Chapter II

PROSE

It is now our turn to examine ancient prose literature with a view to discovering comic elements in them. In this chapter, we will examine the prose dramas first and then pass on to the kathā-guru-carit, the prose biography of the Vaiśṇava saints written by anonymous authors. Besides these two sources, we have a vast number of historical prose chronicles written during the Ahom rule. These chronicles yield us no instance of literary humour or satire, as prose in them is business-like. The epistolary dynastical, scientific, court and epigraphic prose, that is, the bulk of secular prose in Assamese literature is generally devoid of literary humour. The same thing can be said about Bhattadeva's kathā-gītā, Kathā Bhakti-Ratnākar and kathā-bhāgavat.*

It must be remembered that there are few works in ancient Assamese literature in which comic sentiment is predominant or primary. This applies to the prose works also.

Sankardeva was the originator of the prose literary dramas in Assamese. Next in importance to him was Mādhavdeva and other Vaiśṇava saints, who also wrote dramas. But it is interesting to observe that the comic sentiment is present only in the works of the two masters. The lesser lights are seen to adhere strictly to the rules of bhakti rasa. Therefore we shall confine ourselves to

*Bhattadeva seems to have lived in the latter part of the 15th or the first part of the 16th century. (See ASR, p.180). All these are highly serious works.
These dramas are one-act plays, meant to be staged in popular prayer-halls before the village assembly. In form, it consists of the classical elements like purva-rānga (dhemāli), nāndī, prastāvanā, bharat-bākya (mukti-maṅgala bhaṭīmā) and sutradhāra and some indigenous elements of folk theatre after the manner of ojā-pāli, etc. The contents include slokas, songs, dialogue of characters and connective speeches of sutradhāra. These dramas resemble in a way the gīti-nāṭya (opera). ¹

Among the dramas of Saṅkardeva, mention may be made of Rukmīṇī-harana and Parijāta-harana, where comic elements are cognizable. It is often noticed that in the village theatre, besides the literary elements found in the text, some oral elements are improvised during the course of actual performance through the medium of jesters or buffoons (bahuva). ²

There is no Viduṣaka in these dramas, but these jesters have ready wits and flair for the farcical that sometimes verges on the obscene. A famous bahuva, Bhumuk, observes W. Neog, is mentioned in an Ahom chronicle. ³ L. N. Bezbaruva notes in his autobiography that in the bhāvanās (village folk-theatres) of his days the hilarious presence of the jester was very keenly sought after. ⁴ But the improvised elements of laughter or humour are non-literary

---

¹ ASI, p.122
² SAHT, p.277; see also chapter on dramatic art and technique.
³ SAHT, p.275
⁴ BG, p.11; see also BG pp 481-93.
and outside the scope of our dissertation, which is based on literary texts.

Sankardeva has a drama called *Rukmini-haraṇa* as well as a poem of the same name. In both these works, we come across the character of a Brahmin, Vedanidhi. He delivers a message from Rukmini to Śrīkṛṣṇa at Dvārakā. Immediately on receipt of the message, Śrīkṛṣṇa sets out for Kuṇḍin by chariot and takes the Brahmin with him. The journey provides us with some comic relief. Vedanidhi, being unaccustomed to travel in a fast-moving chariot, feels giddy. His hearing is disturbed, his hands and feet cease moving, the belly begins to inflate and the nose ceases to breathe. He lies unconscious like a corpse. In a mood of remorse, Kṛṣṇa sprinkles water on his head and lets in a current of air produced with the mouth, to revive him to consciousness. Then Kṛṣṇa asks him to regain his composure.

**Sutradhāra** - The Brahmin, who has regained consciousness hears Kṛṣṇa's soothing words and says:

**Vedanidhi** - O friend, who are you? Who am I? Why have we come here?

**Kṛṣṇa** - (smiling) I am Kṛṣṇa of Dvārakā and you are Vedanidhi, whom Rukmini sent. For reasons already known, you and I are on our way to Kuṇḍin.

**Sutradhāra** - Hearing this, the Brahmin embraces Kṛṣṇa with his arms. Then he says:

**Vedanidhi** - I am saved. I am saved. I was dead for a time. I am reborn due to you.

---

5. *SSBM*, p.13
"tathi ālokya brāhmaṇa Vedanidhi ratha bege
śruti bhangā huiā parala, hāta pāva sava thira
bhela, peta uphandala, nāsāta nīsvāsa nāhi
nihsare yaiśe mrtaka tadvat acetana bhela. tāhe
pekhie Śrīkṛṣṇa hā hā buli sīre jala siñcie
phunki phunki dhātu ānala. Kṛṣṇa bola:

[Kṛṣṇa] — he Vedanidhi svastha hava, svastha hava.

Sutradhāra— Kṛṣṇak āsvāsā sunie cetana pāi bipra bolola.

Vedanidhi — he bāpu toho ke? hāmu kon? ki nimmīta ethā
āvala thika?

Kṛṣṇa — (bihaisi bola) hāmu dvārakāka Kṛṣṇa, toho Vedani-
dhi Rukmiṇī pathāvala, tannimitta tohu hāmu kun-
dina calaichi.

Sutradhāra— tāhe sunie bipra bāhu mei kṛṣṇaka dharala,
bipra bola.

Vedanidhi — hā bāpa bartalu bartalu, hāmu kṣaneke mari yāno,
tohāka nimmīta punu upajala.)

This passage produces a farcical situation by portrayal of
the changes in bodily and mental states of the unaccustomed travel-
er in Kṛṣṇa’s chariot. In the kāvya also the episode is the same.
The passage is amusing and intended for farcical relief.

In Pārijāta-haran, Nārada figures as a divine intriguer.
He causes jealousy in Kṛṣṇa’s co-wife Satyabhāmā. Nārada who comes
to introduce Indra to Kṛṣṇa, and to report about Narakāsura’s depre-
dations, presents the magical flower called pārijāta, which is sup-
posed to bring greatest merits to a woman. Kṛṣṇa, on being requested
by Rukmiṇī, offers the flower to her. Nārada reports this matter to Satyabhāmā in his own cunning manner. He says: "By ignoring you, Kṛṣṇa with his own hands, has pegged the divine pārijāt on Rukmiṇī's hair with greatest show of affection. Fie upon you! it is better to die than to be a living witness to the co-wife's prosperity. You are as good as dead. What more shall I add?"

("tohāka katakṣa kariye āpuna hāte priya rukmiṇīka maṁhe parama sādare se dibya pārijātā pindhāvala. O tomāka jīvana dhika dhika! satinīka abhyudaya dekhi ki nimitta prāṇa dharaye māva, tuhu jivante marala, hā hā bistara ki kahaba.")

Satyabhāmā receives a terrible shock and loses consciousness. She is nursed and brought back to life by her friend Indumati. Nārada reports the matter to Kṛṣṇa and asks him to attend her. Kṛṣṇa then promises her to present the whole tree of pārijātā to appease her, but this does not satisfy her. She wants to accompany him in his proposed campaign to Kāmarupa and his subsequent journey to Amarāvati to bring the Pārijātā tree; this is just to ensure that the tree does not get out of her hands under any circumstances. Kṛṣṇa had to agree to it. Witty Nārada then remarks, "Now it is clear that you are abandoning the task entrusted to you by the gods. You are well-versed in the art of wooing women. You wasted the whole day in wooing your wife."

6. SSBM, p.6, Pārijātā-haran, T. N. Sarmā suggests that intriguing Nārada in Pārijātā-haran is Saṅkardeva's invention. He is not so lively and intriguing in Bhāgavata or Haribhama. He is introduced in the drama to provide comic relief. His character is modelled after the traditional village intriguer, who is also called jokingly Nārada (pp.160-169: Pañcapuspa).

7. SSBM, p.9, Parijātā-harap
Kṛṣṇa admits that he was unable to persuade the princess not to accompany him in his war campaign and therefore succumbed to her wish. Nārada teases Kṛṣṇa by reminding that it is rare to find a hen-pecked husband like him. He confesses that he is now ashamed of his behaviour. "Even at the time of war, you cannot leave the company of woman", he sarcastically adds. Nārada feels that Kṛṣṇa's behaviour is unbecoming of his status as the teacher of the world and therefore he is now ashamed of his own singing campaigns of praise for Kṛṣṇa in the three worlds.8

Kṛṣṇa is again on the defensive. He profusely apologises for his weakness. But Nārada makes a devastating remark: "Kāmatura purusaka oicana avasthā. Strī-ye ajñā kare, se avāsyē karite lāge. hoka se kāmarupa Narakāsura pāta. ohi dvārika hante svabhāve cāri māsar path. Strī loiā yāite batsara dui cāri pāvaba. a devakārya bhalla sattara sadhana."9

(This is the plight of a person possessed with erotic desire. Whatever the wife asks him to do, he has to do, even if it means a long journey to the (distant) Kāmarupa kingdom. It needs four months to reach this country from Dvārakā. If you go with your wife, it will take quite a

8. SSBM, p.10, Pārijāt-harap
9. ibid.
It is clear from the above that Nārada is not only an intriguer, but a complex character. Through an intrigue, he brings to the fore the erotic sentiment in the play, and then through the witty comments on Kṛṣṇa's condescending behaviour towards jealous Satyabhāmā, which suggests a transient satiric degression, he consciously or unconsciously prepares the ground for the ascendancy of the bhakti rasa. The satiric mood is therefore a stage in the climactic experience of bhakti rasa. Low laughter is aroused by the scene of bawdy verbal duel between earthly Satyabhāmā and heavenly Śacī over the possession of the pārijāt tree. Nārada again plays an intriguing role in rousing Satyabhāmā's ire against Śacī, who is not only inclined to part with the plant, but also questions the right of a human female to wear the divine flower. Kṛṣṇa then forcibly takes away the tree from Amarāvatī; this leads to a battle between him and Indra, which is preceded and foreshadowed by the verbal duel. Śacī is the first to paint Kṛṣṇa's amours in the most unfavourable light and to call him promiscuous. Satyabhāmā is naturally provoked to make a fitting reply by painting Indra's amours in equally unfavourable light. The yardstick in each case crudely human:

Satyabhāmā - dekho amarāvatīka yata naṭī tohāka svāmīka nāhi ātala. tohāri svāmī kayala ki, gautama riṣīka bhār-yā ahalyā, tāheko māyā karikaho jāti bhṛāsta kayala tanimitta saba sarīre dhāki yoni dāka bhēla; oye pāmarī, oicana Indraka hāṃku āge bakhānaha.10

10. SSBM, p.16, Pārijāt-haran.
(Satyabhāmā - Look, all the dancing girls of Amarāvatī could not satisfy your husband. What did your husband do? He put on an illusory appearance and actually made Ahalyā, the wife of sage Gautama, lose her caste. That is why his whole body was covered with obscene spots (yoni-dāka). O singing woman, do not sing praise of such a one before me.)

This is washing dirty linen in public. Her ire was no doubt caused by Śacī's earlier abuses:

Śacī - Oye satyabhāmā, tohāri svāmī Mādhavaka kathā āmi sava jāni ... unikara agha gokulaka stṛi nāhi rahala. Dekho kaṁsaka dāsī kubji tāheka hēta nāhi carāvala. Tāheka āra ki kahaba? Oicana anācārī Kṛṣṇa tā garbe kayakaho hāmāka pārijāta niyā jāi.11

(Sācī - O Satyabhāmā, I know everything about your husband, Mādhava ... No woman of Gokula could escape his attention. Look, the hump-backed maid of Kaṁsa also was not spared by him. What more should I speak of him? You are taking away my pārijāta, while boasting about Kṛṣṇa who is so immoral in conduct.)

This type of low satire, introduced in the drama as a farcical interlude, is meant for providing relief or occasion for popular laughter. Divinity of personages is counterpoised by their gross earthiness and the incongruity caused by this reversal of expected behaviour causes laughter.

11. SSBM, p.16, Pārijāt-haran
The drama presents a scene of fighting between Indra and Kṛṣṇa, in which the greatest of gods trembles in fear and deserting his elephant flees for life. His hands and feet lose balance (hātapatāva thira nohe, mahābhaye hasti cāri palāvala). Satyabhāma's parting but vulgar sally at fleeing Indra and vanquished Śacī emphasises this degradation of the divine hero. After hurling the usual and common-place abuses, she triumphantly declares, 'now your husband shall not turn back. I, who is a human being, am taking away your pārijāta. Do not now die out of repentence' (ābe tohā-ri bhatāraka nāhi pālatāva. Hāmu mānusī huyā tohāri pārijāta niyā jaño, ohi tāpe marite nāyāva). All these are however farcical.

In this drama, Satyabhāma's jealousy is painted in the lurid manner; the predominant sentiment is not hāsya rasa, but bhakti rasa. The writer's intention is best expressed in Rukmini's reply to Satyabhāma's expression of womanly pride in possessing the divine tree. Eulogizing the devotion to Kṛṣṇa as the highest virtue on earth, she says, '(in Him) one gets all the four objects of life, dharma, artha, kāma and mokṣa. Your divine flower-tree is inconsequential before Him' (dharma, artha, kāma, mokṣa cāri padāratha hāte milāve, tohāra pārijāta kona kathā?). Nārada's intrigue and witty comments, as we have seen, earlier hinted at such an end; he allowed the erotic sentiment as typified in Satyabhāma to grow to its highest pitch, where the heroine takes pride in possessing the very source of that divine flower which brings highest prosperity to a lover. It was Nārada who brought this flower from heaven to the earth. It is thus

12. SSfM, p.18, Pārijāt-haran
13. ibid.
14. ibid., p.20
a symbol of divinity as well. Rukmini is not perturbed. She chooses Krishna to the pārijāta tree, because before Him, the end of all earthly objects, the divine flower is inconsequential. The drama contains more farcical elements than meaningful laughter. The farcical elements appear to be merely mirthful, but the witty remarks of Nārada and his intrigue, that hint at the impropriety of bhakti rasa, provide us with meaningful laughter.

The numerous buranjis, written during the Ahom period, collectively give us an elaborate history of Assam down to the 19th century and their interests extend beyond the boundary of the Assam State, whose diplomatic pursuits inspired enquiries into the affairs of India as a whole. As A. K. Warder rightly observes, "they are more detailed and meticulous than practically anything we have met so far, concentrating on the factual record for the sake of its own interest rather than seeking either aesthetic ends or moral justifications." The epistolary and scientific prose also contain little aesthetic elements. So these are of little value for our study.

The only other texts that provide us with isolated pieces of humour are a few dramas of Mādhavdeva and the kathā-guru-carit (depicting the lives of Vaishnava saints).

Among the dramas of Mādhavdeva (1489-1596), those dealing with the early life of Krishna are important from our point of view. Among his four recognised dramas, cordharā, Pimparā-gucovā, Bhūmilotovā Bhojan-bihār and Dadhi-mathan (all dealing with Lord's early

15. p.96, An Introduction to Indian Historiography, A. K. Warder, Bombay Popular Prakāshan.
life), we have chosen here to deal with only two dramas, cor-dhara and pimparā-gucova as the spirit, the subject-matters and the structures of his dramas are similar. These are known also as jhumurās, the sentiment of vātsalya rasa (filial sentiment) predominates in these one-act plays.

Dr R. K. Kakati opines that Madhavadeva's dramas can be regarded as a near-prototype of modern comedy. However Kakati seems to have referred more to the spirit of comedy than to the structure of European comedy. The contents of Madhavadeva's dramas, as we shall see presently, are frolicksome exploits of Kṛṣṇa. The laughter is situational arising from some incidents. It shows that he was at ease with child psychology and the filial sentiment. The intention is again not to create humour, but to depict child Kṛṣṇa, as the human symbol of supreme reality. He does not depict Kṛṣṇa, as in Pārijāt-haran, as a hen-pecked husband of a jealous wife, but as a naughty boy whose mischievousness worries her affectionate mother, but whose wit and supernatural powers impress her.

In both cor-dhara (catching the thief) and pimparā-gucovā (removing ants), Kṛṣṇa appears as a juvenile thief. In cor-dhara, he steals butter from a milk-maid's house. On being detected, he twists the incident in such a manner that the blame squarely falls on the innocent Gopīs, who cannot defend themselves. A happy compromise is soon reached with the Gopīs being persuaded to share their butter with the cow-herds and Kṛṣṇa agreeing to dance.

16. ASR, p.128; ASI, p.133
17. ANS, pp.34-35; Purani Assamīyā Sāhitya, pp.64-65
Yasodā too shows her motherly partiality in the amusing episode by siding with her son and says:

"You base milk-maids, slaves of slaves! How you dare to call my son Kṛṣṇa a thief and thus bring disgrace to him! Fie on you! You should feel ashamed. O dearest Kṛṣṇa, under no circumstances you should visit them again."19

(Ā he dhāndi govārīśava, dāśīka-dāśī, tohā sava hāmāra ohi bālaka Kṛṣṇa ka cora buliye kalaṅka karaichī. chih, torā savaka mukhe chāra paroka. He bāpū Kṛṣṇa, ohi bāndīsavaka thāve āvara nāhi āvahi.)

Yasodā makes a travesty of justice, blinded by her motherly love for her son. But neither her partiality nor Kṛṣṇa's prankishness is important. These are part of the game. The whole treatment of the incident is poetically comic and good-natured. The audience has before him an innocent world of harmless childish play which he enjoys by contrasting with his arid adult world. The incident is more than amusing. The childish trickery of Kṛṣṇa does not affect our sense of justice, but evokes our sense of laughter. All adults thus enjoy the waywardness of their children. Kṛṣṇa's skill in reversing the situation of his being accused as a thief, which he certainly is, is all the more enjoyable for it. He says, "Oh cowherdresses. You want to transfer the blame to me after partaking of curd and milk yourself. I shall not allow you to go scot-free."20

19. Cordhārā āru Pimparā-gucovā, p.56

He says thus after coming to the public street in presence of a crowd formed mainly of his playmates, the cowherds. The embarrassed Gopis, fearing counter-defamation, allow him to go. This clears the field for Yasoda's sallies.

We meet with the same vein of humorous depiction of incidents in pimparā-gucovā. Here Kṛṣṇa is again detected while he is trying to steal butter from a pot in a milk-maid's house. On being accosted, he pretends doing a useful work in removing ants from the pot of butter. The piece of conversation that follows is enjoyable and shows the part dialogue plays in arousing comic sentiment:

Milk-maid  –  O boy, who are you? This is my house.

Kṛṣṇa  –  Oh, don't you know me? I am Balāi's youngest brother.

Milk-maid  –  Ah, so you are Balāi's youngest brother! I now know, what exactly brought you here.

Kṛṣṇa  –  Oh Milk-maid, I came here mistaking it for my own house. I lost my way.

Milk-maid  –  Oh Kṛṣṇa, so you came here by chance, being unable to recognise the path to your house! For that you cannot be blamed! But why are you taking out butter from my pot?
Kṛṣṇa - Ah, Is it a great crime really? Those ants have spoiled the butter; I am only trying to remove them.

Milk-maid - Oh Kāṇāi, you are very cunning. You have eaten my butter and you lie when I ask you to explain your conduct. If you have not really taken my butter, how can its smell come out of your mouth as you speak?

Kṛṣṇa - Well, milk-maid, you are very cruel. It is you who have eaten the butter inside your own house to satisfy your appetite. Now for fear of your husband, you lay the blame on me. I have enough butter at home. Am I so famished that I would steal your butter.21

(Gopi) - Ahe bālaka, hāmāra mandire tu hu ke?

Kṛṣṇa - hāmāka nāhi cinaha, Hāmu balāika kaniśtha bhāi.

Gopi - Āhe, jānalo, jānalo, ki nimitta ethā āvali thika?

Kṛṣṇa - Hāmu hāmāra mandira bulī āvalo, pantha bicuralo.

Gopi - Ne Kṛṣna, tuhu ghara nāhi jāni āvala, ihāta kona doṣa nāhi. Hāmāra lavaṇu kalasī bhitare kaicana haste nibesiye thāv thika?

Kṛṣṇa - Āh, hāmāka bada doṣa pāvala. ohi pipilikā saya lavaṇu nāsa kayala ihāka dūra karite hāta diā āchi ...
The milk-maid this time persuades Yasodā successfully to take a stringent view of her son's crime. She chides him in anger and tries to out him to size. Cunning Kṛṣṇa however bursts out into a song and tries to defend himself. The child makes the usual complaints. He describes his supposed miseries at home and his uniqueness as a divine child; he threatens to desert his mother by making his escape to Mathurā. All these are immensely enjoyable as typical instances of childish audacity. The dialogue shows Mādhava-deva's capacity at characterisation through dialogue. There is much drollery with its air of innocence and surprise in the scenes described above. It is admirably mixed with the filial sentiment that is only a variant form of the devotional sentiment. In the comic elements there is amiable humour, that is polished by poetic imagination. Even though it is incidental and mirth-evoking, the incidental is integrated with the whole dramatic structure and the feeling of mirth is not purposeless.

The kathā-Rāmāyaṇa by Raghunāth Mahanta of circa early 18th century is unlike Mādhava Kandali's epic seems to be bare of any humour or satire and therefore we can leave this and other similar prose works out of consideration for our purpose. However one prose work of the period contains a few instances of laughter that are
worth examining. The work, already referred to, is the venerable Kathā-guru-carit, a typical production (circa 18th century) of the Vaisnavite theological culture in Assam.

Two of these are connected with the life of the doyen of saints, Śri Saṅkardeva, the founder of the neo-Vaisnavite religion in Assam. The first incident, is about "the taming of the bull" (gānda-mardana) and the second relates to "the wrestlers' flight".

The first incident is, in brief, as follows. The great saint, accompanied Paramānanda Ātoī, starts on a particular day for destination along the Rupkhār ālī. They cross the Deorā and soon reach Dalañi-bhuñyi. Here Paramānanda tries to dissuade his master from going that way as there is in it a black bull well-known for his depredations. The master however asks him to proceed fearlessly. The bull, seeing them coming, rushes at them, but presently it gets frightened and feels diffident to confront the mighty master; so it stops. The master throws his head-dress or turban at the bull; when it hits the bull, it falls down upon its horns with its eyes being lost to the view. Saṅkardeva takes him by the horn, presses its face against earth and throws him towards the street-drain. The bull whirls in the air. When Paramānanda examines him, it appears to have ceased breathing. Paramānanda is seized with fear lest the master be defamed with the crime of killing the bull. But soon the bull winks at him and Paramānanda heaves a sigh of relief. Paramānanda's unjustified fear about the master being involved in a heinous crime causes laughter, as the latter is believed in accordance with the Vaisnavite faith to be infallible. But this

22. Kathā-guru-carit, pp.37-38
laughter is sectarian, episodical and farcical. There is an element of improbability in the incident too.

There is some fun also in this incident of taming the bull, which reminds us of Bhīma's taming of Śiva's bull in Bhīm-carit. What is however noticeable here is the attempt on the part of the anonymous author to use the Hindu taboo on killing cows as an ingredient of laughter. In another story, again connected with Paramānanda Ātoī, the same device is used to arouse laughter. The incident is more interesting and amusing.

Once Śrī Rām Ātā asks Paramānanda whether he still counts on the support of his near and dear ones. Paramānanda replies in the affirmative. One day Ātā is hoeing his orchard field. He digs a pit and while filling it with rubbish materials, he puts a plain-tain sheath inside it in such a manner that a part of it, lying outside the pit, looks exactly like a cow's tail. He then calls Paramānanda and says:

"garuti māilo, ote puti thoico, jagarhe lāgil, daṅdo laba, yā lar mār, tor iṣṭa mitrat koi māti āngoi, ki budhi diye sodhgol." 23

(I have killed the cow, and buried it there, This is crime (sin). I shall receive punishment. Please go quickly and inform your relatives and friends and call them. Take their advice and see what can be done now.)

Paramānanda is greatly shaken, and runs to his relatives to inform him about the crime. Their reactions are interesting.

23. Kathā-guru-carit, pp.419-20
"Kataye kole ātā janā-bujā lok ki koile?
Kejho bole bhat khāi yāo bolā. Koto bole bolā yāo.
Kejho bole yi koile, prācit hoi barsabāh karak.
Koto bole koto nokabā, kejho bole goino ki karim
goi, ehi krame sabeo kahile, keo nāhil." 24

(Some of them reply that ātā is well-versed in Šāstras and so he should not have done this. Others simply tell him that they will go after dinner. Some of them assure him that they will be able to go after sometime. Others simply say to him: "What is done is done; now let him do atonement and hold a big prayer assembly (bar-sabāh)." Still others advise him to keep the matter secret. The rest of them frankly tell him that no purpose would be served by going there. Thus everybody gives excuses and refuses to turn up.)

The society is evidently upset by the news of the crime. Paramānanda's relatives fail him. He returns to ātā's place to report to him about his unusual experience. Ātā tauntingly remarks:

"Bole eihe ista mitra bharasa kariche, mor thākurat koichiline? Bole yā lar de kagoi." 25

("You have been relying on these relatives and friends. Did you inform my master? Now go quickly and inform him.")

Credulous Paramānanda runs to him (Mādhavdeva) and informs him of ātā's act of sacrilege. Mādhavdeva simply smiles at his worries and cuts jokes with him saying, "bāpere garu māriche, tāke koichahi". (How strange it is to hear from you that your senior has killed a cow?) Mādhavdeva then goes to ātā's

24. Kathā-guru-carit, pp.419-20
25. ibid.
place with Paramānanda and asks him the reason for calling him. Ātā replies, "iyār hunu sāthi jan iṣṭa mitra āsā kariche, tār pramāṇ karā gol." (He boasted that he has sixty relatives and friends on whom he relies. I tested (their loyalty) them.)

The moral of the story is to prove the limitations of worldly attachment or reliance on one's near and dear ones. But lesson is being imported through the humorous episode based on the taboo of cow-killing. The laughter is caused here by the contrast between human gullibility and human intelligence. Viewed as a story, it is indeed humorous; but the belief in the taboo is confined to a sect. Nevertheless it has a genuine touch of the laughable in it.

The story of the wrestler begins with the arrival of two veteran wrestlers at the court of Naronārayana, the Koca King. There is no rival to them at his kingdom. This causes depression in king's mind. When Saṅkardeva comes to know it, he invents a verbal trickery to demoralise the wrestlers. He carefully examines the daily ration allotted to the unwelcome guests; it consists of rice, salt, firewood, mustard oil and meat. Saṅkardeva then advised the store-keepers:

"bole tenekoi nidibi, pācire dhān, got bāh, gotā sarih, got pahu dibi. Sudhile kabi buli āmār mālak yenekoi diu tahatakarni tenekoi dicho. Si bole jadi tahatar mālano khāi kenekol, kabi buli āmār māle dekho dhān mohār māri phu māre, tuh yāi, sarih cepā māre tel olāi; bāh pitiki bhāṅgi nie; pahu coca māri uliāi khāi rāndhi."  

26. Kathā-guru-carīt, pp.419-20
27. ibid., pp.190-91
28. Ibid., p.191
"Do not give ration in the usual manner. Give basketful of paddy, whole bamboos, solid mustard seeds, and a full deer. If they express surprise, tell them that the menu and other necessaries have been served exactly in accordance with the practice here. If they want to know about the manner in which the local wrestlers prepare their food and eat, inform them that our wrestlers dehusk their paddy by blowing on it a current of air produced with their mouths. Tell them that they use no other instrument than hand to prepare edible oil from mustard seeds. Similarly, firewood is prepared from the complete bamboo and meat is squeezed out from the deer's body by means of hand. Then they cook and eat."

The ration-carriers carry out his instructions exactly according to his direction. Hearing their version of the local wrestlers' feat, the visitors get frightened and flee. When the king and the courtiers hear the funny story, they are much amused. Really it is a funny story, but wholly farcical.

Literal interpretation of the master's words causes, in the next episode, a devotee, named Harigatī, to behave like a fool. Madhavdeva, in one of his prayer-session, opines that the devotees should cultivate the nature of a python (āru bole bhakat hole ajagār-bṛttī hoba āge).²⁹ What he means is actually this:

"āmi kolu bolāko nubuli nindāko nusuni yei mile sukhata āge mile tāte santos hoi khāi-loi manak budhi khāoit pelāi ātmāk cinti hari gun gāba, nubuji laghane bhoke pari thākilgoi."³⁰

(What I mean is this. The devotee should always ignore popular slanders and abuses, and learn to live conten-

²⁹. Kathā-guru-carit, p.430
³⁰. ibid., p.430
dedly with what he finds near at hand. Thus living happily by controlling his mind by means of intelligence, the devotee should meditate on the soul and sing Lord's name).

This is what Nādhavdeva meant by the "nature of a python". But Harigoti ātoi, unable to catch its true meaning, goes to a ditch near his cottage and lie within it with his face towards the earth. When the master finds that he has been lying in this condition for three consecutive days, he is concerned and sends for him. It needs two persons to carry him in that wretched condition to the master's place. The master then rebukes him for distorting the meaning of his advice. This misuse of the mind and misinterpretation of words are however done often by honest men, as in this case. It is comedy's inherent belief that the mind and intelligence as instruments of knowledge or cognition of truth are imperfect and this belief is at the root of much wit and intellectual comedy. It is another device comedy uses to emphasise the limitations of the human mind often unconsciously. The limitation of mind is only the higher aspect of human limitations, which wit and humour often make it point to remind us. Harigoti's dullness points us towards that truth.

The third story reminds us of a more commonplace truth of comedy that even in our highest moment of prayer, it is often too difficult to forget the needs of the body. The following story in fact tells us this:

"ārhol ātoiyē kudhi (kurhi) māch tintā rāndhi kharikā di thoi, nām dhoilat gāhaloi eri āhil. Gai pāth sūniche, alpa nidrā āhiche, bole cuh cuh. pāth tholat gurujane bole kiya tumi ouh cuh cuh karichilā? Daṇḍavate pari bole bāp, kurhi māchaloī cāul sijāi thoi āhiho nām dhoilat
Arhoi Ata has cooked rice and roasted three kuhi fish in a spit. When the prayer-time arrives, he leaves these as they are and comes to join the Lord's prayer. After the prayer is over, he listens to the recitation of the sacred text, but soon begins to doze. Presently, he is heard to mutter the words, "get away" several times. As soon as the recitation is over, the master wants to know the reason of his muttering those words. Ata apologetically falls on his knees before him and says: "I was cooking rice and kept three kuhi fish ready for the meal, when the prayer-time arrived. I was worried lest the fish might be eaten by the cat. So I was thinking of it."

Madhavdeva advises him not to come to prayer without having his meal and then makes a witty remark:

"That cat is not real. Your mind is the real cat. The five ambrosias (i.e. Krsna) are being daily taken by it stealthily. You are being deprived of the same. Due to your unmindfulness and illusory dozing (mohanidrā), you have not attained real consciousness."

(Si biral nahaye, tomar manhe biral, Krsna pañcamrt curkoi khāba lāgiche bañci nite ān mankoi moha nidrāt pari cetanehe nopoā.)

The laughter here is caused by the situation in which Ata's culinary desire gets better of his devotional urge. In a sacred assembly he looks ridiculous. There is wit in the simile of the mind-cat which deprives the devotee of the five ambrosias. But what is

31. Kathā-guru-carit, p. 429
32. ibid.
loss for the soul of man seems to be gain for comedy; it invari-
ably reminds man of his hunger, sex, the need for clothing and shel-
ter.

In page 208, there is a reference to an interesting contro-
versy over the concept of 'Brahma'; this controversy is unconsciou-
sly provoked by the wrong interpretation of the concept by an ascetic
named Khagesvar, who comes for a contest, riding on the sacred book
placed on the back of a black cow. Sankardeva is surprised to meet
this eccentric and asks him the reason for his riding on the cow and
the Divine Book (kene brahmacāri, go śāstrar upare cari phurā?). Khage-
svar's reply suggests mal-functioning of his intellectual appara-
tus. Therefore he argues that the sacred book, the cow and himself
are all Brahma, and there can be no objection; a Brahma can ride
upon another Brahma (bole go, śāstra, hāmu sabe brahma, kicu dos
nāhi). The foolish argument requires perhaps a rough dealing of
some sort. Therefore the servant (ligirā) Rām asks him whether he
knows who he is. To this, the ascetic gives the hackneyed reply
that the servant is also Brahma. The master then moves aside to
enable the servant to give a fitting reply. The reply is in the
form of a physical blow on the ascetic's chest. The latter's head
then begins to reel and he bleats like a goat. The master then in-
tervenes and argues: "Well, the cow, the śāstra, myself, yourself,
everybody is God and Brahma. There is no fault in Brahma riding
upon a Brahma" (tehe gurujane bole, guru, śāstra, tumi, ādi īśvar,
brahma, Brahmat brahma carile kiohu dos nāi). The ascetic feels
vanquished and hurriedly leaves the place in shame. When the king
comes to know about it, he is unable to check his laughter.33

33. Kathā-guru-carit, p.207
There is a farcical element in the episode, but the controversy is not merely farcical. There is a serious element in it too; the malfunctioning of the intellect raises a question about the use of intellect itself. Khageśvar’s sophistic and unbalanced arguments are a trend in human thinking that denies the validity of thinking itself. This is a fit subject for comedy of the mind, but in Kathā-guru-carit, it receives a very casual treatment. It is not a work of comedy. In fact, the few episodes, some farcical and some comic, discussed here are merely peripheral; they are even not very meaningfully integrated with the highly reverential spirit of the compendium of popular biographies of the saints.