these women writers Anita Desai has earned a separate space for her particular attention towards psychological insight and existential concerns. Her sensitive portrayal and understanding of intrinsic human nature makes her writings conspicuous and captivating. She herself admits her preference for the internal world of the psychic space that has always been a major concern in her fictional writings: “My writing is an effort to discover, underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating those depths till they become more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world.” Apart from concentrating on the problems of women and the way they impact their mind, Desai’s novels have an irresistible appeal for the treatment of the external world of politics impacted by momentous historical events. For example, her *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and *In Custody* (1984) fictionalize the life impacted by the tragic saga of the partition. The present paper is an attempt to analyze the dynamics of motive and mode that make In Custody an artistic achievement.  
  
**1.** Desai’s treatment of the questions related to the social role and implications of language forms the central thrust of the novel. Her motive becomes amply clear when she replies to a question related to the theme of the novel in the following words: “I was trying to portray the world of Urdu poets. Living in Delhi I was always surrounded by the sound of Urdu poetry, which is mostly recited. Nobody reads it, but one goes to recitations. It was very much the voice of North India. But although there is such a reverence for Urdu poetry, the fact that most Muslims left India to go to Pakistan meant that most schools and Universities of Urdu were closed. So that it’s a language I don’t think is goiang to survive in India ………There are many Muslims and they do write in Urdu; but it has a kind of very artificial existence. People are not going to study Urdu in school and college anymore, so who are going to be their readers? Where is the audience?” The loss of the glory of the language, Urdu, due to the growing importance and usage of Hindi has been shown in the novel.   
  
**2.** The fictional discourse in the novel presents a critique of the essentialist nature of the understanding of language that treats it as related to particular communities. Her treatment of the problematic of language culture divide also marks a rejection of the view that considers langue as the real custodian of any language. In the process it marks a preference for Bakhtinian view of language that treats the parole or language in use as the real language. Language in such a view, instead of being related to any community in particular, is related to the people who use it irrespective of the community they belong to. Another view about language that finds fictional expression in the novel is related to the use of language - its teaching or learning – is not always a matter of communal responsibility rather it is more related to one’s vocation.  
  
In the novel Deven, a lecturer in Hindi in Ram Lal College in Mirpore is assigned the job of interviewing an old Urdu poet, Nur, living in Old Delhi. He loves Urdu and Urdu poetry but has to choose Hindi as a subject for teaching because of its value in the job market. . He says: “I am only a teacher……..must teach to support my family.”  
  
**3.** Otherwise he has great love for Urdu poetry and fondly remembers his father’s affection for it. On the other hand the people like the head of the department of Hindi in his college associate language with community and dislike Deven’s love for Urdu. When he applies in person for one week’s leave to conduct an interview with the legendary Urdu poet Nur Shahjahanbadi; the head of the department, Trivedi, bursts out: “I’ll get you transferred to your beloved Urdu department. I won’t have Muslim toadies in my department; you’ll ruin my boys with your Muslim ideas, your Urdu language. I’ll complain to the Principal, I’ll warn the RSS, you are a traitor." Even the tussle for the importance of language is used to discriminate among people on the basis of religion. There is an imaginary border and partition among people even they are residing in a country and society.   
  
**4.** Trivedi’s violent reaction to Deven’s request clarifies how language becomes a signifier of religious identity and national loyalty. This linguistic confrontation leads to communal riots. The novelistic discourse here gains greater relevance in terms of contemporary language base politics gaining significance in political and social affairs. The novel presents the Hindi /Urdu controversy that involves communal implications and does not allow the languages to become objective mediums of communication. This controversial issue taken up in the novel has been aptly explained in the following words: “The Hindi –Urdu controversy by its very bitterness demonstrates how little the objective similarities between language groups matter when people attach subjective significance to their languages. Willingness to communicate through the same language is quite a different thing from the mere ability to communicate.”  
  
**5.** The political meanings attached to these cultural activities resulting in communal divide are rejected in the novel. At the same time the false beliefs of the people who developed a highly romantic attitude towards poetry and language also stand exposed in the novel. The poets and writers no doubts play a significant role in the progress of a language but their romantic notions tend to play havoc with it. Instead of understanding the use value of language some of them tend to attach a romantic notion of false pride in being a poet or writer in a language and, like Nur, consider certain forms of behavior as essential. It is perhaps because of such an attitude towards poetry and language that Nur, in his senile old age, still lives with the aristocratic habits, feeding his pigeons, gulping rich food and gathering around him a group of admirers whom he supplied rich food and liquor. Treating them as the custodians of a language, and by implication a culture or cultural group people like Nur indulge in glorifying their role. Even genuine attempts of persons like Deven are spurned by Nur simply because he fails to understand language freed from established views associating language with certain cultural groups or persons and artists like himself : “Urdu poetry...How can there be an Urdu poetry when there is no Urdu language left? It is dead, finished...So, now you see its corpse lying here, waiting to be buried…Those Congress-wallahs have set up Hindi on the top as our ruler. You are its slave. Perhaps a spy even if you don’t know it, sent to the universities to destroy whatever remains of Urdu, hunt it out and kill it…It seems you have been sent here to torment me, to show me, let me know to what depths Urdu has fallen. All right then, show me, and let me know the worst.”  
  
**6.** The sense of doubt and personalized feelings related to Urdu as a language with Nur himself mark an understanding of language in narrow terms. The novelist’s artistic achievement here lies in keeping the fictional discourse free from such views about language. The fictional presentation of different perspectives about language also finds extension into existential issues related to broader human experience. How the novelist has brought these diverse forms together can be explained through her use of different fictional devices. Nur’s ailing body symbolically represents the sickening state of Urdu. The psychological pain of Deven is alter-ego of Nur’s physical pain. Deven is torn between the conflict of dreams and duty. Murad, editor of Awaz is in some better position than Deven as he has not surrendered to Hindi. He wishes to crown Urdu its coveted crown. His accusation of Deven as a traitor haunts him perpetually. Whenever he enters Urdu arena, he feels like an alien. Sincerity of purpose, zest, hero-worship of Nur help Deven in no way to realize his dreams. Deven’s failure is reminiscent of Desai’s tragic vision. Her novels never end in the fructified results. *In Custody* adds one more name to the series of novels which show an ultimate catastrophe waiting for her protagonists. The sordid reality of the world clashes with Deven’s brittle world of dreams. The collision smashes his hopes. He is caught in the middle of linguistic-politics. The debunking of Urdu from mainstream is equally painful to him. But his Hindu religion stands in the way to his loyalty. His meetings with Nur made him clear the essential absurdity of life and Desai’s existential interpretation of human predicament. Who was Nur? A poet? An idol? A god? Or perhaps he was Deven himself wedged in the labyrinth of unexpected reversal of incidents. Apart from this, the use of different symbols and metaphors marks the way the dynamics of motives and mode functions in her novel. Symbols and metaphors are the beautifying components of the novel. For example, Murad’s face serves as a metaphor. He is facially disfigured by pockmarks; he epitomizes an Urdu speaker who is tainted by his contempt for Hindi. The title of his magazine is Awaz meaning voice. Paradoxically, nobody around is interested to hear the voice of Urdu. It incorporates the sighs and cries of a diminishing language. When Deven visits Nur for the first time, he witnesses the symbols of death and decadence on his way. A dead body of dog, a floating fly in the cup of tea and a group of crows feasting on the dead dog: “He turned and peered out of window to see if the dog lay on the road, broken, bleeding or dead. He saw a flock of crows alight on the yellow grass that grew beside the ditch, their wings flickering across the view like agitated eyelashes.”  
 **7.** The dead body of dog stands for the putrefying condition of Urdu language in the hands of its new masters, it also bears a resemblance to Nur and his exploitation by his cronies. The setting and locale of Nur’s residence are symbolic of dereliction and filth. Deven finds himself entrapped and could not find an exit from the mazy surroundings. Nur’s residence was in Chandni Chowk which looked like a market in a nightmare. The peeling, stained walls of the office buildings wore a squalid look. Deven could not imagine the dwelling of his hero among these ruins. The stench of unclean lanes, overflowing gutters, quacks with their powders held his breath. Chandni Chowk had witnessed the mutilated bodies of its residents during partition. It seemed as if someone has pulled out its liveliness and cursed it with morbidity. Siddiqui, the head of Urdu department is symbolic of past grandeur of Muslims. He is not entrusted with the job of custodian of Nur’s poetry because he himself is living on the fringe of the society. Murad chooses Deven for this vocation as he belongs to the emergent group i.e. Hindi. Siddiqui’s home in a dilapidated villa has an air of impeccable royalty and majesty. He is the silent spectator scrutinizing the shifting interests of the society. His ancestral home is his lucrative commodity which he plans to sell to some landlord. He is unmarried and spends lavishly on himself and his friends. He is patronizing and encourages his servant for his melodious voice. Symbol of surahi appears twice in the novel and in different contexts. First it appears when Deven is singing to himself the poetry of Nur & is nourishing a lingering hope in his heart to make his life worthwhile with his friendship of Nur. Surahi an earthen jar, container of water becomes a reservoir of nectar of life, in search of which Deven is traveling. It holds the promise, fulfillment of Deven’s hopes. At another time, towards the end of the novel, surahi becomes a signifier of impending summer, like a doom waiting for Deven, slicing his throat. Like Eliot, Desai only suggests, never confirms. There are thunders in her world but not a shower for rejuvenation. In the same way, Desai’s presentation of man woman relationships in a patriarchal society reveals her concern and understanding of different forms of woman’s experiences through an effective interplay of motive and the medium The women in the book seem vicious, specially the enraged young wife of Deven’s hero, the poet Nur. Just as the male characters are entrapped in an unsuccessful world, the female characters feel frustrated within a patriarchal society that reduces them to clinging to these men who fail to provide them what they want. Deven’s wife Sarla hates him and feels disgusted at his failures. All her dreams of a luxurious life are dashed to the ground because of his meager income. But the way she registers her protest is nothing more than a symbolic dissatisfaction with her lot. It may be because of the centuries of serfdom that runs through their blood that these women fail to rebel openly. “Sarla never lifted her voice in his presence- countless generations of Hindu womanhood behind her stood in her way, preventing her from displaying open rebellion. Deven knew she would scream and abuse only when she was safely out of the way, preferably in the kitchen, her own domain. Her method of defence was to go into the bed room and snivel, refusing to speak at all, inciting their child to wail in sympathy.”  
  
**8.** Desai is an advocate of the legitimate rights and freedom of such unfortunate women. “Anita Desai has conveyed her women characters’ fundamental dependence on men through her lexicon and tropes of mastery, command and domination. Her women sometimes do attempt to assert their independence and self- sufficiency, but their quest for identity is thwarted at significant junctures ……No woman in Anita Desai’s novels ……..has been fortunate enough to free herself from the shackles of femininity.”  
  
**9.** The character of Imtiaz Begum is problematic. She belongs to the family of dancers, and is second wife of Nur. She is bold enough to call Deven a jackal who has come to relish the blood out of Nur’s body when he will be dead. She calls universities “asylum of failures”. Her powdered and painted face, reptile like movements disgusted Deven. Her insistence on telling her story to Deven is symbolic of Indian Women Writers who tell their own stories and that of other women. In her previous novels, women protagonists were of poetic temperament and male characters were cold and calculating: Maya-Gautam, Monisha-Jiban, and Sita- Raman, all represent such couples. But, here, the situation is reversed. Imtiaz Begum and Sarla mock at the poetic sensibilities of their husbands because they fail to meet their corporeal needs. The bold letter of Nur’s wife towards the end of the novel presents her as an icon of New Woman. She gains respect as a character by asserting her rights and abilities, Deven never manages such fiery rebellion. “The elegance and floridity of her Urdu entered Deven’s ears like a flourish of trumpets and beat at his temples while he read. The essential, unsuspected spirit of the woman appeared to step free of its covering, all the tinsel and gauze and tawdriness, and reveal a face from which the paint and powder had been washed and which wore an expression that made Deven halt and stumble before he could read on.”  
  
**10.** Deven did not have the courage to read the poetry of a woman, because she is a woman. Her bold questions point out the bias of a sexist society: “Are you not guilty of assuming that because you are a male, you have a right to brains, talent, reputation and achievement, while I, because I was born female, am condemned to find what satisfaction I can in being maligned, mocked, ignored and neglected? Is it not you who has made me play the role of the loose woman in gaudy garments by refusing to take my work seriously and giving me just that much regard that you would extend to even a failure in the arts as long as the artist was male? In this unfair world that you have created what else could I have been but what I am?”  
  
**12.** Her angry statements make the reader reevaluate what they previously had only seen through the eyes of a male character. By making women’s aggravation understandable, the primary unsympathetic portrayals of women characters turn out to have been of Deven’s and not the author’s perceptions. This new image of woman makes prominent feministic concerns in Desai’s works. Nur’s wife is the representative of a feminist who explains the change that has taken place in Indian society that new woman will tell her story: “Not long ago a woman who spoke about herself was considered a loose woman. To voice a pain, to divulge a secret, was considered sacrilege, a breach of family trust. Today, voices are raised without fear, and are heard outside the walls of homes that once kept women protected, also isolated. Some of the women who speak here have stepped out. Others, who have not, are beginning to be aware, eager to find expression. But let them speak for themselves.”  
 **13.** The novel incorporates language- confrontation, male- dominance and existential concerns of Desai. All these components are bound with the beauty of language which never fails to satisfy the aesthetic sense. Though there is an ultimate catastrophe waiting for Desai’s protagonist, yet it is his will to struggle which makes him indefatigable, a traveler in the never ending quest for identity and purpose in life. The interaction of the fictional concerns and their artistic presentation makes the novel an artistic whole and stands testimony to Anita Desai’s maturity as a novelist.