

CHAPTER - IV

COMMUNICATION: HUMOUR

4.1. Humour: An Introduction

Humour is the highest form of creativity. ¹ It plays a myriad of roles and serves a number of different functions. Most theories of humour and laughter are concerned with the situations under which laughter is regularly elicited rather than with an analysis of its nature or functions. It has been established that humour is a mental experience whereas laughter is its psychological response. Therefore, it may be stated that laughter indicates the presence of humour. ² According to the standard analysis, humour theories may be classified into three neatly identifiable groups: ‘Incongruity’, ‘Superiority’, and ‘Relief’ theories. The ‘Incongruity’ school sees humour as a response to an incongruity, a term broadly used to include ambiguity, logical impossibility, irrelevance, and inappropriateness. The ‘Superiority’ school believes that humour arises from a “sudden glory” felt when one recognizes one’s supremacy over others. The ‘Relief’ group of theorists sees humour as fundamentally a way to release or save energy generated by repression. ³

The present chapter, instead of strictly adhering to any particular theory of humour, takes into account an eclectic viewpoint or the general understanding on ‘humour’ developed in the contemporary age. In the present time, ‘humour’ is believed to be the tendency of particular images, stories, or situations to provoke laughter and provide amusement. ⁴ Thus, one finds ‘laughter’ and ‘amusement’ to be the two indicators of the presence of humour, or they may also be said to be the two end effects of humour. In fact, laughter and amusement are only generated when one comes across something unexpected; something that breaks the rules, or one’s expectations; something that is incongruous and unconventional. One finds here an echo of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, which states that the best way to get an audience to

laugh is to set up an expectation and deliver something “that gives a twist.”⁵ In the *Critique of Judgement*, Immanuel Kant gives a clearer statement on the role of incongruity in humour: “In everything that is to excite a lively laugh there must be something absurd (in which the understanding, therefore, can find no satisfaction). Laughter is an affection arising from the sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing.”⁶ Alastair Clarke, another renowned theorist, also expresses a similar idea and explains that humour occurs when the brain recognizes a pattern that surprises it, and that recognition of this type or sort is rewarded with the experience of the humourous response, an element of which is broadcast as laughter.⁷

In the light of the above discussion, a few poems of Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma have been analyzed to highlight the communication of humour in their thoughts, ideas, and personal experiences.

4.2. Humour in the Poetry of Maha Nand Sharma

Although Maha Nand Sharma’s poetic effect on the reader is mostly witty, ironic, or satiric, he sometimes tends to leave a comic impact as well. In some of his poems, he uses words in such a way that create a discourse which is pregnant with humour.

4.2.1. ‘Women’s Delegation to God’

For example, in the poem ‘Women’s Delegation to God’, the grievances of the female sex against bearing the torment of delivering a child have been underlined. A group of contemporary women forms a delegation and approaches God to file its complaint against the issue. The women charge God for being unjust to them as they are punished to suffer the pangs of labour pain time and again. They appeal to the Lord that their male counterparts should also be cursed with the capability of giving birth to offspring:

(1)
 In the novel land of Timbuctoo
 Was freedom all around
 But nature with one shackle, Pooh !,
 The women’s freedom bound.

(2)

The shackle, child-bearing, ah !,
 In process pained them deep
 For 'ah's' and 'ooh's' emanated, Pah !,
 From the mouth without sleep.

(3)

Though Science has lessened la bour pains
 For the rich and wicked folk
 Yet poor women bear the chains
 Of long delivery's yoke.

(4)

The women politicians rich
 Are social workers oft.
 They feel their poor fellows' itch
 And raise their flag aloft.

(5-6)

“Since Nature brings the pangs of birth
 Upon our fellows weak,
 And Nature both on stars and Earth
 Is ruled by God we seek,
 We'll form a delegation large
 And loudly shall complain
 In tones with burning passion charged,
 Of women's labour pains.”

(7)

So saying, women leaders all—
 In jeans like men appearing,
 Their tresses cascade-like—called
 On God with a queer bearing.

(8)

With a beard wavy, white and long
 Upon His throne of gold
 Almighty God was seated, strong
 And calm and grave and old.

(9)

He gaped with sudden wonder when
 The jeans-clad dames appeared.
 He asked them, “Ladies, what's your plan?
 What doubts? What sorrows, fears?”

(10)

A smile at God their leader threw
 And winked her flowery eye.
 With God unmoved, she quickly knew
 The stratagem she should try.

(11)

This tall and robust leader then
 In a furious voice thundered,
 “Your sly unequal-making plan
 Our freedom’s right has murdered.

(12)

From labour pains you keep the men
 So free they roam about
 While we, like cruelly butchered hens,
 In wild agony shout.”

(13)

In serious tones Almighty said,
 “Equality cannot be
 The samenesses which you want. How dead
 With sameness life will be !

(14-15)

You can be rid of labour pains
 If you are made the same
 As men in body. Then your gains
 Shall end Divine game.
 No children shall be born at all
 And human life shall end.”

A dame whose heart was full of gall
 Thus tried God to mend:

(16)

“So change thy laws that once the wife,
 And once the husband bears.”

“The changing laws of politic life
 Are not my laws, my dear.

(17)

“The child-bearing turn by turn
 May lead to competition.
 Till sons are borne by both, they’ll yearn
 For child- birth –repetition.

(18)

“If men give birth to babes like Eve,
 One-third of working persons –
 Of men and dames—shall be on leave
 With birth-pangs as their reasons.

(19)

“In schools and courts and offices all
 No work shall ever be done.
 With such a work-obstructing fall,
 How shall your world be run?

(20)

“To me the life is not, O fools,
 Democracy’s big jungle.
 You all should be the duteous tools
 Which work but do not grumble.

(21)

“My global Universe is a field
 Of four dimensions vast
 Where stars of different sizes yield
 To laws which bind them fast.

(22)

“With all its beings your world as well
 Is an organization large.
 There disciplined minds and hearts should dwell
 To sail humanity’s barge.”

(23)

“But what for equality?” bawls
 A woman leader straight.
 “In balanced traits the creatures all
 Are equal. Why you prate?”

(24-25)

“If men have strength, the beauty you,
 And what you freedom call
 Is but licentiousness.” “Oh ! Pooh !”
 Thus roared the women all,

“To parliament we all shall go
 And sit at *Dharna* there
 And Parliament shall overthrow
 Your cruel laws unfair.”

“In the novel land of Timbuctoo” sets the ground for the poem. It serves as an image to depict the idiosyncrasies of all types juxtaposed with the so-called civilized intelligence of educated/learned people. The stories related to ‘Timbuctoo’ in various societies is rich with amusing anecdotes, and the poet here adds to such amusing experience by narrating the strange appeal of women’s delegation to God. The place Timbuktu, often referred as ‘Timbuctoo’, is used as a metaphor and metonymy to refer to what is unattainable, surprising or fantastic, but at the end, helps human race to progress. Thus, with the help of the proper noun ‘Timbuctoo’, the narrator helps the readers to escape into the fictional land. The first two stanzas of the poem clearly project the central concern of the poem, and the reader becomes aware of the context of the poem. The way the poet uses the exclamatory “Pooh”, “Pah”, “ah” etc. helps him to verbally create the very situation of labour pain on the one hand, which complement and re-inforce the women’s delegation’s key logic. They want to break the shackle and be free. The poet reaches the height of humour when the women challenge God.

The fourth stanza of the poem makes a mockery of the female social activists as it suggests that women who are rich step into the role of a politician via their social activities (or NGOs ?) because they have nothing else to do. They aggrandize the pain suffered by the poor ladies to gain the attention of the world, and thus, raise themselves to become popular; but are not at all concerned for them in real terms. The ladies belonging to the upper strata of the society talk of women’s rights and liberty, without investigating the roots of the problem, and raise illogical, unjustified, and petty issues to create a large debate.

The phrase “women leaders all”, in the first line of the seventh stanza, suggests that the group of ladies is unable to select a particular leader among themselves, as no one supports the other or is not ready to be guided by any other lady, and they all consider themselves to be leaders. The next line adds to the humour as the women are protesting against the inequality between men and women but they present themselves as men, as far as clothing and appearance is concerned, and not women.

The description of God in the eighth stanza of the poem intensifies the humorous effect as it projects God as a male character, who is “grave and old.” The phrase “gaped with sudden wonder”, in the first line of the ninth stanza, to describe the reaction of God is quite amusing as it suggests that even He is unable to recognize His own creation, i.e. they were women, in the first glance.

The stratagem adopted by one of the ladies to influence God by her beauty and gestures, “winked her flowery eyes”, in the first attempt, and then, when she finds it not doing the trick, immediately changing her strategy to roar loud upon Him, which is suggested by the phrase “furious voice thundered”, casts an amusing and surprising effect. It communicates that the contemporary woman knows all the tricks to influence a man, and she resorts to different tricks at different junctures of time. She charges God for being unjust to women and murdering their right to freedom.

The twelfth stanza depicts a comparison between women and “cruelly butchered hens” to suggest the condition of a woman bearing labour pain, whereas on the other hand, the men “roam about” freely as they never encounter such a pain. The image of a “cruelly butchered hen” has a gender connotation with a criticism of Nature making women only undergoing the sufferings of pregnancy. The imagery of “hens” is loaded with suggestion, such as ‘helplessness’, ‘slow dying’, and ‘commodification’. While women have to suffer the labour pains alone, men keep roaming about freely; they compel sexual union, impregnate women, and leave them “cruelly” to suffer like “butchered hens” all the subsequent agonies.

The delegation demands an equal status for women, i.e. to be placed at par with men. Finally, God is forced to give an explanation, and He explains that equality never means sameness. God has blessed both the sexes with certain distinctive characteristics, capabilities, and powers to make the functioning of the world smooth. If women are relieved from the responsibility of bearing children, the world would come to an end.

Such an explanation on the part of God makes the women speechless, but one of the women finds an alternative to it as well, and she suggests to God to change His laws by making the husbands bear pregnancy turn by turn. Such a suggestion, and that too, by a woman (who is

blessed by the ability to bear children) to the Almighty evokes boisterous laughter. The suggestion is outrightly rejected by the Supreme, and He provides a number of reasons to support His decision. The reasons provided by God add fuel to the inherent humour of the situation.

The poet subtly turns the humourous stance of women folk to political satire because one frequently encounters the parliament becoming a theatre of slogan-shouting and sit-ins (*dharna*) which throttles the very spirit of democracy and breaks all rules. Stanza 20 evokes a gentle satire, with an undercurrent of humour, on the system of democracy as it is termed to be “big jungle.” It communicates that people, especially the leaders, only talk big in a democratic set up but never make an honest attempt to meet their responsibilities. The surprising element is that although God puts forth enough logical arguments to support His laws, the delegation does not accept it as fair, and continue protesting. The delegation even goes to the extent of challenging the authority or ‘Supremacy’ of God by saying that they would sit on a protest (sit-in or *dharna*), until and unless, their demands are entertained favourably.

The last few stanzas of the poem seem to mimic the feminist trend that was in vogue in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The poem closely develops an association with the women social activists fighting for the cause of women in the present times. Some of these social activists unearth such issues that do not require any discussion at all, but they project it so large that it becomes a hot debate, even threatening the stability of the government. They link each and every issue to the subjugation of women, and thus, display a prejudiced opinion regarding the male sex. It seems that the women of the contemporary age are seeking a revenge on the men for their past deeds, i.e. oppression of women in the past. The delegation is even not ready to listen to God, only because, He is a male (in the poem). The women allege God for making “cruel laws unfair”, which clearly depicts their uneasy state. The use of double modifiers, i.e. “cruel” and “unfair”, to comment on the laws of God is humourous in the context of the poem.

A close analysis of the poem reveals that all the lines of the poem range between five to nine syllables, and each stanza strictly adheres the end rhyme-scheme *a b a b*. The dramatic structure of the poem and the dialogue between women and God is interesting. The arguments of the delegation are funny, even if said seriously. The first and the third line of each stanza is of eight or nine syllables, whereas the second and the fourth are of five to seven syllables each, and such a uniformity along with the end rhyme pattern lends a smooth rhythm to the poem. The narration has no abrupt deviations or break-ups and that facilitates the discourse of humour. The stress pattern of the poem depicts that the key-words that help in the synthesis of humour are stressed.

Overall, the triangle of ‘Women versus Men’, ‘Nature and God’ versus ‘Men and Women’, and ‘Nature and God’ versus ‘Democracy and Parliament’ presents a humourous situation which climaxes in satire, i.e. what is conceived as humourous ends up in satire. The poem seems to be designed in a biased manner to support male chauvinism, as it depicts that God is a male and He talks ‘sane’, whereas ‘women’ talk ‘insane’ as they support their argument with stupid logics.

4.2.2. ‘If’ or ‘A Politician’s Precepts to his Son’

In the poem ‘If’ or ‘A Politician’s Precepts to his Son’, the narrator (a politician) tells his son how to become a politician. This is rich and subtle in self exploration and understanding what a politician is supposed to do to retain his job or to be successful. The poem creates a comic effect which runs on the verge of irony. The narrator is such an experienced and thick-skinned politician that even in talking to his son, he talks the way he would talk to other politicians or leaders. Even if he sounds to give his son the freedom of choice – mark the use of the conditional clauses beginning with “If” and its hypothetical implications – he seems to talk plain with no motif to change his lot. The discourse also suggests that he is grooming his son the way he himself has become, i.e. a seasoned-crook:

“ If you can loudly preach but practice not,
And slyly pull the strings from far behind;
If you can change your stand with not a jot
Of pain, in subtle plausible words refined;

If you can grease the palm to please the flocks
 Of those with whom the way to wealth is lined;
 If you can use the toughs, for money bought,
 For blotting out your questioning rivals blind;

“ If you can gather all your wiles and charms
 Of smiles, of flesh, of speech, of slavish help;
 And show’r them like the fragrant flow’rs to warm
 Your master’s heart with extra dose of pelf;
 If you can play the double role, unharmed,
 Between your boss and boss of boss by stealth;
 If you can worm the secrets out by charm
 And give them out in places due, yourself;

“ If you, for hours and hours, can hold the mike
 And, like Messiah new, can thump and thunder,
 And rouse mill-hands to promptly go on strike
 And then, for money, let the hands go under;
 If you can fool the rich and poor alike
 And get the funds from one and votes from the other,
 And then through bribes, heavy taxes, hikes,
 And heavy cuts and large commissions, plunder;

“ If you can bear to be, by *chappals*, hit
 And say a Gandhian victory you have won;
 If you can be a crook, a thief, a hermit,
 A person chaste, a lecher—all in one;
 If you can get released, notorious culprits
 And count thick wads of notes when the day is done;
 Yours is the Earth and everything that’s in it
 And—which is more—you’ll be a man, my son.” ⁹

The poem is a parody of Rudyard Kipling’s famous poem ‘IF’. The politicians and the political scene has been one of the leading concerns of most of the poets, and they have been depicted, either in a humourous or a satirical vein. Therefore, as soon as it is discovered that the given piece (text) projects contemporary politicians, one is prepared to receive some ironical, satirical, sarcastic, or humourous remarks, and such an expectation on the part of

the reader facilitates poetic communication. The poet may, either directly infuse the humour by making certain comments, descriptions, portraiture, etc., or in an indirect (concealed or implicit) manner as Maha Nand Sharma does in the present poem, where humour is integral to the discourse of the poem. When humour is directly infused, it may be easily traced with the analysis of the lexical elements, semantic structure, and the ideas/thoughts conveyed, but when a poet chooses the other way round, the humourous effect depends on the knowledge of the reader in regard to the topic or subject of discussion, i.e. the context of the discourse exactly from the perspective of the poet.

One is sure to enjoy the poem's sheer humour if one has read Kipling's 'IF'. Kipling's poem is an inspirational, motivational, and serious cum elevating poem, which encourages and boosts the confidence of the reader; whereas Sharma's 'IF' is a humourous cum sarcastic poem that depicts all the negative characteristics or vices of a politician in a manner that they appear to be positive qualities (virtues) that a politician must possess in order to survive in politics. But, even if one is unaware of Kipling's 'IF' (not read Kipling), and reads Sharma's poem as the first reading, one cannot miss the humour that characterizes the context and discourse. The poetic style adopted by Maha Nand Sharma in the poem, especially the way he ridicules or expresses his contempt for the contemporary politicians, reminds one of a contemporary British poet Clive James, who too, castigates dons, politicians, and poetasters his *Poem of the Year* (1983):

But then the crocus drives up to the sun
 And Sue puts on a floating cotton dress
 And that fine friendship as of priest and nun
 Erupts into a secular distress.
 Those sonnets that she turns out by the ton
 Must mean the girl's a gifted poetess:
 Sue's such a doll she'd make Professor Carey
 Say that she wrote like Dante Alighieri. ¹⁰

Such a humourous stance is also noticed in one of the short poems of R.K. Singh in *Music Must Sound* (1990):

Doctor Chakroverty
 damned Mrs Gandhi
 damned Nixon
 damned Politics
 called them rogues
 when I said
 they're fools
 he said
 no

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Although the poetic style of Clive James comes closer to that of Maha Nand Sharma, Sharma distinguishes himself by communicating in a general tone, or simple manner, instead of straight away mentioning the names, like R.K. Singh, of those he wishes to refer. Thus, Sharma avoids himself from directly attacking the persons at the receiving end.

The poems communicate the political awareness of the poets by underscoring the deceptiveness of politicians. Sharma's poem unveils the true nature of the politicians and highlights the difference between what they say and what they practice. It also projects, how they plunder the country's wealth and resources for their personal benefit. The whole seems to be a 'Checklist' (which the speaker, a politician, passes on to his son) to ensure that one is properly quipped and geared up to get into active politics.

The very first line of the poem is amusing as it juxtaposes two contrasting human behavioral aspects together, "loudly preach but practise not." The rest of the stanza is a self-exploration of the nature of a politician: who keeps away from active participation in an event where risk is involved, and instead manages it through his aides; who changes his "stand with not a jot" with the help of "subtle plausible words refined"; who pleases "those with whom the way to wealth is lined"; and who hires "toughs" to be able to blot out "questioning rivals blind", i.e. check any revolt or disturbance against him. The first stanza displays alliteration and assonance, for example, "grease/please", "loudly/slyly", "preach/practise", "with/whom/way/wealth", "for/blotting/out", "questioning/rivals/blind", etc; the end rhyme-scheme of *a b a b a b a b* with the lexical items "not/jot/flocks/bought" and "behind/refined/lined/blind"; and anaphora as each alternate line begins with the conditional

phrase “If you can...”, and these all features impart internal rhyming and a smooth rhythm to the poem. These stylistic features are evident throughout the poem and it contributes to the making of humour.

The second stanza continues in the same vein, with the same rhythm and equal number of syllables in each line, to throw more light on the hypocrisy and corrupt ways of the politicians. The startling contrast between their (politicians) projection of themselves, and their real nature constructs the discourse of humour with an undercurrent of satire. The politician-speaker continues to preach his son and suggests him further that one should be capable of using one’s smiles, speech, acts, etc. to impress one’s seniors and use their favour to elevate oneself in terms of status and power. The use of the phrase “extra dose of pelf” is quite humorous, as it depicts “pelf” (measured in terms of ‘dose’) possessing certain medicinal qualities; it is a cautious reminder for parting with more money to buy favours. The fifth and the sixth lines of the stanza communicates that one should be able to “play the double role” between one’s “boss and boss of boss”, i.e. should know how to double-cross the people who trust him, in order to ascend to power quickly. Again, the last two lines of the stanza communicate that one should leak out certain secrets at “places due”, i.e. appropriate places, where they reap maximum profit, irrespective of one’s moral obligation and ethical commitments.

In the same humorous vein, the third stanza communicates that one should be able to give long speeches, and that too, in a loud voice to impress and encourage the audience; gain the favours of all the different classes alike, such as labourers, capitalists, industrialists, poor, rich, etc. and then use their services to meet one’s maximum requirement; and should never forget one’s personal gain behind all the activities. All such suggestions unveil the ugly face of the politicians, and thus, construct a satire coated in the sweet syrup of humour.

The final stanza of the poem continues in the similar vein to maintain the uniformity of the poem. The first two lines are quite humorous as it depicts that a politician is even ready to be hit by *chappals* (footwear), which depicts insult and protest, if one sees a profit in it. The next two lines communicate that one should inculcate the qualities of a crook, a thief, a

hermit, a chaste person, and a lecher, all at a time in order to succeed in politics. In the context of the poem, the characteristics of a crook, thief, and a lecher are displayed as if they were qualities or virtues rather than being vices. The suggestion of possessing the traits of a crook, thief, and lecher along with the qualities of a chaste person (to project oneself as a hermit) communicates that one needs to be a hypocrite to succeed in politics. Another noteworthy point that adds to the humour of the poem is the use of a small “m” in the word “man”, whereas in Kipling’s ‘IF’, the narrator provides the tips to become “Man”. The humour lies in one’s journey from ‘Man’ to ‘man’. The poet effects such a change at the lexical level to impart the poem with a new suggestive meaning, i.e. the “Man” degrades to the status of a “man” by becoming a politician (?); this also suggests that human beings have deteriorated to the position of a weak, selfish, cunning, and ordinary creature; or in other words, the human beings have lost the reputation of being the Supreme creature of God. Thus, the poem demonstrates an inextricable blending of humour and satire. Like Kipling’s ‘IF’, Sharma’s poem is composed in four stanzas of eight lines each, and all the stanzas display an end rhyme scheme of *a b a b a b a b*, thus, maintaining a uniformity in the texture and rhythm of the poem.

However, Sharma seems to be challenging the logic and viewpoint of Rudyard Kipling in his discourse. Though he follows the same poetic pattern and design, as Kipling, but his intention is to convey the opposite of what Kipling’s ‘IF’ conveys. Sharma’s parody is remarkable for his set of rules for a would-be politician which is in fact provided by the politicians themselves. The poem is relevant today because it characterizes the politicians’ urge for power and self-development at the cost of personal integrity, dedication, loyalty, and positive behavior towards the people who elect them to power and position. Thus, Sharma’s poem projects how to dehumanize a human or how a man seizes to be a ‘Man’, when he becomes a politician; this is what is Sharma’s concern, which is totally different from Kipling’s concern of making a ‘man’, a ‘Man’. Kipling’s narrator appears to be a ‘sage’, while Sharma’s narrator is an experienced crook, and it is quite evident from their tone and style.

4.2.3. 'A Paradox'

The poem 'A Paradox' is a comment on the way English Literature is taught at schools, colleges, and universities in India. It is composed in the Shakesperean/Elizabethan sonnet form. As the previous two poems, it is developed in a humourous vein with an undercurrent of satire. The poem begins in a dramatic style with an address to the great bard, Shakespeare, and discloses that how his reputation is endangered at the hands of the teachers of English Literature in the present times:

Immortal Shakespeare, thou art every day
By teachers, pupils murdered in our schools
And learning's temples higher, in various ways
Through notes and cramming, learning's cheapest tools.

The cerebral critics bred in politics' dens,
Our institutes, who tear the lovely rose
Of poesy fine to bits with axe-like pens
Are daily murdering thee in dullest prose.

But grieve not, Bard. For we, the common readers
Penetrating to the heart of thee, who hear
The music of the poesy fine, are feeders
Upon thy charm with hearts and minds clear.

O ! what a startling paradox is this !
The pigmies follow what the giants miss. 12

The speaker celebrates the worldwide popularity and genius of Shakespeare by addressing him as "Immortal" in the very first line of the poem. The second and the third line unveils that Shakespeare is murdered every day in schools, colleges, and even in universities, not only by the pupils but also by the teachers. It communicates that Shakespeare (plays and poems of Shakespeare) is not taught properly at the places of learning, and as a result, the young learners have framed an entirely different opinion of Shakespeare. They do not read the original texts of Shakespeare, but rely on "notes and cramming." The poem unveils the practice of teaching as well as learning Shakespeare (and other celebrated authors/poets)

from the ‘cheap’ (not well developed) study materials that are easily available in market, which do not give a correct analysis of the text; and thus, murdering the literary essence of the great texts. In the first line, Shakespeare is said to be “Immortal”, whereas the next line unveils his ‘murder’ to construct the discourse of humour.

The use of the word “cerebral” as a modifier to the critics of the contemporary age suggests that they do not apply their emotions or feelings when analyzing a text, and are solely guided by their intellectual instincts, although it may be misleading them. All the centres of learning are claimed to be politics’ den, and the use of the word “den” for academic centres infuses a pungent satiric note into the poem. The treatment that poetry receives at the hands of the contemporary critics is well described or suggested by the expression “axe-like pens”. These critics are said to “tear the lovely rose”, i.e. poetry, with their cruel “axe-like pens”. In the process of their analysis, they kill the poetic essence of ‘poesy’, and thus, convert the living poetry into “dullest prose.”

In the third stanza of the poem, the speaker projects himself as a representative of that class of readers who read poetry for deriving aesthetic pleasure out of it, and assures Shakespeare that he would do justice to his poetic worth. The stanza communicates that it is this class of readers, who dive deep into poetry to celebrate its beauty and essence rather than being harsh on the same with their strict yardstick of measurements, that has kept poetry alive and made eminent authors and poets immortal.

The last two lines of the poem add to the discourse of humour as well as intensify the underlying satire. The use of the word “startling” as a modifier to “paradox”, which itself suggests a surprising revelation, sounds an amusing exaggeration. Again, the contrast developed between the two entities, i.e. “pigmies” and “giants”, in such a way that “pigmies” are projected as “giants” and *vice-versa* leads to the comic effect. On the same hand, it also constructs a satire on the contemporary critics who consider themselves as “giants”, but are not even worthy enough to be placed among the “pigmies” as well.

Humourously, the poet shows his concern towards the reputation of the great genius, Shakespeare, and condemns the way Shakespeare is taught in schools and universities,

thereby displaying a good affinity with the “Bard”; but himself is putting the reputation of Shakespeare at stake by forging the structural quality and elements of Shakesperean sonnet in his adaptation of the same, thus, making the *Paradox* humorous. For creating the humorous effect, Sharma adapts Shakesperean sonnet form leaving out the standard stress and metrical pattern, which is necessarily iambic pentameter, in Shakesperean sonnets. This is intentionally done in this particular poem, as it is well known that Maha Nand Sharma is quite competent in handling Shakesperean/ Elizabethan sonnet form. To quote Mamta Sharma: “In most of his sonnets, Sharma follows Shakespeare not in the simple outward rules of rhyme and lines but also in the more intricate ones such as a turn in emotional tone in the third quatrain, making the concluding couplet clinching and introducing modulations in the iambic lines by substituting spondees here and there. The modulations make the lines musical. Like Shakespeare, he keeps his lines end-stopped.”¹³

4.2.4. ‘Revolution in Timbuctoo’

In the poem, ‘Revolution in Timbuctoo’, the speaker narrates the story of a revolution, political as well as sartorial, that Timbuctoo witnesses because of an eccentric idea. As already discussed, the name “Timbuctoo” itself is pregnant with humour because of its association and connotative suggestions. The poem sounds like a ‘*nursery-rhyme*’ because of its rhyme-scheme, stress-pattern, meter, and rhythm:

With Turkish cap upon his head
A dhoti round his legs,
In tie and coat himself he clad
And daily drank some pegs.

And those who saw him smiled at him
And asked him, “What you are?”
Replied he, turning stern and grim,
“I’m secular man untarred.”

When a secular government came to power,
He went to high-ups straight,
And said, “I’m secular culture’s flower.
My dress has secular traits.

“Symbolic t’is of all the main
 Religions of this land
 To introduce this dress is sane
 In line with national trend.

“The votes of Christians, Moslims all
 And secular Hindus too
 You’ll get in close ensuing polls
 If such address you woo.”

In Turkish caps and ties and coats
 And *dhoties* round their legs,
 The secular leaders begged for votes.
 Their tongues they glibly wagged.

As a secular government came to power
 Sartorial revolution
 Of culture secular brand o’erpowered
 Timbuctans’ novel nation.

Timbuctoo’s English dailies took
 The cry, “The Turkish cap
 And *dhoti*, tie and coat, forsooth,
 Must fill our cultural gap.”

The elite all around now sang
 The praises of this dress.
 Traditional dresses all were hanged
 For this sartorial mess. ¹⁴

The first stanza of the poem describes the appearance of a person who intends to project himself as a secular person, and for the purpose, he attires himself in a unique combination of clothing, each item being a symbol, or having a strong association, of a particular caste or community of people. The person has a political motive of gaining the support/confidence of all the sections of the society, and therefore, puts on a “Turkish cap”, “*dhoti*”, “coat”, and “tie.”

The second stanza depicts that although people laugh at his appearance, he does not feel shy and continues to present himself in the same fashion (of his own). People look at him amusingly and ask “What you are ?” Here, the interrogative remark, “What you are?” instead of ‘Who you are?’ or ‘Who are you?’ evokes humour, as it suggests that people look at him as if he is a commodity and not a human. The reply, “I’m secular man untarred”, adds to the humour as it uses the word “untarred” as a modifier to the term “secular man”.

The third stanza reveals that the person is a political agent as he rises to power with the change of the government. Now, he calls himself a “secular culture’s flower” and also explains the characteristics of his dress, i.e. its “secular traits.” The dress represents all the religions of Timbuctoo, and therefore, the dress is adjudged to be in line with the national trend. The trend setter advocates the great utility and worth of the dress to his party workers, and humourously, they willingly accept the unique dress as their dress-code. The efforts on the part of the party workers attired in the ‘new’ dress bear fruitful results and a secular government comes to power. Thus, the poem communicates that how easily the politicians have a sway over the minds of the common people, or how the common people are easily befooled by these leaders, and they go to any extent to lure voters.

The expression “Sartorial revolution” in the second line of the seventh stanza evokes boisterous laughter as it has its roots in the foolish/funny idea of dressing oneself in a *dhoti*, coat, tie, and a Turkish cap. Humourously, as a result of the “Sartorial revolution”, the dress is recognized as a brand of secularism, and thus, it becomes a symbol of national importance. The sartorial revolution is hilarious like the comic concept of ‘Timbuctoo’ in various literatures. The poet seems to view India as Timbuctoo, and the comic portrayal of a secular man with a Turkish cap, *dhoti*, tie, and coat is not only critical of the policy of secularism followed in India, but it is also humourous: “To introduce this dress is sane / In line with national trend.” The narrator seeks to poke fun at the politics of votes in the name of religions, and yet, theoretically remaining secular. The humour of appealing to secular Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, with “Turkish cap”, “*dhoti*”, “tie and coat” smacks of the common man in the cartoons of R.K. Laxman (In R.K. Laxman’s cartoons, the common wears a Gandhian cap, instead of Turkish cap). Such a dress should strengthen national unity

besides filling “our cultural gap.” The humour is loaded both in favour and against certain political parties in India that question the secular credentials of the country. The use of the expressions such as “Sartorial revolution”, “culture secular brand”, and “novel nation” facilitates the communication of humour.

The last stanza of the poem depicts all the elites of Timbuctoo singing the praises of this ‘new’ dress, which is actually a “sartorial mess”, as they believe that it fills the cultural gap of the country. The new dress banishes all the “Traditional dresses” of Timbuctoo. There is a pun over the word “hanged” as it is in function with both (connotative and denotative) of its meaning simultaneously: the first, suggesting that the traditional dresses were left in the wardrobes, i.e. discarded; and the second, the traditional dresses were murdered, killed, or executed to make way for the revolutionary one. The stanza communicates the narrator’s dissatisfaction with “sartorial revolution” becoming “sartorial mess” because this has facilitated the supporters of change to come to power. The victory of pseudo-secularism is not appreciated. The last stanza seems to be a severe comment, but in a humourous vein, on the young generation that is getting away from its roots/traditional values/culture, as it is being befooled by the alluring glamour of the modern world.

The poem is a mockery on the attitude of the contemporary people, who consider themselves wise, to replace the good things/qualities/values/practices with the worthless ones on the name of development and improving standards. It communicates Sharma’s temperament which does not advocate of leaving traditional practices (those that are good) in a haste to make way for the modern ways of living. The end rhyme scheme of *a b a b* in each stanza and the regular repetition of the stressed vowel sounds throughout the poem imparts a high tone, but a smooth rhythm, to the poem facilitating the discourse of humour.

4.2.5. ‘Encashment’

The poem ‘Encashment’ humourously criticizes the materialistic attitude of the contemporary people. It displays that in the present age, everyone likes/wishes/plans to have a reward for any good trait that one possesses, or any service that one provides:

(1)

“We did not use our leave; therefore,
 We’ll get our leave encashed.
 We are fair in dealings,” *babus* roar,
 “Our fairness we’ll encash.”

(2)

“Our leader’s image we’ll encash,”
 The followers slyly think.
 At followers’ money-grabbing rash
 The ‘honest’ leader winks.

(3)

The freedom-fighters say, “We will
 Our struggle get encashed,”
 While nation, bleeding fast, is chilled
 To penury sin-enmeshed.

(4)

When invaluable traits of soul
 Are bartered for such trash,
 Why not this greedy nation whole
 May grope in the dark and crash? 15

The narrator recalls how after retirement an employee seeks ‘encashment’ of leave and other benefits. The dealing clerk who is used to performing his routine duties only after receiving bribe, asserts his ‘fairness’ by declaring “Our fairness we’ll encash.” The clerks (humourously called *babus*, which literally means important or powerful person) can make or unmake one’s official documents and so they expect, in fairness, some extra money for their ‘service’. The first two lines of the poem implicitly also suggests that the employees, especially of the government sector, could easily manage all their personal and private affairs by absconding from the office during working hours, i.e. being on leave without any official leave sanctioned, and that it why they still have their leaves intact on the official records, and now they demand cash against these leaves on the records.

Similarly, the next stanza pictures the encashment of “Our leader’s image” by money grabbing, land grabbing, etc. by the followers of various political hues. The raw humour lies in “The ‘honest’ leader winks.” The fact is that the leader is ‘dishonest’ and the followers

are 'sly'. The party activists or workers always exploit others on the name of their party's/organization's top leadership. The humour evolves from the fact that these workers or activists have hardly ever met the top leaders, but they wish to draw materialistic gains on account of that acquaintance which does not exist at all. The use of the word "honest" for the corrupt politicians amuses the reader. The word "winks" unveils the corrupt attitude and mischievous intentions of these leaders.

Even the freedom-fighters want to get their struggle encashed, although the country still remains enslaved to all sorts of ills, difficulties, and challenges. It is expected that these freedom fighters would fight against the present evils endangering the bright prospects of the country, but they show no such interest and instead of safeguarding the interests of the country, they push it towards more challenging situations. The humour evolves from the fact that although there are a good number of people who call themselves 'freedom-fighters' in order to receive the benefits from the government, they are not at all concerned about the country.

The last stanza of the poem displays the speaker's concern for the country. It communicates that it is the dubious, unfaithful, corrupt, and hypocritical attitude of the citizens that has plunged the country into the penurious state. Thus, one finds the poet, yet again, constructing a discourse of humour with an undercurrent of a gentle satire to communicate his social awareness. The poem, implicitly, encourages one to shed off one's personal benefit motives and work towards the development of the country.

4.2.6. 'The Professor-Critic and His Class of Poets'

Maha Nand Sharma seems to be very displeased with the lukewarm attitude of contemporary critics towards poetry, especially Indian English Poetry. The critics of the contemporary age are well equipped with a number of theoretical approaches and the scientific study of the language, so much so that they apply all these skills in the reading of poetry. They tend to forget/neglect that poetry is a quite different genre from others (such as fiction, drama, and prose) as it is the emotive function of language that is at work in poetry, unlike others, where language is most of the times referential. A number of poems of Maha

Nand Sharma reflects his viewpoint which advocates a different set of principles, or yardstick to assess the merit of poetry and discards the approach of the contemporary critics towards poetry: “As tender as a rose I am. / O Critic, crush me not. / The tide of feelings do not stem / With hair-splitting thought.”¹⁶

Maha Nand Sharma, being a poet and a critic himself, is of the opinion that poetry should not be judged on certain strict parameters, and that too, of grammar and syntactic rules of the language: “Should piercing knife—Your head—dissect / What none but heart can make? / I’m sp’rit divine brewed, in fact, / The thirst of soul to slake.”¹⁷ He sounds very critical of the contemporary critics and states: “Some modern critics seem to have a craze for novelty and, as if in response to their demand, some poets also introduce all sorts of novelties in their poems—each novelty surpassing the other in grotesqueness. The novelties look no better than the novelty of a man wearing one-legged trousers or a conical paper cap, just to distinguish himself from others. It is very often forgotten by such critics and poets that poetry, like many things in this world, has always been passing through a process of evolution in which each forward step has been an advance upon the former ones but certainly not a turning about.”¹⁸

Sharma presents his profound poetic philosophy/consciousness, wrapped in a layer of humour and irony, in his poem titled ‘The Professor-Critic and His Class of Poets.’ The poem, in a humourous vein, depicts the contemporary academic/ literary sphere, where deserving talents (poets) are dominated, exploited, and ruled over by such critics who stand no match to their poetic genius. Logically, the critics should be dependent upon poets; but ironically, the scene is just the other way round in the present times, and it is observed that the poets are dependent on these modern snobs (critics) for recognition and accreditation. The narrative poem begins with the description of a scene, which resembles the image of a *gurukul*, where a class (group) of poets awaits a celebrated Professor-Critic. The description of the poets, assembled under “a spreading banyan tree”¹⁹, with “beards o’ergrown”²⁰, “nails too long”²¹, “locks disheveled, dry”²²; but “hearts which throbbed with passion strong”²³ and “hopes that never die”²⁴ present the traditional (the image people have of a poet) and realistic image of a poet. These poets are compared with “urchins”²⁵ and it is

revealed that they have assembled to “please”²⁶ the visiting professor “with their creative works.”²⁷ The narrator describes the entry of the Professor-Critic (Professor Ramsay Phagot) in a dramatic mode:

The class was into silence tamed
 When, quick as a striking thought
 Or lightning in the heavens, came
 Professor Ramsay Phagot. ²⁸

Professor Phagot is very impressive (look-wise) in his western outfit, and as a result, the four great poets namely Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, and Tagore decide to descend from Heaven to “enjoy the fun” of “poetry-learning”:

They thought, “We should enjoy the fun
 Of poetry-learning there
 On Earth where poets read with a Don
 Who smartly takes a chair. ²⁹

The very idea of the four great poets, who devoted the whole of their life to poetry, to learn poetry from a modern critic is trifle enough to evoke laughter. Again, the use of the word “Don” to refer to the modern critic (Phagot) leads to multiple meanings: the word “Don” has an archaic use in the British context, where it means ‘a teacher at a university, especially Oxford or Cambridge’; whereas in the Indian context, it means ‘the leader of a group of criminals’; and humourously, both the meanings fit well in the semantic structure of the poem, to lead to two different discourses of humour. The four poets decide to change their names in order to conceal their real identities: Shakespeare becomes “Sutto”³⁰; Milton becomes “Milton Singh”³¹; Shelley becomes “Phuppur”³²; and Tagore becomes “Thakur”³³. The new names decided upon by the four poets do not only sound typically Indian, but is also humourous from the viewpoint of phonetic articulation. The revelation of the fact that even the Professor-Critic is an Indian who had changed his name, thereby his identity after migrating to the West, from “Ram Sahai Phogat”³⁴ to “Ramsay Phagot”³⁵ adds to the humourous impulse of the poem. The close resemblance of sound in the utterance of both

the names, although one typically Indian and the other purely British, leads to amusement and also displays how subtly the Professor-Critic has changed his identity:

Since “Ram Sahai Phogat”, the name
Of Indian Don, was strange,
By him had earlier been the same
To ‘Ramsay Phagot’ changed. ³⁶

The narrator unleashes his contempt for all such Indians who change their names, religion, tradition, practices, behavior, and overall lifestyle to match with that of the country where they get settled, and later, boast off when they return to India, or visit India. The way in which the Professor-Critic commands, and then, humiliates the four all time great poets in order to display his ‘critical’ sense and vast knowledge adds impetus to the discourse of humour. What to say of the minor poets, even the major poets, or rather classical poets such as Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, and Tagore, find their reputation at stake in front of the ‘learned’ Professor-Critic. Phagot criticizes Shakespeare (Sutto) for his “double superlative”:

“ ‘The most unkindest cut’—this line
Has double superlative.
‘Unkindest cut’ would have been fine.
How poor’s your grammar, native !” ³⁷

Sutto is not even allowed to defend his reputation, and forced to silence by the Critic:

As Sutto murmured , “Sir,” the Don
With a birch-rod struck his joints:
“By me a poet’s worth is known
To the farthest decimal point. ³⁸

Professor Ramsay makes a mockery of the Shakesperean style of writing poetry, but in real terms, he makes a mockery of himself and the ways or stipulations which are taken into account by the contemporary critics while critically examining a piece of poetry. Phagot displays his arrogant temperament, bossy attitude, and dominating nature when he forces Shakespeare (Sutto) to silence. Phagot boasts that he is capable and competent in evaluating

the worth of a poet “To the farthest decimal point”, which implicitly suggests that contemporary critics adopt mathematical standards/precision while judging the merit of a poet. They place poets on a rigid mathematical scale and draw comparisons, instead of evaluating each poet for one’s individual worth. Professor Ramsay further asserts:

“I quote not, sift not, ne’er explain
 Nor furnish facts and figures,
 With sweeping statements I have slain
 The tallest men of letters.

“Minute are all my critical norms,
 Exact like Mathematics.
 On trivial themes I can perform
 My finest acrobatics. 39

The stanzas throw more light on the characteristics, temperament, and attitude of the contemporary critics. Phagot, who stands as a representative for all modern critics of the present times, declares that he never gives a poem a serious thought or close-examination before attempting an analysis of the same. He is neither in the habit of providing explanations for his findings nor does he ever refer to any established source of information or set of rules. He just comments whatever is his first impression of a poem, without giving it a second thought. Phagot takes pride in saying that he has criticized, or distorted the reputation of a number of established poets with his sword of critical observations, and as the reader knows that he is doing the same with Shakespeare presently, evokes humour. Ramsay Phagot talks astoundingly of the parameters on which he judges a poem, and thus, tries to project his competence. The self-assertion that he can create or project a mole into a mountain is quite humorous in the given context. The use of the words and expressions such as “facts and figures”, “sweeping statements”, “slain”, “tallest men of letters”, “Minute”, “critical norms”, “Exact like Mathematics”, and “finest acrobatics” in the context of the poem creates the discourse of humour. The words “Mathematics” and “acrobatics” display the Professor’s ability to make precise calculations, and in the process, give twists and turns to any simple idea/thought/subject. The poem, thus, implicitly communicates that poetry is

an art form, which overcomes the limitations of any language, and fills the reader with joy and aesthetic pleasure; and therefore, should not be constrained by any set of rules that are applicable to other forms of language or literary writing. The aesthetic appeal of a poem lies in its meaning, emotion, rhythm, and spontaneity, but not merely in the lexical items or the syntactic structure. Giving a verdict on Sutto's (Shakespeare's) poetry, the Professor-Critic further asserts:

“ ‘Tomorrow and tomorrow’—Ah !
 ‘Tis boring repetition !
 Prosaic are all your lines. Pah !
 ‘Tis poetry’s perdition.” 40

The condemnation of Shakespeare's poetry for “boring repetition” is indeed amusing. The humour oozes out of the use of the word “boring” as a modifier to “repetition”. Ramsay labels all Shakespeare's poems as “prosaic” in nature, and the declaration, “Tis poetry's perdition” adds to the humorous affect of the poem.

In similar vein, the narrative develops to reveal that the Professor-Critic is not happy, or rather satisfied, with either of the poets. He criticizes Milton for not following the grammatical rules:

“Absurd are all your lines, O Singh.
 If subject comes in one,
 Its object in the third you bring.
 Your work is all ill-done.” 41

He instructs Milton that there must be “Some alienation”⁴² in “modern poetry.”⁴³ Ramsay quotes an example to exemplify his statement with regard to modern poetry:

“ ‘As curved as a boy’s arc of piss’,
 ‘As tight as underwear’—
 Such striking similes do not miss
 Modernity’s garb to wear.” 44

Sharma seems to be very critical of such experiments in the genre of poetry as he comments: “... the kind of novelty which ultra-modern critics seek is neither the function nor the aim of

poetry which, far from being a piece of research in academic groves, has a spiritual utilitarian purpose for life.... poetry should be judged primarily, and not in terms of bare novelty.”⁴⁵ The poem, implicitly, evokes a gentle satire on the modern scene, where poets conceal their flaws, weaknesses, incompetence, and nudity under the garb of ‘modernity’. But the use of expressions such as “As curved as a boy’s arc of piss” and “As tight as underwear” undermines the poetic credentials of the contemporary academicians cum critics converted into poets, and in the process, adds to the humorous impulse. Ramsay Phagot criticizes Phuppur (Shelley) for his romanticism:

“ ‘O World ! O Life ! O Time !’ – Alas !
Your tears are false, O fool.
Romantic nonsense cannot pass.
It breaks the modern rule. ⁴⁶

Phagot misjudges the tone and emotions lying in the poems of the romantic period, and humorously, adjudges it as “nonsense”. Phagot discards “The rules of rhetoric, rhythm and rhyme, / The poetic diction, metres”⁴⁷ calling them “fettters.”⁴⁸ Sharma, thus, ironically and implicitly states the reason behind the deterioration in the standards of poetry written in the contemporary age. The humour lies in the revelation that the contemporary critics call such poetry, which has no poetic charm and is merely a chunk of neatly-cut lines in a proper shape, good. The surprising element is that the contemporary poets have stopped taking care of the important characteristic features of poetry to suit their convenience, and yet, if some poets try their hands at writing good poetry by adhering to the traditional norms of poetry, they are neither appreciated nor encouraged by the critics and academia, but ridiculed for being a threat to “the modern rule.” Professor Phagot even criticizes Tagore for depicting real India in his poetry:

“The English summer’s warm; therefore,
Your summer warm must be.
With ‘scorching, burning heat’, O bore !
Your summer startles me. ⁴⁹

Ramsay suggests Tagore to depict “An Indian beggar”⁵⁰ and “An Indian defecating / In fields!”⁵¹ as for poetry “Indian damned / Are subjects richly paying.”⁵² Here, the surprising element is that the Professor-Critic has completely forgotten his roots, i.e. Indian origin, and therefore, comments: “Your summer startles me.” Underneath the humorous tone of the poem, there lies an undercurrent of gentle satire on all such Indians who migrate to the West, and later, sing the praises of the foreign country on the one hand, and ridicule their native land on each and every ground on the other hand. The stanza, thus, reflects Sharma’s contempt for all such poets and authors, especially the diasporic, who use Indians as a subject for their writings not because of their attachment with them, but only to gain the attention of the Western readers. These poets and authors intentionally project only the poor, sordid, gloomy, and pitiable state of India to satiate the Western reader’s taste/expectations and receive appreciation from them. Phagot is shown criticizing Thakur’s (Tagore’s) poetry for being deficient in “Irreverence, alienation, sex--/ Modernity’s features three”⁵³. Phagot severely criticizes Thakur: “O Thakur, stand not. Go and piss. / The poetry’s not for thee.”⁵⁴ Such a severe criticism and that too, of a Nobel Laureate by someone, who has a very shallow understanding of poetry, is indeed amusing and humorous.

The four poets, their reputation and ego badly mauled, decide to leave the Professor’s class. They get back to Heaven, and laugh and jeer at the modern-snob, i.e. Professor Ramsay Phagot, as by this time, they have understood that the Professor has no knowledge of poetry, neither does he possess any poetic sense at all, and just imitates certain modern and Western views. They finally decide to piss over Phagot to equal scores with him. Such an idea on the part of the four celebrated poets seems to be very childish, but reflects their rage and disgust against such a hypocrite or imposter. And finally:

From Heaven their streaming arcs of piss
 Upon the professor fell.
 He upward looked. “What bird is this ?”
 He asked. But none could tell. 55

The final stanza, or the climax of the narration, has the potential to evoke boisterous laughter.

The whole narrative maintains a uniform end-rhyme scheme of *a b a b*, which imparts a smooth rhythm and tone that facilitates the discourse of humour. To maintain the end rhyming, Sharma even uses an extra syllabic unit, either stressed or unstressed, disrupting the metrical arrangement of the lines; and thus, also maintaining a regular deviation in the tone of the poem that helps the evolution of humour. Most of the stanzas display the first and the third line possessing an iambic tetrameter, and the second and the fourth line having an iambic trimeter, as its metrical structure. It is also noteworthy that the key lexical items, which result in humour, are ‘stressed’ throughout the poem.

It is surprising that no reviewer or critic has commented on ‘humour’ in the poetry of Maha Nand Sharma. Perhaps, ‘The Professor-Critic and his Class of Poets’ is one of the classic examples of humour in the poet’s oeuvre. The poet stands out as the best among the various contemporary voices appearing in the print or the electronic media.

4.2.7. Humour with an undercurrent of Satire and Sarcasm

Thus, an analysis of a few poems of Maha Nand Sharma reveals that he is successful in evoking humour through the depiction of unusual situations/scenes, or projecting the idiosyncrasies of human behavior, especially of politicians, thereby gaining the interest and attention of the readers. It is also discovered that most of the poems displaying a humorous affect do possess an undertone of satire and sarcasm, and this reflects that Sharma never distances himself from his prime objective, i.e. initiating a wave of resurrection and reformation in the society with the help of his poetry. Therefore, most of his poems displaying a humorous affect are at the same time rich in didactic/ moral preaching, explicitly or implicitly, and it may be stated that he uses ‘humour’ as a sugar syrup to coat his satire and sarcasm.

4.3. Humour in the Poetry of I.K. Sharma

I.K. Sharma, with his six collections of poetry, has established himself as an acute social and political observer. Although most of his poems concerned with society, politics, and

economy of the country are rich in the discourse of irony and satire, the poems dealing with quotidian themes are humorously developed.

4.3.1. 'Mosquito'

For example, the poem 'Mosquito' that describes the little creature and its activities, and draws an analogy between the mosquito and bomber plane, mosquito and monster, and mosquito and keepers of gold:

The boss of the night
pays stinging respects
to my toes before feasting
on other limbs.

With hair-thin legs
it soars like a plane,
dives and lands
on my ear or nose.

Singing it dips its mouth
in the cauldron of witches
before cracking a hole
in my skin.

I burn, I yell, I fret, I fume,
and strain to chain the monster
with open palm that makes me
a zombie at home.

It slips through traps I lay
like keepers of gold,
who know how to cross
the net and grow.

I roll back to sleep
and the savage eyeing from above
bounces back to serve me hot
on the same old spot.

The kid of Hell mocks
 at every item of creation
 that spends hours in a bunk :
 a babe, a mother, or a hunk. 56

In the first stanza of the poem, the narrator addresses a mosquito as “The boss of the night”, which indeed the tiny insect is, for paying “stinging respects” to the victim and feasting over his entire body. The use of the phrase “pays stinging respects” in the second line followed by “to my toes...” evokes humour. The mosquito reverently follows the Indian cultural tradition: first, touching the toe and then, stands upright to move or act further that is, to bite, or “feasting on other limbs.” The humour is enhanced with the description of the diabolic movement of the mosquito’s “hair-thin legs” with which it dives and lands on the speaker’s ear or nose, as if it were a plane.

In the third stanza of the poem, the use of the word “singing” for the humming sound is deliberately rhymed to go with the word “stinging”, and the rhyme as well as the parallelism drawn between a negative entity “stinging” and the positive quality of “singing” turns humorous. Again, the expression “cauldron of witches” for the bodily cavity of human being displays wit, and leads to a humorous affect.

Since the mosquito is referred to as a “boss”, it fits well with the characteristic description of it as a “plane”, “monster”, “savage”, and “kid of Hell” *vis-a-vis* “cauldron of witches” and “zombie”. The hyperbolic language communicates the deeper disturbance it causes to the narrator, and for that matter, to anyone else by repeatedly biting “on the same old spot” and keeping one from sleeping in peace is humorously ironical. It is a fact that mosquitoes have a tendency of sitting at the same spot of the body from where they have been chased away, which may be because they have prepared that part of the skin for their sucking activity. The discourse turns humorous in the fifth stanza when the narrator finds the mosquito more skilful entering the net and growing than him. The end-rhyme between the last two lines of the sixth stanza, i.e. hot/spot, imparts a humorous tone just as the repetition of the similar sounding vowels such as /au/, /ə/, and /əe/, hints at the speaker’s real pain.

In the last stanza, the ‘boss’ becomes “kid of Hell”, which is capable of challenging anyone and anything. The shift of emotion is rhythmically balanced with the use of the rhyming words “bunk” and “hunk” in the last two lines, which reinforce humour with disgust.

4.3.2. ‘Cockroach’

In the similar vein, yet another poem ‘Cockroach’ displays I.K. Sharma’s mastery in weaving poems over trivial subjects. The poem begins with a witty and humorous note as the cockroach is introduced and addressed as “The king of the underworld” as if it is the don who rules from his hiding:

The king of the underworld
surfaces when summer
scrapes the back of the earth.

To pass the word to their kin
they meet soundlessly behind
gas stove, in toilets

where darkness lies tethered in a corner.
Their presence freezes the solarplexus
of maidens and they scream to the skies.

If a broom or chappal rises
they ply between fair legs
and spring for bare skin.

They frisk but a prince charming, unseen,
in love-garments blesses the Lord:
‘Happy I am at the new site’.

57

The pun on the words “king” and “underworld” sets the discourse of humour. The first stanza communicates a common observation that the cockroaches remain hidden in corners which are least visible, and leave their hidings to surface up when they are uncomfortable or the climate is hot and humid. Like the criminals communicate without being caught, cockroaches too communicate and meet their kin “soundlessly behind / gas stove, in toilets”

and cracks between joints in kitchen cabinet or sewages, etc. The humour lies in the use of the words “soundlessly” and “kin”. This sounds in tune with the way in which criminals operate in the underworld: “where darkness lies tethered in a corner.”

The metaphor of darkness tethered in a corner appears philosophically loaded but in fact it is simply to heighten the significance of darkness for cockroaches (as well as the dons) to survive and multiply. The poet uses ‘enjambment’ at the end of the second stanza to add fuel to the curiosity of the reader, and hence, facilitate the discourse of humour.

The expression “freezes the solarplexus of maidens”, although an over-statement in the given context, very adequately describes the reaction received from the girls/ladies as they confront a cockroach. What remains unsaid is that in the presence of criminals from the underworld, ordinary people too, “scream to the skies” and look for their safety against their attacks. The attempt to kill a cockroach is fraught with failure because it is quick to run away to a still safer place: “If a broom or chappal rises / they ply between fair legs / and spring for bare skin.”

The fourth stanza evokes humour because no one uses a gun or a heavy stick to kill the creature. This again implies one’s helplessness in defending oneself from criminals (of the underworld) as they escape instantly or remain unaffected by a broom or *chappal*. In the case of cockroach, it can quickly “ply between fair legs” escaping the *chappals* a lady may be wearing or using as a weapon. She screams because the cockroach can jump on her bare skin, and presumably bite. The narrator seems to be enjoying the (imagined) scene of a fortunate cockroach landing behind the garments that cover a lady’s body, or escaping to a new place.

The use of the expression “prince charming” (for a smaller cockroach?) escaping to “love garments” (the private / covered parts of the body of a girl / lady) is sensuously humorous, and challenging one to catch a skillful cockroach who feels happier in its new abode. This again smacks of the undercurrents of sex in the criminal underworld that the poet seeks to typify via ‘cockroach’. That is, the poem turns out to be a potent image of kings and princes of the ‘crime’ world, who are difficult to control, but remain active in dark corners of a

house or city, and survive by creating terror. The same way, a cockroach survives by causing fear to common people.

4.3.3. 'Gopal'

'Gopal' is another poem in the same vein as 'Cockroach'. It concerns a milkman who mixes water in milk and delivers it on his motorbike. The humour of the poem rests on the "suburban"⁵⁸ culture of the person: "no turban on head / like his old dad"⁵⁹, but very smart, in that:

he ties his cows
in a shed
with a twine
for the night,
milks them at dawn,
drives them away
before old men
go for a walk ⁶⁰

This is, in fact, a common sight. The cows move freely on the roads and streets and become a potential danger to every passer-by, on the one hand, and made to yield milk without being fed by the owners, on the other. The milkmen lack sensitivity both for the cattle and the humans.

The narrator, apparently without intending to criticize the "mobike-borne"⁶¹ milkman, humorously notes: "I once observed him / playing his solo / at a public tap / at the end of the road"⁶². Adding (contaminated?) water to milk is viewed as a 'solo' act—perhaps because the narrator saw it for the first time (?)—but the fact is, Gopal is a "veteran"⁶³; it has been part of his profession. The public tap at the end of the road is his "processing centre"⁶⁴ where he makes "Fast Milk"⁶⁵, like fast money.

The echoes of the words the poet uses provide not only the context but also the text of humour and irony. The irony lies in the very name of the milkman, Gopal, which literally means, someone who tends cows. Gopal is also one of the names of Lord Krishna. But today's Krishna/ Gopal just exploits the animal for making fast bucks, rather than save or

protect it. And humorously, if the cows fail to yield enough milk, it can be processed by adding water from public tap, as if adding water is an industrial enterprise. There is no shame or fear in the mind of our new suburban milkman.

4.3.4. 'My Maiden Ride'

The poem 'My Maiden Ride' seems to be autobiographical in its content and context. The poem presents the two incidents (real life incidents?) when the narrator sat on a horseback:

I sat on horseback twice in life:
 once in marriage
 another in childhood.
 The 'Once' earned me a comely wife. 66

The narration, thus, starts with a humorous note as the act of sitting on a horseback is said to 'earn' the speaker "a comely wife." The narrator gets nostalgic in the poem and recollects the past experiences, but in a reverse order, i.e. the "marriage" first, and then, the childhood. The use of the modifier "comely" to qualify "wife" helps in the construction of the discourse of humour.

The rest of the poem is a humorous narration of the speaker's experience of riding on a horseback "another" time in his childhood. The simile drawn between the "knowing animal"⁶⁷ (horse) and a "faithful clerk"⁶⁸ who attends his office "during Emergency"⁶⁹ adds to the humour. Everything goes smooth until "... a tom-tom came / driven by a mare / with blinkers on."⁷⁰ The mare passes loving gestures to the horse. The "blinkers", which is meant to save the horse/mare from distraction, fail in its purpose as because of it: "She did not look side-ways. / She dug straight into his eyes,"⁷¹ to which the horse lovingly replied and "unblinkingly sent his amorous rays."⁷² The humour lies in the discovery that the blinkers which were meant to save the horse/mare from distraction helps, in the present case, to distract both the animals, i.e. the horse and the mare. The speaker humorously admits that he could not understand what was going on between the two, as he lacks the understanding of the psychology of a horse, in the following words: "I did not know what it was all / I had no

horse-sense at all.”⁷³ The humour lies in the use of the compound word “horse-sense” to connote the ‘knowledge’ of tending a horse.

The horse gets (sexually?) provoked by the mare’s response, and then:

Soon he smelt :
the lightweight is of no consequence.
He stood up in the air
my heart sank unlike my hair,
my innards l o o s e n e d. ⁷⁴

The contrast between the response of the “heart” and the “hair” of the speaker, the earlier sinking and the other rising, in the line “my heart sank unlike my hair” intensifies the inherent humour. The poet uses graphological technique to impart suggestiveness in the line “my innards l o o s e n e d”, alongside the evolution of humour. The speaker tries his best to take the horse back in control, but in vain:

Lo, my horse was free.
The mare got the lover’s clue
and broke the harness.
They went on their love rampage
ravishing, round and round the town.
I stood like a battered clown. ⁷⁵

The use of the expression “love rampage” to describe the love-affair between the horse and the mare reflects wit and evokes humour. The expression is highly suggestive and may be treated as a comment on the prevailing contemporary scene, where young lads and girls get infatuated towards the opposite sex and mistaking it for true love, they get involved in certain things that adversely affects their lives. The use of the term “battered clown” for the speaker heightens the humour. The last two lines of the poem display an end rhyme, “town/clown”; alliteration, with the repetition of the consonant sound /r/, “rampage/ravishing/round and round/battered”; and also assonance, with the repetition of the vowel sound /au/, “round and round/town/clown”, that lends musicality and smooth rhythm to the poem, and thus, adds strength to the discourse of humour. The poem,

implicitly, reveals that the concept of ‘love at first sight’ has become misleading in the present times, and therefore, one needs to keep a tight check over one’s senses, which are similar to horse, in order to avoid any mishap.

4.3.5. ‘Arjun Meets His Class’

The next poem selected for an analysis to study the construction of discourse of humour in I.K. Sharma’s mode of poetic communication is ‘Arjun Meets His Class’. The speaker in the poem narrates, as a bystander, the experiences of a newly appointed teacher on the first day of his job. The first stanza describes the preparation that Arjun (the new teacher) makes in order to appear before his students on the very first day of his teaching career:

To woo the ungroomed he makes a move:
dons a new suit, wears a blue tie
that tickles the eye of a passer-by,
and black shoes that add to his height. ⁷⁶

The use of the word “woo” as an equivalent to suggest ‘teach’, and “ungroomed” for the ‘students who are in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge’ unveils the humorous intent of the speaker in the very first line of the poem itself. The detailed description of the outfit, especially the shoes with heels of considerable height as it “add to his height”, sets the ground for the construction of the discourse of humour.

Arjun is punctual on his first day and arrives at the college before the scheduled time:

At college he arrives before the bell warns,
waits for kindly faces in the common hall:
they loudly greet him as they slip in
and wish him well in his open trial. ⁷⁷

The stanza communicates that Arjun is the first one to arrive as he had to wait for his colleagues. He heartily accepts all the loud greetings that he receives from his colleagues who “slip in” the staff-room. The use of the expressions “kindly faces” as a metonymy to refer to the faculty members of the college, and “common room” to refer to the ‘staff-room’

facilitates the evolution of humour. The phrase “slip in” communicates that the faculty-members walk into the staff-room leisurely, although late, as per their convenience. Again, the use of the expression “open trial” to refer to the first class of the new faculty (Arjun), i.e. his first encounter with his students, implicitly, hints at the challenges that are in the offering.

The nervousness of the teacher is well presented in the third stanza of the poem:

His heart quakes as the bell goes,
breathes deep to boost up his soul,
in hand a book, in head his notes,
he sets out to seek his heavenly goal. ⁷⁸

The use of the word “quakes” to depict the status of his heart is very witty and suggestive as it captures the real picture of the teacher. Arjun “breathes deep” in order to collect all his strength and wavering confidence. He holds his book, as if it was his weapon, and refreshes the notes in his mind, as if it was his artillery, and sets out to meet/engage his class. The expression “heavenly goal” to refer to the teaching assignment sounds as an exaggeration and evokes humour. The way in which Arjun is described, it seems that he is on a very difficult and challenging mission, and here, the reader cannot desist from making a comparison between the Arjun in the poem and the great Arjun (one of the Pandavas), who was a very skilled warrior, in Mahabharata. The analogy drawn between the two Arjuns, ‘teacher’ Arjun and the ‘warrior’ Arjun, intensifies the inherent humour in the poem.

The next stanza describes the welcome that Arjun receives from the students of his class:

Catcalls welcome him as he steps in,
planes land on his well-lighted head,
the limbs of devil yet stand up dutifully,
and fair faces lovingly hide many a cad. ⁷⁹

The way in which the students welcome their new teacher is amusing, ironical, and humorous. The lines evoke more humour when the present welcome (in the poem) is compared with the way people used to be welcomed in the past, especially as per the rich

Indian culture and tradition, i.e. with loud trumpets and clarions, and flowers. In the present case, “Catcalls” replace ‘musical instruments’ and “planes” take the place of ‘flowers’. Again, the expression “well-lighted head” suggests a multitude of meanings in the context of the poem, each of them being equally humorous: first, it suggests that Arjun has applied a lot of oil in his head (to his hairs); second, he has stuffed his head with a lot of knowledge, i.e. notes; and third, his head has lost its weight due to the nervousness of the situation. Humorously, it also leads to a comparison between Arjun’s head and the runway of an airport, as a plane lands on both of these surfaces. In the third line, the students are projected as “devil” and yet said to be ‘dutiful’, and such a contrast is amusing and humorous. The last line uses the term “fair faces” as a metaphor for the students (or even as a metonymy for the girl students), but humorously, these innocent looking faces “lovingly hide many a cad.”

As it is Arjun’s first lecture, he must have expected a very warm welcome from his students, and comes to the college well-attired, both physically and mentally, but is startled to find:

Softly he heads for the high chair,
finds a broom served on his table,
he bends his knees to grace the chair,
leaps out, turns like cat in a fable.

He sees little pins—their tongues of censure
happily cushioned in the chair’s pit,
the light he has held tight in his brain
blows out ere he opens his intellectual kit. 80

Arjun is welcomed with a broom and little pins, instead of a bouquet or sincere smiles, which make him, turn like “cat in a fable.” The use of the words and expressions such as “high chair”, “grace the chair”, “cat in a fable”, “tongues of censure”, “happily cushioned”, and “intellectual kit” helps in the construction of the discourse of humour.

Arjun makes all possible efforts on his part to keep his courage, confidence, will-power, and enthusiasm intact. He tries all his tricks to gain command over the class, but all goes in vain:

Arjun tries, tries to revive his dying fire,
debates Action, Fruit, or designs of Fate,

strives to mend the broken chain
without a sign of blankness in his face.

He does his best to lift the heart,
tries to restore sense in the class,
he waves his hands, raises his voice,
strikes the table like a stringless boss. 81

The repetition of the word “tries” twice in the first line of the seventh stanza bespeaks the utmost efforts on the part of Arjun. The expression “dying fire” suggests a decline in his zeal or passion for teaching, and in order to regain his spirit, he thinks of ‘Action’, ‘Fruit’, and ‘Fate’, i.e. he thinks of high philosophical concepts to gain strength, and thus, sway a command over the adverse situations. The attempts made by Arjun are projected on a grand scale as if he is in a war, but the fact is that he has just to engage a class. Again, the comparison drawn between Arjun and a “stringless boss” is humorous.

The next two stanzas of the poem depict the plight of the teacher further:

He opens the book, reads a few lines,
runs to what, where, how, and why,
but no device works in such a throng
where lilies and cactus deliciously combine.

His lips dry, not his book-bound spirit,
in one hour he walks through a long night,
yet valiantly he guards gift of his eyes,
does not offer one till out of sight. 82

Arjun tries to get the attention of the class by reading a few lines from his book, and then, making an attempt to explain the same. The second line of the ninth stanza depicts the hurried explanation that Arjun offers to the class, and the use of the words “what”, “where”, “how”, and “why” in succession, implicitly, display confusion and chaos that prevails in the class. The use of the words “lilies” and “cactus” as metaphors for the students is suggestive, witty, as well as humorous. Here, the word “lilies” stands as a metaphor for all good, sincere, and obedient students of the class; whereas “cactus” stands for all the disturbing elements (students). The words “lilies” and “cactus” may also be decoded for girl-students

and boy-students respectively. The humour evolves from the phrase “deliciously combine” which refers to the co-education set up in the present times.

Although the students do not co-operate with the new teacher (Arjun), he is able to see through “one hour” of his lecture’s scheduled duration. By the end of the hour, he finds “His lips dry”, but ironically, yet his teaching spirit remains high. The humour lies in the use of the expression “book-bound spirit” for the enthusiasm of the teacher. Again, the experience of walking “through a long night” in the duration of “one hour” (in the context of the poem) is humorous, but at the same time evokes *karuna rasa* (feelings of compassion and pity) as well. The last two lines of the tenth stanza communicates that Arjun is strong enough to hold the “gift of his eyes”, i.e. ‘tears’, in front of his students, but could not constrain the outburst as he gets “out of sight.” Although the lines evoke a sense of pity and compassion in the context of the poem, it is the pitiful condition of the teacher (Arjun) that yields a humorous effect, as the character (teacher Arjun) is a parody of the great warrior Arjun, who won the deadly battle against the *Kauravas* at Kurukshetra, of the *Mahabharat*. Kalpana Rajput observes: “Though named Arjun (the known hero of the Mahabharata war) he is unable to face his class (note the pun in *his class*. After all, teachers and students generally go together)... Inside the classroom (his Kurukshetra) his ‘open trial’ begins.”⁸³

The final stanza of the poem depicts Arjun’s impression upon his students:

Dream broken, he ends up his class,
 maidens see in him a mate for a ball,
 lads read in him a new manuscript
 which they can test and tear at will. ⁸⁴

Humorously, although Arjun tries his best to prove himself a good teacher, the girl-students are not interested in having him as a teacher but find him adequate for being their dance-partner. On the other hand, the boy-students find him to be a funny character that lies at their disposal. Thus, the poem ends on a good humorous note. The humorous affect of the poem multiplies when one draws an autobiographical semblance between the speaker in the poem and the poet himself, as the poet is also a teacher (in a college) by the profession. Kalpana Rajput opines: “I surmise the poem is based on the poet’s own life experience. He looks

back at his younger days, recollects bits of experiences, and laughs at his own doings. This act of laughing at oneself is a sure evidence of a genuine humourist.”⁸⁵

The poem successfully displays I.K. Sharma’s competence in the construction of the discourse of humour. Sharma is quite successful in bringing to life the actual scene: the teacher’s appearance, the teaching method adopted, the pranks played by the students, and even the nervousness or the disturbed inner state of the teacher with the evocation of humour. The subtle use of the language helps the poet to depict even a dreadful experience, which may be his personal, in a humorous vein. N.P. Singh rightly comments: “ ‘Arjun Meets His Class’ is a short narrative poem but it is a comic masterpiece. It describes vividly a teacher in a new suit and a blue tie going to meet his class in the college. The plight of the teacher has been described in the most humorous manner.... The touch of hyperbole in the picture makes the reader laugh at the teacher who reminds us of Don Quixote who had no idea of the adversaries he was going to face. Instead of being able to meet the class successfully, the teacher is outwitted by the first-generation learners who are primarily interested in having fun at the expense of the helpless teacher. The misery of the teacher has been described in one of the most beautiful stanza.... The comic is more than comic. It has also the elements of pathos, conveyed by the phrase “Dream broken” that makes the comic so trenchant. The preponderance of the comic has another significance in the poem ‘Arjun Meets His Class’ and that is to prevent the narrator from lapsing into sentimentalism. A kind of objectivity and restraint marks the narrative from the beginning to the end.”⁸⁶

4.3.6. ‘Ezekiel on My Scooter’

‘Ezekiel on my Scooter’ is another poem in the same vein (humorous) and it depicts one of the real life experiences of I.K. Sharma. The poem is based on the poet’s personal experience of receiving and bringing Nissim Ezekiel, another well-known Indian English Poet, to the venue of a seminar organized by the Commerce Department of Rajasthan University. Humorously critical of the department for not providing Ezekiel with any conveyance or fee, poet Sharma had to bring the other poet on his scooter. The context is

steeped in humour, as evident from the poet's use of expressions such as "commerce", "port", "payment", "smuggle", and "goods":

Yesterday afternoon
the faculty that **sees commerce** everywhere
invited the great poet to its **port**
without any **payment**.
I was asked to **smuggle the goods**.
That I did. ⁸⁷ (Emphasis mine)

While the use of the terminology of commerce and business significantly creates the atmosphere of humour for enjoying poetry free of cost, the poet's concern is different: "Ezekiel and you on the same scooter ! / What'll happen if a mishap there is: / **I die or he injured.**" ⁸⁸ (Emphasis mine) The poet is worried about his reputation, or rather the safety of Ezekiel, in case he falls (because he had sat on Sharma's mind "like a paperweight." ⁸⁹ What others will say or how others will blame him if there is a "mishap" troubles him the most:

If I die
the seminarians will quietly meet and say:
'he died on the martyr's day
at the Gandhi circle'.
But if the dust licks the poet's pants
I will again die.
The seminarians will then meet and say:
'he did it purposely'.
Then all conscience-keepers of the world
who lie in ambush
till they see the biscuit of their choice,
will spring out fervidly
to maul the harmless creeper
with bullets rising in their eyes. ⁹⁰

The uneasiness or nervousness of the speaker is clearly stated with intuition of what the "seminarians" would think, say, or do. On the one hand, he is overwhelmed by the honour of accompanying the celebrated poet, and on the other hand he is afraid of ignominy befalling him if he (Sharma) died. He imagines how some good souls will pay him tribute for dying

on Martyr's Day (30th January, when Gandhi fell to his assassin's bullet) at Gandhi Circle, but the saving the life of Ezekiel. And, if Ezekiel died, they would blame him for deliberately not saving him (Ezekiel) and will thus, kill Sharma (the poet) doubly. The pragmatics of humour is maintained *via* their "ambush" for "the biscuit of their choice" even as they indulge in the blame game.

The speaker's sense of humour also lies in his identifying the spot where he would meet the accident, i.e. Gandhi Circle, which complements the "martyr's day (30th January). Surprisingly, in the context depicted, the death of the speaker is equivalent to dust licking Ezekiel's pants. People would mourn the speaker's death, and if he is saved, they would punish him severely for soiling Ezekiel's pants, i.e. causing any sort of damage to the celebrated poet, and thus, cause another death for him.

There is humour even in the ridicule of the narrator, in that it is a common observation in the seminars that the participants hardly bother to attend the proceedings but make their presence at the time when food and refreshments are offered. Apparently, they may talk about the poet's death but their main concern is food and enjoyment as *freely* as possible. The use of the words and expressions such as "conscience-keepers", "lie in ambush", "biscuit", "spring out fervidly", and "harmless creeper" facilitates communication of humour.

The fourth stanza is of only two lines in which the speaker mimics the expected reaction of Prof. P. S. Sundaram, the convener of the seminar: "*Sundaram* would roar: / My God! You better had my dog, this car." The use of the word "roar" depicts the loud reaction of the convener after the mishap, and ironically, it is now that he talks of the use of his car for fetching the poet. G.D. Barche rightly points out: "'*Ezekiel on My Scooter*' subtly attacks the tendency of some people who show sympathy, concern and magnanimity after the hour of the need, and not before, or when exactly arises."⁹¹

There is irony in others' – "all p's and q's of the world"—⁹² reactions too. This includes various personalities from the Press and academia who won't leave the narrator till he lands in jail, and thus, becomes a martyr for voluntarily serving an esteemed guest. The personal

references made to certain people such as P.S. Sundaram, R.K. Kaul, and Khushwant Singh imparts the narrative an autobiographical tone which, too, is quite amusing:

Kaul would gently say:
 follow the rule of law,
 proceed according to constitution,
 it's a matter of institution.
Khushwant would take reports
 illustrated to his *Weekly*, while I
 the poor ass stand meekly.

Press, police, professors, poets, painters,
 all p's and q's of the world
 will come smugly and whisper
 in my innocent ears:
 have one round of jail
 on the martyr's day,
 and come
 after the seminar is over. ⁹³

The speaker presumes that Prof. R.K. Kaul would gently ask him to abide by the “rule of law” and adhere to the “constitution” as it was the matter of the “institution.” The repetition of the same idea in the phrases “rule of law” and “constitution”, and the rhyming between the words “constitution” and “institution” intensifies the humorous affect. Khushwant Singh would promptly take reports for his *Illustrated Weekly*, thus, bringing the incident to the notice of the whole world. Humorously, the speaker finds his position similar to a “poor ass” that stands helpless and ‘meek’. B. Cauveri rightly comments: “Here again the academic sham is delightfully exposed and the leading academicians and literary figures like Prof P.S. Sundaram, Prof. R.K. Kaul, and Mr. Khushwant Singh are mockingly mimicked. It is ironical that Nissim Ezekiel who is one of the fore-runners of modern Indian English Poetry, whose chief weapon is irony, becomes the subject of giving rise to such a situation.” ⁹⁴

The repetition of the nouns with an initial explosive sound /p/ such as “Press”, “police”, “professors”, “poets”, and “painters” in the very first line of the final stanza, implicitly, suggests that all of them would ‘explode’ upon the speaker, i.e. charge/convict the speaker

for the mishap. It also communicates that all those who would come to know of the mishap would go against the speaker but no one would take an initiative to defend him. The use of the expressions such as “all p’s and q’s of the world”, “smugly and whisper”, “innocent ears”, and again “martyr’s day” facilitates the discourse of humour.

4.3.7. ‘An Encounter’

The conversational style of the poem ‘An Encounter’ is culturally sensitive. In most rural communities (in India) married women do not call their husband by name nor do they utter their name to other people. The poet contextualizes such a situation where the narrator has to use his imagination to know from a village lady, the name of her husband. When he asks her, her husband’s name, “She looks sideways. / To push forward His name / she looks up into the sky.”⁹⁵ The use of the capital ‘H’ in “His” indicates that husband to her is God, and therefore, she looks up into the sky. As she says “He lives in the sky.”⁹⁶ It is witty to the extent either his name is one of the names of God, or he is dead, or he is someone whose name is associated with one who lives in the sky. The complexity of the situation can be gazed from what the narrator asks and what she replies:

Is he not alive? I ask.
‘You die’ says she,
 and spits twice.

He lives in the sky, you say.
 Right. His name embodied in the sky.

Do you mean he is Surajbhan?
 Right?

‘No, no’, she replies.

Is it some religious name? I ask.

Look, He shines at night, says she,
 with an expression of delight.

Oh, you mean
 he is Chandrabhan,
 or Chandraprakash,
 or Chandrakumar,
 or plain Chandalal.
 I unfurl my scroll of names. 97

The narrator seems to have come to his wit's end when he decides to offer various possible names to her to choose from to authenticate as he has confirmed that her husband is alive. The situation turns humorous when she negates a couple of names and the narrator continues trying to offer other possibilities:

Do you mean
 he is Chand Tara?
 Sorry, Sorry.
 I mean Tara Chand.

That's precisely His name, says she,
 with a glow of triumph on her face. 98

The poem presents an instance of pragmatic communication in cross-cultural encounter which is riddled with aspects of tradition in Indian villages, as the narrator says:

I learn the star lesson of life:
 facts creep,
 and man acquires wisdom
 in fragments. 99

The poem's dialogic pattern is the communicative pattern which contains humour *via* the literal meaning of the proper nouns, i.e. "Surajbhan" (as against her name "Suraj Bai"), Chandrabhan, Chandraprakash, Chandrakumar, Chandalal, Chand Tara, and Tara Chand, because the options are limited to names that relates to someone shining at night in the sky. And, when the exact name of the lady's husband is arrived at, there is a "glow of triumph on her face" rather than on the face of the narrator (who makes brain storming efforts to find out the name).

Perhaps, the poet would have done better, if he had not written the last stanza, which sounds didactic or philosophical, unlike I.K. Sharma's poetry which is remarkable for not being didactic, or philosophical, or moralistic.

4.3.8. 'If I Die Tonight'

'If I Die Tonight' is another poem composed in the same spirit as 'Ezekiel on my Scooter'. The poet rehearses his death in imagination and expects, rather humorously, that he would be mourned by a large number of people:

If I die tonight
 messages 'll come from far and wide
 unearthing virtues not smelt so far
 will pile high to the sky above. 100

The self-consciously made hyperbolic expression and expectation sets the tone of the poem, especially as the poet knows he is alive, and not dead, and in all likelihood, no one would remember him. It would be all a mere formality after the end of rituals:

Faces folded in grief
 will drift into the widow'd house
 where my body lie cold an' bare,
 and join me in my last journey
 --a procession of specks to the eternal house—
 lead me to its final end.

Once pyre on fire, the work is done,
 subjects scatter on surrounding sands,
 matter living burns with matter dead,
 upkicking flames mock glorious trends.

The runaway rise in prices, petrol,
 grade running, permit, control,
 all hike high with hungry flames
 to oracle, miracle, poll debacle.

Oh, that's over,

let's honour the dead :
 give him the sweet parting kiss—
 fuel his last fainting fire.
 All memories of sweet days so cheaply dusted !

Splinters beyond translation
 then ply on the walking lips :
 'he was a good soul',
 'invoked poor poetry', 'is no more',
 (let's rush to our lowing hearts'
 'waiting for tea at four o'clock.)
 'He had wit', 'wasn't a bore',
 'help his family', 'pray for his soul'. 101

The use of the verb “drift” in association with humans is witty just as the phrase “widow'd house” evokes wit with humour. The use of “a procession of specks to the eternal house” is an understatement *vis-à-vis* the last line in the first stanza. Humour emerges from the juxtaposition of hyperbole and litotes that prefaces the “final end.” The poet sounds his best when he says: “Once pyre on fire, *the work is done*” (Italics mine) that is, the end is complete, and all the mourners return to their petty concerns rather than feeling genuinely about the demise of the poet. The burning of the body is humorously viewed alongside discussion on the burning issues, and all memories mingle in the dust. V.D. Singh rightly points out: “I.K. Sharma is not all irony. He occasionally mixes it with humour as in ‘If I die tonight’. ‘Once pyre on fire, the work is done’ and the mourners (they belong to the articulate, educated middle class), no longer able to maintain their grim solemnity begin talking about: The runaway rise in prices...poll debacle.”¹⁰²

Reading the poem ultimately evokes no sympathy for the poet or his death or loss of a great talent. It just appears a routine affair with no impact whatsoever, which is indeed the success of the poet's communicative intention. Use of expressions such as “eternal house”, “upkicking flames”, “glorious trends”, “hungry flames”, “fainting fire”, “cheaply dusted”, and “walking lips” not only make the communication poetic but also reveal the mixed feelings, if not total sadness, in imagining his status after death. The rhyming words “oracle,

miracle, poll debacle” and “ ‘He had wit’, ‘wasn’t a bore’, / ‘help his family’, ‘pray for his soul’ ” intensify the humour besides sounding self-degenerating much before his actual death.

4.3.9. ‘Toothache’ and ‘Teeth’

I.K. Sharma, thus, attempts a variety of themes and subjects with humorous or ironic twists. In the process, he pays generous tribute to objects, persons, places, and experiences, such as gulmohar, camel, cockroach, broom, mosquito, Inland letter, Hawa Mahal, teeth, etc. The poems ‘Toothache’ and ‘Teeth’ stand out as examples of pure humour. Both make him self-conscious. He is painfully aware of teeth as a major constituent of the design of his “mouth”¹⁰³ and toothache as the “dinosaur”¹⁰⁴ of the mouth. Both its presence and loss has an irreversible effect on one’s health and look:

They stood close to each other for years,
discussed food and the world among themselves;
now apart, have altered the design of my mouth
and changed the geography of my face. 105

The personified entity that one’s teeth essentially are helps in eating food as long as they are intact. In toothache they make one run “like a mad dog”¹⁰⁶ from place to place for relief, as he notes elsewhere. The design of the “money-yielding mouth”¹⁰⁷ changes with aging— “now apart”—¹⁰⁸ and he becomes aware how the very geography of the face is changed when teeth disappear. In an almost epigrammatical vein, the speaker observes, “Born in pain, they went out in pain.”¹⁰⁹ In ‘Toothache’ he knows how “Walls rise between words and voice”¹¹⁰ just as the loss of teeth leaves “behind a train of broken dreams.”¹¹¹ It is humorous to be aware of one’s youth or attractiveness by virtue of the strength of teeth in the mouth just as it is enlightening to recall the immense pain one suffers when teeth grow in mouth or weaken and fall with degeneration. The narrator of ‘Teeth’ appears relaxed when he reflects how age, or the resultant loss of teeth and change of the geography of the face, has made him sexually irrelevant: “maidens blink, read carefully the change of season, /

mates respectfully make a detour in their walks.”¹¹² This is very unlike from his experience of the “anarchy insight” in ‘Toothache’:

In the morn I rush to a clinic
 where the noseey antiseptic hands peep
 into my money-yielding mouth,
 assess the value of anarchy inside. ¹¹³

The speaker’s wife is unperturbed by the dentist’s onslaught on the “archetypal arches”¹¹⁴ of his mouth. In ‘Teeth’, the narrator’s cool response is: “They that were once the pride of my face, / are lost like heroes of Indian myths.”¹¹⁵ The loss of teeth in ‘Toothache’ is the loss of personal pride, but in ‘Teeth’ its loss is not mourned but in a way celebrated impersonally. The poet excels in laughing on himself detachedly.

4.3.10. Humour: A Genuine Outgrowth

The analysis of the poems reveals that humour is, undoubtedly, one of the distinctive poetic characteristic of I.K. Sharma. Sharma’s humour is a genuine outgrowth yielding from wit, irony, comic situations, characters, images, personifications, etc. It stems out from his poetry as naturally as leaves on a branch of tree. Many of his poems display that how a depressing and tantalizing experience can even be turned into memorable poetry with the help of humour. He extracts the last drop of poetry from each moment, or any trivial/common experience, in his poetic process. He resolves to portray experience as it really is. He does not distort the living voices of life in order to generate humour, and as such, his poetry is a revelation or an unveiling in his own distinct style.

4.4. A Comparison of the Two Poets

A comparative analysis between Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma on the basis of the use of humour in the process of poetic communication reveals that Maha Nand Sharma does not make use of humour to that great extent as I.K. Sharma does. That is, Maha Nand Sharma’s poetry is not heavily dependent on humour *per se* for communicating the message. In fact, he starts with humour but subtly ends up in satire. I.K. Sharma, on the other hand, is

humorous. His poems make one smile. Maha Nand Sharma never distances himself from his moralistic/didactic objective, and therefore, because of the presence of grave thoughts/serious subjects/issues of mass concern, his humour does not sparkle as illuminatingly as in the case of I.K. Sharma. Maha Nand Sharma's humour is always tinted with an undertone of satire or sarcasm; whereas the humour displayed through the poetry of I.K. Sharma is mostly free from any such undertone, and thus, the humorous effect on the reader is more intense. I.K. Sharma generally constructs a discourse of humour in the poems that are built around trivial subjects or day-to-day common observations, and therefore, one finds oneself associated with the depicted scene/situation, or places oneself quickly in the context of the poem, and thus, personally experiences the fun. Most of the poems of Maha Nand Sharma that display communication of humour are built around the academic and political themes, and they depict the degeneration in both the spheres (academic and political) of contemporary life. Maha Nand Sharma evokes humour by depicting the contrast between 'what exists' and 'what should ideally exist'. He laughs at the idiosyncrasy, and then, implicitly suggests measures to rectify the fault. On the other hand, I.K. Sharma is able to evoke humour by just projecting 'what exists', on a larger canvas, with his unique poetic binoculars. He just laughs at the prevalent hypocrisies or idiosyncrasies without any objective of stimulating / initiating a wave of resurrection / reformation. The humour in the poetry of I.K. Sharma provides a sort of comic relief from one's contemporary/societal dealings, and thus, transports the reader to a world of pure amusement; whereas the humour in Maha Nand Sharma reminds one of one's contemporary situation and the ways of the world. The humour in the poetry of Maha Nand Sharma evolves from the context in which the subject is treated, whereas in the case of I.K. Sharma, it evolves from the subtlety of the language use or the unorthodox projection or depiction or the exposition of a different perspective.

Both Maha Nand Sharma and I.K. Sharma criticize the Indian society without alienating themselves from it. Even when they laugh and seem comic, they seek to dismantle the corrupt power structures through laughter. Their humour is serious, and it is about changing the world. They engage in self-examination and expose our own world and reality. Maha

Nand Sharma often mixes his humour with the idiosyncrasies of a satirical consciousness while I.K. Sharma is able to give a subtle twist to what he observes or experiences, and exposes an ironical consciousness. Both the poets integrate the quotidian with the mythical, historical, and contemporary, and develop a critique of life and people, the larger humanity, that has fallen short on the standards they desire. Their corrective purpose includes ridicule, laughter, and change.

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