

THE LITTLE CLAY CART (MRCCHAKATIKA)

Sudraka

(c. 300-350CE)

Cultural significance

The significance of this story in Indian culture must, in part, be measured by its longevity: dating from around 300-350 CE, this is the earliest surviving drama in the long course of literature in the subcontinent. It has been read, performed and watched by audiences for nearly two thousand years. It was also the first Indian play to be performed in the West (in translation), in Berkeley, California, in 1907. In India, it has been adapted four times as a film. A comparison of *The Little Clay Cart* with the other great classical Sanskrit play, *Shakuntala* (written by Kalidasa approximately a century later) also reveals something of its genius. Whereas *Shakuntala* is a tragic romance, sprinkled with mythological and religious motifs and characters, *The Little Clay Cart* reads like a social realist novel, with a good dose of satire. In Sudraka's play, gods and other celestials hardly make an appearance, while gamblers, watchmen and other common people have prominent roles. It is truly amazing to think that a story based on a child's toy would still enchant readers and audiences nearly two thousand years after its creation.

Story

The story told in this classical Sanskrit play (c. 300-350CE) is a romance laced with palace intrigue, murder and political skulduggery. It is also leavened with considerable humour. The drama opens with Carudatta, a kind but impoverished and profligate young Brahmin man, who has a wife and a son. Rather than look after his family, however, he has continually given away money to friends and acquaintances whenever they asked. Despite living in a crumbling house, his generosity has earned him a high reputation which he is desperate to retain. His deteriorating situation appears to brighten when he falls in love with Vasantasena, whom he glimpses at a temple festival. Vasantasena, a courtesan of considerable wealth and great beauty, returns his affection.

Soon, however, the plot darkens as another figure appears. This is Samsthanaka, a crazed brother-in-law of the king, who is also in love with Vasantasena. Mad with love, he and his gang pursue her, but she escapes by fleeing to Carudatta's house. Carudatta and his friend, Maitreya, are talking over his financial troubles when the door bursts open and Vasantasena flings herself upon them in distress. This chance meeting between the two increases their love for one another, and before she leaves his house, Vasantasena gives Carudatta a box of her jewellery for safe-keeping (to provide her with an excuse to return).

The plot takes another turn when a thief named Sarvilaka steals the jewels as part of his plan to purchase the freedom of his lover, Madanika, who (coincidentally) is one of Vasantasena's serving maids. Although Vasantasena recognises the jewels as her own, she does not object to freeing Madanika from her service in return for them. Her ulterior motive is that Carudatta will find out that the jewels stolen from his house have been recovered, which will again make him seek her out. Having not yet seen the recovered jewels, however, Carudatta himself becomes a 'thief' and decides to send his wife's expensive pearl necklace to Vasantasena to compensate for the lost jewels. His friend Maitreya cautions him against this action, pointing out that courtesans are 'scheming creatures, not to be trusted.' Has she planned this all along, he wonders, to recover her own jewels and then receive more jewels from Carudatta? Carudatta ignores this warning, sends the necklace and begins a new life with Vasantasena as his mistress.

This happy arrangement is then darkened by a seemingly trivial thing: a clay cart. When Vasantasena meets Carudatta's young son, he is upset because he has seen a friend with a gold cart and no longer wants to play with his poor, little clay cart. Seeing the little boy's distress, Vasantasena

heaps her gold jewellery into his little cart and then leaves the house intending to meet Carudatta in a park. When she steps into a familiar looking carriage, however, she finds herself kidnapped by Samsthanaka, who has always been in love with her. He is furious, still smarting from her rejection of him, and orders his men to kill her. When they recoil from this act of violence, Samsthanaka himself strangles her to death. Hiding the body beneath some leaves, he then accuses Carudatta of killing her. Despite his pleas of innocence, Carudatta is found guilty by a judge investigating the crime. The incriminating evidence is, of course, the little clay cart stuffed full of the dead woman's jewels. Obviously, Carudatta had robbed her, killed her and tried to hide the stolen goods in his son's toy cart.

Then comes the most astounding element of the plot: the dead woman is not Vasantasena but an unknown woman. Vasantasena was revived by a Buddhist monk and taken to a nearby village to recover. At the very moment that Carudatta faces execution, Vasantasena appears in the palace, just in time to save both him and his wife, who was ready to throw herself on a funeral pyre. When Vasantasena tells her story, Samsthanaka is arrested and put in prison. The reconciliation of the various plot strands continues when Sarvilaka, the thief who started everything by stealing Vasantasena's jewels, helps the prince Aryaka escape from prison and overthrow the evil king Palaka. Now sitting on the throne, Aryaka makes Carudatta a minister in the palace. As a final demonstration of his compassionate nature, Carudatta then convinces Aryaka to pardon Samsthanaka.

Themes

Duplication One of the more clever themes in this ingenious story is that of duplication or double identities. First, we have the pair of jewels that play such a key role in the plot. Vasantasena gives her jewels to Carudatta, in order to provide her with an opportunity to return to his house. When those jewels are stolen, Carudatta himself steals another set of jewels (from his wife), this time a pearl necklace, and presents it to Vasantasena. We can also mention that the first set of jewels is used to win Carudatta's love, and when stolen, they are used to purchase the 'love' of a woman. The cycle of jewels and love turns again, when the stolen pearl necklace is presented to Vasantasena to win her favour. We also have three sets of paired characters: 1) the courtesans Vasantasena and Mandika; one is the rich lady and the other her servant; 2) the rival lovers Carudatta and Samsthanaka competing for Vasantasena's love; the first is the hero, the second the villain; 3) the kings (or princes) Palaka and Aryaka; the first is evil, the second is good. Next, we have the central object of the play: the little clay cart. It, too, is paired with another cart, the golden one owned by a playmate of the heroine's young boy. Later, the clay cart itself becomes a golden cart, when Vasantasena fills it with her gold jewellery in order to win the boy's affection. This clay-turned-gold cart is then the crucial piece of evidence used to convict Carudatta of the murder of Vasantasena. Except that Vasantasena was not murdered, we only thought she was. She was attacked and left for dead, but she was revived and taken away. So, the dead body found on the spot of the crime is a second woman. Duplications of all sorts—double identity, false and true rings, recycled plot elements—are common in Indian literature, and indeed world literature. Usually, however, the second identity is deliberately assumed by a criminal or other guilty person in order to escape blame, whereas in this little jewel of a story, it becomes the accidental method by which the innocent man is vindicated. It also allows the heroine to return for a happy-ever-after ending.

Love A second, and possibly more conscious, theme in this wonderful drama is the recuperative power of love. The story is, essentially, a romance, but we have desperate acts of violence and murder that (appear to) kill off the heroine and land the hero in prison. We have crimes of theft and acts of deception. But we also have the unstoppable power of love, in all its forms—conjugal love, erotic love, filial love and love between friends—that transforms characters, rescues people and cancels their ill deeds. On the most obvious level, we have the unexpected love of a high-status courtesan (Vasantasena) for an impoverished man (Carudatta). Her love is what changes him from the hopeless figure at the beginning of the story into a respected minister of state at the end. Even the thief, Sarvilaka, who steals the jewels does so not for monetary gain but in order to purchase the freedom of his lover, Mandika. Again, Sarvilaka's love-propelled crime leads to a positive change in her position in life. Not all love, however, is benign. Samsthanaka, who tries to murder Vasantasena, 'loves her' but with a deranged passion that turns to vicious jealousy and vindictiveness. There is also the compassion of the Buddhist sage who rescues Vasantasena and nurses her. His universal, platonic love does literally resuscitate her and return her to life. When she wakes up from the coma

caused by the assault on her, Vasantasena says, 'Revive me by taking me to Carudatta. Revive me like the sight of the cool moon revives the night lily.' Then, she, in turn, rescues Carudatta when he is about to be executed. 'He [Carudatta] lives, he has risen again,' says a guard at the execution site. And she remarks, 'But it is I who am brought back to life again.' A final release by love is the freeing from prison of the good prince Aryaka, who has been put in a dungeon by the evil king Palaka. His 'rebirth' is also an act of brotherly love on the part of Carudatta and Samsthanaka. Some commentators have sought to explain the prevalence of this 'resuscitation' motif in the play by reference to the Hindu belief in the karmic cycle of life-death-rebirth, but this seems a stretch too far. A simpler and more likely explanation is that these 'revivals' were understood as the healing power of love.

Evil Although this story is an ancient Sanskrit romance-comedy (perhaps the oldest 'rom-com' in world literature), it has its distinctly dark edges and layers. The prominence of greed, theft, betrayal, crazed jealousy and murder in the plot suggests that one of the author's intentions was to consider the nature of evil. Is it passion, the bastard child of love, which slips its moorings and ensnares a person in a twisted need to possess? Certainly, this is a plausible description of what motives Samsthanaka to murder a woman (who he thinks is Vasantasena) and then to falsely accuse Carudatta of the crime. Or is evil caused by money? Certainly, this is what leads to Carudatta's downfall (through gambling and giving money to gamblers). There is a very funny exchange between two gamblers who are desperate to raise some cash so they can 'roll the dice.' Money is also what propels Sarvilaka's theft of the jewels. At one point, a character does actually comment that the 'lack of money is the root of all evil.' He goes on to make a modern-day argument regarding crime: poverty leads to despair and then to foolish actions, including theft. There is also the innocent young boy's desire to have a gold cart, which his friend has. The common clay variety is not good enough for him, not after he has seen the gold one. And, finally, greed is the false motive deliberately attributed to Carudatta by his accuser: that he killed Vasantasena in order to steal her jewels. The only major character who appears not to be trapped by money is Maitreya, Carudatta's friend who supplies him with Buddhist-inspired wisdom about the transience of life. In this satirical exploration of human failings, the author Sudraka, seems to answer his question about the nature of evil with a combination of passion and money. When the two are intertwined, as they are in greed, we can only expect people to act in terrible ways.

Characters

Carudatta Carudatta is the hero of the story. He is a generous but foolish man, who falls in love with a courtesan and makes mistakes but eventually triumphs in the end.

Maitreya Maitreya is Carudatta's closest friend and advisor. Although he cautions Carudatta against a certain course of action, his friend ignores him and brings tragedy upon himself.

Vasantasena Vasantasena is the female protagonist. She is a wealthy courtesan who returns Carudatta's love and proves herself to be a person of virtue and generosity.

Samsthanaka Samsthanaka, though brother-in-law of the king, is an unstable man and violence-prone character. He is Carudatta's rival for Vasantasena's love and does not hesitate to murder her when she rejects him.

Aryaka Aryaka is a captive prince freed through the efforts of Sarvilaka and Carudatta. He deposes the tyrannical king Palaka and rewards Carudatta's for his help.

Sarvilaka Sarvilaka is a thief and a Brahmin, who kicks off the drama by stealing the jewels that Vasantasena left in Carudatta's house. He shows his admirable side, however, when he aids Carudatta in freeing the good prince Aryaka from prison.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Carudatta (Weak)

Character Carudatta, the central male figure of this story, is a mixture of admirable traits and character flaws. He is generous, unpretentious and compassionate, and genuinely loves Vasantasena. He is also a Brahmin, which doesn't always remove a fictional character from blame but does usually give him the benefit of the doubt. Carudatta is thus virtuous, but he is also a weak character, who can't say no to his gambling friends. In some ways, he is also foolish, naïve and immature, unable to understand the less than virtuous world around him. There is also a whiff of self-pity about this man, who wallows in his poverty: 'This is my sorrow. They whom I would greet as guests, now pass me by. "This is a poor man's house," they cry.' Perhaps it is because he is such a weak man that the author has chosen another person, a woman named Vasantasena, to be the protagonist of this story.

Activities Carudatta is a poor Brahmin, but he still has friends with whom he spends time talking and going to concerts late at night, sometimes returning after midnight. He also has a garden behind his house, where he often sits with his friends, usually bemoaning his fate. Other leisure time is spent in a large park in the centre of the city, where he walks with Vasantasena. His guilty pleasure is gambling, and when not rolling the dice, he likes to go to a public bath for a shampoo and massage. At the same time, he is a pious man and observes a strict daily routine of worship and meditation at home.

Illustrative moments

Foolish The most significant of Carudatta's flaws is his foolishness, especially with money. In the sharp social realism of this story, money 'does make the world go around,' and he who has none of it suffers. But even more pitiable is he who had it and then lost it. Such is the case of Carudatta. This foolishness is referred to in the opening scene, which presents Carudatta in conversation with his friend, Maitreya. When Carudatta laments his 'fate', his friends try to console him by saying that he should feel good about himself since he gave the money away. 'Like a waning moon, your lost fortune has an added charm,' Maitreya says, 'Even this rather clever simile on the part of the Sanskrit poet, however, cannot remove Carudatta's sense of shame. He recognises his folly in giving it away but still says that 'poverty afflicts me like another form of warfare.' When Carudatta then says that his friend must make an offering to the gods, Maitreya refuses because 'they do not favour the virtuous, like you.' Pious Carudatta answers that one must do his duty regardless of material gain, which, coming from anyone else, would make us respect the speaker. But foolish Carudatta is not able to distinguish between ideals and reality. He cannot afford to make donations to gods, but he does so because it is expected of him.

Honest Compensating for Carudatta's impracticality is his honesty. This trait is clearly illustrated in a scene that follows quickly on the first one in which he shows how foolish he is. The situation is that Vasantasena has left a box of jewels in his house for safe-keeping (after she escaped from the villain of the story and took refuge in Carudatta's house). However, the following morning, after Carudatta and Maitreya, his friend, discover that the jewels have been stolen. Maitreya advises Carudatta to 'deny the whole thing. Just say nobody gave you anything. Nothing was stolen. There are no witnesses.' His friend is not a practiced liar and is only trying to avoid the likely prospect that Carudatta will be accused of stealing the jewels. After all, when valuables given to a poor man for safe-keeping go missing, it is all too easy to assume that he took them himself. Knowing this, that his poverty will probably condemn him, Carudatta, nevertheless, refuses to take his friend's wise advice. 'No, I will not tell a falsehood, even though it saves me. No, I will beg [the Brahmin's traditional livelihood] until I gain the money to repay my debt.' His friend again tries to convince him that telling the truth 'will slip a noose around your neck,' but Carudatta persists in his aversion to deception. 'Falsehood,' he nobly declares, 'only steals your character away.' Again, we might see Carudatta as foolish, and he is certainly judged that way by his friend, but we can also begin to admire his truthfulness.

Compassionate Carudatta's final action in the story is a moving demonstration of his compassion. We know that the poor and foolish Brahmin is also honest and loyal, but not until the very last page does he have the capacity to show his compassion in such a dramatic fashion. The scene is the

aftermath of his trial for murdering Vasantasena, in which he was rescued by her and in which she pointed to Samsthanaka as the man who (tried to) murder her. Following the trial and acquittal, Carudatta is appointed a minister in the court of Aryaka, who has deposed the evil Palaka (an ally of Samsthanaka). Samsthanaka, who stands guilty of attempted murder is thrown in prison for life. On the final page, this brutal and arrogant man begs for mercy from Carudatta. Although Samsthanaka has insulted him, brutally assaulted his lover and tried to frame him for the crime, Carudatta finds enough love in his heart to forgive him. 'He who seeks protection shall be safe,' he says, even as a mob of people are chanting the criminal should be killed. In part, Carudatta has been inspired by the compassion of the Buddhist monk, who rescued Vasantasena and nursed her back to life. Perhaps only a foolish man would pardon his oppressor.

Vasantasena (Steadfast)

Character Vasantasena, the female protagonist of the story, is a courtesan. However, we should not think that her profession was then regarded with the same disapproval as it would be today. She is not simply a prostitute, who sells her body for temporary male pleasure. She is, in fact, a well-educated and wealthy woman who frequented the palaces and merchants' houses of the city. The courtesan of classical India is often said to resemble the high-status *hetaera* of ancient Greece or the *geisha* of medieval Japan. Even more significant, for an Indian audience, is that she speaks Sanskrit (albeit only briefly), like the other high-status characters, while the several characters of lower status speak a variety of Prakrit dialects. In assessing her character, it is useful to compare her to the heroine of the other great classical Sanskrit drama, *Shakuntala* by Kalidasa. While Shakuntala, the eponymous heroine, is a charming young woman, sweet-faced and innocent, Vasantasena is a mature woman of experience. Shakuntala is simpering and innocent, whereas Vasantasena is both witty and wise. 'Money and virtue seldom keep company,' is one of her characteristic quips.

Vasantasena is also loyal in her love for Carudatta, whom she comes to treat as her husband; her loyalty resembles that of Sita, who is the exemplar of the dutiful wife in Indian literature. Indeed, it is this love that convinces Vasantasena that she should leave her profession and become a 'social' wife. This is the essence of her character. Although being a courtesan does not mean you cannot retain self-respect and a good social reputation, it is still a profession that cannot fulfil every woman's needs. Much more than the proverbial 'tart with a heart,' Vasantasena is a woman struggling to find happiness.

Activities As a high-status courtesan with money, Vasantasena enjoys a privileged life, frequenting the king's palace and the houses of wealthy men, where she would sometimes dance and sing. At other times, she strolls through her large private garden and watches various sports arranged for her, including bullock racing and elephant riding. She also frequently visits temples, especially a temple dedicated to Kama, god of love. At home, she observes daily rituals of purification and worship, like all high-caste Hindu women. However, her special love is painting, particularly portraits of her lovers, such as Carudatta.

Illustrative moments

Vulnerable Even though Vasantasena is educated and wealthy, she is still a woman subject to male predators. This aspect of her character is illustrated in the opening scene of the story, when she is pursued by Samsthanaka and his gang on a public street. When he roughly stops her, she cries out for help, but all her servants have fled with fear. Samsthanaka then makes crude remarks (using a commoner's dialect) about her beauty and her body, adding that he is pursuing her 'like dogs hunting a jackal.' The implication is clear. Frightened, Vasantasena says, 'What do you want? Here, take my jewels. They're yours.' But the burly man waves that away and moves toward her. Fortunately, it is pitch dark, and Vasantasena is able to run, turn down several narrow streets and escape, finally ending up in Carudatta's house, as a refuge. It is a harrowing scene, even in the genteel language of a classical Sanskrit play, and it reveals an important element in Vasantasena's character. She has status and money, but she remains vulnerable to abuse. The scene is also revelatory in that it introduces, in its final lines, Carudatta as the heroine's saviour. This is the brilliance of Sudraka, the author, who is able to present his story in miniature in the opening scene of his story.

Generous One of Vasantasena's virtues is her generosity, not only of materials but also of spirit. This side of her nature is demonstrated in a scene, when the thief, Sarvilaka, goes to her house and

returns to her the jewels she had given to Carudatta for safe-keeping and which he had stolen. Vasantasena overlooks his crime because she knows that he had stolen the jewels for a good purpose: in order to purchase the liberty of his lover, Madanika, her servant. The magnanimous Vasantasena pretends not to know the true history of her stolen jewels and receives them as if they had simply been misplaced. Smiling at the thief, she says, 'Now, you can marry Madanika.' The thief replies that he doesn't understand, and Vasantasena herself now lies and says that Carudatta told her that Madanika should be given to whoever returns the jewels. Yes, it is confusing, and the interlocking pattern of motives, truths and lies only becomes clear after several re-readings. But the fundamental revelation of the scene is Vasantasena's wisdom and generosity. First, she understands why the thief stole her jewels in the first place and cannot condemn his intention of freeing his lover. At one point, she says that she would free all her servants, if she had the money to do so. Then she cleverly invents her own story about Carudatta saying that Madanika should be given to the man who returns the jewels in order that the thief's original goal will be achieved. In other words, she accepts her own stolen jewels as payment for Madanika's freedom.

Steadfast All through the twists and turns of this turbulent story, one thing remains constant: Vasantasena's love for Carudatta. He is an unlikely lover for such a woman. She moves in the highest social circles, while he is penniless and a nobody, but she has never forgotten that he rescued her from great danger (in the revealing first scene of the play). The most poignant display of her constancy comes toward the end of the story. Carudatta is about to be executed for the murder of Vasantasena, whom Samsthanaka has in fact strangled and falsely accused of the crime. Then the supposedly dead Vasantasena arrives at the place of execution, where Carudatta is tied to a board with an axe raised high above his head. She sees what is happening and screams, 'No. He is innocent. It was another man, the king's brother-in-law who tried to kill me. It was Samsthanaka.' Immediately, Carudatta is released and the real criminal arrested. Here is the demonstration of Vasantasena's steadfast love. She has nearly been killed, strangled and left for dead. While recovering in the home of a monk, she has heard about Carudatta's execution and runs to the scene, just in time to save him. It is a trifle melodramatic, but it is also an action that we are not surprised to read. From the very beginning of the story, Vasantasena has been presented as a person of courage and principle. In the hour of need, the courtesan proves her love.

Samsthanaka (Brutal)

Character Samsthanaka is an intriguing character. The brother-in-law of the king, he is close to power, too close, in fact, for his own good. Driven by a desire to exercise power, he is a man of unlimited villainy, brutal lust and ignorant egotism. And he is also cunning, able to devise a plan to kidnap Vasantasena, remove all witnesses, murder her and then have another man (Carudatta) convicted of the crime. There is something chillingly distorted in the character of a man who can, after killing a woman, remark to his friends, 'Come now. Let's go play in the pond.' His character brings to mind the phrase 'the banality of evil' (the title of a book by Hannah Arendt on the crimes committed in the Nazi concentration camps). We are also reminded of the novel *In Cold Blood*, by Truman Capote, which details the true case of mundane men who murdered a family in Kansas. Our fascination with the grotesque makes Samsthanaka possibly the greatest of the several great characters in this story.

Activities Samsthanaka is a brother-in-law of the king and so spends a good deal of his time in the palace grounds, especially in a beautiful but private garden. At night, however, he is usually found wandering about the city, drinking in various spots with his gang of ruffians. He has a particular love of careering around town in a common bullock cart and running into anything, such as a person or a wall, that stands in his way. Some nights he rides farther out in the countryside to take his pleasure with liquor and prostitutes.

Illustrative moments

Arrogant Propelling all Samsthanaka's evil actions is a bullying arrogance. He appears to take pleasure in belittling everyone, even Buddhist monks. This vivid illustration of his arrogance occurs mid-way through the story, after we have already witnessed several instances of his brutality and conceit. The scene opens with a monk approaching Samsthanaka's garden, hoping to wash his yellow robe quickly and disappear before the ruffian discovers him. But he is not quick enough. Samsthanaka enters and, when the monk begins to run away, yells at him to stop. 'Stop, you confounded monk. Stop, or I'll bash your head in like a pulverised radish.' When the monk asks for

mercy and addresses him as 'servant of the Buddha,' Samsthanaka wilfully misinterprets his words. 'Listen! The monk insults me! Calls me a "servant." What do you take me for, a barber?' Then the monk tries to reassure him and says he is a 'brick of virtue,' but this, too, misfires when the man's arrogance takes this to mean that he is a 'maker of pots' or a 'brick-layer.' Soon, Samsthanaka begins to beat the helpless monk, who is only rescued by a third man arriving on the scene and convincing Samsthanaka that the monk meant no harm. It is a shocking scene. Hindu priests and sages are sometimes objects of ridicule in Indian literature, but Buddhist monks are rarely subjected to mockery. They were regarded as beyond reproach because they had placed themselves outside the social system of caste and kinship. And in this scene, the monk more than once refers to the Buddhist principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*), which meant a rejection of the large feasts with their animal sacrifices at the centre of early Hinduism. This is a deliberate choice by the author, it seems, to highlight Samsthanaka's brutal arrogance by juxtaposing it with the peaceful humility of a Buddhist monk.

Cunning Samsthanaka would not be half as dangerous if his violence were not allied to cunning. We are aware of this aspect of his character from the beginning of the story and, especially, when he lays his plans to kidnap Vasantasena using a disguised coachman and a coach that resembles hers. But an even more telling illustration of his cunning occurs in the court room scene, toward the end of the story. Samsthanaka has decided to accuse Carudatta of the murder of Vasantasena. He will tell the court that Carudatta strangled her and stole her jewels. However, it is a difficult accusation to substantiate because there is no body: Vasantasena was strangled by Samsthanaka, but she was found alive by a monk who helped her recover in his house (all this is unknown to anyone in the court room). But Samsthanaka manages to shore up his claims by bringing Vasantasena's mother to testify that she (Vasantasena) went to Carudatta's house, that she later went to meet him in the park and that Carudatta had her jewels in his possession (thus establishing a motive for the accusation of murder). When Carudatta says that he returned the jewels, Samsthanaka cleverly stage-manages a scuffle with Maitreya (Carudatta's friend), in which Vasantasena's gold ornaments fall to the ground. This is the crucial evidence that convicts Carudatta. (The truth is that Vasantasena gave the ornaments to Maitreya so that he could buy a gold cart for Carudatta's little boy to replace his clay cart.) Although judges in the court room appear to be somewhat dim-witted, they do try to be fair and reach their verdict based on the evidence, but that evidence has been manipulated cleverly by Samsthanaka to support his accusation.

Brutal Acts of outright brutality are rare in Sanskrit literature, or if presented they are usually hinted at rather than described (much as murder usually occurs off-stage in classical Greek plays). This is what makes the brutality of Samsthanaka so shocking. Once he has deceived and kidnapped Vasantasena, taking her away in a carriage that resembles her own, he then threatens to rape her 'with these itchy hands of mine.' When she kicks him to fight him off, he flies into a rage and declares that he will murder her. First, however, he orders his servants to do the killing, knowing that they will demur, which only frightens Vasantasena more. Then, when they are alone and he makes her speak of Carudatta, Samsthanaka grabs her throat, saying that he will strangle that 'penniless Brahmin.' And he does strangle her until she falls down, dead, he assumes. Looking at her body on the ground, he justifies his actions by telling himself that she condemned herself because she refused to return his love. It is the classic mentality of a psychopath, who distorts reality so completely that he never blames himself. With this protective distortion, Samsthanaka feels no remorse. When a man asks him where Vasantasena is, he says quite calmly, 'I murdered her. But she deserved it, of course.' Finally, he decides he better make sure she really is dead. 'If she isn't,' he says, 'I'll murder her again.' The scene is shocking in its description of a violent yet coolly committed murder and in the murderer's calm justification of his brutality.