PROSTITUTES 1 IN THE MRCCHAKAŢIKA 2 OF ŚŪDRAKA

As in other parts of the world the prostitutes are found in India also from a very early period³. They are mentioned in the *Rgveda*. At one place the bright *maruts* are said to have become associated with the young lightning just as men become associated with a young cour-

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^{1.} Prostitute is a woman who offers herself indiscriminately to sexual intercourse for hire. Websters New International Dictionary of the English Language, vol. III, p. 1988. Prostitute is a woman who offers herself to many men for money. Chambers New English Dictionary, ed. by A. M. MacDonald, Singapore, 1971. Generally the words gaṇikā and veśyā have been used in the same sense. Almost all the lexicons of Sanskrit and Prakrit make no difference between their meaning. But in Pali-English Dictionary these words carry different meanings. Here the word gaṇikā means a high-caste public woman who could be enjoyed only by the bureaucrats and members of the royal family and the word veśyā on the other hand stands for a low-caste public-woman who could be carnally approached by any common man. From this it can be concluded that during the period of Buddhism there was a clear distinction between gaṇikā and veśyā, but later on the difference started becoming vague and in the end these words became synonyms. K. C. Jain, Bauddha aur Jaina Āgamon men Nārī Jīwan, Amritsar, India, 1967, p. 146 ff.

^{2.} In the long and varied history of Sanskrit drama the *Mṛcchakaṭika* of Sūdraka occupies a unique place. It has been variously assigned to periods ranging from the 2nd Century B.C. to the 6th Century A.D. It is one of the few Sanskrit dramas in which the dramatist departs from the beaten track and attemps to envisage directly a wider, fuller and deeper life. In this drama, for the first time we turn from the stories of Kings and queens to a more playbian atmosphere and from the dramatisation of timeworn legends to a more refreshing plot of everyday life. It holds the mirror up to nature and gives us a good picture of the social, religious and political conditions of its day. The title *Mṛcchakaṭika* (the little claycart) is derived from an episode which leads to the leaving of the heroine's jewels in the toy clay-cart of the hero's little son and gives rise to complications of the plot which are finally resolved in the denouncement and has a psychological significance in the form of the heroine's life.

^{3.} Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. X, p. 406.

tesan 4. Gautama also refers to prostitutes 5. In the Mahābhārata and the Arthaśāstra courtesans are described as an established institution. In the Mahābhārata it is narrated how a prostitute waited upon Dhrtarāstra when his wife Gāndhārī was pregnant 6. Yudhisthira sends greetings to the prostitutes of the Kauravas 7. Courtesans are described as going out to welcome Krsna when he came on a mission of peace to the Kaurava court 8. When the Pandava army is described as about to start for battle it is said that courtesans also accompanied it 9. Kautilya recommends the appointment of the superintendent of prostitutes who watched their activities and looked after their welfare. The prostitutes also paid regular tax to the king and attended his court and rendered him personal service ¹⁰. Kālidāsa also refers to the institution of prostitutes ¹¹. In the Jātakas also there are numerous references to prostitutes which indicate that they were tolerated and even esteemed to a certain degree. The fees paid to them were exceedingly high. The roguery and rapacity of prostitutes are often mentioned and it was regarded as a misfortune to be born of a harlot's womb. The stories of Ambapālī and Śālavatī show the important role, the prostitutes played in the social life. Under the Muslim rulers also unmistakable existence of prostitutes is referred to. There is mention of elaborate organisations of the brothels at Vijayanagar in the 15th Century. Under Akbar the prostitutes of the realm had a separate quarter in the town assigned to them. Even in the modern India prostitution existed as an established institution. They were often recruited from widows or women expelled from caste for immorality or other misconduct 12.

Sufficient materials regarding the existence of the prostitutes are found in the Mrcchakatika also. Prostitutes were normally looked down upon in the society ¹³ and were vehemently condemned. Birth in a family of prostitutes was taken to be a result of one's evil doings of the previous birth. It is, therefore, that Vita 14 wishes that virtuous Vasantasenā 15

4. Rgveda, I.167.4.

6. Mahābhārata, I.115.39.

7. Ibid., V.30.38.

10. Arthaśāstra, II.27.124-25.

11. Pūrvamegha, 39.

13. Tasmānnareņa kulašīlasamanvitena, Veśyāh smaśānasumanā iva varjanīyāh, 4/14.

Mṛcchakaţika, ed. by R. S. TRIPATHI, Varanasi, 1969.

... na veśajātāh śucayastathānganāh (ibid., 4/17).

14. Vita is the servant of Sakāra, but presents a good contrast to his master. He is well accomplished and cultured in his manners. He has great regard for Vasantasenā and helps her when he knows that she is in love with Cārudatta.

15. Vasantasenā, the heroine of the play Mrcch. is a courtesan by birth but a kulastrī by her demeanour. Unlike her fellow-prostitutes, she is more devoted to virtues than to wealth.

^{5.} Gautama Dharmasūtra, XXII.27.

^{8.} *Ibid.*, V.86.15. 9. *Ibid.*, V.151.58; IV.239.37; VIII.94.26.

^{12.} Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, vol. X, pp. 404-9.

not be reborn in the family of prostitutes but in that of good men ¹⁶. It was below dignity for a respectful person to go to such places where they resided ¹⁷. Their social status was far inferior, so much so that neither they nor anything belonging to them had any access to the interior of the house of a gentleman ¹⁸. Even Vasantasenā does not find herself fit to enter the inner apartment of her lover Cārudatta's ¹⁹ house. Even visiting his house, she regards as a crime and with bended head apologises for it ²⁰. In the morning finding herself in the house of Cārudatta she feels very much guilty ²¹, thinking that her presence in Cārudatta's house might have very much pained the inmates of the house ²². Even ornaments put on by the prostitutes were also the objects of contempt. Cārudatta seems reluctant to allow the entry of Vasantasenā's ornaments in the inner apartment of his house ²³.

Persons, in any way related to the prostitutes also were considered to be untouchables. In the opinion of Vidūṣaka ²⁴ the brother of Vasantasenā is untouchable like the Campaka-tree growing on the way to the cremation-ground ²⁵. For a respectable person keeping company with a prostitute was a shameful act. In the court when the judge asks Cārudatta whether the prostitute Vasantasenā is his friend, he keeps mum ²⁶. When pressed further, in a very low tone, he, throwing all blame on unbriddled youth, accepts his relations with Vasantasenā ²⁷. Even Vasantasenā's mother feels reluctant to disclose that Cārudatta had friendship with Vasantasenā. She knows full well that a respectful person does not like to disclose his relations with a prostitute, however noble she might be ²⁸.

Anyasyāmapi jātau mā veśyā bhūstvam hi sundari!
 Cāritryagunasampanne jāyethā vimale kule (ibid., 8/43).

^{17.} Gaṇikā, hastī kāyastho, bhikṣuh, cāṭo, rājabhaśca yatraite nivasanti tatra [duṣṭā api na jāyante (ibid., 5/7/1).

^{18.} Vasantasenā says to herself, Mandabhāginī khalvaham tavābhyantarasya (ibid., 1/52/7).

^{19.} Cārudatta, the hero of the play *Mṛcch*. is a large-hearted brahmin by birth and a wealthy merchant by profession, whose princely liberality wins the admiration of the whole city but reduces him to lonely poverty.

^{20.} Etenānucitabhūmikārohaņenāparāddhā'ryam śīrşeņa praņamya prasādayāmi (ibid., 1/56/2).

^{21.} Kim pravistāhamihābhyantacaratuļisālakam? (ibid., 6/0/11).

^{22.} Api santapyate Cārudattasya parijanah (ibid., 6/0/13).

^{23.} Alam catuḥśālamimam praveśya prakāśanārīdhṛta eṣa yasmāt (ibid., 3/7).

^{24.} Vidūşaka, named Maitreya, a comedian is a staunch friend and confidante of the hero Cārudatta.

^{25. ...} tathāpi smaśānavīthyām jāta iva campakavṛkṣo'nabhigamanīyo lokasya (ibid., 4/29).

^{26.} Ārya! ganikā tava mitram?

Cārudatta lajjāri nāţayati (ibid., 9/16/11-12).

^{27.} Cāru — (Salajjam) bho adhikṛtāḥ! mayā kathamīdṛśam vaktavyam — yathā [gaṇikā mama mitramiti? Athawa yauvanamatrāparādhyati, na cāritryam [(ibid., 9/17/2).

^{28.} Adhi — kimnāmadheyam tasyā mitram? Vrddhā — hā dhik, hā dhik, atilajjanīyam khalvidam (ibid., 9/7/29-30).

Prostitutes gave top preference to wealth. That is why they preferred kings and feudal lords and their favourites most ²⁹. Wealth was the only means by which they could be procured ³⁰. When Sakāra ³¹ wants to call Vasantasenā to his place, he sends ornaments worth ten-thousand goldcoins in advance to her as her fee ³². This led to the accumulation of huge wealth in the house of prostitutes ³³. Vasantasenā's residence has been compared with the palace of Indra and the residents of the former with those of the latter ³⁴. The prostitutes gave second preference to a learned brahmin youth ³⁵. Such business-class persons, in their eyes, occupied third position as had acquired much wealth by doing business in different cities and towns ³⁶.

Vātsyāyana lays down that prostitutes, while choosing a person considered three points — his wealth, his capacity to protect them from all possible dangers and misfortunes and his love and aflection ³⁷.

Prostitutes were by nature greedy. A greedless prostitute was hard to find ³⁸. They often amassed vast wealth and owned palatial mansions with varied riches ³⁹. They as a general rule loved the riches of a man more than the man himself whom they deserted as soon as they had screwed out all his wealth from him ⁴⁰. They accompanied anyone who offered them great wealth in any form and even went out to public gardens to sport with such men. They were looked upon as the common property or a commodity that could be purchased by anyone at will ⁴¹. This aspect of their character is further brought into bold relief by the statements of Vita where he compares a prostitute with a public pond,

^{29.} Kim rājā rājavallabho vā sevyate? (ibid., 2/0/14).

^{30. ...} vahasi hi dhanahāryam panyabhūtam śarīram (ibid., 1/31).

Cf. yasyārthastasya sā kāntā dhanahāryo hyasau janah (ibid., 5/9/1).

^{31.} Sakāra or Samsthānaka is an important character having unique personality in the whole field of Sanskrit dramatic literature. He is Cārudatta's co-suitor seeking Vasantasenā's hand per force.

^{32.} Cetī — Yena pravahanena saha suvarņadašasāhasriko'lankāro'nupresitah.

Vasant - Kah punah sah?

Cetī — Eṣa eva rājaśyālaḥ saṁsthānakaḥ (ibid., 4/8/14-16).

^{33.} Ibid., 4/27/6, onwards.

^{34.} Yatsatyam nandanavanameva me ganikāgrham pratibhāsate (ibid., 4/29/5).

Cf. Kim tävatganikägrham? Athawä kuberabhawanaparicchedah (ibid., 4/29/3).

Cf. Iha gandharvāpsaroganairiva vividhālankārasobhitairganikājanairbandhulaisca [yatsatyam svargāyate idam geham (ibid., 4/27/17).

^{35. ...} vidyāviśesālankṛtaḥ kim ko'pi brāhmaṇayuvā kāmyate? (ibid., 2/0/16).

^{36.} Kimanekanagarābhigamanajanitavibhavavistaro vanijayuvā vā kāmyate (ibid., 2/0/18).

^{37. ...} arthānarthapratīghātaḥ prītiśceti Vātsyāyanaḥ (Kāmasūtra, 6.1.18).

^{38. ...} alubdhā ganikā...iti duṣkaramete sambhāvyante (Mrcch., 5/6/1).

^{39.} Read the detailed description of the Vasantasenā's palace given by Maitreya in the fourth act of the drama *Mrcchakaţika*.

^{40.} Striyo hṛtārtham puruṣam nirartham, Niṣpiḍitālaktakavattyajanti (Mṛcch., 4/15).

^{41.} Ibid., 1/31.

with a wild creeper, and with a hired boat 42, which are open to all irrespective of caste, creed or any other consideration.

Some prostitutes were, however too good for the profession and refused to be attracted by wealth. They cared more for qualities 43 than for money and boldly stuck to their resolve in spite of an opposing mother 4. It is because of this that Vasantasenā, who loves wealthless Cārudatta feels that she is above condemnation 45.

Prostitutes were well-versed in dance and music — both vocal and instrumental, and in the art of drawing and painting. From their very childhood they were properly trained in these arts. They were also experts in arts conducive to sexual pleasures 46. Even while moving on roads they displayed such amorous activities as produced passion in the hearts of persons given to sensual pleasures. The result was that a band of notorious and undesirable persons followed them on roads 47, passing vulgar remarks and using abusive words for them and followed them to long distances 48.

Various derogatory and contemptuous names and titles given to prostitutes throw ample light on the dark aspect of their character in general. They have been called nānakamosikāmakasikā (they whip up the sexual passion of thieves, who steal costly gems and metals); matsyāśikā (they always take fish, a very passion-provoking food); lāsikā (they always indulge in fine-arts like dancing etc. to attract men towards them); nirnasā (they, after their death go to hell on account of their evil-doings); kulanāśikā (they spoil the families of noble persons by their contaminating contact); avaśikā (they cannot be made one's own by giving them even vast wealth); kāmamañjūsikā (they are the storehouse of amorous activities); veśavadhū (they are the wives of such persons as are dependents on the earnings of their wives); suveśanilayā (they always keep themselves decorated with beautiful, costly and attractive clothes and ornaments); veśānganā (they reside in the red-light area);

^{42.} Vāpyām snāti vicakṣaṇo dvijavaro mūrkho'pi varṇādhamaḥ, Phullām nāmyati vāyaso'pi hi latām yā nāmitā barhinā; Brahmakşatraviśastaranti ca yayā nāvā tayaivetare, Tvam vāpīva lateva, nauriva janam vešyāsi sarvam bhaja (ibid., 1/32). Cf. ibid., 5/9.

^{43. ...} guṇāḥ khalu anurāgasya kāraṇam na balātkāraḥ (ibid., 1/31/1). 44. ... yadi mām jīvantīmicchasi, tadaivam na punaraham mātrā jñāpayitavyā (ibid., 4/0/20). 45. Vasant — daridrapuruşasankrāntamanah khalu gānikā loke avacanīyā

[[]bhavati (ibid., 2/0/31). 46. See Vasantasenā's palace — description in the fourth act of the drama,

^{47. ...} salīlam gacchantī ratisamayalajjāpranayinī, Ratiksetre range priyapathikasārthairanugatā (ibid., 5/12).

^{48.} For detail see how Vita and Sakāra follow Vasantasenā for quite a long distance, ibid., 1/17, onwards.

and $ve\acute{s}ik\bar{a}$ (they enter into the hearts of other men in order to procure wealth from them) ⁴⁹.

The following various activities of the prostitutes as described by the dramatist further refer to some more evil-aspects of their nature and thus render their dark character still darker. They like birds eat-up the fruit, like wealth of tree-like noble persons 50; they are the tender weapons of Cupid 51; they are cause of sorrow to the ladies of noble families 52; they are the charming flowers of the tree of Cupid 53; they are the fire-house of the fire of passion where men's youth and wealth are offered as oblations 54; they try to procure wealth by laughing and weeping as the occasion demands 55; they first create confidence in men and then cheat them 56; they are fickle-minded 57 and their affection is unstable 58; they first squeeze out wealth of men and then kick them out 59; they are expert in using sweet words 60 and telling lies 61; they are clever in creating rift between true-lovers 62; they are the birth-place of illusion, deceit and untruth 63; they always take recourse to fraudulent behaviour 64; they always keep themselves engaged in amorous activities and sensual pleasures 65; they sell their youth 66 and they exert such a pull on a young man that once entraped he could hardly get rid of

49. Eşā nāṇakamoṣikāmakāśikā matsyāśikā lāṣikā, Nirnāṣā kulanāśikā avaśikā kāmasya mañjūṣikā; Eṣā vesavadhūh suveśanilayā veśāṅganā veśikā; Etānyasya daśa nāmakāni mayā kṛtānyadyāpi mām necchati (ibid., 1/23). Cf. ibid., 1/31. Manu (4/84) also condemns such men as earn their livelihood by allowing their

wives to earn money by immoral ways.
50. Iha sarvasvaphalinah kulaputramahädrumah.

Nisphalatvamalam yānti veśyāvihagabhakṣitāḥ (ibid., 4/10).

51. Praharanamanangasya lalitam (ibid., 5/12).

52. Kulastrīņām śoko (ibid.).

53. Madanavaravrksasya kusumam (ibid.).

54. Ayam ca suratajwālah kāmāgnih pranayendhanah, Narānām yatra hūyante yauvanāni dhanāni ca (Mrcch., 4/11).

55. Etā hasanti ca rudanti ca vittahetoh (ibid., 4/14).

56. Viśwāsayanti puruşam na tu viśvasanti (ibid.).

Cf. Anyām manusyam hṛdayena kṛtvā, Anyam tato dṛṣṭibhirāhwayanti,

Anyatra muñcanti madaprasekamanyam śarīrena ca kāmayante (ibid., 4/16).

57. Samudravīchīva calasvabhāvah (ibid., 4/15).58. Sandhyābhralekheva muhūrtarāgah (ibid.).

59. Striyo hrtartham puruşam nirartham nişpiditalaktakavattyajanti (ibid., 4/15).

60. When Vasantasenā abuses Sakāra, he says — « Vasantasenā! vešavāsaviruddhamabhihitam bhavatyā » (ibid., 1/30/10).

61. Nānāpurusasangena vešyājanah alīkadaksino bhavati (ibid., 4/0/8).

62. Madanasandhivigrahacaturah itastatah paribhramanti ganikā (ibid., 4/27/13).

63. Sāţopakūtakapaţānrtajanmabhūmeh (ibid., 5/36).

64. Śāthyātmakasya (ibid.).

65. Raţikelikrtālayasya (ibid.).

Vešyāpaņasya suratotsavasangrahasya;
 Dakṣinyapanyasukhaniṣkrayasiddhirastu (ibid.).

them and they always keep him under perpetual torture like a pebble in shoe ⁶⁷.

Retired old mother of the prostitute was her sole guardian ⁶⁸. She was harsh and money-minded. Her sole aim was to see that her daughter, by any means, earned maximum wealth. Knowing that Śakāra has sent huge wealth in the form of gold ornaments she orders Vasantasenā to rush up to Śakāra's house ⁶⁹. She does not respect at all the feelings and emotions of her daughter ⁷⁰.

Prostitute's mother was the mistress of the house. Dressed in printed clothes, she amorously occupied a high and cushioned seat ⁷¹. She put on shoes in her highly greased legs ⁷². She had a huge and bulging belly ⁷³. She drank different kinds of intoxicants ⁷⁴.

Prostitute's brother was also dependent on the earnings of his sister. He put on silken garments and ornaments in odd ways. His life was swayed by material prosperities. Under the heady influence of wealth he walked like a drunkard, in a staggering manner ⁷⁵. Though he profusely used costly and scented cosmetics, yet he was considered inauspicious and untouchable like a campaka tree grown on a cremation ground ⁷⁶.

The houses of prostitutes were dens of libidinous persons ⁷⁷. Youths of well-to-do families neglecting their faithful and devoted wives went to the prostitutes and spent their money extravagently over them ⁷⁸. There, in their company, they indulged in luxurious carnal pleasures. They chewed camphored betels offered by them and cut jokes with them preceded by throwing side-glances. They very gladly and most

68. Mātrā vinā kiñcinna cesteta (Kāmasūtra, 6/2). 69. See — the dialogue between Cetī and Vasantasenā, Mrcch., 4/0/10-20.

0. Ibid.

Vidūşaka — Bhavati! eşa punah kā puşpaprāvārakaprāvṛto...
uccāsane upaviṣṭā tiṣṭhati? (ibid., 4/29/1).

72. ... pānādyugalaniksiptatailacikkaṇābhyām pādābhyāmuccāsane upavistā [tisthati?

Cetī — Ārya! eşa khalvasmākamāryāyāḥ mātā (ibid., 4/29/2). 73. Aho asyāḥ kapardakaḍākinyāḥ udaravistaraḥ (ibid., 4/29/3).

74. Sīdhusurāsavamattā etāvadavasthām gatā hi mātā (ibid., 4/30).

75. Vidūşaka — bhavati! ka eşa paţţaprāvārakaprāvrtodhikataramatyādbhutapu-[naruktālankārālankrto'ngabhangaih pariskhalannitastatah paribhrāmati? Cetī — Ārya! eşa āryāyāh bhrātā bhavati (ibid., 4/28/7).

76. Mā tāvadyadyapyeşa ujjwalah,

Snigdhaśca sugandhaśca.

Tathāpi śmaśānavīthyām jāta iva,

Campakavṛkṣo'nabhigamanīyo lokasya (ibid., 4/29).

77. Taruṇajanasahāyaścintyatām veśavāso (ibid., 1/31).

78. ... ime apare'vadhīritaputradāravittā manuṣyāḥ (ibid., 4/28/8).

^{67.} Gaņikā nāma pādukāntarapravistā iva lestukā duḥkhena punah nirākriyate (ibid., 5/7/1).

willingly drank the ice-mixed wine, which was left over by the prostitutes after partially tasting it ⁷⁹.

Prostitutes maintained a hallow of religious life around them. They regularly performed their daily duties and observed religious ceremonies and worshipped gods ⁸⁰. Cupid was their most favouirte diety. Prosperous prostitutes had idols or temples of Cupid located in the courtyard of their houses ⁸¹. If, they due to any unavoidable circumstances could not themselves worship their dieties, brahmins deputed by them did the job ⁸². Besides this, there were also public temples of Cupid where they went on certain festive occasions ⁸³.

There existed a provision under which a prostitute could get emancipation from the hellish condition of her ignominous life. She could attain the status of a $Kulavadh\bar{u}$ (woman of a respectable family) by getting married ⁸⁴ and such a $kulavadh\bar{u}$ was considered to be superior in status even to her former mistress ⁸⁵. Sometimes the king bestowed the title of a $kulavadh\bar{u}$ on a prostitute in appreciation of her good qualities ⁸⁶. Consequently, she could become a lawful wife of the man of her choice.

Thus we see that *Mrcchakațika* presents a very living, true and vivid picture of prostitutes prevailing during its time.

80. Cetī — Ārye! mātā'diśati — snātā bhūtvā devatānām pūjām nirvartaya (ibid., 20/0/7).

^{79.} Dīyate gaṇikāmukayoh sakarpūram tāmbūlam. Avalokyate sakaṭākṣam.
[Pravartate hāsah. Pīyate cānavaratam sasītkāram madirā. Ime cetāh,
[imaśceṭikāh, ime apare'vadhīritaputradāravittā manuṣyāh
[āsavakarakāpītamadiraih gaṇikājanairye muktāste pibanti (ibid., 4/28/8).

^{81.} When Sarvilaka comes to meet Vasantasenā, Madanikā asks him to wait in the temple of Cupid, located in the courtyard of the house of Vasantasenā, *ibid.*, 4/21/1.

^{82.} Vasant — Adya na snāyāmi. Tat brāhmana eva pūjām nirvartayatu (ibid., 2/0/8).

^{83.} Ibid., 1/32/2.

^{84.} Sudrstah kriyatāmesa sirusā vandyatām janah. Yatra te durlabham prāptam vadhūsabdāvagunthanam (ibid., 4/24).

^{85.} Sāmpratam tvameva vandanīyā samvṛttā (ibid., 4/23/5). 86. Ārye Vasantasene! parituṣṭo rājā bhavatīm vadhūśabdena anugṛhṇāti (ibid., 10/58/10).