

Diplomacy and Politics in the Play Mudrārākṣasa

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Mudrārākṣasa a political drama exhibits how Caṇakya a crafty politician and minister has become instrumental in bringing about the destruction of the Nanda Dynasty paving the way for the reign of king Candragupta Maurya and this has been possible due to his diplomacy and crooked plans. The present play is a full-length play consisting of seven Acts. The plot of the play arouses suspense and curiosity in the outset and arrests the consistent attention of the readers. We are really amazed at the successful use of political intrigues, calculated designs and twisted actions of the Hero of the play who fulfills his desire at the end for which full credit must go to him.

The play gives us a clear idea of the ancient Indian Political Governance in India where monarchy was the common form of polity. The king strictly followed the Rājadharmā and discharged duties in consultation with his council of ministers. The main goal of the king was around development of the kingdom.

Keywords:

1. Caṇakya
2. Candragupta
3. Rākṣasa
4. Kauṭilya
5. Malayaketu
6. Intrigues

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Mudrārākṣasa in the singular Sanskrit drama that deals with political theme with the exclusion of the element of love and romance. It shows how Caṇakya the minister of king Candragupta, by political intrigues defeats Dhanananda the king and facilitates the ascent of Candragupta to the row of Magadha on the fall of Nanda dynasty. This play consists of seven Acts nicely designed and well organized. How the political intrigues unfolded along with the gradual progress and development of the plot will be evident from a brief discussion of the seven Acts of this drama.

Act I – the scene begins with a prologue in which future happenings of the drama are announced, Caṇakya's soliloquy signifies his future plans. Report of the wife and son of Rākṣasa taking shelter in the house of Candanadāsa, a merchant is received through Nipuṇaka a spy. Then we see Nipuṇaka's discovery of a signet-ring in Candanadāsa's house, handing over of it to Caṇakya. Caṇakya's receipt of letter from Rākṣasa's friend Sakaṭadāsa and thereafter Caṇakya's handing over of that letter duly sealed with signet-ring to Siddhārthaka his messenger with instruction. Then Candanadāsa is arrested on his refusal to hand over Rākṣasa's family to Caṇakya.

Act II – Political Intrigues grew more complex in this Act. Virādagupta, one spy of Rākṣasa, exposes how Rākṣasa's plan to murder Candragupta was frustrated due to his wrong policies resulting in the detention by Caṇakya of Rākṣasa's allies and one friend Sakaṭadāsa. In the meantime Siddhārthaka rescues Sakaṭadāsa on secret instruction from Caṇakya and bring him to Rākṣasa. Rākṣasa rewards Siddhārthaka with same ornaments which Siddhārthaka keeps in box sealing with signet ring and then gives back the ring to Rākṣasa. Here Siddhārthaka's dubious role as a spy is noticed.

Act III – Caṇakya has beguiled Rākṣasa his enemy by ensuring a feigned quarrel between him and Candragupta relating to the king's order of Kaumudi festival, being defied by Caṇakya, leading to seemingly estrangement between them. This is Caṇakya's shrewd diplomacy.

Act IV – The report of this altercation encourages Rākṣasa. Malayaketu along with Bhāgurāyana appears to enquire about Rākṣasa's illness. Bhāgurāyana finds an opportunity to create suspicion before Malayaketu about Rākṣasa's loyalty to him. He gives him a misinformation about a likely clandestine link with Candragupta. Malayaketu overhears the talk of Rākṣasa with his agent and his advise for immediate attack on Pataliputra.

Act V – Jīvasiddhi a spy of Caṇakya pretending to be a friend of Rākṣasa expresses his intention before Malayaketu and Bhāgurāyana to leave them being disgusted with Rākṣasa. He falsely accuses Rākṣasa of killing Malayaketu's father with the aid of poison-maid. Malayaketu discovers Caṇakya's letter accusing Rākṣasa of the aforesaid murder and the ornament box with signet-ring seal in the hands of Siddhārthaka, who appears in the scene. Malayaketu's suspicion grows. He identifies the ornament box that was actually owned by his father and subsequently possessed by Candragupta. Rākṣasa is now accused by Malayketu though Rākṣasa denies. Malayaketu then gives death sentence to five kings under him. The plot of the drama thus grows complex.

Act VI – Malayaketu is seen kept behind the bar by Bhāgurāyana and his allies, as a result of his failed expedition on war. Rākṣasa has come to Pāṭaliputra for the release of Candanadāsa for whom Caṇakya has ordered death sentence along with his own family.

Act VII – In this scene the development of the drama reaches the pick point. Candanadāsa is brought to the gallows where Rākṣasa appears and readies to surrender before Caṇakya for the purpose of rescuing Candanadāsa. Now Caṇakya enjoys Rākṣasa's defeat, exposes his real purpode of making all his machinations. He orders Rākṣasa to take over as the chief minister of Candragupta. Rākṣasa agrees after initial hesitation. He thus saves she life of his friend leading to happy end of the play.

The plot of Mudrārākṣasa definitely testifies to the fact that it is a political drama having a historical backdrop. Caṇakya the principal character of the play wins over his political opponents Rākṣasa by his political intrigues, diplomacy wisdom, crookedness and foresight as opposed to simplicity, lack of confidence, frailty of decision and weak power of judgement being the characteristic features of Rākṣasa. The following features of ancient Indian polity are clearly noticed in Mudrārākṣasa. These features are:

- (1) Kingship (2) Relationship between the state and citizen (3) Relation between the Executive and the central Assembly (4) The powers and functions of the central Assembly (5) Functions of the central executives (6) Functions of the provincial, divisional district town and village Government (7) Expenditure revenue and taxation (8) Foreign relations and war policy (9) Functions and duties of ambassadors and spics.

These aspects can now be illustrated briefly:

- (1) **Kingship** : The king should be a responsible person of rectitude on whom the welfare of his subjects will rely. For any sort of hazards or crisis the subjects face, the king must be accountable. According to Kauṭilya the king ought to do his duties like a trustee and as such he cannot claim personal benefits. The ancient political thinkers advised that subjects must be critical of the unjust activities of the king. The existence of the local bodies, village communities and town councils enabled the common subjects to open their mouth against the inconsistencies of the administration and thus the king could be kept under the vigilant eyes of the subjects.
- (2) **Relationship between the state and the citizen**: This relationship was mutually cooperative when the state constantly strived for the well-being of the citizens, the citizens obeyed the rules and orders of the state. Unlike in the modern state the rigid caste system made a division of labour in the ancient state. The Kṣatriyas were assigned the duty in the defence department while the other castes were on engaged in agriculture, trade and commerce. The state stood as an agency between the king and the citizens. State demanded allegiance of the citizens for effective Governance.
- (3) **Relation between the Executive and the Central Assembly**: The small states and the Big states had different form of Executive and Central Assembly. The small states controlled a few scores of villages while the Big state had dozen of cities and thousands of villages under control. The small states used to gather in the hall called Santhāgāra for adopting resolutions. Each member of the aristocracy was called Raja and his son Upārāja. In case of any dispute of water supply among the peasants the Rājā had to settle the problem. For the Big states which were divided into provinces, the privileged class would form separate Government. Many urban areas of

the state had autonomous Government units like city councils. In the village councils the common people had their dominance. Many bureaucrats appointed from the villages.

The Central Assembly being a bigger body enjoyed supreme power. It had 5000 -7,707 members usually 2000-3000 members would be present in the meeting of the Assembly. The central Assembly had overall control over the executive.

- (4) **The powers and functions of the Central Assembly:** The central Assembly in ancient India did not enjoy any legislative power. It had to depend on the customary law that was thought to be divine. The king nor the Samiti had the power to make legislation. The king was supposed to maintain 'Dharma' properly. But subsequently in the 3rd century B.C. the state was given the legislative power. This change of machinery was felt necessary due to the growth of complex problem. According to Manu the king could pass administrative order only for the welfare of the state. Jajivalkya advised the law courts to enforce the administrative order of the king.
- (5) **The machinery of the central executives:** The crown-princes and the viceroys had their own ministry in their courts. In the Mauryan Empire the viceroys of Taksasila had their own council of ministers and so was the case of Agnimitra the crown-prince and viceroy of Malvā under Puṣyamitra. The council of ministers would run the whole administration like policy framing, taxation, training of princes, war policies and so on.
- (6) **Functions of provincial, divisional, district town and village Government:** In the Mauryan empire the provinces were separated into divisions and division into Districts. Prādeśikas was in charge of the divisions. The Districts were in charge of the Rajjukas. Both Prādeśikas were assisted by the lower official called Yuktas. The executive, judicial, tax Pradeśṭṛs who have as good as Divisional commissioners. The town committees were consisted of 30 members which were again sub-divided into 6 sub-committees. Those sub-committees did the work of surveillance on foreigners, statistical work including registration of birth and death, manufacturing articles, determination of wages, seeing the market of affairs. An intermediate committee was formed by 5 or 10 villages supervised by two officers called Gopa and Sthānika. Village or grama has the smallest unit that was headed by Grāmika.
- (7) **Expenditure, Revenue and Taxation:** Different forms of taxation were the means of revenue to be earned for expenditure towards the welfare of the state. The taxation was equitable and less burdensome. In the field of trade and commerce tax was levied only on net profit, not on total income. Increase of tax would be made only in time of national disaster after obtaining the consent of the people. There was also a system of concession of tax. Deaf, dumb, blind people and hermit would be given exemption of taxes. In trade commerce and industry octroi duty was levied on the imported articles. These Octroi charges varied in rate on different articles, Octroi collected at the entry in towns and villages was known as Saulkika. Tax levied on the artisans was also imposed on the barbers, washerman and goldsmith. Trade of wine also attracted excise duty. In the ancient time there was a system of forced unpaid labour called vīsti. The poor people unable to pay taxes were engaged to give free service with their own labour one or two days in a month.
- (8) **Foreign relations and War policy:** Foreign relation as existed among the ancient Indian state was not a to the modern international law of relation. Inter state relationship in ancient India was based on hostility (vighraha), neutrality (udāsinata), friendship (mitra) and mediation (madyasthata), War (vighraha) usually was waged against a weaker enemy. Neutrality (udāsinata) was actually a posture of war not actual war. When war appeared to have horrible **outcome** the king would enter into Sandhi or treaty with the enemy. Intermediary states would interfere in the mutual affairs when required.

In the war policy more importance was given on military for which 50% of central revenue was spent. The military consisted of infantry, cavalry, elephant corps, chariots, boats and spies. Different departments of military were headed by different personal namely Senāpati, Mahāsenāpati, Mahābalādhikṛta under the guidance of the head called Mahāvīyūhapati. The army included medical facilities. So at comprised doctors, nurses, ambulance, medical appliances, medicines and bandages. The foreign affairs department was headed by Mahāsandhivighrahika. There was also Intelligence Department that worked secretly in disguise to collect information about the foreigners.

- (9) **The functions and duties of ambassadors and spies:** Manu has differentiated Dūta (Ambassadors) from Prānidhi (Spy). According to him, Dūta has to perform chiefly three functions – (i) declaration of war and peace on the advice of the king (ii) making alliance (Sandhi) and (iii) visit to foreign state for of the sake of his own state.

According to Kauṭilya, Dūta are of three classes (i) Nisṛṣṭārtha that who is to see that the decisions to tritiated war or maintenance of peace is followed. (ii) Parimitārtha who visits foreign state for a particular purpose (iii) Śāsanahara who carries the message of the king. A Dūta should have a good pedigree. He should have loyalty to monarch, honesty good conduct, good power of speech. Among other activities a duta could give ultimatum, make alliance, divide enemy's friends and rescue hostages. The role of Dūta was unavoidable in the ancient political system.

The Pranidhi (spy) had equally an important role in the diplomacy. The spies did their work in the guise of students, monks, trademan, prostitutes, dancing girls, betel-bearers and umbrella-bearers in the court, physician, astrologer, artisans, lunatic etc. In fact the spies were the 'eyes of the kings'. The Fraudulent disciple was a spy who investigated into what might harm the kingdom. Similarly the 'household spy' was actually a farmer having knowledge of cultivation and household matters. 'Merchant Spy' had to have knowledge about quality and cost of the goods produced in the kingdom. 'Fiery spies' were engaged to murder others for money. 'Poisoner Spy' had to poison others to death. The news and informations gathered by the spies were sent to the spy establishment who used 'sign' alphabets for correspondence. These sign alphabets perhaps have paved the way for introduction of modern code languages.

The ancient science of polity with all its dynamism and complexities has been clearly manifested in the plays of present discussion. The playwright Viśākhadatta has done a poetic justice in replacing a tyrannical monarch of the Nand Dynasty by an ideal king of the Maurya empire leading to peace, happiness and well being of the common subjects of the kingdom concerned. Political intrigues, diplomacy and real wisdom of a political leader like Caṇakya have finally won over short-sightedness, vascillation, lack of courage and ready wit of Rākṣasa and thus the aim of the playwright has been fulfilled.

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