

Global Sanskrit Literature Series in English - 4

Ratnāvali

By
Harsha

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lost cousin.



RATNĀVALI



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GLOBAL VISION PUBLISHING HOUSE

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Ratnāvali

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PREFACE

“The story is romantic,” says H. H. Wilson in *The Theatre of the Hindus*, “the incidents are well contrived, the situations are eminently dramatic, and although the spectator is let into the secret of the plot from the beginning, the interest is very successfully maintained.” He adds, though, that the play’s poetry “is merely mechanical,” and laments “the want of passion and the substitution of intrigue,” suggesting that this makes the play devoid of “poetic spirit,” “gleam of inspiration,” devoid even of “a conceit in the ideas.” All of which means that *Ratnāvali* “may be taken as one of the connecting links between the old and new school; as a not unpleasing production of that middle school through which Hindu poetry passed from elevation to extravagance.”

It is a charming conclusion, but one which assumes that the play is by King Harsha of Kashmir, who ascended the throne in 1113, and since there is insufficient textual evidence to warrant such an assumption and considerably more evidence that suggests that the play was written in the seventh century A.D. during the

Ratnāvali

reign of the *other* Harsha (also known as Harshavardhana, or Shiladitya, who reigned in Kannauj, 606-647 A.D.), it is required to modify Wilson's extreme judgment of *Ratnavali* as a 'bridging' play. Another intriguing bit of information puts everything in question. Dr. Saradaranjan Ray mentions in his notes on *Ratnavali* that a friend of his forwarded him some verses from the *Kavimimamsa* ascribed to the tenth-century Sanskrit poet Rajashekhara which, translated, read:

"A poet's skill isn't the result of being born rich or elegant. Look at Bhasa, a poor washerman, considered the best of poets. His *Priyadarshika* delights people with open minds; his *Ratnavali* is a necklace glittering on the breasts of Drama. King Harshavikrama was so pleased with *Nagananda* that he appointed Bhasa his court poet."

Though later in the passage Rajashekhara seems to confuse the Bhasa of *The Dream of Vasavadatta* with the Bhasa of *Ratnavali*, *Priyadarshika*, and *Nagananda*, there is reason to believe that the plays attributed to King Harsha are actually the work of Dhavaka-Bhasa, his court poet. The seventh-century Dhavaka-Bhasa, in fact, borrows the plot of *Ratnavali* not from the first-century *Ocean of Stories*, as was commonly supposed,

Preface

but from his namesake Bhasa's *Dream of Vasavadatta*, written some time in the fourth century B.C. There are many echoes that suggest this. King Udayana questions Yaugandharayana in identical words in both plays when he wants to know Yaugandharayana's motive in devising the plan; and in his nervousness during the plan's earlier stages, Yaugandharayana expresses very similar doubts about its success.

The story, corresponding so closely in so many respects, differs in one fundamental. Bhasa disguises the queen Vasavadatta as Yaugandharayana's sister and places her in the care of the princess Padmavati; Dhavaka-Bhasa (or Harsha) has the princess Ratnavali living incognito in Vasavadatta's palace. To the reader uninitiated in the intricacies of Sanskrit plot-weaving, a summary of the background may prove useful. King Udayana of Vatsa is married to Vasavadatta, daughter of Pradyota, king of Avanti (for which reason she is sometimes addressed as 'Lady of Avanti' or 'Avantika').

Her maternal uncle, Vikramabahu of Simhala, or Ceylon, has a daughter named Ratnavali (which literally means 'a necklace of gems' and refers in the play to the necklace Ratnavali will receive as part of her dowry when she marries). The minister of Udayana, Yaugandharayana, realising that the

Ratnāvali

holy men have predicted absolute control of India for the man who marries Ratnavali, devoted himself to bringing about the matrimonial alliance of Udayana and Ratnavali. This isn't easy, for obvious reasons. Vasavadatta may not like the idea of a co-queen; her uncle Vikramabahu wouldn't like to hurt his niece's feelings; and Udayana loves Vasavadatta too much to entertain thoughts of another marriage. (The feelings of Ratnavali are nowhere taken into consideration: she is the charming, dutiful, maneuverable princess who knows her father knows what's good for her.)

Yaugandharayana's first step is to convince Vasavadatta that Udayana's marrying Ratnavali would mean his glory as unchallenged ruler of India, and that she should subserve her own interests for the sake of her husband's majesty. This she does; Yaugandharayana immediately spreads rumors in Simhala that Vasavadatta has perished in a fire at the village of Lavanaka, and that the king has intentions of marrying again. The chamberlain Babhravya is sent with proposals of marriage to the court of Vikramabahu. Nothing of this reaches the ears of Udayana.

Since Vasavadatta and Ratnavali knew each other by name only, the best plan Yaugandharayana could think of was to have Bhabhravya bring

Preface

Ratnavali from Simhala straight to his house; he would then smuggle her into the harem disguised as an orphan girl, and let the revelry of the spring festival, the beauty of Ratnavali, the words of the prediction, and the amorousness of Udayana do the rest. The mischief is well co-ordinated; a royal marriage seems likely.

But the boat in which Ratnavali is being escorted by Bhabravya and Vasubhuti (the minister of Vikramabahu) capsizes, and Ratnavali, separated from her guardians, clings to a plank and is rescued by a merchant of Kausambi, Udayana's capital, who recognises her by the necklace she is wearing. She is brought to Yaugandharayana and he proceeds with the plan. Ratnavali is grateful to the kind gentleman who gets her a maid's position (she is now Sagarika) in Vasavadatta's palace, and complies with his request that she should not disclose her identity to any person in the strange country where she has been brought by the merchant. The curtain now opens on the love-and-fun game called *Ratnavali*.

Dr. Keith's terse comment sums up the play excellently: he says, "it has found favour in the text-books of the drama, and has served to illustrate the text-book rules." But that is a cruelly kind cut. The swift interplay of love and scolding

Ratnāvali

in the quick succession of scenes of mistaken identity in Act III can, with proper direction, be made eminently dramatic. One virtue Dhavaka-Bhasa has, even in his excessive moments—a sure sense of the stage and its requirements. Slight though it may be from the serious viewpoint of *rasa*, *Ratnavali* is a perfectly wrought comedy, combining horseplay, slapstick and soap opera; and if the reader cannot detect a gentle and humane irony in the king's apostrophe in the garden:

O dearest Sagarika, darling Sagarika,
Moon-faced Sagarika, lotus-eyed Sagarika,
Lotus-fingered Sagarika, lotus-armed Sagarika,
O Sagarika, lovely-thighed Sagarika,
Pleasure-giving Sagarika,
Come to me, Sagarika, and love me with your
lips!

then he has failed to see how the seventh-century poet of *Ratnavali* went about his business of entertaining the sophisticated *nagaraka*.
[This drama has been edited by Ramji Thakur].



CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	(v)
<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Characters</i>	11
Act I : The Festival of Love	13
Act II : The Banana Garden	23
Act III : The Rendezvous	39
Act IV : The Magic Show	53
<i>Notes</i>	67

INTRODUCTION

Ratnāvalī is a famous Sanskrit drama (*nāṭikā*) composed in four Acts by Śrī-Harsha. Technically, this drama is called '*nāṭika*'. *Ratnāvalī* and *Priyadarshika* (another play by the same author) are variations on a single theme with the same set of characters and almost an identical situation. In Sanskrit the generic term for drama is '*rupaka*', meaning 'poem in forms'. It is divided into ten divisions, while '*upa-rupaka*' (lesser variety) is divided into eighteen. *Ratnāvalī*, being a *nāṭika*, comes under the *upa-rupaka* class.

The *Natyashastra* states that a *nataka* ought to depict some events in the life of a distinguished prince of good character and should deal with the past and not with a present or future event. According to later rhetoricians a *nataka* should have a celebrated story for its plot and contain five acts and five junctures, etc. As against this, a *nāṭika* may be based on an invented story, consisting of four acts and abounding with female characters. The hero of a *nataka* should be an illustrious prince—a character gay and thoughtless but firm. It will be observed that *Ratnāvalī*

Ratnāvali

conforms to this definition and possesses all the characteristics of a *nātika*.

The play is a comedy of court life, centring round the light-hearted love-intrigue of king Udayana with a lowly maiden of unknown descent, their secret meetings through the help of a jester and the damsel's friend, the jealousy of the queen and her anger and resentment, and finally her acceptance of the situation when the maiden is discovered to be her lost cousin.

If a drama is the reproduction of certain situations so as to induce in the spectators a sense of identification with the hero or other characters, and if composing drama is an art of presenting a story in the form of dialogues, Shriharsha is a success by any standard. He has been able to depict beautifully the scene of Udayana's secret love-making with the accompanying sentiments of desire, anxiety, and frustration. He is skilled in touches of lightness, vivacity and tenderness, although he is far behind Kalidasa in brilliance.

Yaugandharāyaṇa, minister of Udayana, king of Vatas, has planned the marriage of his king with the daughter of the king of Ceylon; he spreads the news that Vāsavadattā, the queen of Udayana, has died in a fire at Lavanaka. The king of Ceylon then yields the hand of his daughter and sends

Introduction

her in the care of Udayana's chamberlain and his own minister Vasubhūti to Vatsa, but, wrecked at sea she is rescued by a merchant of Kausāmbī, is taken there and handed over to Vāsavandattā.

The queen seeing the beauty of the princess now named Sāgarikā, decides to keep her away from her innocent husband. But at the Spring festival which she celebrates with Udayana, Sāgarikā appears at the queen's train, watches the ceremony of the worship of Kāmadeva (love god) and falls in love with the king. But the queen herself appears before Sāgarikā, meets the king and listens to his confession of love Sāgarikā, and then bitterly reproaches him. At the plight of the king, Sāgarikā attempts suicide wherefrom Vidūshaka saves her and hands her over to the king.

When a magician is displaying his art, Vasubhūti, escaping the shipwreck, appears and relates the tale of disaster. News suddenly comes that the queen's quarters are on fire and Vāsavadattā reveals that Sāgarikā is there. The king rushes to aid her and emerges with her; Vasubhūti recognizes in Sāgarikā the princess and Yaugandharāyaṇa arrives to confess his plot. Vāsavadattā gladly gives Ratnāvalī (the original name of Sāgarikā), the princess of Ceylon, to the king since her husband will thus be lord of the earth.

Ratnāvali

In depicting characters, the playwright followed the traditional framework. Udayana and Vasavadatta come from tradition. Sagarika is his own invention. In presenting dramatic situations like Sagarika's despair, Udayana's sudden appearance, unexpected discovery of the lost cousin of queen Vasavadatta in the person of Sagarika— an object of hatred turning into an object of love, Shriharsha shows his skill.

The plot of *Ratnāvali* is borrowed from the *Brihat-katha* of Gunadhya, and it is obvious that Shriharsha has taken Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra* as the model for his play. Dramatically, the characters are stereotyped, but the language and descriptions are simple. In fact, the simplicity and raciness of the play offer a pleasant contrast to the involved style of Bana. The action moves swiftly and the development of the plot leading to the fruition of the protagonist's love is logical.

Several rhetoricians have taken verses from this play to illustrate technical terms of dramaturgy and figures of speech. Shriharsha's influence on later Sanskrit dramatists is considerable which is explained by the play's popularity and success on the stage. It is said to be the most perfect play from the point of views of the classical canons of dramaturgy, its excellence being accounted for by the fact of its being a closer and more

Introduction

successful imitation of Kālidāsa. The play has also been translated into modern Indian languages because of its dramatic quality.

About the Dramatist : Harsha was an eminent dramatist. He is the author of three plays—*Ratnavali*, *Priyadarshika* and *Nagananda*. It is now almost certain that this Harsha is none other than king Harshavardhana of Thaneshwar and Kanauj, who reigned from 606 to 648 A.D. and to whose court the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang paid a visit. Hiuen Tsang credits him with the authorship of a play with Buddhist content, presumably the *Nagananda*.

Harsha was a great patron of letters; Banabhatta, the famous author of prose romances and Mayura the poet adorned his court. All his three plays are set against the background of the royal palace and there is nothing in them which would preclude possibility of royal authorship.

The *Ratnavali* and *Priyadarshika* are clearly modelled on Kalidasa's *Malavikagnimitra*, a court comedy in a gay and cheerful vein. Coming two centuries after Kalidasa, Harsha adopts the same theme of love intrigues but embellishes it still further by harmonizing parts of the plot into a neat and convincing pattern interwoven with novel motifs.

Ratnāvali

In both the plays the king falls in love with a pretty maiden whose antecedents are shrouded in mystery until the very end. In both, the queen senses the king's infatuation and tries her level best to prevent the lovers from meeting. However, she fails in this attempt because both the king's and the maiden's friends ingenuously bring about the lovers' union.

And finally, in both it transpires in the final act that the unknown maidens, Ratnavali and Aranyika are really princesses whose parents had sent them over as brides to these kings but due to certain mishaps—a shipwreck in the *Ratnavali* and a battle in the *Priyadarshika*—the princesses were separated from their escorts. They eventually come to the kings' courts for whom they were intended. They live incognito under assumed names for a time, fall in love with the kings, are tormented by the jealous queens who when they discover their identity happily give them in marriage to their husbands.

The *Nagananda*, however, is very different in character. Its first three acts give us a *natika*-like love story between the Vidyadhara prince Jimutavahana and the Siddha princess Malayavati after they pass through contrived hurdles of a similar nature as we find in the other two plays. But in the last two acts the play is suddenly

Introduction

switched over to a Buddhist theme. Jimutavahana finds out that Garuda, the semi-divine bird, eats snakes, the nagas, in the region. Jimutavahana is moved at the plight of a victim and, unknown to him, offers in the latter's place himself to Garuda.

Malayavati then appeals to the goddess Gauri holding her to her promise of not letting Jimutavahana die. Gauri revives him, and at his request all the earlier naga victims, too, are brought back to life. This play is clearly a product of Harsha's later life when he was converted to Buddhism. Here the author bases the last two acts to preach the Buddhist message of compassion to all creatures.

Harsha generally favours the longer metres; he employs the Sauraseni Prakrit for dialogues and the Maharashtri for verses. He uses figures of speech rather sparingly. His style is Vaidarbhi and the flow of the language is easy, charming and artistically finished. He follows rules of dramaturgy so carefully that the *Ratnavali* is a great favourite with authors of dramaturgy, who select examples from it quite frequently. Characterization as such is almost wholly absent but the plots are constructed with the great ingenuity, and innovations are invariably successful.

A decorative border composed of repeating floral and geometric patterns, forming a rectangular frame around the central text.

Ratnāvali

CHARACTERS

Yaugandharayana

King Udayana

Jester (Vasantaka)

Madanika

Chutalatika

Vasavadatta

Kanchanamala

Sagarika

Susamgata

Nipunika

Vasundhara

Vijayavarman

Sambarasiddhi

Vasubhuti

Babhravya

ACT I

THE FESTIVAL OF LOVE

Yaugandharayana (*enters in front of the curtain.*

He speaks reflectively): It's true. That she should be miraculously saved by the trader from Kausambi and then recognised from her pearl necklace... that was the prophecy. That there would be a shipwreck, that she would be saved... the daughter of the king of Simhala would be saved... *He speaks joyfully*. Luck favours our king. *He speaks reflectively again*. And I did well, keeping her in the care of the queen.... And then there's more good news. Our chamberlain, the excellent Babhravya, and the king of Simhala's minister, Vasubhuti, have conferred with Rumanvat, who was on his way to conquer the Kosalas. All this indicates a bright future for our king, but... I'm far from satisfied. Fate's on our side, true—but I've got a hand in it as well, and human hands are none too sure. *There is a noise offstage*. The clapping citizens, the sweet-sounding drums. Now His Majesty is proceeding to the palace, where soon the celebrations for Madana, god of love, will

Ratnāvali

begin. *He looks up.* Now he is in the palace.... And I must be home too, planning for the future. *He leaves.*

The curtain rises, showing the King seated with the Jester, colourfully dressed, at his side.

King: Vasantaka...

Jester: Sir?

King (*happily*): Look, Vasantaka—what more could a king ask? The empire's enemies under control, an honest minister in charge, the subjects all happy, and then my wife, the springtime, you... This isn't Madana's festival, it's mine!

Jester: Sir, it is so. But not yours, no. Not the god of love's, no. *Mine!* A brat of a Brahmin's, sir.... Ah, the festive spirit! *He looks out.* Dancing in the streets, women and song, the drums, the red powder, the water sprinklers, the songs like firecrackers!

King (*also looking out*): This is the peak of the festival. What a sight! The scented red powder, the glowing jewels, the asoka flowers drenching the dancers in gold: it's like a second dawn breaking over the city. And on the veranda there, a river of vermillion churned by the blossoming fountains into a scarlet mud.

Act I

Jester:. The ludicrous water syringes aimed at the pretty girls!

King: Brilliant! Like snakes squirting sweet venom.

Jester: Here comes Madanika, very lovelorn, her feet full of the dance. And with her I think is Chutalatika.

Madanika and Chutalatika, *attendants to the queen, enter singing.*

Madanika: Blow, south wind, blow us mango scent, flower scent,

In all hearts blow liveliness,
Waiting means pain and the girls are languishing
For love and a lover's caress,
Spring comes to melt our hearts, bringing beauty,
Bringing loveliness...

King: Lovely! Delicious!

Jester: I think I'll join them.

King (*smiling*): By all means. Lucky rascal.

Jester: Your Majesty commands. I obey. *He rises and dances with the girls.* Madanika, teach me the song.

Madanika and Chutalatika (*speaking together*): Sing it. *The Jester sings.* Silly, it's meant to be chanted, not sung.

Ratnāvali

Jester (*surprised*): Chanted? *He speaks sadly.*
Chanting's not in my line. I must return to
my friend. *He shuffles away.*

Madanika and Chutalatika, *barring his way.* You
don't like us?

Jester (*snatching his hand free*): Dear girls, sweet
girls, I have danced, I have sung. Enough, I
must go! *He runs back to the King.*

King: Bravo!

Chutalatika: Madanika, the queen's message....

Madanika: Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. *She and*
Chutalatika approach the King.

Madanika and Chutalatika: Sir, the queen
commands—*They check themselves,*
shamefacedly. The queen says—

King: 'Commands' is good, very good, Madanika.
Today is the festival. So why shouldn't the
queen command? Tell me, what is it?

Jester (*aside*): When *didn't* she command?

Madanika and Chutalatika: Sir, the queen says
she will expect Your Majesty near the red
asoka tree in the honeyflower gardens where
she is going to perform the ritual worship of
the god of love.

Act I

King: Then you may tell Her Majesty that His Majesty will be there. What do you say, Vasantaka?

Jester: Most assuredly, sir.

Madanika *and* Chutalatika: We shall take your message to the queen, sir. *They depart.*

King: Let's go, Vasantaka. *The King and the Jester, descend the palace steps.* And now you lead the way, sir.

Jester: This way, sir. *They walk a few steps.* The honeyflower gardens, sir. *They enter.* The giddy black bees, the sweet kokila, the south breeze wait in the canopy of the garden for you, sir, to bid you welcome.

King: It's an exquisite spot. Look at those trees there, how the touch of spring intoxicates them till they sprout green leaves and coral flowers. The drunken hum of bees is in their heads and the south breeze shakes them into teetering tipsiness.

Jester: The drowsy hum of bees. But I think I hear the jingling of anklets.

King: You may be right.

Vasavadatta, Kanchanamala *and* Sagarika *enter, carrying implements for the ceremony.*

Ratnāvali

Vasavadatta: Is this the way to the honeyflower gardens?

Kanchanamala: Yes, my mistress.

Vasavadatta: And how far from here is the red asoka tree?

Kanchanamala: A few steps, my mistress. Just three—beyond the *madhavi* and *navamalika* vines.

Vasavadatta: Let's hurry. *They walk a few steps.* Ah, here's the tree. Now where are the flowers and other offerings? Sagarika *hands her the ceremonial objects.* Vasavadatta *muses aloud to herself.* The fools! Letting her step forward. Why, she might be seen by the very person who should be the last to see her. *She looks up.* Sagarika, what are you doing here? Get back to the palace birds at once. Don't you know the poor *sarikas* are all alone there? Give the flowers to Kanchanamala. She can manage.

Sagarika: Yes, my mistress. *She obeys and walks away, but then stops and speaks to herself.* But I did so want to see the ceremony. The *sarikas* aren't alone! I'll just hide myself here and gather flowers for the ceremony. *She hides herself and plucks some flowers.*

Act I

Vasavadatta: The god's image should go at the foot of the tree, Kanchanamala.

Kanchanamala, *places the image*.

Jester: No more jingling. Her Majesty must have begun her worshipping.

King: Yes, yes, she is near the tree. See, the god's image is under the branches. We'll go to her. *He approaches the queen*. Dearest Vasavadatta—

Vasavadatta: My husband! Please sit here. *The King sits down*.

Kanchanamala: The flowers are ready, my mistress, the saffron, the sandalwood, and the cloth offerings.

Vasavadatta *worships*.

King: When you worship, dearest Vasavadatta, it is you who look divine, for then your clear skin, fresh from the bath, glows in the added holiness of the ritual. A pity the god's an image. Otherwise the touch of your hand might arouse sweet feelings in him.

Kanchanamala: The rites for the husband now, my mistress.

Vasavadatta: Flowers and scents, Kanchanamala. *She worships the King*.

Ratnāvali

Sagarika (*finishing her flower gathering*): Oh, it completely slipped my mind, the flowers were so enchanting. Here, let me look. *She peers through the creepers.* The god of love! In person, worshipped by my mistress! I too will worship him. *She turns and tosses the flowers in the direction of the god's image.* O god of love, I salute you: help me and guide me. *She bows.* So, I have seen what I wanted. But there is a difference: in my father's palace we worshipped a painting, here we worship the god of love in person. *She tries to slip away unseen.*

Kanchanamala: Noble Vasantaka, here are gifts for you in exchange for blessings from you.

The Jester approaches.

Vasavadatta, *offers him scents, flowers, and jewels.*

Vasavadatta: For you, sir.

Jester (*taking the gifts*): And my blessings upon you.

Voice (*offstage*): The hour of dusk.

O sun, going down behind the distant hill,
Take the homage of the king as you do the
homage of lotuses.
Night is coming on.

Act I

Sagarika (*turning to look again at the King*): Oh, is this the King Udayana to whom my father betrothed me? *Wistfully*. I never thought—

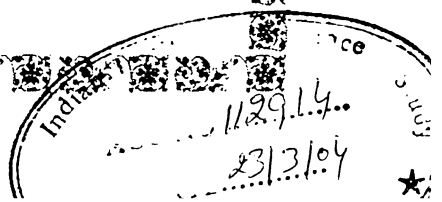
King, *to* Vasavadatta: The festival had stolen our minds away. Evening's here. See, dearest, how the beloved sun clings to his darling night.

Sagarika: They're leaving. I must be back before them. *She looks at the King and sighs deeply*. Oh, that I wasn't aware earlier such beauty could exist!

King: Dearest Vasavadatta, your lotus face shames the lotuses of the lake. Even the moon objects.... The songs are over; the bees, like embarrassed girls, are back in the bosomy buds. Let us go.

All depart.

CURTAIN



ACT II

THE BANANA GARDEN

Susamgata enters, carrying a caged sarika bird.

Susamgata: Where has Sagarika disappeared?
Poor little *sarika*! *She looks around.* Here's
Nipunika. I'll ask her.

Nipunika (*entering and speaking to herself*): I
must give the message to the queen
immediately....

Susamgata: Nipunika, haven't you eyes? Can't
you see me?

Nipunika: Oh, Susamgata! My head's full of
such exciting things! The holy man
Srikhandadasa—you've heard of him?—he
says he'll make trees blossom out of season,
he says he'll bring flowers to the *navamalika*
today. The queen sent me to inquire—but
where are *you* going?

Susamgata: Looking for Sagarika.

Nipunika: Sagarika? I saw her entering the banana
garden, with a box of colours, a painting
board, and a paintbrush. She looked all
flustered—I don't know why. But see, I'm
in a hurry. You can find her.

They both depart.

Ratnāvali

Sagarika, wearing a lovesick expression and carrying her brush and board, enters and speaks with a sigh.

Sagarika: Oh, my heart, stop! Why cry for the moon? When the moon won't come, there will be tears and sadness.... Yet my foolish heart hungers for a glimpse of the distant moon. Kamadeva, god of love, help me! *She folds her hands and prays tearfully.* O Kamadeva, god of love, I am a helpless woman.... Leave me, leave me. *She looks at the painting board.* Will this help? I'll try.... *She concentrates, with a deep sigh.* My fingers tremble; but if this is the only way to have him, I will have him. *She sketches.*

Susamgata (*entering and whispering to herself*). So lost she doesn't even notice me.... Let me see what she's painting. *She steals behind Sagarika.* Why, it's His Majesty! *Aloud.* It's beautiful, Sagarika! I didn't know you painted so well.

Sagarika (*sadly*): Only a painting—*She hides the board beneath a fold of her dress and smiles weakly.* Susamgata, my dear friend, Susamgata... sit here.

Susamgata (*picking up the board*): All your own work? It's the king—but who are you portraying him as?

Act II

Sagarika (*blushing*): The god of love.

Susamgata (*smiling*): You don't say! But you must put the goddess in too. *She picks up the brush and sketches quickly.*

Sagarika (*angrily*): But you're painting *me*.

Susamgata (*laughing*): And why not? For every god a goddess... But come to the point. What are you doing, Sagarika? What's going on? The whole truth now!

Sagarika (*blushing and speaking to herself*): She knows. *Aloud.* Oh, Susamgata, I feel so ashamed. I can't help it—What shall I do now?

Susamgata: Nothing. The whole thing's perfectly normal. You love handsomeness; you are beautiful.... Beauty loving handsomeness is good. But we'll have to go about it secretly. This *sarika's* going to give us trouble. She's picked up every word we've said, and if she blabs it out—

Sagarika (*sadly*): Nothing could be worse than the fire in my heart.

Susamgata: Wait, I'll get you some cool leaves. *She goes offstage and returns quickly with a mat of woven lotus shoots, and with lotus leaves which she places on Sagarika's breasts.*

Ratnāvali

Sagarika: What good is a lotus mat? What good are lotus leaves? I love him but I can't have him. Oh, the dreadful inequality of love! He is great, I am lowly... I am lost. Susamgata, I must die. *She hears a noise offstage.* The monkey's loose!

Voice (*offstage*): The stable monkey's loose, his gold chain jingling! He's in the palace now, frightening the ladies... The dwarf has scuttled inside the chamberlain's gown, The eunuchs and the harem guards have fled in fear. Susamgata, *taking Sagarika by the hand.* Quick, let's get out of here before the monkey arrives.

Sagarika: Which way?

Susamgata: This way—among these banana trees.
She looks back fearfully.

Sagarika: I've left the painting board behind.

Susamgata: Let it be! That scamp of a monkey's opened the birdcage... look, the *sarika's* flown out! We'll have to follow her. She knows every word we said, she'll start chirping it any moment.

Sagarika: What will happen, Susamgata?

Jester (*offstage*): Brilliant! Brilliant!

Act II

Sagarika (*fearfully*): The monkey again!
Susamgata. No, the Jester.

Jester (*entering*): Ha-ha! Srikhandadasa, fine
fellow! Brilliant! Ha!-ha!

Sagarika, *gazes curiously at him.*

Susamgata: Let's go. We must look for the bird.
Come. They both leave.

Jester: Good Srikhandadasa, you're a marvel!
Your recipe is a marvel: you've made the
navamalika blossom—glistening, glorious
flowers! This news must go to the king—
He looks about.—if the king does not go to
the news, for here he comes, beaming with
joy. He must have seen the creeper in bloom.

King (*entering*): A lovely white creeper, as sweet
as a woman's love.

Jester (*approaching the King and speaking
excitedly*): The creeper's in bloom, sir.
Srikhandadasa has performed a miracle!

King: I never doubted the man's powers. Herbs
and gems and charms are wonderful things.
Where is the creeper?

Jester (*importantly*): This way, sir. *They both
proceed a short distance; then the Jester
stops suddenly, fearfully.* Sir, let's run.
There's a—a—a—

Ratnāvali

King:.. Speak up! What's wrong?

Jester: A—a—a—s-s-s-spook in this *vakula* tree.

King: You're out of your head. Ghosts? Here? Bah!

Jester: It—it's a spook, sir. I heard it. Listen, sir. Here....

King (*putting his ear near the vakula tree*): Yes... soft... and very sweet, like a girl's... oh, it's a bird, a *sarika*.... *He smiles*. It's a myna, you fool.

Jester (*listening carefully*): A myna, sir?

King (*laughing*): That's what I said.

Jester: And you thought it was a spook? Ha-ha!

King: I thought it was a spook? *You* thought it was a spook!

Jester: I did? I did? No, don't stop me! *He raises his staff excitedly*. Why, you bloody *sarika*, you bitch of a myna, did you think I'd be frightened? A Brahmin be frightened! Wait till I knock you down, you rotten apple! *He prepares to strike*.

King (*stopping him*): Don't be a fool! The bird's speaking... let's listen.

Jester (*listening*): Did you hear that? "Who is he?" "The god of love." "But you're painting

Act II

me!" "And why not? For every god a goddess...." "Come to the point.... What are you doing? What's going on? The whole truth now!" Oho, oho, what's this?

King: Some girl in love painting her handsome heart's desire—and her friend teasing her.

Jester: Yes, that's it. Neat, very neat. *He snaps his fingers.*

King: Ssssh... She speaks again.

Jester: "You love handsomeness, and you are beautiful.... Beauty loving handsomeness is good...." A pleasant morsel, sir, a juicy bit.

King: Ssssh... Listen. This may lead to something.

Jester (*with his ear to the tree*). Ha! Aha! Listen to this... "What good are lotus leaves, I love him but I can't have him...."

King: Warmer and warmer.

Jester: Sir, listen. Riddles from the beak of a bitchy bird! "Oh, the dreadful inequality of love! He is great, I am lowly.... I am lost, I must die."

King: Who but a Brahmin could speak like that? A Brahmin or a desperate lover.

Jester: Ha-ha! That's a good one, sir. *He claps his hands and laughs loudly.*

Ratnāvali

King, *looking up into the tree*: Stop, stop it!...
Blast it, there goes the bird.... Where is she
now? *He shades his eyes and squints.*

Jester, *also squinting*: In the banana garden, sir.
He points. Let us go there. *They move a few
steps.* Here's the garden. *They enter.* Oh,
what's the use? The bird has flown. Let's
rest ourselves on this cool slab of stone under
the shady banana trees. *They both sit down.*

King: Children and parrots and mynas—
dangerous things for lovers to have around
them. Love will out, love will out.

Jester: What's this? *He goes to pick something
up.* A bird cage, sir! The myna's, I think.
He searches further. And here! A painting
board! Sir, look at this!

King: (*with curiosity*): What have you got?

Jester: A spitting likeness of you, sir, painted as
the god of love.

King (*stretching out his hand*): Show it to me.

Jester: No.

King: Why?

Jester: Not just your likeness, sir, but a lovely
girl's. Are lovely girls shown free?

Act II

*The King hands him a bracelet and takes the painting,
which he studies intently.*

King: Oh, but she's graceful and lovely, like a
swan stirring in a lotus-filled lake.

*Sagarika and Susamgata enter, but are screened
from the King and the Jester by a vine.*

Susamgata: We'll never find the bird, but let's
get the painting board from the banana
garden.

Jester, still looking at the painting:

Why does she appear so pale and lost?

Susamgata (*listening*): The Jester's voice. The
king must be with him. Let's hide here,
Sagarika, and listen. *The two girls hide
themselves.*

King: Oh, but she's graceful and lovely, like a
swan stirring in a lotus-filled lake.

Susamgata: Lucky you, Sagarika! Praise from His
Majesty's lips!

Sagarika (*blushing*): You tease me, Susamgata.

Jester: My question was not that, sir. I wanted to
know why she looks so pale and lost.

King: The bird answered that, didn't she? Why
ask me?

Ratnāvali

Susamgata: I knew the *sarika* would tell it all.

Jester: And how do you find her, sir—pretty?
Yes?... No?.....

Sagarika (*to herself*): My heart hangs on his words.

King: Pretty? The word is *lovely*, my friend. My slow eyes feast on her lovely thighs, pause on the delicate curves of her hips and waist, thirstily move up her heavy breasts, and rest tenderly in the peace of her tear-filled eyes.

Susamgata: You heard, Sagarika?

Sagarika: He praises the skill of your painting.

Jester (*looking again at the painting*): And you are so struck by her that you haven't a word for your own likeness?

King: Why not? She did me honour by painting me. Look at that wet patch like a smudge of perspiration on my body—her tears that fell on the board while she painted, smudged where her palm touched them.

Susamgata: I can't believe my ears. Lucky girl!

Sagarika, *looks embarrassed*.

Jester: Here's a lotus mat, sir, for a lovesick girl.

King: You have quick eyes. And she lay on it: where it was touched by her breasts and

Act II

hips it is faded, but the center is undisturbed where her soft body and arms enclosed it. And here lie two large lotus leaves, full of warmth still—the warmth they received when she placed them on her lovesick breasts.

Jester: Here's a lotus shoot, sir.

King (*placing it on his heart*): You must have slipped from between her breasts. How could there be a place for you there?

Susamgata (*to herself*): This is the madness of love. He's talking nonsense. I'll have to think of something.... *Aloud*. Sagarika, the man you came for is here.

Sagarika (*with irritation*): Whom did I come for? Who's here?

Susamgata (*laughing*): Oh, the painting. The man you painted. Take it.

Sagarika (*angrily*): Very clever. Let me go.

Susamgata: Wait. I'll get the painting for you.

Sagarika: Nobody's stopping you.

Susamgata, *enters the banana garden*.

Jester (*seeing Susamgata*): Sir, the queen's maid Susamgata. Quick, hide it.

The King covers the painting with his cloak.

Ratnāvali

Susamgata: Sir, my homage.

King: You are welcome, Susamgata. Sit here.
Susamgata *sits down*. How did you know I was here?

Susamgata (*laughing*): But I heard all, sir—the painting, the whole story... the queen will be delighted to hear it from me.

Jester (*in alarm; aside*): Stop her. She's a frightful gossip.

King (*catching Susamgata's arm*): A joke, Susamgata, a gay little joke. The queen won't be interested, will she, Vasantaka? Take these. *He gives her his earrings.*

Susamgata (*bowing and smiling*): Oh, I understand, sir. I was joking too. But I don't want earrings, sir. All I want is to join Sagarika, who is very *angry*, sulking behind that creeper there. You see, sir, Sagarika's very touchy, and you could help her—she's very angry because I painted her on that board—

King (*rising hastily*): What! Where? Where is she?

Susamgata, *leads them to the creeper.*

Jester: I'll keep the painting—it might come in handy someday.

Act II

Sagarika, *at first sight of the King, speaks nervously and joyfully to herself*: I'm so nervous. I feel so silly. What shall I say?

Jester (*catching sight of her*): A flawless gem! Paragon of beauties! A sight for the gods!

King: You know, Vasantaka, I agree with you.

Sagarika, *speaking reproachfully to Susamgata*. This is the painting you went to bring?

King: Don't be angry: anger in your eye melts into gentleness. No, don't go yet.

Susamgata: Take her hand, sir, she is very annoyed.

King: Gladly, Susamgata. *He takes Sagarika's hand.*

Susamgata: You shouldn't be angry now, Sagarika. The king has taken your hand.

Sagarika (*petulantly*): Stop it, Susamgata!

King: Oh, but you shouldn't be *angry* with your friends.

Jester: Sir, I see queen Vasavadatta. *The King quickly releases Sagarika's hand.*

Sagarika: What will I do now, Susamgata?

Susamgata: Come, follow me—behind these banana trees. *The two girls depart.*

Ratnāvali

King: Where is Vasavadatta?

Jester: Vasavadatta, sir?

King: You said you saw her.

Jester: Oh, sir, she looked so much like
Vasavadatta I thought I saw Vasavadatta.

King: Superidiot of idiots!—just when things were
warming up. You would do something
like that!

Vasavadatta, *enters with Kanchanamala*.

Vasavadatta: You said the *navamalika* is here?

Kanchanamala: Yes, my queen. *She sees the King
and is surprised. Your Majesty! She bows.*

Vasavadatta: What a pleasant surprise, my
husband!

King (*aside*): Hide the damned picture!

The Jester covers it with his robe.

Vasavadatta: I heard that the *navamalika* is in
full bloom.

King: I was waiting for you.... Come, we'll go
there together.

Vasavadatta: But you look so happy, my husband,
why do we need a *navamalika*? Let's stay
here in the garden.

Act II

Jester (*lifting his hand*): Good! Very good! *His robe slips, the painting is revealed, and the King glowers at him. Aside.* Don't worry. I'll handle it.

Kanchanamala (*picking up the painting*): Look at this lovely painting, my queen.

Vasavadatta (*to herself*): My husband... Sagarika... *Aloud.* What is this?

King, *bashfully: aside.* What now?

Jester: Oh, I was teasing him, Your Majesty—I said he couldn't paint if he tried... and he produced *that!* *He points to the painting.* Not bad, eh?

King: He's right.

Vasavadatta: And the girl there—her likeness must be your work, Vasantaka? No?

King: Oh, no, no... pure imagination... a work of fancy... I did it out of my head... never saw her before....

Jester: By this holy thread, Your Majesty, I swear I never laid eyes on a girl with that face. I mean *we* never laid eyes—

Vasavadatta (*aside*): Don't I know you, you double-crossing liar, Vasantaka, my sweet clown! *Aloud.* I feel so tired suddenly, my

Ratnāvali

husband. I'll go lie down. *She rises and prepares to go.*

King (*catching at her dress*): Did I do anything, Vasavadatta? Did I say something wrong? I'm sorry. Shall I say I won't do it again?... Won't do *what* again? I'm all confused. Did you mind?... Are you angry on account of me?

Vasavadatta (*gently releasing her dress from her husband's grasp*): Oh, no, my husband. Just a little headache. One of those things... I think I should rest. *She leaves with Kanchanamala.*

King: What a fool I've been! I've made her angry; it's true, even if she won't show it. A frown, a smile, a cool look, but no cruel words, not one insult or rebuff. There's good breeding for you.... Well, let us go to the queen.

The King and the Jester depart.

CURTAIN

ACT III

THE RENDEZVOUS

Madanika *enters in front of the curtain and turns to address someone offstage.*

Madanika: Is that Kausambika? Kausambika, where's Kanchanamala? You mean she came here and left? A long time ago? *She looks ahead.* Oh, never mind—she's here.

Kanchanamala (*entering; speaking to herself*): Vasantaka, your schemes would beat Yaugandharayana's!

Madanika (*smiling*): And why, dear Kanchanamala, is the Jester accorded such golden praise from your lips?

Kanchanamala: Can you keep a secret, Madanika? You know you can't.

Madanika: Keep a secret? I swear by the queen I will. Tell me, tell me, Kanchanamala.

Kanchanamala: Well, come closer then.... *She lowers her voice.* This morning I saw the Jester and Susamgata huddled together in conversation near the picture gallery...

Madanika (*impatiently*): Go on, Go on.

Ratnāvali

Kanchanamala: You won't believe it, Madanika, but he told her there was no cure for the king's grief except Sagarika....

Madanika: And she?

Kanchanamala: Well, you won't believe this either, but she said she would disguise Sagarika as the queen, and the king could meet her in secret near the *madhavi* creeper. "I'll dress up as Kanchanamala," she told him, "and you meet me near the picture gallery." I heard it all.

Madanika: The deceiving witch! Who ever thought Susamgata would play such a sly trick on the queen?

Kanchanamala: Be sure you keep it to yourself. Where were you going?

Madanika: To look for you. The queen sent me, because you took such a long time inquiring after His Majesty's health. How is he now?

Kanchanamala: Health! He's bursting with it! He's only a little lovesick, and a little worn out from trying to hide it under what he calls his indisposition. Let's tell the queen.

They both depart: The curtain rises, revealing the King in a lovesick attitude.

King (sighing): Burn in my heart, O fire!

Act III

My heart, be scorched in the heat of love!
The more fool I, having held her hand,
To let it slip away without a protest.
Yet the whole thing is a marvel—
The mind's invisible, a state of flux,
How could the god of love shoot at it?
Five-armed Kamedeva, ruler of the world, Help
me!...
But no, not me, help innocent Sagarika,
Open to the fury of the queen...
Fear lives in her heart now, she does not notice
people,
Harmless talk becomes flaming gossip in her ears,
Smiling friends confuse her,
Poor Sagarika...
Damn you, Vasantaka, what's keeping you?
Haven't you news of her for me?

The Jester enters, beaming, speaking to himself.
Ha-ha! This news is worth twenty kingdoms!
He sees the King. Waiting for me, I see. He
approaches the King. And your wait, sir,
has not been fruitless.

King: You mean she is well?

Jester (*teasingly*): I mean you'll see her soon.

King: Again! When?

Jester: Aren't you the king?

King: *You, sir, are the king. But tell me—when,*
where? He listens as the Jester whispers in

Ratnāvali

his ear. Oh, excellent! A good job! Take this. *He gives the Jester a gold bracelet.*

Jester (*placing the bracelet on his arm*): Gold! Thank you, sir. Now to my wife—who likes pure gold.

King: Later to the wife who likes pure gold. It's not yet sunset.

Jester: There—on that hill—the thousand-eyed sun, with love in his heart, is struggling toward the forest of the hilltop, where his beloved Evening calls....

King: Yes, you're right... it is sunset. Let us go to the *madbavi* creeper where she waits for me. Lead the way, Vasantaka.

They go on their way.

Jester: We're in the dark of the honeyflower gardens, the trees thick around us. What now? I've lost my way.

King: Use your nose. Champak scent; *sindhuvara* scent; the fragrant beds of *vakula*; the roses... This is the way.

Jester: Sir, here is the *madhavi* creeper! Drunken bees and divine fragrance—oh, the scent, the scent! Wait here, sir, I'll bring Sagarika to you. She's dressed as the queen.

Act III

King: Hurry!

Jester: No more than a minute, sir. *He leaves.*

King: Till she comes, loneliness... only these green stone slabs to sit on. *He sits down.* Stolen love is sweet—most delicious!... Damn the man, what's wrong with him? Has the queen got wind of it?

Vasavadatta and Kanchanamala enter, but are screened from the King's view by the creeper.

Vasavadatta: You mean she'll go to him dressed as me?

Kanchanamala: It's the truth, my queen. To prove it you have only to go and see Vasantaka waiting near the picture gallery.

Vasavadatta: Take me there.

They circle the stage. The Jester enters, his head covered.

Jester: Footsteps! Sagarika! *He calls loudly.*
Sagarika!

Kanchanamala: We are near the picture gallery, my queen. Watch. *She snaps her fingers.*

Jester (*smiling*). Oh, is it you, Susamgata? I've been waiting for you, *He catches sight of Kanchanamala.* Perfect, Susamgata! Anyone would think you were Kanchanamala! Where's Sagarika?

Ratnāvali

Kanchanamala, *pointing to Vasavadatta*. Here.

Jester (*awe-stricken*): But that's the queen herself!

No? What a perfect disguise! My lady Sagarika, follow me please. Let's hurry, my lady, the moon is up.

Vasavadatta, *looks significantly at Kanchanamala, and all three proceed around the garden.*

King (*to himself*): I know she's coming... but the pain of waiting! Love oppresses most when near fulfillment, like a sweltering day before rainfall.

Jester (*overhearing the King*): My lady Sagarika—you hear how he loves you? Wait, I'll tell him you've come. *Scarcely waiting for Vasavadatta's nod, the Jester approaches the King.* Sir, she is here.

King (*jumping up*): Where?

Jester (*beckoning to Vasavadatta*): Here.

Vasavadatta, *stands before the King.*

King: O dearest Sagarika, darling Sagarika,
Moon-faced Sagarika, lotus-eyed Sagarika,
Lotus-fingered Sagarika, lotus-armed Sagarika,
O Sagarika, lovely-thighed Sagarika,
Pleasure-giving Sagarika,
Come to me, Sagarika, and love me with your lips.

Act III

Vasavadatta (*aside*): He's crazy—oh most strange!
He's insane, Kanchanamala.

Kanchanamala (*aside*): He's in love.

Jester: Good Sagarika, be kind to him. For his wife Vasavadatta speaks harshly to him, his ears are full of the queen's anger. Soothe him with the sweetness of your honeyed speech.

Vasavadatta (*ironically; aside*): I harsh, and Vasantaka most sweet—isn't that it, Kanchanamala?

Kanchanamala: He'll be sorry for those words some day.

Jester: Your Majesty, look—the moon!

King: Dearest Sagarika, see the moon!
Oh, the wan moon robbed of her loveliness,
Dearest Sagarika;
Your beauty is richer.
Oh, the envious moon, Sagarika!

Vasavadatta: No more of this—this lunacy! *She snatches aside her veil.* “Sagarika! Dearest, darling Sagarika!”—Bah, where's Sagarika? I am the queen, Queen Vasavadatta!

King (*confusedly*): Damnation! What's this?

Jester (*sadly*): I'm ruined....

Ratnāvali

The King kneels before Vasavadatta and addresses her with folded palms. O Vasavadatta, my darling, my dearest, forgive me—

Vasavadatta: “My darling, my dearest—” *To me!*
No, my husband—that’s for Sagarika.

Jester (*aside*): What now? *Aloud.* Oh, but you are noble, Your Majesty. You have a forgiving heart. Forgive him, Your Majesty, I beg you.

Vasavadatta: I forgive *him*? He should forgive *me* for butting in on his mooning and spooning. I’ve spoiled the fun, haven’t I?

King: I am guilty. I know it, Vasavadatta. But I beg you, dearest, please forgive me... if there is a bit of pity and love in your heart.... *He falls at her feet.*

Vasavadatta: No, my husband—don’t. *She stops him.* How can I be angry when you are sorry? You are my husband. It is all right.... I must go now.

Vasavadatta and Kanchanamala depart.

Jester: Rise, Your Majesty. She’s gone—no point in crying now.

King (*looking up at him*): Gone? And she didn’t forgive me after all.

Jester: Of course she did—we’re alive, aren’t we?

Act III

King: Shut up. No more of your damned jokes.
You started the whole business. *You* made me do what I thought I'd never do in my life. The shame of it!... What must she think of me?

Jester: It's not so much you, sir—consider Sagarika. What's going to happen to her?

King: Dearest Sagarika!

Sagarika enters, dressed as the queen, but is unnoticed by the King and the Jester.

Sagarika (*speaking to herself anxiously*): No one saw me slip past the picture gallery. But where shall I go now? *She broods distractedly.*

Jester: Oh, come off it! It's all over. What's the next step?

King: There's only one—she must forgive us. Let us go to the queen. Maybe she will listen to me now.

The King and the Jester take a few steps toward the exit from the garden.

Sagarika (*still musing to herself*): Oh, I could kill myself: the queen knows all about me now. Hanging is all that's left. Death is better than disgrace. Oh, good asoka tree, I am coming.... *She walks toward the tree.*

Ratnāvali

Jester (*in an attitude of listening*): Footsteps! I think the queen's coming back, sir. In a good mood—I hope!

King: I *knew* she'd forgive me. She is noble by nature. Go see if she's coming.

The Jester peers through the stems of the creeper.

Sagarika (*approaching the asoka tree*): A noose of the *madhavi* creeper—*She takes a tendril from the vine.*—and the hanging from the asoka. Oh, homeless, helpless, miserable... to die so young... *She places the noose around her neck.*

Jester: Help! Help! The queen's hanging herself! Help, sir! Help!

The King runs to Sagarika and removes the noose from her neck.

King: Such foolishness! Are you insane? Oh, my darling, what made you do it?

Sagarika: Let me go, sir, let me go. Sagarika must die—she is a slave. Let me go! *She struggles to replace the noose around her neck.*

King: Sagarika! *He is immediately overjoyed.* Don't be silly! Not a noose around your neck, lovely Sagarika, but a noose around my neck—a noose of your arms, lovely

Act III

Sagarika! Not a noose of death, lovely Sagarika, but a noose of life! *He places her arms around his neck.* Ah! What joy! A shower with no clouds! Joy with no pain!

Jester: That is to say, if Queen Vasavadatta doesn't appear. Then there'll be storm clouds!

Vasavadatta and Kanchanamala enter, but are screened from the others by the creeper:

Vasavadatta: It was cruel of me, Kanchanamala. Think of it—he fell at my feet and begged pardon, and I walked away.

Kanchanamala: If the king does wrong, should the queen do so too?

Vasavadatta and Kanchanamala circle the stage.

King: How long must you treat me like this, O heartless, O callous?

Kanchanamala (*overhearing*): It's the king—coming to entreat you again.

Vasavadatta (*joyfully*): I'll surprise him from the back....

Jester: Good Sagarika, be kind to him.

Vasavadatta, *angrily*. Sagarika! She here! *She peers through the creeper.*

Sagarika: But you love the queen, sir. Your words are mere courtesy.

Ratnāvali

King: Love?... How little you know, dearest girl.
She flamed in anger, I trembled. She was
silent, I begged forgiveness. Her eyebrows
shot up, I fell at her feet. You call that
love?—old-world routine, royal affections....
I love *you*, my body thrills when you come
near me, my dearest....

Vasavadatta, *surprising them and speaking irately.*
Brilliant! Well done! A very pretty love
scene!

King, *taken aback.* Vasavadatta!—but you’ve
misunderstood everything: I thought she was
you. I didn’t mean what I said. That is—*He*
falls at her feet. I mean—

Vasavadatta: You don’t know what you mean!
“Old-world routine, royal affections.” Isn’t
that it? You may rise.

King (*to himself*): She overheard that too! Well,
the game’s up.... *He stands shamefacedly,*
looking at the ground.

Jester: You’ve got it all wrong, my queen. I
thought *she* was the queen—from the dress
she’s wearing—and I thought the queen was
trying to hang herself, so of course I called
the king to come and help me save her. If
you don’t believe it, look at this. *He shows*
her the noose.

Act III

Vasavadatta (*angrily*): Oh, I believe you all right.
And we'll put the noose to good purpose
too. Put it around the fool's neck,
Kanchanamala, and take him to the palace.
The foolish girl too. I'll see to them later.

Kanchanamala (*doing as she is told*): Lead on,
Vasantaka. This way, Sagarika.

Sagarika (*to herself*): Oh, the shame, the shame!

Jester (*looking sadly at the King*): I tried, sir.

Vasavadatta (*leaves*); Kanchanamala, Sagarika,
and the Jester follow.

King (*despondently*): The queen, her smile frozen
into anger. And Sagarika, poor Sagarika, at
the queen's mercy. And good Vasantaka, the
noose around his neck... Whatever I think
of is painful. What's the use of staying here?
I must go to the queen... to soothe her
displeasure.... *He departs.*

CURTAIN

ACT IV

THE MAGIC SHOW

Susamgata enters in front of the curtain, carrying a pearl necklace, sighing and speaking sorrowfully to herself. While she is speaking the Jester enters, also speaking to himself, but joyfully and laughingly.

Susamgata: Poor Sagarika, so gentle, so noble, where are you now? *She sobs.* Oh, Fate, creating beauty, then shattering it... pitiless Fate. This pearl necklace—"Give it to some Brahmin," she said; it was her last wish.... But now where's a Brahmin? *She sees the Jester.* The good Vasantaka!

Jester: Oho! Ho-ho! The king has soothed the queen, the queen has soothed my stomach... cakes after prison, sweets after the noose, cooked all by herself! This silk robe too, ho-ho! And new gold earrings!... Where's the king?

Susamgata (*approaching and speaking tearfully*): Noble Vasantaka!

Jester: Susamgata—crying? Tsk-tsk. Why?... Is anything wrong—something to do with Sagarika?

Ratnāvali

Susamgata: Sir, she's gone... poor girl. The queen packed her off to Ujjain at midnight.

Jester (*looking concerned*): Cruel, most cruel.

Susamgata: She wept and wept, and despaired of her life; and then she gave me this necklace and said, "Give it to noble Vasantaka".... Sir, I give it to you.

Jester, sadly. No... how can I?

Susamgata: Take it, sir. *She implores him with folded hands.*

Jester: All right... perhaps it will console the king. *He looks at it.* But where did she get an expensive trinket like this?

Susamgata: That's exactly what I asked her, sir.

Jester: And what did she say?

Susamgata: She looked up, sighed deeply, and began to weep, saying only, "You wouldn't understand."

Jester: But this betrays royal rank, Susamgata, a necklace like this. Where is his Majesty?

Susamgata: In the Crystal Room, sir. I saw him go there when he left the queen's rooms.

They both depart. The curtain is raised, revealing the King seated on the royal dais.

Act IV

King: It wasn't my words and promises that did the trick, nor my confusion, my begging and pleading with the maids. It was her weeping that did it! Nothing like tears to dissolve anger: excellent washers of excess passion. *He sighs.* And now my heart begins to long again for Sagarika, lotus-soft Sagarika—gone as soon as she came to light my life. *He muses.* And Vasantaka snatched away too—no shoulder left for me to weep on.

The Jester enters, jubilantly. Sir, it's me!

King: Ah, Vasantaka! Come near.

Jester (*embracing the King*): The queen's let me off.

King: I can see by your robe you've won her favour. Sit down. What news of our dearest Sagarika? *He notices that the Jester looks worried.* Come, what's the news?

Jester: Sir, I cannot—

King: What is it? Is she ill? Angry? Is she—*He breaks off in horror.*

Jester: No, no; not that.

King: I'm prepared for the worst. Tell me.

Jester: I'm told the queen's packed her off to Ujjain.

King: Who told you? The queen is heartless.

Ratnāvali

Jester: Susamgata, sir. And she gave me this—a pearl necklace, Sagarika's.

King: Bring it here. *He looks at it and places it on his heart.* No more her loving hands... only a string of cold pearls. *He gives it back to the Jester.* Take it. It hurts. Darling Sagarika!

Jester: Sssh! Sir, the queen's spies are everywhere.

Vasundhara (*entering and bowing*): My homage, sir. Rumanvat's son Vijayavarman is at the gate with good news.

King: Send him in.

Vasundhara leaves and returns with Vijayavarman.

Vijayavarman (*bowing*): My homage, sir. Rumanvat is victorious, sir.

King, *joyfully*. Kosala is conquered?

Vijayavarman: Yes, sir.

King: Well done, Rumanvat! A great victory! Tell me the details.

Vijayavarman: My father, on your orders, marched from here with a striking force of elephants, cavalry, and foot soldiers, and within a few days had brought siege against the fort of Vindhya. But the king of Kosala, incensed, brought forth a terrible army, consisting

Act IV

chiefly of elephants. With our arrows showering him, he charged us—fire flashed, blood flowed, helmets were dashed gorily on the ground! Then the king of Kosala attacked Rumanvat, my father; and my father slew him as he sat on his elephant, pierced by a hundred arrows.

King: A brave king, Kosala. Even his enemies speak of his courage.

Vijayavarman: My father Rumanvat is now at the gates, leading the wounded elephants.

King, *to Vasundhara*. Tell Yaugandharayana to look after him well, as befits a hero.

Vasundhara *leaves*; Kanchanamala *enters*.

Kanchanamala, *to Vasundhara in passing*. The queen wants a magician of hers to see His Majesty. *She sees the King*. Sir, the queen says, "Here is an excellent magician named Sambarasiddhi, whom Your Majesty would like to meet."

King: I always love magic... send him in.

Kanchanamala *leaves and re-enters with the magician, who is carrying a plume of peacock feathers*.

Kanchanamala: His Majesty.

Ratnāvali

Sambarasiddhi: May the king prosper! *He whirls his peacock feathers and continues in verse.*

Bow to the feet of Indra, the Magician!

Bow to Sambara!

Sir, a word from you and the moon

Flashes on earth,

Hills float in the air,

There is fire in water, darkness at noon.

A word from you, sir,

Brings your heart's desire.

Jester: You talk big, my friend.

King: Wait. Ask the queen to come here, Kanchanamala. We shall see the magic together. And clear the room of people.

Kanchanamala *leaves and re-enters with* Vasavadatta.

Vasavadatta: The magician is here? My husband—

King: Good Vasavadatta, he's made himself hoarse promising the weirdest things. Do sit here, near me. *She sits down.* Proceed with the show, my friend.

Sambarasiddhi (*dancing and flourishing the feathers*): The gods, Hari and Hara and Brahman and Indra and the nymphs dancing—all behold!

King (*stepping down from his seat*): Look! Look, Vasavadatta—

Act IV

Sambarasiddhi: Brahman on his lotus,
In the sky moon-touched Shankara,
Indra on the holy elephant Airavata,
The nymphs dancing—
Jingle of anklets on tripping feet!

Jester: Bah! Who wants gods and nymphs? Why,
you damned son of a slave, can't you bring
Sagarika here?

Vasundhara (*entering and bowing*): Sir,
Yaughandharayana sends the minister of the
king of Simhala and his chamberlain
Babhravya to see you. It is urgent, he says,
and the time is auspicious. He will follow
soon.

Vasavadatta: I think you should see them, my
husband. They come from my uncle.

King, *to Sambarasiddhi*. That's all for now. You
may go.

Sambarasiddhi: But, sir, my best trick—

King: All in good time, my friend, all in good
time. I'll send for you later.

Vasavadatta: Give him something, Kanchanamala.

Kanchanamala and Sambarasiddhi depart.

King: Vasantaka, you'll have to go and welcome
the minister Vasubhuti.

Ratnāvali

The Jester and Vasundhara leave, and the Jester returns with Vasubhuti and Babhravya.

Jester: This way, sir. This way, sir.

Vasubhuti, *aside*, seeing the pearl necklace worn by the Jester. Isn't that the necklace His Majesty gave her.

Babhravya, *aside*. It's the same. Shall I ask?

Vasubhuti, *aside*. No, not now. There might be two here like that: this place has the look of luxury, hasn't it?

Jester: His Majesty, King Udayana.

Vasubhuti: My greetings, sir.

King, *rising*. I welcome you, sir. A seat, Vasantaka.

The Jester brings a chair and Vasubhuti sits down.

Babhravya: My homage, sir.

King: You are most welcome, good Babhravya. Please sit down.

Babhravya does so.

Vasavadatta: I salute you, sir, and you, sir, and bid you welcome to my husband's palace.

King: How is the king of Simhala, good Vasubhuti?

Act IV

Vasubhuti (*sadly*): Oh, sir, well, sir.

Vasavadatta (*to herself*): I hope nothing's wrong.

King: Speak up, Vasubhuti. What is it?

Babhravya (*aside*): Tell him the truth. Now is the time.

Vasubhuti (*sadly*): Sir, it's a long story. The princess Ratnavali knew that you wanted to marry her. So her father betrothed her to you when he heard that Queen Vasavadatta had perished in the fire, and—

King (*aside to Vasavadatta*): Is he mad? What's he saying?

Vasavadatta (*aside; giggling*): Is he mad?... Oh, it's so funny.

Jester: Well, go on.

Vasubhuti: And Princess Ratnavali was drowned when our ship was wrecked. We were escorting her to you, Your Majesty. *He bows his head in shame.* It's all our fault.

Vasavadatta (*in tears*): Sweet Ratnavali! Sweet cousin! Is she dead? *Noise and shouting are heard offstage.*

Voices: Fire! Fire in the palace! Flames in the golden turrets! Help! The garden is burning! The palace is burning! Help!

Ratnāvali

King (*rising hastily from his seat*): The palace on fire? Vasavadatta!

Vasavadatta: Sagarika's in there!—I kept her in chains.... Oh, save her!

King: Sagarika? Where, which room?

Jester, *catching hold of the King's robe*. Sir, do not go.

King, *pulling himself free*. Not go? With Sagarika in there? Let me go—*He rushes out; the others follow cautiously.*

Inner curtain is drawn, revealing Sagarika in chains and smothered in smoke.

Sagarika: Oh, burn me, kill me, kind fire! Let me die in your arms!

King: Sagarika! *He runs to her*. Here I am!

Sagarika: Help! Please...

King: Wait, I'm here... it's all right. Your dress is burning! And this chain! Put your arms around my neck. *He tries to lift her*. That's strange. What's this?... No fire? Where's the fire? And the smoke? Vasavadatta *enters*. Is that you, Vasavadatta? Vasubhuti *enters*. Is that you, Vasubhuti? Babhravya *enters*. It's you, Babhravya! *The Jester enters*. My friend Vasantaka! Am I dreaming? What has happened?... There was a fire—

Act IV

Jester: No fire, Your Majesty. Just the last trick of the magician.

King: And here, good Vasavadatta, is Sagarika.

Vasavadatta: I know.

Vasubhuti, *on first seeing Sagarika, speaking aside to Babhravya*. The princess?

Babhravya (*aside*): Princess Ratnavali!

Vasubhuti: Sir, who is this lady?

The King looks at Vasavadatta.

Vasavadatta: Yaugandharayana left her in my care. She is Sagarika, child of the sea.

King (*to himself*): Yaugandharayana told me nothing.

Vasubhuti (*aside*): The same necklace... Sagarika, child of the sea... *Aloud*. Princess Ratnavali!

Sagarika (*in tears*): Vasubhuti! Good Vasubhuti!

Vasubhuti (*falling at her feet*): I am innocent, my princess. Forgive me.

Sagarika: Oh, Father, where are you? Mother—
She sobs uncontrollably.

Vasavadatta (*astonished*): Is she... is she my cousin—Ratnavali?

Babhravya: Yes, Your Majesty.

Ratnāvali

Vasavadatta: (*embracing Sagarika*): Oh, Ratnavali—I didn't know.

King: The daughter of the noble king of Simhala?

Jester (*removing the necklace*): I knew this was worth something! *He places it around Sagarika's neck.*

Vasavadatta: Don't cry, Ratnavali. Everything is over now.

Ratnavali (*shamefully and confusedly*): But what I did to you—after what I did—

Vasavadatta: Don't you worry now, Ratnavali. *She opens her arms and the two embrace again. Vasavadatta then turns toward the King.* Oh, my husband, I've behaved so horribly... But Yaugandharayana never told me anything.... I didn't know....

Yaugandharayana *enters in time to overhear the last of Vasavadatta's excuses.*

Yaugandharayana: Let me explain, sir. When Queen Vasavadatta agreed to your taking a second wife, a new responsibility fell on me. Yet I was obliged to serve you, and I did what I thought was best in the circumstances. If I was wrong, sir, I implore you to pardon me.

King: What do you think you did wrong, Yaugandharayana?

Act IV

Yaugandharayana: Sir, please take your seat, and I'll explain. *Everyone sits down.* A great sage, whose words are truth itself, said of Princess Ratnavali when she was a child, "Whoever marries her will rule the world." But her father, the king of Simhala, would not agree that you should marry her, for he thought that Queen Vasavadatta—I beg your pardon, Your Majesty—would object.... But I kept trying; I spread the rumour that the good Queen Vasavadatta—I beg your pardon, Your Majesty—had perished in the fire at Lavanaka. Then Babhravya took the message to the king of Simhala, and—

King: The rest we know. But why did you entrust Sagarika—I mean Ratnavali—to my wife's care?

Jester: That's easy. So you'd see her and fall in love with her.

King: Which I did. Yaugandharayana?

Yaugandharayana: Sir, I plead guilty.

King: And the magician was your man too, ch?
And the fire?

Yaugandharayana: Guilty again, sir. It was the only way. *He laughs.* Queen Vasavadatta, it's all in your hands now.

Ratnāvali

Vasavadatta (*smiling*): What you mean, Yaugandharayana, is—why not give her to him? Isn't that it? Come, why don't you say so?

Jester: He doesn't have to.

Vasavadatta (*reaching out her hand*): Come, Ratnavali, come to me. You are my sister now, not cousin. *She decorates Ratnavali with her jewels, and leads her by the hand before the KING.* My husband, here is Ratnavali. She is yours. And she is alone: console her in her loneliness. And you, Ratnavali, make a good queen!

Yaugandharayana: Sir, it is over. Sagarika, child of the sea, is with us, the queen is happy, the Kosalas are conquered, His Majesty is on the throne, and I—I am the proudest of ministers.

CURTAIN

NOTES

Agastya, the legendary sage (supposed to have been born in a jar, hence also called Kumbhayoni, "jar-born") who pioneered the Aryanisation of Southern India. To his pupil Rama he presented the invincible bow and inexhaustible quiver of Vishnu. (*The Later Story of Rama.*)

Airavata, the holy elephant, vehicle of Shiva, created by Brahma's seven chants. (*Ratnavali*)

Arundhati, wife of the great sage Vashishtha; in Hindu tradition she, along with Sita, represents the ideal wife. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

"As Sita died, as Draupadi died," a confusion of legendary stories, indicating Sansthanaka's lack of cultivated taste. Sita is the heroine of the *Ramayana*, and does not, strictly speaking, "die." Draupadi, wife of the Pandava brothers in the *Mahabharata*, is the first to collapse on the way when, after successfully ruling their regained kingdom, they decide to trek to the Himalayas to offer their life's work to Brahma. (*The Toy Cart*)

Avanti, Ujjain, the capital of Malva, kingdom of Pradyota, Vasavadatta's father; also the surrounding territory. (*The Dream of Vasavadatta*)

Bhagirath, a descendant of Sagara, he brought the Ganga from heaven to the earth after a thousand-year penance, in order to purify the memory of his ancestors who were burned down by the wrath of the sage Kapila, founder of the Samkhya system of

Ratnāvali

philosophy; hence the Ganges is also known as the Bhagirathi. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Bharata, (1) a son of Dasharatha by Kaikeyi; (2) the author of the *Natyashastra*; (3) a son of Dushyanta and Shakuntala; (4) the eldest son of Rishabhadeva; hence India is called Bharatavarsha, "land of Bharata."

Brahma, the creative aspect of the Hindu trinity, born from a lotus out of the navel of Vishnu reclining on the waters; represented with four faces, standing for the four quarters, and the four parts of the mystic syllable *Om* (also, in flat representation, represented as the *Trimurti*).

Ceremony of the would-be mother; special clothes and jewellery and food are offered to the would-be mother, and a puja is performed before her by friends and relatives who are already mothers. This is different from the "puerperal longings" which the husband is supposed to satisfy. (*Shakuntala and The Later Story of Rama*)

Chakravakas, red geese or sheldrakes. These birds were supposed, in legend, to be ideally mated in the day but, as a result of a curse, during the night they bewailed each other's absence from the opposite banks of a river. (*Shakuntala and The Dream of Vasavadatta*)

Chanakya, the author of *Chanakya-niti* (*Laws of Chanakya*) and *Arthashastra* (*The Science of Success*). As minister of Chandragupta Maurya, his chief policy was to subdue the Nandas and annex

Notes

their kingdom. Also known as Vishnugupta or Kautilya. (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

Chandalas, outcasts, specifically children of a Sudra father and a Brahmin mother. (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

Dandaka, a king of the solar dynasty who raped the daughter of his guru and was punished by having his kingdom turned into an impenetrable forest, Dandakaranya (*aranya* is Sanskrit for 'forest'). (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Dasharatha, son of King Aja of the solar dynasty; father of Rama. His chief queens were Kaushalya, Sumitra, and Kaikeyi; after he had performed a special sacrifice under the direction of the sage Rishyasringa, Rama, Lakshmana and Shatrughna, and Bharata were born respectively to the three queens; his daughter was Shanta. He sent Rama to fourteen years' exile in order to honour a promise he had made to Kaikeyi, but died soon after of a broken heart. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Dharma, an ethical code, way of life, social conscience, "the natural condition of things or beings, the law of their existence, truth, religious truth." From this is derived *sva-dharma*, taken to mean recognition of one's right to perform the duties dictated by one's nature and conscience.

Draupadi, daughter of King Drupada and wife of the five Pandava brothers; Krishna treated her as his sister and came to her help whenever she needed assistance. (*The Toy Cart*)

Ratnāvali

Durvasas, son of Atri, one of the seven great sages, and Anusuya. Proverbially hot-tempered, he cursed Shakuntala because she neglected to serve him. (*Shakuntala*)

Dushyanta, a king of the lunar dynasty. (*Shakuntala*)

Five deadly sins, killing a Brahmin, getting drunk, stealing, committing adultery with a guru's wife, and associating with any person guilty of any of these crimes. (*The Toy Cart*)

"*Five-Tufted Boy*," refers to the sign of pupilhood, especially in one belonging to the Brahmin caste. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Gandharva, literally, a celestial musician; but it also signifies marriage by exchange of garlands, a love union, recognised by Manu in his Shastras as one of the eight acceptable types of marriage. (*Shakuntala*)

Ganga, the name of India's most sacred river and its presiding deity (also called *Bhagirathi*); she was the first wife of Shantanu and came to the earth as the result of a curse, giving birth to eight sons, of whom Bhishma was the youngest.

Goddess of the Sakya hills, presumably Devi, Hinduism's mother goddess, whose other forms are Parvati, Uma, Durga, and Kali. She lives in the Himalayas and descends periodically to fertilise the plains. The Sakya hills are north of Magadha, in the foothills of the Himalayas in central India. (*The Toy Cart*)

Notes

Hara, Shiva, destroying aspect of the Hindu trinity.

Hari, Vishnu, preserving aspect of the Hindu trinity.

Hastinapur, the ancient site of Delhi, about thirty miles east of the modern Delhi in Northern India, situated on the Ganges. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Horse sacrifice, the Ashvamedha; a ritual performed by the absolute ruler of Bharata, to denote his unchallenged sovereignty over the land.

Ikshvaku, the first king of the solar dynasty. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Indra, the chief god of the Hindu pantheon of lower deities. He molested Ahalya and was cursed by her husband, the sage Gautama; the thousands of sores that festered on his body as a result later became so many eyes. He is also, as the god of rain, the dispenser of blessings.

Janaka, king of Mithila, foster father of Sita; called "best among Brahmins" because of his extraordinary performances of charity and penance. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Jatayu, eagle-son of Aruna, the charioteer of the sun god. In Hindu myth he is the king of birds and dies trying to save Sita from the clutches of Ravana. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Kaikeyi, daughter of Kekaya and one of the three chief queens of Dasharatha. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Kama, the god of love; his wife is Rati and his friend the season *vasanta* (spring). He was shriveled into

Ratnāvali

cinders by the eye of Shiva, who was practising penance and disliked Kama's stirring passion in him for his wife Uma, and reborn as Pradyumna.

Kamboja, the territory to the east of Kashmir and beyond the Himalayas.

Kanva, a sage, foster father of Shakuntala. (*Shakuntala*)

Kashyapa, a sage who, by marrying the thirteen daughters of Daksha, became the progenitor of the inferior deities (*devas*), demons, human beings, beasts, and reptiles.

Kayastha, member of the Kshatriya, the second, warrior and administrator caste. (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

Khara, a demon, half brother of Ravana, who was killed by Rama. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Koel, or *kokila*, a cuckoo. In Sanskrit, it is called *parabhrta*, "brought up by another," because the female koel leaves her eggs in the nest of a crow to be hatched. The koel's song expresses the sad sweetness of frustrated or alienated love. (*The Toy Cart*)

Kosala, the territory along the banks of the river Sarayu which had two capitals, Kushavati (for South Kosala) and Sravasti (for North Kosala).

Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu. Born to Vasudeva and Devaki, he was brought up by Nanda and Yashoda, and killed by his maternal uncle, the wicked Kamsa. He was a friend of the Pandavas

Notes

during their exile, charioteer of Arjuna, and hero of the *Gita*.

Kshatriya, see *Kayastha*. (*Shakuntala*)

Kuru, a legendary monarch, ancestor of the Kauravas and Pandavas.

Kusha grass, a tapering soft grass (*Eragrostis cynosuroides*) considered sacred and used in all Hindu religious rituals. (*Shakuntala* and *The Dream of Vasavadatta*)

Lotus, a symbolic flower in Indian religion and literature. Brahma is born out of the lotus in the navel of Vishnu; the Buddha is always depicted as sitting on a lotus; the Tibetan prayer chant is *Om mani padme hum*, "I salute the jewel in the lotus." Growing in stagnant village ponds, it symbolises emergence into selfhood from the temptations of sensual life; the leaves, unaffected by water, symbolise the atman uncontaminated by the interplay of the gunas; and its daytime opening and nighttime closing within itself suggest the eternal day and night of Brahma in the framework of Hindu metaphysical belief.

Madana, Kama, or Kamadeva, god of love. (*Ratnavali*)

Magadha, the territory around Southern Bihar, in central India. In Dasharatha's time, it was ruled by Shurasena (4000 B.C.); during the time of the Pandavas, by Jarasandha; during Chandragupta's reign (fourth century B.C.), its annexation became part of the minister Chanakya's grand political design. (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

Ratnāvali

Mahendra, from Sanskrit, *maha*, great, and *Indra*, it is another name for Indra.

Malaya, the Southern portion of the Western Ghats, a mountain range forming the Eastern boundary of Travancore in Southern India.

Marichi, son of Sunda and Tadaka, he was ordered by Ravana to assume the form of a golden deer to lure away Rama and enable Ravana to abduct Sita.

Matali, the charioteer of Indra.

Maya, in Vedantic philosophy, "the cosmic illusion on account of which the One appears as many, the Absolute as the relative." It may also be defined as the ignorance that prevents man's realisation of his identity with Brahman, leading to increasing involvement in the bewildering multiplicity of mirrors created by the senses. On the sthetic plane, maya governs the realm of rasa, the principle of all forms of artistic relish. Zimmer associates maya with shakti, the creating and binding force in the phenomenal world.

Menaka, the heavenly nymph who seduced the sage Vishvamitra; her daughter is Shakuntala. She was sent by the gods to distract Vishvamitra from his yoga, because excessive practice of moral discipline gave him power over the deities. Since he was a Kshatriya, Dushyanta (also a Kshatriya) finds it perfectly proper to marry Shakuntala. (*Shakuntala*)

Mithila, the capital of Videha, the kingdom of Dasharatha.

Notes

Nanda, king of Magadha. Its capital was Pataliputra, the modern Patna. (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

Nirvana, literally, 'a snuffing out'; in Buddhism, the extinction of all forms of desire, achieved through the practice of the eightfold path which cures the cause of *dukkha*, 'sorrow.' (*The Toy Cart*)

"*Offering water to ancestors*," the eldest son offers water and balls of rice to his ancestors at prescribed intervals to preserve their state of blessedness in the next birth. (*Shakuntala*)

Prakrit, from *prakriti*, 'primordial nature'; hence, 'not cultivated, vulgar', hence, all vernaculars or dialects which derive from the Sanskrit (meaning 'cultivated to perfection'). (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

Puru, founder of the lunar dynasty. (*Shakuntala*)

Poison girls, girls employed as spies by Chanakya, with specific instructions to poison suspected enemies of the king. (*The Signet Ring of Rakshasa*)

"*Radha's son, Pandu's son*," a muddle of legends again, to indicate Sansthanaka's lack of good breeding. Pandu, father of the Pandavas, is in the *Mahabharata*, while Radha is the gopi (cowherdess) whose love for Krishna symbolises, *Song of Solomon* style, the atman's search for union with Brahman. (*The Toy Cart*)

Raghu, founder of the solar race, the dynasty of Rama, who is therefore called a Raghava.

"*Rama kissed Draupadi*," another muddling of mythology, reflecting Sansthanaka's neglected

Ratnāvali

education. Rama, the hero of the *Ramayana*, has nothing to do with Draupadi, the common wife of the five Pandava brothers in the earlier epic, the *Mahabharata*. (*The Toy Cart*)

Rasa, a mythical river in the sky; also a theory of dramatic purpose and effect as propounded by Bharata; more broadly, the central principle in Hindu esthetics. In the Aitareya Upanishad occurs the sentence: *Raso vai sah*, "The well-carved is the well-loved," in the sense that "Perfection alone is delectable." The ineffable nature of *rasa* is suggested in its intimate association with the dance of the divinely inspired gopis who, in honour of Krishna with whom they desire union, perform the *rasa-lila* to the accompaniment of his fluting in the moonlight.

Ravana, the demon king of Lanka; he had ten heads and twenty arms, and the power to assume any form he wished. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

"Released from further lives," the attainment of *moksha*, or release from the cycle of rebirth, through the performance of the pure act (as distinct from the good, evil, or absurd act) conceived in terms of a harmony between social duty and private conscience, is a basic tenet of Hindu belief. (*Shakuntala*)

Ritual birth-knot, one of the thirteen *samskaras* (religious observances) which a Hindu is expected to perform in the course of his life. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Notes

"Round this fire," fire is the basic Aryan religious symbol, water the Dravidian; Hinduism harmonises both within its world-view. Birth, marriage, departure, death—all require a form of fire ritual. (*Shakuntala*)

Sacred thread of a Brahmin, the *upavita*, worn by upper-caste Hindus, which is a cotton thread of three strands, given to the boy by his guru during the initiation ceremony, which takes place when he is between eight and twelve years old. The sacred thread makes a boy *dvija* (the twice-born), the first birth being a purely physical one, the second symbolic of his entry into the complex Hindu process of *moksha*, or salvation in the sense of release from rebirth. (*The Toy Cart*)

Shakuntala, daughter of Vishvamitra and Menaka. Abandoned on the banks of the Malini when Menaka returned to heaven, she was looked after by *shakuntas* (birds)—hence the name—until the sage Kanva found and adopted her.

Shankara, another name for Shiva. (*Ratnavali*)

Shanta, daughter of Dasharatha; wife of Rishyasringa, the sage who successfully performed the ritual of penance for the sonless Dasharatha. (*The Later Story of Rama*)

Simhala, Lanka, or Ceylon, the island kingdom of Ravana. (*Ratnavali*)

Soma, the milkweed plant; also the sacred wine used in Vedic times during the performance of rituals;

Ratnavali

sometimes personified as the god of the moon.
(*Shakuntala*)

'*Son of Kunti*' presumably Arjuna is meant (Bhima and Yudhishtira are her other two sons). Kunti was the wife of Pandu, the regent king because his elder brother Dhritarashtra was blind; Pandu's second wife Madri had two sons, Nakula and Sahadeva. (*The Toy Cart*)

Tadaka, a female demon killed by Rama.

"*Thief scatters special seeds*," since expert thieving is one of the arts of civilisation, there are *shastras* (science, prescribed rules, scriptures) available in Hinduism explicitly designed to promote efficiency in the practice of stealing. (*The Toy Cart*)

Three worlds, in Vedic conception *triloka*, or the universe consisting of the earth, the middle space or atmosphere, and the ether or sky. It also signifies the world of men, the world of semidivine creatures, and the world of the gods; also heaven, earth, and Patala (the world of the demons). The "three-forked river flowing into heaven" mentioned in *Shakuntala* refers to the descent of the Ganga from heaven into the matted locks of the supreme yogi, Shiva, who received it on the earth.

Trishanku, a king of Ayodhya (the modern Oudh) of the solar dynasty who asked Vashishtha to perform a sacrifice that would enable him to ascend to heaven with his mortal body. Vashishtha refused and condemned him as a chandala. The sage Vishvamitra, however, agreed, in spite of the

Notes

repeated objections of the gods and Brahmins. Indra hurled Trishanku down through space, but Vishvamitra, with his extreme penance, stopped the fall; as a result Trishanku hangs in midspace, one of the stars in the sky. (*Shakuntala*)

Urmila, wife of Lakshmana.

Urvashi, the celestial nymph who came to the earth as the result of a curse, married Pururavas, and had a son, Ayus.

Vali, brother of Sugriva and monkey ruler of Kishkindha. So powerful he even defeated Ravana, he was killed by Rama at Sugriva's request.

Valmiki, legendary author of the *Ramayana*. Born a Brahmin, he lived by stealing until Narada, the sage of the gods, set him right. It is said that he burst into song when he saw a hunter's arrow shoot down a mating bird; from *soka*, "grief", came *sloka*, "poetry."

Vashishtha, the family priest of the Ikshvakus, the solar dynasty. The holy cow Kamadhenu was his property and because Vishvamitra tried to take the cow away from him by force, the two never got on well together.

Vedanta, literally, "consummation (*anta*) of the Vedas"; the nondualistic philosophy of Shankaracharya, the eighth-century Aquinas of Hinduism. See *Maya*.

Vedas, the earliest Hindu scriptures, psalmlike in structure and spirit. There are four collections of these songs: Rig-Veda, Yajur-Veda, Sama-Veda, and

Ratnāvali

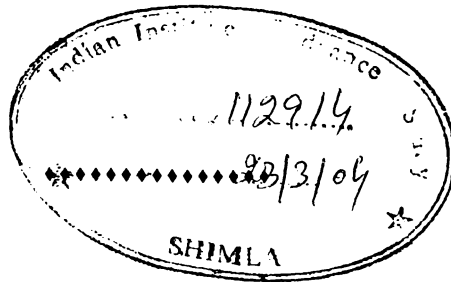
Atharva-Veda; sometimes the Brahmanas and Upanishads are also included.

Vibhishana, Ravana's brother. When Ravana refused to restore Sita to Rama at his request, he joined forces with Rama who appointed him king of Lanka after Ravana's death.

Videha, territory identified as that around the south of Nepal, in central India.

Vishnu, preserving aspect of the Hindu trinity; he has ten chief incarnations, but whenever the balance of the natural moral order is upset, he "bodies himself forth" in order to restore stability by destroying the excess of evil. He is said to have been born out of the forehead of Brahma, as Brahma is born out of the lotus in his navel.

Vishvamitra, a great sage; son of Gadhi of the lunar dynasty. His name means literally, "friend of the world." Vishvamitra's title is 'Brahmarshi' or 'Sage of Brahma,' because his thousand-year yoga is said to have given him Brahma-like powers. He is also called Kaushika.



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