

CHAPTER - III

COMEDY : GENERAL CRITICISM

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3.1 INTRODUCTION:

Marjorie Boulton observes, 'All definitions in the various fields of art are dangerous, because they are inevitably too narrow some where'.¹ King Lear is probably the most profound of Shakespeare's tragedies, yet even in it, fragments of the comic are to be found. Even more surprisingly, in Sophocles' Antigone there is a soldier who can be interpreted as a comic character. The 'purest' tragedy is supposed to be written by Racine, which is alien to the taste of many English people. Much Ado About Nothing is Shakespeare's comedy; but the sight of the young girl fainting at the altar would not have been amusing to the people. If a comedy is a play with happy ending, Measure for Measure is a comedy; but its main theme is cruel and insoluble dilemma treated with passion and pathos. Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy, but contains two wonderful comic characters, Mercutio and Juliet's Nurse.

Thus it is proved that the definitions of tragedy and comedy are not sufficient and there is much overlapping. Yet tragedy and comedy have been defined from the days of Aristotle to the modern days. All of us in our own way know

what a comedy is and yet the definition of comedy is not exactly an easy thing. This very fact leads to the inescapable conclusion that tragedy is a clearly defined form of literature but comedy is not exactly easy to define. Then the question arises that what is a comedy? Here we will discuss the various definitions of a comedy given by different writers.

Oxford English Dictionary derives the noun from comxdia and defines comedy as 'a stage play of a light and amusing character with a happy conclusion to the plot'. The term comedy is probably to be derived from the Greek name for the festal processions which were part of ritual worship. A Komos was a festal procession, hence, Kwu-wdia meaning 'the bard of the revels'².

The Chronicle of Troy (1430) has a subtler definition than this :

'A comedy Hath in his gynnyng (beginning)
A pryde face, an maner complaynunge,
And afterward endeth in gladnesse'³.

Aristotle defines comedy as 'an imitation and persons of an inferior moral bentIt consists in some blunder or ugliness that doesnot cause pain or disaster, an obvious example being the comic mask which is ugly and distorted but not painful'⁴.

The Tractatus Coislinianus says 'Comedy is an affair of the stage and it is an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect'.⁵

The Roman critics and scholars also have tried their hands at defining comedy. According to Cicero Comedy is 'an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth'⁶. Quintilian points out that 'everything is laughable which is obviously pretended'⁷. John Tzetzes states that 'comedy embraces stories of every day life and its aim is to move people to laughter'⁸.

According to Gottsched comedy is 'a faculty for clear analysis, which could perceive and condemn anything irrational and exaggerated in the behaviour of men'⁹. For Schlegel 'Comedy must necessarily present an idealized version of reality and could never approximate too closely to life'¹⁰.

The philosophers like Kant, Spencer and Schopenhauer have tried to define comedy. According to Kant, 'laughter is an affection arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing'¹¹. Spencer attributes comic laughter to physiological factors and for him it is 'a descending incongruity'¹². For Schopenhauer 'The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real object... and

laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity,¹³.

William Hazlitt says 'Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be',¹⁴.

The nineteenth century renowned novelist and critic, Meredith says, 'There never will be civilization where comedy is not possible',¹⁵. and according to him the purpose of comedy is to arouse 'thoughtful laughter',¹⁶. C.C.Everett defines comedy as 'simply the recognition of incongruity',¹⁷.

The French critic, Henri Bergson defines comedy as 'something mechanical encrusted upon the living',¹⁸. Croce seems to be endorsing a relief theory when he says 'The comic has been defined as the displeasure arising from the perception of a deformity immediately followed by a greater pleasure arising from the relaxation of our psychic forces, which are strained in anticipation of a perception and whose importance was foreseen',¹⁹. The disciple of Croce, Prof. Carrit defines Ludicrous 'as an aesthetic defect',²⁰. For Max Eastman comedy is 'an intellectual affair',²¹. According to Stephen Leacock humour is 'the kindly contemplation of the incogruities of life and the artistic expression thereof',²².

According to Menon, humour is 'a sense of incongruous suggested by an object in its nature and relation to other things as known to us',²³. The greatest psychologist, Sigmond Freud says, 'Wit... is an activity whose purpose is to desire pleasure - be it intellectual or otherwise - from the psychic processes',²⁴.

Thus critics and scholars from the ancient times to the modern times have attempted to define comedy and yet there is no agreement among them regarding the exact definition of a comedy. Therefore, the renowned Shakespearian critic, L.C.Knight in his Notes on Comedy considers all attempts at defining comedy as 'profitless generalizations',²⁵

The general English notions of Comedy are vague and fluid in contrast to the stricter notions of Comedy. Generally, if a play ends with a pleasant feelings about life we call it a Comedy. The popular idea of Comedy is summed up in two simple notions: that if a play makes you laugh it is a comedy and another notion is that any play with a happy ending is a Comedy. However, L.J.Potts doesn't agree with the first notion of Comedy that if a play makes you laugh it is a Comedy. He admits that laughter is one of the attributes of Comedy but doubts whether the end of comedy is to produce laughter. He observes :

'The fact is that laughter is a very erratic and unreliable action, ranging from the hysterical scream or giggle to the deliberate trumpeting of disapproval or discontent and from the loud guffaw of the vacant mind to an utterly peaceful signal of sudden sympathy or complete understanding'.²⁶

For example, Don Quixote, The Tempest and La Misanthrope are great comedies but the sobering effect they give has led many critics to comment that they are tragedies. They may not contain a high degree of laughter but they are after all comedies. Laughter is one of the means by which the comic writer seeks to influence his public. We laugh spontaneously at the happenings that strike us eccentric.

The same can be said about the other popular notion that a play with a happy ending is a Comedy. L.J. Potts observes :

'To begin with, happiness is so wide and vague a term that it introduces rather than removes confusion. The conventional end of a tragedy is the death of the hero or some catastrophe approximating to death, and the conventional end of a comedy is a wedding'.²⁷

For example, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth happily sitting on the throne of Scotland in the end of the play cannot turn Macbeth into comedy. Or take Sophocles' Oedipus Tyrannus where the hero does not actually die in the end; yet a play remains a tragedy. Similarly Much Ado About Nothing ends with a marriage and thus has happy ending, but even if the end were not happy the play would retain its comic spirit.

This leads us to the conclusion that an unhappy ending does not necessarily require the death of the hero and a happy ending is not always without a death. As Nicoll points out, 'the happy ending though frequent in comedy, is not the distinguishing characteristic of comedy'.²⁸ This is what the same when Potts says 'the end of the play is of course important, but it does not by itself determine the character of a work'.²⁹

Laughter is one of the attributes of Comedy. Since the aim of Comedy is to entertain the audience and make them laugh, every Comedy has scenes which are full of light or brilliant wit-scenes which keep the audience smiling or roaring with laughter.

Many critics have written much on the sources of the risible in Comedy but none has been able to give all the reasons of our laughter. There are theories of laughter starting from Plato to modern scholars like Bergson and Freud. We will mention some of them here.

Aristotle evidently believed that risible to lie in degradation. He says, 'men in comedy are made worse than they are and consequently become objects of merriment'.³⁰ According to Ben Jonson, 'what either in the words or sense of an author, or in the language or action of men, is awry and depraved does strangely stir mean affections, and provoke for the most part to laughter'.³¹ Kant and after him a whole

series of critics and of philosophers from Schopenhauer to Hazlitt, have discovered the secret of laughter to lie in the incongruity of two facts, two ideas, two words or two associations. Hazlitt owes the source of laughter to two jostling ideas. He says, 'The essence of the laughable is the incongruous, the disconnecting of one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another'.³² The view expressed by Sidney is not different from Hazlitt when he says, 'laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature'.³³

The first theory of laughter is the theory of incongruity. Incongruity produces a sort of emotional shock. We face something different from we have expected and we laugh. For example, In Importance of Being Earnest, the heroine asks the hero if his hair curls naturally. The hero replies, 'Yes, darling, with a little help from others'. The addition of the phrase 'with a little help from others' causes the laughter.

Degradation, incongruity, automatism and the sense of liberation all are sources of laughter. Of them all, however, undoubtedly the greatest is incongruity. It is the incongruity of Jove in Amphytrion's shape, of Mercury in the form of a serving man, that provides the prime comic essence of Dryden's play. The incongruity between two ideas that presents to us the twin qualities of wit and of humour. What Feibleman says is right. He says, 'the source of laughter is

the recognition of the wide difference between what is and what ought to be'.³⁴ In other words it is the recognition of the difference between incongruity and the normal situation. When our expectations to see a normal thing are shattered, we laugh at this abnormality or incongruity.

The second theory of laughter is the theory of the ludicrous. Ludicrous is 'some defect or ugliness which is not painful'. Here the laughter is aimed at somebody's defect. For example, mothers-in-law have always been figures to laugh at. A husband deceived by his wife is a tragic figure but an old man who has married a young wife who elopes with her lover is comic. So this theory of laughter suggests that we laugh at the inferiority, eccentricity or defect of others and we are thankful at our goodluck. For example, we burst into laughter as soon as we see Falstaff on the stage because his fatness creates laughter and we think that we are lucky enough to escape such fatness. The blundering use of long words of Mrs. Malprop in The Rivals by Sheridan, causes same type of humour. Thorndike observes :

'It advances comedy far beyond the range of farce and suggests the depiction of manners and character. The follies, affectations, absurdities and even the vices of mankind are held up to ridicule and scorn. The braggart, the coward, the pendant, the pettifogger, the fool and the hypocrite are revealed as defective and inferior. We glory over Malvolio, and are perhaps purged of that self-love which is his infirmity'.³⁵

However, according to Nicoll, the portrayal of mere eccentric characters does not give rise to the

risible.³⁶ The playwright, along with eccentricity, has to present the humorous situation, words, characters something that is less or more ordinary. Eccentricity doesn't become comic unless it is opposed to or contrasted with something that is normal. For example, in Twelfth Night, Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek are ridiculous because they are opposed to main characters in the play like the Duke, Sebastian, Viola and Olivia. In A Midsummer Night's Dream, Theseus and Hippolyta are the centre; the artisans are absurd in comparison with them.

When Nicoll discusses the sources of the risible he uses a term like comic conflict.³⁷ He says the essence of comic conflict lies in the attempt of the playwright to introduce a comparison between two sets of characters. It was the feature of the drama in ancient Rome. The Eunuchus written by Terence has Chremes and Phaedria, Antipho and Charea, with opposed characters of Gnatho and Thoraso and Parmeno. This type of device is also found in the modern drama. There we find the average intelligence placed in strict juxtaposition to the equivalents of old fathers and the cheating servants of the ancient stage.

The third theory of laughter is the theory of spontaneous laughter. The essential source of the spontaneous laugh is a desire for liberation, liberation from the restraints of society. Sometimes we laugh at solemn

situation. This merriment at solemn or sacred things is a spontaneous merriment. The real cause of this spontaneous laughter lies in the sense of liberation which the laugh itself involves. It is the liberation of natural man from the ties and conventions of society. Thorndike observes :

'We laugh in imitation or by contagion rather than in superiority. A play may aim to make us share in a merriment that is relaxing and invigorating. With such a purpose comedy turns to sentiment or romance or fancy and responds to the joy of life rather than to the ridicule of inferiority'.³⁸

Another important attribute of Comedy is humour. Penguin English Dictionary defines humour as 'capacity for seeing the funny side of things, cheerful and good tempered amusement'.³⁹ The word 'humour' has an exceedingly varied history from its inception as of the kin of 'humid', through its Jonsonian source in the seventeenth century. Humour is an indispensable part of comedy and comedy extracts humour from situations in life and thus shows how rich human life is. Humour is free from malice and the laughter arising out of it is the genial laughter of love, pleasure and sometimes even envy.

Meredith has drawn very subtle distinction between humour and the comic. 'The comic spirit is censorious and critical, but the humourist---- has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of comic poet'.⁴⁰ Thus we have laughter arising from the comic and from humour. Pure comic scenes

give us superficial laughter at the expense of some butt of ridicule but humour teaches us to smile philosophically at the superiorities and inferiorities of mankind. Thorndike has rightly described humour as 'the consummation of the instinct for laughter'.⁴¹

Thus a good comedy must depend upon humour as its mainspring of amusement. It can appeal to our sense of humour by revealing the humorous aspects of men and their deeds. For this purpose the playwright presses into service the devices of satire, ridicule, whimsicality, nonsense and wild exaggerations etc.

Humour always gives to comedy a mellowed note. In humour, sentiment and intellect are united. Humour may appear in comedy in many different ways. The humour of character is to be discovered in its fullest form in the person of Falstaff. He is fat and laughs at his fatness. He poses continually for the sake of arousing laughter. He does not make fun of others but he himself is the butt of his own wit. Humour may be displayed also through the media of situations, of the words, and of the manners. The situation in which Bottom is caught and his manners give rise to humour. In Sheridan's The Rival, Mrs. Malprop's wrong use of long words creates a lot of humour.

3.2 THEORIES:

There are numerous theories of comedy. These theories are classified into two groups : 1 classical theories and 2. Modern theories. First we will discuss some classical theories of comedy.

3.2.1 CLASSICAL THEORIES:

3.2.1.1 REALISTIC THEORY : PLATO

The history of the theory of comedy properly begins with the philosophy of Plato. However, it doesn't mean that there were no theories earlier Plato. If there have been any, they are unknown. We have to approach Plato's theory of comedy in terms of realistic philosophy. Plato acknowledged the objective existence of the comic. He was chiefly concerned with its effect on the observer. He believes that which is comic contains a contradiction; but it is with the conflicting sensations aroused by this contradiction that the observer is mainly concerned. Impotence masquerading as fate - this is the essential nature of comedy for Plato. For example, the boastful man who at heart a coward : Bacchus pretending to be Mars.

However, it should not be forgotten that comedy does have psychological effects, which is discharged in laughter. Plato in his 'Ideal State' emphasised the suppression of the passions as the only means toward

"happiness and virtue" and regarded the effect of comedy as something like a deception. Plato says :

'There is a principle in human nature which is disposed to raise a laugh, and this which you once restrained by reason, because you were afraid of being thought a buffoon, is now let out again; and having stimulated the risible faculty at the theatre, you are betrayed unconsciously to yourself into playing the comic poem at home'.⁴²

In his later works Plato pretended to an extremely low opinion of comedy, holding that it was fit only for slaves and strangers.⁴³ In Plato's theory we see that comedy is never very far from tragedy, since the logical inexorability of fate which in tragedy has the power to make good its threat, in comedy is seen to be weak; yet by outward form at the beginning of any sequence of events they both are the same. So comedy becomes the avoidance of the terrible outcome of the events which are threatened in tragedy. Where tragedy deals with the substance of power, comedy is more concerned with contradictions revealed in the form of absence of power. Thus tragedy is largely an affair of feeling, the feeling of the inexorable power of fate, while comedy is largely an intellectual affair, being concerned with the issue of logical contradictions.

Plato tries to present a wholly objective and independent theory of comedy. However he is more occupied with the emotional effect of the recognition of the comic. He wants to note just what the effect of observation of the comic is on the observer. For example, the boastful man makes

us admire and envy him, and when his boasts are exposed, we laugh at our own unfounded admiration and envy.

3.2.1.2 REALISTIC THEORY: ARISTOTLE

Aristotle's theory of comedy doesn't differ sufficiently from Plato's theory of comedy. It doesn't bring up any radically new points for discussion. However, Aristotle tried to remove the slur which Plato had placed on comedy by considering it fit only for slaves and strangers.

According to Aristotle comedy is 'an imitation of persons of an inferior moral bent... It consists in some blunder or ugliness that doesn't cause pain or disaster, an obvious example being the comic mask which is ugly and distorted but not painful'.⁴⁴

Aristotle's interest lies in the psychological effect of comedy. Cooper cites the scattered passages to show Aristotle who was very well aware of the laughter of infants as well as in adults. Aristotle's understanding of comedy is better than Plato. According to Aristotle comic appeal applied to the general rather than to the particular. Aristotle even understood the ideal nature of comedy. He pointed out that comedy always deals with inferior people, with low personages.⁴⁵ Thus he contrasted the present inferiority with what ought to be. He contrasted the reality with the ideal. Thus by inference we may say that in comedy

the Katharsis is through the purgation of pleasure just as it is in tragedy through pity and fear. According to Aristotle comedy causes pleasure which, in its own way, hints at a serious purpose.

3.2.1.3 LATER GREEK COMMENTATORS:

THE TRACTATUS COISLINIANUS:

The next important work on theory of comedy is the fragment which is known as the Tractatus Coislinianus. This appears to be a Greek work and scholars have dated it in the neighbourhood of the first century B.C.. It's authorship is unknown. It is a condensed version of a theory of comedy which is evidently dependent on Aristotle's work. It is clearly an attempt to do for the theory of comedy what Aristotle's Poetics does for the theory of tragedy.

The Tractatus says that comedy is an affair of the stage and thus a form of representative art. The Tractatus distinguishes between comedy and tragedy by noting that comedy is 'an imitation of an action that is ludicrous and imperfect'.⁴⁶ Comedy is not abuse. The Tractatus says, 'comedy differs from abuse, since abuse openly censures the bad qualities attaching, whereas comedy requires the so-called emphasis...'⁴⁷ Comedy, according to Tractatus, is certainly a criticism of actuality and an affirmation of something else, which presumably is to be preferred to things as they are.

Tractatus, like Aristotle, believes in the psychological aspect of comedy. The effect of comedy is that of the purgation of the emotions through pleasure and laughter. The Tractatus uses no classical language for comedy. The Tractatus adds, 'the diction of comedy is the common, popular language. The comic poet must endow his personages, with his own native idiom, but must endow an alien with alien idiom'.⁴⁸

The Tractatus has no great value in itself since it proposes nothing new for comedy. It displays how Plato and Aristotle influenced the Greek mind for centuries afterwards. For the Greeks, laughter was the psychological effect of comedy. But for the subjectively oriented modern, laughter is not the effect of comedy but is constituents of comedy, itself. The modern investigator seeks an analysis of comedy in the physiological mechanism because for him the laughter is comedy. The Tractatus ignored this physiological mechanism. However, the Tractatus is significant because it is the last of the realistic theories of comedy. Later on the psychological view became more prominent.

JAMBlichus:

Jamblichus of Chalcis is doubtfully given the credit of having written De Mysteriis. Jamblichus points out that 'the obscene language that is uttered indicates the

privation of the beautiful in the world of matter'.⁴⁹ He contrasts what is with what ought to be. He recognised that the method of comedy is to emphasise the ugly in order to demand a change for something better. Jamblichus returns to the famous theory of the psychological aspects and sets forth some observations on the cathartic effect of comedy. It is similar to the catharsis theory of tragedy as presented by Aristotle in Poetics.

PROCLUS:

Proclus was a neo-Platonist who was one of the last heads of the Academy of Athens. He advocated the Catharsis theory both for tragedy and comedy. But it is unknown whether he derived it from Aristotle. He may have obtained it from one of the Aristotelian commentators, since his mention is too brief to suggest that he developed it by himself. Proclus approves Plato's views regarding the rejection of both tragedy and comedy in the ideal state.

3.2.1.4 ROMAN COMMENTATORS:

CICERO:

The Romans were practical people and their theories of comedy naturally miss the subtleties we find in the Greek scholars. Cicero was a Roman scholar (106-43 B.C.) who had access to the various earlier works on the theory of comedy and to the teachings of post-classical Greek scholars who were in Rome at that time. It is evident that he had

studied the Platonic and Aristotelian writings on the same subject. Cicero was an orator and that is why he was primarily interested in the relation of comedy to rhetoric. However, the realism of his viewpoint is beyond suspicion. He dismissed psychological aspects of comedy as these are contained in the nature and origins of laughter. But he didnot dismiss the subjective explanation.

Cicero by-passes the psychological aspect of comedy and tries to find out the nature of the ridiculous. He says, 'The province of the ridiculous lies within the limits of ugliness, and a certain deformity; for those expressions are alone, or especially, ridiculous which disclose and represent some ugliness in a not unseemingly fashion'.⁵⁰

This is a realistic conception, because it establishes the objective nature of the comic subject-matter. According to Cicero comedy consisted of cheated expectations. Further Cicero distinguishes between wit and the ludicrous. He says that, 'comedy is an imitation of life, a mirror of custom, an image of truth'.⁵¹

Quintilian:

The Roman critic, Quintilian also dismissed the psychological aspect of comedy in passing, and proceeded to the laughter itself. However, he didnot make one notable observation on the topic of laughter. He merely noted down

many forms of the comedy occasioned by many things from tickling to witty utterances. He pointed out that the impulse to laughter is a tyrannical one which most persons utterly lack the power to resist.

Quintilian pointed out that 'everything is laughable which is obviously pretended'.⁵² Comedy is not a subjective affair. He believes that comedy doesn't lie entirely in words although words refer to "external circumstances". Words should not be taken subjectively merely because they are uttered by a speaker or orator, because 'the laughable is found in things and words'.⁵³

3.2.1.5 COMEDY IN TRANSITION:

TZETZES:

John Tzetzes tried to give a theory of comedy. It is merely a repetition of what the Greeks said of comedy, and therefore, it is unworthy of notice. Tzetzes seems to have been familiar with the Tractatus Coislinianus and with the Greek dramatic comedies. But he clearly brought out his views on the purpose of comedy and the comparison of comedy with tragedy. He says :

'Tragedy differs from comedy in that tragedy has a story, and a report of deeds that are past, although it represents them as taking place in the present, but comedy embraces the fictions of affairs of everyday life; and in that the aim of tragedy is to move the hearers to lamentation, while the aim of comedy is to move them to laughter'.⁵⁴

Tzetzes had brought out the essential nature of comedy. Comedy deals with the "affairs of everyday life", since only the present can be amusing. However, it is not merely the affairs of everyday life that preoccupy comedy, it is the "fictions of the affairs of everyday life".⁵⁵

James Feibleman adds : 'To lay bare the fictions of the affairs of everyday life, with a view to founding that life more firmly, may be taken as an excellent brief account of what the comedian tries to accomplish and what the purpose of comedy essentially is'.

GIAMBATTISTA VICO:

Giambattista Vico was an Italian social philosopher. He lived in the seventeenth century. However, like Tzetzes, he is a definite transition figure. Vico was influenced by the various inventions taking place in his times but he refused to throw overboard the valuable inheritance of the past. According to Vico humour has no place in social philosophy which bears strong moral considerations; and therefore, he looked down upon humour.

Vico has tried to give a sociological bearing to a psychological interpretation of laughter. He has added the old objective validity of the realistic theory of the comedy to the newer psychological theory. However, his theory doesn't have much validity. It is coloured by the subjective aspect since he confines comedy to second-rate minds who do not see things as a whole.

3.2.1.6 NOMINALISTIC THEORY:

HOBBS:

Thomas Hobbes was a sixteenth century scholar. He attempted to fit a theory of comedy. He stated his theory of comedy in the following words :

'There is a passion that hath no name, but the sign of it is that the distortion of the countenance which we call laughter, which is always joy : but what joy, what we think, and wherein we triumph when we laugh, is not hitherto declared by any. That it consisteth in wit, or as they call it, in the jest, experience confuteth : for men laugh at mischances and indecencies, wherein their lieth no wit nor jest at all. And foresmuch as the same thing is no more ridiculous when it groweth stale or usual, whatsoever it be that moveth together, it must be new and unexpected. Men laugh often, especially such as are greedy of applause from everything they do well, at their own actions performed never is little beyond their own expectations : as also at their own jests : and in this case it is manifest, that the passion of laughter proceedeth from a sudden conception of some ability in himself that laugheth. Also men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison therewith their own abilities are set off and illustrated. Also men laugh at jests, the wit whereof always consisteth in the elegant discovery and conveying to our minds some absurdity of nature : and in this case also the passion of laughter proceedeth from the sudden imagination of our own odds and eminency : for what is else the recommending of ourselves to our own good opinion, by comparison with another man's infirmity or absurdity. For when a jest is broken upon ourselves, or friends of whose dishonour we participate, we never laugh thereat. I may therefore, conclude, that the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from sudden conception of some eminency in our own formerly : for men laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour.'

From this theory of Hobbes, it becomes obvious that Hobbes explains comedy in terms of its subjective effect, which is laughter. He tried to give some objective status to theory of comedy. He believes that laughter is the sudden glory arising from a feeling of superiority over others. Laughter thus proved for him a psychological effect arising from an objective stimulation.

GOTTSCHED:

Gottsched was eighteenth century German critic who has offered his views on the theory of comedy. Gottsched was a metaphysician who turned his attention to the analysis of comedy. The critics who think that reason is entirely mental also think that comedy is entirely a matter of laughter. According to Gottsched comedy is 'a faculty for clear analysis, which could perceive and condemn anything irrational and exaggerated in the behaviour of man'.⁵⁷ Gottsched depends upon reason and believes the comedy consists in 'the mental comparison of eccentricity with a norm'.⁵⁸ Gottsched's analysis of comedy is keen and incisive and not very far from the truth. He understood very well that comedy is an affair involving the intellect and recognition of irrationality in behaviour. But here subjective prejudice becomes evident. In this concept the subject matter of comedy gets limited to the behaviour of man, thus greatly restricting the scope of comedy.

Gottsched always had rigid class distinctions in mind. He excluded the aristocracy from comedy partly for reasons of respect.⁵⁹ On the other hand, he thought comedy must never deal with the lowest classes for fear of losing its social standing; comedy was to be severely confined to the middle classes. According to Gottsched comedy was supposed to preserve the existing order of things. He looked upon comedy only as a moral force and it is his limitation. For Gottsched the subject of comedy is petty and ridiculous faults like absent-mindedness, quaint mannerisms, eccentric habits or mechanical tricks of behaviour etc.. Gottsched limited comedy to the middle class and took the aristocracy as the norm.

J.E. SCHLEGEL :

J.E.Schlegel was the eighteenth century German comic dramatist and critic. There is a vast difference between Gottsched's point of view and Schlegel's point of view because Gottsched looked to the past whereas Schlegel turned to the future. Schlegel thought that 'comedy must necessarily present an idealized version of reality and could never approximate to closely to life'.⁶⁰

Schlegel contradicted Gottsched's view regarding the moral effect of comedy. According to Schlegel the purpose

of comedy is not to present the faults of the people on the stage; but to teach the middle class how to be gentle folks with good manners. Schlegel wanted comedy to make its appeal to all classes and then he represents a broad view than Gottsched. However, he was prejudiced, like Gottsched, in favour of his own class, that is middle class.

KANT:

According to Kant, laughter is 'an affection arising from a strained expectation being suddenly reduced to nothing'.⁶¹ We are strained to expect a certain thing, and when we find that it is not there the result is laughter. This statement has a certain amount of truth. But the validity it has is not that of a theory of comedy but a theory of laughter. Thus it is wholly psychological and not objective and logical at all. Kant also believes that humour is not a certain frame of mind in which a topsy-turvy view of life is enjoyed. Generally most commentators have ignored the previous sentence in Kant's theory of laughter. It runs as 'something absurd must be present in whatever to raise a hearty convulsive laugh'. Thus Kant himself admits that there is something inherently absurd in the object which is responsible for raising a hearty subjective laugh. Thus laughter becomes a subjective response to an objective stimulus. Kant's theory of comedy can be objectively stated as comedy resides in the contrast between what is and what

ought to be. This realistic description clearly gives Kant's subjective effects as noted in 'sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing'.⁶²

SPENCER:

The theory of comedy derived by Herbert Spencer is very much the same to the theory of comedy by Kant. For Kant, laughter is the result of an expectation which of a sudden ends in nothing. For Spencer, laughter is the indication of an effort which suddenly encounters a void. Spencer carries his explanation from psychology to physiology. He states that, the nervous energy which makes preparation for a big thing when a little thing follows, is relieved by laughter. This is what Spencer called 'descending incongruity'.⁶³

Thus while Kant attributes comic laughter to psychological factors, Spencer attributes it to physiological factors. But it also requires an objective contrast between what is and what ought to be. Both the theories of Kant and Spencer are same but neither undertakes to discover what are the objective conditions which the subjective apprehension recognizes by the reaction of laughter.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER :

Arthur Schopenhauer's work is of tremendous importance to theory of comedy. Schopenhauer was influenced considerably in his philosophy both by Kant and Plato. He

tries to weld together Platonic realism and Kantian subjectivity. Schopenhauer says that 'the very incongruity of sensuous and abstract knowledge, on account of which the latter always merely approximates to the former, as mosaic approximates to painting, is the cause of... laughter'.⁶⁴ He further adds, 'The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity'.⁶⁵

James Feibleman observes : 'This bias in favour of subjectivity has prevented Schopenhauer from analysing the true nature of comedy'.⁶⁶ Schopenhauer's theory is vitiated by the influence of psychology. The ludicrous and consequently its effect laughter, gives pleasure. The face of laughter is very closely related to that of joy. Schopenhauer takes an anti-rationalistic pose and takes pleasure in the defeat of reason by primitive animal instincts. He starts with the comic impulse as an intellectual affair, but according to him, it gives pleasure through the recognition of its irrational nature which in itself is a contradictory statement.

Later on Schopenhauer becomes more realistic when he considers comedy as 'will to live' in which all troubles are solved in the end. He believes that comedy finally proves

to be 'an incitement to the continued assertion of will to live'.⁶⁷ He continues that 'it is true that comedy... must bring before our eyes suffering and adversity; but it presents it to us as passing, resolving itself into joy in general mixed with success, victory and hopes, which in the end preponderate... Thus it declares, in the result, that life as a whole is thoroughly good and especially is always amusing.⁶⁸

Thus comedy can be viewed as a call for the improvement of actually in the future. We see the influence of Plato and Kant in Schopenhauer's writings. It is very difficult indeed to free Plato from Kant. Nevertheless, Schopenhauer made desperate efforts to it. Thus we get something of value on the theory of comedy.

WILLIAM HAZLITT:

William Hazlitt, Schopenhauer's contemporary, was the English critic. He says, 'Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be.'⁶⁹

This statement is remarkably objective and valid. He further says, the ludicrous depends upon a contradiction between the object and our expectations. He also discusses incongruity and the contradiction between the object and our expectation about it. Hazlitt's point of view is subjective viewpoint exclusively.

3.2.1.7 MEREDITH AND THE GENTEEL TRADITION:

MEREDITH:

Meredith gives his ideas on the theory of comedy in his essay titled An Essay on Comedy.⁷⁰ Meredith was a nineteenth century novelist. He was sensitive, fearless and sincere. Through his novels he attacked the foibles of the contemporary society. He exposed the superficial and even unimportant weaknesses that he found before him and he thought himself something of a revolutionary in manners and morals.

Meredith says, 'The first requirement for true comedy is a staple society of cultivated women as well as men, to serve both as the subject matter of comedy and its appreciation'. This limitation is typical of the nineteenth century thinking. Meredith recognized the essential nature of comedy and its objective nature as well. He emphasised that comedy criticizes what is current and contemporary. But we cannot understand Meredith's idea of limiting comedy all to only cultivated men and women.

The chief merit of Meredith as a social reformer is his insistence upon equality between the sexes. He thought that our civilization and its progress will increase only when we treat women as equal with men. But it is very hard to see how it is related to the idea of comedy. We may fully agree with Meredith's statement that 'there never will be

civilization where comedy is not possible' but we cannot agree to his further opinion that both are entirely dependent upon 'some degree of social equality of the sexes'.⁷¹ The other important point of Meredith's analysis of comedy is that his recognition of the objectivity of comedy and its inherently rational appeal. According to Meredith the true purpose of comedy is to awaken 'thoughtful laughter'.⁷²

However, there are many weaknesses in Meredith's theory of comedy. It is narrow and superficial, touching only unimportant foibles of the most important people. Farce and other things have no place in his theory of comedy. Comedy is nothing very profound, it is certainly not very revolutionary. It doesn't bring about any radical changes. Meredith sees comedy as objective, as intellectual, and as critical, but consisting of a criticism merely of superficial manners, graces and foibles, not of anything which could shake the self-assurance of the established order of society.⁷³

C.C.EVERETT:

C.C.Everett's famous book is Poetry, Comedy and Duty, in which he tries to define the theory of comedy. He believes that 'comedy is created in the mind of the beholder'.⁷⁴ A certain sense of superiority in the beholder is an integral part of his theory. The persons in the comedy

are in the midst of the flux of actuality whereas the observer takes a god's eye view and is free from time and change. For Everett comedy is simply the recognition of incongruity; it is concerned with reasoning, intellect and is occupied with form. Everett's observation is penetrating and accounts for the intellectual nature of comedy. He says, 'In the comic we are taken into the world of surfaces. The forms about us mean nothing. All is empty. We are wholly free from the substance and are refreshed'.⁷⁵ His theory speaks of his genius but it is by no means sufficient.

3.2.2 MODERN THEORIES:

In this section we will discuss some of the modern theories of comedy. These modern theories can be grouped under five categories : 1) The Subjective - Metaphysical Theories. 2) The Subjective - Literary Theories. 3) The Psychoanalytic Theories 4) The Physiological - Theories 5) The Logical Theories.

3.2.2.1 THE SUBJECTIVE - METAPHYSICAL THEORIES:

BERGSON:

Henri Bergson is a French philosopher and author of a famous explanation of comedy. His famous treatise is Laughter, which outwardly seems so simple but is very difficult to understand. Bergson treats the theory of comedy from a subjective and metaphysical point of view. According

to Bergson comedy 'depends upon the recognition of something mechanical encrusted on the living'.⁷⁶ He further adds 'the comic doesn't exist outside the pale of what is strictly human'.⁷⁷ If we examine this statement closely, it becomes clear that it is not fully correct statement. He also states that the laughable is usually excited by a comparison between the human body and a machine. 'Comedy', says Bergson, 'is mistaking of the mechanical for the living'.⁷⁸ What causes laughter is the knowledge that time sweeps all before it. But all this is subjective because comedy, in the last analysis, is the imposition of the mechanical on the living and all humour derives itself from limitations of actuality.

Bergson is keenly aware of the rational and abstractive nature of comedy. He believes that comedy is devoted to generality while tragedy deals with what is more individual. Bergson observes rightly that 'comedy is far more like real life than drama is'.⁷⁹ He also emphasises the social connections of comedy, when he says, 'you would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others'.⁸⁰ Feibleman observes :

'The metaphysical basis on which all of Bergson's work rests, namely that time is, so to speak, the essence of the contract, that what fluxes is more real than what is saved from the flux, can apply with equal force to his own philosophy which he no doubt hopes to keep safe and inviolate from change'.⁸¹

When Bergson speaks of the mechanical encrusted on the living, it is with the human beings that he is mainly

concerned. Bergson neither writes in subjective terms, nor in objective terms. Thus his theory lacks both the objective basis of a realistic theory and the exact scientific information of a psychological theory.

CROCE:

Croce says 'The comic has been defined as the displeasure arising from the perception of a deformity immediately followed by a greater pleasure arising from the relaxation of our physical forces, which were strained in anticipation of a perception whose importance was foreseen.'⁸²

Croce's theory includes of all his classical predecessors from Plato to Kant. It is an example of the 'relief' theory of comedy. According to the relief theory, comedy is psychological and when bent up psychic forces are released the result in laughter.

However, Croce's theory of comedy is not without faults. The first demerit of this theory is that it takes for granted that comedy is an entirely psychological affair, and its second presupposition is that 'the perception of a deformity' is possible. Croce admits that the comic is psychological, and then states that laughter is its 'psychological equivalent'. Thus there is a ambivalence in his theory.

PROF. E. F. CARRITT:

Prof. E. F. Carritt was a disciple of Croce. He has attempted to set forth a theory of comedy. His theory confirms with the views of his master but he departs from Croce, in that he doesn't cast any final doubt upon his own theory. Carritt calls our attention to that the ludicrous is part of the theory of beauty and that comedy therefore is one of the subdivisions of aesthetics. According to Prof. Carrit, the ludicrous has its own theory of beauty. The comic situation also is, in a certain sense, a beautiful situation and appreciation of the comic implies aesthetic activity.

Carritt's chief contribution is his idealistic theory of the ludicrous. Carritt says, 'Our dissatisfaction with what is ugly or aesthetically incongruous can give rise to an aesthetic satisfaction only by being expressed'.⁸³ Prof. Carritt says, 'the ugly upsets us because of its incongruity, and where we can do nothing to render it more beautiful, when we are powerless to change it as we should like, we laugh'.⁸⁴ According to Prof. Carritt, the comic aspect of real life becomes comic and aesthetic through the exercise of human activity. The theory reveals its subjectivism in reducing the ludicrous to laughter and the recognition of the comic.

3.2.2.2 THE SUBJECTIVE - LITERARY THEORIES:

JANKELEVITCH:

Prof. Jankelevitch's work on irony has a bearing on the theory of the comic. Plato was concerned with the nature of comedy and with its effect on the observer. Jankelevitch seizes the aspect of its effect upon the observer, and assumes that the creation of irony or humour takes place in someone's mind. Recognition of impotence masquerading as power doesn't depend upon any human creator but merely on the capacity of observer to understand that secret. For Jankelevitch, irony is the child of leisure. The man who delights in irony and humour is freer. Irony is the voice of conscience. Comedy implies the dissatisfaction with the things as they are as against things as they ought to be.

MAX EASTMAN:

Max Eastman in his book, Enjoyment of Laughter states his theory of comedy. Like Bergson, Eastman accepts that to a certain extent comedy is an intellectual affair. But in comedy its logic lies nearer the surface than in tragedy. Eastman's theory is timidly set forth and for the most part lacks development. According to Eastman, 'things can be funny only when we are in fun' and that 'when we are in fun ... disagreeable things ... tend to acquire a pleasant

emotional flavour and provoke a laugh ⁸⁵ and that 'being in fun is a condition most natural to childhood' which 'grown-up' people retain in varying degrees.⁸⁶

Eastman's theory is neither profound nor new since it is the restatement of the 'play' theory. He has endeavoured not to do any pioneer thinking but rather to present a piece of painless knowledge. He has just couched it in the language of 'literary psychology'.

STEPHEN LEACOCK:

Leacock's two books, Humour : It's Theory and Technique and Humour and Humanity are very important from the point of view of the theory of comedy. Leacock's criticism comes from experience and is really perceptive. He criticizes the contemporary society and customs from a superficial point of view. He objects to the minor pretensions of the middle class, but at heart Leacock doesn't want to change anything fundamental. Since he doesn't like change, he has come to regard things as-they-are as more or less equal to things as they-ought-to-be.

Leacock defines humour as 'the contemplation and interpretation of our life' which finds its basis in the 'incongruity of life itself'.⁸⁷ In his later works he defines humour as 'kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life and the artistic expression thereof'.⁸⁸

V. K. KRISHNA MENON:

Psychologists have cast a strong spell upon the theory of comedy. V.K.Krishna Menon's famous book is A Theory of Laughter, in which he propoundes a theory of comedy. Nowadays the subject of what makes us laugh has become more prominent rather than the essence of the comic situation. According to Menon, laughter has something to do with the liberation of energy and this liberation of energy takes place inside the human body. Menon says, 'The cause of laughter is more intimately connected with ourselves, the subject, than with the object, and laughter has to be explained subjectively rather than objectively'.⁸⁹

Menon arrives at his psychological conclusions from physiological premises which are as follows :

1. Laughter is a demobilization of force;
2. these forces are psycho-physical, instinctive;
3. in some elementary form laughter is common to all animals; and
4. its biological value lies in providing the alternative to repression and its attendant complications.⁹⁰

Thus Menon starts with the theoretical foundations of physiology and psychology and arrives at a completely subjective view of humour which consists in laughter and that laughter has a physiological explanation. Menon compares

his theory with other theories and it is here he begins to weaken a little. His explanation of laughter is undecipherable when confronted with actual instances of comedy and laughter drawn from the great comedians of literature. In discussing the nature of humour, even Menon has to fall back upon the theory of incongruity. Menon is deeply influenced by Bergson's theory of laughter. He says, 'We may, from the intellectual point of view, say that humour is a sense of incongruous suggested by an object in its nature and relation to other things as known to us'.⁹¹

Menon's theory of comedy is not so significant since it is not sufficiently original. Yet Menon is noteworthy because he begins with the orthodox subjective theory and arrives at an objective viewpoint of theory of laughter .

SAMUEL S. SEWARD:

In his book, The Paradox of the Ludicrous, Seward gives his subjective theory of comedy which tries to base itself upon the spirit of play. His theory explains the psychological origins of the ludicrous. He observes :

The process as a whole may be thought of as one of building up, of enriching the meaning of the playful spirit, of adding to its resources for pleasure. And now when the spirit is thus prepared, we stumble across some incongruous spectacle that brings us vivid associations, direct or indirect, with this store-up sense of playfulness. The playful mood thus is reinvited,

and it dominates our feelings as we regard the incongruous spectacle. This feeling, this emotional attitude accompanying observation, is not the recollected pleasure of any definite experience, but a vaguer sense that there is matter here inviting a playful attitude. Though this attitude was cultivated in an active pursuit of playful pleasure, it has now become essentially passive, contemplation steeped in pleased emotional consciousness. The charm of the subjective mood has transferred itself to objective spectacle. The original active mood was felt as a mood of fun; the spectacle that awakens the mood is now felt to be funny. In that transference our sense of the ludicrous is born.⁹²

We can make a lot of comments on this theory of comedy but the rich comment by James Feibleman would be enough. He says, 'Professor Seward has his own little incongruity theory. Our mood is said to be one of fun, because when playful in spirit we ran, or rather stumbled, across some incongruous spectacle. This event caused us to transfer the fun to the incongruous spectacle, which is now felt to be funny. This is the new incongruity - and it was this transference which caused our sense of the ludicrous to be born.'⁹³.

J.C.GREGORY:

J.C.Gregory's book, The Nature of Laughter is an important one in which he discusses the theory of comedy from a subjective point of view. Comedy is a matter of laughter, and laughter results from some physiological and psychological events that take place in the body. Gregory's book is a mine of quotations. He tries to define humour

although no small task - all varieties of humour. His analysis of laughter comes to :

'The happy convulsion of laughter occurs in a situation of relief. It collapses the laughter into a stationary exercise of his own body who is convulsively withdrawn from intervention in the active affairs of life. It makes the sudden relaxation of unrequired effort, and its repetitive series of respiratory explosions or tremulation of body, more vigorously or more quietly, rehearses an original, situation in which a call upon effort is sharply called off. The original, more physical situation of the laughter is too plainly exposed in the motions of his body to be mistaken. As a spring firmly pressed against an obstacle vibrates when the obstacle is withdrawn, so the body shakes to an fro, with gaps in its breathing, in tremulous laughter, when its effort suddenly relaxes into relief is the essential characteristic of laughter as it is revealed in its characteristically bodily expression. Laughter is a diversion - a pleasant expenditure upon the body of energy released from other activities.⁹⁴

Gregory's analysis of laughter is correct and has been made entirely at the level of common sense. In his theory we get a notion of 'relief'. This is the classic relief theory. The other observations are common. It is neither abstractive nor highly penetrating. Throughout his work Gregory refers to Freud. However, Gregory has committed a mistake in not relating the objective nature of comedy to the subjective nature of laughter.

3.2.2.3 THE PSYCHOANALITIC THEORIES:

SIGMUND FREUD:

Sigmund Freud was the follower of German Lipps who had given an explanation of laughter as the release of

nervous energy following a disappointed expectation. According to Lipps the occasion of the comic is the exposure of pettiness under the imposing front of seeming grandeur.⁹⁵

Freud, in the outset, admits that he is taking the start in the theory of wit from Lipp's own theory. His theory of the comic centres round the 'essentially subjective side of the comic.'⁹⁶ The release of unconscious psychic forces produces the pleasure and the comic relief. Freud says, 'wit.... is an activity whose purpose is to desire pleasure - be it intellectual or otherwise - from the psychic processes.'⁹⁷

Wit depends upon the condensation of meaning and Freud lists down two kinds of wits - 'word-wit', or wit resulting from plays on the means of expression of ideas, and 'thought-wit,' or plays on ideas themselves. The character of wit depends upon the way we express things. e.g. play on words, spoken jokes, funny gestures etc.. Wit removes inhibitions and sets free the areas of pleasure. Freud confirms, 'The main character of wit-making is to set free pleasure by removing inhibitions'.⁹⁸

The way in which Freud defines wit is nothing but the subjective side of the comic. However, Freud's theory cannot adequately explain the instance of objective comedy. He even tries to explain in terms of subjectivity only, why things other than human can also create comedy. He adopts

Lipp's definition of wit as 'the subjective side of the comic',⁹⁹ Later on Freud shows the influence of Bergson on him when he says, 'We laugh because we compare the motions in others with those which we ourselves should produce if we were in their place'.¹⁰⁰ 'We laugh when we admit to ourselves that had we been placed in the same situation, we should have done the same things'.¹⁰¹ Freud compares the wit and the comic and states that 'wit is made, while the comical is found; it is found first of all in persons, and only later by transference may be seen also in objects, situations and the like'.¹⁰²

According to Freud humour is a psychological process and the subjective mechanics give rise to communicated humour. He says that 'Wit-making is inseparably connected with the desire to impart it'.¹⁰³

Thus Freud catches the logical and critical nature of wit and the comic in general. He demonstrates revolutionary nature of wit by showing how it can furnish the criticism of current customs and institutions. These suggestions indicate an insight into the true meaning of comedy.

3.2.2.4 THE PHYSIOLOGICAL THEORIES:

All schools of comedy agree that laughter is a psychological phenomenon. The only point of disagreement is

whether laughter and comedy are one or the same or whether laughter is the subjective reaction to an objective comedy. Laughter is an event which takes place at a number of levels. Laughter is said to be the psychological release of pent-up emotions. However laughter can be examined at physiological level also. An effort has been made to study the physiological mechanism of laughter by such critics like Dumas, Crile and Bechterev.

DUMAS:

Dumas is a French psychologist who states that laughter is a release of nervous energy occasioned by some contrast, and reflected in the movement of the facial muscles. According to Dumas, fifteen facial muscles are active in the process of laughing. But he cannot account for why should we express feeling of joy only by working the muscles of face. He says that nervous energy is released through laughter when we perceive a sudden contrast or contradiction.

BECHTEREV:

The Russian physiologist, Bechterev is more concerned with reflexology, the study of conditioned reflexes, than with the investigation of laughter. He relates laughter to certain centres of the brain which 'can show symptoms of excitation through the mere absence of inhibition from the cerebral cortex'.¹⁰⁴

Dr. GEORGE CRILE:

Dr. Crile offers a variety of the familiar surplus-energy or letting-off steam theory of laughter.¹⁰⁵ According to Dr. Crile, 'everyone of the causes of laughter, when analysed, resolves itself into a stimulation to motor activity of some kind'.¹⁰⁶ Laughter follows when stimulated motor activity is checked and the energy has no other way of escape. In a way Dr. Crile offers the 'relief' theory.

James Feibleman sums up as follows : Laughter is psychological as well as physiological, and will always be constituted of more than the innervation of certain facial muscles. The inference, international or otherwise, always seems to be that laughter is accounted for when we understand the physiological processes which accompany it'.¹⁰⁷

3.2.2.5 THE LOGICAL THEORIES:

DUDLEY ZUVER:

In his famous book, Salvation, by Laughter, Zuver considers comedy and religion jointly. Comedy and church would make strange bed-fellows. The prophets and their followers have usually been assumed to be serious. Zuver says, 'My thesis... is that there exists a ... gulf... between the two worlds, both of which man inhabits. The ideal fails of embodiment, yet the real cannot be permitted a final

or decisive word. In our intercourse with environment we listen to two voices which are discordant and seldom speak in unison'.¹⁰⁸ Thus there is a wide gap between the actual world and the ideal world. To accept this requires a quality of meditation, which, in some respect, is a sense of humour. He looks upon humour as a mediator between the real and the ideal. According to Zuver mercy of God is the 'manifestation of the comic spirit'.¹⁰⁹ God has a sense of humour and God does this mediating between the real and the ideal.

Thus Zuver is not trying to define comedy here, but to highlight one of its important functions. In a way Zuver leads his arguments to a point of absurdity when he refers back the question of humour of God.

ROBERT GRAVES:

Robert Graves was basically a novelist. He has written a little amusing book on the nature of humour entitled Mrs. Fisher or The Future of Humour. There he tries to advance his theory of comedy. For him, humour is, first of all, a personal affair, and diffusion and generalizing make it trite. He defines humour as 'Humour is the faculty of seeing apparently incongruous elements as a part of a scheme for supra-logical necessity. Humour is not of the Gods who have... only the most rudimentary sense of the ridiculous, but of the Fates, and of this Necessity, who is, according to the Greek theologian at least, above all the Gods'.¹¹⁰

Here Graves also, just as Zuver, tries to see humour as the mediator between the ideal and the real, between the logical order and actuality, between things as they ought to be and things as they are. Graves sees the ridiculous as a lower form of humour, and humour as a form of the endorsement of logic.

3.3 TRAGEDY AND COMEDY:

There are two distinct types of drama : Tragedy and Comedy. We often refer to the very famous book, Poetics, written by Aristotle in which he distinguishes between the Tragedy and the Comedy. According to Aristotle, Tragedy is 'an imitation of an action that is serious, complete in itself, and possessing a certain magnitude; in language that gives delight appropriate to each portion of the work; in the form of drama, not of narrative; through pity and fear accomplishing its Katharsis of such emotions.'¹¹¹ He defines Comedy as 'an imitation of persons of an inferior moral bent... It consists in some blunder or ugliness that doesn't cause pain or disaster an obvious example being the comic mask which is ugly and distorted but not painful'.¹¹²

Nowadays the popular ideas which define Tragedy and Comedy are very simple. The play which ends happily is Comedy and on the other hand the play which ends with a death of hero or heroine is considered as Tragedy. But these definitions cannot account for the end of the plays like

Eliot's The Cocktail Party or Ibsen's An Enemy of the People, since they are insufficient in themselves. A Tragedy may have some patches of comic scenes and likewise a Comedy may have pathetic scenes here and there. That is why writers like Moulton feel that the terms like Comedy and Tragedy have outlived their utility. He says :

'These terms were naturally used in Greek literature, where the distinction they imply between sombre and amusing tones described two wholly separate forms of literature. But seeing that a main feature of Romantic Drama is the mixture of tones, a continued interchange between grave and gay in the same drama and even in the same scene, the continued use of tragedy and comedy is most awkward and is a relic of the discarded critical temperament which applied to all literature the single standpoint of the ancient classical literature. ¹¹³

But this doesn't mean that we should not know the two distinct types of Drama - Tragedy and Comedy. A number of modern plays lie on the undefinable borderline of Tragedy and Comedy, and tell us that these forms have no longer remained pure; Yet there are also a number of plays which are clearly tragedies or comedies and hence the terms 'Tragedy' and 'Comedy' maintain their validity even now. As Thorndike says :

'The distinction of Comedy as separated from Tragedy is not of great service in modern drama, still it is a distinction that in some degree has continued to be recognized and it is not without force today'. ¹¹⁴

The Roman critic in transitional period, John Tzetzes, differentiates Comedy and Tragedy as :

'Tragedy differs from Comedy in that Tragedy has a story, and report of deeds that are past, although it represents them as taking place in the present, but Comedy embraces the fictions of affairs of everyday life; in that the aim of Tragedy is to move the people to lamentation, while the aim of comedy is to move them to laughter'.¹¹⁵

The traditional distinction between Tragedy and Comedy is that Tragedy has a sad ending and a Comedy a happy ending. For dramatic purposes it means that Tragedy ends at least with one death and Comedy at least with one marriage. All in all the classifications of literature, the tone of voice, the general mode of thought, the emotional approach to the subject is more important than the nature of the end. Aristotle said that Tragedy purged our minds by means of pity and terror; Moliere implied that the function of Comedy was to make decent folk laugh. These definitions are more satisfactory. Tragedy treats life more seriously and with a sense of importance but also of its difficulties; it deals with conflict; dilemma and suffering. Comedy is lighthearted and has often a better sense of proportion from the common point of view, but usually shallower. Boulton Further observes :

'The diction of Tragedy is more dignified, and poetic tragedy is much commoner than poetic comedy. In Tragedy the attitude to life and

especially to the problems of personal relationship is more austere and more responsible. There is almost continuous heightening of emotions from beginning to the end of the play, whereas in Comedy, though there may be tension, it is not continuous and we do not expect anything serious to happen.¹¹⁶

Tragedy reminds us that the earliest function of drama was magical and religious. Therefore, we find in Tragedy people such as kings, statesmen or at least the rich and cultured. The catastrophe of Tragedy affects the whole community. On the other hand, we find ordinary men and women with their petty problems in Comedy. The middle class provides most of the social environment for Comedy.

The observations regarding the distinction between Tragedy and Comedy made by Prof. J.L. Styan are worth-mentioning here. He observes :

'Tragedy tends to exalt man as an individual, by exploring his place in a world inhabited by forceful forces, and by showing how important he can be in the face of insuperable odds. Comedy tends to see man as a social animal, and to belittle his dignity by making him one of a crowd. Tragedy tends to punish man with a punishment out of all proportion to his sin, but only after making us feel that he is being crucified for sins that are ours too. Comedy gently mocks him for his ultimate unimportance, but only after we have shared a little of his humiliation. Tragedy encourages us to be passionate, Comedy usually seeks to bring the intellect into play'.¹¹⁷

James Feibleman in his book, In Praise of Comedy, has dealt in detail to bring out the distinction between Tragedy and Comedy. He brings out the points of difference as

well as similarity between Tragedy and Comedy. He says :

'There is nothing which doesn't have its tragic as well as its comic aspect. Comedy and Tragedy are both members of the same class of objects, and are known to bear some close relation to each other'.¹¹⁸

Comedy is defined as the indirect affirmation of the logical order by means of derogation of the limited order of actuality. Tragedy, by setting over against this definition of Comedy, may be described as the direct affirmation of the formal logical order by means of the approval of the positive content of actuality. Further Feibleman provides many points of contrasts between Comedy and Tragedy which explain them in a more thorough manner. He writes :

'Comedy is an intellectual affair, and deals chiefly with logic. Tragedy is an emotional affair, and deals chiefly with value. Comedy is negative; it is a criticism of limitations and an unwillingness to accept them. Tragedy is positive, it is an uncritical acceptance of the positive content of that which is delimited. Since Comedy deals with the limitations of actual situations and Tragedy with their positive content, Comedy must ridicule and Tragedy must endorse. Comedy affirms the direction towards infinite value insisting upon the absurdly final claims of finite things and events. Tragedy tries to serve this same purpose but through a somewhat different method. Tragedy also affirms the direction towards infinite value... and positive stuff which Tragedy affirms is greater than Comedy which can affirm it only by denying its limitations'.¹¹⁹

Comedy is, according to Feibleman, a more revolutionary affair by its very nature than Tragedy. In

Tragedy, the positive aspect of actuality always yields a glimpse of infinite value. Thus Tragedy leads to a state of contentment with the actual world just as it is found. On the other hand, Comedy is occupied with the termini of things and events i.e. it is occupied with their positive content. Comedy leads to dissatisfaction and the overthrow of all reigning theories and practices in favour of those less limited. It is thus works against customs and institutions, and hence it is revolutionary.

Feibleman agrees with Bergson's view that 'Comedy bears a closer resemblance to 'real life' than does Tragedy. According to Feibleman it is Comedy which wears the common dress.¹²⁰ Comedy criticizes the finite for not being infinite. It witness the limitations of actuality, just as Tragedy witnesses the fragmentary exemplifications of the logical order. He says :

'Tragedy affirms continuity by showing how it exists in every actual thing and event. Tragedy shows the worth of every actual, down to the most ephemeral, so is always close to the permanent value of the worship. Comedy comes to the same affirmation, but inversely and by indirection, just as one might affirm beauty by criticizing the ugly. Comedy catches the principle of unity in every finite thing; Tragedy attends to the principle of infinity'.¹²¹

3.4 COMEDY AND FARCE:

Cassells's dictionary defines Farce as 'a short dramatic work in which the action is trivial and the sole

purpose is to excite mirth'.¹²² Farce aims at producing laughter by exaggerated effects of various kinds. Farce doesn't have psychological depth. In Farce, characterization and wit are less important than a rapid succession of amusing situations. Generally these situations are of the most exaggerated and impossible kind and they are dependent not on clever plot-construction, but upon the coarse and rudest of impossible incongruities.

The book published by Open University titled Comedy gives perhaps the best distinction between Farce and Comedy. It observes :

'It has been often remarked that farce stands in the same relation to comedy as melodrama does to tragedy : it is cruder, shallower, more artificial. Unlike comedy, farce rarely engages our concern for its characters ... The staple feature of farce is its pace : plausibility of plot and depth of characterization are less important than the multiplicity of confusions and the rapidity with which incident follows incident. The world of Farce, than that of Comedy, is contorted, bizzare, extravagant. What ultimately distinguished Farce from Comedy is that the bias of the former is towards the mechanical, the reduction of humans to automata, while the later is always finally rooted in the observation and presentation of recognizably human figures'.¹²³

In Farce, there is abundance of surprises, coincidences and exaggerations. Character is deliberately sacrificed to situation. Horseplay rouses our laughter in them more than the comic characters. The situations in Farce are not subtle and they lack piognancy and amusement

extracted from these situations depends upon the physical characteristics of the situation itself. Farce has been called 'Custard-pie Comedy' because it often uses such purely material absurdities as people throwing custard pies or other messy things at each other's head.¹²⁴

L. J. Potts defines Farce as 'physical sensationalism of a ludicrous kind, bearing the same relationship to Comedy as melodrama bears to tragedy'. For Potts, Farce is a comedy with the meaning left out. The main difference between Comedy and Farce is that Farce aims at producing mirth and there mirth is means to an end. Farce is not Comedy but Comedy can contain Farce. Farce confines itself to merely physical situations because its only purpose is to excite mirth. For example, the fantasy of a man with a donkey's head on him. According to Potts it is useless to draw out the distinction between Comedy and Farce because everything depends on the response of the reader or spectator. Potts says :

'In practice one can never say with confidence 'this is Comedy; that is farce'. If I think a 'Comedy' lacks significance, however funny its separate episodes may be, I call it a Farce, if I can see in it a significance of the kind indicated in this book I call it Comedy'.¹²⁵

Therefore, to some The Importance of Being Earnest is a good Comedy but for some it is a Farce. Charles Dickens has been described as the greatest humourist of the nineteenth century but Potts disagrees with this since it

appears to him that Dickens have the arbitrariness of Farce and strong vein of sentimentality and sometimes, satire. According to Potts the presence of Farcical episodes in real Comedy makes it very difficult to distinguish between Comedy and Farce. For example, Twelfth Night by Shakespeare. In this play the case of mistaken identities is a traditional device derived from late Greek Comedy, but it is more farcical rather than comic.

Farce has relatively low artistic level, but good Farce, like good melodrama, may show a high standard of slick production. Good Farce is usually nearer to the Comedy of errors than to the other kinds of Comedy. The example of good Farces are Charley's Aunt by Brandon Thomas, Miss In Her Teens by Garrick and The Deuce Is In Him by Colman. The examples of good twentieth century Farces are Terence Rattigan's French Without Tears and Sean O'Casey's The End of the Beginning.

3.5 COMEDY AND SATIRE:

According to L. J. Potts it is difficult to draw the distinction between Comedy and Satire because they are incompatible.¹²⁶ He states that Satire is not a clearly defined species of literature. It originated in formless writing and the word means 'hotch-potch'. The Latin Satura took at least two distinct forms; the more persistent was no more than an essay in verse. Quite early in history, it was

used largely for invective, and from this historical accident the modern sense of the word is derived.

Nicoll, while pointing out the difference between Satire and Comedy makes some important observations. According to Nicoll, the true comedian appeals nearly always to the feelings but the satirist appeals to the intellect. The Satirist presents to the reader a series of pictures addressed to the reason. He doesn't call upon us to sympathize with anything or to feel emotions of any kind. The satirist attacks vice simply because of its folly. His real object is to ridicule follies. Nicoll observes :

'The division between Satire and Comedy is excessively slight. Satire may be so mild that it can barely be detected under its mask of laughter, for Satire fades in some of its forms imperceptible into both wit and humour. Still, the fact remains that we really do not laugh at the satirical as such; we laugh at the purely comic qualities with which it is accompanied or in which it is enclosed. Thus purest of Comedy, however, usually rules satire in any form out of its province',¹²⁷

The Satire becomes subjective in standpoint. The Comedy tries to highlight the emotional aspect and is capable of mental detachment. The satirist is usually baffled and they are angry, bitter or disappointed men. They compare life as it is with the life they would have it to be. They are unable to reconcile between the two and hence they attack which is the less dear to them. Comedy accepts life and human nature with a light heart; as in A Midsummer Night's Dream,

sometimes rather sadly as in Don Quixote, but always with the good sense that comes from the clear vision and understanding. On the other hand, Satire doesn't accept it, it rejects and aims at destruction. L. J. Potts comments :

'Comedy and Satire cannot in the last analysis be reconciled. The comic writer need not spare anything in nature, but he must not fall out with Nature herself. The satirist writes only from his own feelings; the comic writer must partly go outside his own feelings, to a perception of nature. Their techniques are in part interchangeable; but in idea they conflict. The distinction between them has something in common with the distinction between madness and sanity'.¹²⁸

The famous example of the twentieth century satiric drama is Shaw's The Philanderer which is a satire on doctors.

3.6 TYPES OF COMEDY:

A dramatist doesn't set out to write a particular type of Comedy. In fact a number of elements go to make a Comedy what it is. There are no hard and fast borderlines of types. And yet certain dominant types have emerged in the field of comic plays. There are many types of comic productivity and distinctions can be carefully made to classify them. We will discuss these types of comic plays as follows.

3.6.1 Romantic Comedy:

The Romantic Comedy or the Comedy of Romance is often used to describe the type of Comedy which Shakespeare

used. This is the type of play which imaginatively creates an idyllic world replete with young lovers, stern but ultimately understanding parents, a pleasant natural setting and imaginative language. Young lovers, freshness of youth, setting in the heart of exotic forests, action and speeches that are unrealistic, glamour of courts, magnificence and supernatural atmosphere - all these elements go to make a Romantic Comedy. Shakespeare's As You Like It and A Midsummer Night's Dream are the best examples of Romantic Comedy.

William Shakespeare streamlined this type of Comedy and brought it to a level of sophisticated perfection using kindly and good-natured fun, romantic love of young lovers, sometimes purely farcical characters and scenes, supernatural creatures like fairies behaving just like human beings and the triangular love conflicts with everything ending with marriage bells. Sometimes songs, masques and dances were introduced in order to enhance the entertainment value of such Comedies.

The Romantic Comedy takes us in the world of dreams where nothing is impossible. There is a perfect blend of the fanciful and the real. There is a perfect balance between idealism and reality. Nicoll says, 'Shakespeare, with the instinctive artistic taste, has made Italy the spiritual home of his comic characters'.¹²⁹ The Romantic Comedy borrows ecstatic abandonment of Aristophanes, hilarious

merriment of Plautus, sophisticated sentimentalism of Terence and crude humour of the mediaeval farce. In Romantic Comedy, the objective and the subjective elements are united artistically. There is laughter but it is much intellectual. The clowns of Romantic Comedy speak wisely and wisemen act like fools.

Nearly all Romantic Comedies take place in the background of pastoral settings. They are not confined to the places in cities. As Nicoll observes :

'Nearly all are set in national surroundings - a wood near Athens for A Midsummer Night's Dream, a sea-coast town with flowering gardens for Twelfth Night, orchards and their surroundings for Much Ado About Nothing, the Forest of Arden for As You Like It. There is not a hint in them of those localities so dear to later comic dramatists - 'Pall Mall' or 'St James Park'. The scene, then is peculiar in that it is of nature as opposed to the city, and in that it is set, not in the surroundings of English country life, but in the surroundings of the country life in some land remote in distance or time'.¹²⁹

Although some of the characters of Romantic Comedy have slightly more romantic colouring than others, the majority of the characters are drawn realistically. The characters generally reflect the manners and types of Elizabethan England. Some of the characters are so funny that we cannot forget them. As Nicoll puts it, 'Claudios and Dogberries, Lysanders and Bottoms, are as common today, and everywhere as they were in Shakespeare's time'.¹³⁰

The methods by which the Romantic Comedy provides unified effect are the general subduing of high tones and the utilization of humour rather than of wit. It doesn't mean that their plays are minus wit. Sometimes they use wit but it is mellowed and chastened and it is never allowed free play. If wit begins to become sparkling, then a sudden turn is taken to make a strong appeal to feelings. All Romantic plays are full of emotions and feelings. All the Comedies of Romance are full of appeals to our meditative faculties and to our emotions. In Romantic Comedies the element of humour is so prominent that it would be more correct to style this drama as the Comedy of Humour.

3.6.2 COMEDY OF HUMOURS (Comedy of Satire):

Comedy of Humours is a typical type of comedy which was first introduced by Ben Jonson. It is a term applied especially to the type of comic drama written by Ben Jonson and John Fletcher, where 'humour' is a personification of some 'individual passion or tendency'. But before we discuss the Comedy of Humours, it is desirable to know the classical theory of humour.

In the days of Renaissance, 'Humour' was a psychological term. The original meaning of the word 'humour' is liquid. According to the Greek and Latin medical theory the human body possesses four humours or liquids - phlegm,

sanguine, choleric and melancholy. The predominance of any one of these four humours in the body decides the temperament of the person concerned. Thus the preponderance of phlegm would mean calm temperament; sanguine would mean ardent temperament; choleric people are easily angered and melancholy would imply depressive temperament. In the 16th century the meaning of 'humour' came to be recognized as man's characteristic disposition.

In Ben Jonson's comedies, each person is regarded as motivated by a preponderent humour, or a characteristic bias or eccentricity of disposition. Jonson believed that he could get maximum humour and satire out of a situation if he showed human beings dominated by humours or dominant traits of character. Jonson enunciated this in his plays Every Man out of His Humour and Every Man in his Humour. In his play Every Man out of His Humour, we are introduced to a set of eccentrics and all the 'humours' are based on genuine traits of character, and not on the customs and ways of mankind. The comic of Every Man in His Humour rises out of the follies of Bobadil, of Matthew, of Cob, of Clement, and not out of the manners of the class. He presents the gullibility of fools and the cunning of sharpers in his play The Alchemist and in Volpone he presents the natural greeds of all types of men. In other words, Jonson's characters are stock characters, which are, in fact, not uncommon in the comic plays of these days. The boastful soldier, the greedy merchant, the hard-

headed swindler, the gullible fool - all these are not exactly new. Pointing out the greatness of Jonson, Nicoll writes :

'Jonson's great merit lies in the fact, not that he popularized the ancient comedy of 'humours', not that he infused into English Literature the spirit of Terence and of Plautus, or he used Terence as an inspiration for dramatic effect, but that he drew comedy to real life, presenting the classes and foibles of contemporary London at a time when there was a fear of comedy's vanishing altogether into those fantastic and impossible realms of make-believe which had been popularized by Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher'.¹³¹

The dramatists of the Comedy of Manners depicted in their plays the manners and habits of their time. They focussed people's home life as well as street life. Even the various types of fashions, costumes, the life of inns and different types of foods are depicted. They delineated the life of people full of oaths, conversations and aspirations.

The Comedy of Humours is full of ambivalent elements. They are highly exaggerated and therefore, unrealistic characters move about in highly realistic atmosphere. The Comedy of 'Humours' habitually disregards humour. It depends occasionally on wit, but more on satire. This lack of humour in the so-called Comedy of 'Humours' marks one of the many contradictions in our literary nomenclature. Therefore, it would be much safer to style Jonson's comedy as the Comedy of Realism or the Comedy of Satire.

3.6.3 THE COMEDY OF MANNERS (Comedy of Wit):

The Comedy of Manners is also known as the Comedy of Restoration period. During the reign of Cromwell theatres were closed. Very simple ugly dress, round clean shaven heads and dark clothes were the order of the day. Natural instincts were suppressed ruthlessly. Every act was concerned with the morality. So people were tired of leading what was considered chaste and pious life. The coming of Charles II to the throne brought some exuberance in English life. The Puritanic upsurge of austerity ended. Charles II brought French manners and morals along with him. In his court witty remarks and flippancy passed for cultural sophistication and the fashions of dress and manners were considered all important in the aristocratic gay, carefree and immoral upper-class society.

According to A.F.Scott, 'Comedy of Manners' originated in France with Moliere's Les Precieuses Ridicules in 1658, and Moliere himself defined it when he said, 'correction of social absurdities must at all times be the matter of true comedy'.¹³² The title given to this type of drama - the Comedy of Manners is derived from the manners, the social follies and conventions, presented in the plays of the time. But more than that the word 'manner' has a deeper significance. Manners may mean simply the ways of men. It may mean the conventions of an artificial society, and it may

mean something brilliant about men and women, not a 'humour' derived from natural idiosyncrasy, but a grace habit of refined culture.

The matter and the characters of the Restoration Comedy differ from the matter and characters of the Comedy of Humours. However, there are some similarities. For example, not a single one of the true Restoration Comedies of Manners is set out of the bounds of London. They clung firmly to the circle of London society. Like Jonsonian Comedy, satire was an integral part of the Comedy of Manners. However, this satire was markedly different. It didn't satirize the eccentric individuals, but the follies and foibles of the aristocratic class. Moreover, the Comedy of Manners did not confine itself to satire only, but used the wit powerfully. Jonson's satire was crude and came as heavy blows but the satire of the Comedy of Manners was airy and delicate and depended chiefly upon the incongruity between two ideas or an idea and an object.

The scene of Comedies of Manners written during the Restoration period is always London. Satire and witty remarks keep the audience constantly laughing. Life in such plays consisted of parties, evening walks and love intrigues. In Restoration times it was thought foolish to be virtuous. Boorish manners and tomfoolery was the order of the day. Characters of these plays were people of leisure spending

their time on fashions and their sole aim was to pass as witty gentleman and ladies. They engaged in obscene jokes. Feeling and morality have no place in them. These comedies are full of episodes of intrigue, deception and tricks. A gallant uses a trick to marry an heiress, or to fool a husband. These are followed by counter tricks and their success or failure was the main concern of the plot of the play.

Critics lay a charge of indecency against the Comedy of Manners. There arises a question of morality in such comedies. It was this occasional indecency of the Restoration Comedy which led Jeremy Collier to write a scathing pamphlet entitled Short View of Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage. To modern people this indecency may be simply harmless but in the seventeenth century, Collier's denunciation against the immorality of the comedies of his days went home to the public. It appeared as if the Comedy of Manners had the monopoly of immorality in those days.

Today, it appears that too much fuss has been made by the critics about the immorality of these plays. It is needless to take these plays seriously. They are just the light moments of pleasure distraction. They also have some social interest in the sense that they paint a particular section of that society. The playwrights have pictured the

aristocratic society and it is the follies and affectations of such society which are held up to ridicule. The comic writer was the mouthpiece of the society and his plays contained the indecent and coarse jokes of that society.

Despite its treatment of gay and carefree life of aristocratic people, the Comedy of Manners is essentially intellectual. It doesn't play upon our feelings but appeals primarily to our reason. It has brilliant dialogues in which the best possibilities of English language have been explored fully. It is witty, ingenuous and purely refined. It's wit is purely intellectual and appeals to our mind. This intellectual quality in the works of Etherage and of Congreve renders their indecencies and vulgarities comparatively harmless. The other important observation about the Comedy of Manners is that it reflects real life, but it is a real life, artificilized. Further it is airier, more spiritual treatment of real life.

The most notable playwrights of the Comedy of Manners are William Wycherly and Congreve. The Way of the World by Congreve and The Country Wife and The Plain Dealer by Wycherly are the famous examples of the Comedy of Manners.

3.6.4 THE GENTEEL COMEDY:

The Comedy of Manners, with the passing off the aristocratic society, virtually ended in the early eighteenth

century. However, it tried to endure in an altered form. In its original shape it was killed by the advent of sentimentalism, but it continued in the guise of what was called in the eighteenth century Genteel Comedy. This Genteel Comedy of manners adapted to the less natural society of the century that followed that of Charles II. The term 'Genteel Comedy' was first used by Addison and it remained a vague and obscure for a long time. According to Nicoll, 'It is explained nowhere more clearly than in the anonymous introduction to the third volume of The British Modern Drama (1811).¹³³ There, the play written by Cibber, The Careless Husband, is described as :

'The first genteel comedy upon the English stage, and the precursor of a numerous class of plays, which didnot, as formerly, represent the operation of one single passion rushing with impetuosity to the accomplishments of its desires. It is not the natural, but the artificial state of man, which this species of drama presents; exhibiting characters not acting under the predominance of natural feeling, but warped from there genuine bent by the habits, rules and ceremonies of high life'.¹³⁴

The age of Anne and the later age of mid-eighteenth century were both sentimental and less natural than the age of Charles. Intellectuality reigned high and there were marks of vast changes on society and the theatre, following the Revolution of 1688. The age was more effeminate, and affectations ruled the life of the upper-class society. The Genteel Comedy treats these affectations.

There was no place for moral indecencies. In the Genteel Comedy, there was intrigue, but it was highly sentimentalized. For example, Suspicious Husband written by Hoadly is full of notes of sentimentality. The coarser manners were toned down to an atmosphere of decorum. The Genteel Comedy showed its prime concern for morality. There was no wit at all. There was laughter, but it didn't arise out of the playful fancies and highly intellectual men, but out of the affectations of this mannerized society. There was fine airs and highly artificial modes of life of people. The Genteel Comedy concentrated more on the follies of the contemporary life.

3.6.5 SENTIMENTAL COMEDY:

Sentimental Comedy was a type of pathetic play which reflected the false sensibility of the rising middle class in the eighteenth century. It arised in the last years of the seventeenth century. It had a long and successful career extending well in the Victorian era. During all this long period it changed spirit and shape considerably and constantly.

The Sentimental Comedy represents a reaction against the loose morals and general cynicism of the Restoration Comedy. In Restoration Comedies there was no place for sentimentality. But in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, comedy gradually turned towards

sentiment. The Comedy of Sentiment came as a reaction to the Comedy of Manners. According to Nicoll, the originator of the Sentimental Comedy is Cibber.¹³⁵ In his play, Love's Last Shift, Cibber depicts an ordinary hero of manners school who comes to grief in the end.

The Sentimental Comedy was an attempt to prove that virtue and innocence could be entertainingly attractive on stage and vulgarity and wit are not necessarily the sources of laughter. It's main themes centred round domestic situations and innocent thwarted love. It aimed at exciting the gentle emotions in the audience and proving the triumph of sheer goodness. This type of comedy became immensely popular because of the widespread desire of audience to have less immoral theatre. Richard Steele's play, The Conscious Lovers is such a Comedy underlining the devotion to morality and a virtuous view of life. The essentials of this type of Comedy are decency in language, praise of virtuous love and marriage, attack on social abuses and an emotional appeal to compassion. What Thorndike says of The Conscious Lovers applies to the entire type of the Sentimental Comedy :

'But neither Steele, nor subsequent dramatists and the general public could stop half-way, and this play as to have many successors which reveal virtue in act one and ask for it our incessant sympathy during the experiments of an improbable story, which presents problems and attacks evils of society with moral earnestness, which excites us to morality by both preaching and weeping, and which have little room left for fun or wit'.¹³⁶

In Sentimental Comedy we have tears instead of laughter. The age of Johnson and Goldsmith was also the age of Sentimental Comedy. People believed that morals and manners of the society should be reformed. But changes couldn't come so easily. Everybody wanted to work for the welfare and improvement of the society, and as a result, Sentimental Drama was produced in the eighteenth century. Sentimental Comedy rose to full height in the two comedies - False Delicacy by Kelly (1768) and The West Indian by Cumberland (1771). The other notable playwrights of the Sentimental Comedy are Joseph Richardson, Edward Morris, William Goldsmith etc..

Out of this Sentimental Drama of the eighteenth century arose the problem drama of later years. In the twentieth century, the Sentimental Comedy has made its appearance in a new garb. There came a line of playwrights who believed that the stage must have some morally uplifting influence. As a result, there existed the drama of social consciousness or the drama of commitment which is nothing but the rebirth of the Sentimental Comedy. The dramatists wrote with some purpose and they concentrated on the problems of their time. For example, the comedies of Shaw have purpose, Brecht used drama to expose social and political hypocrisy. Ibsen's play An Enemy of the People and Bernard Shaw's Candida and A Doll's House deal with contemporary problems and hence they are called problem plays.

3.6.6 COMEDY OF INTRIGUE:

Comedy of Intrigue or Situation Comedy is a term used some times by critics to define play in which humour depends mainly upon intricate plotting, hair-breadth escapes and rapidly changing situations. In fact, the Comedy of Intrigue had preserved almost perennial existence during the whole period from its beginning in the days of Fletcher to the end of the eighteenth century. It is difficult to find a genuine and pure Comedy of this class. However, there are countless plays which have the preponderance of the intrigue element. In the Comedy of Intrigue the laughter arises solely or largely out of the disguises and intrigues and the complications of the plot. It is closely allied to farce. However, it differs from farce since it doesn't employ horseplay or rough incident in its development. The complications of the Comedy of Intrigue present intellectual incongruity. There is practically no wit, no humour and no satire, but there is the genuine Comedy of Situation. The Comedy of Intrigue has its own disadvantages. Sometimes the plots become exaggerated or monotonous. The novelty of plot-development is worn-off and it ceases to interest the spectators. Despite these flaws, the Comedy of Intrigue has its own world of existence. It is independent of time and place. It doesn't paint the manners of a particular time, but its theme is the sportive merriment of mankind.

3.6.7 THE DARK COMEDY:

There are a number of plays which are called comedies and yet they do not come under any one of the well-known type of comedy. For example, Shakespeare's Winter's Tale and Measure for Measure or T.S.Eliot's The Cocktail Party. They can be called comedies because any other apt nomenclature didn't fit them. Though such plays ended happily, they are more tragic than comic. The general tone of the play lack laughter and it had a mixture of tears and laughter. Therefore, critics labelled them Tragi-Comedy or Comic Tragedy. For such plays Prof.Styan has used the name the Dark Comedy, and that phrase has now become popular. In these plays there is little laughter and at times they are anti-heroic and anti-romantic. These plays contain at times a serious discussion of problems. The most fitting examples of these types of plays are Look Back in Anger by John Osborne, Tartuffe by Moliere', An Enemy of the People by Heri Ibsen and Mrs.Warren's Profession by Bernard Shaw.

3.5.8 TRAGI-COMEDY:

There is another type of comedy which is known as Tragi-Comedy. The term 'Tragi-Comedy' gained currency during the late Renaissance. It characterizes a form of drama that fell easily into neither of the basic categories, Comedy or Tragedy. Therefore, a play that included both comic and tragic elements came to be regarded as Tragi-Comedy.

There was a good tradition for Tragi-Comedy and the question of Tragi-Comedy was much discussed in earlier times. During Renaissance there existed the satiric drama, a species distinct from Comedy and from Tragedy alike. There were some playwrights who indulged either in variations from the usual tragic ending in death or in the introduction of the comic elements in plays not otherwise laughable. There was one Roman dramatist who experimented in writing of a comic play with characters taken from heroic legends and tales of the gods. In such a type of drama the usual concomitants of Comedy and Tragedy were mingled in one manner or another.

There is a very valuable explanation of Tragi-Comedy given in Comedy published by Open University Press. It says :

'It is when the atmosphere of reconciliation and harmony remains at the end dubious or compromised that comedy moves close to tragi-comedy... The more serious the comic dramatist's vision of life and the more radical and questioning his view of the nature of man and society, the closer he moves to producing drama in the tragi-comic manner.'¹³⁷

In John Fletcher's phrase 'it wants deaths---- but brings some near to it.'¹³⁸ However, it has come to be a useful term to designate a play which is at once tragic and comic. To an ordinary reader, the question naturally arises that why do playwrights mix the elements of Comedy and

Tragedy in their plays. In the tragic plays a certain element of the comic is permitted to intrude. According to Nicoll, such comic material may be utilized for three very different purposes in accordance with the main aim of the dramatist.¹³⁹ These aims are as follows.

I) The comic may be used simply as a contrast to the tragic. Here the purpose of introducing the comic element is not to raise a laugh but to enhance the sense of the tragic. For example, the porter scene in Macbeth; jesting of Lear's Fool in King Lear or the gravediggers' scene in Hamlet.

II) Sometimes the object of playwright is to provide relief. The comic element is introduced in order to devise a breathing space. For example, the Nurse Scenes and Mercutio Scenes in Romeo and Juliet.

III) Sometimes the comic scenes, bound together by the strands of a regular plot, may be developed along lines of their own parallel to the main plot and sometimes even largely dependent of it. For example, Sean O'Casey's play Juno and the Paycock.

There are many examples of Tragi-Comedies. Thomas Otway's play Venice Preserved is a fairly good tragedy, but there are two comic episodes showing the courtship of a foolish senator and his harsh lady. Southern's Isabella is a play in which there is the mixture of the comic and the

tragic. Modern drama, with its stress on realism, makes much use of the mixed type. Priestly's Summer Day's Dream is mostly a comedy, but has tragic possibilities. T.S.Eliot classed his The Cocktail Party as a comedy, but its heroine, Celia, meets a martyrdom. Almost all Shakespeare's plays are mixed to some degree. The term Tragi-Comedy may also be applied to plays which have a serious theme but happy ending - the best example being in Shakespeare's Measure for Measure.

3.7 A BRIEF SURVEY:

Comedy is probably as old as human civilization. A civilization without any traces of humour is inconceivable. Varieties of popular entertainment and ritual existed among the Greeks before the comedies were first admitted to the Dionysius Festival in 486 B.C.

John Feibleman in his book, In Praise of Comedy, has tried to trace the origins of comedy. According to him 'The most ambitious comedy of early times, which was, like the tragedies, most likely based upon traditional songs and legends, was Margites, a comedy written by Homer and dated about 700 B.C., has unhappily been lost, but we know that Margites, the hero of the poem, was a foolish youth who 'knew many things and knew them all badly', a condition which got him into all sorts of difficulties.'¹⁴⁰

The earliest comedy which has survived is the Batrachomyomachia or The Battle of the Frogs and Mice in which Homer has been parodied. The rules of dramatic contents in Athens, required that each dramatic entry must consist of a four part work : three tragic play-parts and a comic interlude which has no relation to the tragic theme. In this comic interlude the chorus dressed as satyres entertained audience with comic bits of buffoonery. Only one such play, Cyclops of Euripides, survives. Epicharmus of Cos (5th and 6th century B.C.) introduced the element of plot and connected scenes. He thus influenced the development of Attic Comedy. Later Cratinus, Crates, Eupolis and Aristophanes and other dramatists used mimes, pantomimes and mythological dialogues. Cratinus satirized contemporary politics and others exposed the follies of the contemporary society. Of them, Aristophanes, no doubt, was the master of Greek Comedy. As Nicoll says :

'It's foundation was the Attic comus, a popular ritual where in a group of revelers organized processions, and sang songs of doubtful propriety in honour of Dionysus. From this comus, comedy takes its name. Often the comus groups wore masks, or dressed themselves up in a kind of animal masquerade, appearing as birds, horses or frogs, and this element also was incorporated into the literary comedy when finally that assumed an independent existence.'¹⁴¹

3.7.1 CLASSICAL GREEK COMEDY:

Classical Greek Comedy or Old Comedy refers to the satirical plays of Aristophanes (4th and 5th centuries B.C.)

His plays were mainly based on contemporary issues. Aristophanes did not alter greatly the framework of the early Greek religious ritual dramas. Prof. Cornford observes : 'The fertility dramas of the year-god, the marriage of the old year transformed into the New, interrupted by death and revival of the hero : this is the classic theme of Aristophanic comedy.'¹⁴²

The old Comedy showed concern for the most serious and fundamental aspects of life. The comic dramatists concentrated on contemporary life. Aristophane's comedies concentrated on characterization because it was the mirror of the customs and institutions. He used masks in the Greek Comedy which is a clear indication of its formal property. According to Aristophanes the purpose of comedy was to expose the shortcomings of actuality in the name of the logical order.

Prof. Gilbert Murray in his book Aristophanes, demonstrates how the plays of Aristophanes were severe and serious attacks upon the shortcomings of customs and institutions of the contemporary Athens.¹⁴³ Aristophanes fought against Cleon, the unscrupulous demagogue and against War (Knight, Peace, Lycistrata); against the unvowed class struggle which was responsible for the corruption of the jury courts (Wasps); against the precious excesses of the exaggerated realism of Socrates and his circle (Clouds),

against the dramatic innovations of Euripides and experimental technique which compared so unfavourably with the more solid work of Aeschylus (Acharnians, Thesmophoriazusae, Frogs); and against the imperialistic ambitions of the Athenians in remote Sicily (Birds). Aristophanes pleaded for the good throughout his life.

Plato was not a professional comedian but a serious philosopher. His Dialogues are the best example of it. The only grand comedy of this period is Symposium, in which we find Socrates having dialogues with his followers at a banquet.

After the Peloponnesian War, the Old Comedy underwent a change and the New Comedy came into existence. The New Comedy was developed by Menander (340-292 B.C.). Verbal wit and the rigid structure of the Old Comedy was pushed into the background; and a wider range of stock characters was included. The grotesque comic dress and mythological characters were gone. There was a meagre use of masks but in general dresses and talk became realistic. As Allardyce Nicoll observes :

'Aristophanes' fantasies are forgotten, and the characters are familiar; nor need we be surprised, since the comedies were penned for a bourgeois civic audience, to find that, despite the changed conventions of life, a peculiarly 'modern' note is struck in the dialogue. When we hear the persons of New Comedy speaking about 'golddigging' and 'shopkeeping minds' we recognize the world we are in.'¹⁴⁴

Menander wrote about one hundred plays but fragments of only four of them are extant. One of them is Samia (The Girl From Samos). The subject matter of his plays is romantic love. His plots are intricate and he criticizes religion, politics and exhibits antics of individuals, mainly of women, trapped in the contemporary confused situations. It is the Comedy of Manners, with happy ending of united young lovers. Even Roman translators were immensely influenced by the New Comedy. As James Feibleman says :

'The New Comedy is the comedy of manners with the happy ending of united young lovers; its reformatory and revolutionary implications are practically nil.'¹⁴⁵

Menander exerted a greater influence on the development of comedy than Aristophanes because the Latin comic writers like Plautus and Terence imitated him to a considerable extent.

3.7.2 ROMAN COMEDY:

Every Roman activity was influenced by its Greek equivalent. However, Roman Comedy did not grow immediately out of Greek Comedy. Roman Comedy had its primitive start in the so-called Fescennine Verses, Idylls of Theocritus and the Hymns of Callimachus. The Greek Comedy in its decline influenced the early Roman comic playwrights. The greatest influence came from the comedies of Menander and Aristophanes. Prof. Nicoll observes :

'The Greek genius was inventive, the Romans knew best how to adapt; the Greek felt an innate demand for spiritual expression; the Roman delighted more in practical things. The result is that the Roman theatre is built out of what the Greeks created, and the Latin plays were based confessedly on Athenian models',¹⁴⁶

The first impetus to Roman Comedy was given by the translation of some of the Greek Comedies by Campanian, toward the end of the third century B.C. The attack on current politics led to his arrest and comedy was suppressed. There were some disguised writers here and there but none showed the excellence of Aristophanes either in subject-matters or technique. Later on a number of changes came in the theatre building, costumes and scenery. The Roman theatre was a single architectural theatre. Plays became indoor affairs and they introduced the appearance of the front curtain.

Plautus (254-184 B.C.), a Roman dramatist, was not a genius but his reputation rests chiefly on his translations of the Greek plays of Menander and others. However, his adaptations were full of Roman allusions. He exploited places and characters which would be familiar to the Roman audience. His plots chiefly included the romantic lover-affairs of the New Comedy. Plautus' Comedies do not acquire greatness despite the wit and humour and petty criticism of local foibles in them. His Comedies highlight his familiarity with the humble and middle classes of Rome and it adds spice to

his plays. The best known Comedies of Plautus are Amphitrus, Meanaechmi etc.. He wrote one hundred and thirty plays, but only twenty of them survive. He divided his plays in three parts : one-third of the play was dialogue and the song portion occupied two-third part of the play.

Terence (195-159 B.C), another prominent Roman playwright, wrote comedies on Greek models, modified to suit Roman conditions. His style is fastidious and correct. Prof. A. Nicoll says, 'If Plautus wrote to please the crowd, his successor, Terence, sought the esteem of the intellegentia'.¹⁴⁷ Terence wrote six plays, two of which Andria (166 B.C.) and Eunuchus (161 B.C.) are the best comedies. His plays were adapted from the plays of Menander.

The other Roman playwrights among notable of them were Horace and Petronius. The Comedies of Horace were based on the detection of small faults and the celebration of amusing pleasures rather than the higher criticism. Petronius was rather a more uproarious comedian than Horace who was chiefly specialized in satires. However, the Comedies of both Horace and Petronius were not profound since they didnot deal deep in customs and manners of the contemporary society.

The Roman Comedy saw its decline in the first century A.D. The Comic writers concentrated on petty wit of contemporary fashions and they attacked bitterly the rampant

corruption. Naturally, the humour was subdued. It degenerated into harsh satires. The rise of mimes witnessed decline of the spoken Comedy. Roman Comedy ended in a pure licentiousness and lost itself because the Roman audience insisted that the actors of their Comedies should play their parts naked.

3.7.3 MEDIAEVAL COMEDY:

The insistence on the part of the Roman audience that the players in Comedies must play their parts naked led to its downfall. Christianity awoke in the profligate Roman world and it opposed to the Roman theatre and to Comedy in general. Theatres were closed down and the actors were banned. This move made the actors to accept the livelihood of minstrel. These minstrels went from place to place singing songs. E. K. Chambers reports : 'The duties of these bards were to sing the praises of the tribal chieftain to the accompaniment of the harp at feast times, in hall or tent'.¹⁴⁸

The life of these minstrels was very tough. Their chief weapon was humour. Through their songs, they criticized sharply the follies of bad rulers and clergies. They made people laugh but within their heart they were disappointed.

Then there was the rise of a new class - the Goliards. The Goliards were wandering clericks, scholars

travelling from one university to another. However, they were more interested in wine, women and dice than in studies. They wrote ballads. The very famous of their ballads is The Confession of Goliards.

The primitive and pagan fertility festivals kept Comedy alive in the Mediaeval Age. There were village festivals and May-Day festivals. These were the versions in which formal Comedy survived from paganism to peasantry.

The most interesting form of Comedy in the Mediaeval Age is Mummers' Play. The Mummers' Play generally would begin with a prologue, a spoken welcome to the spectators and the introduction of the actors. The action mainly comprised of someone slain and then restored to life by a doctor. And finally some supernatural characters are introduced. In almost every Mummers' Play, we find a character of doctor who restores the slain to life. Coulton says, 'The doctor is invariably a comic character who always brags about his travels, qualifications and remedies'.¹⁴⁹ At the end of the play there was an introduction of some petty and needless characters. Besides the Mummers' Play, the so-called Feast of Fools, a festival, also kept up the spirit of Comedy. These plays were taken over for church purposes. Feibleman observes :

'History of Mediaeval Comedy is the account of constant efforts on the part of the Church to suppress all gaiety and criticism, and of the way in which these tended to burst forth despite suppression'.¹⁵⁰

Mediaeval Comedy comes to a close with the Liturgical Plays. Chambers comments : 'These were Christmas and Easter Plays. The Comedy in them, with some exceptions, was confined to the perennial quack of doctor of all Comedy'.¹⁵¹ However, these plays lack Comedy and they came to an end with the rise of the interludes i.e. brief plays given before royal patrons and on the road by professional players.

Besides these minor developments, there were Mediaeval Mystery and Miracle plays, based on the stories from the Bible or the lives of saints. Such plays were financed by the craft guilds in towns on the feast of Corpus Christi. Cycles of these plays represented usually stages starting with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden and ending with Christ's crucifixion. These plays were staged on high wagons called pageants. These pageants would stop at fixed points in the town and present a particular play in turn. Thus the pageants moved but the audience at a fixed point can see the whole cycle of plays without moving from their places. Their plays were basically religious and contained a great amount of tragedy and farce. The comic scenes in these plays paved the way for full-fledged Comedies of the days of the Renaissance.

3.7.4 RENAISSANCE COMEDY :

The three streams that helped the survival of the European Comedy were folkdrama, religious liturgy and classical translations. Terence and particularly Plautus had tremendous influence upon the playwrights. The comedies of these days laughed at the gross absurdities of mediaeval life, causing them to appear old. It tore away the pretences and the customs and the institutions once claiming reverence of the people and they came to a naught.

There was much reawakening in the fourteenth century. The French Fabliaux and the Italian Novelle consisted the humorous episodes of ordinary life. The Fabliaux were gay, crude and vigorous. They were chiefly amoral and they especially targeted women as opposed to the chivalric mediaeval customs. The Italian Novelle were the first European novels in prose. Boccaccio was a master at Novelle. In England, The Comedy of Canterbury Tales of Chaucer kept up the tradition of comedy. Chaucer was influenced by classical survivals and also by Boccaccio and Petrarch, and by Dante. In his The Canterbury Tales he treats small human virtues and petty vices. The another important comic poet at the time who deserves mention is Villon from France. He was a true comedian, a rebel in full revolt against all the customs and institutions of his time. He focussed his attention on the contemporary and commonplace.

his criticism is bitter. Both Erasmus and Rabelais satirized the dogmas and ritual of the Catholic Church. Rabelais, through his comedies, criticized the politics. The great Spanish Comedy of the sixteenth century, Don Quixote, written by Cervantes attacks the absurdities of mediaeval chivalry. However, the classical plays of Plautus and Terence were more known and their plays were performed at Oxford and Cambridge in the middle of the sixteenth century.

The new religion of protestantism didn't oppose the enjoyment of sensual pleasures. Comedy was endorsed as a weapon to be employed against Catholicism. The Renaissance marked a revival of interest. James Feibleman observes :

'There was a renewal interest, in the sensible realities of the actual world here and now, and this world was filled as always with contradictions and disvalues, with unattained goals and interrupted striving',¹⁵²

The new social order came into existence but it was in a sense non-revolutionary. Comedy ceased to be a satire and it was directed against the nature of things as they were found to be, and not against the foibles of customs and institutions.

We find sheer fun in the pre-Elizabethan and Elizabethan Comedies like Ralph Roister-Doister and Gammer Gurton's Needle. The Gammer Gurton's Needle is a gay Farcical Comedy with characters rooted in an English village and speaking rustic dialogue.

There were many greatest playwrights like Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson etc. The Elizabethan comedies are well-known. For example, a Romantic comedy by Shakespeare is A Midsummer Night's Dream and his The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline etc.. are Tragic Comedies. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher are well known. We see the rise of the Comedy of Humours with the production of the plays like Ben Jonson's Everyman In His Humour (1655), Bartholomew Fair (1614), Volpone, the Fox (1606) etc.. The most important contribution of Renaissance Comedy is that it mixed comedy and tragedy in the same plays. This realistic type of comedy ushered in a new phase of development in English Comedy.

3.7.5 THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY COMEDY:

The seventeenth century in England saw a new twist in the content of comedy. The Comedy writers, no doubt, stuck to social criticism; but they drifted into the comedy of gaiety, licentiousness and frivolity. The laughter, of course, was healthy enough but it lacked significance.

At this time the things were taking a definite turn on the rest of the continent. The classic influence had a stronger hold there. In Italy, Commedia dell' arte was a new phenomenon that came into existence and its influence spread strongly also to France. There is a lot of controversy

regarding whether the Commedia dell' arte had its origin in the Attelene Farces of Classic Rome or in more recent mediaeval sources. There is a remarkable similarity and family resemblance between Commedia dell' arte and the Old Comedy of Greece. Commedia dell' arte had a genius of all its own.

There was little or no Comedy in Germany. In France, there were Cyrano de Bergerac and Boilau and some others, but Moliere was the greatest of them all. Moliere's comedies rank high. His comedies show strong influence of previous comedies, from Menander to Plautus, to Boccaccio and Scarron. Moliere carefully unravels the life of human beings with their errors and foibles in his comedies. One of the most important comedies of Moliere is Le Medecin Malgre' Lui in which he shifts from the convention. In earlier comedies the doctor was always a comic character because death was not taken seriously and the dead could always be restored to life by the doctor. But Moliere here ridicules not the doctor but the actual contemporary medical profession. Thus Moliere stands out as a strong figure in Comedies in France.

In England there were numerous comic dramatists like Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, Wycherly and others. They had a keen perception of the smallest details of daily life. However, they missed the larger issues. They were not so successful to point out contemporary foibles and comedy for

them purely meant the pursuit of pleasure. H.A.Taine has rightly pointed out the spirit of the age. He says :

'Society didn't lack vigour, no literature talent, men of the world were polished, writers inventive. There was a court, drawing-rooms, conversations, worldly life, a taste for letters, the example of France, peace, leisure, the influences of the sciences, politics, theology - in short, all the happy circumstances which can elevate the intellect and civilize manners. There was the vigorous satire of Wycherly, the sparkling dialogue and fine raillery, the sparkling dialogue and fine raillery of Congreve, the frank nature and animation of Vanbrugh, the manifold inventions of Farquhar, in brief, all the resources which might nourish the comic element',¹⁵³

However, the age showed no progress. Again to quote Taine :

'Nothing came to head; all was abortive. The age has left nothing but the memory of corruption; their comedy remains a reportery of viciousness, society has only a solid elegance, literature a frigid wit. Their manners were gross and trivial, their ideas futile or incomplete',¹⁵⁴

3.7.6 THE EIGHTEENTH - CENTURY COMEDY:

The eighteenth century saw a great deal of confusion in comedy. Eighteenth century is called 'the age of reason' and there was no proper climate for the comic spirit. The period marks the sharp decline of the superb Commedia dell' arte. Comedy criticizing the limitations of an out worn system which still persisted in contemporary society. But Comedy lost its touch with realism and believed in a naive conception of sweet reasonableness. Voltaire in France and Goldoni in Italy tried to imitate Moliere in writing comedies

for the middle class and thus tried to bring some new spirit to Comedy.

The most original comic figure of this period was Casanova of Italy. Through his comedies he dealt with sentimental love affairs and criticized contemporary activities seriously to show the rotten nature of the accepted system. Casanova had a great admiration for Voltaire. Outwardly he claimed to be the upholder of customs and laws of the day. He protracted himself as a moralist.

The Comedy in Germany, however, didn't show any land marks. Yet some worth mentionable pieces are Jobsiade of Kortum, and Die Abderiten of Wieland. The Jobsiade is a comic epic about a student who did everything but study and Die Abederiten is a humourous satire. In all and all, there was no comic drama in the eighteenth-century Germany.

In France comedians like Destouches criticized a new philosophy of mechanical materialism of the French Encyclopaedists and their followers. Voltaire, through his Candide, ridicules the dogmas of the Theodicee of Leibniz. Candide has a rich humourous value.

In England the growth of democratic spirit was accompanied by a prosaic attitude to life and a dull matter-of-fact approach with a reformist intention. Of all the comic writers of the age, only Sheridan stands on par. In his

Comedy, The Rivals, he has created a character of Mrs. Malprop which is wonderfully alive with her wrong use of long words. However, the dramatic world came to a loss when Sheridan entered into politics.

Then there were other mentionable dramatists like Samuel Foote, William Goldsmith, Fielding, John Gay etc. Fielding's Tom Thumb satirizes the absurd condition of the contemporary popular tragedies. John Gay's Beggar's Opera is a true comedy in a fine and complete sense. As Bernard Shaw observes :

'On the stage, comedy as a destructive, derisory, critical, negative art, left the theatre when sublime tragedy perished. From Moliere to Oscar Wilde we had a line of comic playwrights who, if they had nothing fundamentally positive to say, were at least in revolt against falsehood and imposture, and were not only, as they claimed, 'Chastening morals by ridicule', but, in Johnson's phrase, 'clearing our mind of cant, and thereby shewing an uneasiness in the presence of error which is the surest symptom of intellectual vitality',¹⁵⁵

However, eighteenth-century theatre in England marked a definite decline of comedy. The comedies of these days became self-conscious and sentimental. The puppet-shows of Punch and Judy became terrifically popular in the eighteenth century. Prof. Cornford has brought out the surprising similarity between these puppet-shows of Punch and Judy and traditional folk-plays of Classic Greek and Roman times.

A new type of humour appeared in the eighteenth century England : the prose Comedy as contained in the novels of Fielding and Smollet, and the prose satires as written by Sterne. Fielding called his novels 'comic epics'. His novel Tom Jones makes fun of the customs and morals of contemporary life in general. Smollet attacked fashions. Sterne, through his prose satires, attacked in candid fashion, the customs and institutions of the day. His famous satirical Comedy is Tristram Shandy.

The comic writers satirized an aspect of sentimentality through ironical incidents. Comedy ceased to take interest in gallants and cavaliers. The encouragement was given to Comedy chiefly because of the rise of the middle class. The important Comedies of the eighteenth-century are Farquhar's Beaux Stratagem, Steele's The Conscious Lovers and Goldsmith's She Stoops to Conquer.

3.7.7 THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY COMEDY:

One of the prominent features of the nineteenth century was freedom. Alongwith freedom there was a complete retrenchment within the walls of this new freedom which was a new kind of restriction. Any kind of change from the norm was looked with suspicion. A perfect order has been established and it was considered profane to criticize established customs and enshrined institutions. As a result, there was no comedy although one finds a lot of gaiety in the nineteenth

century. Taine, who recognized the universal nature of comedy, observed that comedy 'consists in leading by an agreeable path to general notions.'¹⁵⁶ And Meredith also laid down the rule that comedy was not to disturb anything fundamental. Time-honoured customs and institutions were to be honoured, and not ridiculed.

The nineteenth century English Comedy properly begins with Byron. Byron was a true comedian but he was romantic and bitter. His criticism of contemporary foibles was not profound. He was a child of his times. The another important figure in the comic field was Charles Dickens. He attacked the corruption of the jails and social abuses like orphanages of the times. His attacks were funny and had far-reaching social consequences. His comic characters are universal. For instance, we cannot forget Mr. Micawber, a comic figure found in his Pickwick Papers. Dickens was the great humourist. There is a more humour in the practical jokes of Theodore Hook and tortured puns of Thomas Hood. The jokes at Holland House were a higher kind of comedy. Sydney Smith, a Holland House figure, was a clergyman and chief figure for his sense of humour. Other important comic writer was Lewis Carroll, best known for his work Alice in the Wonderland. The social criticism in Carroll's work is deeply embedded. However, the works of Carroll bordered on the level of superficiality. Gilbert and Sullivan were the comic opera

writers who primarily attacked the foibles of the British in a lighter way. Samuel Butler is another worth-mentioning comic writer who ridiculed the weaknesses of the ruling middle class. His two important satires are Erewhon and Note-books. Shaw's Arms and the Man, Candida and Caesar and Cleopatra created a new stir in the field of comedies in which gay laughter was always tinged with thought and which contained dialectic of ideas. Oscar Wilde captured London audiences by storm with his plays like Lady Windermere's Fan and The Importance of Being Earnest. These are great comedies of Wilde by all standards.

There were a host of comic writers in the nineteenth century France but none of them is worthy of mention except Balzac. Balzac's important work is Contes Drolatiques, which is chiefly lusty and uproarious. Frenchmen of the nineteenth century laughed a great deal because of the comic operas of Offenbach and others, the vivid style of life, the cabarets and night life. Virtually all Europe looked to France for the style and enjoyment in the nineteenth century.

In Russia, there were certain remarkable developments in the field of Comedy, during the nineteenth century. The most important comic writer of Russia is Gogol, who has based most of his works chiefly upon the abuses of the official class. His famous political satires are The

Government Inspector and Dead Souls. His criticism of the government is far-reaching. He has been called the Russian Dickens. Another important comic writer in Goncharov who has depicted the typical Russian characters of the period. In his Comedy, Oblomov we find a petty landowner who is the epitome of lassitude. He is too lazy to get out of bed, too inert to dress himself, too weak-willed to take any important decisions affecting his own life and career. This play was received tremendously since Russian people identified themselves with the character of Oblomov.

The most important comic playwright of the nineteenth century Germany was Goethe. He published the first part of Faust in 1808. Like Dante's Divine Comedy, it is a great poem. It plays upon the eternal theme of the struggle between God and the Devil. Goethe exposed the Christian legends and prepared people for scientific myth. Heinrich Heine is the only other German Comedian of the nineteenth century who deserves mention. He spent greater part of his life in France. He wrote travel accounts and satirical lyrics. There runs through a romantic strain in Heine and his comedies are most amusing.

The life in the nineteenth century America was grown weary of building. In this melancholy kind of atmosphere, Comedy gave a kind of relief. The comedies have contemporary value. The American comic writers confined

themselves to native types, a native dialect, and a native way of looking at things. However, their works are not worthwhile.

3.7.8 THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY COMEDY:

The Twentieth-Century Comedy is a complex phenomenon. The dramatic productions are a cent percent commercial today. Playwrights like strindberg, Chekov and Ibsen came to mean more to English dramatists than Moliere and others. The two World Wars deepened the sensibilities of the writers. Prose realistic plays, fantastic and symbolic plays and cynical plays became fashionable in the twentieth century. For Shaw, Brecht and Ionesco, the theatre become a place for preaching as well as entertainment. Nicoll comments:

'The trouble with the stage during the modern period has been that a cleavage has been developed between entertainment and instructions, leading to two kinds of performance, almost a kin to the 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' productions of the nineteenth century - those which, devoid of any deeper significance aim only at thrill or vicious laughter and those which subordinate the giving of pleasure to an intellectual and often political end',¹⁵⁷

The birth of the Irish Literay Theatre gave new life to plays rooted in the Irish soil. The Irish dramatists like A.A.Milane, J.M.Synge became popular. However the name of Bernard Shaw stands at the top in the list of modern playwrights. The comic plays of J.M.Synge like The Shadow of

the Glen and The Playboy of the Western World are cynical and farcical comedies of ideas. Bernard Shaw's plays like Mrs. Warren's Profession, Candida, Doctor's Dilemma and Arms and the Man give a topsy-turvy sense of fun. J.M. Barrie's sentimental comedies like Dear Brutus and Quality Street are full of humour and gentle irony.

Oscar Wilde revived the tradition of the Comedy of Manners. W.R. Goodman writes :

'Since the days of Sheridan and Goldsmith there had been no worthwhile comedy until Robertson attempted to present a gently ironical view of life as it is really existed. His lead was followed in plays like The Deacon (1890) and The Liars (1897), by H.A. Jones, and by Oscar Wilde, in whose hand the comedy of manners attained heights untouched since the eighteenth century',¹⁵⁸

The development of Comedy was in full swing during the inter-Wars period. In fact, it was the most popular dramatic form. The most popular playwright in the twentieth century England is Noel Coward. He is most widely known as a writer of social comedy. His famous comedies are The Vortex, Hay Fever, Private Lives, Blithe Spirit and Design for Living.

The other important dramatist of the twentieth century is Somerset Maugham. The Comedy of Manners received close attention from Maugham. He made his name and fortune with gay, light-hearted comedies, which were full of wit and

epigram. His best known comedies are Lado Frederick, Mrs. Dot and Jack Straw.

Other worth-mentioning playwrights are John Drinkwater, J.B.Fagan, H.M.Harwood, Terence Rattigan, Gerald Savory etc. The post-War period saw the rise of the 'problem' plays. It is the revival of the eighteenth century Sentimental Comedy in a new garb. Bernard Shaw's Arms and the man, Widower's Houses, The Apple Cart and Ibsen's An Enemy of the People are examples of Problems Plays.

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