Humour, in its broadest connotation, is an aspect of thought, an attitude to life and an aesthetic appreciation combined. It can never be the sole privilege of a country or an age; rather, since it has its roots in the living language and people, it must reflect the mental and social progress of a nation.

English literature is born of two literatures: the first being Anglo-Saxon, the second literature 'imported' from France by the Normans. Each has influenced the thoughts, the works and the temperament of the English people.

The history of English humour falls roughly into three phases:

1. From early times to the Renaissance
2. Renaissance to the end of 17th century.
3. Beginning of 18th century down to the modern era.

Anglo-Saxon literature as we know it is the work of preservation not creation - of the Latinist clerks who copied all the Latin works.
The oldest epic in this literature is Beowulf, where we do find traces of humour, albeit "unconscious humour" meaning that there is no full humourous intent in Beowulf and also other similar works of the period.

The humour in Beowulf is that of ironical understatement, a trick so characteristic of English humour today: the trick of an expression obviously too low for the object, the speaker apparently unaware of the difference in valuation. This slyness of understatement can be seen in the following examples:

"...the Sayldings folk never used treachery in those days..."¹

"In truth I tell thee, son of Ecglaf, that Grendwel, that frightful demon, would never have done so many deeds to thy prince, such havoc in Herrot, if thy heart, thy spirit, were so war - like as thou sayest thyself."²

The riddle has, from the beginnings of civilization, been a popular pastime and an exercise in wit. In the Exeter Book of Riddles we find a close affinity between humour and riddles, because

². Ibid., p. 590.
1) both hide their real meaning and only half reveal it through cleverly contrived hints

2) there is a leap from the surface meaning to the aesthetic and intellectual end.

The riddle too, allowed free play for the racy and spontaneous spirit, in contrast to the Old English literature which was restricted by religious and moral boundaries.

The Anglo-Saxons had their own brand of humour, and the Church sought to correct such, 'course and heathenish amusement'. For example, the fables of the Middle Ages that exist today are only a small number of the large shock which were not copied or preserved. Even among the preserved fables much of the humour and free utterances were expurgated, and only 'dignified' themes were retained.

Cazamion makes clear the Anglo-Saxon stand with respect to humour:

1. The Anglo-Saxons lacked objectivity from the urgency and violence of their own passions, like most early races.

2. They lacked a supple intellect to appreciate the fine variety of humour they were limited to worse spontaneous fun - in horseplay and banter.
Yet they had a rich fund of concrete perceptions, showing a realistic frame of mind, which would later develop in English humour. (Casamion traces this chiefly to James Joyce).  

The Normal Conquest of 1066 imported into England a French literary ideal. The Anglo-Saxon lost its two fold dignity of official and literary language. What effect did this invasion, which permeated every aspect of life, have on humour? The Normandy humour had wit, satire and drollery, and all the tricks for evoking laughter. Their tricks were conspicuously self-aware, (self-conscious?) just as they were successful. In sharp contrast, the English "took their pleasure sadly."  

But we must remember that the most merry nations are not always the richest in humour.  

The Anglo-Saxons were regarded as a gloomy people, and the invaders prided themselves on lightness of spirit. The strong influence of the British climate had indelibly formed the character of the race - the Anglo-Saxons had a natural disposition towards a mood ranging from sober reflection and melancholy. Perhaps this inward turn and a preoccupation with moral issues led to the development of Puritanism.  

4. Attributed to Duo de Sully in his Mémoires, written c 1630 and this assertion is substantially repeated by Priestly, J.B., in English Humour, London, 1929, p.2.
"The humourist deals in self-restraint, so does the Puritan, and the modes of the restraint are not of course identical, but that there is an analogy and a natural passage from one to the other is undeniable."

The English developed an approach to humour in a manner congenial to their own nature - in reserve and self-control- which a habit of brooding would give rise to.

"Our insular situation and character, are, I should say, most likely to foster, as they have in fact fostered, the greatest quality of striking and natural humour, in spite of our plodding tenaciousness and want of gacit..."

We should not say, therefore, that the invaders "introduced" humour into England, for the spirit of a whole nation cannot be changed like that. However we can say that the Normandy influence drew out what was inherent in the English nature, like a magnet, the thin particles of fancy, from which the full force of English humour grew.

The literature before that of Chaucer shows signs of the characteristic English humour.

In Handling Synne, we find a witch who teacher some

5. Cazamion, Development of English Humour, p.46.
magic words to a bishop claiming that at their chanting a
magic bag would fly out and milk the cows. However when
the bishop repeats the charm it does not work. The witch
retorts,

"What you lack is faith." 7

The humour is created in the paradox of the situation
of the inverted roles of the teacher and the taught, coupled
with fine irony.

Piers Plowman by Langland also shows a shrewed sense
of the other side of things and a sense of irony, though the
tense seriousness of the theme inhibits the humour. For
example, in the Prologue, when the angel of heaven condescends
to speak, it is only in Latin. And even the remark on the
pilgrims is pugnacious (a better word?).

"They went forth on their way, with many wise tales,
And had leave to lie all their lives after." 8

Chaucer was recognised as the leading poet of his
age, but the then critics failed to pay tribute to his humour
in characterization, description or dialogue, mentioning only
his 'pleasant vein', or 'delightsome mirth' as if the works

7. Brunne, Robert., Handling Synne, ed. F.J.Furnivall,
8. Langland, Prologue in Piers Plowman, ed. Skeat, London,
line 46.
had only an air of pleasantry and nothing else. It was only in the 19th century that his achievement as a humourist was acclaimed. Chaucer's humour has great variety: kindly and patronizing as in the case of the Clerk of Oxenford; broad and semi-farcical, as in the wife of Bath; pointedly satirical, as in the Pardonner and Summoner; or coarse, in the tales of the Miller and the Cook. Yet we are aware of his kindly tolerance towards the weaknesses of fellow-mortals. Cazamian opines that Chaucer's humour was not greatly appreciated in his time because "while not foreign... [it] did not answer to the... [then] central and most normal type of English humour and temperament."  

It was during the Renaissance and the Reformation that English humour fully developed.

English humour during the Renaissance grew along two main lines: the humanistic and the popular.

The spirit of humanistic humour was found in a few writers, thinkers, some of the middle class and the nobility who were familiar with the classics and foreign languages. It refers to the discovery of a tone and manner that could best express a humour which they intuitively perceived, and was the core for the intellectual advance for English humour.

9. The Development of English Humour, p. 84.
The popular humour was the result of the innate tendencies of the majority of the nation: shrewd, racy and sly. It embodies patterns of thought and speech and an attitude to life of the people in general.

In short, the humanistic influence gave birth to an aesthetic technique, the popular remained based on the instinct of a nation. The essential originality of English humourists is a happy combination of both and it is in Shakespeare that we find a perfect synthesis of the two.

The Renaissance humourists took for their models the classical authors Lucian and Aristophanes, and the contemporary authors like Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes etc.

During the Reformation, with its stress on Puritanism, humour was eclipsed for a time. But it sprung back all the more sharply during the century that followed the Reformation. Puritanism emphasized the details of moral conduct and the objects of the outside world, thus focusing on the forces that man has to struggle against. But this itself fostered humour because of the contrast between the state of the soul in relation with our daily experience of whimsical behaviour, petty goals, anxiety over trifles etc.

Ben Jonson's theory of humours was based on the understanding of body fluids - stressing the oddities of
human temperament. The modern notion of humour is of an attitude, a psychological process that is the result of greater skill in the distinction of shades of meaning.

Thus, both Shakespeare and Jonson are important in their approach to humour: Shakespeare for his wider understanding of, and nearness to, the modern concept of humour; Jonson for his stress on 'humours' - an important role in the history of the word. The other Elizabethan dramatists and poets have their own individual approach, but in general we may say that the mixing of comedy and tragedy became an established tradition.

In the metaphysical poets, it is the brilliance of the conceits that strike us, but we also find that the poet has a dual mind; one engrossed in the creation of far-fetched similes and extreme examples, another in the perception of the comic element in these extreme examples.

"Nor can you more judge woman's thoughts by tears,
Than by her shadow what she wears,
O perverse sex, where none is true but she,
Who's therefore true, because her truth kills me."10

But the growth of the consciousness of humour took rather more time, one reason being the Jonsonian theory of humours. It was understood to mean 'odd temperament' and consequently, all satire exposed only eccentricities. Aesthetic and Literary criticism came to England only after Italy and France, and the bending of the mind to its own dual self, i.e. the rationalization of humour as a subjective attitude than as aimed at objective recipient was made only in the 18th century. Swift's humour, for example, is like that of Butler’s harshly ironic and Congreve's humour is one of brilliant and refined cynicism.

The ages of Dryden and Pope stressed the neo-classical values of lucidity and order, and thus turned inquiries into the interrelation of mental faculties, among them humour. Satire was the most flourishing type, and criticism also had a vigorous rise.

Sir William Temple singles out Shakespeare rather than Jonson, when he talks of English humour. He makes it clear that humour is not natural albeit unconscious oddities of manner but "an exploitation of these oddities." The stress is on exploitation, which means humour is a creative faculty of mind. It is this half-smiling amusement in the keen sense of oddities that was brought out by Addison and Steele in their

Spectator papers, and carried to much greater heights by masters like Goldsmith and Lamb.

Such was the tradition of humour which Lawson inherited, though writing far, far away from England. Narayan, a much later writer had the good fortune of being exposed to the influence of the later masters of humour, of the Nineteenth as well as the twentieth centuries. The tradition of Addison, Goldsmith and Lamb distinguished humour sharply by associating it with insight and sympathy much more than intellect and some of the finest humourists later - Dickens, Leacock, Theorber, Wodehouse and essayists like Gardiner, Lynd and Belloc - belong to this tradition. It is indeed the nineteenth and the twentieth century humourists that inspired many a writer outside England. Narayan was no exception.

II

Australia as a nation is less than a century old. The six states had been self-governing since the 1850's, when they formed the Commonwealth (federation) of Australia in 1901. Australia's image overseas is that of a cultural wilderness: and this national inferiority complex regarding the arts is now fading under the aggressive promotion of an 'Australian identity'.
Australian literature too, passed through the phases of evolutionary development common to literature of any country: the nascent form being narratives. The first form being narratives. The first form of poetry with a true Australian flavour was the ballad, and the first form of prose was the short story.

The level of achievement in the Australian short story, especially in the first few decades, is higher than that of the novel. One rather obvious reason is that the novel is an intellectual exercise on a large scale — construction and rearrangements in plots, multiple descriptions, stereotypes etc. While the short story centred briefly and more directly on casual experience, with which the Australian writer felt more at ease.

"Judged by a high canon, our most talented short story-writers are still only clever students at the art of writing ... so the stories and sketches are the literary dreams of men of action, or the literary realisation of things seen by the wanderers..."12

This statement of course became less applicable as time went by and writers became more practised. But we must remember that at that time a considerable proportion of writers were not Australian born.

Thematically, most writers stressed the countryside more than the city, and their treatment of ordinary life and adventure in the 'outback' was melodramatic or sentimental, seldom humorous, and almost never historical or psychological. In the matter of form, the Bulletin had the greatest influence on the early writers: With its stress on brevity, simplicity, realism and dramatic force. While this did have the merit of pruning verbosity and containing description, its adverse effect was that stories tended to become mere frameworks, limited in style and ideas. The Bulletin stressed high contrasts and irony, romance was confined to the harsher and not the pathetic side of reality, and the characters were supposed to be hardworking, spitting, tough.

Most short story writers, therefore, were churned out by the Bulletin, but there was a healthy variety in their writing. There was also the palpable influence of the Lawsonian tradition on both his contemporaries and post-1920 writers, who share his warm sympathy and humour.

The humour of Steele Rudd (Arthur H. Davis) 1868-1935 was characteristic of the Bulletin and of the time and place; it is up-country humour of the rough knock about kind, founded on a hard realism. Rudd's forte is a long line of small selection sketches which began with On Our Selection in 1899,
presenting the humorous aspect in the little incidents of family life. We chuckle over the memorable comic incidents as we identify 'Dad' and 'Mum' and 'Dave' in our close relatives. The humour rises from the situation itself - e.g. a parson comes visiting just as the family is finishing their tea, and there's only one scone on the table, and bush hospitality demands they pretend there's more in the kitchen.

Like Steele Rudd, Gye Hal, who wrote under the pseudonym James Hackston, also wrote of a 'father', again also using humour to conceal an underlying pathos. James Hackston made a career for himself as a short story writer in the Bulletin, publishing his first story in 1937. Yet he follows the Lawsonian tradition in that the humour is integrated with situation as well as character and dialogue.

"Every now and then father used to go on the warpath about something or other, but mostly about Mother's mismanagement. These storms always ended with father's clearing out again - not that he ever went, for he contrived to pack up with such slow care, to be so long preparing to depart, that it was always too late for him to get away that day, and so, in the circumstances, he had to put off 'leaving' us until the next day, and by that time the squall had passed over." 13

Edward Dyson also follows the same lines in his lively stories with urban industrial settings (works like *Factory Ands, Benno, Some of the Push* etc. spring to mind). He is best known for his "A Golden Shanty", where the Chinese neighbours take away Mike Doyle's hotel brick by brick after having accidentally discovered that the bricks were made of 'rich earth', which, properly panned, would yield gold nuggets.

"Whenever he caught a Chow in the act, a brief and one-sided conflict raged, and a dismantled Chinaman crawled home with much difficulty."\(^{14}\)

('A Golden Shanty')

Mention must also be made of Ernest O'ferrall, a humourist of no mean order, who joined the staff of the Bulletin in 1907, and wrote under the name of 'Kodak'. His forte is the comedy of situation with a liberal touch of slapstick. His 'The Lion and the Lobster' is an uproarious tale of a drunkard who brings home an escaped circus lioness, thinking it to be a 'large mastiff'.

William Astley, better known as "Price Warung", although thematically differing from Lawson - he is famous for his

convict stories - nevertheless shares with Lawson accurate observation, along with a preference for life and scenes of Australia to that of other countries.

Robert Brothers has also contributed a few notable sketches and short stories, published in the Bulletin in the early 1900s. One consequence of the Bulletin restriction is best exemplified in his writings - the definitions of 'sketch' and 'short story' tend to overlap.

The sketch is open and heterogenous, and need not necessarily move towards a reconciliation or process of enlightenment which one normally associates with the short story. Though of course innovations in the short story have made it possible for it to (apparently) lack a plot or characterization, thus moving towards what would traditionally be considered an 'inconclusive' end. Robert Brothers, like Henry Lawson, was influenced by the Bulletin to which his contributions were made, but, again like Henry Lawson, also experimented with narrative perspective and narrative voice. Both use the anecdotal form, the narrator becomes a major feature and use of local idiom is made; in Lawson however there is a better synthesis.

The Lawson tradition was followed not only in short stories but also in novels: in the works of K.S. Prichard,
Vance Palmer and Frank Davison, who are primarily known for their novels. They are very much in the Lawson tradition, although each emphasizes a different characteristic of his own.

Katherine S. Prichard's (1884-1969) quiet humour is nearest to that of Lawson, and one also gets the feeling of 'Australianness' and the sense of 'belonging to the soil' as one does with Lawson. Author of a trilogy on the W.A. Goldfields, Coonardo, and Working Bullocks, she also has a collection of short stories Kiss on the Lips.

Vance Palmer (1885-1959) stresses the creation of character more than description and action, and in him we find the feature of psychoanalysis which was very rare in the Australian short story then.

"She had a teasing way of putting awkward questions, and when I was stumped she laughed and rumpled my hair. Her hands were never still; they fluttered about like butterflies, picking up a leaf and tearing it to pieces, twisting her ring off and on. What did she talk to the old boy when they were together? I wondered."15

It is almost inevitable that 'The Drover's Wife' springs to mind.

"Thud, thud, comes the woman's club on the ground... She lifts the mangled reptile on the point of her stick... Presently he looks up at her, sees the tears in her eyes, and throwing his arms round her neck, exclaims: 'Mother, I won't never go drovin', blast me if I do!' And she hugs him to her worn-out breast and kisses him; and they sit thus together while the sickly daylight breaks over the bush." 16

Frank Davison (1893-1970) preferred the tough unyielding bush of West Queensland as the setting for his short stories, and he displays a fascination for analysis of behavioural patterns found in lives full of physical rigours and emotional upheavals. This focus on the lives of men and women who are not intelligent enough or articulate enough to know their own worth (but whose worth we are made to realise), shows the influence of Lawson.

Nor does it end here. The mateship theme and the realistic mode were followed by later authors: Judah Waten in Alien Son writes on Australia albeit from the point of view of a non-Anglo-Saxon outsider; John Morrison, who in his Twenty-three takes a fresh look at the workers of the Melbourne

docks; Xavier Herbert's 'Larger than Life' uses the yarn spinner technique and Lawsonian humour.

Lawson lives on: indeed, readers would agree that "there was no Lawson except in prose and verse." 17

TII

As is well known, Bharata, in his Nātyashāstra, mentions Hāsya or Humour as one of the eight Rasās, the other seven being Sringāra, Karuna, Roudra, Vira, Bhayānaka, Bībhatya and Adbhuta. Aestheticians later have identified Shānta as the ninth rasa. Of all these some like Sringāra and Vira are considered major or primary rasās and others including Hāsya minor or secondary. A good play was expected to present all the navarasās, in appropriate proportions, for some of them are more prominent than others, but life is a blend of all of them. Hāsya has been traditionally considered indispensable in drama. But being a secondary or a derivative rasa, it has never been accorded much importance in ancient Indian literature. It is normally relegated to a minor

character often a confidant of the hero. Quite often he does not even have a name of his own but is referred to by a common nomenclature for such a character, Vidushaka.

The Vidushaka, in a way, is like the fool in Shakespeare, apparently a blundering ignoramus but occasionally coming out, at the right moment, with a wise and telling statement. But more often than not, he is forced into situations of embarrassment, of his own making, and that induces laughter in the spectators. He endears himself to them only momentarily, for at the end of the day, the spectators would reflect on the protagonist and his consort rather than on the comic character.

In other words, our writers in the past rarely took the comic character or humour seriously. The eminent Sanskrit scholar and linguist R.C. Hiremath observes categorically:

'Although Hasya is accorded its rightful place in Indian philosophical thought... it cannot be denied that in literature, it is relegated to a secondary position. It is crystal clear that our aestheticians have not given a place of importance to Hasya and a few other rasas.'

The comic character, whenever he appeared on the stage, was reduced to the level of a mere clown. Humour got confined more to the physical than the intellectual aspect of man. The colossal Kumbhakarna, the brother of Ravana, of the Ramayana is made a figure of ridicule — he sleeps at a stretch half-the year and even a whole army of drummers and trumpeteers cannot make him up. He snores like the roar of a wild beast. Similarly, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas in the Mahabharata is supposed to arouse laughter when he gets confused and confounded in the exquisite palace of Dharmaraja mistaking walls for mirrors and attempting to wade through water when it is but the cleverly polished flooring which gives the appearance of a pool. Draupadi and her maids repeatedly burst out into guffaws which naturally hurt our hero who has his revenge later at the game of dice and humiliates the princess. Even the number of stories round the child god Krishna's naughty ways with the Gopikās are not free from such rather crude exhibition of humour. The young Krishna is an adept at aiming stones perfectly at the earthen pots on the heads of the milk maids, shattering them and allowing the milk or curds to drench the girls, and dance in glee at the sight! A famous incident is where he takes away all the robes of the maids bathing in the river and sits himself in a tree and laughs at their embarrassment. Whatever be the symbolic meaning of
this incident—scholars never tire of insisting that this suggests that unless you surrender your all to God, you cannot win him over— one wonders whether this could be cited as an example of healthy humour.

Nevertheless, our epics and puranas have a number of stories within stories— these, indeed, happen to be the first stories in Indian literatures— which offer excellent studies of humanity of a very high order. The story of Rishyashringa19 is one such.

A son of the sage Vibhandaka, Rishyashringa, born and brought up in the woods, had never set his eyes on the female of the human species. Leading a simple life of the ascetic, he spent most of his time in meditation and tapas. To him are sent, by King Romapada, a bevy of beautiful young girls. Rishyashringa's first contact with the fairer sex and his initiation into the romantic joys make hilariously funny episodes.

The paucity of genuine and wholehearted humour in Sanskrit literature is due mainly to the fact that literature was inspired to propagate religion and uphold the nobler values of humanity. Also, works were written by either sages living in isolation in their hermitages, or else by court

19. Vanaparva, Mahabharata.
poets living in the exclusive surroundings of the royal palaces, having little touch with the joys and sorrows of the common man and deprived wholly of an experience of the variety that is human life, so vital for a humorist. Alluding to this, the well known Sanskrit scholar Professor V.V. Dixit says: "A humorist ought to possess breadth of outlook this can be acquired by a free intercourse with sundry people following various pursuits of life."  

Even Kalidasa, who, as the story goes was born of humble origins and settled at the court of Bhoja as one of the 'nine gems' much later in life, has little to offer in the form of genuine humour discernible in the day-to-day living of common humanity. Whether it is the description of Siva as an uncouth recluse with a bull for his vehicle and animal skin for his attire, in Kumarasambhava, or the awkward signals by which princes attempt to express their feelings for the princes Indumati in Raghuvansha add to the Sringara bhava rather than arousing pure humour. It is with the advent of Sri Harsha that humour is seen emanating from general human attitudes and a genuine experience of the simple and ordinary pleasures of the common man. His 'Naishadiya Charita' recounting the story of the legendary King Nala and his consort Damayanti has numerous instances of such humour. While

describing the feast on the occasion of Damayanti's wedding Harsha lays bare, in a hilarious way, the conceit and arrogance of the groom's people - a common experience in any traditional Indian wedding - with a view obviously to hold such an attitude to ridicule.

In the entire corpus of Sanskrit literature, however, a single play stands apart as a model of genuine comedy - Shudraka's Mricchakatika (The Clay Cart). Dr. Ryder, the oriental scholar compares the play with the best of comedities in European literature: "Sudraka's humour runs the whole gamut, from grim to farcical, from satirical to quaint. Its variety and keenness are such that king Shudraka need not fear a comparison with the greatest occidental writers of comedies." The play is an excellently conceived political satire with an extremely complex plot involving romance of the highest order on the one hand, and political intrigue on the other, both coming through an apparently light-hearted presentation. Witty repartees, deliberate misreading of intentions and choice of phrases with multidimensional meanings make witnessing or reading of the play an intellectual treat.

Ultimately, it is in the short story form that humour could blossom fully. Our most celebrated writers Anand, Raja

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Rao and Narayan have all at one time or another expressed their debt to the fables of the *Panchatantra* or the tales in *Kathasaritsagara*. It is these works along with the stories within our epics that have been the inspiring models for the form of the story in all Indian literatures. Thematic variations, varied approaches to the study of the society and the individual and experimentation in the telling of the story are all a legacy of the west.

English education in India opened out to the Indian a luxuriously rich literature. The Nineteenth century saw translations into Indian languages of Shakespeare and all the European classics. Stories of Tolstoy, E.A. Poe, Maupassant, O. Henry and others, the nineteenth century British novelists like Dickens and Thackeray and essayists Addison and Steele, Lamb and Hazlitt, and the later Gardiner, Chesterton and others fascinated our creative writers. The early decades of the present century witnessed a spurt of fictional writing in all the Indian languages. Apart from the new forms of writing, a wholly fresh approach to presenting life itself was seen. The Indian freedom struggle for the first time focused the attention on the common man and western fictional writing gave the right approaches. The most sought after was that of humour, and India saw the birth of a number of its finest humorists. Narayan is among the most popular of these.