



B. K. BHATTACHARYYA
Bharatiya Jnanpith Award Winner



**HUMOUR
&
SATIRE
IN
ASSAMESE
LITERATURE**

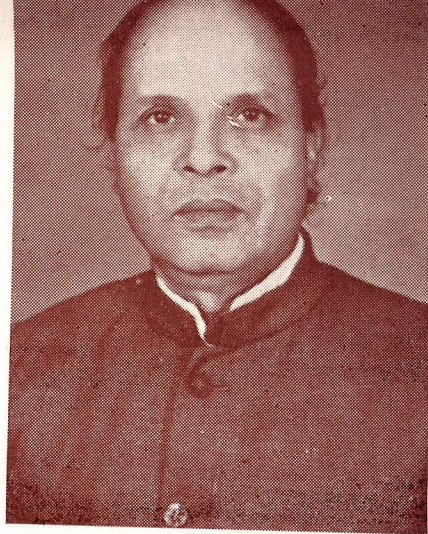


The work *Humour and Satire in Assamese Literature* is a searching inquiry into the elements of true humour and satire in Assamese Literature. The field of inquiry includes both ancient and modern writings. The author shows that the ancient writers, despite their obsession with the Bhakti rasa, treated Hasya rasa as a necessary ingredient of their poetry and prose. There is more farce than real comedy and satire in ancient literature.

The modern literature, gave more place to farce to begin with, specially in drama. The impact of the Western literature was decisive both in content and form. Soon satiric prose arose, and Hem Chandra Barua's *Kovā Bhāturī* set a distinct trend of merciless social criticism. Later the spirit of satiric criticism invaded poetry, and a number of poets like Chandradhar Barua, and Dandinath Kalita used their medium effectively to deride superstitious beliefs and customs as well as human follies in an effective manner.

The powerful manifestation of the comic spirit was however found to be manifest in the prose works of L.N. Bezbarua whose power of creativity is evidenced by the comic character of Kripabar Barbaruah. Kripabar is a unique comic character. He views everything in the world with an eccentric vision. The figure is a miscellany of images. His temperament is genial but would not tolerate artificiality and insincerity. This is a character comparable to other comic characters of world literature.

The author has been able to bring out clearly the significant elements of humour and satire in one of the little known Indian literatures. His introduction provides a good perspective and he has made an attempt to synthesise the western ideas of humour and satire with the Indian concept of Hasya rasa. In this he has attained no mean success.



Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya (b 1924) is a distinguished Assamese novelist, who, as the Bharatiya Jnanpith citation says, possesses "the capacity to detect the significance of the moment and endow it with a permanence and universality of art". He is also a poet, short story writer and critic.

He was the editor of the famous Assamese monthly *Ramdheni* (1953-63), the journal which became for a decade the centre of a new literary movement.

His three famous novels, *Iyaruigam* (1960) *Pratipad* (1970) and *Mriyunjay* (1970) won him wide recognition as an outstanding writer. *Iyaruigam* won him the Sahitya Akademi award in 1961, while for *Mriyunjay* he got the prestigious Jnanpith Award in 1979.

Bhattacharyya is the youngest writer to receive both the Sahitya Akademi and Jnanpith Awards.

Bhattacharyya feels that he has a long way to go and is conscious of his limitations. "I would humbly say that I am committed to the path of integrating beauty and truth in life and would be so all the more hereafter". (Extracts from his speech delivered on the occasion of Jnanpith award-giving ceremony : 15th December, 1980).

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PREFACE

This study was partly the result of my quest to know an aspect of my own literary heritage, and partly the result of sheer outward necessity. I was hardly proud of my academic acumen, yet I tried to the best of my ability to investigate into and evaluate the elements of comedy and satire in Assamese literature. In this uneven academic endeavour, Dr Satyendra Nath Sharma, the eminent Assamese scholar and ex-Rabindra Professor of Gauhati University, acted as my unfailing guide. In fact, he goaded me to work. The thesis was submitted to the Gauhati University for the Ph. D degree. In 1977, the degree was conferred on me following favourable recommendations made on it by two other learned examiners, Dr R.K. Dasgupta, the eminent professor of English and scholar, and Shri Pramatha Nath Bisi, the well known writer and scholar. I have reasons to be deeply grateful to these distinguished academicians for their trust in me. This trust shall ever remain my cherished treasure. Particularly I shall not forget Prof Bisi's cheering words.

Book is a form of mass communication. The publishers come in here. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Shri O.P. Ghai, the dynamic Managing Director of the Sterling Publishers Private Ltd., for readily agreeing to publish the work and thus enabling me to reach my public. My thanks are also due to Shri T.K. Ghosh of the editorial department in the publishing firm for the care with which he scrutinised the manuscript for print.

I am more of a writer than an academic. My thesis was written at a time of my life when I had to live by writing alone, and any academic endeavour seemed a luxury. I have no pretensions to scholarship. I shall be happy if it adds to or encourages the understanding of an aspect of Assamese literature by the wider reading public. To those friends, who gave me consistent moral support in writing this work, I shall always remain heavily indebted.

Birendra Kumar Bhattacharyya

Gauhati
31.1.82

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INTRODUCTION

I

The subject of hāsya rasa or humour and satire in Assamese literature is a subject which has so far received little critical attention of scholars, partly because comedy has never been regarded as an honoured Muse in our literature, and partly because of the feeling among scholars that there is paucity of materials for study. L.N. Bezbarua, the foremost humorist in our literature, deeply regretted the tendency to treat hāsya rasa as inferior.¹ He decried the traditional social apathy and asked for a reappraisal of our attitude. He claimed that there was nothing vulgar about laughter, since God has also a smiling face. As regards paucity of materials, it is a matter of opinion. It is, however, true that the ancient period yields us less materials than the modern period. But this is no cause for despair, for the historians* of Assamese literature assure us that it is not at all an arid desert.

For the purpose of study, the work is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the ancient period. The ancient literature differs from the modern in form, contents and spirit. The literature was essentially derivative; the Sanskrit literature, specially the two epics and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, supplied not only the spirit, but also the body. It had almost a second-hand existence though some poets treated the borrowed contents always with refreshing originality. It however did not possess the urbanity, sophisticated art and intellectual background of classical Sanskrit literature. From its beginning in circa 14th century to its eclipse in the 19th century, the bulk of Assamese literature remained more religious than artistic, more emotional than intellectual, more musical than poetic and more

*ASI, pp. 92-93; p. 234.

communal than individualistic in spirit. Its character was moulded by the needs to cater to the taste of an essentially rural audience. The writers no doubt studied Sanskrit poetics, but their conception of *rasa* was more religious than poetic. Happily, the literature has to its credit a number of secular prose-works, which include the Āhom prose-chronicles. There is a body of religious prose writings also. To facilitate our study, we propose to divide the ancient period into two parts, poetry and prose.

The transition from the ancient to the modern literature is marked by a radical change in the socio-economic basis and intellectual background. The Āhom feudal rule was replaced by the British colonial rule in 1826, the year of Yāndābu treaty. The patronage to literature by the kings and nobles came to end. The new bureaucratic administration introduced new laws to govern the country. Assam's economy became an appendage of British imperialist system in India. The social and educational reforms introduced facilitated the growth of a new middle class. The slavery was abolished. The rigours of the caste system were relaxed. The first English school was established at Gauhati in 1835; one of its students, Ananda Ram Dhekiyal Phukan (1829-59), went to Calcutta and joined the Hindu College to receive higher education. He later fervently advocated the cause of western education, of vernacular medium of instruction and modernisation of Assamese society. Major Jenkins, Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General in Assam, invited the American Baptist Mission Foreign Society to the country in 1835, and two missionaries, Rev. Nathan Brown and Rev. William Oliver Cutter, reached Sadiya with a printing press in March 23, 1836. In 1841, Nidhiram, an Assamese, was converted to Christianity. The missionaries opened hospitals and started schools for boys and girls. In 1846, *Arunodai*, a monthly journal devoted to religion, science and general intelligence, was published by them from Sibasagar. Two of the early comic writers, Hem Candra Barua and Guṇabhiram Barua became its contributors. Robinson, another magnanimous missionary, published his Assamese grammar in 1841. In 1839, Jaduram Dekabarua (1801-67) compiled an Assamese dictionary; it was followed by Dr Miles

Bronson's Anglo-Assamese Dictionary containing about 14,000 words. The Mission also published varied types of books including fiction. These activities of the missionaries laid the foundation of modernisation of Assamese literature. Even before they came to Assam, they had encouraged publication of Assamese books. The first Assamese Bible was published in 1813. The educated Assamese youths were also initiated into the western thoughts and ideas in and outside the classrooms. Some of them imbibed the spirit of social reform and rationalism initiated in Bengal by men like Raja Rammohan Roy. These young men became a sort of cultural go-betweens in Assam between the British and the Assamese people. The writers, who accepted the western thoughts and ideas, became eventually creative interpreters of their own culture and history. They learnt the forms of western literature and became acquainted with its heritage. They were largely free from mediaeval bondage of thoughts and self-expression and received patronage of the new rulers. However, the growth of the new literature was slow. The new education was welcomed, but a long controversy arose in the period between 1836 and 1873 A.D. over the introduction of Bengali as the medium of administration and instruction. The controversy was finally settled in 1873, when the claim of Assamese language was conceded by the Government. This provided a fresh impetus for writing of books. By 1889, when *Jonākī* was published by a group of young romantic writers in Calcutta, a truly vigorous, modern and creative period in Assamese literature began. L.N. Bezbarua, the foremost humorous writer, belonged to the *Jonākī* group.²

The new spirit the Baptist missionaries introduced was not free from evangelism, but it was tempered by their ideal of humanitarian social service. Hem Candra Barua, a scion of an orthodox Brahmin family turned agnostic, learnt English clandestinely from an English official and also from the Baptist Missionaries at Sibsagar. Like Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, whose zeal for social reform and Bengali literature he admired, Barua was one of the first writers to evolve standard Assamese prose style. His pungent satirical prose directed against

**Kanāklāl Barua Racanāvalī*, p. 59.

priestly corruption was a new thing in Assamese literature. Guṇābhiram Barua, who studied in Calcutta Presidency College, was also a liberal humanitarian; after the death of his first wife, he married a widow. This was the first marriage in Assam, to be registered in the court. Barua's zeal for social reform was expressed in his tragedy *Rām-navamī*, which is a drama on the theme of widow remarriage. The *Jonākī* was the mouthpiece of Assamese romanticism. Its pages were adorned by various forms of literature: lyrical poems, short story, novel, farce, humorous pieces and essays. Lyrical poets showed a degree of sensibility and imagination that was quite unique in our literature. One aspect of the spirit of the age was expressed in patriotic poems and historical dramas. Achievements of the past age in literature, religion and social organisation were rationally assessed with the aid of historical and archaeological methods. Most of the writers sympathised with the movement for local self-government, gradual social and economic progress, and above all, the movement for national freedom led by Mahatma Gandhi. The creative spirit was manifest both in tragic as well as comic forms of the writings. The mood lingered till the end of the 'thirties, when the economic crisis, the approaching world war and the intensified national struggle created a new social consciousness in the mind of younger writers. The comic spirit in literature was already on the decline by 1930, as Mitradev Mahanta's dramas written after that date show. We have therefore decided to set a limit to our study of the modern period at circa 1930. This limit is justified on practical grounds also. The period between 1846 and 1930 yields enough material for study. Moreover, the abridgement facilitates our task of collection of materials, which, for dirth of ready reference libraries and poor state of book-publishing in the state, are not readily available. The modern part is divided into three chapters: poetry, prose and drama. In the concluding chapter, a summary of our findings is given.

II

Humour and satire may be defined as two types of comic expressions. A. Nicoll, while discussing comedy in *IDT*³ presents humour as a form of mellow, refined and intellectual laughter; it is caused by incongruity, and presented in comedy through the media of character, situations, words or manners. It is a medium also of securing a spirit which harmonises scene and character; it is of a peculiarly meditative, fanciful and kindly sort, romantic in essence. Satire is, on the other hand, a less amusing species of laughter; it as a rule, aims at ridiculing follies without showing pity, kindness or magnanimity. Its end is not always clear and often becomes cynical. It is often so mild that it can barely be detected under a mask of laughter or it may imperceptibly fade into both wit or humour. It can occur in a comedy (as a subsidiary element) or in a comic type of drama called comedy of satire or in other literary genres. There is a kind of comedy called Comedy of Manners, in which mild satire is directed against follies of a particular and circumscribed society; it is not crude or cruel, but airy and delicate. It depends upon incongruity between two ideas or between an idea and an object. It utilises the power of wit to create effect. Wit⁴ is, unlike unconscious incongruity of words, conscious and intellectual. It is the mood and expression of a highly intelligent man playing with his fancies, and with the discrepancy and incongruity of his fancies, for the enjoyment of himself and others. But the word humour is not always conscious. The unconscious word humour depends for its effect also on incongruity of words. The deformation of the word raises a contrast between the idea (the word that was meant) and the object (word that was uttered). Wit or conscious word—humour is artificial, brilliant, and cultured. It differs from humour in being hard and insensible. Humour is always marked by sensibility and mellowness. There are thus, four main types of comic expression in comedy: the unconsciously ludicrous, the conscious wit, humour and satire. But in a comic work, none of these modes occur singly; they are found to exist usually in conjunction. The sources of the laughable is

not one; the laughable in a comedy may depend not on one source, but on several sources closely intertwined. It is sometimes difficult to disentangle and analyse them separately. There is another fact to be carefully noted; while laughter is assuredly the most common characteristic of comedy, it is not its end, but means to an end. For some comedies, do not raise laughter at all.

Comedy is the most natural vehicle of wit and humour, but wit and humour are not comedy. Comedy as an art-form was first invented in ancient Athens. It is usual to separate the Greek comedies into three divisions: Old, Middle and New. Aristophanes (448-380 B.C.) was the prominent representative of old comedy. His comedies had a broad form; it was satirical and had an extraordinary range; their growth was facilitated by Athenian democracy. It gave way to social comedy of the middle period. The New Comedy of Menander is often styled as a Comedy of Manners, which essentially is the comedy of our own times. In this there is an admixture of sport and earnest, chance taking the place held in tragedy by destiny, and emphasis being laid on what is laughable in human character and situations, while the verisimilitude is preserved. In hands of writers like Molière and Congreve, the form attained its exquisite artistry. Yet comedy is not merely a form of drama and as Potts shows, its outward shape is variable.⁵ It can be narrative, dramatic or descriptive; the essay also can become comic. It is essentially a mode of literary thinking. Satire's aim is essentially practical and it is not as distinct as an art form as comedy. There is a form of poetry called satire and a form of drama called comedy of satire or satirical comedy. Satirical prose works are also not wanting. But the nature of satire is not clear. It is not always easy to distinguish satire from comedy. However, as a comic type of expression, it can occur always in any kind of literary work as a subsidiary element.

While there is commonness between satire and comedy, satire is the art of articulate hate. The satirist scoffs at the manners of an age or human follies by taking a moral posture. But when he lacks self-control, he condemns the human nature itself; he then becomes cynic. He either condemns the generality

of mankind or himself. He sometimes uses invective to cure society, and in the process loses his balance. Satire cannot accept life and nature with good sense that comes from clear vision and understanding; moreover, typical satire aims at destruction. As a picture of living manners, satire has enduring interest, but as a substantive form of literary art, it is marred by the uniformity of censure. Satire has no distinct form as comedy or tragedy.

Satire is a form of prose or poetry that does not primarily aim at arousing laughter or even a smile, but at ridiculing follies. We do not laugh at the satirical as such; we laugh at the purely comic qualities with which it may be accompanied or in which it may be enclosed. Comedy, too, does not necessarily depend on laughter, but laughter is assuredly its most common characteristic. The satiric spirit may, at times, become sufficiently strong in a comic writer to make him ridicule follies, but this is not his main aim. Comedy may not be directly concerned with morality, but satire usually cannot do without being concerned with it. Their techniques are however in part interchangeable; it is specially true of the art of caricature, irony or wit, etc. But modern comedy rarely uses the satiric devices of cynicism or invective.

Farce similarly is to be distinguished from comedy. In Aristophanes' time, farce was a broad comic form. But it is now regarded as either an inferior type of comic drama or a comedy with the meaning left out.⁶ Its sole purpose is to excite mirth. Walter Kerr in his *Tragedy And Comedy*⁷ discusses the relationship between tragedy and comedy, and points out that comedy is at its most vigorous state when the tragedy is at its most vigorous state. He shows how in great creative periods of literature, farce emerges as a fundamental comic form, when it stands next to great tragic creations. It then puffs itself upto greatest possible proportions and makes room for every sort of effect: it can inhale lyric beauty, a degree of kindliness, and even tears if it cares to. The size of the tragic hero produces the oversize of the clown. In the great comedies of Aristophanes farce elements are predominant. In the typical comedies of Molière and the gentle ones of Shakespeare, we find a farce understructure. **However in absence of tragedy, farce cannot**

increase its dimensions. Once the Greek tragic impulse was broken, comedy was diminished to the soft and solacing domesticities of Menander. We were then denied access to the Cloud-Cuckoo-Land or to Hades and confined to the narrow and circumscribed world, which Potts calls "comic microcosm". Now we have a comedy that is distinguished from farce, which is treated as a sort of clumsy country cousin whose table manners are notoriously coarse. It is defined as a short play where there is usually no time or opportunity for the broader display of character and of plot; it deals with exaggerated, and hence often impossible comic incidents with frequent resort to horseplay. It is physical sensationalism of the most exaggerated kind. Comedy may however contain farce or be embedded in it.

We do not propose to deal here with different types of works that exist on the borderline of comedy. The problem of identifying them is often complex. Comedy can be usually clearly distinguished from tragedy. But a play like *Cherry Orchard*, which Chekov called comedy and is widely held to be so, is not easy to distinguish. Indeed it was presented at the stage as a tragedy. This comedy is intellectual, conscious, artificial and refined; conflict in it is inner, and not outer as in many low comedies. The Sanskrit dramas present a still more complex problem. In Sanskrit literature, there is no tragedy or comedy as we understand it. An Indian writer calls *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam* and *Mṛcchakaṭika* as romantic comedies.⁸ Mere happy ending however is not comedy. Kālidāsa's drama is a poetic, serious and idealist drama. Śudraka's drama, as Henry W. Wells points out, may be superficially related to the western conception of comedy as a theatrical genre, but may be even more closely related to the mythological and religious pattern.⁹ The high Sanskrit dramas often no doubt remind us of that eclectic form of fiction: tragi-comedy. Kālidāsa's *Mālavikāgnimitra* is recognised as a light-hearted court comedy. But as S.K. De points out it is neither a full-fledged comedy of manners or genteel comedy. It does not deal with the world of fashion, but a romantic world of fancy. The subject matter is legendary and fictitious, and the atmosphere of the play is sentimental and poetic. It also does not present fully an artificial

state of man, in which characters do not act from natural feelings, but act, being prompted by their habits, rules and ceremonies of high life; affectations of mannerised society are not utilised here fully to give greater scope for wit and humour. *Mālavikāgnimitra* is also regarded by some as a veiled satire on some royal family of his time.¹⁰

Prahasana is a clear genre in Sanskr̥t literature. It is rightly called farce. Farce is defined as a type of degenerated comedy, shorter in form, where there is no scope for broader display of character and of plot. In this sense, *prahasana* is farce. When a strict notion of comedy is applied, farce cannot be regarded as a comic type, but as an outcaste, whose sole purpose is to excite mirth. S.K. De, however, claims that the best of Sanskr̥t farces, *Bhagavad-ajjukīya*, attains real comedy,¹¹ not by cheap witticism and antics, but by a genuinely amusing plot and commendable characterisation. By comedy, he perhaps means meaningful laughter. The Assamese *Nimantran*, as we shall see in Chapter 5, too approximates in form or spirit the comedy of humour. There is thus borderline cases even in this light genre, and Nicoll concedes the possibility of farce approximating in tone to any of the major types of comedies. He also concedes that a farce does not always depend only on the farcical elements.¹² Aristophanes' funny comedy *Frogs* is called a farce, which is an example of what Walter Kerr calls fundamental comic form. But the word farce seems to be used here not in the usual sense. There are thus many borderline cases which cannot be identified clearly.

A.L. Birney claims that the satiric drama is an intermediate form between tragedy and comedy. He calls *The Acharians* an early satiric drama. But satire, in spite of having a history and a place in literature, is not as clear a genre as comedy and tragedy. And Birney himself admits that satiric genres are traditionally difficult to define.¹³ The warning Potts gives us against treating satire as a clear-cut genre is also in our mind.¹⁴ Arthur Melville Clark too seems to regard satire not so much as a kind, but as a flavouring or quality like humour, a flavouring or which may taste any of the formal kinds whether in prose or in verse. Satiric quality whether it is marginal or predominant in a piece, is the most

volatile and unstable substance, it is a symphony in discord.¹⁵ Even comedy, which is a clear-cut genre, is often difficult to recognise. Potts calls *Volpone* a comedy; at the same time, he does not object to it being described as a satire against avarice. There are thus works which are clearly on the borderline. Admittedly, there is some commonness between satire and comedy.

Comedy is an art form. The Greeks invented the form out of phallic processions held at country festivals in celebration of the vintage. Coarse lampooning and abusive jests were a feature of these exhibitions. Comedy was established in Athens at the time of Pericles when the demagogues introduced the country sports into the city to give them an opportunity of attacking their political opponents with impunity. Personal satire or caricature was the distinguishing note of old comedy, in which the object of popular dislike was exhibited on the stage in a ludicrous light. Aristophanes is the last and only representative writer of old comedy, whose eleven out of fifty works are available to us. His comedies are a mixture of personal satire and farce. If we allow for what is dubbed as obnoxious or obscene in his art by critics including Aristotle, as ritualistic features allowed by the customs of his land and conventions of his age, his comedies strike us as astonishingly fresh even today and as products of a genius. No doubt, his earlier plays like the *Acharians*, *Knights*, *Peace*, *Clouds* and *Frogs* were marked by utmost freedom of thoughts and speech that was characteristic of Greek democracy. As Gilbert Murray points out in his *Aristophanes*,¹⁶ he had that vitality that never loses its freshness. He had a unique style and offered a fundamentally sound criticism of life. His fight for peace and against war-neuroses of nationalistic states still inspire us; his interest in the woman's problem is astonishingly modern. His jokes, public spiritedness, intellectual power, idealism, courage, interests and lyric beauty deeply impress us. The laughter his works arouses seems ageless. His comedy was a complementary art-form that existed side by side with tragedy and drew its sustenance from it. The new comedy of Menander did not have the broad range of Aristophanes. The form shrunk its scope, when the Greek tragic impulse was broken.¹⁷ The Greek

tragedy began to decline after Sophocles and Euripides. The old comedy, by virtue of its broadness of form, was as vigorous as tragedy, as it derived its being from the affirmations of the latter. The buffoon was as great as the tragic hero. The Menanderian comedy had no such advantage, and was, moreover, restricted in scope. Comedy is a parasitical form and needs a richer form to feed on. But it has also its particular viewpoint or truth to reveal. Its domain is human limitation; when the tragic assertion of total freedom of an individual is not possible in literature, comedy is deprived of its ready source of parody. Even to show limitation on or to something, the writer of comedy needs a referent. In Menanderian comedy the referent is not as large as in Aristophanic comedy. The domain is narrower, and the target of sport smaller. It is confined to the narrower ideals of life and restricted domestic world. We have already noted that from this new comedy to the routine domestic comedy of our own day, the step was clear. As Montgomery Belgion points out that comedy in last 2,400 years has remained virtually the same.¹⁸ Belgion points out that there are two fundamental types of comedy : the comedy of manners and comedy of character.¹⁹ The comedy of character can be also regarded as comedy of humours, where the comic effect is created through contrast and balance of characters or through internal comedy of a single character. When the writer concerns himself with behaviour rather than with the character underlying that behaviour and fixes his norm by convention rather than by psychology or ethics by referring to the standards of a group of people in a particular time and place, we get comedy of manners. But when comedy is concerned with the permanent and universal scientific or philosophical principles underlying that behaviour or standard of behaviour, the type approximates to comedy of character.²⁰ In comedy of manners, wit plays a predominant part, while in a typical comedy of humours, satire is usually employed. In high Shakespearean comedy, scene and character are harmonised by utilisation of humour rather than of wit; it is of peculiarly meditative, fanciful and kindly sort, romantic in essence. It is therefore called comedy of romance or humour. Nicoll refers to other types of minor or indistinct varieties such as comedy

of intrigue, comedy of sentiment and genteel comedy. The genteel comedy is a descendant of comedy of manners and the laughter here arises not out of playful fancies of brilliant and highly intellectual men, but out of the affectations of mannerised society. A pure comedy of intrigue is rare; this comedy stands below other types in being in its nature closely allied to farce, though it sparingly employs horseplay or rough incident to create mirth. It relies for its effect chiefly on intrigues or complications of plot; it dwells entirely on external sources of laughter. But in every successful stage comedy, an element of intrigue is invariably present. The sentimental comedy is a still more rare species, and cannot truly be said to exist. These are indistinct types and hardly find favour with serious critics. Even Nicoll emphasises the necessity of changing the nomenclature and pleads for simpler and clearer distinction of types, based on a study of the comic methods used by each species. He reserves the name comedy of humour for Shakespearean comedy. He calls Jonson's comedy as comedy of satire and Congreve's, the comedy of wit.²¹

Satire is derived from the Latin word *satira*, which means miscellany. In literature, it means exposure of vice or folly prompted by indignation. As such it ranges from lofty denunciation of the wickedness of an age to scornful reflection upon the defects of an individual. It denotes a form of verse, existing from early times; it was developed by the Roman poet Lucilius (148-103 B.C.) into a degree of literary perfection. Horace, Persius and Juvenal developed the form further. These poets exercised their influence on mediaeval English poets, and from the early sixteenth century, a form of English satiric poetry began to appear.²² Its flowering time in England was the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. John Dryden, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope are great satirists; Swift is regarded as the greatest satirist of prose. Swift's satiric genius was warped and clouded by the growing misanthropy of the later years, and the last part of his *Gulliver's Travels*, where satire is turned against human nature itself, was marked by cynicism. This lack of proportion mars the effects of satiric work even of a genius. Potts points out, in his comparative study of satire and comedy, that although we

classify a work as satirical by virtue of its immediate purpose, satire is distinguished from comedy by a deliberate and *ad hoc*, or an inherent and constitutional lack of balance.²³ Comedy accepts human nature and life, sometimes with a high heart, and sometimes rather sadly, but always with good sense that comes from clear vision and understanding. It is a weapon of man as social being against defeatism and anarchy; it rejects misanthropy and pessimism. Satire, on the other hand, professes to have a moral purpose, but the norm is not always clear. Its function is destructive criticism. Over the years, satire grew polite; but whether it is brutal or refined, flippant or earnest, trivial or didactic, it has no pity or magnanimity. Like humour, it cannot sympathise with the object of satire. Satire may occur sometimes in a whole work, whether it is parody, burlesque or verse. In other species, it may crop out sporadically or may be of frequent or even of constant occurrence. This is true of essay, drama or fiction.

The satirist may be preacher, friend, eulogist, literary critic, politician or gossip-monger according to the role he plays. By convention, he is to castigate vice and folly, pose as the moralist or social arbiter. Satire is usually local, occasional and particular. The satirist draws on the human instincts of hate and anger, and claims to possess himself or provide us with the licensed cathartic of envy, hatred, malice and uncharitableness. Jaques, the rejected satirist of Shakespeare's pure comedy *As You Like It*, expresses the satiric spirit, when he says :

Invest me in my motley; give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world
If they will patiently receive my medicine.²⁴

(Act II, Scene VII)

Jaques thus wants to be dressed in a fool's costume and play the traditional role of curing society by verbally attacking its sins and sinners. Even granting that the fool's motley and Saturn's black are in conflict with each other, the speech defines the satirist's function well. However, in the drama, his satire is transcended by the Shakespearean human spirit of comedy.

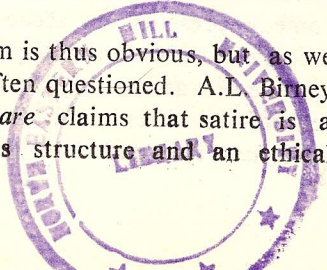
Satire can form a part of the overall comic method, but satire usually presents life as it is and ridicules it for not being ideal. Even when the norm is cognisable, the satire does not aim at social reconciliation as comedy usually does; its direct method of attacking evil and its lack of the sense of artistic detachment often create a disharmonious effect. Its spirit is often indistinguishable from the spirit of social reform or political service. As Previte Orton in his *Political Satire in English Poetry* shows, satire is powerful, and often aids a good cause to be established; in a democracy where society is ruled by discussion, its use in attacking the cant and humbug cannot be denied. But there is always danger in identifying the social aim and the aesthetic aim, as often these do not agreeably coincide. When the satirist writes from his personal feelings and seeks a personal catharsis or when he is not able to harmonise the antimony of contrasting situations he creates, the reader misses the kindly after-taste he demands from reading. The aesthetic effect thus gets blurred. Propriety demands that the satirist should combine his art and aims in neat aesthetical framework. Satire and comedy use the same literary vehicles singly or in conjunction such as allegory, fantasy, travesty, parody, burlesque, monologue, dialogue, caricature and manners-painting, etc., to achieve their end. A whole set of rhetorical devices like wit, ridicule, irony, cynicism, sarcasm and invective are open to them, though comedy does not, as a rule, use the last three modes. The satirist is most at home with invective and cynicism, but the growth of aesthetic sensibility among the civilised communities has had impact on his method. The polite satirist, even when he aims at the satiric catharsis, tries to achieve it not by direct invective or cynicism, but by indirection of wit, innuendo, parody and irony. There is the extreme case of satire where the satirist, instead of condemning merely vice or folly, turns his wrath against human nature itself. It is exactly so in Gulliver's fourth voyage, in which Swift turns his wrath against human nature itself. The cynical assertion of superiority of the philosophical horse to man and condemnation of generality of mankind, as perverse, evokes our bitter laughter at first, but when we take a close look at the land of Houyhnhnms and Swift's pessimistic comments on mankind, we are left with

no clear norm to detect eccentricity. This destroys the effect. Cynicism is thus a very unreliable literary device of satire.

The basic difference between humour and satire is that humour is kindly, whereas satire is merciless. Humour accepts human nature and treats its oddities and incongruities in a sympathetic manner. Usually it takes a social norm or an ideal standard to judge eccentricity, and views absurdities and weaknesses of human nature in the light of an enlightened world-view. Sensibility on the part of the spectator and the imagination on the part of the writer are essential to appreciate humour. The psychical distance created between the feelings evoked by the presented spectacle of incongruous comic world and the notion of the desirable in the spectator's mind is bridged by sympathy and a sense of human commonalty. The sense of commonalty need not be necessarily social. Satire, when it is pure and sure of its objectives, is marked by antipathy, rather than sympathy and what is more striking, by a feeling of destruction. May be, satire wants to destroy in order to create, but it often does not know its mind. It also does not know where to stop; even the norm from which eccentricity is viewed remains obscure. The satirist makes an art out of malice and virtue out of hate; it is only when his moral indignation is socially necessary and artistically tempered, a sincere satirist earns the approval of both the critic and his public. But this rarely happens. A work of art is composed of different elements (and in a great work these elements multiply and contain richer and fuller experiences), having usually parallel or opposite impulses which need to be balanced. This balance or equanimity can come only when disinterestedness, detachment and impersonality allow aesthetic imagination to bring equilibrium of opposed impulses. Unless the satirist possesses this imagination and depersonalise the low emotions he deals with, aesthetic balance cannot occur; instead, the effect becomes one of bafflement.

Satire's inferiority as an art form is thus obvious, but, as we have already seen, the position is often questioned. A.L. Birney in his *Satiric Catharsis In Shakespeare* claims that satire is a viable genre having a harmonious structure and an ethical

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purpose. But there is obvious difficulty in showing that a particular Shakespearean comedy or drama is satiric. For example, he interprets Falstaff of *Henry IV*, part II, as a revolutionary and rejected satirist who exposes through verbal attack the vacuity of the established system of values.²⁵ He concludes that the text, because its ending displeases, should provoke discontent with established rule and courtly values. He also feels the play should be presented on the stage in this light.²⁶ Unfortunately, the tendency in English criticism is to present Falstaff as an amiable humorist. R.J. Rees emphasises this point when he says that at the comedy of Falstaff, we laugh because we love it, and there is no malice in our laughter.²⁷ The turn given by Corbyn Morris²⁸ in 1744 (through an essay) to comic criticism in establishing the superiority of humour over satire, specially by presenting Falstaff as an amiable humorist, helped in making comedy what it is today: amiable. It is the home of amiable humour. Later English critics have followed this lead. The difficulty in giving a fresh turn to comic criticism is therefore obvious.

One popular notion about comedy is that it makes us laugh. Potts rightly warns us against identifying the subjects of comedy with causes of laughter.²⁹ Natural laughter is a physical act and cannot be always called comic. There are some comedies like *Don Quixote* or *The Cherry Orchard* that make us sober. Yet there is an essential link between laughter and comedy; any thing or any happening that strikes us as eccentric or abnormal usually evokes our laughter. This laughter is generally a means to end; it reminds us of our human limitation and that we must suffer comically together for it with a sense of detachedness and even pleasure. The effect of comedy is therefore not merely funny, it is a way of looking at life and nature. Laughter in comedy is an informed laughter, a laughter that hides within it a groan. Walter Kerr shows how subjects of low as well as high comedy are potentially meaningful. The comedy presents us scenes of incongruities, but all these incongruities rest ultimately on this one incongruity.³⁰ A man capable of transcending himself is incapable of controlling himself; it is hilarious but shocking to believe. The demigod in *The Acharians* is reduced to the status of a common man; his

immortality is to be established and he is in want of "a little ready money for his journey."³¹ Even Don Quixote needs cash. Dionysus in *The Frogs* is subjected to human miseries. The comic hero never aspires like the tragic hero to rise to the very heights of heaven and realise the infinite possibilities of man. Comedy reminds us that man is a prisoner of his body, and only solace for him lies in keeping company and accept the human conditions in the comic spirit.

The subjects of low comedy are invariably related to the physical necessities : hunger, covering nakedness, sex, etc. The eccentricities or abnormalities in these fields are judged by the norm, which is human and real. The pot-bellied glutton, the curiously dressed clown and the lustful cleric exhibit their ludicrousness to show that the noblest of man cannot shake off the crust in which his soul is put. Man's helplessness makes him seek solace in company and laugh at his own fate. When a man cannot help what his body is doing to him he begins to be a clown. The norm, which is social or real, simply helps us in perceiving the immediate incongruity, behind which lies this basic incongruity between man's freedom to soar high in the scales of infinity and his obvious limitations. The list of subjects of comedy can be made long to include twinning (or similar phenomena of accidents of nature), every kind of deformity and even death. Comedy is also concerned with the limitations of the natural world imposed on the human body. Accident, chance and coincidence, etc., within the material world are used to create comic situations. It either accepts them with resignation or transcends them with help of fantasy. Even in high comedies where resources of the human mind are utilised to the full for the comic end, the original incongruity—that of infinitely flexible talents harnessed to a fixed inferior appetite—stands. The intellectual comedy does not generally achieve its effect with jokes and buffoonery, but with wit and intellect. But it is not always cheerful like the low comedy. Its realm is the human mind, but the intention is not to glorify it, but to display the limitations that exist within seriousness, within intellect and within the tragic landscape. A pun invariably registers the collapse of meaning and hence shows the limitation of the intellectual tool, i.e., words. It is,

as Walter Kerr points out, the lowest form of high comedy.³² The slapstick of intellect is a form that embraces malapropisms, verbal misunderstandings, faulty intellectual connections of every sort.³³ In high comedy, the comic hero displays the powers of human mind and imitates the tragic hero, but his whole intention is to make our deepest seriousness suspect. This is what Chekov's intellectual hero Trofimov in *The Cherry Orchard* does. When the comic hero accepts his limitations consciously and willingly, as Falstaff does, he becomes a tragic scapegoat. But when he despises his limitations, he is prone to reject comedy itself. This is what Alceste in Molière's *The Misanthrope* does.

There are several theories regarding the sources of the risible in comedy. Aristotle evidently believed that the source lies in degradation. He says, "comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type, not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists of some defect or ugliness which is not painful and not destructive. To take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain."³⁴ Other theorists tell us that the secret of laughter lies in the incongruity of two facts, two ideas, two words or two associations. "The essence of the laughable then is the incongruous", says Hazlitt, "the disconnecting of one idea from another, or jostling of one feeling against another."³⁵ Besides these, there is the theory of Bergson. His basic tenet is that all laughter springs from the contrast between what is the mechanical and what is natural. Life is characterised by change; the mechanical on the other hand has a pattern that is characterised by its antitheses—repetition, inversion and reciprocal interference of series. It is the mechanical that prompts laughter. We laugh at the man acting like an automaton, mindlessly following a pattern when the situation calls for a change (repetition), or at the man allowing himself to be victimised by mere things (inversion), or the man clumsily falling over himself instead of acting gracefully and effectively (reciprocal interference in series).³⁶ According to him, conditions of comedy are insociability on the part of the object of laughter, insensibility on the part of the

laughter, and a certain automatism in the situation, in the words or in the character that appears ludicrous.³⁷ But as Nicoll points out, this theory is not comprehensive. There is the laugh of liberation, where there could be little sense of incongruity or automatism. Degradation, incongruity, automatism and the sense of liberation are thus sources of laughter, but among them the greatest is incongruity. However, mere eccentricity is not comic, it must be judged against a norm. It is through contrast of two sets or characters that a comic conflict is effected. Laughter is both conscious and unconscious; wit, as we have seen, is conscious. The absurd, on the other hand, is purely unconscious. Humour, again, is conscious but sensible. There are thus three main sources of laughter—degradation, incongruity and automatism. Of these, the second is the greatest. Alongside these, there are some subsidiary causes such as the sense of liberation. The objects of laughter are generally unconscious of their ridiculousness, but there are two species of the risible, which are conscious. Humour is, again, kindly. In a comic work, these are presented in various ways; in a drama, these are presented through the physical and mental attributes of the *dramatis personae*, through the situation, through the manners and through the words.³⁸

The word *humour* originally meant a certain disposition of man. A perfect man was believed to have four humours in equal proportion; the four humours, blood, choler, phlegm and melancholy, lay at the base of the sanguine, bilious, phlegmatic and melancholy dispositions of men. In sixteenth century England, the word was used to explain every kind of behaviour as a complex or affected manners. It was used by Ben Jonson as a name for something real and deep-seated in human character. Stuart M. Tave, in his *The Amiable Humorist*, traces how, between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, certain conventions of comic theory and criticism were so altered as to produce a new group of conventions which he calls amiable humour. His study shows how the ancients and the renaissance theorists located the external source of laughter, commonly, in ugliness or deformity of body or soul; laughter was supposed to be a scornful expression of superiority to a deformed thing. In the Elizabethan usage, the humorist was synonymous with

'satirist'.³⁹ During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, an interesting turn was given to the comic theory. There was reaction against the tradition of satirical wit and the ill nature associated with it. Laughter was interpreted more as good-natured, benevolent and sympathetic than as a sudden glory in triumph over another's inferiority. The comic theory arrived at a point where critic no longer asks for knaves or fools, but persons of cheerful, amiable oddities and foibles whom one would choose as companions in real life. The function of comedy was no longer moral punishment but liberal love and joyous delight. It spoke of human freedom, rather than constraints. The embrace of humour and sweet philanthropy seemed perfectly agreeable in a society that could afford to take moral risk in allowing individuals to indulge a generous flow of spirits. The theory of incongruity connected with this notion of humour found its culmination in the romantic theory of humour. It arises not from contrasts between finite objects, but from a contrast of the finite and the infinite. Humour lowers the great only to set it beside the little, and the little beside the great to lift it up, so that in the presence of the infinite, all are alike or equally nothing. Humour, in this theory, not only became amiable, but get identified with genius.⁴⁰ It held that pathos and humour are fit companions, and humour can relieve pathetic tension. According to this view, the enjoyment of laughter is a process in which the three series of thoughts, our own insight, that of the stupid comic figure and that part of our own insight which we lend, are held as one intuition. Our mind toys with these possibilities, and plays back and forth in delightful freedom. On a still higher plane, this process of contrast becomes a measure of the finite against the infinite. To this laughable form of the sublime, one gives the name "humour". "If man, like ancient theology, glances down from the world beyond the terrestrial world, the latter looks small and vain; if he measures the infinite world with the small one, as humour does, connecting one with the other, then laughter arises wherein is sorrow and greatness."⁴¹ Whether it is humane or infinite contrast, this humour is always amiable and markedly different in spirit from satire.

Comedy is distinguished by its particular viewpoint. It can be best understood by contrasting it with tragedy. L.J. Potts defines tragedy as an expression of natural pride of man, defending himself as a sentient being with a will and convictions of his own against all forces, human and superhuman, and inhuman that fight against him, and comedy as an expression of natural modesty of man, mixing with his kind, and defending himself against megalomania, egoism, misanthropy and other forces of disintegration inside human nature.⁴² Comedy reminds us of commonness, views our eccentricities against a certain norm, merges our separate identities in the world to which we were born and adjust ourselves to it. The end is, something larger than laughter, which is the commonest expression of comedy; neither it is happiness as it is popularly understood. Comedy, whether it is poetical or quotidian, narrative or dramatic, emotional or intellectual, is a revelation of human nature. It is marked by a sense of artistic detachment. It all depends upon maintaining a proper balance among different elements of a comic work—subject-matter, setting, style, characters and plot. Further, it must be informed by the comic spirit that helps us to comprehend the true reality and significance of human eccentricities in life. A work then is to be judged by the total effect. The quality of a comic writer is best expressed in his perception of duality in human nature, and in his power of harmonisation.

Comedy is an idea and an art-form. There are various literary elements within the work like subject matter, style, characters and plot which are to be selected, treated and integrated in such a manner that the effect becomes obvious.

Traditionally the most popular subject of comedy is sex. This is because sex is funny and it presents us the usual natural cases of differentiation among men. Sex follies or maladjustments are therefore commonest subject of comedy. Aristophanes used comedy as cathartic of disorderly passions including the erotic. While tragedy deals with the normal but unusual, comedy deals with the abnormal, but not unusual.⁴³ The abnormal can be judged only when there is a norm, and the setting and the form of subject matter clearly reveal the distinction. For this, some comic writers do take help of fantasy or allegory.

Comedy usually deals with manageable or curable follies or maladjustments. There is however no limit to subject matters of comedy, it is as vast as life itself. Even the supernatural or the larger subhuman world is not foreign to it. It depends on the writer himself, whether a larger world suits him better or a little comic world. Generally modern comedy operates within the bound of little comic world of social, mental or intellectual follies.

As the subject-matter in comedy tends towards the common place, it is its style that gives it a characteristic form. It is style that makes a given subject-matter comic by its tone, expression and suggestive power. While a genius like Aristophanes or Shakespeare creates his own standard, the lesser writers of comedy, as a rule, show certain commonness of style. Even this is difficult to identify. The tone, rhythm and images of a particular writer are different from those of another writer. The comic narrative has to be precise; it has to reveal the finest shades of character in a clear setting. Analysis, description, literary devices such as irony or rhetorical elements—all these can be used in comic narrative effectively. The comic essay does not contain any story; therefore it has to use frequently all the elements, mentioned just now, in conjunction to create comic effect. The dialogue in comedy is a means of characterisation and is usually vigorous and imitative. Poetry or imagination are too used to give a characteristic tone to comedies by masters like Shakespeare. A comic style is always informed by good nature; absence of it degrades it to a level where it is difficult to identify. A sense of proportion and artistic detachedness on the part of the writer is therefore important. Ultimately it helps in creating a comic effect.

The plot of comedy is different from that of tragedy where people take for granted a logical sequence of significant events. A tragic character is destined to be doomed; his aspiration leads him to the inevitable confrontation with fate. He is subjected to a tragic destiny. As a rule, a tragic character is not abnormal in the sense a comic character is. He retains his fundamental humanity. A comic character on the other hand, is noted for his eccentricity and judged according to a standard norm conventional, moral or psychological. His eccentricity is not regarded as fatal, but curable. He is not usually regarded as super-

human or subhuman, but identified with the generality of mankind. A comic character is to be judged by the total comic effect of the work in which he appears. It must not sound heroic, or arouse strongly sympathetic feeling; it should not arouse strong antipathetic feelings either, as it may set in a satiric reaction. Jonson's conception of comic character is based on his theory of 'humours'. According to this, every man has his particular humour, his prevailing mood, or rather his oddity, mental habit or fact. Jonson wished to make 'humour' the capital characteristic on which all others depend, but it is individual oddities that he mainly portrayed.⁴⁴ The idea that interplay of eccentric characters introduced in a play is comedy seems to emanate directly from it. A comic character need not be virtuous or wicked, since his success depends on his efficiency or inefficiency. Although the characters in a comedy are units of society, one of them may be the centre of attraction. This happens specially in fiction. The development of this character is mainly revealed in what is called internal comedy or self-criticism; in such a case, the character is seen behaving normally, but it actually reveals his mental follies in comic monologue. Comedy reveals the social aspect of character. Here conventions play a part in determining the types of comic characters and spirit of characterisation.

The setting in a comic work is important, as it defines the particular society or the artificial world in which the writer wants his characters to move. The quality of the created world determines the range of comedy. In comedy, suggestions of universality cannot be altogether ruled out; but when the spirits or gods enter the comic world, they enter usually in the spirit of farce. Even when the hint of the supernatural or the superior natural forces is given in a comedy, it is precisely to remind us of our human limitations and the need of adjustment with human nature. The incongruity between the finite and the infinite is legitimate theme of comedy. Not only the physical laws of the body or universe, but also social, historical, biological, psychological and intellectual laws can be set as norms to detect human eccentricities; in theory, all such eccentricities may form subject-matters of comedy. The setting may be fantastic or naturalistic; or it may be external or inward and mental. The comic characters

can be conceived broadly or in a high setting; the setting must have room enough for interplay and display of their eccentricities in comic contrast and antithesis. Potts says, "what is essential to a good comic plot is an exact balance and proportion between the characters, and a progressive revelation of their true nature by means of contrast, interplay, and mutual influence."⁴⁵ The progression of events in sequence of time is not essential for comedy, its plotting is based precisely on the internal necessity of this progressive revelation of characters; originality and imagination of the writer are also revealed in his capacity to maintain the exact balance and proportion. The comic plot tends to be circuitous or as Potts says, a plot in space. Generally, the humour arises from the fact that characters are set in juxtaposition with other normal types. Most comic contrasts are outward, i.e., between an individual and society, between two individuals and between sexes. But contrast may be also inward. The complex duality of mental moods or contrast between profound intelligence and disordered wits is often tragic. However, the duality between two thoughts, two emotions and two fancies, is widely employed by comedy profitably. This peculiar genre of laughter is called wit. The comic plot is thus a pattern of grouping of characters rather than a march of events.⁴⁶

III

Hāsyā rasa is one of the nine sentiments recognised in the Sanskrit poetics and dramaturgy. The Indian and Western thinkers are one in tracing the sources of comedy to defect, degradation and incongruity. The Indian thinkers not only dealt elaborately with the physical and mental causes of laughter, but also recognised that it is different from other rasas. Viśvanātha says that mirth is caused by one's own or another's defective appearance, speech or attire.⁴⁷ Abhinavagupta points out that laughter is caused by low characters and it does not evoke in the audience the highest state of sāttvic pleasure.⁴⁸ Hāsyā rasa is not

directly related to the four primary aims of life and is concerned with the ordinary things of life and generality of mankind.⁴⁹ While congruity is soul of an aesthetically valid poem, incongruity is the soul of a comic poem.⁵⁰ While *hāsyā rasa* and *rasābhāsa* are different, semblances of other rasas can be converted into the comic sentiment.⁵¹

The sources of laughter are thus identified correctly. But the Sanskrit aestheticians did not regard comedy as a distinct mode of literary thinking as in the west. Theoretically, the end of *hāsyā rasa* is the same as that of other rasas, i.e., to create an ideal, impersonal and exalted effect, which is akin to *brahmānanda*. The aesthetic experience begins with the formation of the proper attitude on the part of the audience from the moment he enters the theatre hall. By the time the play begins, the audience is supposed to be in a state of self-forgetfulness, his mind being purged of all ideas and emotions irrelevant to the aesthetic experience. He then perceives the presented spectacle through the psycho-physical condition of the hero, free from limitations of time, place and individuality. The subject and the object being thus universalised, the process of identification begins, and the spectator begins to see and hear all that is going on the stage as if through the eyes and ears of hero. It is the state of identification of the basic mental state with the self-forgetful self of the audience; after this, the aesthetic image is developed slowly with the progress of the dramatic performance and the audience experiences aesthetic pleasure when the basic mental state rises to the highest relishable pitch. It is thus an ideal state in an ideal situation. This state is indefinable and transcendental. The objective perception of the aesthetic experience is a psychological impossibility.⁵²

Hāsyā rasa is different from other rasas in that the ideal identification between the basic mental state evoked by the comic spectacle and the sensibility of the audience is not fully achieved. The comic situation is caused by inferior beings or defects and degradation; this feeling of inferiority or degradation of the comic object hinders identification, as the superior feeling and aesthetic sensibility of the subject or the audience cannot be merged in the former. This psychic distance between the object and the subject can be theoretically bridged

partially by aid of either poetic suggestion (byañjanā) or skilful acting on the part of the comedian.⁵³ The trained audience also views the inferior comic situation with an enlightened attitude or kindly feeling. But the psychic distance cannot be entirely eliminated, and the audience cannot derive the ideal aesthetical pleasure, the fullest state of joy of the soul endowed with the *sāttva guṇa*.⁵⁴ That is why *hāsya rasa* is regarded as a *uparañjaka rasa* or a pleasant sentiment.⁵⁵ Kanjilal is inclined to call it so; but he seems to use the word in the broad sense to include both wit and humour. He points out that the ideal *hāsya rasa*, as envisaged in the aesthetical texts, fit in with the concept of wit or humour in English. But he goes further, and seems to claim that humour and *hāsya rasa* are synonymous.⁵⁶ In a state of *sāttvic hāsya rasa*, as envisaged by Madhusūdan Sarasvati, the aesthetician of the Bhakti school, every kind of audience, inferior or superior, is capable of relishing the highest pitch of blissful joy. According to him, even malice or jealousy that sometimes lie at the root of predominant emotion of laughter can be tempered by a sense of infinite and indivisible self-awareness on the part of the audience which evokes transcendental pleasure.⁵⁷ L. N. Bezbarua, the modern exponent of Assamese Vaiṣṇavism, seems to subscribe to this view; according to him, the basic state of mind in all the nine rasas including the *hāsya* gives rise to this highest form of aesthetic pleasure.⁵⁸ The emotions of the finite world are transmuted into this form of pleasure by the impersonal and disinterested devotional feeling of the devotee. Even an illiterate devotee is capable of experiencing it. That is why the basic state of mind in the *bhakti rasa* is the love towards Kṛṣṇa, the ever-smiling God.⁵⁹ This theory seems analogous to the theory of infinite incongruity of Richter, discussed earlier in this essay.

Hāsya rasa, in this sense, is warm, tender fellow-feeling with all forms of existence. It seems to have no place for misanthropy and melancholy jest. It is a meaningful laughter that arises from the contrast between the finite and the infinite, which is conceived in the kindest light. Therefore it is akin to humour, if not synonymous with humour. Satire as a comic type of expression is recognised in Sanskrit aesthetical texts.

Kanjilal refers to such types of expression in his *SSH*R (chap VI).⁶⁰ But it is mild and polite. There is no trace of malice in it. Even in Daṇḍīn's *Daśakumār-caritaṃ*, as Kanjilal points out, satire is tempered by benevolent sympathy; the work as a whole, is comic.⁶¹ Among the six types of laughter mentioned in Sanskṛt aesthetical texts, *smita* or smile is associated with the most refined audience;⁶² it is the laughter of humour.

There is, in Sanskṛt no comic works which is comparable to the old Attic Comedy. The Sanskṛt comic works can, at best, be compared to the new Menanderian comedy; they have a narrow range of interests, a sophisticated language, a restrained tone and an art strictly governed by canons of taste. Aristotle, who insisted that the comic mask does not imply pain, did not approve lampooning⁶³ or personal satire, which is the chief feature of old Attic Comedy.

In India, the literature did not develop in the same manner as in Europe. The difference in the two modes of development lies in the difference between two social situations or two ideals of life. As Pōts points out, tragedy and comedy are two distinct and complementary modes of literary thinking in European literature.⁶⁴ In Indian literature, comedy was not recognised as a distinct genre. In the classical Sanskṛt literature, many types of dramas are recognised, two of them being the *Nāṭaka* and the *prakaraṇa*; the *prakaraṇa* is the lighter form. However, as Henry W. Wells points out, Śūdraka's *prakaraṇa Mṛcchakatika*, which he calls a masterpiece of Sanskṛt comedy, may only superficially be related to western conception of comedy as a theatrical genre, but is even more closely related to the patterns of Hindu mythological and religious thought.⁶⁵ The *prahasana* was a later development, but in it, we do not get the broad comic form. As a genre, *prahasana* is akin to modern farce.

Comedy in European literature is viewed as a parasitical form, that draws its sustenance from tragedy. In fact, comedy was vigorous in those creative periods of literature, when tragedy was also vigorous. No such symbiotic development of tragedy and comedy was possible in India, because the Indian literary thinking induced a different type of development. It assigned a place for humour or satire in drama, epic and fiction, but it rarely was given a predominant position. The aim of

literature was to create that exalted effect, called *rasa*, which is non-particular, supra-normal and supra-spacial. M. Christopher Byrski describes this aesthetic experience in the following way, "By means of this aesthetic perception, the spectator experiences happiness and despair of the world, uncircumscribed by any particular time or space. Now slowly the multiplicity of existence, which underlies the duality of joy and sorrow, comes to an end. The obstacles and barriers which divide humanity from the object of desire fall to the ground and only now the true state of inner fullness (*tr̥pti*) becomes emotionally experienced by the spectator. There is no more place in the heart for pity, mirth, love, fear, heroism, violence or disgust which are all inherent in multiplicity. Emotionally the spectator reaches a plenum of perfect satisfaction or marvellous harmony which is reflected in the heart as *adbhuta rasa*, the *rasa* of Brahmā. In such a way, the spectator becomes aware of the ultimate destiny of all human endeavours which finds its fulfilment in perfect rest,—the unity and identity with the Brahman. This may for the spectator become a prolonged awareness of the harmony of the universe and the purposefulness of human life or it may descend on him at the highest pitch of *adbhuta rasa* like a lightning."⁶⁶ Behind this theory of *rasa*, was the Indian literary thinking which sought the identity of the world and the mystical awareness of reality. To a European, the same still sounds blasphemy.⁶⁷ The Indian writer did not want to confine itself to the particular comic vision of life and nature, but transcended it to get a complete view of the whole existence in its essential nature. If the tragic end was incompatible with the Indian view of life,⁶⁸ the comic aim was equally found wanting. A drama as a work of art was regarded as a whole, as a cycle complete in itself. The Indian thinking seems to regard both the tragic and comic views of life as partial and incomplete. It aimed at containing both. The same view of existence seemed to have characterised Indian poetic thinking.

Henry W. Wells points out that the Sanskr̥t *nāṭaka* stands somewhere between western tragedy and the representative *prakaraṇa* while the *prakaraṇa* stands between western high comedy and the *nāṭaka*. The former is exalted, its story is mythological and its spirit is notably religious; the characters

are legendary or super human. The latter is less exalted, has an invented plot and its characters are not far removed from the social position of its audience.⁶⁹ In form, it approximates more to comedy of manners than to the old Greek comedy. The Sanskr̥t drama lacks the gall of Attic tragedy and the salt of Attic comedy. The purgation of tragedy is not demanded, nor satirical wit of old comedy.⁷⁰

No Sanskr̥t comedy, if it can be so called, has the broad comic form of Aristophanes' dramas. Two factors distinguish his comedies from the later European comedies and the Sanskr̥t light dramas. These were essentially a product of his age; secondly, he was a comic genius who could make room for every sort of effect in his works. The society in which he lived was essentially democratic and allowed him to use his powers with utmost freedom. Indeed this freedom was unique. The so-called indecency and bitter personal satire of his comedies, which offend modern sensibility, were allowed by the conventions of art of his times. The bitter satire was a continuation of the freedom and licence of the village festivals, to which the old comedy was an heir, while his indecency is due partly to the survivals of the primitive and sacred Dionysaic festival and partly to the simple and outspoken frankness of the Greeks on topics which modern taste deems improper. The old comedy flourished side by side with the tragedy and derived inspiration from it. These two fundamental modes of literary thinking are rooted in human nature and embodied in two separate but complementary art-forms. The subject matters of Aristophanes' comedies are rich and significant enough to be subject matters of tragedy. In *The Acharians*, he pleads for peace and attacks war-mongers. He continues his attacks on the chief of war-mongers, Cleon, in *The Knights*. He attacks the sophistic philosophy of Socrates in the *Clouds*. In *Lysistrata*, he turns his attention to the woman's question and ingeniously introduces a scene of sex strike to end war. *The Birds* provides us with an opportunity to escape from worry and the sordidness of life, away into the Cloud-Cuckoo Land. By 411 B.C., the liberal democracy in Greece was no longer a possibility and the times were dangerous for airing political opinions freely. He had to change his subject-matter. In the *Frogs*, he still offers us an elaborate

literary criticism of Euripides's works in the form of drama.

We have already referred to Gilbert Murray's estimate of Aristophanes' works. Aristophanes had that vitality that never loses its freshness. He had a standard of his own. His laughter seems ageless.

Comedy ceased to be a broad comic form even in Aristophanes' times. But the Menanderian comedy that came after him became narrower in range, though more refined in style. Menander set a new standard for comedy, and through the Roman intermediaries (Platus and Terence), its influence began to be felt far and wide. "Directly or indirectly", writes Gilbert Murray, "no one who writes polite comedy can avoid the influence of Menander."⁷¹ Tragedy dealt with *res sacra*; the comedy of Aristophanes with *res publica*, that of Menander with *res privata*, in which the emotions and changes of fortune may be smaller in extent, but infinitely more various. Laughter in it seldom hurts, and the pain is suffused with beauty. Its range is smaller, its subject-matter non-political, its language refined and its characters typical. According to Nicoll, the type may almost be styled a comedy of manners.⁷² It served as a model for the Roman comedies (Platus and Terence) and they in turn served as model for the English dramatists.⁷³ Gilbert Murray points out that through the Roman intermediaries, Menander conquered the modern stage.⁷⁴

In his survey of *Wit, Humour and Satire** in Sanskr̥t literature, S.K. De observes that even in the creative classical period, conditions were such that there was no effective evolution of a really humorous literature, and none of the authors, despite their brilliant achievements otherwise, need be classified as outstanding humourists. From the beginning, the literature appears to be preoccupied with its own aesthetical and philosophical principles, which did not encourage formulation of specifically tragic or comic attitudes. Western tragedy presents an ironical impasse at which the soul grieves, while western comedy presents a comic irony at which mind smiles.⁷⁵ The Sanskr̥t critics recognised no pure tragedy or comedy of wit or manners. Lampooning of Aristophanic comedy seemed totally foreign to

*"Wit, Humour and Satire in Ancient Indian Literature"; *ASL*, pp. 257-289.

the Indian literary outlook. The characters were no doubt conceived as types, rather than as individuals; the setting was generally urbane, the literary form was rigid and the effect sought to be created was an impersonal and spiritual sentiment. The satiric elements were never bitter and personal, and subjects in the light comedies or farces were predominantly erotic. We have no reason to believe from available data that the theatre in ancient India enjoyed the patronage and freedom of the type obtained in the Athenian democracy in Aristophanes' times. The exuberance, license and fantastic form of Aristophanic comedy were specifically a Greek phenomenon. But it was shortlived; with the eclipse of liberal democracy, the form declined. European comedy after him grew polite and somewhat narrower in range. The courtly atmosphere in which the Sanskrit drama was produced was conducive to creation of comedy of gentler and human kind. Yet the scope was not fully utilised, because the aim of literature was different. Kalidasa's *Mālavikāgnimitra* can be viewed as a light comedy of court life.⁷⁶ Śūdraka's *prakaraṇa* is suffused with a comic spirit, but its predominant outlook is idealistic. These dramas are the nearest prototypes of western comedy. None of them is however nearer to the Aristophanic spirit.

In the major types of Sanskrit drama, *nāṭak* and *prakaraṇa*, *hāsya rasa* however appears as a supporting sentiment. Even in poetry, room was made for it. A great poet and dramatist, Kalidasa was most distinguished for his fine sense of humour. The gentle humour tempered by charming fancy in the picture of young hermit appearing before Umā and depreciation of Śiva in *Kumāra Sambhava* is finely conceived. His mastery of humour and pathos as shown in the masterly handling of the characters of king and his jester in *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam* testify to his unique gift of imagination and sense of proportion. Like the typical but refined fool, Mādhavya is neither at ease in the hermitage, nor allowed passage to heaven; he is horsewhipped in the palace by the heavenly charioteer; he complains of fatigue and hunger, and acts as a humorous foil to the love-lorn hero. He constantly reminds us of our finite world and its limitations. He seems to assert that what is said in jest should be taken in earnest.⁷⁷ Kalidasa was a genius with a humorous

imagination and had a fine sense of proportion. In the gay circle of the courtly comedy of elegant love *Mālavikāgnimitra* the viduṣaka is livelier still and far more active. Kalidasa, however, never allows his wit to get better of his poetry. On the whole, one is inclined to agree with S.K. De when he says that "the smile of Kalidasa's Comic Muse has nothing in common with the loud laughter of the caricaturist or the bitter mirth of the satirist; it is charged with poetry and kindness, with the finest romance and the profoundest good sense."⁷⁸

Among the lesser plays, the *prahasana* and the *bhāṇas* deserve passing attention. The critics recognise *prahasana* as the only form of drama, where the *hāsyā rasa* is predominant. The *bhāṇa* where the erotic sentiment is predominant, contains strong elements of *hāsyā rasa*; it has the rake as its hero. The *vīṭa* is a type character recognised in Sanskr̥t dramaturgy. He is an assistant in the love affairs of the hero and resembles the parasite in the Greek drama, but is not a despicable character. These two forms of short literary play accommodate, as a rule, low humour and polite satire. The early *bhāṇas* are livelier and more amusing than the later *bhāṇas*; they abound in type characters. They may at times faintly remind us of comedy of humours, but are too short and coarse, though amusing. There is a fine ludicrous plot in *Bhagavad-ajjukīya*, which is held to be the best among Sanskr̥t farces or *prahasanas*. Here the mirth arises from the fact that through a curious exchange of souls, the saint speaks like the courtesan, and the courtesan like the saint. The fun goes on till the messenger of Yama returns the souls to their respective bodies. The small play is highly amusing and as S.K. De points out, easily the best of the Sanskr̥t farces. The *prahasana*⁷⁹ is a short play, having a simpler pattern, low characters and short duration of action. Its specific end is to create mirth, and it appeals to an inferior audience.

The critics consider it to be an inferior species, precisely because it does not aim at serving any of the four recognised ends of life (*puruṣārthas*) and deals with low characters. The trained aesthete finds it difficult to identify himself with the low characters, or the comic spectacles they present. In the absence of a harmonising power, it becomes difficult to bridge the

psychic distance between the sensibility of the audience and odd feelings aroused by the presented comic spectacle. This distance cannot be bridged completely, and the ideal harmony which paves the way for relishing of the highest pleasure envisaged by the theorists is not possible in the case of *hāsya rasa* of *prahasana*. Laughter is thus low. *Prahasana*, like the modern European farces, is thus not included in the finer types of literature. We need not add that the Sanskrit farce has not the range of Aristophanic farce or its broad comic form.

Compared to western literature, the humorous literature in Sanskrit seems to be meagre. This is precisely due to the manner of literary thinking and the philosophical outlook prevalent in ancient India. *Hāsya rasa* was never assigned a high place in literature and was generally regarded as a supporting sentiment. The critics however recognised it as one of the nine sentiments and its nature was explained with sufficient insight. The sources of laughter were known. Even its distinct nature was indirectly recognised. The basis of laughter was found in incongruity. Its aim was recognised to be less heavenly. The effect it creates was recognised as less exalted than the effect created by the major *rasas*. But there was no formulation of specifically comic attitude. They always aimed at a superior philosophical and aesthetical harmony than mere comic harmony. Life and nature were viewed in the light of their own idealistic philosophy. The existence of *karuṇa* and *hāsya rasa* was recognised, but the general aim was to transcend them and attain a marvellous harmony. The relishing of *rasa* is possible in a perfect state of equilibrium of the soul.

References

1. BG, *Hāñhi*, pp. 1492-93.
2. NLAL, pp. 337-391; *Assam in the Days of Company*, p. 266.
3. IDT, pp. 143-175.
4. IDT, pp. 170-171; *Studies in Literary Modes*, pp. 46-47. Wit is used in all branches of literature. It is a common mode. It is

one of the highest types of comic expressions. It is the satirist's most effective dazzle-disguise or compensation for malignity of satire. It may be described as a sparkle in style. Formerly the word meant intelligence or understanding. It has come to mean the power, displayed in conversation and literature, of affording intellectual satisfaction by the unexpected association of apparently unconnected ideas, some point of similarities being realised with a shock of surprise. It is a trait of style. The definition given by Issac Barrow in 1678 (*The Amiable Humorist*, p. 58) equated wit with facetiousness. It said, "sometimes it lieth in a pat allusion to a known story, or in a seasonable application of a trivial saying or in forging of an apposite tale, sometimes it played on words and phrases, taking advantage from ambiguity of their sense, or the affinity of their sound; sometimes it is wrapped in a dress of luminous expression; sometimes it lurketh under an odd similitude. Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer, in a quirkish reason, in a shrewd intimation; in cunningly diverting or restoring an objection; sometimes it is couched in a bold scheme of speech, in a tart irony, in a lusty hyperbole, in a startling metaphor, in a plausible reconciling of contradictions or in acute non-sense; sometimes a scenical representation of persons or things, a counterfeit speech, a mimical look or gesture passeth for it, sometimes an affected simplicity, sometimes a presumptuous bluntness giveth it being; sometimes it riseth only from a lucky hitting upon what is strange; sometimes from a crafty wrestling of obvious matter to the purpose; often it consisteth in one knows not what, and springeth up one can hardly tell how." (Quoted in *HSL*, pp. 285-286).

5. *Comedy*, p. 10.
6. *Comedy*, p. 137; R.J. Rees in *AIEL* draws our attention to comedies which do not evoke laughter. He says, "The words comedy and comic are so closely associated with people's mind with the humorous, the funny, the ridiculous that we find it hard to accept plays like 'The Tempest' or 'The Winter's Tale' as being comedies at all." (p. 198) Essentially he points to the same problem. Mere laughter is not comedy.
7. *Tragedy and Comedy*, pp. 309-312.
8. *BSLND*, p. 23; pp. 36-37.
9. *CDI*, p. 158.
10. *ASL*, p. 265.
11. *ibid.*, p. 275.
12. *IDT*, pp. 176-77.
13. *SCIS*, pp. 144-145.
14. *Comedy*, pp. 138-140.

15. *Studies in Literary Modes*, pp. 131-32.
16. *Aristophanes*, pp. 218-219.
17. *Tragedy and Comedy*, p. 17.
18. *Reading for Profit*, p. 191.
19. *ibid.*, p. 162.
20. *Comedy*, p. 110.
21. *IDT*, p. 197; see *Types of Comedy*, pp. 176-197.
22. *The Verse Satire*, p. 2.
23. *Comedy*, p. 141.
24. *Complete Works of Shakespeare*, p. 265.
25. *SCIS*, p. 66.
26. *ibid.*, p. 78.
27. *AIEL*, p. 200.
28. *The Amiable Humorist*, p. 118.
29. *Comedy*, p. 18.
30. *Tragedy and Comedy*, p. 30.
31. *The Acharians and Three Other Plays*, p. 6.
32. *Tragedy and Comedy*, p. 245.
33. *ibid.*, p. 246.
34. *LCSH*, p. 46.
35. *Selected Essays*, p. 414.
36. *LCSH*, p. 568.
37. *IDT*, p. 153.
38. *ibid.*, p. 160.
39. *The Amiable Humorstst*, p. 92.
40. *ibid.*, p. 220.
41. *LCSH*, p. 379; Jean Paul Richter's conception of the comic.
42. *Comedy*, p. 104.
43. *ibid.*, p. 32.
44. *AHEL*, p. 445.
45. *Comedy*, p. 127.
46. *ibid.*, p. 118.

47. *SSHR*, Chapter II, pp. 28-55; Kaviraja, Viśvanātha mentions in his *Sahitya Darpana* (p. 124) nine rasas : śṅgāra, hāsyā, karuṇā, raudra, vira, vibhatsa, bhayānaka, adbhuta and śānta. Bharata mentions only eight rasas. K.C. Pānde, in his *Comparative Aesthetics* (Vol. I), discusses the various views on number of rasas. Bhānu Datta maintains that the number of rasas are nine, though he also mentions four others including *vātsalya* and *Bhakti*. Bhoja recognised śṅgāra as the king of rasas, and admits the existence of ten (or twelve) rasas including *vātsalya* and *śānta*. Dhanañjaya and Abhinavagupta however maintain the number of rasas to be nine. Hāsyā is not generally recognised to be a major rasa. As this rasa is not directly related to the four basic human activities (four *puruṣārthas*), its status is not regarded as high (*Comparative Aesthetics*, pp. 171-174).

A.B. Keith in the *Sanskṛt drama* says (pp. 32-33), "The comic sentiment depends upon mirth, which is caused by one's or another's strange appearance, speech or attire."

48. *ibid.*, p. 3.
49. *ibid.*, p. 36.
50. *ibid.*, p. 46.
51. *ibid.*, p. 66.
52. *Indian Aesthetics*, Vol. I, p. 168; In page 12, rasa, the aesthetic object, is defined as unity in multiplicity. "The unifying factor in the multiplicity is a basic state of mind (sthāyi-bhāva) which binds together in an organic whole, (1) the emotive situation in human setting, consisting of the physical cause of the basic mental state (vibhāva), (2) the mimetic changes, which are inspired by the aroused basic mental state and as such indicative of the internal state (anubhāva), and (3) the transient emotions (vyabhicāribhāva). This basic mental state is the central and most important phase of configuration." In the pages 130-31, Abhinavagupta's views on rasa is given. He recognises two levels of aesthetic experience. In the first level, in which the basic mental state is realised objectively as it were by the universalised object, rasa means the object of relish. Here the basic mental state is relished. In the second level, the basic mental state sinks into the subconscious and there is the experience of the *ānanda* aspect of the self. It is a state of rest within itself. Rasa at this stage means the act of relishing. Rasa is thus different from the basic mental state. It is not an ordinary experience, but that of an ideal man in an ideal state (p. 168).
53. *SSHR*, p. 74.
54. *SSHR*, p. 79.
55. *ibid.*, p. 79.

56. *ibid.*, p. 126.
57. *ibid.*, p. 86.
58. *BG*, p. 382.
59. *BG*, pp. 216-17.
60. *SSHR*, p. 60; He mentions *bākakeli*, *utprāsana* etc., as satiric types of expression.
61. *ibid.*, 229.
62. *ibid.*, p. 122; *hāsya* is of six kinds : *smita*, *hasita*, *vihasita*, *avahasita*, *apahasita* and *atīhasita*. *Smita* is smile and is denoted by a facial state in which chins move lightly and the eyes are slightly stretched. When teeth become visible, it is *hasita*. These two forms of laughter are refined (of the *uttama rasika*). When the laughter is expressed in sweet sounds, it is *vihasita*, while in *avahasita*, there is the movement of the head and the shoulders. These forms of laughter are characteristic of men of average taste (*madhyama rasika*). *Apahasita* and *atīhasita* are laughters of men of low taste (*adhama rasika*). In the former state, laughter causes tears to flow, while in the latter state, limbs of the whole body are affected (*Sahitya Darpana*, p. 137). The division of laughter into six categories and men of taste into three categories is admitted also by Rupa Gosvami, the Vaiṣṇava aesthetician (*SSHR*, pp. 100-103).
63. *LCSH*, p. 63.
64. *Comedy*, p. 10.
65. *CDI*, p. 154.
66. *CAIT*, pp. 160-61; *CAIT*=*Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre*.
67. *CAIT*, p. 191. *CAIT*=*Concept of Ancient Indian Theatre*.
68. *ibid.*, p. 137.
69. *CDI*, pp. 167-68.
70. *ibid.*, pp. 136.
71. *Aristophanes*, p. 261.
72. *IDT*, p. 12.
73. *Comedy*, p. 13.
74. *Aristophanes*, p. 260.
75. *CDI*, p. 9.
76. *ASL*, p. 265.
77. *Kālidāser Granthāvalī*, *Abhijñāna-Śākuntalam* p. 852, Act II, p. 949, Act VI :

In the second Act, the king revealed to the jester his growing amorous feelings for Śakuntalā, but after a second thought, he denied the whole affair saying that what had been said in jest should not be taken in earnest (*parihāsa-bijalpitam sakhe, paramārtheno na grahyatām bacah*). Evidently he did not want to confide his secrets to him, lest the jester would disclose it to the palace women. The jester, in the Act VI, reminded him the very line, and added that he had been foolish enough not to believe in what had been said in jest. Had he believed in the jest, Śakuntalā's tragedy could have been averted. Does he not suggest that the earnest that lies behind the jest should be recognised and grasped ?

78. *ASL*, p. 265.

79. A.B. Keith observes : "The Prahāsana and Bhāna indeed appeal to the comic sentiment, but only in an inferior and degraded form". (*Sanskrit Drama*, p. 280). According to S.K. De, the laughter of prahasana is, in general, coarse. (*HSL*, p. 66).

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