

THE DATE OF THE *MṚCCHAKAṬĪKA*

The *Mṛcchakaṭika* (*MK*) is a unique play in Sanskrit dramatic literature. The plots of Sanskrit plays are generally derived from the two Sanskrit Epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Some are based on harem intrigues in the lives of historic kings. See e.g. the *Mālavik-Āgñimitra* of Kālidāsa, and the *Ratnāvalī* and the *Priyadarśikā* of Harṣa. The plots of a few plays like the *Mālatī-Mādhava* of Bhavabhūti are, no doubt, taken from social life, but even in their case most of the characters are from the higher social status. The *MK* is, however, concerned with incidents in the lives of persons of a low social status like the hetaera, the masseur, the gambler, the Viṭa and the Cheṭa. Therein lies its uniqueness.

*The Relation of the MK to the Cārudatta*

There are several problems raised by the *MK*, and many of them are still unresolved. The *MK* bears close resemblance to another Sanskrit play, viz., the *Cārudatta* in respect of plot, characters<sup>1</sup>, language etc. So it has been a matter of long-drawn controversy whether the *Cārudatta* is an abridged version of the *MK* or the latter is an enlarged redaction of the former with the addition of several incidents and characters. We have briefly discussed this question elsewhere<sup>2</sup>. Still, we may add here some more instances in support of our view.

---

1. The names of some characters are, however, changed in the *Cārudatta*. Thus the name of the person who commits a theft in *Cārudatta*'s house is given as Sarvilaka in the *MK*, while it is Sajjalaka in the *Cārudatta*. Similarly, the person who had advised the Naṭī to undertake a fast is named Jūrṇavṛddha in the *MK*, while he is called Cūrṇagoṣṭha in the *Cārudatta*.

2. V. V. MIRASHI, *Studies in Indology*, vol. IV (1966), pp. 85 ff.

In both the *MK* and the *Cārudatta*, the Sūtradhāra notices great preparations going on in his house for a feast. In reply to his inquiry the Naṭī tells him that it was the day of the *pāraṇa* of her fast for securing a good husband. When the Sūtradhāra asks her if the husband is of a future life, she replies in the affirmative. Then the following dialogue occurs:

Sūtradhāra (*angrily*) — See Gentlemen! She is trying to secure a good husband in her next life at my cost.

Naṭī — Noble Sir! Be pleased. Be pleased. This my fast is for securing you as my husband in the next life.

This interesting incident is much mutilated in the *Cārudatta*. When the Naṭī tells the Sūtradhāra that her fast is for obtaining a good husband in the next life, he simply says, *savvaṃ dāva ciṭṭhadu* (Let it be). This looks unnatural. One feels that something has been omitted here. On the other hand, the speeches in the *MK* appear quite natural.

See also the following dialogue in the *Cārudatta* (Act I):

Sūtradhāra — Who advised you to undertake this fast?

Naṭī — Your revered Cūrṇagoṣṭha.

Sūtradhāra — Well done! Cūrṇagoṣṭha, Well done!

This very incident is much better treated in the *MK*. When the Sūtradhāra learns that the fast was recommended by his friend Jūrṇavṛddha, he exclaims, « O you Rogue Jūrṇavṛddha! When shall I see you, fragrant as you are like locks of a newly wedded young bride, cut off by the enraged king Pālaka? ».

As we have shown elsewhere, this passage has been misunderstood by all editors and commentators of the *MK*. The words of the Sūtradhāra are not to be taken literally. Jūrṇavṛddha was a friend of the Sūtradhāra as he was of Cārudatta. The aforementioned remark of the Sūtradhāra is purposely inserted here in order to show how cruel King Pālaka was, and to foreshadow his downfall which occurs in the last Act. The author of the *Cārudatta* has omitted this remark of the Sūtradhāra as he makes no reference to the political crisis at the end of the play; for he has omitted the last six Acts of the *MK*.

We may take another incident, *viz.*, that of the upper garment perfumed with jasmine flowers (*jāti-kusuma-vāsita-prāvāraka*). The author of the *MK* has made a skilful use of it. We find in the first Act that it was sent by the perfumer Jūrṇavṛddha as a present to Cārudatta. When the latter saw it, he was painfully reminded of his poverty, since he formerly used to shower such presents on others, while he was now reduced to such penury that his friends, knowing his fondness for perfumed garments, made such presents to him. This incident explains why Cārudatta, in the very beginning of the first Act, dwells on his miserable life due to poverty. There is no reference to this *prāvāraka* in the *Cārudatta*. Hence Cārudatta's opening remarks about the miseries of poverty are inexplicable in that play.

The author of the *MK* has made further use of this perfumed garment skilfully. We find in the first Act that Vasantasenā who was pursued by Śakāra, Viṭa and Ceṭa gives the slip to them and stealthily enters Cārudatta's house by a side door when it was opened by Vidūṣaka. Taking her to be his maid Radanikā, Cārudatta throws the perfumed garment to her and asks her to cover with it his son Rohidāsa who was sleeping in the open. When Vasantasenā smells the fragrance of the perfumed garment, she concludes that Cārudatta was not indifferent to the enjoyment of such pleasures. That enhances her love for him.

In the second Act we find that Cārudatta, being pleased by the daring of Karpapūraka who brings a wild elephant under control, throws the perfumed garment as a present to him as he had then no precious ornament on his person. When Vasantenā learns about this incident, she inquires of Karpapūraka whether the garment was perfumed with jasmine flowers. When she comes to know that it was so, she concludes that the person who made that present to Karpapūraka must have been Cārudatta and none else. That furthers her love for him.

All these incidents are interconnected and have been woven skilfully by the author of the *MK*, while they are not noticed at all in the *Cārudatta*. This is an unmistakable proof that the latter play is an abridgement of the *MK*. In the Kerala country where the manuscripts of the *MK* have been found, Sanskrit plays are even now abridged for being put on the boards<sup>3</sup>.

So there is no doubt that the *MK* is the original play. But there is a divergence of views as regards its author and the age in which he flourished. We now proceed to discuss this question.

### *Sūdraka, the Author of the MK*

Sanskrit authors generally insert their names in the *prastāvanās* of their plays. The *MK* also not only mentions Sūdraka as its author but gives much information about him. He was a Brāhmaṇa well versed in the Vedas. After performing an Aśvamedha sacrifice and placing his son on the throne, he, at the age of a hundred years and ten days, ended his life by entering fire. It is difficult to believe this story. The *prastāvanā* of the *MK* was evidently written by somebody long after the age of Sūdraka. It is, however, not unlikely that the author of the play was named Sūdraka. Vāmana (circa A.D. 800) says after defining *ślesa* — *Sūdrak-ādi-raciteṣu prabandheṣv-asya bhūyān prapañco dṛśyate* (Many instances of this *ślesa* are noticed in the works of Sūdraka and others). He has cited two passages from the *MK*: (1) *Dyūtaṁ hi nāma puruṣaśy-āsinhāsanam rājyam* (Act II), and (2) *Yāsāṁ balir-bhavati mad-*

3. As the *Cārudatta* is an abridged version of the original play meant for the stage, it does not contain the *Bharata-vākya* as in the other Trivandrum plays.

*gr̥ha-dehalinām* etc. (Act I). Of these, the first passage is not noticed in the *Cārudatta*. So it is evident that Vāmana knew Śudraka as the author of the *MK*.

### *The Date of Śudraka*

There is great uncertainty about the date of Śudraka. In fact it seems that there were several kings of that name in ancient times. From the *MK* it appears clear that its author had a detailed knowledge of Ujjayinī. So he may have flourished there. On the other hand, Bāṇa, in the beginning of his *Kādambarī*<sup>4</sup>, mentions a king of that name ruling in Vidiśā. The Purāṇas mention long lists of kings who flourished in ancient times. Śudraka's name is not found therein.

Recently two Sanskrit works (1) the incomplete and fragmentary prose work, the *Avantisundarikathā* of Daṇḍin, and (2) its metrical abridgement, the *Avantisundarikathā-sāra*, have been published in the *Dakṣiṇabhārati Grantha-mālā*. The former of these contains the following verse about Śudraka<sup>5</sup>:

*Śudraken-āskṛj-jitvā svacchayā khaḍgadhārāyā /  
Jagad-bhūyopy-avaṣṭabdhām vācā svā-carit-ārthayā //*

This verse states that Śudraka not only conquered the world more than once with the bright edge of his sword but he has also provided it with a work based on his own career.

The sense of this verse is not quite clear, but it seems to imply that Śudraka has given indication of the incidents in his life in a literary work. Such stories are known to occur only in the *Avantisundarikathā-sāra*.

Daṇḍin's *Avantisundarikathā* has been recovered in a fragmentary form, but its contents have been abridged in the metrical work *Avantisundarikathā-sāra*. This work gives the following account of Śudraka's life<sup>6</sup>:

« In his previous birth Śudraka was a Brāhmaṇa named Śaunaka. After rebirth in the Āsmaka country, he came to be known as Indrāgnimitra. People called him Śudraka also. Once upon a time he was told by a Brāhmaṇa that he would get Rāja-lakṣmī (royal fortune) after passing through several calamities. He grew up in the company of a prince named Svāti. While playing together, the friends were turned into enemies. Once upon a time Śudraka lifted up a large stone-slab. The Buddhist monk Saṅghilaka who saw that feat of his took him and

4. See the description of Śudraka, king of Vidiśā, in the *Kathā-mukha-prakarāṇa* in the beginning of Bāṇa's *Kādambarī*.

5. *Avantisundarikathā* (Dakṣiṇa-bhārati-grantha-mālā), Madras, 1924, pp. 1-2.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 41 ff.



entered a large hollow. The monk attempted to kill him while he was engaged in *ras-oddharaṇa* (extraction of mercury), but Śūdraka put him to death, and then emerged from that hollow. Once he noticed a woman feeding on the flesh of his friend Viśvalaka, but as soon as he seized her, she was freed from a curse and went to heaven. He abducted the princess Vinayavatī and ruled over the earth surrounded by the four oceans, enjoying the company of his friends and queens ».

M. Ramakrishna Kavi, who has edited the *Avantisundarīkathā-sāra*, believed in the historicity of the aforementioned incidents of the life of Śūdraka, and inferred that he was a contemporary of the Andhra (Sātavāhana) king Svāti mentioned in the Purāṇas. He fixed the end of Svāti's reign in 56 B.C. and identified Śūdraka with King Vikramāditya, the reputed founder of the Vikrama Saṁvat <sup>7</sup>.

This theory about the date of Śūdraka is based on a very shaky foundation. The stories in the *Avantisundarīkathā-sāra*, like those in such Sanskrit works as the *Kathāsaritsāgara*, are purely imaginary and have no historical basis. Secondly, we have no reason to suppose that this Svāti who is supposed to have been a playmate of Śūdraka was a prince of the Andhra (Sātavāhana) family. Even supposing that the identification is correct, it cannot be useful in determining the date of Śūdraka; for the Purāṇas mention as many as five kings of that name in the Andhra (Sātavāhana) family <sup>8</sup>. We have no means to know which of them was a contemporary of Śūdraka. Śūdraka's name Vikramāditya occurs in a very late work, viz., the *Viṣamaśīlambaka* included in the *Kathāsaritsāgara*. So these legends about Śūdraka deserve no credence. Though the tales in the *Avantisundarīkathā-sāra* are imaginary, the order of poets praised in the preliminary verses in the original *Avantisundarīkathā* appears to be chronological as we have shown elsewhere from the mention of the Vākāṭaka king Sarvasena and the Chappannaya Group of Poets <sup>9</sup>. So we are inclined to take Śūdraka also mentioned in one of the preliminary verses as historical. He is not called there the author of the *MK*, but no other person of that name is known to history.

The preliminary eulogistic verses in the *Avantisundarīkathā* mention the following authors in this order: (1) Śūdraka, (2) Bhāsa, (3) Sarvasena, (4) Chappannaya Poets, and (5) Kālidāsa. This order appears to be chronological. Kālidāsa is now proved to have flourished in the time of Candragupta II — Vikramāditya, in *circa* A.D. 400. Sarvasena ruled in *circa* 330-355, as shown by us elsewhere <sup>10</sup>. Bhāsa is known to have preceded Kālidāsa and probably flourished in *circa* A.D. 300. Śūdraka eulogised before Bhāsa may be placed in the second century A.D. This

7. He is called Vikramāditya in the *Viṣamaśīlambaka* also. See *Kathāsaritsāgara* (Nirṇayasāgar Press, Bombay, Saṁvat 1837), pp. 566 ff.

8. PARGITER, *Dynasties of the Kali Age*, Vārāṇasī, 1962, pp. 38 ff.

9. V. V. MIRASHI, *Inscriptions of the Vākāṭakas* (CII, Vol. IV, pp. liv ff.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. vii ff.

is also supported by another evidence. In the *prāstāvanā* of the *Mālavikāgnimitra* Kālidāsa mentions Saumilla as an old Sanskrit dramatist. No work of his is now extant, but from a verse of Rājaśekhara we learn that he collaborated with another poet named Rāmila in writing a work on the life of Śūdraka. See the following verse:

*Tau Śūdraka-kathākārau vandyau Rāmila-Somilau /  
Kāvyaṃ yayor-dvayor-āsīd-ardha-nārī-nar-opamam -//*

This verse states that the *Śūdraka-carita* composed by the two poets Rāmila and Somila appears uniform throughout like the Ardhanārī-nareśvara form of Śiva.

As Somila (who is probably identical with Saumilla mentioned by Kālidāsa) was regarded as an old poet in the time of Kālidāsa (A.D. 400), Śūdraka whose life he described must have flourished much earlier, probably in the second cen. A.D.

Scholars are shaply divided as regards the date of Śūdraka. Macdonell says that his play «not improbably belongs to the sixth century»<sup>11</sup>. Keith has admitted that it is impossibly to fix its date definitely<sup>12</sup>. Sten Konow identifies Śūdraka with Śivadatta, the father of the Ābhīra king Īśvarasena who started the so-called Kalacuri era in A.D. 249-50<sup>13</sup>. He overthrew the last Sātavāhana king. This political revolution is reflected in the last Act of the *MK*. In that Act we find that the cowherd Āryaka slays the reigning king Pālaka, and usurps the throne. In ancient times the Ābhīras were classed among the Śūdras. So Śivadatta may have been known as Śūdraka. Other scholars have not accepted this view of Sten Konow. S. K. De has not assigned a definite date to Śūdraka. He merely says that the *MK* is not a very late play<sup>14</sup>. Winternitz<sup>15</sup>, Oliver<sup>16</sup> and Karmarkar<sup>17</sup>, who accept the view that the *MK* is an enlarged redaction of the *Cārudatta*, assign Śūdraka to the fifth or the sixth cen. A.D. This is a mistaken view. The *MK* is certainly not so late. We proceed to show that on the evidence of the religious condition described in the play and some political references which occur in it it is possible to fix an approximate date for Śūdraka.

We have shown elsewhere that the political condition in the last Act of the *MK* occurred at the end of the reign of Pālaka, son of Pradyota or Caṇḍamahāsena, King of Ujjayinī. Pālaka was a cruel and despotic ruler. So people rose in revolt against him, slew him and placed a young cowherd named Āryaka on the throne. Pradyota was a

11. A. A. MACDONELL, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, London, 1917, p. 361.

12. KEITH, *Sanskrit Drama*, Oxford, 1924, p. 131.

13. STEN KONOW, *Das Indische Drama*, Berlin and Leipzig, 1920, p. 36.

14. S. K. DE, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta, 1947, p. 240.

15. WINTERITZ, *Geschichte der indischen Litterature*, Leipzig, Vol. III, (1922), p. 203. Winternitz changed his view afterwards.

16. R. P. OLIVER, *The Little Clay Cart*, Urbana, 1938, pp. 25 ff.

17. R. D. KARMARKAR, *Mṛcchakaṭika*, Poona, 1937, p. x.

contemporary of Gautama Buddha. His son Pālaka is known to have been defeated by King Ajātaśatru, the King of Magadha. The latter's date is fixed as 493-462 B.C. So the religious condition in the time of the *MK* must be that prevailing in about the middle of the fifth cen. B.C. We next proceed to see how it is described in that play.

Buddhism had then considerably spread in Central India. Those who were tormented by the calamities in worldly life or by some other happenings resorted to that religion for peace of mind. In the second Act of the play we find that the Saṁvāhaka loses ten gold coins in gambling. The gamblers harass him by their demand. So he seeks shelter with Vasantasenā. When she comes to know that he was previously serving Cārudatta, she gives her gold bangle to the gamblers in order to free him from the debt. But the Saṁvāhaka becomes so much disgusted by the harassment of the gamblers that he resolves to espouse Buddhism and become a Śākya Śramaṇa (Buddhist Monk). Next, in the eighth Act Śākara strangles Vasantasenā and believes that she is dead. He departs after spreading a large mass of dry leaves over her body. Then there comes the Saṁvāhaka turned a Buddhist Monk, and after taking a bath he spreads his clothing over the heap of dry leaves for drying. He soon notices some motion inside it, and when Vasantasenā comes out of it, he says to her, « In the Vihāra nearby, lives my religious sister. Please take rest there for a while and then go home ».

From this scene in Act VIII, it is clear that there was at least one Vihāra then in Ujjayinī. At the end of the last Act, after the political revolution was over and Cārudatta was saved from the gallows, Śarvilaka asks him, « What should we do to this Monk? ». Then Cārudatta replies, « *Prthivyāṁ sarva-vihāreṣu kulapatir-ayaṁ kriyatām* (Make him the head of all Vihāras on the earth i.e. in your kingdom) ». This shows that there were then in Central India a large number of Buddhist monasteries.

Even great poets are sometimes noticed committing the fault of anachronism unwittingly and describing the condition in their own days. Śūdraka is no exception to this. See e.g. the following speech of Śākara pursuing Vasantasenā in the first Act <sup>18</sup>:

*Andhakāre palāyamānā mālya-gandhena sūcitā /  
keśa-vṛnde parāmrṣtā Cāṇakya-eva Draupadī //*

The reference to Cāṇakya in this verse involves the fault of anachronism. We have shown above that the political condition intended to be described in the *MK* is that of *circa* 450 B.C. when King Pālaka was ruling in Ujjayinī. Cāṇakya was not living then or before that date. He was a contemporary of Candragupta Maurya who ascended the throne of Magadha after exterminating the Nanda family in *circa* 324

18. *MK* (ed. by Hirananda Shastri), Bombay, 1910, p. 27. This is Sanskrit rendering of the original Prakrit verse.

B.C. i.e. after more than a century and a quarter. So the reference to him in the speech of Śākara suffers from the fault of anachronism.

Śūdraka seems to have committed the same fault in describing the religious condition of Ujjayinī in the *MK*. That condition could not have obtained in Ujjayinī in the time of Pālaka (*circa* 450 B.C.). Buddhism did not spread much in Central India during the first three centuries after the death of the Buddha (*circa* 486 B.C.). It was only after Aśoka espoused Buddhism and appointed *Dharmamahāmātrās* and *Buddhist* missionaries that Buddhism spread far and wide. So the religious condition in the *MK* which presupposes the existence of several Buddhist monasteries in Central India could not be of the middle of the fifth century B.C. It must be of a much later age. It cannot also be of as late a date as the age of the Guptas; for Buddhism was then yielding place to Hinduism. Though Śūdraka professes to describe the religious condition in the time of King Pālaka, that condition really prevailed in a much later age, *viz.*, in the early centuries of the Christian era.

As Śūdraka has unwittingly described the religious condition in his own age, he has also inserted some political references which betray his own time as we propose to show now.

After the political revolution mentioned in the tenth Act, the new king Āryaka sends the following message to Cārudatta through Śarvilaka, « Immediately after accession, your friend Āryaka offers to you the kingdom of Kuśāvātī on the bank of the river Veṇā. Please agree to this first request of your friend by accepting it ». Scholars have not so far understood the implication of this passage. Let us discuss it in some detail.

When a king of Ujjayinī offers the kingdom of Kuśāvātī on the bank of the Veṇā (modern Vaingāṅgā in the Bhaṇḍarā District of Vi-darbha) to his friend, it means that his own rule then extended from the country of Ākarāvāntī (modern Mālwa) in the north to the country on the bank of the Vaingāṅgā in the south. But this political condition did not obtain in the time of King Pālaka (*i.e.* in the middle of the fifth cen. B.C.). Śūdraka is unwittingly referring to the political condition in his own time. For understanding its full significance, we must first identify Kuśāvātī.

We learn from the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki that before his death Rāma distributed the countries of his empire among his own and his brothers' sons. About the kingdoms of Kuśa and Lava the *Rāmāyaṇa* says as follows<sup>19</sup>:

*Kosaleṣu Kuśaṁ vīram-Uttareṣu tathā Lavam /  
Abhiṣiñcan-mahātmānāv-ubhāv-eva Kuśi-Lavau //*

Rāma gave the Dakṣiṇa or South Kosala country to Kuśa, and the Uttara or North Kosala country to Lava. Uttara Kosala was the name

19. *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* (Cr. Ed.), Baroda, 1975, Uttarakāṇḍa, Canto 97, vv. 17-18.

of the country round Ayodhyā. Rāma founded Śrāvastī, and made it the capital of Lava, Dakṣiṇa Kosala comprised the modern Chattisgarh Division of Madhya Pradesh comprising the modern districts of Rāipur and Bilāspur with some adjoining territory now included in the Bhaṇḍārā District of Vidarbha. Kausalyā, the mother of Rāma, was a princess of this country. This shows that the view of some scholars that the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not contain any references to South India, and that Laṅkā, the capital of Rāvaṇa, was situated a few miles north of Jabalpur in North India is erroneous.

After making over the country of Dakṣiṇa Kosala to Kuśa, Rāma founded the city of Kuśāvati in his name, and made it his capital. This city is described in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as situated on the slope of the Vindhya mountain (*Vindhya-parvata-rodhasi*)<sup>20</sup>.

In the sixteenth canto of the *Raghuvamśa*, Kālidāsa describes that while Kuśa was ruling from Kuśāvati, he saw one night the presiding deity of Ayodhyā, who described to him to what pitiable condition that city had been reduced after the passing away of Rāma. She importuned Kuśa to shift his capital there in order to restore its previous glory to that city. Kuśa promised to do so, and soon proceeded to do it. Kālidāsa has describes Kuśa's journey from Kuśāvati to Ayodhyā in the sixteenth canto of the *Raghuvamśa*. He mentions the Vindhya mountain and the river Revā in this connection. This leaves no doubt that Kuśāvati was situated to the south of the Narmadā and the Vindhya mountain.

The mention of Kuśāvati as situated on the bank of the Veṇā (modern Vaingāṅga) helps in the identification of that city<sup>21</sup>. The Veṇā or the Beṇā is undoubtedly the Vaingāṅgā which flows through the Bhaṇḍārā District. It has been regarded as very holy from very ancient times. The territory on both the banks of it was known in ancient times as Beṇākāṭa<sup>22</sup> or Beṇākārpara-bhoga<sup>23</sup>. These names occur in the inscriptions of the Sātavāhanas and the Vākātakas. The city of Kuśāvati must have been situated on the bank of this very river.

But have we any evidence that such an ancient city existed in this part of the country? The description suits the town of Pauni in the Bhaṇḍārā District. It is situated on the bank of the Veṇā (modern Vaingāṅgā). Several *Stūpas* dating back to the Maurya-Śuṅga period have been discovered there in recent excavations<sup>24</sup>. King Bhagadatta of the Bhāra family established a *pādukāpaṭṭa*, evidently of the Buddha,

20. See the following verse, *ibid.* Uttarakāṇḍa, canto 98, v. 4:

*Kuśasya nagarī ramyā Vindhya-parvata-rodhasi /  
Kuśavat-iti nāmnā yā kṛtā Rāmeṇa dhimatā //*

21. OLIVER thinks that this Veṇā was a tributary of the Gaṅgā and flowed past Kuśāvati and Ujjayinī! KARMAKAR thought that it was a tributary of the Narmadā, and identified Kuśāvati with Rāmnagar in Bundelkhaṇḍ!

22. See Nāsik Cave Inscription of Gautamīputra Sātakarni, *EI* (1906-8), pp. 71 ff.

23. MIRASHI, *Inscriptions of the Vākātakas* (*CII*, Vol. V, 1968, pp. 29 ff).

24. *Pauni Excavations*, Nagpur, 1972.

there as recorded in a large stone inscription discovered there<sup>25</sup>. The place was probably his capital. The country of Beṇākaṭa has been mentioned in some inscriptions of the second century A.D. in the caves at Nāsik, which shows that the place was famous in the early centuries of the Christian era<sup>26</sup>. This town must evidently be ancient Kuśāvatī. There is no other so ancient a place on the bank of the Vaingāṅgā.

From the description in the *MK* it seems that this region was comprised in the empire of the king ruling from Ujjayinī. This political condition obtained only in the beginning of the second century A.D. The Kuśāṇa Emperor Kaniška and his successors soon extended their rule not only to such countries of North India as the Panjāb, Uttar Pradesh, Bihār, Gujarāt, Kachchha, Kāthiāwād and Mālwa, but also to Koṅkaṇ, Northern Mahārāṣṭra and Vidarbha in the South. They appointed Kṣatrapas (or Provincial Governors) to rule over these provinces. They are known to have appointed Caṣṭana over Kachchha and parts of Kāthiāwād, and first Bhūmaka and later Nahapāna over Koṅkaṇ and Northern Mahārāṣṭra. Their inscriptions and coins have been found in all these provinces. That Vidarbha also was placed under a Kṣatrapa became known from a memorial pillar of Mahākṣatrapa Rupiamma discovered at Paunī itself<sup>27</sup>. These Kṣatrapas of Veṇā-taṭa were evidently ruling as Governors of the Kuśāṇa king of Ujjayinī.

This situation changed soon thereafter. In *circa* A.D. 125 the Sāta-vāhana king Gautamīputra Sātakarṇi of Pratiṣṭhāna raided Vidarbha and annexed the country to his kingdom. He next marched west and exterminated the Kṣaharāta race in battles fought near Nāsik and Kārle in Northern Mahārāṣṭra. In the grant of a field which he made soon after his victory at Govardhana near Nāsik, he describes himself as *Beṇā-kataka-svāmī*<sup>28</sup> (the Lord of the Beṇākaṭaka).

Gautamīputra next invaded and occupied several countries in Central India such as Saurāṣṭra (Kāthiāwād), Ākarāvantī (Eastern and Western Mālwa) etc. as stated in a Nāsik Cave inscription of his son Puṣumāvi. But this large empire of Gautamīputra did not last long. Soon after his death, Rudradāman, the grandson of Caṣṭana, reconquered some countries of the north like Saurāṣṭra and Ākarāvantī, but he could not extend his rule to Vidarbha and conquer Veṇā-taṭa (the Pauni region)<sup>29</sup>.

The *MK* shows that the kingdom of Kuśāvatī was comprised in the empire of the ruler of Ujjayinī. This state of things obtained only in the early period of Kuśāṇa rule, *i.e.* in the beginning of the second century A.D. If we suppose that Śūdraka has described in the *MK* the

25. *EI*, 24 (1937-38), pp. 11 ff.

26. *Ibid.*, 8 (1906-8), pp. 71 ff.

27. *Ibid.*, 37 (1968), pp. 201 ff.

28. *Ibid.*, 8 (1906-8), pp. 71 ff.

29. The Gīrnār Rock Inscription of Rudradāman mentions Eastern and Western Ākarāvantī (Mālwa) as included in his empire, but makes no mention of Vidarbha as comprised therein.

political situation in the country as it obtained in his own time, *he must be placed in the first quarter of the second cen. A.D.*

Recently, a *Bhāṇa* (one-character play) in Sanskrit, named *Padma-prābhṛtaka* ascribed to Sūdraka has been discovered and published<sup>30</sup>. Before closing this subject we must discuss how far its date agrees with that of the *MK*, fixed above. Sūdraka's name occurs only in the colophon of the play, but as one of its verses has been cited under the name of Sūdraka in the anthology *Vidagdhanavallabha*, we must credit him with its authorship. But from the religious and social condition, style of composition and language, this play appears to be later by at least two or three centuries than the *MK*. Its subject matter may be summarised as follows:

Mūladeva, son of Karṇi, sends his Viṭa named Śaśa to Devasenā, the daughter of a hetaera, to probe her mind. He meets her and comes back with the present (*prābhṛtaka*) of a lotus (*padma*) given by her. Hence this one-character play is called *Padma-prābhṛtaka*. It is written in a well developed style, full of long compounds and *alaṅkāras*. While passing by the streets of Ujjayinī, the Viṭa accosts a number of persons following different professions such as a poet, a grammarian, a Buddhist monk, a nun etc., and indulges in much social satire, pointing out their vain pretensions and foibles. In some places he draws a graphic word picture of lovely young women or of those suffering from the pangs of separation.

Some characters of this *Bhāṇa* have been mentioned by Bāṇa in his *Kādambarī*. So it is undoubtedly older than the sixth century A.D., and may even be of the Gupta age as shown by the Editors Moti Chandra and V. S. Agrawal. But this *Bhāṇa* is not likely to have been a work of the author of the *MK*. The latter play has been written in a much simpler, forcible and direct style, free from verbal acrobatics, and the society it describes is of a higher moral standard than that in the *Padma-prābhṛtaka* which is full of hypocrites, rogues and rakes. The *MK* must, therefore, have been written in a much earlier age, *viz.*, the beginning of the second century A.D. as shown above.

*Nagpur.*

---

30. *Caturbhāṇī*, edited with Hindi translation etc. by MOTICHANDRA and V. S. AGRAWAL, Bombay, 1959.