



Traditions and Customs As Reflected in the Writings of Sudraka

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Abstract:

Any work of art directly or indirectly is a product of contemporary society. Apparently works of art are products of imagination but they are also complex amalgam of socio-cultural circumstances, economic relations of their society, and cross-cultural influences. The present study aims to study the beliefs and practices as reflected in the writings of Sudraka. Various practices have been studied in this article. The researcher has followed different secondary sources of information like books, journals. Internet sources have also been followed for required information. The study concludes that some of the beliefs and practices which were found in the writings of Sudraka are still observed in the modern society of today which seems to be quite astonishing.

Keywords: *Contemporary Society, Socio-Cultural, Sudraka, Cross-Cultural, Human Nature.*

Introduction:

Śūdraka was a famous poet of handsome form and features, stately gait, and no mean valour, and the best of *kśatriya*-s. He was well versed in the ṚgVeda and the SāmVeda, Mathematics, fine arts and the art of training elephants; he performed a horse-sacrifice, crowned his son a king and enjoying a full span of a hundred years and ten days, entered fire. 1 There is no clear information regarding the period and life of the author Śūdraka. A lot is written about him in the preface of his play *Mṛ.* but it is believed that this information is not given by the author himself but incorporated by someone else, according to the opinion of the intellectuals. From the internal evidences in the play his period can be finalized to a great extent. The importance given to a Buddhist monk suggests the flourishing period of Buddhism then. The reference of courtesans and the detailed description of their life suggests the period closer to the *Kāmasūtra*. From these facts and from his style of dialogues, his period can be approximately fixed as 2nd or 1st century B.C. From the internal evidences of the play it can also be derived that the author of the play is a resident of South India.

Objectives:

The study has been undertaken to discuss the beliefs and practices like Astrology, caste system, chastity, **Concept of auspicious and inauspicious etc** as reflected in the writings of Sudraka.

Method: The study is descriptive in nature. Therefore the researcher has followed different secondary sources in terms of books, journals, articles etc. Internet sources have also been followed for the required information.

Astrology - (Jyotiṣśāstra)

It is strongly believed that the planets exercise a powerful influence on the life of men and the course of worldly events. Śūdraka's knowledge about astrology is revealed through the comment of his character Candanaka. Candanaka casts a dreadful horoscope for the release of the imprisoned Āryaka.

It is believed that if in the horoscopic diagram, the Sun in the eighth mansion, the Moon in its fourth, Venus in its sixth, Mars in its fifth, and Saturn in the ninth, that person suffers from pain, colic, fatuity, consumption, sorrow and indigence.

The judge describes the fateful ornaments as the appearance of comet by the side of Jupiter, weak in strength and in antagonistic combination with Mars.

When the moon is reduced to a slender segment, it is believed that the moon is drunk by gods.

Caste system - (Jātīvyavasthā)

The *brāhmaṇais* considered to be the highest caste, *vaiśyais* on the third place. A *brāhmaṇais* not supposed to bow down in front of a *vaiśya*.

It is held that a *brāhmaṇa* can never be expected to perform lowly tasks as washing the feet. It is the job of a low-caste person. The barber as well as the shoe-maker, both are considered to be the low castes. The low-caste people are not allowed to chant Vedic *mantra*-s. The judge chastises Śākāra, comparing his charge against Cārudatta to the sinful act of reciting the Vedic *mantra* by a low-caste person (Mṛ.IX.21).

But it is a sign of virtuous conduct not to abuse anybody by his low caste. On the contrary, even a low-caste man should also be called with honor as Cārudatta calls the cāṇḍāla-s as *svajātimahattara* and asks a favor from him because an innocent cāṇḍāla is very much better than the sinful king. It is also believed that a human, though born in the lowest caste such as cāṇḍāla should not consider himself as mean. On the contrary, a sinful human though born in highest caste should be considered to be a cāṇḍāla-

न खलु वयं चाण्डालाश्चाचाण्डालकुले जातपूर्वा अपि।
येऽभिभवान्ति साधुं ते पापास्ते च चाण्डालाः॥ (Mṛ.X.22)

Chastity - (Pātivratya)

The climax of *pātivratyais* to follow the husband in heaven even prior to his death by entering into the fire because she doesn't want to see her husband dead. Dhūtā, the wife of Cārudatta, is ready to enter the fire because Cārudatta is going to be slaughtered. Though prohibited by Vidūṣaka, she declares that she will prefer to be sinful rather than staying alive to see her husband dead. It is considered that it is the effect of her chastity that Cārudatta stays alive.

It is also mentioned that a *brāhmaṇa*-wife should not mount a separate pile. It means that it is permitted for a *brāhmaṇa*-wife to enter the same pile with her husband.

Common Beliefs

Śūdraka has put forth some exquisite beliefs. They are still valuable in the walk of life. For instance, Vasantsenā says that it is to men and not houses that deposits are entrusted. 15

Women as a whole are wise by nature while wisdom is acquired by men by learning the *śāstra*-

स्त्रियो हि नाम खल्वेता निसर्गदेव पण्डिताः।
पुरुषाणां तु पाण्डित्यं शास्त्रैरेवोपदिश्यते॥ (Mr.IV.19)

It is strongly believed that everybody has to face prosperity as well as downfall. Those who rise do fall. Nobody escapes this phenomenon. Even the sun and the moon though dwell in heaven are overtaken by the disaster. Considering this, one has to be courageous

Concept of auspicious and inauspicious - (Maṅgala and amaṅgala)

According to Śūdraka, auspiciousness can be attached to a name. Madanikā is seen commenting that Cārudatta's name is most auspicious to utter.

There are four things which are never to be observed by anyone; Indra's pole being carried off, the delivery of a pregnant cow, the falling of stars, the slaying of a good man. These are believed to be inauspicious –

इन्द्रः प्रवाह्यमाणो गोप्रसवः संक्रमश्च ताराणाम्।
सुपुरुषप्राणविपत्तिश्चत्वार इमे न दृष्टव्याः॥ (Mr.X.7)

Fire is also of two types, auspicious and inauspicious. The first one is kindled on holy occasions such as marriage and the other upon the funeral pyre –

एककार्यनियोगोऽपि नानयोस्तुल्यशीलता।
विवाहे च चितायां च हुतभुजोर्द्वयोः॥ (Mr.VI.16)

Moon eclipse - (Candragrahaṇa)

Śarvilaka prepares himself to go to release his friend, Āryaka who appears as though the moon has fallen into the jaws of Rāhu. When a person seems to be innocent but later deems to be guilty then it is commented that 'this moon though spotless bright is now eclipsed by Rāhu.'

When one cāṇḍāla does not call Cārudatta respectfully another cāṇḍāla comments that though Rāhu seizes the moon, the moon is adored by men.

Omen – (Nimitta)

When Chandanaka gives Āryaka a sword for his defense his right arm throbs so he thinks, all is favorable to him. When the burglar Śarvilaka finds a proper place to dig a hole in the wall, he attributes it to being a good omen for the successful completion of the burglary. This reveals that omens were followed by all sects of the society.

A good omen is mentioned by Śakāra that a person, who sees his enemy being killed, gets relieved from the disease of the eye in the birth to come. The throbbing of the left eye of a male along with the anxious state of the heart is a bad omen. The sight of a Buddhist monk is also considered to be a bad omen. To avert such an omen, a different path other than that taken by the monk is considered. In Act VII, when Cārudatta does not see Vasantsenā for a long time, he experiences his left eye throbbing at the same time his heart too is causelessly anxious and highly distressed. Thereafter, he sees a Buddhist monk and considering it to be a bad omen, chooses to take a different path than the present one, to avert omens. This shows that evils could be considered to be averted by following or doing certain changes in the routine behavior.

When Vita goes to Śakāra to ask him to give him back his pledge on the way he sees a tree fall and a woman being killed by that fall which he perceives as an evil omen.

Evil omens sometimes indicate death that seems to be approaching. In Act IX, when Cārudatta experiences his left eye throbbing and crows shrieking violently, he experiences that those evil omens torment him very much. He sees other bad omens like a serpent, his left eye throbs again, his left arm trembles repeatedly, a bird screams terribly so often he thinks that all these omens portend a cruel and disastrous death. As he moves on, his head dashes against the door indicating one more evil omen.

In Act VI, Vasantsenā experiences the throbbing of her right eye but it surprises her because right eye throbbing is considered evil but she is actually going to meet Cārudatta so she pacifies herself by saying that his sight shall wipe away the evil omens.

The 'other world' – (Paraloka)

The other world (*paraloka*) is two-fold: heaven and hell and is considered to be attained as the result of good and bad deeds respectively. (*sukṛtaduṣkṛtasyapariṇāmah*).

A person attains heaven if he sacrifices himself for a noble cause. Sthāvaraka says that if he sacrifices his life to save Cārudatta then surely he will attain heaven.

Cārudatta is confused on seeing Vasantsenā and thinks that after her death, as declared, she has come from heaven. It is considered that one should store religious merit, restrain one's appetite, control and conquer the senses that try to steal away the merit, observe the transient nature of world, remove the egotism, purify the mind; by that one can attain heaven.

One who has full control over his hands, mouth and senses, definitely reaches heaven –

हस्तसंयतो मुखसंयत इन्द्रियसंयतः स खलु मनुष्यः।
किं करोति राजकुलं तस्य परलोको हस्ते निश्चलः॥ (Mr.VIII.47)

Conclusion:

It can be observed that human nature changes at an infinitesimal rate and therefore the beliefs and practices can be observed as continued with a very few changes throughout the span of period under discussion. Moreover, some of these beliefs and practices are still observed in the modern society of today which seems to be quite astonishing; but given scope to the teachings of the sacred texts and their deep-rooted impact on Indian mind, it does not become a matter of bewilderment.

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